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Terrorism alert leaves Rabinowitz shaken but undeterred

NICOLA MILTZ

Popular comedian Nik Rabinowitz was “shaken and unnerved” when he woke up last Thursday, 27 October, and saw his name splashed on the warning that his forthcoming Johannesburg comedy act could be the target of a terrorist attack.

“My agent called me the night before about a News24 journalist who wanted to speak to me about my show being a possible target,” he said.

Rabinowitz said he was busy preparing for an online Zoom shiur on his Barmitzvah portion and didn’t respond. After the shiur, Rabbi David Masinter, who had arranged the shiur, called him to say that while there had been some chatter about the forthcoming gay pride parade taking place in Sandton on Saturday, there was nothing known about his show being a possible target.

“That set my mind at ease a bit,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

However, the next morning, he woke up to read it on the news, and he was having to field calls and do radio and television interviews.

“Initially, I thought it must be a rumour,” he said, “but there was still a need to take precautions.

“My show was 72 hours after the so-called attack was due to take place, starting on 1 November.”

In a bid to find out more information, the exasperated comedian contacted the journalist who wrote the story, who assured

him that his unnamed sources were legitimate.

“A mad 48 hours ensued, with the most amount of press I’ve done for a show in a long time,” he quipped, setting the record straight that he didn’t set this up as a publicity stunt to promote his show.

“It’s a little bit bizarre when you land up on Japanese news. People were calling me from all over the world asking, ‘Are you ok? Are you still alive? We just heard the news, what’s going on?’”

“I was, like, let’s just ride the wave of this madness,” he said. He posted a photograph on Instagram of himself lying flat down on a stage saying: “For safety reasons, this is how I’ll be performing in Joburg next week. Shout out to ISIS and @News24 for additional publicity. #GonnaBeABlast #TooSoon?”

On a serious note, Rabinowitz said there was some “fallout” with his family, which he had to face.

“I had to tell my kids because I was concerned someone might tell them at school, and my wife was overseas so she was concerned,” he said.

He said his 10-year-old was particularly unnerved.

“I was quite shaken in the beginning, I was like, ‘What the actual...?’ I had a couple of wobbly moments, and the following two nights, I was like, ‘What if this is real? What would this be like?’ That’s the point of these things. They’re designed to make us afraid, and we can’t let them win, but obviously, we have to take the



Nik Rabinowitz posted a photograph on Instagram of himself lying on the stage in response to the terror threat

Photo: Facebook

necessary precautions.”

The comedian had forwarded the previous night’s message from the journalist to Daphne Kuhn from Sandton Theatre on the Square, where Rabinowitz’ comedy act was due to open the following week. According to him, Kuhn thought he had made it up and was joking.

“She thought I’d written it, and she said, ‘Oh my word Nik, you’re such a scream,’” he said (in a Joburg Jewish woman’s accent).

Little did Kuhn know that he was actually being serious, and the last thing her intimate theatre needed

was talk of a terrorist threat in the area, having only just started experiencing sold-out shows post the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I heard about Nik’s show being a potential target only when I read about it in the paper,” said Kuhn this week.

“News that Nik’s show could be a possible target was unfounded and ridiculous because his show was due to open only a few days later,” said Kuhn. She arranged extra security precautions for the weekend shows and tried to allay patrons’ fears as best she could.

“Everyone was thoroughly checked at the door with names and tickets, and extra security personnel were employed and deployed,” she said.

“We lost 50 bookings for the last shows of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* on Saturday, 29 October, because some people were worried, but thankfully, our jazz concert the following day was full,” said Kuhn.

Johannesburg was in turmoil last week as news of the United States embassy’s security alert spread across the city. The warning stated, “The US government has received information that terrorists may be planning to conduct an attack targeting large gatherings of people at an unspecified location in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg, South Africa, on 29 October 2022.

“There is no further information regarding the timing, method, or target of the potential attack. The US embassy has advised staff to avoid crowds of people and other large public gatherings in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg during the weekend of 29-30 October 2022.”

Meanwhile, the security upheaval caused by last week’s terrorist alert rippled through state security, with numerous lessons learned and red flags raised.

President Cyril Ramaphosa criticised the US for failing to discuss the terror alert with local authorities.

Continued on page 7>>



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Lula victory polarises Brazilian Jewish community

MARCUS M GILBAN – JTA

As left-wing former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva completed a triumphant return to politics by beating incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in a tight election on Sunday, 30 October, Brazilian Jewish groups welcomed him with a conciliatory message they hope will cool down the polarisation within their deeply split 120 000-strong community.

“President Lula, we wish you every success in your four-year term. At the same time, we reiterate our permanent readiness for constructive and democratic dialogue,” read a note signed by Claudio Lottenberg, the president of the Brazilian Israelite Confederation, the country’s umbrella Jewish organisation.

Da Silva, a former union leader who was president of Brazil between 2003 and 2010, garnered 50.90% of all valid votes in the tight Sunday run-off. President Bolsonaro, a fervently Christian right-wing nationalist, received 49.10%.

Lottenberg’s statement points to the fact that Jewish groups had a very rocky relationship with Da Silva, nicknamed Lula, during his tenure.

In 2009, Da Silva warmly welcomed former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a notorious Holocaust denier whose regime persecuted minorities and critics, for a visit that drew international criticism.

One year later, Da Silva became Brazil’s first head of state to visit Israel since Brazilian Emperor Pedro II toured the holy land in 1876. However, he refused to visit Theodor Herzl’s grave on part of the itinerary for visiting foreign officials in honour of the 150th anniversary of the father of Zionism. Days after, he laid a wreath at Yasser Arafat’s grave in Ramallah. In the final month of his administration, his government

officially recognised a Palestinian state.

“Long live the Brazilian people, who chose the path of freedom and democracy instead of hatred, intolerance, fascism. A heartfelt thank you from this Brazilian-Palestinian diaspora,” read a note by the Brazilian Palestinian federation welcoming Da Silva’s victory. Brazil is home to a diaspora of about 60 000 Palestinians.

The PalestinaHoy website went further, posting a picture of Bolsonaro holding an Israeli flag with the words, “Zionism was defeated in Brazil.”

While in power, Da Silva enacted ambitious social programmes and prioritised foreign policy, but his tenure was plagued by scandal. In 2017, he was convicted of corruption and money laundering – which he denied – and was sent to jail, where he served 580 days. His political ally and presidential successor, Dilma Rousseff, was eventually removed from office for manipulating the budget.

Bolsonaro, known for his highly controversial rhetoric, which has been widely labelled at different times as racist, misogynist, homophobic, and fascist, developed a historic closeness with Israel and its former prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Both Brazilian and Israeli media highlighted the fact that Bolsonaro’s wife, Michelle, wore a T-shirt with an Israeli flag at a polling station on Sunday. The Brazil-

Israel Institute, a non-affiliated far-left Jewish group, accused the first lady of appropriating Jewish symbols.

“I don’t believe that the polarisation will end in the short term, but many voices and relevant actors are working effectively at least to mitigate it,” Lottenberg told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “We’ll continue to promote civilised and constructive debate between the different currents of Brazilian Jewry based on the defence of democracy, tolerance, and Jewish values.”



Photo: Mauro Horita/Getty Images

**New Brazilian President
Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva**

Count your lucky stars

Torah Thought



**Rabbi Yehuda Stern –
Sydenham Shul**

Millennials have grown up in the modern world of the 21st century. Confident, ambitious, achievement-oriented are a few of the adjectives given to this age demographic. This generation is generally marked by elevated familiarity with the internet, mobile devices, and social media.

Ironically, in 2019, *New Yorker* magazine ran an article titled, “Astrology in the age of uncertainty”. It focused on Millennials, who see no contradiction between using astrology and believing in science, and are now getting hooked on a belief system that’s as old as the stars.

Some have associated this renewed interest in astrology to the decline of organised religion and the creation of a large spiritual void in the world. In times of crisis, people search for something to believe in.

Judaism has always believed in astrology, the study of the positions of the celestial beings. The wish and blessing, “*mazaltov*”, indicates belief in the constellations. You’re not simply wishing someone “good luck”, as we frequently translate this term. The real translation is, “May this event take place under a good constellation.” Similarly, when we refer to someone as being a “*schlimazel*”, it’s really the Yiddish word for someone who had the misfortune of a bad constellation.

However, Jewish tradition also teaches, “*ein mazel l’Yisroel*” – we need not be subject to the signs of the zodiac. It may be helpful to synchronise an event with a good constellation, but the event can be equally successful nonetheless. Being born in a particular month with a specific constellation may define your character, but it won’t limit who you are and who you

can become.

This idea is illustrated in this week’s Torah portion, in which G-d tells Sarai and Avram, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.” But as the years pass, the Bible records Avram’s cry to G-d that he’s childless. There will be no one to carry on his name and beliefs. G-d then takes Avram outside and says, “Look now toward at the heaven and count the stars. If you will be able to count them, so shall your seed be.”

Simply speaking, G-d is telling Avram, “Don’t worry, you’ll have as many children as there are stars.” However,

there’s a deeper explanation. G-d was taking Avram out of the limitations of astrology. Some say, he counted the stars from on top, not from below. “Avram and Sarai cannot pro-create,” said G-d, “but I will change your name, and Avraham and Sarah will have children.” Because, ultimately, we’re greater than the zodiac.

Astrology may be coming back into fashion in a generation that’s searching for meaning. However, it’s important for us to remember the lesson G-d taught our forefathers. We should reach for the stars, but always remember that we’re greater than them too.

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In this week’s parsha, G-d changes Abram’s name to Abraham (“father of multitudes”), and Sarai’s to Sarah (“princess”), and promises that a son will be born to them. From this child, whom they should call Isaac (“will laugh”), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond.

Wishing You. all Shabbat Shalom

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Editor Peta Krost – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz
Journalists Nicola Miltz • Tali Feinberg • Junior Reporter Saul Kamionsky • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver • Editorial co-ordinator Dylan Berger – editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

Proofreader Kim Hatchuel Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za • New business development manager

Laura Kaufman laura@sajewishreport.co.za • Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman

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It’s now or never, say SA *olim* on Israel’s fifth election

TALI FEINBERG

“Democracy is at stake,” says South African *oleh* Jonathan Schwartz, regarding the Israeli legislative elections that took place on 1 November to elect Israel’s 25th Knesset. Though it may be the fifth elections in four years, he feels that now more than ever, Israelis need to decide what kind of future they want.

“If Bibi [Benjamin Netanyahu] puts together his ‘all right’ government, he’ll destroy the legal system to avoid going to jail and will politicise the civil service with political appointees,” says Schwartz, who made aliya from Johannesburg in 1978, and lives in Kochav Yair Tsur Yigal in the Sharon area.

Like many of Israel’s 20 000 immigrants from South Africa, he has strong opinions about Israeli politics, democracy, and its Jewish identity.

“I’ve been living in Israel for nine years. I voted for [Itamar] Ben Gvir because I feel he’s the only one that will make a difference in Israel,” says Ami Kubalkin, also from Johannesburg and living in Neria, near Modi’in. “He’s the only person from the Knesset that actually goes to where there were terrorist attacks and speaks out. He also feels very strong about the country and the Jewish people and that it’s a Jewish country! Only Ben Gvir!”

Ben Gvir heads up the far-right Otzma Yehudit party. He’s known for defending Jewish radicals on trial in Israel and calling for the expulsion of Arab citizens who aren’t loyal to the country. He’s a member of the Knesset.

Other South African *olim* believe Ben Gvir’s election could be the worst thing for Israel’s future as a Jewish and democratic state.

“His views are ultra-nationalist and Jewish supremacist in the extreme. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to define him as a fascist,” says Paul Mirbach, who made aliya from Cape Town in 1982 and lives on Kibbutz Tuval.

“I have just voted for Yesh Atid, but I’m consumed with fear that it’s not enough,” says Mirbach. “I’ve voted in every election since 1984, and not once have I been filled

with such an intense feeling of impending disaster, that we are about to enter a period of dystopia. Not once have I felt that the fate of the country’s character hangs in the balance.

“Never before has the prospect of the upheaval of the balance of forces that define our country as a democracy been at risk like they are today,” he says. “Never before has the possibility been so real that we’ll join shrinking democracies and dark regimes. And I cannot even begin to contemplate what life would be like here if the axis [Mirbach’s name for Likud, Otzma Yehudit, Shas, and Yahadut HaTorah] parties win this election.”

Speaking anonymously, another South African *oleh* in his 20s says, “The political situation in Israel is scary. While antisemitism grows around the world, my feeling is that within Israel, Jews aren’t



Ronit Belevi

getting along with Jews, and so we once again find ourselves in an election cycle which seems like it will never end.

“I’m sure I’m not the only one who stood in the line today and was actually more confused than certain about who I wanted to be the next leader of Israel,” he says. “I don’t see an end to this cycle of repeated elections, and I really fear the country could become anarchic if we cannot form a budget and cannot have at least a government for a full

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term to try stabilise relations amongst Israeli Arabs and Jews, and to strengthen relations with the world.”

Immigrants who made aliya more recently also have strong opinions. “My hope for this election is to have a government with a strong security focus together with an interest in a more secular approach for its everyday modern Anglo citizens,” says Sandra Sparks, who moved to Israel from Johannesburg and lives in Ra’anana. She couldn’t vote in this election, but if she had done so, she would have voted Likud.

“I would like to see an increased interest in caring for the elderly in society – they’re easily forgotten,” she says. “I would love to see an intensive recycling programme in place, with solid government backing. Lastly, a sterilisation programme for the street cats to halt uncontrolled breeding and neglect.”

Esther Gluckman and her husband, David, made aliya in October 2021 and live in Ramat Bet Shemesh. They were “very excited” to vote in their first Israeli election. “This is our country that Hashem promised to us. We’re voting for a purpose.” Their voting station was “very quiet” but they were thrilled to see so many parties outside, including a religious party with a table set up for Shabbat. “We’re home, this is for us. We voted for a right-wing party. This is our land. Though our real leader will one day be Moshiach, we hope for a leader that’s good for the Jewish people and *frum* communities.”

Ronit Belevi made aliya in April from Johannesburg, and lives in Bat Yam. “Israel is in such a difficult time now and I’m honoured to hopefully be able to be part of choosing

the right party to make a change here,” she says. She voted for Shas.

Twenty-six-year-old Tal Gordon made aliya in 2019 from Johannesburg and lives in south Tel Aviv. “I hope people went out to vote because we’re really in need of a government that functions,” she says. “I voted for Meretz because I strongly support its values and believe that it’s capable of creating positive change in Israel.”

“If Bibi [Benjamin Netanyahu] puts together his ‘all right’ government, he’ll destroy the legal system to avoid going to jail and will politicise the civil service with political appointees.”

Another *oleh* in his 30s who left Johannesburg in 2014 and lives in Tel Aviv, says, “Multiple things are at stake. First, the justice system and the separation of state powers – pillars of any healthy democracy – have been under attack. Second, the country is increasing under the control of a few influential companies and families. Free-market policies are the only way to bring prices under control. Third is the future of the Haredi schooling system and its ability to make a contribution to this country as their numbers increase. Finally, the protection of minority rights and the addition of minority rights are at stake.”

He voted for Yisrael Beiteinu. “These items are its main agenda, and I’ve gained some respect for Avigdor Lieberman and his choices in the past few rounds of elections.”

Says Mirbach, “In Zimbabwe [where he was born] and later South Africa, I never felt that it was my fight. Here, in Israel, it’s my fight. This is my home. I have nowhere to go. There’s nowhere else I want to be. And so, I’ll stay and I’ll fight – for justice, for rightness, for equality, and fairness. And also for our way of life and the character of our society so that I can feel proud to say I’m Israeli.”

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Israeli man shot dead near V&A Waterfront

TALI FEINBERG

Speculation surrounds the death of a 40-year old Israeli Arab man, Abdel Fattah Nassar, shot dead in Cape Town at about 01:30 on Sunday, 30 October. The shooting took place on a road near the popular Oranjezicht City Farm Market and the Grand Africa Cafe & Beach on the outskirts of the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront.

“The circumstances surrounding a shooting incident in Haul Road, Table Bay Harbour, in which a security guard was shot and wounded and a 40-year-old male shot and fatally wounded are under investigation,” says Sergeant Wesley Twigg of the South African Police Service Western Cape Media Centre.

“According to reports, a shootout between the victim and the deceased

occurred after they had an argument. Both were taken to a medical facility for medical treatment, where the 40-year-old male later died due to injuries sustained,” says Twigg. “Table Bay Harbour police registered cases of murder and attempted murder for investigation.”

This scenario differs from what was reported in Israeli media. According to *The Times of Israel* (TOI), Nassar was “gunned down” in a gun battle. The *Jerusalem Post* said he was “stuck in the crossfire of a firefight between armed men”.

Israeli media identified the man as Nassar, but said he was 23. They reported that he was a resident of the so-called “triangle”, a concentration of Israeli Arab towns and villages adjacent to the Green Line. The 11 towns are home to about 250 000 Arab citizens of Israel, representing between 10% to 15% of Israel’s Palestinian Arab population.

TOI reported that Israel’s foreign ministry said in a statement that it was made aware that a citizen had been killed. Nassar’s family had hired a local attorney to help deal with South African



Abdel Fattah Nassar

authorities, and it was waiting for the results of an autopsy before his body was brought back to Israel.

The Israeli Embassy in Pretoria said, “An Israeli citizen was killed during a gun battle last Saturday in Cape Town. At the moment, we have no further information regarding this unfortunate incident as relevant authorities are overseeing the investigation. On the principle of confidentiality, we’re not at liberty to disclose any further details. The embassy is facilitating the repatriation of the deceased to Israel. We share our condolences with the family and friends of the deceased.”

A family member told the Walla news site that Nassar was “a good guy”, and that

he had travelled to South Africa to join his cousin who lives there, hoping to study or find work, possibly in real estate.

But the *Israel Hayom* newspaper reported that Nassar had ties to organised crime in Israel. According to this report, Nassar was part of the Marwan Nassar crime family based in Tira and had been arrested several times in recent years on suspicion of violent crimes, including shootings and possession of firearms.

At the same time, *Israel Hayom* said that Nassar had moved to South Africa to distance himself from the gang-land fighting in Israel.

Confusion surrounds his death. According to *Walla news*, a relative said the family was originally told that he died in a car accident. “Afterwards, there were all kinds of rumours that he was murdered. We still don’t really know exactly what happened.”

The Israeli foreign ministry said it was unaware of any other Israelis injured in the incident, and its department for Israelis abroad was helping to co-ordinate matters with local authorities.

Anyone with any information about this shooting incident can contact Crime Stop on 08600 10111.

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Sisulu uses Jews to play the victim card

NICOLA MILTZ

Tourism Minister Lindiwe Sisulu is using the Jewish community to play the victim in what appears to be a point scoring game in the African National Congress (ANC) presidential race.

Sisulu told SABC News on Sunday, 30 October, that the South African Jewish community was enraged with her when, as minister of international affairs and cooperation, she implemented the 2017 ANC resolution to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel to a liaison office. She went on to complain that President Cyril Ramaphosa didn't "come to her rescue" at this tough time.

The minister, also an ANC national executive committee member, has open ambitions to take over the presidency from Ramaphosa. She went on to tell SABC News political editor Mzwandile Mbeje that she was left "dangling alone" when she carried out this controversial resolution, which, in fact, wasn't enacted as such. However, it has been so stripped of resources, it is barely able to look after its own citizens in Israel, let alone perform the normal range of diplomatic functions normally expected of a foreign mission, according to A Board of Deputies (SAJBD) national director Wendy Kahn.

However, Sisulu claimed that when she executed this downgrade, she recalled how the Jewish community became "livid" and made their views well known.

She felt "punished by the Jewish community and the ANC", she said, as no one stood up for her in saying that it was, in fact, an ANC resolution.

"The Israeli representatives in the country felt aggrieved," Sisulu said, and she was "publicly humiliated in their newspapers".

In the television interview, which covered many other issues as well, she said she expected Ramaphosa to come to her rescue as "it was a public matter everybody could see".

"I would have expected him to say, 'Look, this is my minister, and I'm going to respect the resolutions of government.' I was left dangling alone." Asked if the president did anything while she was being "attacked", she said, "The president kept quiet."

The interview took place just few weeks shy of the ANC's elective conference, with the race for the top job intensifying and the tourism minister making her ambitions for the top job clear.

The minister is "dredging up grievances from years ago to score political points and attack the president", said Professor Karen Milner, the SAJBD national chairperson.

"This seems to have more to do with internal ANC issues than the Jewish community. But it's important to mention that the implication that the Jewish community was out of line in some way for holding the minister accountable for her actions must be rejected.

"As citizens of this country, the Jewish community is entitled to express its views on policies that affect it, and we're surprised that the minister would think otherwise," Milner said.

Steven Gruz, an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs, said, "It's part of the moves before the ANC elective conference in December to make President Ramaphosa look weak and indecisive. I don't think this is a big issue for anyone in the ANC in the bigger picture. People are unlikely to fall for her desperation and exasperation. The anti-Ramaphosa are her target here. It's election season, and strange things happen."

Political analyst Daniel Silke agrees that Sisulu is trying to "show Ramaphosa up" in any way possible.

"Lindiwe Sisulu is attempting to campaign to become president of the ANC. She has spent the past number of months – and it's reaching a crescendo – finding ways to

criticise Ramaphosa. She's suggested that the step-aside rule be applied to him in relation to the Phala Phala scandal, so she's certainly becoming more and more outspoken as we move towards December in an attempt to put a clear blue line between her and the president, to denigrate him, and show him up.

"The Israel issue is always an issue that can be used as a political football, and she's trying to drive a wedge between herself and the president in a bid to undermine his authority and his leadership, and to show him up as some sort of inadequate president in the case of this particular ANC resolution," he said.

"It's a terribly thin issue, and it has little relevance for the broader ANC. Her complaints



seem to be extremely thin. They don't have much ground."

According to reports, Sisulu has long positioned herself as a presidential hopeful, siding with the Radical Economic Transformation faction. More recently, she has reportedly teamed up with the candidate endorsed by former President Jacob Zuma,

namely his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

In January this year, Sisulu landed in hot water after she launched an outrageous attack on the country's Constitution and judiciary when she penned the now infamous open letter titled: "Hi Mzansi, have we seen justice?" Which was published a day ahead of Ramaphosa's delivery of the ANC's annual January 8th Statement.

"The most dangerous African today is the mentally colonised African," Sisulu wrote. "And when you put them in leadership positions or as interpreters of the law, they are worse than your oppressor... In America, these interpreters are called House Negroes."

Sisulu was summoned by the president to account for the article, the presidency issued a statement claiming that she had retracted it and apologised, but she responded with a fierce denial (effectively accusing Ramaphosa of lying), and the presidency reiterated its statement and called the matter closed.

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Deborah Lipstadt is a historian, academic and the author of award-winning books: "The Eichmann Trial"; "Denial: Holocaust History on Trial"; and "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory". As special envoy, Lipstadt leads efforts to advance US foreign policy to counter antisemitism around the world.



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Speculation isn’t news

When news broke last week that the United States government had warned of a planned terrorist attack scheduled to take place last weekend in Sandton, we were putting the final touches to our newspaper.

But, as journalists do, we immediately got back on the story trail, and went about furiously making calls and contacting people.

There was a fair bit of panic around and a lot of speculation. Oh boy, we heard all sorts of things! Can I say that it’s best not to share these crazy stories we heard because they might create more panic – and we don’t need that. Suffice to say, we couldn’t back up any one of them, so we let them fall by the wayside.



As journalists, we dare not put out speculation, particularly about threatened violence, that’s not substantiated. Our hot-shot team even triple checked – in a very short space of time – that the warning was, indeed, from the American government.

You see, in the days of fake news, it’s all too easy to mistake fiction for fact, and then find yourself in deep trouble.

There are websites that appear to be 100% legitimate news sites and they look almost identical to genuine news sites, but they’re fake, and they put out destructive, false news that appears to all intents and purposes like the real deal.

These fake sites often put out “news” relating to Israel, spreading horrific rumours that appear to be true – especially to those who already hate Israel and believe the worst from the Jewish state. To them, it isn’t a stretch of the imagination to read so-called news about Israeli soldiers boiling Palestinian children in huge pots. Seriously, I kid you not. Of course, such fake news spreads like wildfire, and only does damage.

Suffice to say, as journalists, we have to tread carefully and verify our stories to the best of our ability.

We couldn’t verify exactly what or whom was under threat of attack in Sandton. We knew that Joburg Pride was scheduled to go through Sandton, but there were other events too, although none that anyone could firmly say was a real target.

So, when on Thursday morning we all woke up to online news that the Joburg Pride march and Jewish comedian Nik Rabinowitz’s show were supposedly being targeted, we were a little taken aback. The piece went on to say that sources said that though the exact target hadn’t been identified, the pride march and the comedy show were to be held near one another.

In one foul swoop, what all our sources had claimed was definitely not a threat focused on the Jewish community, by virtue of Rabinowitz’s birthright, was made into a Jewish issue. That is, if, in fact, the sources were correct.

However, just a little surface digging uncovered the fact that Rabinowitz was going to be performing at the lovely Theatre on the Square, but he wasn’t going to be anywhere near Sandton last weekend. His shows start only this week. So, somehow, some sources got sauce on their face. Unfortunately, the damage is done. As many as 50 people cancelled tickets for the show that was actually showing at the Theatre on the Square last weekend.

And as many of us know, Daphne Kuhn has been admirable in being able to keep her theatre going through the pandemic when its doors were firmly shut and no shows could be performed there.

All performers and theatre folk battled beyond understanding over lockdown because there was no work. Now they’re back and starting to make a living again. In fact, this particular show that Rabinowitz is putting on is apparently about coming back to life after lockdown. In other words, this is his show to put the two years of pandemic behind him – and then this scare!

I appreciate that if it’s true, then of course, the story must go out and everything must be done to prevent any attack, but how certain was this source or sources? I guess we’ll never know.

In the meantime, Kuhn has had to fork out lots of money to ensure that just in case there’s something to these threats, she has extra security around her theatre and stars.

I’m fully behind sharing genuine information with the public. It’s our job, and I have no idea how much checking was done in regard to this information. It may have been absolutely verified, but if it wasn’t, it was unnecessarily cruel to put it out there.

But then, they say there’s no such thing as bad publicity, so hopefully, it will draw more people to watch Rabinowitz and go to the Theatre on the Square.

Meanwhile, as we get on with life here, Israel once again – for the fifth time in four years – went to the polls. (See story on page 3 and Biko Arran’s opinion piece on this page.)

Though an announcement had not yet been made at the time of going to print this week, it looked pretty certain that Bibi (Benjamin Netanyahu) was back in the prime minister’s seat.

What is it about this man that he keeps getting back into power? He’s already the longest serving prime minister. Does he have some secret way of manoeuvring the situation into his court, or does the Israeli population really believe that he’s the only one to take their country forward? He’s facing charges of corruption, but still seems to be accepted back into this role.

My opinions aside, I find it fascinating that we could have a situation like this.

I look forward to watching the scenario playing itself out and the changes that will be implemented in Israel.

But for now, I wish you all Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor

Riding a tiger – what could go wrong for Bibi?

OPINION

ZVIKA BIKO ARRAN



Israel’s polls closed hours ago, and it will take a day or two to get the final results, but every vote counts – even more so in such a close election.

In Israel’s electoral system, you have to get a certain percentage (3.25%) of the votes to be in the allocation process for representatives in the Knesset. Four Knesset seats is usually the minimum, or nothing.

In this election – the fifth in the past four years – too many parties are close to this threshold. My comments are based on four different exit polls of the Israeli media channels I worked with late into the night (on Tuesday, 1 November) after the polls closed.

In all four samples, the direction is loud and clear: Benjamin Netanyahu and his bloc are closer to getting a majority in Israel’s parliament. It means that the deadlock after three years and five elections has been broken.

In that case, Bibi and Likud would be able to form a pure right-wing government backed by his three other allies: two haredi ultra-Orthodox parties and one “religious Zionism” party. Those are the natural partners.

Because of the number of votes, Netanyahu could block any other option of an alternative coalition. Under the current direction of the results, it seems Bibi has a better deck of cards to play with.



On the other side, you find that some of the factions are disparate and still struggling to be in the race and reach enough votes: the right-wing parties who oppose Bibi personally; the centre and left parties; and two to three Arab parties. Their nightmare of getting even a few votes under the needed threshold isn’t yet over. But even if most of them survive, it seems that the overall number won’t stop Netanyahu from getting into the prime minister’s office again.

It’s not going to be a landslide or clear and solid victory. Don’t buy those declarations. That’s what politicians are supposed to say just as the polls close.

Like any good democracy, in this run, one side crossed the line a millisecond before the other, with a few more votes. Israel didn’t fundamentally change on the night of 1 November 2022.

On one side, the runner came better prepared, concentrated, and ready – and probably won. On the other, a bunch of runners together – but not really a team – wished for too many miracles simultaneously to reach the line. Not even in order to win, just to finish alive.

What can we say about the results, even with no official outcome yet?

Religious Zionist party leader Bezalel Smotrich and Otzma Yehudit’s leader, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and their extreme-right-wing parties had a joint run, gaining tremendous support of probably 12 to 15 seats in the Knesset. This works out to be more than 10% of the Knesset. Their formal brand name is “The Religious Zionism” but its constituency represents more the “hardal” (haredi-religious-Zionists) – the stricter side of religious Zionists.

The other “spice” and ingredient in this highly controversial dish is Itamar Ben-Gvir – the rockstar of

the election campaign. His slogan was, “Let’s show who the real bosses and landlords of this country are.” With a gun in his hand, he arrived at scenes of recent terror attacks and shouted this message at Arabs.

In the past four decades, Ben-Gvir has been the provocateur of the far, far right. Now, he wants to be minister of homeland security. This is the person who stole the emblem off Yitzchak Rabin’s car a few months before he was assassinated. At the time, he said on camera, “We got this sign, and we can get you.” In his living room, Ben-Gvir also proudly hangs a photograph honouring Baruch Goldstein who murdered 29 Muslims in the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in Hebron.

Ben-Gvir is the true successor of the Kahana racist, fascist, extreme-right movement. The only difference is that its original leader, Meir Kahana, was boycotted even by the then Likud prime minister. The prime minister left the hall with all members of the Knesset in order not to hear Kahana’s addresses. Now, his follower is the kingmaker and a popular figure in the media and on the street.

What does it say about the Israelis who followed him with so much support? It’s shocking and all too similar to hear those kind of results for the Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa or for similar extreme-right-wing parties in Italy, Sweden, or France.

Nationalism, xenophobia, and the lack of personal security are key factors everywhere. It’s the voice of this era and generation – we have to listen to its fears and distress.

The success of a Ben-Gvir in Israel raises more questions about populist leaders, poor media, and fragile democracies than about the Israeli society.

What does it say about Netanyahu’s new government? Bibi is responsible for the legitimisation of Ben-Gvir. Netanyahu personally urged in previous elections acceptance of this extreme faction into the political pact in order to get few more votes to his side. He was riding a tiger, and created a poisonous mixture. Now he’ll get a taste of his own medicine.

Bibi might prefer partners from the centre-right like Benny Gantz’s HaMachane HaMamlachti, but no-one from that party or the others (for that matter), trusts Bibi anymore. He has stabbed all his potential moderate partners in the back.

Another more critical reason why other potential partners – other than Likud natural allies the extreme-right wing with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and the haredim – aren’t relevant this time is that they cannot back Netanyahu’s plans for “judicial and legal reforms”. In other words, they won’t back him in stopping his criminal trial.

It’s too close to call, but we’ve seen enough to say that Netanyahu has won, but it’s not his victory. The Likud probably got the same support and even less than previous elections. It’s Ben-Gvir who gained support from fresh electorates and brought a crucial addition to Bibi’s block.

And on the other side, the split among Arab parties and within other Zionist parties meant they didn’t quite make it to get enough seats to block Bibi. That’s democracy. Not “may the best person win”, only the better person.

Netanyahu, like a sphinx, will rise and rule again. He recently celebrated his 73rd birthday. He’s already the longest serving Israeli prime minister. And he’s in court for three charges of corruption that’s being heard on a daily basis. He also has solid opposition to him personally, politically, and publicly. Now he has a lunatic political partner. It can’t go wrong!

That is, unless he decides to make it his last tenure, one in which to “clean up” and leave a glorious legacy with a deal or a plea. Unfortunately, it seems he’ll be more tempted to adopt Hungary’s Orban or Turkey’s Ardegan models, changing the vibrant democracy of Israel. Too close to call.

- Zvika (Biko) Arran is a publicist, social entrepreneur, lawyer, advisor to philanthropists, and has been in Israel briefly, working on the elections. He lives in Johannesburg with his wife and four sons.

First Jewish SRC member in a decade aims to make UCT a ‘welcoming place for all’

TALI FEINBERG

Erin Dodo has just faced the most intense period of her life, battling it out for one of 15 spots in the University of Cape Town’s (UCT) highly politicised Student Representative Council (SRC).

She broke all boundaries: standing as ActionSA’s first nominee in a university SRC election, being the first Jewish person voted onto a UCT SRC in at least 10 years, and then being chosen as part of its executive as deputy secretary general.

And for her, it’s just the beginning. Born in the United States and raised in Johannesburg, this 20-year-old dynamo says she has been told that the politicised elections are nothing compared to the year ahead on the SRC. But she says she’s ready for whatever comes her way.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on the first day of her term in office, she says her role as chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) in the Western Cape was the start of this journey. “I joined SAUJS because I felt that Jewish people were left out of the narrative and activism. People don’t see us. But then I realised that I had a lot more to give and do. I wanted to make my voice heard on an even bigger scale.”

She knew that running in the SRC elections was a major undertaking, but chose to take the leap. She didn’t want to run as an independent candidate or for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), so ActionSA decided put its weight behind her. Dodo became its communications director, and was nominated by the party.

“It’s been a long process,” she says. “There was a lot of push back and politics. If you imagine university as like a country, then the SRC elections is about choosing the government. So, obviously, there will be politics and people using anything they can against you. It’s about rising above that with tenacity and strength. People are willing to use anything to put you down and weaken your morale. You deal with it by having a strong team behind you and realising that it isn’t about you. In the grander scheme of things, you have to realise that you’re doing this for the university and it’s a lot bigger than yourself.”

Terrorism alert leaves Rabinowitz shaken but undeterred

>>Continued from page 1

Security expert Jasmine Opperman told the *SA Jewish Report* that there were many lessons learned. “The weekend has come and gone. Terrorism hasn’t come and gone. The region’s vulnerability to terrorism is on the increase. We cannot sit back and relax now. If ever there was a need for intelligence services, investigation services like the Hawks to proceed in prioritising reports related to terrorism, it’s now.”

She said security forces were able to implement appropriate security measures, but questioned whether this would have been possible without due warning and intelligence.

“Effective intelligence liaison is of utmost importance in countering terrorism. The lack of effective co-ordination resulted in hysteria, questions, and fear this is exactly what we don’t want to see when the word ‘terrorism’ comes up as a forewarning,” she said.

Intelligence services need to streamline the process of liaison with global intelligence structures “irrespective of political differences”, Opperman said.

Professor Hussein Solomon, senior professor of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State, said the events of the past week were troubling. “Bilateral relations between South Africa and the US have

Thirty people ran in the election, and Dodo came sixth out of the 15 that were elected. The council is made up of three EFF candidates, 10 independent candidates, and



Erin Dodo

two ActionSA candidates.

“It was an amazing feeling and a big relief. This is the first time that ActionSA has put forward candidates, and we won two seats. It felt like all our hard work paid off. And as a Jewish woman, it felt like an unparalleled accomplishment. I’ve done a lot, but this is the first time I felt like I had really done this for me. It was a beautiful feeling.”

It may have been a beautiful moment, but Dodo has been warned that student politics can get ugly. “I’ve been told that everything about me will be used against me, that people will use bullying tactics. I said, ‘I know this, and I will rise above it.’”

Dodo always wanted to move to Cape Town and go to UCT. She attended Crawford College Sandton where she enjoyed the diversity of students, and wanted the same for her university experience. She lived in residence in her first year, which also allowed her to meet people from all walks of life. She’s studying political science and anthropology, which she says is “a lot of work”, but it’s only one ball she’s juggling as

she takes on her role at the SRC.

“Deputy secretary general is a big role, with a lot of admin,” she says. It also entails being chief operations officer and public relations officer. Her responsibilities include liaising with the department of student affairs; chairing the SRC media and communications sub-committee; preparing and publishing all SRC publications in consultation with the SRC; maintaining the SRC website and student web facilities; and being the chief publicity agent within the SRC.

When fellow students are enjoying the long summer holidays ahead, the SRC will be strategising, planning, co-ordinating, and meeting. And though relationships in the SRC are known to get heated, Dodo says they are “like friends in that we choose to work together and like family in that we have to work together! Just like family, we’ll fight but we’ll also keep forging ahead.”

Personally, her goal is to make the university “more accepting and open”. “The past few years have been quite skewed by political agendas. As the SRC, we have the power to create the environment, an image of campus, and a feeling of warmth, where everyone feels welcome, regardless of who you

are and where you come from.”

That means she wants Jewish students to “walk in and feel seen and heard, and never feel like they are on the sidelines”. She wants them to get involved in their university, which they worked hard to get into, and “deserve to feel part of”.

Regarding Israel Apartheid Week, Dodo says, “Everything that happens needs to be documented and reported, and if anyone on either side says anything untoward, it must be dealt with by the student committee. Though freedom of expression is important, it can border on hurtful and hateful. Our role is to monitor that. People should know that what they say has consequences.”

Dodo says the community, her family, ActionSA, mentors, friends, and fellow students have all been incredibly supportive as she took this path. But at the same time, she has had to blaze her own trail. She feels that more Jewish students should get involved in student politics, and that the community can do more to prepare young people to do that.

“You do need to learn to be strong and not react. If you react, it will be used against you. So you have to stay firm. But the more we shy away, the more we’ll be left out of the narrative. We need to say, ‘We don’t have a choice, this is who we are.’ If we stay in the shadows, we’re never going to be heard.”

And, equipping youth with the tools and knowledge they need to step up needs to start young, Dodo says. “We’re told to ‘be Jewish and proud’, but we also need to know why and how to stand up and defend our people. Teach your kids and re-teach yourself so that you can stand up for yourself and your beliefs. It can be uncomfortable, but ignorance is the opposite to progress.”



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Wits scientist discusses the art of innovation

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Adversity leads to innovation, says iconic biomedical engineer Dr Adam Pantanowitz, a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

“Frugality can be seen as a downfall, a pitfall, but strife creates great art. When you have infinite budgets and infinite timing, you don’t actually end up producing anything. Frugality creates a precious scarcity of resources. Adversity creates pressure, and pressure creates novel solutions.”

Pantanowitz, who lectures in engineering and medicine, was speaking on 27 October at Wits’s Science, Society, and Innovation lecture series.

Innovation is about looking at a problem from a new perspective to take a small step forward, Pantanowitz said. “It’s about breaking down a problem to its simplest form, and then allowing a solution to bubble up.”

When Pantanowitz was studying at the Wits School of Electrical Information Engineering in 2008, they pondered the problem surgeons face in adjusting the overhead light. They knew the Nintendo Wii remote had a little infrared camera, so they decided to try to automate the surgery environment using infrared light.

“We went to the Magic Company, which runs big toy arcades in South Africa,” Pantanowitz said. “It has a huge warehouse with old broken versions of arcade machines. We were able to have donated one of the sets of motors that moves the toy crane around. We repurposed it to our Surgewii system [a surgery automation system which ultimately became a patent]. We were able to control a computer remotely by bouncing infrared light and using Wii remotes to control the environment. Then we had this overhead crane directing light where we needed it. Now, doctors could control the surgery environment without having to touch anything. It became a wireless type of setup.”

Technology can considerably improve the lives of people with disadvantages or disabilities, Pantanowitz said.

He and others used off-the-shelf, cheap consumer electronics to allow a wheelchair user to control their wheelchair by moving their eyes.

“Another example is that we used an off-the-shelf cricket helmet and PlayStation camera to try to detect the position of someone’s pupil and create a more natural human-computer interaction in which they are able to drag a computer mouse around just by using their eyes. This gives them a much more natural way of interacting and interfacing with a computer.”

Pantanowitz also helped create a device for a friend who had a brain implant due to Parkinson’s disease. “The device looks a bit like a mobile phone,” the friend said. “It’s the difference between me being able to talk and move, and not being able to. I have a brain pacemaker, if you like. This is my lifeline. Literally, you can turn me off completely.” He can bungee jump and skydive thanks to

his brain implants.

“We used off-the-shelf technology for a CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] project, in which we used an armband to see whether a person was practising CPR effectively,” Pantanowitz said. “This is about using technology to save lives. Hopefully, we’ll have a new generation of really well-equipped

into silhouettes the individual photos of 161 participants who took part in a study. “Taking a silhouette massively reduces the complexity of the image. Then, we were able to try to predict the person’s BMI [body-mass index] relative to their actual BMI for unseen test data. The problem with this study is that we used a lot of our data to train the network, and then we had

of data protection. We manipulated a single image to allow us to amplify the data and get all sorts of examples of what different people may look like. With a single image, we were able to produce something like 150 examples.

“The underlying rationale of this is that it’s costly to go out and get that data. It’s time-consuming. It requires ethical considerations. We need to consider how and where the data will ultimately end up, whether we’re treating our data responsibly, and so on.”

People wore face masks differently during the pandemic, Pantanowitz said. “Some wore a face mask covering their mouth and the nose; others wore masks under their nose. Some people didn’t wear masks at all. We thought we could use computer vision and image processing to help a person

get quick feedback about whether they were wearing their mask correctly just to raise their bar of awareness. But we were in lockdown. We couldn’t go out and get data about people wearing their masks poorly, not poorly, or not wearing masks at all.”

They generated a fake photorealistic face through thispersondoesnotexist.com, and used processing techniques to mask those faces, allowing them to produce their own dataset without ever having gone out and gathering data on real people.

Pantanowitz believes innovation is permissionless. “On reflection, we need to make sure we’re doing ethical things. When we wield all this magic and power, we have a responsibility to society. When we bring about a new technology and release it into the wild, so to speak, there are countless examples of second-order and third-order effects which technology brings about. With all that in mind, you’re in this amazing environment in the university in which you’re able to, without necessarily asking for permission, go and change how something works. That’s a powerful thought and a huge privilege to us all in working in these spaces.”



Dr Adam Pantanowitz

students who have come through the programmes using the armband.”

Pantanowitz and others turned

few samples left to prove that what we had done was actually useful. We started to think about the principle

people didn’t wear masks at all. We thought we could use computer vision and image processing to help a person

Modern “pen pal” programme connects SA and Israeli students

TALI FEINBERG

Many people might remember growing up with the joy of a pen pal. They may have even become life-long friends. In today’s digital age, letters have gone out the window, but the benefits of connecting with another young person remain timeless.

It’s one of the reasons that the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel (AACI) has started a programme called Student Connect, which connects university students from America, Canada, and South Africa to students in Israel. They have one-on-one conversations to network and discuss topics such as Israel, Jewish identity, and antisemitism.

“We’ve noticed a large disconnect between Israel and the diaspora, and have chosen to recognise it by closing the gap amongst the young and upcoming generation,” says Bracha Singer, a South African student who has participated in the programme. She was so impressed with it, she’s now its recruitment officer. “It’s not a political or religious organisation and has no agenda other than being a platform for open dialogue,” Singer says.

Says project coordinator Orly Heiblum, “The ultimate goal is to address the huge disconnect between Israel and the diaspora by humanising the relationship between Israeli and diaspora students one conversation at a time. We want participants to think in new ways and to develop new perspectives about Jewish identity, Israel, antisemitism, and the desire to have an impact on their own Jewish communities.”

Seven South Africans have taken part in the programme since it began a year ago. One of them is Adam Osrin, from Cape Town. He attended United Herzlia Schools and is 24 years old. “I graduated last year with a BCom Honours in Strategic Brand Management from Vega Cape Town. I heard about the AACI programme from a friend. I decided to join as I love chatting with others and finding out about their experiences,” Osrin says.

Students get to know each other using the prompts provided. There is also an incentive of a \$50 (R914) Amazon gift card for anyone who completes the programme.

“The experience was amazing as we spoke about topics that wouldn’t usually be spoken about if we saw each other for a cup of coffee,” says Osrin. “The Israeli I was partnered with was funny, great to chat to, and very friendly. She’s studying at the moment, majoring in economics. We’ve planned to meet up either when she comes to Cape Town or when I visit Israel.”



Bracha Singer

They found things they had in common as well as differences. “The similarities are that we’re both Orthodox, and we’re both very busy, either studying or working. Some differences are that she has been in the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and I haven’t, and there was an age gap of about three years. She lives with her boyfriend, and I still live at home.”

Ultimately, he feels that “this programme is amazing, and I’ve learnt so much about myself and life in Israel, even though I’m so far away from the homeland of the Jewish people”.

Singer is 24 years old and attended Torah Academy. She’s now studying a Bachelor of Psychology at the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP). She’s also SAUJS (the South African Union of Jewish Students’) chairperson at SACAP.

She heard about the programme through SAUJS. “I found the concept appealing right from the start. I studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem a few years ago. I absolutely loved my experience, and wanted to re-live Israeli student life whichever way I could.”

She was matched with an Israeli student of a similar age. “It has been fun making a new friend across the globe,” she says. “Although it’s been only a few weeks, it feels like we’ve known each other for far longer. She’s about to start her Master’s degree, and I’ll be entering Honours next year. She’s very friendly, outgoing, and personable. This made engagement easy from the start.

“We’re both creative, sparking discussion around similar hobbies,” she says. “When asked about our values and fears, we were able to relate. In spite of us both having strong opinions and knowing what we stand for, we were able to find commonalities and leave room for interesting discussion.”

Singer says she’s definitely become more aware of life in Israel and student life specifically. “It was intriguing to understand current issues through the eyes of someone

who lives it every day. Students from around the world should create a network and support system. There’s much to learn from one another, and it’s important to know that no Jewish student, regardless of where in the world they find themselves, is alone.

“The prompts for each session create a platform for getting to know each other on a deeper level,” says Singer. “There are also fun questions which allow for a healthy balance and the opportunity for unique, quirky conversation, which removes any awkward silences. I’m really looking forward to keeping up this friendship.”

Heiblum says they “have a full matrix” to evaluate the programme’s success, “within the framework of Jewish identity, minimising the disconnection of Jewish students with Israel, and becoming agents of change in Jewish communities”.

The first step is to fill out a registration form. “Once we get the application, we do the match. The first thing is to have one Israeli and one international participant. Then, we try to match according to similar fields of study, and if that’s not possible, according to similar interests or experiences.

“To date, all the matches have worked within the 13 ‘couples’ that finished the programmes,” she says. “We have open and constant communication with them, so if something isn’t working, we can solve this either by talking to them individually or changing the match.”

Heilbron emphasises that AACI Student Connect “isn’t a political or religious programme. We don’t directly give tools to do *hasbara* [public diplomacy in favour of Israel] or to fight BDS [the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation], we start one step before by encouraging them to explore their own position on these issues, put them in direct communication with an Israeli, get them to listen to their side of the story and ask questions, and make an Israeli friend. In that way, they’ll be more empowered to deal with those issues.”

“The South African Jewish community has a uniquely welcoming and friendly disposition,” says Singer. “Let’s use this virtue to close the gap between ourselves and the land we love. What better way to do that than through our youth?”

• Students can register at www.aaciconnect.org/contact-10 or send an email to projects@aaci.org.il



TALI FEINBERG

Along with three cases in the



Rozanne Sack

Expansion to Cape Town started after Uranovsky approached them,

moment, as they made a presentation to teenagers for the first time. “We visited Cape Town Torah High [CTTH], where we first presented to teachers, then did four back-to-back talks with four groups of CTTH high

The women then travelled to Hermanus to meet activists and lawyers working on “the surf school case”. Ryan Halkett, 41, is alleged to have assaulted at least four female foreign tourists and one local woman at his Hermanus Surf School and Lodge. He appeared in the Hermanus

- *Melanie Uranovsky can be contacted on 074 180 5687.*

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Habonim gets a much delayed HUG

DAVE BLOOM



After nearly five years in planning and several stop-starts because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Habonim Dror Southern Africa gathered in Israel last week to celebrate the past, enjoy the present, and look to the future.

Plans began, and people from the around the world started registering for the gathering in October 2020 when the coronavirus hit in March, and things came to an (almost) standstill.

To maintain momentum and connection with those who had shown interest and current and former members of the movement, Habonim created a series of lectures on Zoom called “HED – Habonim Engaging in Dialogue”. That series ended up running for nearly two years with more than 60 sessions drawing more than 2 500 people to register.

Fast forward to 2022, and it was clear there was still a strong appetite for a get-together in Israel.

“Our vision was to mark the 90th anniversary in 2020 by combining the content-rich Kaleidoscope programme with the Habonim Ultimate Gathering (HUG) that would transcend a conventional reunion and look ahead to what we can do collectively to improve the world and support the movement in South Africa,” said Stephen Pincus a key organiser and mastermind of the project. “We finally met in Israel for a deeply emotional and highly successful Kaleidoscope and HUG in October 2022. Now the question is, what’s next?”

“We were blown away by the places and people we met on the tour,” said participant Felicity Swerdlow (formerly of Johannesburg). “Israel continues to develop the most amazing agriculture and industries, which we were shown on the tour.” She was one of the participants in the first part of the event called “A-Guard”, a three-day tour run by guide and former Habonim leader Mark

Kedem.

In the two-day Kaleidoscope programme, attended by 85 people in an Israeli election week, several said they believed the Israeli electoral system was “broken”, and the chances of a stable government emerging weren’t great.

They also spoke about Arab-Jewish co-existence in Jaffa, especially following the riots and violence of May 2021. “Both the Arab and Jewish residents of Jaffa were scared to be on the street,” said Akiva Sygal, who has lived



Habos learning to do the *Jerusalem*



Faine Angel, Daniel Selvan, and Doron Moshe

in Jaffa and taught for many years about the multi-religious and multicultural aspects of Jaffa and Israel at large.

“We workshopped methods on how to have healthy arguments with friends, family, and communities, which Sasha Rodenacker, a current leader in Habonim Dror SA, said could definitely be useful in the movement today.” Rodenacker was one of eight South African leaders who travelled to participate.

The organisers showed a controversial and disturbing film titled H2: The Occupation Lab about the situation in

Hebron. Though the screening shocked and upset some participants, the organisers felt it was important not to shy from difficult issues. The producer and director joined the group, and spoke about the need to reveal these issues to the wider public. “Not many Israelis have ever been to Hebron,” said director Noam Shelzaf.

The anniversary culminated in a one-day reunion called the Habonim Ultimate Gathering at Kibbutz Tzora, where about 350 current and former members of the movement gathered. People came from Australia, California, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, and many other locations, with the majority from Israel.

“I wouldn’t miss this fantastic opportunity of seeing old chaverim,” said Howard Dubowitz formerly of Cape Town, now living in the United States.

Old, familiar faces which spoke at this gathering, included the writer (as MC); former Mazkir Klali Benzi Segal, who is a member of Kibbutz Tzora; the current manhig of Habonim, Wayne Susman; former Mazkir Klali Stephen Pincus; and current Mazkir Klali Aaron Kruss-van der Heever.

Participants were shown about nine different projects that former Habonim members in Israel had sponsored, ranging from water development in Africa to supporting African migrants in Israel, to a project which leverages the game of squash to bring young Jews and Arabs together.

Then, they had a good-old reconnect and “schmooze” over lunch. A group of nearly 40 former Zimbabweans sat under a tree on the grass at Tzora, shared stories and connections from the past, and updated each other on their lives as many had not seen each other for more than 50 years.



Akiva Sygal

At the end of the HUG, they clapped and danced to the Jonathan Miller band playing blue grass, and then had a Habonim sing-along led by Tzora members and former shaliach, Howie Gordon, Brad Gottschalk, and Gaby

Glass Aizenman. It ended with everyone on their feet, learning to dance to *Jerusalem*.

“I’m so pleased with the outcome of the event we worked so hard for so long to put together,” said Hilary Hertzberger (nee Milunsky) a key organiser of the HUG. “It was gratifying to feel the warmth and see so many people with smiles on their faces.”

The organisers were overwhelmed with emails, Facebook comments, and WhatsApp messages in the following days including one from Toni Shimoni (the wife of Professor Gidi Shimoni), both veteran Habonim members, who wrote, “What’s the secret? Why do we all feel so good together, even after so many years? Why do the young members of Habonim fit in with us old fogeys without reminding us of how old we are? Habo magic some call it. I really haven’t got words, but yesterday was one of the happiest days of my life, and I’m still on a high.”

• For more images, reports and responses to the events see www.habo2020.com and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Habo2020>
• Dave Bloom is a Habonim SA vatik (old boy), and one of the organisers of this anniversary event. He now lives in Kochav Yair, Israel.

StandWithUs opens office in SA “the ground zero of BDS”

TALI FEINBERG

“South Africa is ground zero for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [BDS] movement, and has one of the most violent and antisemitic Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) campaigns in the world,” says Noa Raman, the director of partnerships in Israel, who has been leading StandWithUs’ efforts in South Africa for the past four years.

For this reason, StandWithUs is opening offices in South Africa. “We’re making the full resources of our organisation available to our partners, young people, and the community at large in South Africa,” says Michael Dickson, the executive director of StandWithUs Israel. “This includes educational curricula, research, factsheets and booklets, best practices, our vast social media presence, our Holocaust Education Centre, and our Centre for Combating Antisemitism.”

Cassandra Mayekiso has been appointed executive director of the local office in Johannesburg, and Kayla Ginsberg is the new campus regional manager.

Says Mayekiso, “In recent years, StandWithUs has sent a delegation of educators to South African universities [the universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch, and University of Johannesburg] to combat IAW. There was always the request to cater to the community and high schools. This led to StandWithUs South Africa being created.”

StandWithUs South Africa will provide educational material, curriculum, seminars, and access to a broad network of Israeli educators directed at schools, university campuses, and community events.

“Establishing StandWithUs South Africa on the ground will empower the next generation to learn the history, facts, and skills needed to educate about Israel and push back against falsehoods about the Jewish state and anti-Jewish bigotry,” Raman says. “StandWithUs South Africa will inspire communities to be proud of their culture, religion, identities, and beliefs.”



Cassandra Mayekiso and Kayla Ginsberg

The move comes after a history of collaboration: StandWithUs has been working with South Africans for more than a decade. In addition, hundreds of South Africans have visited the StandWithUs Katz Israel Education Center in Jerusalem.

Now, thanks primarily to the generosity of Steve and Rita

Emerson, the founders of the international university Emerson Fellowship, StandWithUs is ready to set up on-the-ground efforts to provide deeper and ongoing support for students as well as for the general community who seek to push back against the misinformation that too often clouds discussion on Israel and the Middle East.

Mayekiso was the co-founder of the Africa for Israel Christian Coalition, and previously volunteered in Jerusalem. Upon returning to Cape Town, she joined the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) as national Zionist officer. After graduating, she went on to work at

Highlight Films in Tel Aviv, where she gained experience at one of Israel’s biggest production houses.

She again returned to Cape Town to work in the film and commercial industry, and assisted in the growth of various pro-Israel organisations. She was the director of SAUJS in the Western Cape, and was also South African Friends of Israel co-ordinator, where she worked closely with the South African Zionist Federation and Christian Zionist partners.

StandWithUs has an important role to play in South Africa because “there’s a rise in antisemitism, and the South African Jewish and Christian Zionist communities

have expressed a need for ongoing support from StandWithUs,” she says.

“In addition to new local educational programming on the ground, we’ll continue to offer an array of initiatives to South African youth spending time in Israel,” says Dickson. “We have had so many requests – especially from students – to grow our presence on the ground, and I’m pleased that we’ll be able to complement, not duplicate, existing work in order to collectively grow in effectiveness through partnerships.”

“This work remains incredibly necessary, albeit isolating and hugely unpopular, but it’s increasingly important to educate on Israel and combat antisemitism,” says Mayekiso. “I lived in Israel and saw first-hand how damaging the propaganda is that’s shared online and by the media about Israel. Thus, I have spent the past 10 years working closely with students and communities in sharing my very real experiences as a black, Christian, woman living in South Africa.”

StandWithUs South Africa has opened an office in Johannesburg, and is launching the Emerson Fellowship for university students “who want to learn and grow in combating antisemitism and the BDS movement”.

StandWithUs South Africa will also assist SAUJS to counter demonstrations during IAW, “along with highly trained on-the-ground delegations and materials that will best equip students and community members. There will also be virtual learning opportunities for students who wish to engage outside the confines of IAW,” says Mayekiso.

Asked how StandWithUs will

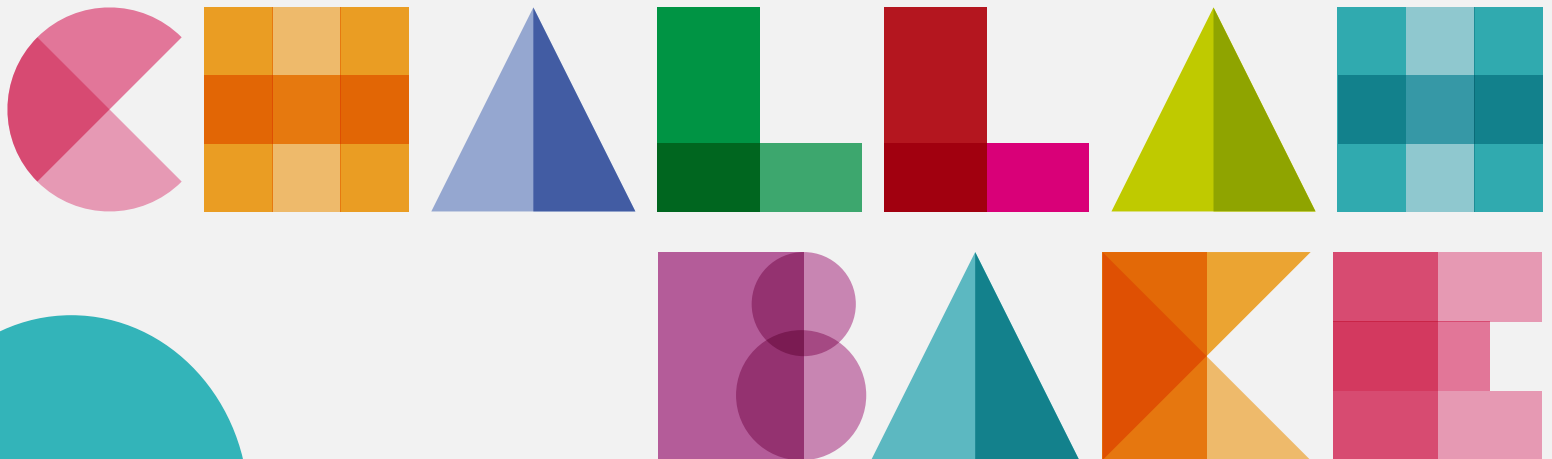
respond to the jaded attitude of many young people towards Israel, she says, “StandWithUs South Africa aims to reignite the spark for young Jewish students through providing educational material, access to interesting speakers, virtual tours of Israel, and through the opportunity to apply to the Emerson Fellowship, which is all of this and much more.

“The Emerson Fellowship will be launching on Friday, 4 November, with applications for cohort one opening the following week,” she says. “This is an incredible opportunity for university student leaders to commit to a one-year learning programme in which they will connect with Emersons all over the world while learning about Israel.”

Says Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, “We welcome StandWithUs to South Africa. For many years, it has supported our community in preparing our students to stand up against the assault on our right to have a relationship with Israel. Giving our young people the tools and know-how to defend their rights to be proud Zionists in South Africa brings an exciting new component to our vibrant community.”

“We are excited to be investing more deeply in our operation in South Africa and welcome our new team,” says Roz Rothstein, the chief executive and co-founder of StandWithUs. “Our work will involve Jewish and non-Jewish communities to inspire people of all ages about Israel with exciting programming. And together, we’ll work to push back against the egregious, slanderous claims made by antisemitic activists.”

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Israeli mother of 12 reaches political pinnacle

STEVEN GRUZD

Rivka Ravitz isn’t your typical Israeli. Maybe having 12 children – nine girls and three boys – isn’t so unusual for an ultra-Orthodox woman. But she simultaneously ran the affairs of Israel’s president, Reuven Rivlin, between 2014 and 2021. Ravitz spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* about her unusual journey.

She was born in Jerusalem to ultra-Orthodox parents who had made aliya from the United States. She had her heart set on being a teacher. She was married at the age of 18 to Rabbi Yitzchak Ravitz, the son of Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, a haredi member of Knesset (MK). Avraham Ravitz was made head of the Knesset’s finance committee in 1997, and turned to his young daughter-in-law, Rivka, when he needed an assistant. She was talked into the role. “At first, the Knesset seemed so big and [I thought] I would get lost,” Ravitz said, “but it soon became my second home.”

When Biden heard that she had 12 children, he fell to his knees in respect.

She had to learn a lot, and learn it fast. “It was a professional and important committee. I saw words I couldn’t even pronounce, and I had to learn how a budget worked. I took piles of papers home, learning them the whole night long for meetings the next day.”

When Ravitz was pregnant with her

first child at the age of 19, her mother was pregnant with her tenth. Her sister was born two weeks before her daughter. “It wasn’t easy,” she said. “I was basically pregnant every year and a half. My eldest is 26 – she’s a mother already herself – and my youngest is three.”

A new law prevented MKs from employing family members, so Ravitz had to look for a new job. She found one with Rivlin, then head of the Likud in the Knesset. “I wasn’t sure, as a religious person, that I could do this job,” she said. “At 23, I was running his office, and was with him when he became speaker of the Knesset. All the other aides were men.” She had three young children at that point, and worked from eight in the morning to eight at night.

Her children sometimes didn’t like her job much, but were proud of her. “We didn’t use babysitters,” she said. “My husband and I made a point of being there ourselves, even if it meant going back to the office in the evening.”

She advised Rivlin when he became a minister and eventually became his chief of staff when he was made Israel’s tenth president. “I had to learn on the job, in a very secular environment, in the heart of

the Likud party.”

Ravitz asserts that being religious helped her get through tough situations. “Being a believer gave me power,” she said. “I was tested and stood up. People respect you when you respect your beliefs.”

Ravitz rubbed shoulders with powerful people. She recalled a



dinner Rivlin had in the Kremlin in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin. “There were gold knives and forks, and all the food was kosher. There were nine courses!” Ravitz said Putin told them that he had had Jewish neighbours as a child, and looked up to them.

She met former United States President Bill Clinton (after he was in office) and spent Chanukah at the White House with President Barack Obama. “He was so nice, and speaks so well,” she said. She met President Donald Trump in Jerusalem when he moved the US Embassy there in 2018, as well as in the US.



In 2021, Ravitz accompanied Rivlin to a meeting with US President Joe Biden in the Oval Office at the White House. Biden wanted to shake hands with Ravitz, but Rivlin explained that she didn’t shake hands with men for religious reasons. When Biden heard that she had 12 children, he fell to his knees in respect. He showed her a framed picture of Obama, Biden, and Biden’s mother.

“This shows the power of a mother. Even the most powerful man in the world remembers and loves his mother. He has her picture in the Oval Office!” Ravitz said.

Ravitz hasn’t ruled out running for a political position in the future, but says haredi parties don’t welcome female members and need to sort that out first. She believes the rift between secular and religious Israelis can be breached by getting to know one another better.

When asked why she was coming to South Africa, Ravitz said, “I believe in young people, young communities, and was delighted to have been invited by Aish. I will deliver a message of being able to succeed without giving up your beliefs.” She will also speak to women, telling them that a woman can achieve her goals even with a big family.

• *Rivka Ravitz will be speaking at the Aish Gala Dinner in Johannesburg on 7 November. To book, email charmaine@aish.org.za or call 073 486 4103.*

Why I dabble in Scrabble

An unemployed American architect in the 1930s spotted a gap in the games market. Though card, board games, and chess were popular, Alfred Mosher Butts realised that there were no word games for sale. Building on the popularity of crossword puzzles, he invented Scrabble.

The game has now sold an estimated 150 million sets in more than 30 languages. There are World Scrabble Championships in English, French, and Spanish, and thousands of clubs all over the world. Countries like Nigeria, Pakistan, and Thailand have become Scrabble powerhouses in spite of a rather poor standard of spoken English. There are many Jewish connections in the Scrabble story too.

No-one is quite sure if Butts himself was Jewish, but Scrabble was given its big break when Jewish businessman Jack Straus, the chairperson of Macy’s department store in New York, played the game on holiday. He insisted that it be stocked and promoted in the early 1950s. There have been four Jewish world champions: England’s Mark Nyman, American Joel Sherman, Canadian Joel Wapnick, and Australian David Eldar. There are flourishing Scrabble clubs in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and the Israeli Open is a feature on the global Scrabble circuit. Arab and Jewish players famously wore gas masks during the 1991 Gulf War at the Jerusalem club.

In South Africa, Jewish women did wonders for the game. The late Gwen Heiman was the mother of

the competitive Scrabble circuit. She formed the first club in the 1960s in Anstey’s Building in the Johannesburg city centre. She was the driving force behind the Johannesburg Scrabble Club (JSC) and the formation of the South African National Scrabble Players Association (SANSPA, now Scrabble SA). At its peak, more than 50 players would congregate at the JSC on a Monday night at the Paterson Park Recreation Centre to pit their wits and words against one another. There was even a smokers’ room in those days, and some would play into the wee hours of Tuesday morning. The late Lynn Roff, an ex-teacher, chaired the JSC for nearly 40 years and was instrumental in nurturing the newbies. The late Sandra Meyberg did the same for her Windsor West Scrabble Club for decades. Anita Kassel built up the Cape Town Scrabble community for many years as well.

International Relations lecturer Larry Benjamin was instrumental in growing Scrabble in South Africa, and the current president of Scrabble South Africa is attorney Andrew Goldberg, who puts his passion into promoting the game. The JSC now meets at Beit Emanuel Progressive Synagogue in Parktown.

My own Scrabble journey started in 1980. When I was eight, I started playing with my late mom, Arlene Fine, who had always loved words and wordplay. In 1984, Transvaal champion Roni Witkin offered Scrabble as an extra-mural activity at Houghton Primary School, and my talent was spotted and developed.



I entered my first tournament, and returned with an armful of prizes. I was hooked. Sandra Meyberg nicknamed me “Boy Wonder”, and called me that until I was well into my forties. My wife was “Mrs Wonder” to Sandra.

As a rather introverted teen, I recognised that to get good at the game, I had to study words. In those days, there was no internet, anagramming apps, or online Scrabble Go. I compiled my own lists by hand using anagram books. My mom and I joined the JSC. I spent many a sleepless Monday night with anagrams and board positions whizzing through my head for hours after leaving the club.

There are many Yiddish and a handful of Hebrew words playable in English Scrabble. You can play “PLOTZ”, “SCHVITZ”, or “NUDNIK”. You can play “MAZELTOV”, “BIMA”, and “TREYF”. You can play all the Hebrew letters, from “ALEPH” to “TAV”. There are lots of South

African words too, including “BRAAI”, “BOEP”, and “NAARTJIE”.

In a recent controversial move – following the Black Lives Matter Movement – about 400 apparently offensive terms were expurgated from the Scrabble lexicon. These included to “JEW” (meaning to cheat or swindle), “GOY”, and “KIKE”. Most players were against messing with the lexicon, but fearing a loss of support from Mattel, the game’s copyright owner, the removals have been grudgingly accepted. Some countries like New Zealand and most of Australia have rebelled, and are continuing to use them in competitive play.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person tournaments were halted, but we arranged online test matches with countries like England, Pakistan, and New Zealand. Apps like Scrabble Go are extremely popular, as are websites like the Internet Scrabble Club and Woogles. Words can be learned using apps like Ulu or

STEVEN GRUZD

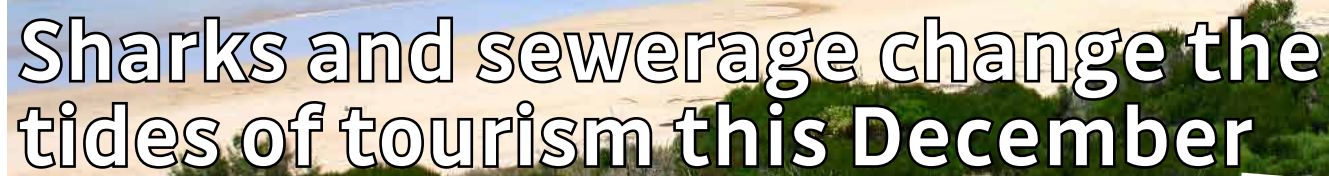
Zyzyyva (literally the last word in Scrabble, a tropical American weevil). There are numerous Scrabble groups on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Scrabble has opened up my world. I’ve won five national championships and have been privileged to represent South Africa at World Scrabble Championships in New York, London (where I came sixth), Washington DC, Melbourne, Las Vegas, Kuala Lumpur, and Warsaw. I’ve played in the African Scrabble Championships in Nairobi, Cape Town, and Lusaka. I came a slightly disappointing 41st out of 86 in this year’s event in October in the Zambian capital.

But most importantly, Scrabble has helped me find my tribe, my community, my world of word nuts. I’m honoured to share a passion with people from all walks of life, from teachers and students to lawyers, doctors, mathematicians, interior designers, police officers, and travel agents. One of our national champions was a contestant on *South African Survivor*. Our Scrabble family comes from across the rainbow nation, and we share one another’s joys and challenges. I’ve become friends with such a diverse group of amazing people that I simply wouldn’t have encountered but for my irrepressible, obsessive love of words.

To find out more about competitive Scrabble in South Africa, contact Andrew +27 83 260 7530.

• *Steven Gruzd is the vice president of Scrabble SA, and a five-time national champion.*



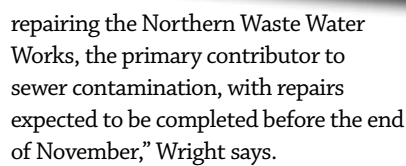
From sharks in Plettenberg Bay to high E. coli levels in Umhlanga, popular seaside destinations are working around the clock to ensure that their beaches are open for bathing this holiday season.

"There are ways to adapt your holiday though," she

Great white sharks in Plett, says Kruger, naturally move from these high areas as summer approaches. "We've already experienced a decrease in the number of white sharks in the area over the past two weeks," he says. As part of its plan for peak season, the PSAG has erected information boards

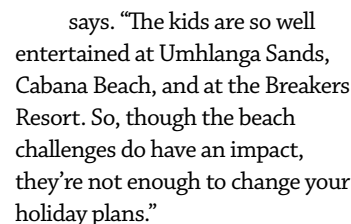
With buy-in from the municipality, PSAG is also researching installing a shark exclusion net on Central Beach, but Kruger cannot comment on when this will be implemented. “We should be in for a really good

The Umgeni River also has an impact on Umhlanga's water quality. "An eThekweni municipal contractor is



She began to feel sick on the aeroplane. "I had to sit down as soon as we disembarked otherwise I would

In the face of these seaside challenges, year-end berg and bush holidays are an up-and-coming trend. "In previous Decembers, I hardly ever sold any hotels in the Drakensberg and at the Kruger Park, but now people are nervous," says Elad. Pilanesberg and Sun City, in particular, are major attractions this year.



"I know there were some cancellations because of the sharks, but we never considered that," he says. "Swimming in the sea was banned at all Plett beaches but the hotel has a great pool, so it wasn't an issue for us. We were able to use and walk on the beaches, there was just no entering the sea. Plett has so

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Blood, sweat, and tears pay off for rugby prodigy

SAUL KAMIONSKY

When Nick Feinberg answered his phone last Friday morning, he became teary-eyed. He found out that his son, the 20-year-old Stormers versatile flyhalf, Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu, was named in the 35-man Springbok squad for the European end-of-year tour which starts in Ireland this weekend.

"I'm elated because playing rugby is what my son does, and getting a call-up for the Springboks is obviously the

pinnacle of the sport," Feinberg says of his son being included in the squad alongside the likes of 2019 Rugby World Cup-winners Siya Kolisi, Eben Etzebeth, and Faf de Klerk.

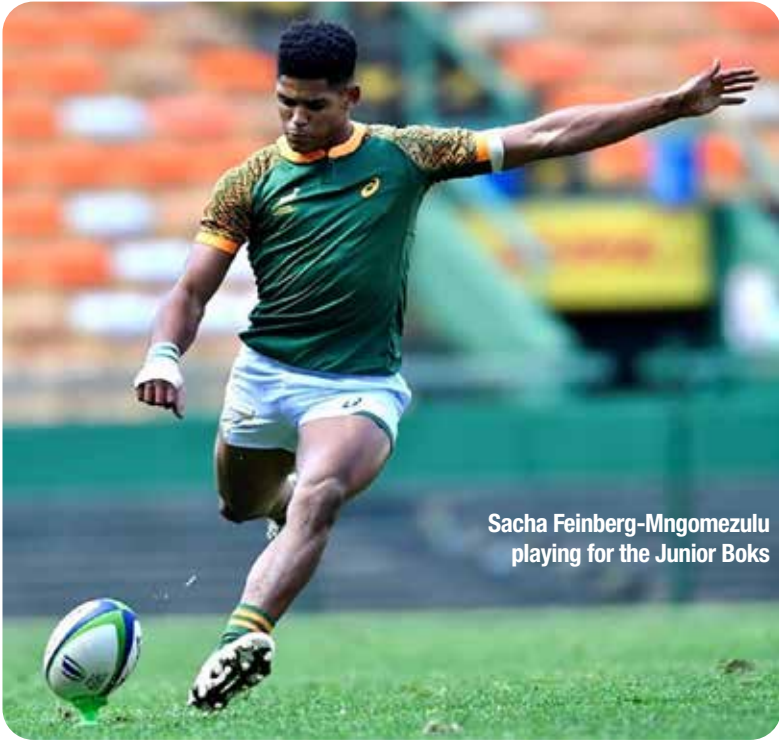
At the beginning of October, Sacha's main goal was to get into the Stormers match-day 23.

"Now, he has been selected by the world champions," his dad marvels. "It's an incredible achievement. It feels amazing. I'm slightly anxious, but also really happy."

Sacha, born in 2002, is the son of

Feinberg and his Johannesburg-based mother, Makhosazana Mngomezulu, who met in 2000 after he emigrated from England to South Africa in 1994.

"Sacha isn't Jewish by religion because your religion is determined by your mother," says Feinberg. "I'm a non-practising Jew and my family are atheists but still, I'm very conscious of Judaism. I won't stand for antisemitism, and my son is the same. In fact, I fought antisemitism on the streets of London. Half of my mother's family were wiped out by the Nazis."



Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu playing for the Junior Boks

From the unknown to the unlimited – weightlifters raise the bar

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Lawyer Gabriella Berkowitz won gold in the women's 87+ kg division at the South African National Weightlifting Championships in Mossel Bay, Western Province, on 22 and 23 October, just two years after taking up the sport. And for fellow Johannesburg-based King David Linksfield alumni, Gregg Bernstein, it was a case of third-time lucky.

Bernstein, a civil engineer, won the men's 89kg division against about 10 other weightlifters after placing third and fourth respectively at the 2014 and 2018 editions of the championships. "I'm extremely proud," he says. "It's something I've been working towards. It's nice to win finally. I always trained to win the national championships, but I was constantly suffering from some sort of injury during previous attempts."

Berkowitz says it feels incredible to have won gold in her first competition. "I wasn't expecting to win. It was a real spectacle. Three people competed in my division. I won by about 15kg to 20kg."

The 60kg she lifted in the snatch was a personal best for her by 4kg. "In the clean and jerk, I lifted 75kg, which is about 99% of my personal best."

Bernstein went up against one of his rivals who have consistently beaten him over the past two or three years. "I knew it was going to be quite a difficult challenge to beat him, but I basically had the best training cycle I've had since I started weightlifting. I felt like it was 50-50 going against him."



Photo: Elin Goodman

Gabriella Berkowitz

through CrossFit in October 2020.

"CrossFit incorporates weightlifting, metabolic conditioning, and gymnastics," she says. "I have always been better at weightlifting. My weightlifting started to improve exponentially in a really short space of time, so I started private weightlifting in addition to CrossFit. My coach thought I had a really promising career in weightlifting. He wanted me to be introduced to the sport through the national champs. That's sort of my weightlifting story so far. We will see where I go from here."

Berkowitz and Bernstein both do weightlifting training, often together, about three times a week at the Bar Strength & Conditioning Gym in Linbro Park, Sandton. "This gym is very well known in the weightlifting community," the latter says. "It has one of the best weightlifting coaches in the country, Andrew Anthony, who has been training me pretty much for the past eight years."

Berkowitz says juggling weightlifting with being a lawyer keeps her sane. "It's my escape, and the thing I enjoy most. It's non-negotiable for me. I refuse to give up

on my training."

She would love to become an African champion, participate in the Maccabi and Commonwealth Games, and push herself to her limit.

"My coach believes in me 100%. That's the most you could ask for in a coach."

Bernstein has won medals in the Gauteng provincial championships and won the Arnold Classic Africa weightlifting event. "I've never been selected to compete overseas. I'm hoping that will change with the results I've achieved. My medium-term goal is to go to the African Championships next year. I would love to be able to snatch 140kg and clean 180kg. The Commonwealth Games is probably my greatest aspiration. I've got four years to train for the next one [in Victoria, Australia]."

South Africa has never garnered a weightlifting medal at the Olympic Games but bagged two bronzes in the sport at the Commonwealth Games.

Bernstein says weightlifting is one of the least developed sports in South Africa, but is becoming more popular.

"You can't make a career from weightlifting in South Africa. This is why I work full-time. I'm not making money from weightlifting. It's not unique to me, it's the case across the board."

Weightlifting is unique because it pushes you beyond your boundaries and there are no barriers, Bernstein says. "To improve in weightlifting, you have to do something you've never done, whereas in other sports, your improvement might be measured in other ways. What appeals to me about weightlifting is how you're always pushing your body to an unknown limit to achieve something you have never done before."

Feinberg says his family always thought Sacha could be called up to national training camp given his captaincy of the Junior Boks at this year's Under-20 Six Nations Summer Series in Italy, where South Africa defeated England, Ireland, France, and Wales to lift the title. "Therefore, there wasn't a 'big' reaction from Sacha on the actual Bok call-up. Conversely, it was an emotional moment for me."

Feinberg becomes anxious watching Sacha play, particularly now that the stakes have been raised. "So, unless I'm at the stadium, I watch at home, generally alone. It's not clear at this point when he will be getting a run during the tour, so I won't be travelling."

Sacha is currently training with the Springbok team in Dublin ahead of their match against Ireland on Saturday. "He's not taking any calls, even from family," says his dad. "He's just absolutely engulfed in what he's doing in Ireland."

Although Feinberg is unsure how much game time Sacha will get during the tour, Springbok coach Jacques Nienaber said in a recent press conference, "If he gets selected in these games, which probably will happen, it will be nice to see him performing at this stage, almost a little step higher to the URC (United Rugby Championship)."

Feinberg says the national team call-up was the culmination of "blood, sweat, and tears".

"Sacha has put in so much time and hard work [sweat]. He's also suffered a number of injuries, a couple that have meant operations, having his teeth knocked in through his gum guard [blood], and there have been tears mainly of joy from him, but some of disappointment from myself. For example, being injured and needing an elbow operation two days before leaving to play in Wales."

Sacha developed a love for the sport by playing tag rugby every Friday at school when he was five or six. "I played [rugby] all through school," he told *Rugby World* in September. "I was good at football and was in the South African Ajax squad. I played first-team cricket at school too. When I was 15, I focused on rugby. It was more appealing."

He moved into the provincial system at that age, and got his first professional contract in 2020.

Sacha's grandfather, Barry Feinberg, was an anti-apartheid activist.

Barry, a poet, painter, and filmmaker, got involved with the African National Congress, and went into exile to London in 1961 after the Sharpeville Massacre. Feinberg was born and raised there, growing up around London's exile community which included some of South Africa's most renowned politicians. "I was around many of the guys who became leaders post-1994," Feinberg says. "The likes of Ronnie Kasrils and Aziz Pahad were very close friends of my dad's."

Feinberg himself worked for the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund, which funded political prisoners in South Africa during the 1980s.

Sacha plans to study something like entrepreneurship and has a few business ideas.

"I'm elated because playing rugby is what my son does, and getting a call-up for the Springboks is obviously the pinnacle of the sport."

Nienaber described Sacha as a brilliant rugby player. "He's athletic, fast, quick, and agile. He has good skills. He had to make a decision between soccer and rugby, so he's a skilful guy. From a defensive viewpoint, he really impressed me for his age. He certainly doesn't look *bang* [scared]."

Sacha has managed to get selected at every level since the age of 13. "Grant Khomo Week, Craven Week, SA Schools, SA 7's [under-18 team], Western Province, Stormers, so many great achievements," his dad says. "He had a great school career as well. I'd say captaining the Junior Springboks [the national under-20 team] was probably his most special achievement so far."

"Anything that he enjoys doing, he seems to excel at," Feinberg says. "He has only ever been disappointed when he couldn't play the following week when he had an injury. Nobody has ever pushed him. He's self-motivated. If he has a bad kicking game, he'll be out by himself on the field with a bunch of balls kicking the following day to put himself straight."

Sacha underwent a huge growth spurt in the four months following his appearance for the Stormers in their URC quarterfinal against Edinburgh last season. "I have never seen a graph like that. I don't know how we can leave him out of the Stormers side ever again," Stormers coach John Dobson told the media.



Gregg Bernstein

Photo: screenshot

Ye got yeself into this, now get yeself out

When I was 15, I was friendly with a guy by the name of James. We weren't great friends as he was a bit wild, and I was a bit of a nerd. But every now and then when we got together, we would chat. On one of those occasions, he told me a crazy story. I had already heard the headlines from my appropriately horrified parents, but it was the text that was more interesting.

It was a regular Saturday night in a leafy Johannesburg suburb when James and company made the decision to "borrow" his mother's car. After a very successful night out, and after a fair amount of alcohol having been consumed, James drove home. Instead of parking the car in the driveway where he had found it, he managed to submerge it in the family swimming pool. Unfazed, he exited the pool, and went to bed. He was, after all, quite tired.

When he woke up, his mother was sitting at the end of his bed, waiting to have a conversation.

Slowly, memory of the events of the night began to return to him. The magnitude of his actions and the trouble he was in became a reality and he knew, without doubt, that the next hour wouldn't be easy.

"James," said his mom, looking at him sadly, "Are you very angry?" And just like that, James had his direction, his way out, and his strategy. He was an "angry" 15-year-old, and all he would have to do to avoid repercussions was to behave as such.

Kanye West, too, seems angry. He's clearly suffering from mental and emotional strain, and is effectively on a path towards the family swimming pool.

His implosion is nothing other than tragic. In a few short years, his behaviour and rantings have cost him his marriage, his financial security, and status. He has clearly lost control of the vehicle and there's little

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



doubt about where it will land up.

The harm he has done to others cannot be understated. With more followers than Jews in the world, he has unleashed a tsunami of hate for which he needs to be held accountable. A swimming pool of "victimhood" won't wash away the stench of his hatred.

In spite of his unrelenting antisemitic attacks and his refusal to back down, there's a part of me that feels like James' mother. On a rational level, I'm aware of the dangers of his language and the fact that he's relying on antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theory to spread his hate. But on another level, I want to reach out and tell him that he doesn't have to do this and that there's an alternative path that will be less painful for him and those he's hurting. And that instead of giving "power" to a non-existent "demon", he should recognise the immense power he holds.

Power that he could use for good, not evil. James' parents chose a different approach. From what I hear, he has gone on to lead a productive and successful life. For him, the days of wild Saturday nights are long past, although he might well be facing the challenges of his own children.

Kanye West doesn't deserve a free pass. His "anger" doesn't just have an impact him and his family, it has shifted the Jewish world. He aimed his car in the direction of the pool, put his foot on the accelerator, and refused all offers of detours and assistance. And now, even though he's under water, it's up to him alone to choose to swim to the surface. Only once he does so can we stretch out our hand to him to help him the rest of the way.

Kids have a ball at Inter-Jewish Cricket Festival

Torah Academy's Inter-Jewish Cricket Festival at Wanderers Cricket Club on 25 and 26 October brought sport and spirit together. King David Linksfeld, King David Victory Park, King David Sandton, and Yeshiva College, participated in a spread of T10 format matches. Each team batted and bowled 10 overs. The days were split into junior and senior categories, with the Terhorst teams playing on the Tuesday, and the Commonwealth playing on the Wednesday.



Torah Academy Under-11 cricket team

Sunday 6 November

• Chevrah Kadisha Bereavement hosts a support group called *Growth from Grief*. Venue: Donald Gordon Centre, Sandringham Gardens Campus. Time: 10:00. Contact sheilaf@jhbchev.co.za

Tuesday 8 November

• The Franz Auerbach Memorial Lecture presents guest speaker Albie Sachs. Venue: Beit Emanuel Shul or online <https://beiteman.link/auerbach>. Time: 19:30. Contact: director@beitemanuel.co.za

Wednesday 9 November

• The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts the 84th *Commemoration of Kristallnacht* with keynote speakers Deborah Lipstadt and Christopher Browning. Time: 18:30. Entry: free. Contact: dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.



Letters

CORPORATE SA SPINELESS THEN AND NOW

During apartheid, many companies chose to say nothing because they were making lots of money for their shareholders. Today, the same is true as many companies choose to do the corrupt, racist African National Congress regime's bidding. Then and now, it's immoral to select a person for a job

based on their skin colour. Making racist legislation for the past 30 years against the working 4% white minority is immoral and will do nothing for job creation. Hence, on the macro side of things, South Africa is now classified as a failed state.
– Frank Cohen, Johannesburg

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Lipstadt's visit comes at opportune time

Final preparations are taking place for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) Gauteng Council conference on 10 November. This includes finalising the programme for the United States special envoy for monitoring and combating antisemitism, Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, who in addition to being keynote speaker will also meet the government and universities.

The visit of someone of Lipstadt's stature comes at an opportune time for our community and, in fact, South African society as a whole. There has undoubtedly been an upsurge in hateful rhetoric in this country, primarily but by no means exclusively on online platforms. Regardless of who the targets are, this proliferation of hate speech is everyone's problem. As Lipstadt herself aptly puts it, "In the fight against hatred and evil, neutrality isn't an option. There are no bystanders".

Antisemitism is often referred to as "the oldest form of hatred", and it's also one of the most complex, taking multiple and sometimes contradictory forms. One thus finds Jews being reviled both as subversive communists and as greedy exploitative capitalists; as seeking the destruction of the white race while also being seen as whites who are especially guilty of exploiting blacks; of being "rootless cosmopolitans" hostile to national sovereignty, while also being ultra-nationalist colonisers and oppressors. A common theme in antisemitic thinking is the notion that Jews secretly control events behind the scenes through domination of the global financial system, the entertainment industry, and other such means. All of these canards, as well as others, have featured in the flurry of antisemitic comments that have appeared online in recent weeks, the furore over Dis-Chem

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



alone having generated scores of offensive posts.

More recently, the news has been dominated by the reaction to persistent antisemitic statements online by world-renowned rap artist and influencer, Kanye West. That controversy has in turn generated a certain amount of antisemitic fall-out, typically manifesting as variations on the theme of West having been "right about the Jews". A number of such comments have appeared on local online platforms, thereby demonstrating how even antisemitic behaviour taking place on another continent can and does have an impact on Jewish communities everywhere. What's also emerging is how a great many South Africans are finding it difficult to understand what exactly was wrong about West's conspiracy-laden rhetoric about Jews. For many, he simply made an objective observation about how the world worked. It's far more likely, however, that this understanding is founded on a lack of basic knowledge about antisemitism than on genuine anti-Jewish prejudice.

Against this background, it will be readily understood why Lipstadt's visit is of special importance at this time. It will provide many opportunities via speaking engagements and in meetings with senior members of government, to educate and raise awareness about the dangers of antisemitism and the need to confront it. We look forward to engaging with her and learning about what's being done at the highest levels to counteract this scourge.

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

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