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south african Jewish Report

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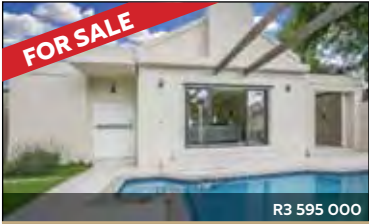
Photo: Ian Ossendryver

People of all ages, colours, backgrounds and religions gathered this week to celebrate their support for Israel at the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) conference. Over 1 000 people gathered in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban to learn more about Israel. Pictured is Tshiarmo Mogana who was there with his parents. See page 10.

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Zuma stands firm on open travel to Israel

ANT KATZ

President Jacob Zuma resisted repeated attempts to get him to impose a travel ban on Israel and he reiterated the ANC’s support for the two-state solution in parliament last week.

More than 15 percent of the two-hour plenary session was devoted to questions about Israel.

ANC chairman of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Co-operation Moses Mosongo asked Zuma what he felt about DA leader Mmusi Maimane, having met with “the most conservative, most reactionary and most ultra-right-wing Prime Minister of Israel.”

While Mosongo urged the president to condemn such visits, the president would not be baited. “Certainly, from the government’s point of view, we don’t necessarily encourage people to go to Israel,” he responded.

Zuma pointed out that SA doesn’t “have a law which says you can’t go to Israel”. He said that he encouraged “those who make contact with Israel to ensure we push for a solution. (If the leader of the opposition goes there, that is his own decision,” said Zuma, “I don’t think we would want to interfere.”

In tackling the issue of support for Palestinians, he said: “We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”

South Africa, said Zuma, “remains convinced that a two-state solution is the only possible solution for durable peace in the region,” and

that “after 50 years under Israeli occupation, Palestinians continue to live in deplorable conditions.”

SA continues to support all efforts towards the creation of two states, said Zuma, living side-by-side and based on 1967 borders. He said SA was involved in all initiatives to facilitate this. The president said SA would continue to stand up for the Palestinian people. “We will never turn our backs on (them).”

Ahmed Shaik Emam, an MP from the National Freedom Party, told Zuma: “It is quite clear that Israel continues to violate all human rights. They continue building settlements...” he said, continuing to complain about Israel and its supporters.

What are we going to do? he asked.

Zuma agreed with Emam that Israel “has violated international laws” in the manner in which they handle Palestinians. He reiterated that South Africa was part of delegations taking part in discussions over this. “Last year I visited four Middle East countries,” he said, and this issue was on the agenda of each.

Zuma then dropped a bombshell: “Even those Arab countries are saying they now agree to the two-state solution,” intimating that they had agreed to recognise Israel. “We are part of the forces who are trying to persuade both sides,” said Zuma, “and we will continue to do so.”

ACDP leader Reverend Kenneth Meshoe asked: “Would the President agree that one of the reasons holding up talks is Jerusalem?” he asked. “What is your position on the status of

Jerusalem?”

Zuma said it was not his task to delve too deeply into the history of Jerusalem. Who had been there and when in the past was not his area. He didn’t care “how David ruled over 3,000 years ago”.

“What I am dealing with are the issues of today.” The history that we know is that history that everybody in the world agrees to regarding Jerusalem, Zuma said. “That is that it includes (Jews), Christians and Muslims. On this point we agree.” There should be a two-state solution, he said.

SA Zionist Federation national chairman Ben Swartz was extremely up-beat after the session, saying: “Jacob Zuma said that it is the prerogative of any South African to travel to Israel.” He also said that where possible, they should do what they can to promote the peace process, according to Swartz.

Shabbat Times

March 24/26 Adar
March 25/27 Adar
Parshat Shabbat Hachodesh
Vayakhel-Pekudeh

Starts	Ends	
17:57	18:45	Johannesburg
18:15	19:25	Cape Town
17:45	18:34	Durban
18:04	18:53	Bloemfontein
18:06	18:56	Port Elizabeth
17:57	18:47	East London

Parsha

Has the cloud evaporated from your inner/outer home?

Rav Yochanan said of G-d himself: “Wherever you find His (G-d’s) greatness there you find His humility.”

At the end of the week’s Torah reading, it narrates about the house of G-d, the Mishkan, in the inaugural raising up of this auspicious edifice. Resting on the Mishkan was the Divine cloud, which bore such intensity, that the place was unapproachable. Similarly, the Haftorah describes Solomon’s Temple, how the Divine cloud that resided in and on it, was of such potency, that “no kohen could enter”.

It seems that prior to man’s entry into the house of G-d, the light is glorious, bright, stunning. When man enters, the light is diminished. Man is of course mortal, flawed

and prone to error and sin. The cloud, expressing the G-dly force in its undiminished state, must be removed, as its purity is incongruent with man’s imperfect nature.

This theme plays such a fundamental role, it is most



Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudeh 1

Reverend Ilan Herrmann,
Lions Shul, Doornfontein

poignantly brought to bear at the very beginning of the Torah. G-d is ever present in the Garden of Eden and then Adam doing his thing results in the dislocation of the Divine presence from that space. Perhaps the explanation of what is being conveyed can be understood using the analogy of a newly-wed couple. As they enter their home on the first night of marriage, the energy is potent, pure and pristine.

Each is like an angel in the eye of the other - perfect, without imperfection. But, they are not angels and, as personalities interact, and as characters check, the impression of perfection is lost. The initial light that was so bright, that inhabited the space, is diminished and evaporates. More accurately, “the perception” of light that each had, is disappointed and dissipates.

But, what is now introduced, is a real, engaging, personal encounter with two souls and bodies and the light that emerges through their relationship, while not as flashy and

bright, is real, meaningful and has depth.

G-d doesn’t want relationships with perfection, with angels, or humans who think they are perfect.

When He removed His light, it was to invite something He cherishes far more than sporting radiance; a relationship with His creation, both in a communal sense and with every person individually.

This is the meaning of: “Wherever you find His greatness there you find His humility.” That the intense light is visible (greatness) and then set aside (humility) to invite a relationship and that is the real expression of “greatness”.

So, when the light feels like it is gone or distant, don’t get reduced to depression, sadness or dejection. Rather, understand that a process is at play, that you in your flawed, human capacity, you are being called to something far greater than superficial light, whose external glimmer may be blinding, but the depth of which is shallow.

The same is of course in our interpersonal relationships. So, embrace yourself with all the imperfections that make up your whole and recognise that as you, you have been invited to create the ultimate home, shining a greater light than any that suggests “perfection” and let that, inspire you to climb.





Billboard wars heating up as BDS lays charges

ANT KATZ

After being bombarded by Israel Apartheid Week messaging on billboards in and around Johannesburg over the past few weeks, Johannesburg residents woke up last week Thursday to a pro-Israel billboard storm. Three huge billboards were spotted on major arteries around Johannesburg and a further dozen street pole ads were put up outside the universities of Wits and Johannesburg. However, last Sunday, one of the IAW billboards near OR Tambo Airport was defaced with what looks like black paint. This led to a case of malicious damage to property being opened at the Kempton Park police station, according to a statement by BDS South Africa. The anti-Israel lobbyists say in their statement that Israel and its supporters have “turned to suppressing of expression by defacing the billboards” and “cowardly

vandalising” the billboard. Kempton Park police confirmed that a case had been opened, but said they were dealing with it as one of random vandalism. The pro-Israel billboards, which first started appearing last October, have been sponsored by Friends of Israel in South Africa - not all of them Jewish or even Israeli. Their message is: “Israel is the only free, multicultural democracy in the Middle-East,” says SA Zionist Federation National Chairman Ben Swartz. To press the multicultural theme home, he said, the theme had been very carefully selected. “We’ve used the theme of two women in hijabs and a Jewish surfer,” he told Jewish Report. Hijabs and burkinis (the latter the Muslim version of women swim wear) are being banned around Europe, explained Swartz, “while in Israel everyone knows how to get along. “We are setting out the true narrative for the broad

array of South Africans who want the truth to be told,” said Swartz. “The truth of the matter is that Israel has more civil freedom than just about anywhere, that is what the board is saying...” The essence of the message is that in Israel it doesn’t matter who you are, you are all equal, says Swartz. Last October, Swartz told Jewish Report: “The reason we were able to do this, was because the Friends of Israel felt this was a great initiative, and sponsors were happy to come forward.” However, BDS SA supporters were unlikely to be happy with the new billboards, especially after the defacing of one of theirs. In their statement, they said: “We may disagree with and oppose the Israeli regime, but we urge tolerance and respect and not these bullying and intimidating tactics by Israel and its supporters.”



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Glenhazel – R4.799 Million
Kingswood. Exciting launch. Brand spanking new upmarket cluster development. Already built waiting for new owners. 2 modern 4/5 bedroomed clusters with all the mod cons. Gourmet open plan kitchen onto spacious entertainment rooms leading onto covered patio and walled garden. Endless possibilities - stunning staff suite/guest suite or work from home. Double lock up garage. off street parking. Web Ref: 11561
Directions: Northfield into Kingswood Road
Joel Harris 082 926 0287 | Marco 082 048 2644

ON SHOW THIS SUNDAY

Glenhazel – R4.950 Million
Sandler Road. Gorgeous modern 4 bedroomed cluster home set in a closed off road in secure complex. Unpack your bags and move into this immaculate luxurious and spacious cluster, Gorgeous gourmet kitchen, boasting 3 grand reception rooms onto covered patio, private manicured walled garden. 4 Very spacious bedrooms, 3 modern bathrooms, SQ, double lock up garage and off street parking. Web Ref: 114667
Directions: Along Kingswood into Fair into Sandler
Joel Harris 082 926 0287 | Marco 082 048 2644

ON SHOW THIS SUNDAY

Glenhazel – R1.499 Million
Northdowns. A gorgeous renovated 2 bedroom apartment. Unpack your bags and move into this beautiful north facing apartment. Stunning gourmet kitchen, spacious reception room onto patio, under cover secure parking. Lovely complex, garden and pool. Hurry to view Web Ref: 11888
Directions: Along Northfield into Mansion
Joel Harris 082 926 0287 | Marco 082 048 2644

ON SHOW THIS SUNDAY

Silvamonte/Glenhazel – R3.2 Million
Cecilia Road. Exciting New Release. Gorgeous modern executive style home. This home oozes style and character - not a cent to be spent - very spacious reception rooms onto covered patio- garden off Eden and exquisite pool setting - gourmet eat in kitchen - double garage. A must to view - will be sold soon. Web Ref: 115280
Directions: Down Ridge Road into Cecilia.
Joel Harris 082 926 0287 | Marco 082 048 2644

Black South Africans aren't fazed by Jews

STEVEN KRAWITZ

South African Jews need not worry about being disliked by black South Africans, because in truth they are not foremost on their minds, according to a report launched on Tuesday.

Human Rights Day was an appropriate day to launch a report on how black South Africans feel about Jews, said Tali Nates of the Holocaust and Genocide Centre of the “Attitudes and Perceptions of Black South Africans towards Jewish People” report. A carefully selected panel presented and discussed the findings of this UCT Kaplan Centre report.

Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Kaplan Centre, explained that over the past few years, influential black South Africans had expressed classical anti-Semitic sentiments. Think of Wits University student leader Mcebo Dlamini.

Jewish academics and leaders were unable to say if these inflammatory remarks were the isolated, personal thoughts of individuals, that would not gain traction and fade away, or whether they were widely-held ill feelings towards Jews, that could tip into wide-spread anti-Semitism and endanger Jewish life in South Africa. This study was commissioned to fill in the gaps.

Black South Africans in three cities, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, were surveyed. Among the main findings were that there is very little interaction between Jews and black South Africans, with only 37 per cent of respondents able to categorically state that they had interacted with a Jew.

There is also very little awareness of the Jewish community and Jewish issues.

Members of the Jewish community were perceived to be the least important players and the least influence in business, media, political affairs and civil society.

Only 10 per cent of respondents feel that Jews have too much power in the business world, very little influence in politics or the media.

As many as 82 per cent responded that they do not associate Jews with apartheid and only 2 per cent associated Jews as opposing apartheid; 72 per cent responded that they are not aware of the conflict between Israel and Palestine and only 4 per cent showed a depth of understanding of the conflict. Only 7 per cent felt that Jews currently work towards poverty alleviation.

Mendelsohn pointed out that there are significant mismatches between, firstly, the proud historical narrative of the Jewish community's struggle against apartheid and black people's knowledge of the role of Jews in the Struggle.

Another mismatch was the current Jewish efforts at poverty alleviation and black people's awareness of our efforts at uplifting and improving lives.



Blacks generally hold no animosity towards Jews

Also, it was uncanny that despite the intense anti-Israel coverage of the Israel/Palestinian conflict in the media and on university campuses, most black South Africans had a broad indifference towards that conflict.

Mendelsohn added that these results were dispiriting if the Jewish community wants recognition for their role in building South Africa. However, if the community's goal is to combat anti-Semitism, these findings are actually positive.

Deborah Posel, another panellist, pointed out that on balance there is very little for South African Jewry to worry about. The lack of contact with and awareness of Jews, makes sense when considering that South Africa has a population of 55 million and a Jewish community of around 50 000 - around 0,1 per cent of the population.

What Posel wanted to focus on was a finding that when asked what they associate with the word “Jew”, 20 per cent of respondents made negative associations, for example, “greedy”, “selfish” or “racist”.

Drawing on an international survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, Posel mentioned that globally anti-Semitism is based on a number of attitudes largely absent in South Africa.

These are that Jews are more loyal to Israel than the land they live in (only 10 per cent of South African respondents felt that Jews were the least loyal segment of South Africa's population); that Jews exercise power over business and finance; that Jews exercise power over world affairs and the American Government; and that Jews look after their own.

Posel posed the question that with so few classical anti-Semitic attitudes present in South Africa, what is the reason for 20 per cent of respondents making negative associations to Jews?

Mendelsohn responded that he believes that the negative associations are weak, can be read in different ways and could be stereotypes ingrained in Christian texts and beliefs. He also added that 44 per cent of respondents had difficulty differentiating between Jews and Muslims.

Phumlani Majozi, a business analyst and commentator, another panellist, joked that he first met a Jew in his honours class at UCT, providing anecdotal support for the survey's findings.

Panellists and the audience felt that future surveys should focus on “thought leaders” and university students - the two groups under-represented in the broad sample of respondents in this survey.

However, these groups are very vocal about the situation in Israel. There was a strong sense that Jewish philanthropic initiatives, of which there are many, should be publicised much more widely, to raise awareness of South African Jewry within the wider public.

• The launch was held under the auspices of Limmud South Africa at the Holocaust and Genocide Centre.

Limmud wins a prize for uniting Jews

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Limmud, the international network of Jewish learning communities, will receive the Jerusalem Unity Prize in the Diaspora category on Unity Day, June 7, in recognition of its global success in bringing Jews together. The award will be bestowed in Jerusalem by President Reuven Rivlin.

“We are grateful for this fabulous honour,” said Limmud global chairman, David Hoffman. “Limmud promotes Jewish unity by offering an inclusive cross-communal space for Jews of all ages and backgrounds, to meet, learn, volunteer and build community.

“Unity is about celebrating our diversity while working together to build community and create a dynamic Jewish future. This is what Limmud does.”

Founded in the United Kingdom in 1980, Limmud today has expanded to 84 communities in 44 countries on six continents. Last year Limmud's 4 000 volunteers produced 74 Jewish learning festivals and events around the world, which drew over 40 000 people.

Limmud South Africa takes place across

three cities during the month of August, drawing over 2 000 participants. It is considered one of the success stories of World Limmud.

Adina Roth, Limmud SA national chairman, said: “When Limmud SA started in 2007, we hoped to emulate the world-class conferences in England and make Limmud SA our own with a unique South African, Jewish flavour.

“However, what we did not anticipate was that the Limmud volunteer culture would develop a community of volunteers and leaders who take responsibility and communal spearhead initiatives throughout the year.

“It is very gratifying to see our Limmud volunteers assume positions in Jewish public office, become thought leaders and go on to develop other start-ups in the Jewish community and more broadly in the South African community.

“Eleven years on, we consider Limmud SA's volunteer culture to be a greenhouse that grows and nurtures Jewish leadership in South Africa. We have become much more than an annual conference.”

Limmud board member and head of

strategic development, South African David Bilchitz, says: “Today, when deep schisms separate Jews - politically, religiously, within communities and between the Diaspora and Israel - the Limmud model and message is more necessary than ever.

“Building and sustaining unity takes hard work and a constant effort to understand and bridge our differences. Owing to Limmud's shared values, it offers a platform to explore, understand and discuss differences, emphasising common denominators and what we can learn from each other.

“It is thus a beacon of light in building the future of community through respect and accepting diverse Jewish identities.”

The Jerusalem Unity Prize and Unity Day recognise individuals, organisations, and initiatives in Israel and throughout the Jewish world, which advance mutual respect among the Jewish people.

“Limmud has shown that in an increasingly polarised world, we are strongest when we work together,” said Limmud Chief Executive Eli Ovits. “As one people, across Israel and the Diaspora, hand in hand with all denominations and parts of society, unity becomes reality.”

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A drunken Purim – right or wrong?

STAFF REPORTER

For some youngsters, Purim has become an excuse to get fall-down drunk, all in the name of religion. And while the source quoted is the Mishnah, that states: “Rava said: a person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’,” some may be taking this too literally.

Last week a petition went out around Johannesburg to “stop the dangerous Purim activities in Johannesburg”, claiming that “numerous Hatzolah ambulance calls testify to the life-threatening danger of this event”. The petition was to be sent to OhrSom Student Johannesburg, who held a Purim party for young people.

The petition signed by 118 people by Tuesday this week, made numerous ugly allegations, but one of them hit a chord with many Jewish parents and rabbis. This was: “To allow such an open flow of alcohol to young adults and teenagers, is undoubtedly a severely dangerous activity that should be halted immediately.



“How can it be allowed for people to get so drunk that they need to go to hospital in the name of religion?” And another uncomfortable point made was the first comment under the petition, which was from Zach Davidowitz, who claimed the petition was outrageous. “Those who were taken to hospital (myself included) were not force-fed alcohol. I made the stupid decision to drink too much myself.

“It is absurd that OhrSom Student is taking the fall for the reckless behaviour of one or two individuals at most, when in actuality all OhrSom did was provide us with an opportunity to celebrate Purim.”

Darren Sevitz, CEO of Hatzolah, would not confirm or deny anything, saying the organisation respects patient confidentiality and does not report on specific operational events.

Tellingly, however, the Hatzolah website gives statistics for their activities during 2016. Of the 2 183 call-outs the Jewish ambulance service had last year, 49 are described as “overdose”.

The buzz on social media claimed that three young people were taken to hospital by Hatzolah with alcohol poisoning, while many others were so drunk they were running around Glenhazel with hardly any clothes on. This could not be verified as a veil of secrecy has dropped over the apparent goings-on at this popular Purim party. The question of getting so drunk at Purim is contentious, as some schools of thought not only practise it, but see it as a mitzvah. Others completely disagree with it.

The social media story of the year-to-date in the community is seeing many questioning the practice of getting drunk on Purim, and asking if there is not a more spiritual and refined way of celebrating the happy holiday.

Drinking excessively was in the past never the norm for Jewish people.

Chabad.org lists over 80 articles on this subject. In one, called “The Purim Drunk” by Yanki Tauber, he questions how the statement in the Megillah should be implemented in practice, saying there was a disagreement between various halachic authorities.

Says Tauber: “All halachic authorities are unanimous in ruling that it is a mitzvah to drink, and drink to excess on Purim, though there are differences of opinion as to whether the obligation is to get as drunk as Rava enjoins, or to a lesser degree.

“In any case, the concept of becoming intoxicated on Purim to the point that one’s reason is totally incapacitated is a legitimate halachic position, which requires understanding and validation regardless of whether or not it is accepted in practice.”

In contrast, another well-known Chabad.org commentator, Tzvi Freeman, answers a question in an article called “Do I have to get drunk on Purim?” The question posed was: “I’m going to sound like a nerd, but I’m not. Do I have to drink on Purim?”

Freeman wrote: “Purim is not about drinking. Purim is about being drunk with sincere happiness.”

He says that traditionally, Jews have celebrated Purim by “drinking a little extra wine at their Purim feast with friends”, and if that gets you there, then it’s the halachically prescribed way to do the mitzvah.

“Drinking, according to the sages of the Talmud,” writes Freeman, “can heighten the joy and excitement of Purim. So, they declared it actually is a mitzvah - as long as you are confident that your behaviour will remain at the high standard expected by the Torah.

“If you are planning to drive, or you know that drinking can otherwise get you in trouble, then alcohol might as well be pork juice.”

One modern Orthodox rabbi put it in the following manner. “To have a drink, is okay, to get drunk, however, can never be considered a mitzvah.”

Hebrew U opens doors for SA students

ANT KATZ

A huge obstacle has been removed for South African students wanting to study in Israel, with the announcement this week that The Hebrew University of Jerusalem will in future accept South African matric certificates.

This makes Hebrew University the first of Israel’s seven state universities to accept the South African matric certificate.

“After a lengthy process, of curriculum analysis and discussions, Hebrew University has officially agreed to accept both the IEB and NSC matric certification as an accredited entrance criteria for the University,” said SA Friends of Hebrew University’s president, Prof Michael Katz;

chairman, Jeff Katz; and vice-chairman Lawrence Barnett in a joint statement this week.

“We at SAFHU are excited that Israel’s premier university has opened its doors to our South African students.” They added that they “look forward to assisting more students with their enrolment to HU”.



The two Katzes and Barnett said it was a “crucial mission of the university, Israel’s main source of innovation and leadership, to recruit the next generation of brilliant scientists and scholars who will conduct ground-breaking research and mentor thousands of students each year”. And as SAFHU, they continue to support The Hebrew University to assist it in its life changing research.

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Jewish Report

Holocaust and colonialism - no comparison

The DA's Helen Zille made comments on Twitter last week that sunk her deep into hot water. She defended colonialism.

To be exact, she tweeted: "For those claiming legacy of colonialism was only negative, think of our independent judiciary, transport infrastructure, piped water, etc."

And then: "Would we have had a transition into specialised healthcare and medication without colonial influence? Just be honest, please."

She later apologised, but the damage had already been done and she is going to have to live with the consequences.

Whether I agree with her or not, is irrelevant in this editorial. I am not about to defend her or sink her even further, and I am sure there are varied views among you, our readers.

The point for me is what it brought out in people, both in mainstream media and all over the Twittersphere.

I was horrified that her gaffe led to people, like DA party member Mbali Ntuli, suggesting: "It's like saying Nazism was good for German democracy and their advancements in technology."

Another wrote on Twitter: "Colonialism is only good if it touched others. That African genocide, enslavement & brutality is the same as the Holocaust is lost on Helen."

And yet another wrote: "I'm sure next you'll tell Jews to look at the positive side of Nazi Germany..."

And it didn't stop there. There were many references and comparisons to the Nazis and the Holocaust.

I understand that colonialism was appalling and the consequences for Africans - among others around the world - were dire. However, for us, there can be no comparison to the wholesale murder of six million Jews, shattering the Jewish world.

In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe was about 9,5 million. In 1950, there were about 3,5 million. In 1933, as many as 60 per cent of Jews lived in Europe and they were the victims and survivors. But those who survived carried with them the pain of the Holocaust that unwittingly was passed through the generations.

Jewish people were decimated. In the Holocaust there was no room for them to defend themselves; they were round up and forcibly sent off to their death.

My esteemed colleague, Kevin Ritchie - who is the regional executive editor of Independent Newspapers – wrote in an editorial that the comparison between colonialism and the Nazi Holocaust are "neither theatrical nor over-stated".

He cites "Australia's aboriginal population having declined from a quarter of a million in 1788 to less than 60 000 by the 1920s due to massacres and diseases imported by the colonists" and then the Germans colonialists who "exterminated" the Hereros of Namibia around the turn of the century.

Yes, there were those and many other atrocities perpetrated under the guise of colonialism and, no, I am not making a comparison with the number of people killed and by whom.

My point is: There can be no comparison.

Colonialism was about people coming in from the outside and taking over from the local inhabitants. The initial perpetrators of the Holocaust were German people against German Jewish citizens and the horror was spread through Europe.

As Jews, the Holocaust touches something in each one of us. We make sure that even our children - born more than a lifetime later - are taught never to forget.

Do I believe that the comparison to the Holocaust was anti-Semitic? No. My sense is that people were trying to think of the worst possible scenario to compare what Zille had said, and so they pick the Holocaust. Yes, it was the worst possible...

And through our history there have been many atrocities done to the Jewish people, but not so fresh and painful as this.

We will never forget, but also don't accept having this deeply etched scar dished up as a comparison wherever it suits.

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

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PAULA SLIER

MIDDLE EAST - "No comment" - the two words journalists most abhor, but which with time have come to be interpreted as an admission of guilt; a tacit confirmation of the party being questioned. Ask an Israeli official if the country has nuclear arms and inevitably you'll get the "no comment" answer. Ask if the country conducts military strikes in Syria, same response.

So, when the Israel Defence Forces released a statement a few days ago admitting its warplanes had hit several targets in Syria, it was unusual to say the least.

The statement went on to read that during the operation, which was aimed at an arms convoy of the Lebanese militant group, Hezbollah, "several anti-aircraft missiles were launched from Syria. One of the missiles was intercepted by the air defence system of the IDF."

That missile reportedly had a 200kg warhead and for the first time Israel officially confirmed firing its most advanced Arrow missile defence system to bring it down. The explosion was heard as far away as Jerusalem and fragments landed in Jordan.

It was the most serious incident to date between the two countries since the Syrian civil war erupted six years ago. Israel's Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman, threatened that Israel would destroy Syria's air defence system if she ever fired an anti-aircraft missile at the Jewish State again.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad retorted that he was counting on Russia to prevent a conflict with Israel.

Strong words from both sides - a warning that neither intends to back down. But at the same time neither seriously wants war.

Assad has his hands full trying to contain the implosion of his country and Israel is trying to stop the war from creeping across her border.

Over the past six years there has been sporadic cross-border fire and shells have landed in the Israeli part of the Golan Heights from Syria. The IDF has always insisted they were strays and while that might be so, the changes in Syria have brought Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's arch nemesis, Iran, closer than ever to Israel's northern border.

Netanyahu regards Iran and its allies, of which the Assad regime in Syria is one and Hezbollah another, as the most dangerous threat facing Israel. Hezbollah fighters are on the ground in Syria assisting Assad's army.

While Israel's official position is that it is not involved in Syria, it is an open secret that the country has relations with Sunni rebels fighting against Assad, near the Israeli-Syrian border.

Israel would much rather they remain the dominant force there instead of soldiers aligned with Assad's army, Iran or other jihadist groups. The last thing Israel wants is Islamic State fighters on its border.

How then to stop Iran and its allies from using the situation in Syria to improve their position against Israel? This is precisely the quandary the Israelis find themselves in.

The winds of war are blowing

"We were not fortunate like our fathers to fight against Israel. We are using this opportunity to fight in Syria, to learn, and then when the war stops we will have the experience we need to turn our attention against Israel" - precisely what Jerusalem is afraid of.

One way is to provide medical aid to Syrian civilians and wounded rebel fighters from the border area - Israel does this and is very public about it, although the precise nature of her assistance to the rebels is unknown.

Stopping Iranian arms shipments destined for Hezbollah is another. In the last four months, in addition to last week's IAF strike in Syria, there have been reports of at least four other similar Israeli raids. Jerusalem worries these weapons will eventually find their way to the group's Beirut headquarters from where they'll be pointed in Israel's direction.

I have spent time on the Lebanese-Syrian border watching huge truckloads of fruit and vegetables passing through the official crossings. Civilians there were afraid to talk on camera but were happy to tell me it was common knowledge that among the produce were hidden weapons.

On another occasion I interviewed Lebanese fighters who patrol the Lebanese-Syria border as a second line of defence to the Lebanese army. They were full of praise for Hezbollah fighters deep inside Syria.

As one of them told me: "We were not fortunate like our fathers to fight against Israel. We are using this opportunity to fight in Syria, to learn, and then when the war stops we will have the experience we need to turn our attention against Israel" - precisely what Jerusalem is afraid of.

At this stage the future of Syria is anyone's guess. Peace efforts continue to fail and there is a lot of talk that the country could be broken up into fiefdoms, although this is no-one's preference.

For years when I interviewed Israelis they would consent that although they despised Assad, the idiom "better the devil you know than the devil you don't", held true. Should Syria be divided, Israel and the international community would face a number of smaller, economically unviable, states with various leaders ruling over different minorities, prone to extremism, and harbouring revenge.

Right now it doesn't look like there'll be a wider confrontation between Israel and Syria. Israel has a military advantage over Syria and it's doubtful whether Damascus is interested in dragging Israel into a war - one that from its perspective would wipe out all the achievements the regime has chalked up in recent months. But the winds of war are blowing and most Israelis feel the chill.



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Net closing in on tax and forex dodgers



STEVEN GRUZD

“In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes,” wrote American statesman Benjamin Franklin in 1789. “If only it could be in that order,” quipped Anthony Chait, founder and CEO of Zeridium, a niche tax and exchange control advisory firm.

With countries soon to automatically share tax and bank account information with one another, the clock is ticking for those with investments outside South Africa to “regularise” their tax and exchange control affairs.

Many in the local Jewish community have surreptitiously squirrelled away money overseas for years (as, of course, have many other South Africans). But will this new measure boost the coffers of the beleaguered South African Revenue Service (SARS), or erode the very tax base it is trying to bolster?

After 9/11, authorities stepped up efforts to track illicit financial flows, in particular those funding terrorists. Cross-border collaboration was ramped up to follow the money. As a result, from September 1, this year, when the international Common Reporting Standards kick in, people will find it much harder to hide foreign bank accounts from their national revenue services, as information will be automatically reported to them by their global counterparts.

In his February 2016 Budget Speech, Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan said: “Our international collaboration is an essential part of efforts to ensure that the tax system remains robust... Time is now running out for taxpayers who still have undisclosed assets abroad.”

Gordhan announced that a Special Voluntary Disclosure Programme (SVDP) would soon be instituted. The legislation was finalised in January.

So, will taxpayers now come clean?

According to Chait, about 45 000 mainly private individuals received amnesty in a disclosure programme begun in 2003, paying a 10 per cent penalty.

Chait noted that when exchange controls were much more restrictive, many South Africans travelling abroad, acted as “currency mules”, transporting forex for wealthy

individuals by using their full currency allowance for the price of an air ticket. Others deposited their leftover travellers’ cheques in foreign banks that didn’t ask too many questions. “This was highly illegal, of course,” he said.

In his 2017 budget, Gordhan said: “South Africa intends to sign a multilateral instrument this year which... will reduce the scope for aggressive tax avoidance activities.”

He said the SVDP - run jointly by SARS and the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) through the eFiling online platform - had already received disclosures of R3,8 billion in foreign assets, said to yield about R600 million in additional revenue.

Chait notes that those who use the SVDP “could pay 26 per cent of the value of the capital to SARS and SARB for the sake of regularising. Some feel this is too expensive and may seek alternatives.” He says that the scheme could backfire, as wealthy employers, entrepreneurs and taxpayers might emigrate to avoid these high costs, including making aliyah.

But what is the cost of non-compliance? Chait says: “You may have to answer some very uncomfortable questions from SARS” and could face heavy under-disclosure penalties. This is despite recent comments by Justice Dennis Davis recently that SARS was on the brink of imploding, due to senior staff departures, reduced collections and political infighting.

The risk is real. Israeli banks, for instance, have been under huge pressure from the US to “know their customers”, demanding disclosure, or otherwise threatening to freeze accounts.

However, for Professor Barry Spitz, who was formerly a consultant to SARS, the IRS and the IBFD in Amsterdam, international solutions begin at the starting point of picking up the original error that led to one misidentifying the real issue in the first place. From then on, the problems solve themselves.

Despite South Africans being notorious for complying with rules at the last minute, Chait says: “People seem to just want to get shot of this.”

The deadline for the SVDP expires on August 31, this year.



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Homework or not? The jury is out



TALI FEINBERG

Adam is eight and a half years old and in grade 2. He is exhausted in the afternoons and it is always a fight to do homework, says his mother, Taryn Levin, who would love to be rid of homework for her littlies.

“I rather would have more quality time with my kids and less fighting to do homework, which creates a very negative and stressful environment,” remarks Levin.

Homework used to be a pillar of school life, but many educators have begun to question if it does more harm than good. A Stanford University researcher recently found that learners in high-achieving communities who spend too much time on homework, experience more stress, physical health problems, a lack of balance and even alienation from society.

The study indicates that more than two hours of homework a night may be counterproductive.

A 2006 study by Duke University psychology professor Harris Cooper, found evidence of a positive correlation between homework and learner achievement, meaning that learners who did homework performed better in school.

The correlation was stronger for older learners (grades 7 to matric) than for those in younger grades, for whom there was a weak relationship between homework and performance.

SA Jewish Report spoke to school principals, teachers, parents and learners at the forefront of this debate.

Shelley Nochumsohn Berman is a teacher with 35 years’ experience, currently teaching English to grades 7, 8 and 9 at a religious Jewish day school in Johannesburg. She feels strongly that “schools give far too much homework. The religious Jewish schools have a very long school day to make time for kodesh learning.

“Homework is a major cause of conflict in the home. Parents are so desperate to avoid these fights that they often land up doing the work for their children. This only encourages children to be dishonest as they then have to pretend that they have done it themselves.

“I do think a certain amount of homework is necessary to teach children responsibility.”

She believes if all schools reduced the homework load, children would be happier. “The number of children being medicated for anxiety and stress is absolutely frightening. We need to take some of the pressure off these kids,” she says.

Sinai Academy in Cape Town has done away with formal homework. “If a child needs extra assistance or practice with any specific skills, work can be sent home to do there, and incomplete work is also sent home,” says director Zeesy Deren. “Each child is treated individually.

“Children can’t learn under stress, so we felt homework became counterproductive,” says Deren. “It has also helped to bring back the creativity and imagination of the child, which has largely been lost in our environments due to external pressures.”

In doing away with homework at Sinai Academy, some challenges have arisen: “Class work can possibly be increased as more repetition or practice of a skill previously done as homework, now falls into class time.

“Some parents believe they have lost a sense of where their child is academically, as they no longer see their work or progress.”

Sheva Messias, principal of King David Linksfield Primary and Pre-Primary, says that currently grade R is their only unit to receive homework. “Parents today do not always understand that by doing away with formal homework, the time should not be replaced by TV, iPads and screens.

“This time should still be used to spend with their child, but rather than completing stressful non-beneficial activities, fun and developmentally appropriate activities can now take place.

“Some parents have been resistant to this, feeling that no formal homework is an indication that the programme is not of the same high standard as when formal homework is given, despite the research showing this not to be the case.”

Herzlia High School Principal Marc Falconer comments: “A holistic and balanced education is what all the Herzlia schools are offering. This does mean that pupils are not loaded with homework, making play, sport and cultural and outreach activities impossible.

“Homework is balanced and thought through, and not overwhelming. There is a place for homework - which does not have to do with marks. We want pupils to be excited by their learning and to use the many educational opportunities they have available to develop their own learning pathways and to explore areas that are of particular interest to them.

“This is not necessarily home WORK, but it is designed for pupils to reflect on, develop and internalise learning for themselves - which may happen at home and after school hours.”

Caryn Gootkin, a parent of two at Herzlia, says: “I don’t think scrapping homework is the answer - I enjoy knowing what my children are doing and can very quickly pick up where they are missing a concept.

“I wouldn’t know this if they didn’t do any work at home. It’s not fair to expect the teacher to have in-depth knowledge of each child’s ability at every point.”

However, she advises that homework should be more creative, which would lead to “some interest beyond simply getting it done to get the signature in the book. It’s often not productive or thought-provoking at all. They love doing project work and investigative work, but it’s very rare.”

Her son Sam (11), in grade 5, says: “I prefer working on projects rather than doing homework based on classwork. I find it boring doing repetitive studying. I like that I can finish my homework in class if I’ve completed the schoolwork. Homework should extend what we did in class, not just simply continue doing the same thing.”

Anton Krupenia, principal of Herzlia Weizmann Primary in Sea Point, comments: “We are aware of how busy our children are and are constantly evaluating what we give for homework and why.

“However, if we did away with homework we would struggle to consolidate certain elements of the curriculum in core learning areas, with the pace of the content being covered moving at a faster rate. This could result in some pupils being left behind.”

Herzlia Middle School in Cape Town faces particular challenges, as learners take a wide range of subjects in order to make subject choices for high school.

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Human rights and missed opportunities

MARK OPPENHEIMER

The Knesset recently passed legislation that empowers the state to refuse entry to anyone publicly calling for a boycott of Israel. The law only applies in cases where the call could reasonably lead to a boycott being imposed.

Proponents of the Bill argue that Israel, like any other state, has a right to control its borders. All nations create parameters that determine who is welcome to visit and who is not. People are excluded on the grounds of where they have previously travelled, how much money they earn, or whether they belong to hostile organisations.

Those opposed to the Bill have raised the concern that it infringes

the right to freedom of expression, since people will be denied entry based on what they have said.

Allowing the free dissemination of beliefs, opinions and other forms of expression, brings immense benefits. It allows for intellectual and cultural progress while provoking discussion and aiding the search for truth.

By stifling beliefs that are different from our own, we lose the opportunity to challenge, reconsider and perhaps reaffirm our own views.

The eminent moral philosopher Ronald Dworkin wrote that “morally responsible people insist on making up their own minds about what is good or bad in life or in politics, or what is true or false in

matters of justice and faith.

“Government insults its citizens, and denies their moral responsibility, when it decrees that they cannot be trusted to hear opinions that might persuade them to dangerous or offensive convictions. We retain our dignity, as individuals, only by insisting that no one - no official and no majority - has the right to withhold an opinion from us on the ground that we are not fit to hear and consider it.”

However, it may be retorted that the Bill does not restrict anyone inhabiting Israel from calling for a boycott, nor does it prevent those who would be blocked entry, from calling for boycotts when they are outside of the country.

Even if the Bill is not a threat to free speech, it does create an insurmountable problem. It denies Israel the opportunity to change the minds of those who are opposed to its existence.

Two years ago, Klaas Mokgomole was invited to Israel as part of a study tour. At the time, he was a member of the ANC Youth League and a vocal supporter of BDS. His experiences in Israel had a profound effect on him.

Days after his return, he wrote: “BDS has monopolised the information flow regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, and it has taken advantage of this to use the people of SA for its own personal and political gain. Today I can say I have been exposed to much more information, not only from what I heard in Israel and Palestine, but also from what I saw.

“Israelis and Palestinians do not agree on everything, but one thing they do agree on is the need for a peaceful solution leading to an independent Palestinian state co-existing with Israel.

“Just that sentence is enough



to upset BDS, which believes in forcing Israel to its knees through boycotts, then getting rid of it completely. As with every educational experience, I came home with more questions, mainly for BDS.”

The Bill will prevent people like Mokgomole from learning about Israel and the true nature of the conflict. It would be a strategic error to exclude those who have the greatest potential to become allies.

• Mark Oppenheimer is a practising advocate and member of the Johannesburg Bar.

Aliyah – the good, the bad and the meshuga



Benita Levin

What are the chances of you spotting a woman dressed as Batwoman sitting in a coffee shop in Oaklands? A hairdresser attending to a client while wearing his Superman outfit in Sea Point, or the teller at the supermarket in Umhlanga donning a clown mask?

Not something I'd ever encountered. But the festival of Purim is a serious business in Israel, seemingly for people of all ages. Festivities continue for a full week, with children being given a new theme each day at school. Pajama day, Superhero day and “Around the World” keeping one’s imagination busy before anyone even tries to attempt the more traditional Queen Esther or Haman costumes.

We’d been briefed beforehand about the marathon celebrations, but seeing signs in the middle of the road wishing everyone a “Chag Sameach” caught me by surprise. A parade for the children - all dressed up in colourful costumes - brought traffic to a standstill in the middle of the week.

Parts of the main road were closed off as toddlers and teenagers alike, come out in their droves to watch the procession. Later in the week there was a more risqué looking parade for older children, in which many boys were dancing around in bikinis and girls were wearing very little. There was something for everyone. Music blared in the main centre of the city, as hundreds of revellers partied along Ahuza Street.

I’d joked with a friend that Batwoman was the obvious choice of costume for me, because one does need superhero powers to cope with all the new changes that come with being an olah chadasha.

In the past, juggling the roles of a wife, mom, radio news editor and life coach, kept me setting regular new goals. Now, one feels a bizarre sense of achievement to co-ordinate a dishwasher load, washing machine cycle and three meals a day, all before leaving one’s home in the morning.

It all comes down to some highly efficient home planning. When I say planning, I mean rostering. Everyone here gets involved. Our children get to pick their

favourite music as they finish their chores - including sweeping, throwing out the trash, washing up after meals and folding clothes. (Kelly Clarkson’s What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger - seems to be a firm favourite, followed closely by a local hit song here, called Zahav.)

There is no doubt that we’re in the novelty phase of this group family clean-up routine. It is simply going to have to become our new normal.

Then there’s the daunting task of taking on the local supermarkets. Who’d ever have dreamt that a routine trip with a trolley could potentially be an ordeal? We’d been warned a debut trip to a local shop - with most branding obviously in Hebrew - would be enough to reduce the toughest of adults to tears.

Armed with a Hebrew-speaking husband, a host of sympathetic women on speed-dial standby and a sharpened sense of humour, we ventured into uncharted shopping aisles.

It bears stating the obvious - as with anything in life, one’s attitude to anything new is most of the battle. Whether it’s a new job, a new relationship or a new home in a new country, we choose how we react to different situations.

The same applies to taking on additional household chores when you’d rather be doing anything else at the time. It also applies to something as mundane as buying groceries.

Depending on your ability to focus on the positive or the negative, you might end up laughing at the fact that you’ve inadvertently bought giblets instead of raw chicken stir fry. You’ll also soon realise that some of the main brands we know and love, are global and are easy to recognise in any language.

It’s part of the journey. You can either let the small things get you down, or you can straighten your Batwoman cloak, acknowledge that you’re experiencing the highs and lows of life in a new country and be grateful that you can...

New word of the week - Be-emet - In truth. Used in casual conversation to say “for real”.

Favourite food of the week - Malau-ach. A delicious flat pastry usually eaten with humus, boiled egg and chopped tomatoes.

Smile of the week - Seeing a concrete scale at the entrance of a park, so people can apparently weigh themselves after a walk or run. (Not worth stepping on after eating malau-ach.)

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Diversity in their support of Israel

Standing for Israel



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of religious and community leaders, from across the African continent and diverse backgrounds, gathered this week with a common goal: to show their support for Israel.

Attendance at the annual South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) conference has grown from a small group of 50 in 2011, to over 1 000 people at the separate venues in Johannesburg, Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal.

The hall in Braamfontein in Johannesburg on Sunday was filled with leaders who had travelled from all over the country and continent to hear more and further educate themselves on how to lead the fight against the delegitimisation of Israel. It was also about learning how to “tap in” and connect to the Holy Land.

Ben Swartz, SAFI founder and national chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, opened the 5th Annual Conference with a strong message about using this platform to learn, and then to take action.

“Friends are not silent. Silence is complicity,” he emphasised. SAFI is an initiative of the SA Zionist Federation and its mission is to change attitudes towards Israel and Jews everywhere by opposing dishonest and hate-filled opinions.

Bishop Timothy Cholu, who led a delegation from Zambia, said: “We want to show Zambian solidarity as part of the South African Friends of Israel and as part of the wide African continent movements in support of Israel.”

Israel’s Ambassador to South Africa Arthur Lenk, reiterated that the link between Israel and the world was getting stronger. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently visited African countries such as Kenya, Rwanda and Ethiopia. “We are gaining friends in numbers,” Lenk said.

The conference schedule was filled with renowned speakers and panellists, addressing a variety of topics, including the UN attitude towards Israel, the ability for South Africa to benefit from relationships with Israel and understanding the power of local media with regard to spreading the truth about Israel and rejecting fake news.

Dr Alexander Chisango, the keynote speaker from Zimbabwe, addressed the topic of UN Security Council Resolution 2334, condemning Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory and the status of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

“People call to wipe Israel off the map, but if you remove Israel from the world map, you have removed the Bible. We cannot stand apart from the Jews on this issue because this is an attack on Christianity

as well,” he said to loud and sustained standing applause.

The crowd was wowed by a musical performance by Dr Tumi, famous South African gospel star, getting the crowd ready for the next keynote address from Chloe Valdary. At just 23, Valdary delivered a riveting speech on Zionism and the Jewish liberation movement in the context of Israel and the Jewish homeland. Her work in the advocacy field is focused on creating digital content to reach out and connect with millennials.

The afternoon panel discussion focused on media and news and was facilitated by author and radio presenter Howard Feldman. Craig Dershowitz, manager of the organisation Artists4Israel, explained how the landscape for advocacy should not be focused on the 10 per cent anti-Israel supporters, but rather on engaging the 80 per cent of people who are indifferent.

His organisation works with more than 100 internationally renowned graffiti and tattoo artists, reaching millions of followers on social media.

“Social media has given the average person a platform to create news,” Howard Sackstein, chairman of the board of the SA Jewish Report, said. He explained how this has both a positive and negative effect on the way this generation takes in information.

The last speaker was a Moses Mayo, editor of the Inner City Gazette. He said “the truth about Israel will not be told by the mainstream media and needs to happen at grassroots level with local communities getting involved”.

As the conference drew to a close, it was clear that the enthusiasm of the delegates to “go out there and take action” was in abundance. One of the delegates, from a community in Polokwane, said that he has plans to start showing his community videos on Israeli agricultural technology and he was hoping to visit Israel himself this year to commemorate 50 years of the re-unification of Jerusalem.

At the highly successful conference, the positive engagement across the different attending communities continued to pour in, sharing their gratitude, thanks and support for both South Africa and Israel.

National Director of the SAZF, Nicci Raz, said: “We are thrilled and humbled by the support and growth of SAFI. We feel that the success of SAFI is vital to our community’s safety and support. We have already seen a huge surge in positive action across Africa.”

This conference, which is hosted nationwide, allows for seeds to be planted, relationships to be built and action to be taken.

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Joseph Meshoe, President of the ACDP and his wife, Lydia Meshoe listens to the speakers



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French right-winger Fillon cozies up to Jews to defeat Le Pen

CNAAN LIPSHIZ
PARIS

Even to his supporters, France’s centre-right presidential hopeful Francois Fillon is a flawed candidate.

Dogged by corruption scandals Fillon, who represents The Republicans Party of former President Nicolas Sarkozy, was indicted on Tuesday for allegedly funnelling public funds illicitly to his children and wife. Fillon, a career politician and former prime minister, has denied the allegations.

Nonetheless, his supporters are willing to forgive him these problems, as they see Fillon as likelier to beat the front-runner in the race, far-right candidate Marine Le Pen. Additionally, many of these supporters see him as more likely to act tough on radical Islam than his left-wing rivals.

On Monday, Fillon - who is running a credible third in the polls behind Le Pen and the centrist independent Emmanuel Macron - for the first time in his campaign attended a town hall meeting with some 700 members of the community, organised by the CRIF federation of Jewish communities.

For Fillon, it was a partial success.

Dozens of supporters welcomed him at the meeting at a Paris hotel. Meyer Habib, a Jewish lawmaker and former CRIF vice president, endorsed him publicly. Fillon earned applause at least a dozen times when he pledged to support Israel and curb jihadism.

Nevertheless, the applause was weak and sporadic, and the audience questions were critical.

Fillon rebuked France’s support for a Unesco resolution passed last year that ignored Jewish ties to Jerusalem, calling it “an error and historical untruth that complicates peace efforts”. And he vowed never to normalise ties with Iran as long as that country “continues to call for Israel’s destruction”.



Photo courtesy CRIF

Francois Fillon shaking hands with CRIF President Francis Kalifat in Paris, last week Tuesday.

He said he supported Palestinian statehood “only if the future Palestinian state is reached by an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians”.

“Jewish values, they are, well, they’re our values,” Fillon said. “Jews had a very major role in building the French republic,” he added, noting that Jews have lived in France “since time immemorial”.

Fillon made little effort to present any Jewish or pro-Israel credentials other than assuring the audience of his desire to curb anti-Semitism and radical Islam.

“Without a candidate for the centre-right, Mrs Le Pen would have a field day,” Fillon warned. “Some in the right wing would express their anger by going so far as to vote for her.”

Many in the crowd, however, remained uninspired by Fillon’s bleak description of French society and were unimpressed by his failure to apologise for mismanaging his financial affairs and accusing Jews of lawlessness.

“He’s precise and logical, but I heard nothing that will inspire young people or instil hope in the minds of those seeking meaningful change,” said Emmanuel Attlan, a 30-year-old finance executive who attended the meeting.

“He’s got nothing but fairy tales to offer,” said Henry Battner, president of the Farband association of Ashkenazi French Jews.

Serge Sznajder, a scholar on Eastern Europe and a Farband board member, used Yiddish to describe his impression of Fillon.

“Let me sum it up this way: Gurnisht,” he said, which means “nothing”.

Both Szajder and Battner said they will vote for Macron.

According to a poll on Tuesday, Le Pen is leading the race with a 26,5 per cent approval rating, followed by Macron at 25,5 per cent. Fillon was third at 18,5 per cent and the far-left Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon had 13,5 per cent.

The top two vote-getters in April’s first round will advance to the second and final round on May 7.

12 SA JEWISH REPORT

News

24 – 31 March 2017

Why Netanyahu is threatening to dissolve the government over a TV station

ANDREW TOBIN
TEL AVIV

What is Bibi up to?

That was the question many in Israel were asking last Sunday morning after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly threatened to bring down his own government to cancel reforms to state media.

According to Hebrew reports, Netanyahu told ministers last Saturday that unless the creation of a new government-funded broadcaster is aborted, “we’ll go to elections”.

Netanyahu ignored questions about the reported comment as he boarded a plane for a diplomatic visit to China on Saturday evening, and his office declined JTA’s request for comment.

Netanyahu and Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, have publicly clashed for months over the planned launch of the new broadcaster, which was supposed to be more politically independent than the current one. After supporting the 2014 legislation to create the Israel Broadcasting Corp, or Kan, Netanyahu led efforts to bury it. Kahlon has insisted that Kan move forward.

Last week Thursday, hours after Kahlon announced a public break with his long-time ally Netanyahu over the conflict, the two Likud party ministers reached a compromise that would have seen Kan launch on April 30.

Netanyahu would have agreed to drop his opposition in exchange for Kahlon’s support for legislation that would give the government oversight of all television and radio stations in the country.

But in a Facebook post on Saturday, Netanyahu said he had “changed his mind”, leaving observers to puzzle over why the prime minster, a master of political survival, would risk his perfectly good right-wing government over the reforms.

These are some theories being discussed in Israel:

Netanyahu is heartbroken.

On Facebook, Netanyahu attributed his about-face to the “heart-breaking stories” he heard when he met last week Friday with employees of the current broadcaster, the Israel Broadcasting Authority. Some 1 000 employees were to lose their jobs when it closed, and many have been protesting.

Netanyahu also cited estimates that it would be cheaper to fix the existing broadcaster than to start the new one.

“So, what do we need the [new] corporation for?” he asked.

But Finance Ministry statistics contradicted Netanyahu’s price estimates. And few Israelis believed that he suddenly developed a soft spot for broadcasting authority employees. After all, he had criticised them previously as left wing and supportive of terrorism.

Last week Thursday, Finance Ministry sources told the Hebrew media: “Netanyahu seems to have forgotten who called them Hamas members and legislated a law limiting their absorption into the [new] broadcaster.”

He fears the wrath of Kan.

Both critics and allies have suggested that Netanyahu opposes the new broadcaster because he fears it will turn against him. David Bitan, the chairman of the ruling coalition, said in November that Kan had already been “hijacked by people whose agenda is leftist and anti-government”.

The broadcaster has already been staffed and said it was ready to go on air at the start of this year.

In August, Netanyahu himself reportedly asked TV and radio employees of the Israel Broadcasting Corp a rhetorical question: “What if everyone in the [new] corporation were from [the left-wing veterans’ group] Breaking the Silence?”

But some commentators have argued that Netanyahu’s alleged desire to control coverage cannot explain his threat to call new elections because he could not really expect any future government to help him quash Kan either.

“First of all, let’s make clear that in any case, the [new] corporation will not shut down,” Yossi Verter wrote Sunday in Haaretz. “With or without elections, it will launch television, radio and digital broadcasting on April 30, and the Israel Broadcasting Authority will cease to exist.”

He is trying to avoid being indicted.

Police have questioned Netanyahu four times as part of two corruption investigations. Netanyahu has said repeatedly of the investigations: “There will be nothing because there is nothing.”

But some have speculated that he may want an excuse to call new elections to prevent the police from recommending an indictment against him - something they would customarily refrain from doing until after the polls close.

Political analysts on Israel’s Channel 2 TV news suggested that the investigations could be a motivating factor for the prime minister. But Netanyahu must know that after the elections,

there would be nothing preventing the wheels of justice from moving forward - and all the more easily if he were no longer prime minister.

He wants to bring his coalition to heel.

Netanyahu’s coalition has looked increasingly unruly of late. In addition to the falling-out between Netanyahu and Kahlon, Knesset member Yehuda Glick last week Thursday posted a 700-word treatise on Facebook despairing at what he said was a culture of fear in his Likud party.

Earlier in the week, Education Minister Naftali Bennet and other members of the government, publicly sparred with Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman over his threat to cut state funding for a pre-army military academy in the West Bank settlement of Eli if the controversial rabbi who heads it did not step down.

The week before that, Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz and Knesset member Avi Dichter both said they would run for prime minister once Netanyahu was out of the picture.

Those are just a few examples. Many interpreted Netanyahu’s threat to call elections as a bid to restore order. On Sunday, supporters and critics differed only on how likely he was to succeed.

In Israel Hayom, Mati Tuchfeld credited the prime minister’s leadership under challenging conditions.

“It’s not just the broadcaster and it’s not just Kahlon,” he wrote. “It’s also Naftali Bennett, who just a couple of days ago said that Netanyahu has neglected religious Zionism.

“It’s also Lieberman, who though he appears Netanyahu’s most trusted partner, nonetheless his comments about closing the yeshiva in Eli sent the prime minister down a dead end.”

On the other hand, Nahun Barnea concluded in Yediot Acharanot that Netanyahu was doomed to “self-destruct” in his fourth term in office, much like his former British counterparts, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

His wife and son told him to.

Finally, some blamed the woman Israelis love to hate, Netanyahu’s wife, Sara. Sima Kadmon wrote in Yediot that Sara Netanyahu demanded her husband take action because of her dislike for certain journalists hired by Kan.

“It’s clear to everyone close to the prime minister that something is going on when Netanyahu is susceptible to the influence of his relatives,” Kadmon wrote. “Ladies and gentlemen, wake up. This is your prime minister.” (JTA)

Masterchef - the kosher edition fundraiser

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

When Gimelli restaurant opened in Bryanston, Johannesburg to critical acclaim, bookings for the gourmet Italian eatery had to be made more than two months in advance.

The creative genius of the Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society was to bring celebrity chef Paulo Santo out of Gimelli’s kitchen and into the kosher environment of the Killarney Country Club.

A packed audience of more than 250 foodies watched maestro chef Santo weave his magical creativity melding together Mediterranean flavours with traditional Jewish cuisine.



In one instance, Santo explained how he had taken his Jewish mother-in-law’s traditional Moroccan chraimeh recipe and combined it with delicious pink Norwegian salmon to create a mouth-watering gastronomic masterpiece.

In another magical moment, Santo took the traditional Judeo-Turkish dish of eggplant flan and combined it with classical elements of Italian melanzane parmigiana to create an exciting culinary dish with an enormous depth of flavour.

His piece de resistance was a home-baked baklava combined with honey syrup, white chocolate cream, honey custard and vanilla poached pears.

Key to Santos’ cooking, is the inclusion of locally grown fresh ingredients and the best quality produce available. All of the audience undertook to cook at least one dish of their new repertoire within the next week.

All money raised from the event went to support the Jewish Women’s Benevolent 55 Club which brings together lonely members of the community twice a week for a meal and entertainment at Sandringham Gardens.

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Leigh Brouze, chairman of the JWBS, explained that initially, the event was established to raise money for JWBS 55 to purchase a van to transport people to events, but a generous supporter saw the advert for the event and single-handedly donated that van to this incredibly worthy cause.

SALMON CHRAIME RECIPE

Ingredients
4 x 150g salmon fillets - skin off, pin bones removed
Chraimeh sauce (see below)
Crushed black pepper
1 lemon, zested and juiced
Fresh Italian flat leaf parsley, chopped

Method

In a medium-sized saucepan (that will fit all the salmon at once), heat the chraimeh sauce over a low heat until simmering. (If too thick adjust with stock/water; it should be the consistency of soup).

Season with black pepper and lemon zest, then add the salmon fillets and shallow poach for 3-4 minutes per side, turning once.

Remove from heat, add fresh parsley and spoon the sauce liberally over the fish to coat. Finish with fresh lemon juice over the fish.

Simply serve with kitke or pita, or even as a sauce for pasta with some Grano Padano parmesan.

Serves 4

Chraime sauce
Ingredients

- 25ml olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1 small red chilli, finely chopped
- 100g Calamata olives, pitted and chopped
- ½ tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp paprika
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- 30ml lemon juice
- 250ml pareve chicken stock
- 500ml tomato ragu
- Fresh basil

Method

In a large pot, heat olive oil, and sauté garlic, onion, peppers, chilli and olives. Add the oregano, paprika and cumin and cook for a further five minutes.

Add lemon juice and stock to the pan, then allow to boil and reduce by half.

Add tomato ragu, then blitz sauce to a homogenous sauce. Return to the heat and adjust consistency if necessary, with some stock/water. Season with salt and fresh basil to taste.



TRIBUTE TO A LEGEND

On 16 December 2016, South African Jewry lost one of its greatest-ever leaders and benefactors with the passing of Gerald Leissner, zt"l.

In a communal career spanning over four decades, Gerald was at the forefront of some of the most significant developments in South African Jewish life, whether in the political, educational, welfare or Holocaust commemoration spheres. Through his unmatched organisational and financial skills, foresight, energy and tireless commitment, he made an immeasurable contribution to our Jewish community, and indeed to South Africa as a whole.

Yeshiva College School and Shul, The SA Jewish Board of Deputies, The IUA-UCF and Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, will be hosting a Memorial evening in tribute to Gerald Leissner.

We invite you to join us in paying tribute to this great Jewish South African.

Date: 3 April 2017
Time: Mincha will start at 5:15pm., the memorial will follow at 5:30pm
Venue: Yeshiva College Shul

No RSVP. Further information: Cheryl.hh@yeshivacollege.co.za, Roseanne - sajbd@sajbd.org or 0116452521



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What do we look like in the world’s mirror?



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

With near-daily scandals rocking this country, it sometimes seems we are unravelling under blundering leadership. But we are not alone and not that bad compared to global citizens’ views on their own, ours and other countries. US News and World Report’s annual “Best Countries” survey for 2017, polled 21 000 individuals from 80 countries on their perceptions of different nations. Questions were asked on culture, citizenship, power, corruption, political stability, human rights and so on. Surveys are always to be taken with a pinch of salt. Mark Twain popularised the phrase: “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics”, which he attributed to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. In the worst of countries listed in surveys, some people live great lives; and in the best, there are always many miserable people. Nevertheless, the US News and World Report survey is worth looking at. Nearly two thirds of respondents agree the world has a leadership crisis, especially Africa and Latin America. Global risk analysis firm Eurasia Group’s head, Ian Bremmer, says the world is in a “geopolitical recession”, a period of instability and lack of leadership exemplified by US President Donald Trump’s election. So too for South Africa. Amidst bitter leadership battles and the mediocrity of many, this country cries out for great leadership as the ANC breaks apart, President

Jacob Zuma and his cabal manipulate state entities through patronage and other means, and opposition figures rush around looking for solid ground. Which countries are the “best” in the world according to the survey’s criteria? Switzerland, as a metaphor for beauty and orderliness, unsurprisingly comes out tops in the category “Best Countries Overall”, for its quality of life and culture. It is followed by Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany. The United States fell to seventh place this year from fourth last year because nearly 75 per cent of respondents said they lost respect for it during the 2016 presidential campaign’s toxic tone. In the Twitter universe, Trump’s ugly tweets reached the furthest corners. Israel ranked number 30 and South Africa 38 for “Best country”. Much of global affairs has to do with activities of powerful countries. In the “Power” category, reflecting “how economically and politically influential a country was”, the United States predictably retained position 1, followed by Russia and China. A surprising figure for Jews emerges from this power category. Many Jews worldwide feel vulnerable because of anti-Semitism, which is rising worldwide. Yet the tiny Jewish state of Israel is ranked the eighth most powerful nation in the world (remember, these rankings derive from people’s perceptions). For its relatively small size, it is important globally . While the world is filled everywhere with conflict, most ordinary people just want to live peaceful lives and raise families.

They want a good job market, economic and political stability, family-friendly culture, good public education and health systems. These reflect in the “Quality of Life” category, where Canada came first, then Sweden, Denmark and Australia. Israel ranked 40, and South Africa 59. Israel’s supporters like to boast about its dynamism, which is clearly reflected in the “Movers” and “Entrepreneurship” categories. In the former, it ranked 19, with its “up-and-coming economics”, and 25 in the latter. What about South Africa and its future? A majority of the 21 000 respondents pointed to income inequality as a priority world

challenge, ahead of gender inequality and climate change. We need to take serious note of this. The shameful gap between haves and have-nots in South Africa is among the highest worldwide. Even 23 years after democracy, there are still desperately impoverished squatter camps lying minutes away from fancy upmarket neighbourhoods. Spatial apartheid is alive and well, not just racially but economically. It’s a time-bomb, waiting to explode. • Read Geoff Sifrin’s regular columns on his blog sifrintakingissue.wordpress.com

Community Columns

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Our duty to safeguard our hard-won democracy



Above Board
Jeff Katz

National Chairman

Last year a Jewish community delegation, headed by the SAJBD and comprising communal leaders, university students and day school learners, participated in the Human Rights Day commemorative events in Sharpeville, scene of the infamous massacre of anti-pass law protestors on March 21, 1960.

Participants met with survivors of that tragedy, visited and laid wreaths at the memorials to those who died and listened as the various speakers sharing their views on what Human Rights Day means to South Africa and why it was decided that it be observed on this particular date.

There was again a Jewish presence at this year’s Human Rights Day events in Sharpeville, led by SAJBD Gauteng Chairman Shaun Zagnoev and including lay and professional leaders of the Board, students and King David and Yeshiva College learners.

The Board today puts much emphasis on leading the Jewish community in being an active part of fostering a human rights culture in our country.

This, as we are increasingly coming to recognise, means identifying with the particular symbols and institutions that encapsulate our shared national heritage and values.

Public holidays are among the most important of these institutions. Each was carefully chosen to highlight an aspect of South Africa’s history that can be said to be core not just to what happened in the past, but to what we, as a nation, are aspiring to in the present and for the future.

Through remembering the suffering and

injustices of the past, we commit ourselves to doing our part in ensuring that those tragic events are not repeated. It is a reality that by and large the white minority, of which our community is a part, has to date failed to identify in any meaningful way with these national days of remembrance, and we need to make a greater concerted effort to remedy this.

Just as our own traumatic experiences of persecution have left lasting scars, so are black South Africans still struggling to come to terms with the legacy of hurt, humiliation, exploitation and dispossession that they and their ancestors were subjected to under apartheid.

Given this shared understanding, I believe that we have a special duty to make ourselves aware of what happened and to empathise with those who suffered and in many ways continue to suffer because of it.

This means resisting the tendency, unfortunately all too common among white South Africans, to play down (whether overtly or by implication) the gravity of what the majority population were forced to endure in the years of white minority rule. In this area, we as a community need to speak less and listen more.

Regardless of background, the duty to ensure that our hard-won democratic rights and humanitarian values continue to be the core of our society, is incumbent on all South Africans.

At both the collective and individual level, our community must strive to be part of that process, not just through upholding democratic, non-racial values, but through at all times acting with absolute integrity in every aspect of our lives.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM every Friday 12:00 - 13:00

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

World News in Brief

Ivanka Trump scores West Wing office

WASHINGTON - Ivanka Trump, the Jewish daughter of President Donald Trump, is working out of a West Wing office and is in the process of receiving a government security clearance. Ivanka’s office is next to senior adviser Dina Powell, who was promoted recently to a position on the National Security Council. Ivanka also is set to receive government-issued communications devices this week. Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to the president, moved their family to Washington, DC, when the president took office.

Though Trump does not have an official title and will not draw a salary, she will reportedly follow the ethics rules that apply to government employees. While Trump continues to own her own lifestyle company, she has turned daily management to the company president and has set up a trust to provide further oversight. “I will continue to offer my father my candid advice and counsel, as I have for my entire life,” Trump said in a statement while acknowledging that “there is no modern precedent for an adult child of the president”. (JTA)

Reason says: look for more diversity in senior management.

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Three generations of distance enable Austrians to discuss Holocaust



Dr Werner Dreier with Tali Nates director of the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre and Matthias Radosztics, deputy head, Austrian Embassy.

Photo supplied

MARGOT COHEN

Today’s increasingly dominant “third generation Austrians” (after the Second World War) are the first to be detached enough from the history of Nazi atrocities to be able to discuss the subject appropriately, according to Austrian historian Dr Werner Dreier, a founding director of *erinnern.at* (National Socialism and the Holocaust; Memory and Present).

Dr Dreier has a special interest in the history of anti-Semitism.

“Except in the bigger cities of Austria, and especially Vienna, young Austrians have very few opportunities to make contact with Jews and to learn about Jewish life,” said Dreier at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide

“Our seminars in Israel have shown how complicated the relationship with Israel and Austria is, even where all concerned have the best of intentions and are keen to talk to one another. Some misunderstanding is always lurking around the corner.”

Centre last week. Since 2001 he has been the Austrian delegate at the education working group of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

“In Austria, our relationship with Jews is burdened by their persecution and our shame. The more people know about the horrors of persecution, the harder they find it to belong to families and a society that were responsible for the horrors,” Dreier pointed out.

He explained that before the Second World War there were more than 200 000 Austrian Jews in the country - about 2,5 per cent of the total population.

In Vienna Jews made up 10 per cent of the population.

After the Holocaust, the Jewish population numbers dwindled to a tiny minority of between 15 000 and 20 000 out of a total of eight million people. In Vienna, many Jewish children and teenagers attend Jewish schools and this created very few opportunities for contact between Jews and non-Jews.

He pointed that there is now new anti-Semitism regarding Israel. “Our seminars in Israel have shown how complicated the relationship with Israel and Austria is, even where all concerned have the best of intentions and are keen to talk to one another. Some misunderstanding is always lurking around the corner.”

Dreier believes that a self-critical approach to crimes committed by one’s own country and the possible involvement of members of one’s own family, as established in Germany and subsequently in Austria, is a major cultural achievement of the “reappraisal generation” of 1968.

The descendants of the war generation also researched and wrote about their families perpetrators’ past in many novels and through films..

“There is a dichotomy. On the one hand we want people to reflect on what the history of National Socialism’s evil means for them on the conclusions to be drawn for their future.

“On the other, we don’t want National Socialist atrocities to be employed to legitimise political interests and divert attention from the urgent questions confronting us today,” he said, cautioning: “Deconstruct the narratives, identify the interests they reflect and adopt a coolly, rational approach.”

Dreier says it is a fact that survivors’ memories and stories grip us emotionally.

Some of the paradoxical effects of Holocaust education are: The more people learn about the Holocaust and the greater their distance of their generation from (such) historical events, the greater the wish to give the family a positive spin - the

so called “righteous gentile interpretation”.

In the 1980s the baby boomers who benefited from the educational reforms introduced by the Social Democrats, received a good education. They established memorial sites and had empathy for their victims. More eyewitness accounts of Holocaust survivors and opponents and victims of the National Socialists were published and they were invited to speak in public.

At the end of 1970 an eyewitness programme for schools was set up that still exists today. These biographies increasingly found their way into history books and Austrian literature. Most of the eyewitnesses in the school programme experienced the Nazi period as children.

The 1986 Kurt Waldheim dispute also generated much public awareness. The misleading and reluctant response of the former UN Secretary General in his biography about the Nazi period, developed into a scandal on an international scale.

In 1997 the Austrian parliament declared


May 5 the “Day of Remembrance” for the victims of National Socialism and changes to school book texts and history curricula were made. The Holocaust is now a compulsory subject for all learners.

The website *erinnern.at* was founded in 2000 at the initiative of the Ministry of Education. The first Austrian Teachers’ Seminar on Holocaust Education was held at Yad Vashem in Israel in 2000. This summer the 30th and 31st groups will travel to Yad Vashem and Ghetto Fighters House for a seminar.

In 1979 15 per cent of Austrians said there was no proof of the Holocaust, but in 2007 only seven per cent held this view.

However, Holocaust remembrance is again under threat because, says Dreier, it is seen as part of the liberal agenda established by the current dominant elite.


He believes that “the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust will not lose its relevance, which means that debate in the interpretation of history will not lose its relevance either”.




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Being a daughter where family has gone

MOIRA SCHNEIDER
CAPE TOWN

When families leave their elderly parents in old age homes in South Africa and emigrate, they usually do this with a heavy heart.

“Who will spend time with my mother? Who will take care of her idiosyncrasies? Who is going to listen to her goings on about how she used to be such a fabulous dancer in her youth and how she and my dad could have taken on Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers?”

This was the concern of one woman who left South Africa with her immediate family because her husband - who had been out of work for almost a year - had managed to get a good job in Australia.

“My mother refused to come with and I know we won’t be able to come visit very often. I go cold when I think about her back in Johannesburg,” said the woman, who asked not to be named, but is one of many, many in this situation. So many Jewish elderly people have “been left behind”.

Two sisters, Desray Conné and Marissa Greenberg have picked up on this dire need to help and care for elderly people. They have taken on the need for “Daughters on Loan”, which is what they called their company. The two found themselves at a crossroads in their working lives, when they decided to combine their experience and expertise in this venture.



Sisters Desray Conné and Marissa Greenberg offer a concierge service for seniors through Daughters on Loan.

Greenberg had worked in public relations, office management and had run a recruitment division for a change management consultancy and Conné had always worked in finance. They had always worked for bosses and now wanted to branch out on their own.

They got the idea from personal experience. “Desray’s parents-in-law were moving and selling up after living in their home for 30 years,” Greenberg recalls. “They could have

been taken advantage of if it weren’t for the family being around.”

This got them wondering how people coped if their families were overseas or if they had no family in this city. And so, some two months ago, their concierge service for seniors was born.

One woman, Jeanette Fur, 79, who lives in Highlands House in Cape Town, says: “Words are completely inadequate (to describe the sisters). I’m a widow and I’m not

always that well - they’ve just gone out of their way, (even if it is) just phoning to say ‘How are you? What can we do for you today?’ They’re caring and they show it - it means a helluva lot.”

For her daughter, California-based Ericka Fur, the women have been “a godsend. Nothing is too much to ask. They get things done with care and compassion and heart. I could not ask for more.

“They also have a lovely way of

making my mom feel visible. Too often elderly people are condescended to or ignored, with people talking to their children/carers without even properly acknowledging them. The sisters are very sensitive to that and my mom has appreciated their approach,” she says.

Since Jeanette no longer drives, the pair has stepped into the breach. “Marissa and Desray have really helped, not only by providing her rides, but also company, care and reassurance.”

The word concierge is critical to an understanding of what Daughters on Loan offers, Marissa says. “Desray and I positioned this service as fixers, problem solvers, facilitators. We get stuck in where children would but can’t.”

Services offered range from assisting with relocation, whether this involves downsizing or moving into retirement homes; decluttering and spring-cleaning; offering comfort and respite to individuals in their homes; helping with recuperation and discharge papers from hospital; attending to medical aid queries and basic finances; and running general errands.

An important focus is keeping the elderly socially connected to enable them to age in a healthy manner, she stresses. “It could be keeping them in touch with their family on Facebook or teaching them IT skills so they can get on to Facebook or planning outings and lunches, but we are open to any requirements.”

Beyachad Library – not just a collection of books

LIONEL SLIER

“The Beyachad Library is (finally) going to be closed down... No, it’s nonsense, it will never close...” Rumour-mongering has always been standard fare concerning this establishment.

The Jewish community in South Africa is rich in heritage and history, but its history is only as good as the historical books and digital means in which it is preserved. Lose those books, and so much of our past will be forced to depend on word of mouth for remembrance.

To preserve our history, Johannesburg Jewry has the Issie Maisels Library at Beyachad in Raedene. The library, named in memory of one of the greatest legal minds this country has ever seen, and also president of the South African Zionist Federation, once held pride of place. But today few people even know where it is and rumours persist, despite denials, that its future is uncertain.

Librarian Maxine Fine, however, says there is reason to be optimistic about the library’s future.

The library contains historical books about the early Jewish arrivals in Johannesburg. It has newspapers dating back to its origins as a mining town in 1886. It has pamphlets, press cuttings and pictorial material on practically every facet of Jewish learning and history, ranging from the community’s earliest beginnings to the present.

The library moved to its present premises in 1994 when Zion Centre on the edge of the Johannesburg CBD was vacated. The Jewish Board of Deputies, the SA Zionist Federation, the Israel

United Appeal, among others, moved to Raedene.

The library was successful. It attracted scholars, researchers, historians, journalists and members of the public who came to borrow books. The archival material was excellent and the books by South African Jewish authors as well as Israeli books, were greatly appreciated. Often there was a waiting list to borrow books...

Eighty-year-old Jack Padolsky remembers that the library was a place where one could come and relax in a pleasant atmosphere. “The librarians were always helpful and often, when doing research, I would be offered a cup of tea.”

In 2014, however, a decision was taken that the library was “an unnecessary expense” and should be closed down. Sections of the community reacted with shock and anger and raised their voices.

A sort of compromise was reached: The library would be downsized. It would no longer be a lending library, but only open for research purposes. About one-third of the library space was taken away and given to Beth Hatefutsoth, an estimable organisation in its own right which is compiling books about the early Jewish country communities.

Fortunately sanity of a sort prevailed. The library was saved, but changes were made. Some staff had to go and Fine, a new librarian, was engaged. A glass wall was built, cutting off public access to the reference section. Only Fine could go in there. The fiction section was discontinued... But the library prevailed.

Fine has been reorganising the records and catalogues, the lists and the

periodicals and the newspapers. Now the lending library has been restarted with books of fiction as well as non-fiction, mostly Jewish and Israeli. She also mentioned the extensive DVD library which long- time library assistant, Eric Machado runs.

So, how did the latest rumours of the library’s uncertain future start? A past employee of the library said that there was always this feeling that because the library was not making money it was a burden. “We never felt that we had job security there. Funding for new books was a joke.”

Isaac Reznik, the well-known commentator on Jewish life, commented that since when were libraries expected to make money? “They provide the community with a service. They serve to educate the community. They guard and preserve the records and the history of the community.”

Alas, members of the Jewish community are not great supporters of the library, but Fine hopes that this will change. She remains optimistic about the library’s future.

Fine is planning social events with guest speakers, have meetings, book launches and discussions with the general public in the space. She added that, as with most libraries, donations of books, documents and publications were very welcome- and of course, donations.

It seems to be a fact of life at Beyachad Library, that rumours will come and rumours will go. Yet for those who care about the library, it is clear that eternal vigilance is needed.

World News in Brief

BDS leader arrested for tax evasion

JERUSALEM - A co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel has been arrested in Israel for tax evasion.

Omar Barghouti, a Qatari-born Palestinian who lives in northern Israel with his Israeli-Arab wife, was arrested on Monday and questioned before being released a few hours later on bail. He was banned from leaving the country and required to leave his passport with the court in Haifa, according to reports.

He received permanent residency status in Israel in 1994. Barghouti, of Acre, is accused of failing to report about \$700 000 in income over the past decade that he earned while working as the director of National Computing Resources in Ramallah. (JTA)

Database of Israelis supporting BDS

JERUSALEM - Israel’s public security minister Gilad Erdan plans to set up a database of Israeli citizens involved in supporting boycotts against Israel or West Bank settlements.

He has been trying to implement the plan for several months, Haaretz reported.

Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit is “vehemently opposed” to the proposal, saying that the ministry does not have the legal authority to collect such information on Israeli citizens, even though Erdan has said the information would come from public platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Erdan has already set up an intelligence unit to collect information on foreign BDS activists. (JTA)

Building a baseball stadium

JERUSALEM - Plans to build the first regulation baseball stadium in Israel have gathered steam in the wake of Team Israel’s surprisingly strong performance in the World Baseball Classic.

Members of Team Israel participated in the ground-breaking for the complex in Beit Shemesh, a city located near Jerusalem with a large expatriate American population. Most of the team roster was American Jewish players with major and minor league experience who came in December with their families to visit Israel and meet Israeli fans before representing the country in the international tournament.

It is one of several baseball fields being built in Israel through the Jewish National Fund’s Project Baseball. (JTA)

In an all out escape from the chometz

SUZANNE BELLING

The Red Sea parting was a miracle, but Jewish women the world over are hoping for a new modern miracle - that their homes could be magically cleaned for Pesach, the chometz packed away, the Passover shopping done and full meals prepared for the family seders.

Yes, this holiday is certainly different from all others. But while celebrating the Exodus from Egypt might not bring about a contemporary miracle, there are answers to the many (not four) questions for those wishing to escape the hassle of Pesach preparations.

But, for the most part, these come at a serious price and are for the very wealthy.

There are few individual communal seders being organised by the shuls this year - mainly in Cape Town at the Sephardi Shul, the Great Synagogue in the Gardens, Marais Road Shul and Morasha in Arthurs Road.

Rabbi Ari Kievman of Chabad House in Johannesburg, with his wife, Batya, invite members of the community to the Pesach Retreat at the Bon Riviera Hotel on the Vaal, describing it as “an upscale Pesach experience, in a beautiful environment”.



Setting the Seder table before last year’s Pesach Retreat

Executive chef Alan Bender will prepare three kosher l’Pesach meals each day, also providing tea and snack box lunches for chol hamo’ed days.

The Vaal River offers water sports and cruises, golf and a spa. There are supervised children’s activities, Jewish movies and other fun-filled activities and Hatzolah will be providing a CPR training course.

Cantor Yudi Cohen, of Sydenham Shul, will an attraction for the services.

Outside guests are welcome to book for the seders that include private or semi-private ones. Prices for the full nine days start at R18 990 per person sharing, or R2 490 per day.

For further information, e-mail pesachSA@gmail.com, or call Batya Kievman on 072-801-7491.

Caterer Avron Almeleh of Avron’s Place in Sea Point, is anticipating little sleep over the Pesach period. He is catering for the seders at all the Cape Town shuls mentioned above, as well as moving in, with his family, to the President Hotel for the entire Pesach period.

Strictly kosher under the Cape Beth Din, the President is located within easy walking distance of five shuls and is close to beaches.

“We have mashgichim on duty 24/7 and kiddies’

programmes and music (during chol hamo’ed).” he said.

“People who want glatt kosher, chalav Yisrael and bishul Yisrael will be provided for and there will be an in-house shul. There is virtually no time of the day when a meal will not be served,” said Almeleh.

Rabbi David Raphaeli, from Israel and formerly of Herzlia School, will be in attendance, as well as guest lecturers.

The full meal rate for the entire period is R12 650, although individual meals and seders may be booked - the cost of the seders is R850 per adult, with reduced prices for children.

Room prices range from R3 210 to R6 710 per person per day. For further information call Cecilia Frans at (021) 430-2450 or go to resco-ordinator@presidenthotel.co.za.

Lunch boxes will be provided for those who want to explore the Cape Peninsula during chol hamo’ed.

Nine days in Umhlanga are being arranged by Shlomo Wainer of Chabad of the North Coast. “All meals, Shabbos and Yomtov, including the seders and accommodation, are being provided, or one can just book for the seders,” said Wainer.

There is a shul next door to the guest house and all services will be held.

The cost for the full Pesach package is R9 750 per adult sharing, with reduced prices for children, or R1 085 per day per adult sharing. Seders are R350 per person. Three meals a day are offered for people staying in the guest house, which is close to the beach. Wainer is organising a Pesach braai.

For further information, call Orit on (031) 561-2487.

The Arabella Hotel and Spa in Hermanus is offering a luxury fully kosher l’Pesach week. Guests are welcome to join the festive communal seder or hold private ones.

All wines, soft drinks and other essentials for the seder will be provided. Glatt kosher menus will be provided to suit the sophisticated and traditional palettes.

There is a shul on the premises, with services, shiurim and workshops by guest rabbis and lecturers.

Cost is R3 450 per person per day (sharing).

Plettenberg Bay offers a full Pesach programme at the Beacon Isle Hotel and includes services at the shul and both seders.

Non-residents are welcome to book for the seders. The kosher kitchen will serve contemporary buffets and dinners during chol hamo’ed. Rabbi Desmond Maizels of the Cape Beth Din will be the rabbi in attendance.

The Pesach programme includes sightseeing trips. Daily snack packs are available. Three meals a day, including the seders, will cost R16 500 per adult. The seders cost R610 per adult, with reduced prices for children.

For further information and prices call Jorge on 083-327-5724 or e-mail jorge@islanddiner.co.za.

In Johannesburg, Beit Emanuel is holding a communal seder at the temple in Oxford Road, Parktown. For details phone Sandy on (011) 646-6170.

There will be seders at Sandringham Gardens, Our Parents Home and the Capri. For details at Sandringham Gardens and the Capri, contact Avril on (011) 483-7495; or Denise for Our Parents Home on (011) 489-7195.

People may book for any or all Pesach meals as well as the seders.

Bikkur Cholim volunteers interact



The guest speaker, Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein, addressing the volunteers.

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein discussed the importance of bikkur cholim at a breakfast for Bikkur Cholim volunteers last Tuesday at the HOD.

All the volunteers - both young and old – then interacted and shared stories.

The organisation also launched its Shabbat Care Packages project, through which it tries to ease the load for any Jewish patient who needs to spend Shabbos in hospital.

Bikkur Cholim has a box which it tries to provide to each patient. These boxes include mezonot biscuits, hamotzi challah rolls, kiddush wine, electronic candles (halachically acceptable), spices for Havdalah, Divrei Torah and some nosh.

Anyone who would like to get involved in any of of Bikkur Cholim’s projects, may call (011) 440-3606 or visitwww.bikkurcholim.co.za

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south african
Jewish Report

King David Linksfield junior councillors

JODI STARKOWITZ

Two King David Linksfield grade 11 learners - Natalia Laffer-Liebson and Jamey Wolpe - have been elected as Johannesburg Junior Councillors for 2017.

Laffer Liebson is head of the school's Outreach Committee. This committee works with the community to improve the living conditions of the community at large. Welfare's projects are often a lot more direct and hands on. The committee achieves its goals by holding events for underprivileged people or working with organisations that help these people.

Wolpe is deputy head of the Advocacy Committee. This committee aims to inspire and unite the youth of Johannesburg to enable them to unlock the true potential for shaping society for the better.

The committee speaks out against injustices in society, to ensure that all South Africans don't just have rights in theory, but in practice as well and they endeavour to empower the youth of South Africa to become leaders in their own right.



Natalia Laffer-Liebson and Jamey Wolpe, KDHL's newly elected JJC representatives.

Photo: Elijah Greeff

Loving the taste of pita

JENNY MILLER



Enjoying their bread tasting are Levi Riback; Jade Kushner; Tali Nathan; and Lexi Zwick.

The children of Sydenham Pre-Primary had a bread tasting, enabling them to do a tongue tip test for pita, rye and health bread.

They discussed the different tastes, textures and smells of each type of bread, with the clear favourite being pita.

KD Sandton dances while DL Link runs a marathon

OWN CORRESPONDENT



Amber Galaun with Demi Treger at the danceathon.

King David Sandton showed their strong support for the South African Jerusalem Marathon runners who ran under the banner of "Running for Recovery" last Friday (see page 20).

The South Africans runners were running for DL Link, a programme that helps those with cancer.

On the day of the marathon, King David Sandton hosted a fun-filled hour dance marathon by Vicki Mervis, a King David Sandton mother and dance teacher, for the whole school.

The children dressed in different colour T-shirts to represent different types of cancer. They all donated R18 to participate, with the money going to the DL Link.

The learners were also encouraged to write a special note with a prayer for all people battling cancer. These notes were taken to the Kotel prior to the marathon.

KDVP's butterflies fly for a good cause

OWN CORRESPONDENT

King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park believes that children need to be taught about and exposed to the mitzvah of tzedakah from a young age.

In the midst of celebrating Purim, the senior group's children were introduced to Uvemvane, a non- profit organisation that provides psychotherapy to those who have limited access to mental healthcare services.

Uvemvane works with children and families who have experienced trauma or adverse life experiences. During the week of Purim celebrations, the children made butterfly wings, learnt about the life cycle of the butterfly and also enjoyed a drama session on butterflies as Uvemvane means butterfly in Zulu. On Friday, March 10, the children sold butterfly iced cupcakes at the school and raised R3 700 in support of Uvemvane.



Back: Sivan Shapiro; Daniela Hollander; Zoe Lazarus; and Ethan Smeyatsky. Front: Keziah Theunissen; Lula Tanchel; and Hugo Immerman.

Bringing the parsha alive

OWN CORRESPONDENT



At Yeshiva College Pre-Primary School, the parsha was brought alive during Sheila Sklaar's parsha lesson, as the children were dressed in the clothing of the Kohain Gadol and Kohanim.

Jacob Froom; Benjamin Meyerson; Eitan Silberman; Eitan Zagay; and Nehorai Cohen.

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DRUNKEN BEHAVIOUR OVER PURIM A BLOT ON JEWISH COMMUNITY

Purim has come and gone, but will be back this time next year. Are we prepared for Purim 5778? Yes, if our standard is that of a drunken sailor.

We fortunately had no deaths and hopefully among our youth we are so far unaware of any unreported rapes this Purim. There were, however, many cases of people being hospitalised with alcohol poisoning, including many underage girls. I can well imagine how our Lithuanian forefathers are turning in their graves over our drunken behaviour on Purim.

Unfortunately many rabbis, shuls and Jewish institution, believe the only way to achieve the goal of not knowing the difference between Mordechai and Haman is to be rip-roaring drunk. Obviously the other extreme way of achieving this goal is to go to sleep, because then you certainly wouldn't know the difference.

If men are insistent on getting drunk, I have no problem if they are



on their own and transport is arranged to take the inebriated home. I feel sorry for their families, but if that is what Judaism is about, so be it.

My concern is about the women, irrespective of their age, but particularly those still at school or recently post-school.

Ensure you know where your daughters are on Purim. Don't be misled by the fact that they might be at a reputable institution. If alcohol is on offer, your daughter's respectability and dignity are seriously at risk.

Heaven forbid your underage daughter should have consensual sex or be raped!

It is time that the rabbis and community leaders collectively speak out against this scourge and let us try and return to the morals of our Litvak grandparents and great-grandparents.

To the community and parents in particular: You are warned. Beware!

Lionel Stein
Glenhazel, Johannesburg

JEWISH IDENTITY IS BEST PRESERVED IN A FREE, PLURALISTIC ENVIRONMENT

As a hostage to the conflict being waged by conservatives on either side, I wish to once again place on record my objections to the war in the Middle East, in particular the internecine, sectarian conflict involving members of various faith groups, who refuse to recognise the rights of secularists such as myself.

The conflict is clearly a long-standing, religious-based one involving the deployment of "displacement theology" by either side, in the battle over identity and the status of Jerusalem, a city regarded as holy by many religions.

I also wish to reiterate my objections to the separation barrier and my rejection of the so-called "right of return" on the basis of my Jewish ancestry, which I placed on record shortly after the wall was built in 2000, and which was published prominently in the Israeli media.

As a secular humanistic Jew and subscriber to the principles of the Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism, (I believe) Jewish identity is best preserved in a free, pluralistic environment.

The freedom and dignity of the Jewish people must

go hand in hand with the freedom and dignity of every human being.

As a Struggle veteran and war resister, I also wish to remind my fellow South Africans of my objections to the rationalisations of members of the IDF in a combined End Conscription Campaign-IDF platform on the UCT campus during 1987 and also the continued dispute involving my Jewish identity recorded in the decision of a South African court, and involving offensive race testing.

Apartheid, and its sequel in the new South Africa, should never be used as the justification for domination by one group over another, nor should its motivations be forgotten. Dialogue - and compromise by all sides - is the only way forward. As objectors on both sides have shown, another reality is possible.

Let peace prevail on earth.

David Robert Lewis
Cape Town

Disclaimer: The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff or directors of the Jewish Report. **Guidelines for letters:** Letters of up to 400 words get preference. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. We do not publish letters under noms de plume. Letters should preferably be e-mailed. Letters may be edited or shortened. *The Editor, PO Box 84650, Greenside, 2034 email: sharon@sajewishreport.co.za*

WHAT'S
NOT

Friday (March 24)

- UZLC hosts Mo Skikne on "Rev Levy and the Grey Shirts in Port Elizabeth". Venue: Our Parents Home. Time: 12:45 – 14:00. Contact: Gloria (011) 485-4851 or (072) 127-9421.
- Lunch hour classical music concerts at the Auto & General Theatre on the Square every Friday at 13:00. No booking. Unreserved seats at R50 (incl coffee and biscuits) available at the box office from 12:30. Piano and violin duo with Sonja van Zyl (piano) and George Ntuli (violin) from the KZN Philharmonic Orchestra. Information: Daphne Kuhn or Mika Stefano (011) 883-8606.

Sunday (March 26)

- SA Jewish Genealogical Society hosts Dr Susan Klugman on "DNA: Jewish Screening Tests and What Results Can Reveal", focusing on inherited Jewish genetic conditions and genealogical significance. Venue: HOD. Time: 19:30. Cost: R25 (incl tea and refreshments). RSVP: Hannah (011) 485-2188 or jgssa16@gmail.com
- King David High Victory Park production of "A Chorus Line" is on from today until March 29. Tickets on sale at R120. Information: Jean (011) 446-7860.

Monday (March 27)

- WIZO and the Lupus Foundation, in collaboration with Luminance, host "Dressed to Give", a charity fashion show produced by Jan Malan with leading local and international show producers. Venue: The Reserve, 54 Melville Road, Illovo. There will also be performances by Louise Carver, Kyla Nicole, DJ Kimmy K and Laurie Levine. Cost: R500 (incl canapes and drinks) Time: 17:30 - 20:00. Booking: <http://luminance.nutickets.co.za/4312> or call (011) 645-2515.
- Florence Melton School invites you to a free "Melton Taster", a sample lesson from its course "Beyond Borders: The History of the Arab Israeli Conflict" facilitated by Wayne Sussman. Venue: No 4 Sevenoaks, 90 5th Street, Melrose. Time: 17:00. RSVP: Ariella meltonjhb@gmail.com or 082-804-6113.
- UJW hosts John Berks, well-known SA commercial radio announcer on "I had a Dream". Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Time: 09:30. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW Office (011) 648-1053.

Wednesday (March 29)

- Chev Social Services offers a "Cheesecake and a Jozi Blue's Coffee Bar" at its "Enrich

Friday (March 31)

- Second Innings hosts a visit to the theatre for a "Maria Callas" movie At The SA. Military Museum, Saxonwold. Time: 09:30 - 09:45. The film starts at 09:45. Cost: R90 (incl tea and snacks). Booking: Ivy Grushkin and Fleurette Jankelow. Information: Linda Fleishman (011) 532-9701.
- Lunch hour classical music concerts at the Auto & General Theatre on the Square every Friday at 13:00. No booking. Unreserved seats at R50 (incl coffee and biscuits) available at the box office from 12:30. Harp and piano recital by Susan Cock (piano) and Ventura Rosenthal (harp) playing works by Rossini, Debussy and Granados. Information: Daphne Kuhn or Mika Stefano (011) 883-8606.

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Running for cancer in Jerusalem



Anna Goldstein and Ruth Welcher took part in the Jerusalem Marathon last Friday.

JACK MILNER

The Jerusalem Marathon has only been run for six years, but it has quickly joined the ranks of its Boston, New York and London counterparts as one of the most popular events of its nature in the world.

However, the 2017 marathon - last week Friday - was especially significant for two reasons: Firstly, it marked 50 years since the reunification of the capital, Jerusalem and was also the largest marathon to ever to take place in the city.

Most notably, however, it was used to raise money for victims of cancer. The Israel Cancer Association invited athletes from all over to make the experience more meaningful by taking on a double personal challenge, namely to complete the race and contribute to the fight against cancer by raising funds for this laudable cause.

South African organisation DL Link, which offers lifestyle and emotional support to patients and families of cancer sufferers, wholeheartedly responded to the call. Originally the idea was to send just 12 people to take part, but the numbers swelled to 57 by the time they left.

Every person contesting one of the events, ran for either someone who had died of cancer or someone who was dealing with the disease. The name of that person was written on the back of their shirts.

More than 30 000 runners, including approximately 3 500 international athletes representing 65 countries, thronged the streets of Jerusalem, clogging traffic but giving the city a festival atmosphere on a cool, overcast morning.

Approximately 2 000 ran the full marathon, another 6 000 competed in the half-marathon, more than 10 000 in the 10km and the remaining participants took part in the family and community races, which included a 5km walk.

“They took to the streets of Jerusalem and were carrying in their hearts and literally on their shirts, the names of ‘DL Link family’ members who are enduring their own challenge as they struggle through chemo, radiation, surgery, treatment and convalescence - to the finish line - remission and refuah... indeed a true marathon for them,” explained DL Link director Michelle Goodman.

“The team of 57 comprised businessmen and women, families, yeshiva bochurim and girls, a batmitzvah girl with her mom and bobba, and even a little four-year-old who did the 5km walk.”

The young boy is Dani Eliason who participated for a nine-month-old baby who is undergoing treatment. The next youngest was Hannah Farber who was in Israel for her batmitzvah. She ran for a cousin in America who died.

From an Israeli point of view, Olympic judoka medallist Ori Sasson, who won bronze in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, ran with Israel’s veteran hero from Operation Tzuk Eitan, Yehuda Yitchak Hayisraeli, who was injured trying to save Hadar Goldin. Yehuda’s comrades came out to join him and Sasson.

Sasson’s name made international headlines in Rio when he defeated Islam El Shahaby in the first round, with the Egyptian refusing to shake his hand - in a gesture of non-sportsmanship.

Also among the participants were dozens of victims of terrorist attacks, who attended the race as a group sponsored by the OneFamily organisation, supporting terror victims and their families.

The race was won by Shadrack Kipkosgei, 26, of Kenya, who completed the 42km course in 2 hours, 17 minutes and 35 seconds, about a minute slower than his winning time in last year’s marathon.

At the finish line, one sweaty participant proposed to his fiancée, who ran alongside him, as bystanders cheered. Mayor Nir Barkat, a jogging enthusiast who attends the Jerusalem Marathon regularly, was the first to congratulate the couple.

With all that happened, one can understand why he said: “The Jerusalem Marathon is not just a sporting event, it’s a spiritual event. We’re in the Holy City of Jerusalem, running where kings and prophets walked, where the Bible happened.”

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