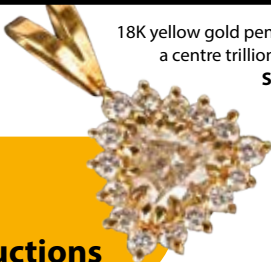


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Jewish doctor escapes death amidst Boksburg explosion

TALI FEINBERG

Twenty-six-year-old Dr Kyle Winik was just 100m away from the gas tanker that exploded in Boksburg on the morning of 24 December, killing at least 37 people. "It doesn't make sense that I'm okay," says Winik, who was in the last days of his two-year internship at Tambo Memorial Hospital (TMH) when the tragedy occurred. He says that if he hadn't been in a car, he wouldn't have survived. "There was a man standing next to me when the explosion happened. Afterwards, there were just pieces."

Winik, who grew up in Johannesburg, attended King David Linksfield and studied at the University of Pretoria, knew many of the nurses from TMH who died in the explosion. "I was about to turn off when I heard a very loud bang, saw a mushroom cloud, and then everything flying towards me. Instinctively, I went into the brace position. My first thought was, 'I'm about to die.' Seeing what was coming towards me, I thought, 'There's no way I'm getting out of this alive.'"

The accident left scores dead, injured, or missing. The fuel tanker was carrying 60 000 litres of liquefied petroleum gas. The driver took the wrong route under a bridge, about 100m from the hospital. When the tanker became stuck, he stopped to assess the damage. Noticing that the cap had been scraped off, he attempted to cordon off the area. At first there were three smaller explosions just after 07:00. This attracted crowds, resulting in casualties and fatalities when a large fourth explosion occurred about half an hour later.

On a whim, Winik decided that day to take his father's car to work. "My car probably

wouldn't have withstood the force of the explosion," he says. His father's far more robust car is now a complete write-off.

"While I was still in the hospital, we heard bangs and felt tremors. As I was driving out, I saw fire. If I had exited right, I would have come to the bridge that the tanker was under," he said. Instead, he doubled back so that he could film the fire to send to colleagues to warn them. It was then that the explosion occurred.

"I could feel the force of the explosion hitting the car, shattering glass. Feeling that I was cut all over, I knew I was still alive. In front of the driver's side there was a huge hole. I looked in the mirror and saw I had blood on my face, but otherwise I was fine, although in shock."

Getting out of the car, Winik recalled seeing people "with injuries not compatible with life. People were either dead or had burns that would kill them in the next few hours".

Covered in glass and small burns, Winik got out of the car and tried to call for help, both for himself and those around him. He tried to phone his family, but because it was early, they didn't answer. He tried to raise help from the hospital, but no one answered.



Dr Kyle Winik and a disaster management official



The aftermath of the gas tank explosion in Boksburg

Photo: JP von Benecke

It was "lonely and terrifying, realising I had escaped death, trying to call for help, and no one responding", he says. He then called Hatzolah.

Hatzolah ensured that Winik was taken to hospital where he was treated for minor injuries. As his family was on holiday, friends took him home and cared for him. His family offered to return to Johannesburg, but he told them not to. "I needed space to process what had happened," he said.

Hatzolah's Yudi Singer says an ambulance team as well as an Advanced Life Support Incident Commander were dispatched as soon as they heard about the explosion. "Our Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) team,

logistics team, and multiple dispatchers were on standby. Hatzolah established incident command, which was then handed over to Gauteng Disaster Management.

"We were faced with an overwhelming sense of panic and despair. We understood that this was an MCI with far-reaching consequences," he says. "Hatzolah has a specialised MCI team which routinely practices and equips itself to be able to deal with large-scale incidents. Incident command is responsible for ensuring that the requirements at the scene are met and resources activated," he says.

"I don't think we totally comprehend the scale of damage and loss," says Singer. "I'd like to acknowledge the hard work that Hatzolah has done to prepare for such incidents, which enabled us to kick into gear."

"The Community Security Organisation took responsibility for tracking down community members possibly affected by the explosion," says Operations Director Jevon Greenblatt. "There were a number who could potentially have been rostered at that hospital. Working with Hatzolah, we narrowed it down to one who couldn't be accounted for. After trying to call him, we contacted his parents, who said he was probably in shul. We went to the shul to confirm it, and he was there."

Winik is suffering from survivor's guilt and post-traumatic stress symptoms. He has started his planned community service at Sebokeng Hospital, and is receiving trauma counselling. He says staff at TMH are still working, even after witnessing horrific scenes and losing friends. He hopes that the community can assist them.

He also attended a prayer service for the nurses who died. "It was extremely emotional, and I had to leave. They were people I worked with daily."

He says the devastation in the area is "huge", and there will be a ripple effect on healthcare in Johannesburg, which was already under stress after a fire at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital in April 2021.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) offered help from the moment the tragedy occurred. "The SAJBD together with The Angel Network (TAN) visited Boksburg to show support for our team on the ground: Fingertips of Africa, the

Continued on page 14>>

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German zoo gets \$26 million from Holocaust widow

The zoo in Cologne, Germany, has received its first cheque from the \$26 million (R442 million) gift promised by the widow of a Holocaust survivor who credited the city’s residents for saving him during the war.

Elizabeth Reichert willed the funds to the Cologne Zoological Garden in 2017 in honour of her husband, Arnulf, who died in 1998. Both Reicherts were born in Cologne and met during World War II, when Elizabeth was part of the local anti-Nazi resistance network and Arnulf, a German Jew, was in hiding with the network’s help.

“They survived the war in Germany thanks only to the help of courageous people from Cologne, who offered hiding places to the Jew Arnulf Reichert,” the zoo said in a statement in German this week.

Though they moved to Israel and, after five years,

America, after the war, Arnulf and Elizabeth maintained affection for the city for the rest of their lives. “We were born in Cologne, and we remember forever Cologne,” Reichert said in 2017.

In the United States, they settled in New Jersey, where the couple started and ran a successful pet wholesale business. They never had children. Reichert chose the zoo out of all institutions in Cologne because of her and Arnulf’s love of animals.

Reichert died in February 2021, at the age of 96, and it wasn’t until recently that her estate was settled and funds could be disbursed. The zoo reported that it had received the first payment from the trust, of more than \$700 000 (R11.9 million), and said it expected annual disbursements to top \$1 million (R17 million) in the future. The gift would be used to improve the zoo for animals and visitors alike.



How long before TikTokers see Nazi content? 75 minutes.

The committee investigating the 6 January 2021 attack on the United States Capitol wanted to test how fast it took social media to get to radical content. The answer, when it came to TikTok and Nazis, was just more than an hour.

It took TikTok 75 minutes to deliver Nazi content to a new user who didn’t seek it, the committee found, according to a report last Thursday in *Rolling Stone*.

Committee staffers were testing a theory that social media giants were reluctant to police right-wing extremist content.

The staffers on the committee’s social media team invented Alice, a 41-year-old woman from Acton, Massachusetts. It took “Alice” 75 minutes of scrolling without prompts or interactions to get to Nazi content, staffers reported.

The social media team said “Alice” was “just one of the committee’s experiments that gave evidence of the power of TikTok’s recommendation algorithm in creating rabbit holes toward potentially harmful content”.

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Jewish artifacts unearthed by Polish construction workers

Construction workers renovating an old tenement house in Łódź, Poland, unearthed a surprising find: an untouched cache of hundreds of Jewish artifacts believed to have been hidden in advance of the Nazi occupation of the city.

The trove – which included menorahs, kiddush and ritual washing cups, and items from everyday life, all wrapped carefully in newspaper – was buried next to a building just beyond the ghetto in which Łódź’s Jews were imprisoned during the Holocaust. Only about 10 000 Łódź Jews survived until the end of the war out of a pre-war population of about 230 000.

“A find like this comes along once in a decade,” Adam Pustelnik, the vice-mayor of Łódź, said in a tweet. “These are extremely valuable, historic items that testify to the history of the inhabitants of this building,” said Agnieszka Kowalewska-Wójcik, the director of the Board of Municipal Investments in Łódź, according to Polish



Piotrkowska Street in Łódź, not far from where the Jewish artifacts were found

Photo: Adam Jones Wikimedia Commons

media. She said the artifacts were being transferred to the city’s archaeological museum.

Two of the discovered menorahs were lit during Chanukah celebrations this year by Łódź’s Jewish community, whose offices happen to be on the other side of the block from the building on Północna Street, where the trove was discovered.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

The art of staying a stranger

Torah Thought



Rabbi Yossi Chaikin
– Oxford Shul

There are two types of traveller. The one likes to feel at home even in temporary lodgings. He unpacks every item in his suitcase, filling the hangers and shelves of the hotel room, and stowing the bag out of sight within minutes of arriving. The other prefers to live out of cases for the entire trip, rummaging around to find items as needed. Inevitably, the two are married to one another.

The Book of Exodus, which we start reading this Shabbat, tells the story of the very first exile, and as its names indicates, how it came to an end. For several centuries, our nascent nation was a guest in a foreign country. They weren’t just immigrants from another land. Everything about the culture, the values, and the faith of the host country was alien to them. The pressure to assimilate and become part of Egyptian society was tremendous. Yet, somehow, they succeeded in maintaining their distinct identity.

In the millennia that followed, history would repeat itself. Our people were subject to exile after exile, living scattered, as guests among often hostile hosts, with the compulsion to assimilate ever present. It started with the Babylonians taking Jews away from Jerusalem in chains and continues to this very day.

A careful analysis of the Egyptian model helps us to understand how we withstood and continue to withstand those adverse conditions.

Here is how the arrival of the early Hebrews in Egypt is described in the very first verse of this Book of Exodus. “These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt.” But this is not a literal translation of the phrase. In Hebrew, the word used for “came” is *haba’im*, which means “who are coming”

– the present tense. “Who came” should more correctly be *ba’u* – the past tense.

Why this grammatical anomaly? Because therein lies the secret to survival in exile. Each day, they felt they had just arrived. They continued, figuratively, to live out of suitcases, never feeling that they were totally at home in what was after all a foreign country. They didn’t unpack all their stuff, mindful every day that this was indeed exile and not a real home.

This has been the winning formula for a people that hasn’t lived on its own land for the majority of its existence. We have survived by remembering that as comfortable as an exile may have been, we could never really call it our land. Our history has shown us that whenever we deluded ourselves into thinking that we were welcome and at home, the consequences were tragic. It was either mass assimilation or persecution by our hosts, sometimes both concurrently.

So each day, we remind ourselves – *haba’im* – that we have just arrived. That we are travellers through this world. The accommodation in our luxury suite may be five-star, the cupboards vast enough to contain our entire wardrobe, and the staff most welcoming. After all, it’s only a hotel, not our permanent home.

Soon enough, we will all be home.

Shabbat Times brought to you by

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Pharaoh enslaves the children of Israel and orders the killing of all male babies at birth. A child is born to Yocheved, and placed in a basket on the river. Pharaoh’s daughter discovers him and calls him Moses. Moses marries Tziporah and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law’s flocks. G-d appears to Moses in a burning bush at the foot of Mount Sinai, and tells him to go to Pharaoh and demand: “Let My people go, so that they may serve Me.” Pharaoh intensifies the suffering. G-d promises that the redemption is close at hand.

'Angel in the surf' leaves legacy after beach tragedy

TALI FEINBERG

What started as a seaside picnic ended in tragedy for a Johannesburg family, when, on 14 December 2022, father of five Dovi Hochstadter (39) rushed into the ocean to help his son, ultimately saving his child but sacrificing his own life.

“This holiday was a break we were looking forward to,” says his wife, Yocheved “Chevi” Hochstadter. “We met my sister for a picnic at Glenmore Sands Beach [in KwaZulu-Natal]. Our 11-year-old son, Daniel, went into the water. Dovi commented how calming the waves were for Daniel to unwind after the year. Within minutes, Daniel, who was swimming with kids close to the shore, was taken out by a current.

“Dovi went in after him, and from then, everything was a blur. We saw them from a distance, Dovi holding Daniel high above the waves. The lifeguard wasn’t there, but my sister, Michal, got some men into the lifeguard room to fetch boards and swim to them. One of the men told Dovi and Daniel that he could take only one of them. Dovi sent us parting messages of his great love for us, and sent Daniel with the words, ‘Go swim, my boy, swim, I love you.’

“Daniel, who was protesting being saved instead of his father, was brought back quickly. Dovi was caught in a whirlpool and when the next swimmer reached him, it was already too late.”

Someone who was with the family directly after the tragedy was inspired to write a poem titled, *An angel in the surf*. It describes how “Dovi’s light was so bright, it took an ocean to put it out. Angels are not meant to swim, because angels are meant to fly.”

Speaking from Israel, his twin, Barak Hochstadter, says, “We were strongly connected from birth. He was always looking after me – my protector.” Describing his brother as “an excellent sportsman”, he says their happy childhood was filled with similar interests and friends. They never fought, and did everything together.

He admired how calm his brother was, even in a challenge. Nineteen years ago, his twin “was very sick, and they didn’t think he would make it. But he pulled through, thank G-d. It was like he was given a second lease on life, able to build a family. When he was sick, I dreamed he would get

married and that helped us through that time.

“Dovi died the way he lived – with complete sacrifice. He was never for himself,” he says. “For example, every day, he would phone a mother whose son had passed away. A petrol attendant cried when he heard of his passing. Dovi visited our parents every day. He ensured that people of all ages felt welcome at shul, and deeply appreciated going back to shul after the pandemic.”

His sister, Sara Kaplan, says, “He loved his wife and children so much, and they will always know that. Many people considered him their best friend. When he gave Barmitzvah lessons, he was able to help boys who struggled to learn. Somehow, they felt his warmth and were comfortable learning with him. He was a true *tzaddik*. He left a legacy of being happy with your life, having your priorities straight, and treating others with love and respect no matter who they are.”

His brother-in-law, Yehuda Markovitz, says, “He had a deep joy inside of him, an unwavering trust that everything would be good. It’s no coincidence that his last words were of care and concern and that his last acts were superhuman acts of service.”

His brother-in-law, David Berelowitz, also expressed his pain in a poem: “You swam for your son. You swam for the young and bright. You swam for his future. You swam for us all.”

“Every minute of his day was dedicated to serving his family or serving Hashem. He used his simplicity to mask his greatness,” say friends Rochi and Bryan Silke.



Chevi and Dovi Hochstadter



Daniel and Dovi Hochstadter

organising for Dovi to be brought back, and ensuring a smooth and quick burial, Hatzolah took care of it all. I want them to know that we’re eternally grateful and that we sensed their love and support in a most significant way throughout those early days.”

The couple had a fairytale love story. “I met Dovi in January 2007 in Jerusalem,” she says. “I made aliya from South Africa with my family when I was eight. I was studying remedial teaching, and Dovi was studying at yeshiva. He grew up in Johannesburg, one of six children. His family and school describe him as a brilliant cricketer, an excellent student, a natural leader, and a friend who was always on the lookout for others.”

They married just four months later, and came to South Africa for a visit soon afterwards, which turned into a permanent move. “Dovi studied, taught, and worked for a property business. We had four girls and a boy. Our home became a girls’ home, but Dovi had his prince. In spite of a hectic schedule, Dovi was energised, positive, and fun. He treated me like a queen. He danced through life until his final hour.

“Dovi was able to leave this world secure in the knowledge that we have the most incredible parents and siblings who have been holding us up,”

she says. “I’m truly humbled by the outpouring of love and support for our family. I thank the community, Hatzolah, Zaka, and each individual and family who has carried us through this most painful time in our lives.

“People can help by carrying on Dovi’s *mitzvot*,” says his brother. “To see such a tragedy and walk away unchanged would be an even bigger tragedy. It starts with putting our arms around each other – small actions – choosing one person in need of support, and greeting people as Dovi would, with a full heart.”

Even those who didn’t know Hochstadter well feel devastated. Community member Rabbi Ilan Herrmann planned a Chanukah event in his honour, even though he knew him only in passing. Says Herrmann, “The Maccabees put their lives at risk to save their fellow Jew. Dovi was a modern-day Maccabee who put his life on the line for his family. On Chanukah, we light the oil – symbolic of a transcendent quality that rises to the top. Dovi, who demonstrated such heroism and transcendence, is a blessing to his family, the community, and the Jewish people.”

• To send messages of support to the Hochstadter family, email powerofkindness18@gmail.com

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From posts to predators: are we putting our kids in danger?

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When we post back-to-school photos of our kids in their uniforms or tag them at particular locations, we may unknowingly compromise their safety. But though there’s no need to delete all your social media accounts, there are ways to protect your kids and still share special moments online, experts say.

It’s natural to celebrate such milestones on social media, but parents have been cautioned not to reveal too much. In an *EWN* article published last week, security expert and private investigator Cameron Robey warned that posting photos in which uniforms and therefore potentially schools can be identified, can make children “soft targets” for predators.

“When we post photos of our kids online, we often don’t realise just how much information we’re actually giving away,” social media lawyer Sarah Hoffman told the *SA Jewish Report*. Hoffman is the co-founder of Klikd, which helps teens and parents navigate social media safely.

“One photo alone may include information such as your child’s name, favourite sport, school name, new classmate, new teacher’s name, and so on. All these things add up to make a very easy and convincing entry point for a predator online.”

We need to adjust our traditional idea of who poses a potential danger to our kids, she says. “The predator in the digital age isn’t the typical dodgy guy lurking in the playground in an oversized trench coat. The predator in the digital age looks, sounds, and appears to have the same interests – even the same friends – as your children.”

Information from photos can easily be used as a casual entry point to start up a conversation on any interactive platform your child may use, Hoffman says. “For example, the predator can say, ‘I see you are at X school in the same class as Ben! I play soccer with Ben.’ making it all the more convincing that this is just another kid you want to be chatting to, anything but

the dodgy guy lurking in the playground.”

In the *EWN* article, Robey also referred to a spike in kidnappings in Gauteng affecting people of all ages. In 2022, 2 104 cases of kidnapping were reported as opposed to 796 cases in 2021. But, CAP Chief Operating Officer Sean Jammy says one needs to keep such stats in perspective.

“To date, in CAP-covered areas, there hasn’t been a case reported of a targeted, criminally motivated



kidnapping of a school-age child. Though CAP recommends that all sensible precautions are taken to ensure that the entire family is kept safe, we need to be careful not to be taken in by populist propaganda and scare tactics.”

Taking such precautions and safely sharing photos of your kids online starts with updating your privacy settings. “Remember, predators store the information shared – a pic of a child in a

school uniform, holding their favourite tennis racquet, and so on and use it later when pretending to know your child in an innocent game of Roblox [an online game platform], for example,” says Hoffman.

“So, check your privacy settings to make sure your posts aren’t visible to the general public or to ‘friends of friends’.” A friend or grandparent may not have the same controls as you, which is why this is important. It’s best to check your spouse or parents’ settings too, says Jammy.

It’s also important to be discerning about who you connect with or allow to follow you online. “Check before you accept a friend – the online space is vast, and people aren’t always who they say they are,” says Jammy. “If you don’t know the person in real life, don’t accept their friend



request.” You should also go through your existing friends list and remove anyone who may be a stranger or someone you don’t altogether trust.

“Think about what you’re really sharing when you pop that cute first day or week back-to-school pic,” says Hoffman. “Be careful of sharing sensitive information such as posting a school sports bag and school badges on a cap or uniform. You can blur these. Boarding schoolhouses in the background are also a huge giveaway, especially in the current grooming climate.” Turn off your location settings on social media too, Jammy advises.

Avoid posting your and your children’s actual birth dates, Hoffman says. This is to reduce the risk of identity theft and fraud. If you want to share birthdays, experts advise at the very least to conceal the year of birth.

Hoffman also stresses the importance of asking permission from other parents before posting photos of their children. It’s also important to put your child’s feelings first. “Consider every photo,” she says. “Really think about whether a photo is going to embarrass your child now or in the future. People comment directly on photos of children without them even knowing it.

“Remember, there’s no right or wrong, but all this information will form part of your child’s digital footprint,” Hoffman says. Prioritise their physical and emotional safety at all times.

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Mirvis knighted in the UK, rooted in SA

TALI FEINBERG

When Errol Mirvis was born in Johannesburg in September 1956, no one expected that he would one day become the United Kingdom's (UK's) Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Yitzchak Mirvis KBE, knighted by the British monarch in recognition of his interfaith initiatives, work within the Jewish community, educational programmes, and other activities.

Mirvis was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, one of the UK's highest honours, in early January.

"I feel exceptionally honoured and humbled to receive this honour," Mirvis told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I'm privileged to be given numerous opportunities to strive to achieve much, and I pray that the Almighty will bless my efforts. I would like to thank the South African Jewish community for giving me the upbringing that has been an ongoing inspiration for me to get to where I am today."

He says he "was fortunate to receive an outstanding upbringing in South Africa including an excellent education at Herzlia in Cape Town". He also attended Bnei Akiva. "Most significant of all, my late parents, Rabbi Dr Lionel and Freida Mirvis, were outstanding role models.

"My wife, Valerie, who is originally from Bulawayo, and I have strong connections with family and numerous people within the South African Jewish community," said Mirvis. "We take a keen interest in the life of the South African community and wish it well.

"Our strong Lithuanian background has given us a natural commitment to Jewish values, coupled with warmth and generosity," he says. "Around the Jewish world, people are amazed at the quality of Jewish education and the high percentage of Jewish children who attend Jewish schools in South Africa. In addition, I have always been proud of the passionate support that the South African Jewish community shows for Israel."

King Charles III's list noted Mirvis' work in the field of interfaith dialogue and his advocacy for Uyghur Muslims suffering under oppressive policies in China. The list also noted Mirvis' efforts to make the Orthodox world more inclusive of women and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) Jews.

"He has been an advocate for greater inclusivity in Orthodox Jewish life, appointing Britain's first female halachic adviser and establishing greater opportunities for female leadership and scholarship," the list noted. "In the field of education, the chief rabbi has championed the cause of faith schools and Jewish education, and issued a guide on the well-being of LGBTQ+ pupils in Orthodox Jewish schools – the first of its kind anywhere in the world."

Regarding the challenges of his role as chief rabbi, Mirvis says, "Jewish communities around the world today are confronted by 'the three As': antisemitism, assimilation, and apathy. In addition, I believe it's our responsibility to show the relevance and beauty of authentic Torah Judaism within an increasingly secular world, to achieve and maintain Jewish unity, to excel in our social responsibility, and recognise the value of and give respect to every human being."

Mirvis received the honour as part of the king's annual New Year Honours List. The 2023 honours list was the



Former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, King Charles III, and Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

first King Charles signed off on, after the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September.

This isn't the first time that British royalty has recognised Mirvis' excellence. A decade ago, when he was ordained as UK chief rabbi, the ceremony was attended by King Charles, then the Prince of Wales, the first time that a member of the royal family has attended a service for the installation of a chief rabbi.

"Outside of Israel, Britain is one of the only countries in which the Jewish population is growing year on year," says Mirvis. "I'm blessed to have a most wonderful community. Of course, like all other communities, we have our issues, but overall, ours is a very vibrant, committed, and warm Jewish community."

Mirvis serves as the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth and served as the chief rabbi of Ireland between 1985 and 1992. But his roots are firmly planted in South African soil. His father was the rabbi of the Claremont and Wynberg Hebrew Congregations in Cape Town and also served as rabbi in Benoni for a time, during which Mirvis attended local schools. His mother was the principal of the Athlone teacher training college in the Cape, which was then the country's sole college for training black pre-school teachers. His grandfather was a Jewish reverend in Johannesburg.

Mirvis has written that his father preached against the apartheid system and visited political prisoners on Robben Island. Mirvis also found himself taking a political stand of a different kind when he made an unprecedented intervention in British partisan politics in 2019, penning an op-ed that alleged that the opposition Labour Party, led at the time by Jeremy Corbyn, was poisoned with "anti-Jewish racism sanctioned from the very top", and indicating that the British electorate shouldn't support Labour in elections the following month.

After making aliya in 1973, Mirvis studied at two yeshivot and then at Machon Ariel in Jerusalem, receiving his rabbinic ordination there. He also obtained a Bachelor of Arts in education and classical Hebrew from the University of South Africa, and received certification from Yaakov Herzog Teachers' College as a high school teacher in Israel.

Mirvis has studied Jewish cantorial music, and is certified as a shochet and mohel. He is a great supporter of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club.

He and Valerie have faced tragedy. Their eldest child, Liora Graham, passed away in 2011 after a long battle with cancer. They have four sons, a son-in-law, daughters-in-law, and 16 grandchildren.

"Our children are our future, and no effort should be

spared in investing in their connection to Judaism," says Mirvis. "Within inclusive, welcoming, compassionate, and united communities, we can show how privileged we are

to have, through the Torah, a G-d-given recipe for a happy and meaningful existence."

The president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Marie van der Zyl; her predecessor Jonathan Arkush; six Holocaust survivors; and TV presenter Rachel Riley were also on the list. Riley was awarded for raising Holocaust awareness and opposing antisemitism.

"It's really heartwarming for the British Jewish community to be honoured in this way," says South African Jewish Board of Deputies Chairperson Professor Karen Milner. "We're so proud that Mirvis is a product of our remarkable Jewish community, and congratulate him on this wonderful acknowledgement of his work. We also congratulate our friends and counterparts at the British Board of Deputies, for being awarded OBEs for their incredible work."

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No debating Israel's vibrancy

Hearing Israelis discussing applying for foreign passports as a security blanket in case they want to leave the Jewish state was a shock for me while visiting Israel in December.

I have to say upfront, this sentiment wasn't widespread, and it was definitely among the more left leaning folk who feel threatened in a now predominantly right-wing-led country. And perhaps it was the shock of finding themselves with the most far-right-wing government in the history of Israel. Perhaps time will soften the blow, and the new national leadership will prove to be good for the country. Suffice to say, coming from a diaspora country, this talk of passports is a familiar refrain, but would hear in Israel.

Having said that, being in Israel was phenomenal. The country is buzzing with development and vibrancy. The economy is soaring, which didn't help with the rand-shekel exchange rate and what us South Africans can buy with our money.

Come Chanukah, everyone is celebrating, whether they are observant, religious, or totally secular. There's such a joy in Judaism being the fabric of the society, no matter your political affiliations or religious choices. Seeing people lighting giant *chanukkiot* in the streets, in homes and offices was awesome, as was the massive variety of *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts) that were sold everywhere. I was astonished at how the latter disappeared as soon as Chanukah ended. In fact, an hour after Chanukah was over, you couldn't find a doughnut anywhere.

Life, as Israelis know it, goes on almost as usual, in spite of many being concerned or excited about this new and very different government. Israelis talk about politics a lot. Perhaps they know I'm a willing ear as politics fascinates me, but I don't think so. I think it is just the Israeli way.

And everyone has a different view about the impact this new government will have. Some are extraordinarily concerned. They believe it will destroy Israel's democracy and harm the education of their children. Others are celebrating, believing that this leadership will keep all enemies at bay. This dichotomy, I guess, is what democracy is all about.

I have no doubt that Israelis won't sit back roughshod over their rights and democracy.

However, the issue of the government having control over the judiciary is something I find extremely disconcerting. For any democracy, an independent judiciary is sacrosanct. The bottom line is, if the government or members of the government do wrong, who will ensure that justice is done if not the judiciary?

Now if the judiciary cannot – unless it is a unanimous decision between all judges – do this, then there's no way to keep a government in check.

Let's consider that this was the case in South Africa. While it's tough enough to get local politicians to the law courts, it would then be made impossible, and they would be allowed to run riot. Who is to say this won't happen in Israel? It also allows the government to change laws at will without recourse. No government, no matter how much integrity and moral backbone it has, should have that power. Not here, and not in Israel.

I have to say, though, that no matter what you or I may think of Benjamin Netanyahu, he's a mastermind in having managed to keep creating a situation in which he's the only one to lead the country.

He has already served for 15 years, and just started a new run in December. He was the first Israeli prime minister to be born in Israel after its independence, and somehow he remains on a winning streak. It's true that under his leadership, the Israeli economy has thrived. The high-tech industry is booming, and Israel's innovation is astounding.

I had the privilege of spending an evening listening to pitches from seven high-tech start-ups who were competing for financial assistance. Their products were either already in production or were in the final testing stages. One entrepreneur was a wine farmer who was battling to find enough labourers to work on his farm. So, with help, he created a type of robot that carefully but quickly travels along the grape-growing lanes picking and sorting grapes. Can you imagine the implications of just this invention?

Then there was an underwater drone; an invention that softens metal to make it more malleable; and others.

To be honest, while I was blown away by these inventions, this wasn't unusual fare for the angel investors who were there. That's Israel under Bibi.

Unemployment is a mere 5%, something you don't find in many countries.

Though Israel is booming, Israelis work hard and long hours and sometimes hold down more than one job. It's rare to find a couple in which one party doesn't work and can have the luxury of being a "home executive".

Under this new government, the issue of peace and peace talks isn't even on the table. In fact, it's not anywhere near the dining room. It's nowhere. And in terms of external threats, the government is most concerned about Iran.

I do understand that to move forward to a government that will speak about peace, you need someone on the other side who can be trusted, wants peace, and is willing to negotiate in good faith. Where's that person? Right now, it's impossible to negotiate with people whose sole desire is to remove you from the Middle East.

While I understand that, I believe all Israelis wish for peace and a time when their children no longer have to put their lives on the line to defend their country.

And for us down here on the southern tip of Africa, I wish peace was on the table because it might make the anti-Israel battle easier for our community to deal with.

Having said all that, life is still good in Israel, and those bars and restaurants in downtown Tel Aviv are still abuzz at 03:00 because Israelis – from the left and right, observant and secular – know how to make the most out of life.



Prayer and perspective on ANC conference



OPINION

PROFESSOR KAREN MILNER

It seemed fitting that it was on the Day of Reconciliation, 16 December 2022, that I attended the 55th African National Congress (ANC) National Conference at Nasrec. It's here that the senior leadership of the ANC is elected, including the "Top 6" (extended to the Top 7 this year) and the president of the ANC (who, while the ANC remains in power, is also the president of South Africa).

It's here that ANC policy on issues ranging from education, health, technology, and economic transformation to international relations (including the ANC's stance on Israel-Palestine) is also set, which makes this conference a pivotal event in South Africa.

Although the ANC is the ruling party, its policy isn't government policy, however policy endorsed by the ANC has a huge impact on that of the South African government.

I was invited to represent the Jewish community by delivering a prayer at the opening. This invitation is an honour and a responsibility. It was an honour because, for all its myriad faults, the ANC is still the democratically elected government of South Africa, the party that liberated this country from apartheid and was brave and mature enough to negotiate a peaceful transition to democracy.

It was a responsibility because I had been invited to represent the Jewish community in spite of some of the harsh criticism it has levelled at the ANC-led government regarding its stance on Israel-Palestine over the past few years. On several occasions, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has called out ANC members and even cabinet ministers for their one-sided, misleading statements on Israel. It's a small but important touchstone of democracy, however, that we engage with both those we agree with and those we disagree with, and so it was both my honour and responsibility to accept the invitation.

The theme of the conference was, “Defend and advance the gains of freedom: unity through renewal”. The Jewish prayer at the conference, written by SAJBD Deputy Director David Saks, referenced this theme and continued with the words, “May you in your great mercy imbue those here today with the moral strength, sagacity, and insight to make this theme a reality in the challenging years that lie ahead. Just as you guided our country into a new era of freedom, peace, and equality, so may we continue to be led in the ways of peace and justice.” The full prayer, which I recited with truly heartfelt *kavannah* (intent) to the leadership of our country and the 3 000 delegates at the conference, was greeted with cries of “Amen!” from across the hall.

The stirring theme and success of the Jewish prayer notwithstanding, the conference started shambolically. Delays in obtaining credentials for delegates resulted in the conference, scheduled to begin at 08:30, starting only after lunch. Sitting in the allocated seats with other faith leaders and waiting for six hours for the conference to start did give me the opportunity to engage with faith leaders, various diplomats, and ANC members, and absorb the conference atmosphere. I was also gratified, on behalf of our community, by the courtesy and respect I was shown wherever I went.

As the day progressed, the atmosphere in the hall became more electric, culminating with the entry of President Cyril Ramaphosa. Given the factionalism and divisiveness within the ANC before the conference, it was fascinating

to try and gauge the mood of the delegates from the atmosphere on the floor. President Ramaphosa was greeted with rousing singing and dancing, only to be disrupted as he took his place at the podium by the late entry of former President Jacob Zuma. Disruptions by different factions now seem par for the course at ANC conferences, but eventually, ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe brought the crowd under control, and the conference was able to start.

Due to the exceptionally late conference start, much of the business of the conference was left unfinished. But the country, waiting on tenterhooks to see who the next leader of the ANC and its top team would be, didn't have to wait too long, and the Top 7 election results were released at Nasrec. In spite of numerous predictions during the conference that Ramaphosa's chief opponent, former Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize, would take over the leadership of the party, Ramaphosa won the leadership election with a comfortable majority. The rest of the Top 7 are largely Ramaphosa supporters, leaving him, according to political pundits, in a stronger position than ever to govern the country as he sees fit – at least until the next national election.



Gabriella Farber and Professor Karen Milner

The remainder of the conference's work was finalised only last weekend in a continuation hybrid conference in Mungaung. The policies adopted at the conference will be mulled over in the next few weeks as their implications for the country's ailing economy, infrastructure, and moral fibre are debated.

From the perspective of the Jewish community, the ANC's stance on Israel remains concerning. This isn't because of the party's friendship with the Palestinians nor because of any desire to shut down reasonable criticism of Israel. It's due to the party's flawed understanding of the complexities of the conflict in Israel partly due to its refusal to engage with both sides on the ground.

This stance flies in the face of the ANC's position on every other global conflict, including Russia and Ukraine, where the party claims even-handedness is its core guiding principle. The fact that the ANC flouts this principle when it comes to the world's only Jewish state remains a point of contention and disappointment for the Jewish community and all peace-loving people in South Africa.

- *Professor Karen Milner is the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.*

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"Temple Mount crisis" awash with misinformation

OPINION DAN DIKER



The domestic and international atmosphere of crisis that has accompanied Israel's incoming government lacks context and historical perspective. This is particularly true regarding the highly charged issue of the latest Temple Mount drama, in which National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir's recent 13-minute visit to the Temple Mount plaza triggered international opprobrium. The international outcry is missing critical information and instead is awash in misinformation.

The recent election of a right-wing Israeli government is the result of the widespread terrorism, violence, and crime that has been overlooked in the international discourse. More than 10 major terror assaults, some ISIS-inspired, across Israel's major cities in 2022 claimed the lives of tens of Israeli civilians in major cities including Beer Sheva, Tel Aviv, Bnei Brak, and Jerusalem.

Israelis became afraid to allow their children to leave their homes, particularly at night. Additionally, Israel has suffered an increasing problem of Bedouin Israeli gangs committing violent crimes, stealing public land in the Negev, and robbing civilians, stopping their cars at gunpoint. Additionally, the Hamas rocket war of 2021 fuelled by the historic "Al-Aqsa is in danger" libel, triggered widespread violence against Jews in mixed cities such as Ramla, Lod, Acco, and Jaffa.

Palestinian Authority incitement against Israel's presence in Jerusalem has taken a toll. A January 2023 Palestinian public opinion poll revealed that a majority of Palestinians support armed terror attacks inside Israeli territory. At the same time, an increasing trend of violent crime within the Arab sector, particularly targeting women in Arab communities, brought a measurable voting constituency for Ben Gvir even among Arab Israelis, as Professor Mordechai Kedar noted in a December 2022 interview.

These trends of terrorism and violent crime across Israel's major cities generated a broad sense of internal insecurity that resulted in Ben Gvir's growing popularity among both religious and secular voters, including in Tel Aviv's bastions of the Israeli left. Additionally, the sharp increase in fatal terror assaults in Israel throughout 2021 were preceded by two major Hamas rocket wars that



Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir at the Temple Mount plaza

forced a third of Israel's population to seek shelter in underground bunkers.

Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terror factions threatened Israel's physical security while they continued to spearhead a decades-long crusade of demonisation and erasure of any Jewish connection to Jerusalem and ongoing warnings and threats preventing Jews from visiting the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site. Hamas spokesman Abd Al Latif al Qanua said in the *Middle East Eye* in advance of Ben Gvir's visit, "The Palestinian resistance [a code word for Hamas and PLO terror groups] will not allow the neo-fascist occupation government to cross the red lines and encroach on our peoples and our sanctities."

It's true that Ben Gvir's brief visit to the Temple Mount, punctuated by his fiery personality, which triggered a dramatic debate in the Israeli and international discourse, was a response to Hamas' explicit warning that the Temple Mount was exclusively Islamic and that Jews had "no business" demonstrating any presence there. But United States state department spokesman Ned Price issued an inaccurate statement suggesting that Jewish visits to the Temple Mount jeopardise the "status quo" in Jerusalem and could provoke violence. It has become clear, though, that any Jewish presence in Jerusalem "provokes violence". Hamas used the recent Sheikh Jarrah (Shimon HaTzadik neighbourhood)

legal case which ruled in favour of a building's Jewish owners, to declare war against Israel, sparking riots.

The issue isn't Ben Gvir's visit alone, but decades of Palestinian opportunistic assaults on Israel's presence in Jerusalem. Israel's Old City historical Western Wall tunnel, opening in 1996 under the first Netanyahu coalition, triggered massive protest and unrest, though it had no effect on the status quo, Muslim holy shrines, or private property. Still, the international community condemned Israel, adapting Arafat's Judeophobic narrative.

In the current situation, Israel's domestic debate has also triggered misinformation which has spilled into the international discourse. Israeli political culture includes extreme language from both political directions, but regrettably, it results in increasing gains for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement in South Africa and across the West. Israeli opposition leader and former prime minister, Yair Lapid, casting Israel's democratically elected government as racist and anti-democratic, has only played into the hands of the Jewish state's harshest adversaries.

Israel's internal debate has also overshadowed the far more significant Hamas and Palestinian propaganda crusade, which claimed that Israel "stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque" in violation of the 1967 status quo in Jerusalem. Following the Six-Day War, former Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan handed the keys of the Temple Mount to its vanquished Jordanian neighbour with the proviso that Jews would be able to visit but not publicly worship at its holiest site. As journalist and Jerusalem expert Nadav Shragai notes, Dayan's concession was punctuated by a fear of turning what he viewed as a territorial conflict into a religious one. Ironically, though, to extremist terror organisations, the conflict is fundamentally a religious one, a fact still widely misunderstood by South Africa and the West.

The religious underpinnings of the conflict have also been underemphasised and even wilfully ignored. Both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas have for decades implemented a policy of erasure of the Jewish presence in Jerusalem. Palestinian leaders have accused

Israel of "Judaizing Jerusalem" for archaeological digs in the Old City of Jerusalem, shamelessly destroying Jewish Temple artifacts in the 1990s after the Oslo Peace Accords had already begun. Hamas has used Jerusalem-related issues as pretexts to launch its rocket wars against Israel. The 2000s' Second Intifada, called the "Al-Aqsa Intifada", cost hundreds of Israeli lives. These claims were merely a continuation of a century-old Muslim Brotherhood inspired legacy. The first Palestinian Arab leader, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, the British appointed and

Nazi-affiliated "Grand Mufti" of Jerusalem, accused Jewish worshippers of endangering the Al-Aqsa Mosque by requesting a small partition be erected to separate men and women worshippers.

Historical context and perspective are key to understanding Ben's Gvir's actions. His symbolic turn away from what has been a tepid and concessionary Israeli approach to Jerusalem in the face of decades of violent PLO, Palestinian Authority, and Hamas policy regarding Jerusalem may appear confrontational and aggressive.

However, his approach is well understood by Palestinian adversaries who for years have succeeded in convincing Israelis and the West to adopt docile, tepid, and concessionary policies in response to both rhetorical and physical aggression. As uncomfortable and unpleasant as the optics appear, in the Middle East, the culture and language of power, honour, self-confidence, and both individual and national resilience, are concepts that Israel's uncompromising adversaries and new regional allies understand.

• Dan Diker is the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and directs its project on the Study of Political Warfare and BDS. Please visit the centre's website at jcpa.org. Senior Researcher Tirza Shorr assisted with preparing this article.

Nothing less than Israel's democracy is at stake

OPINION PAUL MIRBACH



Appearances can be deceptive. Beneath new Justice Minister Yariv Levin's guise of respectability and his soft-spoken manner, is the heart of a radical and fanatical ideologue. And yet, his plan to "reform" Israel's judicial system is so cold, so dispassionate and calculated, with an attention to detail so precise, to make sure that every avenue of recourse is blocked and locked up tight, that it's reminiscent of the precision of a murky regime from our tormented past.

The time has come to rip the façade away from the laundered euphemisms this government uses to mislead the public to give its diabolical agenda a false impression of virtuous propriety. Let's be honest, what Levin wants to do to the judicial system is to ravage it, not reform it.

His proposed "reform" is so radical, it will eviscerate the authority of the court and turn it into an institution devoid of any true power, indentured to the legislature and those that control it.

As for the false pretence of wanting to "redress the imbalance of power" between the different arms of government? Let's call it what it really is: Orwellian doublespeak.

This coalition (now government) has no qualms with tampering with the country's criminal laws and our penal code to ram through an amendment to the law, just so that one man, a twice-convicted felon for bribery, fraud, and tax evasion, can be made a cabinet minister as a precondition to joining the government.

This coalition doesn't have the right to claim that the motivation for the upheaval of our entire judicial system is civic concern for the health of our democracy and the balance of powers between the arms of government. It's not only an affront to our intelligence, it's a fetid lie.

Here are the four changes and what they mean for Israel's democracy:

The Override Clause

The Override Clause will give the Knesset the ability to overturn Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority of 61. In actuality, the Supreme Court has seldom overstepped the bounds of its authority. In the past 27 years, the Supreme Court has struck down 22 laws – and in most cases one clause in those 22 laws. It did not even strike down the Nation-State Law, which creates in-built inequality among citizens and, as a basic quasi-constitutional law, is the cornerstone for future legislation that could turn Israel into an apartheid-like state.

No, what irks the parties in this far-right government, isn't the court's invalidation of legislation, but its decisions regarding petitions about government decisions and policies, and the legality of illegally constructed settlements. Or, about the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, thwarting the government's heartless – if not blatantly cruel – treatment to discourage illegal immigration.

Saying that court decisions should reflect the "will of the people" and the will of those elected, is cheap populist misrepresentation. Seeking to delegitimise the decisions of the court by saying that they aren't elected and therefore have no right to make decisions that don't reflect the "will of the people" displays a blatant disregard – if not misunderstanding – of the role of the judiciary in a democracy. The job of the courts is to uphold the law as they interpret it, not the will of the people.

Cancelling the standard of reasonableness

While everyone is up in arms about the Override Clause, the cancellation of the standard of reasonableness almost flew under the radar. The reasonableness standard is the cornerstone of litigation and jurisprudence in most Western democracies. Cancelling this standard removes us from the community of

Western democracies, and skews the legal system even more in favour of those in power. In Israel, it's the basis upon which citizens, human rights organisations, and other organisations can question the legality of government decisions and policies in court.

By cancelling this standard, Levin essentially deprives all these organisations of legal standing, which means that they have no legal basis upon which to appeal to the Supreme Court for recourse. How convenient! Without the hindrance of appeals to the Supreme Court, the government can basically



Israeli Justice Minister Yariv Levin

Photo: Ivier Fitoussi Flash90

do whatever it wants, trample on the rights of others – whether it be in the West Bank or inside Israel – and no-one can stand in its way. Legal recourse to the courts against government overbearance is a basic democratic right.

Changing the composition of the committee for the selection of justices

As insidious as cancelling the standard of reasonableness is, changing the committee that selects our judges trumps that by politicising the courts to the point where their integrity is brought into question. Today, the balance of the committee that selects our judges ensures a difficult but fair process. The justice minister presides over the committee and sets the agenda. Levin wants to replace the representatives of the Bar Association with "members of the public". In other words, representatives convenient to the government. That's like asking passengers on a bus to decide who's qualified to be a bus driver! It paves the way for the political appointment of judges. This not only impugns the integrity of our judicial system and undermines the integrity of the court and its decisions, the judges appointed would be beholden to those who appointed them, making the court a political arena, not a haven for justice.

Making the appointment of ministerial legal advisors a position of political trust

Up until now, legal advisors in government ministries were answerable to the attorney general. This "amendment" would make the appointment of ministerial legal advisors answerable to the ministers, not the attorney general. That means that the position, which until now has been a position of propriety, an objective, democratic safeguard against ministerial overreach, is now considered a "position of trust". In other words, the legal advisor would be indebted to the minister who appointed him or her. Who is going to be able to stand up to the minister who appointed him/her and object to any measures the minister decided to implement? Yet another democratic safeguard will be removed, giving ministers virtual carte blanche to do whatever they please.

To all those who dismiss our concerns that this government is dismantling our democracy and fundamentally changing the nature of our country, I ask, at what price the ability to govern? At the price of our democracy?

• Zimbabwean-born Paul Mirbach moved to Cape Town at 16, and matriculated at Herzlia School. In 1982, he made aliya to Kibbutz Tuval, which was then a new kibbutz he helped build. He served in the Israel Defense Forces, participating in the first Lebanon War.

Higher education minister lauds new anti-Israel book

OPINION

Dr Blade Nzimande, South Africa's minister of higher education, science, and technology, publicly endorsed a new anti-Israel book via his personal Facebook account on 8 January. Using his given name, Bonginkosi Nzimande, he praised Thomas Suárez's *Palestine Hijacked: How Zionism Forged an Apartheid State from River to Sea*.

Anti-Israel lobby Africa4Palestine gleefully reposted the minister's musings to its 50 000 followers on Facebook and 57 000 on Twitter.

Is this appropriate behaviour for a sitting minister of education, and how is Nzimande furthering the prospects for peace in the Middle East?

Nzimande, who is also general secretary of the South African Communist Party, wrote on his Facebook page, "A real tour de force, and it definitely already comes across as one of the most well researched books on the Palestinian struggle. Although pricey, but for serious readers and Palestinian solidarity activists it is well worth reading or having this book for reference purposes ... As we celebrate the 111th anniversary of the ANC today, let us commit to deepen our solidarity with the just Palestinian cause against the Israeli apartheid regime!" He attached several screen shots of the cover and contents.



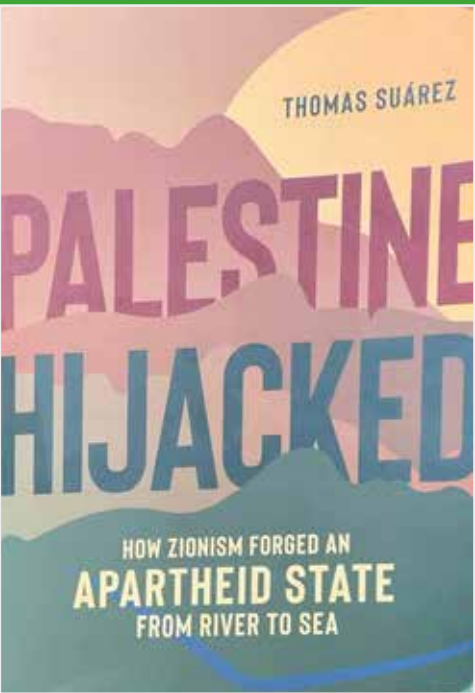
Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology
Dr Blade Nzimande

In a review of *Palestine Hijacked* on the left-leaning Mondoweiss.net website, Jonathan Ofir said, "Terrorism has always been a means through which the Zionist movement has achieved its goals. Using compelling and detailed historical documentation, Suárez shows how the Zionist movement has consistently applied terrorist methods from the pre-state years [against both Palestinians as well as British forces, including international operations and including senior ministers] to the years following the state's establishment in the form of state terror."

The book's title should leave no doubt where the author is coming from. In a linguistic reversal, decades of high-profile airplane hijackings by Palestinian terrorists are superseded by what Suárez sees as state-terrorism by Zionists. It is they who have "hijacked Palestine", not the Palestinian terrorists. His use of the term "apartheid state" makes plain where the author stands politically. And again, reversing language, the phrase "from river to sea" evokes the oft-heard Palestinian chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!" This slogan asserts that the whole of the land – from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea – is historical Palestine, with no room for a Jewish state. Anyone expecting a detached, balanced examination of the subject should look elsewhere.

But are the minister's comment appropriate? Of course, our Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and anyone can express his or her opinions on a book. But Nzimande uses his elevated status to spread slogans about a distant, complex conflict far away from South Africa. This has nothing to do with his portfolios of higher education, science, or technology.

Perhaps there is a clue in the timing. He released his comments on 8 January, the 111th anniversary of the founding of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912. He uses his endorsement of the



book as a prop to support ANC solidarity with "the just Palestinian cause against the Israeli apartheid regime". There is no subtlety here, no attempt at even-handedness, just a clear delineation of whom the minister sees as victim and villain. It's all in the timing and word choice.

A long-time critic of Israel, Nzimande's dislike for the Jewish state was further fuelled in 2015 when he was refused a visa. He has frequently spoken out against Israel, including on university campuses during the so-called "Israeli Apartheid Week". He's clearly using this book as opportunity to besmirch Israel. Solidarity with the Palestinian cause is a populist issue regularly rolled out in a desperate attempt to garner support in the moribund Tripartite Alliance. Nzimande's utterances on Israel are, by this stage, entirely predictable.



Nzimande and his supporters may argue that he used his personal Facebook account rather than his ministerial one to express his views and that there's a clear distinction between the individual and the government. The enthusiastic reposting of the comments by Africa4Palestine puts paid to that. They were put into the public domain, and have been disseminated. As they say, "The internet is forever."

It's obvious from history that the Zionist struggle for independence and security for the state of Israel has been a bloody one. Zionist leaders have had to fight many implacable enemies for the past century, and this has entailed the use of force. Thousands have sadly lost their lives on both sides of this enduring conflict. Gushing on social media about a one-sided account that confirms biases does nothing to further the process towards peace, as distant that may seem under the new Israeli government and the long-time Palestinian leadership.

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs. He writes in his personal capacity.



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Taking *minyan* to the mountain at Lion’s Head

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Jews come from all over South Africa and the world to be a part of the Lion's Head Minyan in Cape Town in December, climbing Table Mountain and davening, lighting a menorah, and singing Hallel with one of the most spectacular views in the world.

On 26 December, Rabbi Dovid Wineberg, who runs Hamakom (The Space) an organisation that finds innovative ways to bring Judaism into Jewish people's lives, led almost 60 people up the mountain from Signal Hill to Lion's Head. At the top, they transformed an ordinary day in paradise into "something beautiful, special, and holy on the eighth day of Chanukah", according to Wineberg. They davened together, lighting a menorah, and singing Hallel with an endless view of Cape Town and its environs.

Men and women of all ages, the youngest about five, from countries including South Africa, Israel, Australia, Canada, England, and Denmark climbed the 5km up to Lion's Head to be part of the service.

The climbers loved the initiative, Wineberg says, with Johannesburg visitor Antony Seeff describing it as "a special experience on a perfect, crystal-clear day"

and Australian visitor Samantha Kavonic calling it an "exhilarating and unforgettable" experience.

It was Seeff and Kavonic's first Lion's Head Minyan experience, although Wineberg has been holding the *minyan* for the past 11 years.



Photo: Rebbetzin Sarah Wineberg

In the beginning, he says, "We climbed up once a week early in the morning, putting on tefillin at the top. It was a great way to connect with people, use the outdoors of Cape Town, and involve people who wouldn't necessarily come to shul. There was a bit of a vibe. Sometimes we had a *minyan*, sometimes not."

But then it was Chanukah, which meant they had to read the Torah during the service, and Wineberg refused to let that stop them. "Why should we cancel? Let's take the Torah up and read it on Lion's Head," he said. And so, the idea gained traction.

Now, Wineberg does the Lion's Head Minyan and climb only once a year because he has become too busy with Hamakom. He's also chairperson of Cape Town Torah High.

The climb and *minyan* has "become a staple of the holiday experience for tourists to Cape Town", Wineberg says. "People hear about it from far and wide. They reach out. They want to know what it is. The day after we went up last month, I was being messaged, 'Are you doing it next week? We just arrived in Cape Town and would like to go up.'"

When they went up in December, they took up the Ichikowitz Tefillin Bank Torah (also known as Kevin's



Leining on top of Lion's Head

Photo: Antony Seeff

Torah), written in memory of Kevin and Ashley Shapiro.

"This Torah is special to my heart," Wineberg says. "More than 15 years ago, my beloved friend, Kevin Shapiro, died suddenly when he was young."

Seeff, who hadn't climbed a mountain in a while and did the climb with friends from Johannesburg, says the climb "was more hectic than I expected. You had to wipe off all your sweat before you put on your tallit and tefillin. It's not a little walk in the park, but getting up wasn't too bad, getting down was a bit more challenging."

An entrepreneur involved with a new start-up, Seeff saw great pictures over the years of people doing the climb, and always wanted to try it, so he grabbed the opportunity when it coincided with his holiday in Cape Town last month.

Kavonic says the climb and davening with the *minyan* was the highlight of her family's time in Cape Town.

She did the climb with her husband, Garron, and two of her children (aged 12 and 15). "I also climbed with my brother-in-law, Brett Kavonic, and two of his children."

"The last time we were in Cape Town was about nine years ago, when we heard about the Lion's Head climb but unfortunately missed it," she says. However, they were in South Africa last month to be with their family and cousins and celebrate Kavonic's parents-in-law's 50th anniversary. "We were determined to experience the climb on this trip, so made every effort to find out the details and join the WhatsApp group."

"We didn't train or prepare at all for the climb, besides setting an alarm, packing lots of water, and taking our siddurim. Luckily, we're a family who loves the outdoors. In Sydney, we do lots of hiking and beautiful walks."

For Kavonic, being part of the *minyan* was special and meaningful. "It was amazing to hear everyone davening together. A particular highlight was when two Israeli backpackers reached the summit and were stunned to see the Torah being lifted. They were reminded, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is everywhere. They immediately called their friends and family back in Israel to share their incredible experience."

Wineberg did a little bit of training ahead of last month's climb, climbing up a few mountains in Cape Town and on the Garden Route.

He puts the whole project together, reads from the Torah, arranges the *aliyot*, and finds someone to lead the service. "Everybody who climbs up gets called up to the Torah, and they typically give a donation towards Hamakom to raise some money for charity," he says.

Wineberg says people climb Lion's Head for two reasons. "First, you can't access it with a cable car, so you have to climb, meaning that everybody is doing the same thing and making the same effort. It's a real climb, not a hike. With Table Mountain, you can just take a cable car. It's also not as high as Table Mountain, so it doesn't take as much investment and effort for people to get to the top. Second, it's so beautiful at the top of Lion's Head. The view from there is absolutely otherworldly. It's a gift to stand there and get a 360-degree view."

"It's about the effort, camaraderie, everybody joining and encouraging, pushing, and helping each other. When everybody reaches the top, there's a beautiful sense of accomplishment and achievement."

"The idea of bringing Judaism to people is a passion of mine. This climb really ticks that box in a beautiful way," he says. Wineberg also puts his passion into his two-minute daily dose of Torah and pop-up shuls, among other initiatives.

Seeff says Wineberg's Lion's Head Minyan helps people connect with Hashem and bring a bit of *kedushah* to the mountain.

"It was a moment of great pride seeing the Torah being lifted high on the top of the mountain," Kavonic says. "It's an experience we'll definitely repeat on our next trip to Cape Town."

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What happened to the Israeli left?

PETA KROST

The Israeli left lost much of its power in the recent elections (2022), leaving the right and far right in control of the country.

The left's demise is partly due to the natural unfolding of events in Israel and partly the fault of the left-wing parties themselves, says *Jerusalem Post* Deputy Managing Editor Tovah Lazaroff.

She was answering a question posed by the *SA Jewish Report* in the Knesset during the international Jewish Media Summit in Jerusalem in December.

Part of the reason for its weakness is that in spite of many years of speaking about peace talks and two-state solutions, there's still no Palestinian state.

To explain, Lazaroff went back in time to when Yitzhak Rabin was elected prime minister in 1992 because of his vision of peace talks and a two-state solution. He was expected to put a stop to the first intifada (Palestinian uprising) and work towards peace.

At the time Rabin was elected, Lazaroff said, "we were also dealing with the international threat of the notion of 'Zionism equals racism' on the United Nation stage". So, Israel was fighting an international and local battle.

Israelis believed that Rabin would sort out these problems and, Lazaroff said, so strong was his support that he came into power with more than 40 seats in the Knesset, one-third of the 120 seats. "It just goes to show how far the pendulum has swung since then," she said.

Lazaroff fondly recalled the day in September 1993 when Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn in the United States, sealing the first agreement between Jews and Palestinians to end their conflict.

In this left-wing heyday, Israel went to the Madrid Conference (1991) and then, in 1993, signed the Oslo Agreement, which marked the beginning of direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. "Soon, 'Zionism is racism' was rescinded at the UN. Things really changed, and doors started opening for Israel. We were on a trajectory to peace," said Lazaroff.

"But then it didn't happen."

Lazaroff said that when she made aliya in April 2000, she did so thinking that either "we're going to see the creation of a Palestinian state, or we'll go the way of violence".

It went the way of violence in no uncertain terms, and Ariel Sharon came to power from the right. "He also had massive support, about 40 seats in the Knesset. There went the pendulum again."

"And then, everyone was thinking, 'Well, now we have a right winger who's definitely not going to secure a Palestinian state', but then what does he do? He withdraws Israel from Gaza."

Sharon then split from the Likud (which he helped found 30 years earlier) in 2005 to form a more centrist party, hoping to win a re-election and offering Israel new hope for peace. He was debilitated by a massive stroke in 2006, and succeeded by Ehud Olmert, who Lazaroff said was one of the more left-wing Israeli leaders, even though he started on the right. Olmert promised to continue Sharon's policies of disengagement from Israeli-occupied areas and set permanent borders between Israel and the Palestinians by 2010.

But Hamas then won the Palestinian elections in 2006 and took over the Gaza Strip, bringing uncertainty to the future of Palestinian and Israel relations. Negotiations

were totally derailed when Olmert then faced corruption charges, significantly damaging his reputation in Israel.

Then, in 2008, Netanyahu's power started to grow. He got the second highest number of seats to Tzipi Livni, a strong peace and

Photo: Israeli Government Press Office



Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, former US President Bill Clinton and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat at The White House in Washington D.C.

two-state solution proponent, but she wasn't able to form a government without "selling out her ideals". So Israel went back to elections and in 2009 Netanyahu emerged as prime minister. The age of Netanyahu began.

"Now, in 2023, we're still talking about Prime Minister Netanyahu," she said, "and after all this time, there still isn't a Palestinian state.

"Whether you like Bibi or not, he's the longest serving prime minister of Israel and he'll continue as such," she said. "He keeps showing that he's the most popular politician. Israelis love him enough to keep handing him power to form a government.

"But when he took power in 2009, there was still the possibility of a Palestinian state," Lazaroff said.

But then Barak Obama became president of the US – the main broker of the peace process – and his and Israel's vision of a two-state solution differed. "They were never able to bridge the differences between Israelis and Palestinians, and so the peace process broke down in 2014 and has never been revived," she said. "So, not only don't we have a Palestinian state, we don't even have a peace process, and we don't have a US president working towards a peace process."

Even though President Joe Biden is supposedly the most knowledgeable US president on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he has done nothing to further the peace process, Lazaroff said.

Lazaroff then shifted focus to the recent Israeli elections, making it clear that even the left didn't include peace in its campaign.

The Labour Party held a huge event during the elections where the media believed a new diplomatic initiative was going to be unveiled there, Lazaroff said.

But that didn't happen. In fact, instead of media fanfare, all it got was a fairly innocuous press release. "The moment your remaining major left-wing party closes off to the press the unveiling of its diplomatic initiative for a two-state resolution to conflict, you know it's in trouble."

This, she said, happened after the head of one of the major left-wing parties, Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, proclaimed at the UN that he supported a two-state solution. "We were expecting something about peace in the election process of the left. But it seems that Lapid was just letting people know that in

some far-off universe, he would support it.

"Is he going to hold talks with the Palestinians? No, he has no such plans. So, you have a left that put forward no plans in the run-up to the elections. And you have the US, which has also no peace plans afoot. Instead,

you have a lot of right-wing politicians being very vocal about how there shouldn't be a Palestinian state."

Meanwhile, she said, the threat from Gaza – once irrelevant – is now a real concern, with sophisticated missiles that have the potential to hit the centre of the country and cause

enormous damage and death. They aren't doing this simply because of the Iron Dome protection system.

"So, if you don't have a peace process, you have a growing war process. But who are you at war with? Who's your enemy? This question is

part of why Netanyahu was able to win so successfully.

"The past election included new elements that arose in 2021 – another war with Gaza and Israeli-Arab riots within sovereign Israel. When you begin talking about the Palestinians as the enemy and then move on to include talk of the Israeli-Arab threat potentially being aligned to the Palestinians, the enemy becomes blurred. It starts to run between who is a Jew and who is not," Lazaroff said. "Now, Israel has a government with parties that actually want to narrow the question of who is a Jew.

"What does it mean to have a Jewish state, and who can be its citizens? This is now on

the agenda precisely at a time when there is rising antisemitism in the world and when the question of who should be in Israel has never been more pertinent to the diaspora at large."

And the Israeli left doesn't really have the power to make its mark in this debate either.

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Israeli doctors save Nigerian lives with critical eye treatment

NICOLA MILTZ

A three-month-old Nigerian baby girl with critical eye cancer this week underwent potentially life-saving treatment by a team of specialised Israeli doctors in the African country. This follows a humanitarian mission conducted by Israeli physicians from Sheba Medical Center who performed an intricate eye procedure on both the tiny baby’s eyes, giving her much needed hope of survival.

“The procedure went off successfully,” said Israeli ophthalmologist, Dr Mattan Arazi, speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Nigeria.

Sheba Medical Center this week sent five specialised doctors to Ilona, Nigeria, to treat several children with life-threatening retinoblastoma – an eye cancer in infants and young children – which can be deadly if not treated early. Retinoblastoma is a malignant tumour that originates in the retina of young children. The vast majority of cases present before the age of five.

It’s estimated that one in 15 000 Nigerian children are inflicted with paediatric ocular cancer – amounting to a few hundred children a year.

The five-day mission included training local medical teams. The doctors also established an intra-arterial chemotherapy (IAC) centre, which will continue to provide much needed care for eye-cancer patients in the region.

The team consists of five specialists led by Professor Ido Didi Fabian, an ocular oncology specialist at the Goldschleger Eye Institute of Sheba Medical Center. “IAC is a highly effective treatment modality that can make a significant difference in the outcome of cancer treatment. It’s something that we have a lot of experience with at Sheba,” he said.

Lithuania’s parliament passed a law this week to set aside more than €37 million (R675 million) as restitution for Holocaust survivors and their heirs.

Ingrida Šimonytė, Lithuania’s prime minister, introduced the bill in the Seimas, Lithuania’s national legislature in Vilnius on 15 November, proposing to nearly double the money the government had already set aside for restitution claims in a country where 90% of its Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Today only 5 000 Jews remain in the country.

The World Jewish Restitution Organisation called it “an important step to providing a measure of justice to Lithuanian Holocaust survivors and their families for the horrors they suffered during World War II and its aftermath”.

The bill passed last week with an overwhelming majority, with 72 parliamentarians in favour, six against, and two abstaining.

“No one can bring the lost lives back and revive the communities we once had. However, the approach the government shows in terms of restitution for the Lithuanian Jewish community devastated during the Holocaust is proper and is welcomed by our community,” said Fania Kukliansky, the president of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, according to the Baltic News Network.

More than a decade ago, the parliament passed legislation to allocate €36 million, then worth about \$72 million, for a Good Will Foundation that funds projects to benefit the country’s Jewish population. The money was considered restitution for communal property seized from Lithuania’s Jewish community under the Nazi occupation.

The present bill would allow survivors and their heirs to apply for restitution for personal property as well, while continuing to fund the Good Will Foundation.

“This is also a moral debt that should be acknowledged and, as far as possible – not 100% –

Intra-arterial chemotherapy, he said, is a treatment option for certain types of cancer that involves delivering chemotherapy directly to the tumour through a catheter inserted into an artery. This allows for higher doses of chemotherapy to be delivered directly to the tumour, while minimising the exposure of healthy tissue to chemotherapy drugs.



Dr Mattan Arazi interacts with a patient in Nigeria

“The treatment for retinoblastoma has evolved. It has become treatable and curable in high-income countries in places like North America, Europe, and in Israel, with all the modern facilities available. In low-income countries, in Africa for example, children still die [from it]. There’s no real reason for that when we can make a difference,” he said.

“Together with my colleagues, I’m honoured to have the opportunity to share our knowledge and skills with our local colleagues in Nigeria, and to work together to treat infants with this

life-saving treatment,” Fabian said. He was originally contacted by his Nigerian colleague, Professor Dupe Ademola-Popoola, the head of paediatric ophthalmology at Ilorin Teaching Hospital in Nigeria, to assist in creating an IAC centre.

After months of logistical planning, the doctors finally arrived on Monday, 9 January, and set to work.

“Our first patient was this baby girl who had bilateral retinoblastoma,” Arazi said. “In one eye, she had advanced retinoblastoma and in the other, she had already received local therapy and was a good candidate for IAC treatment. So, as a group of Nigerian and Israeli physicians, we discussed the treatment, and we successfully treated both eyes at the same time.” He described a sense of “excitement and hope” following the procedure.

Arazi said a Nigerian doctor guided by the Israeli team successfully treated another patient with the procedure. “This was exciting news, I saw Dr Fabian afterwards and I could see the joy in his eyes.”

Proper delivery of intra-arterial chemotherapy requires the co-operation of an integrated team including ocular oncologist, skilled neurointerventional radiologist, anaesthesiologist, paediatric oncologist, and other vital ancillary staff. For each patient, a detailed plan is put in place before initiating this therapy, sometimes referred to as chemosurgery.

It involves precision as the femoral artery is accessed and a guide wire and microcatheter is

used to access the vascular supply to the eye.

According to the Israeli doctors, the five-day mission aims to improve health outcomes for paediatric eye-cancer patients in the area and to increase capacity for long-term quality optical care in Nigeria.

The mission is part of Sheba’s global-impact initiative, dedicated to building bridges to prosperity through healthcare, innovating to implement cutting-edge health solutions globally, and fostering critical relationships to strengthen fragile healthcare systems.

Said Arazi, “Nigeria has one of the highest rates of retinoblastoma. The treatment worldwide varies, but survival reaches up to 90% with things like intravenous chemotherapy and intra-arterial chemotherapy, which is a relatively new treatment modality.”

Asked whether the baby girl will retain health and vision in both her eyes, he said, “It’s hard to say. She will need to be evaluated in a few weeks and will most likely need additional IAC treatments, which the Nigerian physicians can now do. The situation is hopeful.”

“Our commitment and dedication to extending a hand to those in need across the globe is a fundamental guiding principle for us,” said Yoel Har-Even, the director of the international division and resource development, Sheba Global, at Sheba Medical Center. “The mission to Nigeria features some of the most talented physicians we can offer, enabling us not only to treat many patients but to sow the seeds for future advancement in the region. There’s a great sense of pride in being able to contribute to humankind and offer hope without boundaries.”

Naomi Hadar, the executive director of Africa Friends of Sheba Medical Center in Johannesburg, said, “The purpose of the visit is to save babies’ and young children’s lives. There’s no reason for them to die, and our doctors are making the difference. This is part of the *tikkun olam* that we see as our contribution to the world.”

Oman dashes Abraham Accords hopes by criminalising relations with Israel

DAVID I. KLEIN – JTA

Just a few years ago, Oman was expected to be next in line after Morocco, Sudan, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to sign onto the Abraham Accords normalisation agreements with Israel.

On Friday, 6 January, the country’s parliament voted to criminalise any relations or interactions with “the Zionist entity”.

While the exact details have not been made public, the new law seems to be broadly applied.

“The brothers, your excellencies, looked at the development taking place, whether it was technical, cultural, economic, or sports, and proposed additional amendments that include severing any economic, sports, or cultural relations, and prohibiting dealing in any way or means, whether it was a real meeting, an electronic meeting, or something else,” said Yaqoub Al-Harithi, the vice president of the Omani parliament, about the bill, according to Oman’s WAF news agency.

The sultanate at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula was for a long time closer to Israel than other states in the region were.

Oman never took part in any war with the Jewish state and established unofficial trade relations with Israel in the early 2000s. Omani Sultan Qaboos Bin Said welcomed three Israeli prime ministers to his country: Yitzhak Rabin in 1994, Shimon Peres in 1996, and Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018.

Oman carved a niche for itself as the Switzerland of the Middle East, an important middleman in everything from the Iranian nuclear talks to Yemeni civil war negotiations.

However, Qaboos, who was the longest reigning ruler of the Middle East’s oldest independent state, died in 2020 with no heirs. Rulership passed to his cousin, Haitham Bin Tariq, who has subsequently moved closer to Iran.

However, the developments Al-Harithi is referring to could include the rise of Israel’s new right-wing government, which has already provoked anger well beyond the Middle East. “What also potentially fuels this is a recent call by a number of Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, to go to the United Nations and condemn Israel over the recent rise of [Itamar] Ben-Gvir,” Nir Boms, the director of the Program for Regional Co-operation at the Moshe Dayan Center of Tel Aviv University, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

For more Islamist-leaning factions across the region, “The issues around Israel are coming to a point where they need to have a counter-reaction and come back to a boycott policy,” he said.

Another reason may be fear of Iran, which is conducting military exercises off Oman’s coast and is reeling from months of domestic protest.

“The last thing Muscat wants is for the Gulf to become a battlefield with attacks on Western shipping, resulting in the closure of the Straits of Hormuz,” said Tom Gross, a British journalist and Middle East expert. “Oman, like Qatar, is trying to calm Iran.”

In spite of the bill, Gross thinks Omani relations with Israel will continue as they always have – under the table.



Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al-Said (right) with Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani

Photo: Qatari Foreign Ministry/Handout/Arabia via Getty Images

SAUJS wins award for using healing to fight hatred

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Fighting for Israel with healing rather than hate won the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) an international award at the end of last year.

SAUJS won the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS) Israel Engagement Award on 29 December for fighting for Israel with a campaign titled “Heal over Hate” during Israeli Apartheid Week last year.

SAUJS representatives Kayla Diamond, Joshua Pimstein, Natanya Porter, and Joshua Norman who are all University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) students, were presented with a trophy during the WUJS congress at the Dan Jerusalem Hotel in Israel from 27 December to 1 January.

“We won because we showed the World Union of Jewish Students our determination, hard work, and passion for fighting antisemitism on campus,” says Diamond, the mental health officer of SAUJS’ national committee. “In doing so, we were able to unite all SAUJS constituents by creating a sense of Jewish pride.”

SAUJS’s campaign was about ensuring that Jewish students didn’t feel threatened or uncomfortable on university campuses, says Bethia Milner, the chairperson of SAUJS’ Wits committee. “We were able to combat the lies about Israel and ensure that Jewish students felt they had a place on campus,” Milner says. SAUJS openly supported Israel’s existence with information and support structures in place for Jewish students, and built relationships with political structures at universities.

“In taking an open and engaging approach, SAUJS turned Israeli Apartheid Week around,” Milner says. “The week became an opportunity to educate students about Israel rather than the hate fest it has sometimes been in the past.”

During the week, SAUJS was accompanied by Stand With

Us delegates from Israel as well as the 2017 Miss Universe Iraq Sarah Idan, an advocate for Israel. “We promoted peace, and showed all students that we choose – and will always choose – to heal over hate,” Diamond says.

Idan spoke to Wits students as part of SAUJS’ campaign, says Pimstein, religious officer of SAUJS’ Wits committee.

“One way to fight antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment is by proudly practicing our Judaism and celebrating Jewish life in the country,” says Norman, Wits SAUJS social events officer. “Last year, in addition to our counter campaign

community.”

Pimstein says SAUJS’ “Heal over Hate” campaign achieved its goal of almost completely nullifying Israeli Apartheid Week. “We also created some really good awareness of Israel and what’s actually going on.”

He says winning WUJS’ Israel Engagement Award is testament to the efforts of SAUJS and its impact on Jewish students. “It will definitely energise the team going forward in that the work we have done in the past and the work we will continue to do is obviously having a good effect on local students and raising the eyebrows of people around the world such as the Jewish Agency.”

SAUJS says it will continue to fight for Israel regardless of changes in the country’s government. “One of the pillars of the SAUJS involvement is ensuring that we advocate positively for Israel and fight the antisemitism and anti-Zionism out there,” Pimstein says. But he points out that “one of SAUJS’s goals for this year is to create a much stronger sense of Jewishness and Yiddishkeit on campuses so that we’re not only a political movement that fights for the state of Israel, we’re also a movement Jews feel a connection to and one which uplifts Jewish life on campus for all Jewish students”.


The location of the congress, attended by students from across the globe, was controversial, Diamond says. “The Dan Jerusalem Hotel sits past the Green Line. Everyone had different opinions about that.”

SAUJS, however, hasn’t taken a stance on this issue. “We’re proud of the fact that our members are heterogenous and have diverse opinions on every matter, including Israeli politics,” Diamond says.



Kayla Diamond, Joshua Pimstein, Natanya Porter, and Joshua Norman


during the vitriolic Israeli Apartheid Week, we held a megillah reading on campus, a party where about 200 Jewish students came together, and we pushed major outreach projects such as a pad drive to end period poverty on campus. That’s how we intend on moving forward – by giving back to the Jewish and broader South African



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Brilliant at ballet – King David pupil wows judges at world championships

SAUL KAMIONSKY

King David Primary School Linksfield pupil Sami Levin is no ordinary ballet dancer. She was named second best 12-year-old ballet dancer at the International Dance Organisation World Championships in Slovenia in November 2022.

“I’m very proud,” says Levin, who has just started Grade 7. “I didn’t expect to place so high. It felt good because you weren’t there just for yourself, but for your country. I felt proud to be South African.”

Levin was awarded Protea Colours for performing arts by South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee in October last year. It followed her top-three finish at a South African Body of Dance (SABOD) competition.

She made it into the Protea team and went on to come first in every genre of dance before representing South Africa at the world championships.

In this, her first international competition, Levin progressed from the first round, which had 19 participants. She was the lone South African in a group that included dancers from Poland, Italy, Finland, Turkey, Canada, and Croatia.

She came second to Poland’s Michalina Ostachowska in the final, bagging a silver medal and becoming vice-world champion in her age group.

“Not all the participants did the same dance routine,” Levin’s mom, Aurrit, says. “In ballet, you have two sections. One is the ‘open classical’, which is your own choreography. The other is ‘repertoire’, a portion from a famous

ballet, for which there are a whole lot of famous classical ballets the dancers can choose from. Sami chose *Giselle*, which she did in every round, but you could also do *Lilac Fairy*, for example.”

At least nine international judges, including one South African, Debbie Rakusin, were present. They adjudicated points based on technique, mentality, dance ability, interpretation, presentation, costume, and entertainment.

“A total of 2 500 dancers from 29 countries took part in the championships across all genres,” Aurrit says. “Every country has their own qualifiers, and the top three go to the championships.”

Levin also participated in the American Dance Awards last year, and won an ultimate gold medal.

Although no one in Levin’s family has a dancing background, she started ballet at about the age of three. “Most girls like to dance, so I took her to a very non-directed dancing school where it was all just about fun,” her mom says. “When she started to demonstrate skill, I took her to a more intense class where they



Sami Levin at the International Dance Organisation Championships in Slovenia

do practical exams and learn technique.”

Levin’s participation in other forms of dancing such as modern and jazz began three years ago at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning she had to learn everything online initially.

“I would say ballet is her greatest achievement, but she also does very well in jazz and modern,” Aurrit says.

Levin says she loves dancing because “there are so many

different types, and you can be free”.

She does modern and jazz at Shablam Dance Academy in Orange Grove, and ballet at Eborall Melville DeWitt in Orchards. She practices every day for up to two hours.

“It’s hard work, challenging, and keeps you strong,” says her mom. “Ballet is one of the hardest sports in the world because you use your whole body.”

Levin has several coaches and attends a lot of dance classes focused on the practical ballet exam syllabus. “They do these exams through the Royal Academy of Dance, which goes through London, and they get results,” Levin’s mom says.

On top of this, Levin has private lessons, in which she works on technique and choreography.

Levin danced on Yom Ha’atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron at school, and would like to perform in more overseas competitions for South Africa.

“The main one is the SABOD competition because that’s where you represent your country as opposed to just some international dance,” Levin’s mom says. “There are no other dance competitions for which you can get awarded Protea Colours.”

Jewish doctor escapes death amidst Boksburg explosion

>>Continued from page 1

Clive Mashishi Foundation, and Sibambisene Foundation,” says SAJBD Chairperson Professor Karen Milner.

“The blast was devastating,” she says. “Families lost breadwinners, parents lost children, people were badly burnt, and others had their houses destroyed. It was reassuring to know that our team was able to assess the needs of the community.

“Between the organisations, we were able to cater for more than 1 200 people at funerals, repair 120 windows, fix electricity including at the badly-affected old age home, and provide food packages. Equally importantly, Arielle Susman provided trauma counselling. Though the impact of the tragedy is unfathomable, knowing that we could assist meaningfully was reassuring.”

After visiting the community, TAN’s Glynne Wolman said it was “utterly devastating. I couldn’t get images out of my head. We can never forget what we witnessed. While we were there, they discovered an arm near the scene.

“A mother had lost her own mother and her 13-year-old daughter,” she says. “They haven’t buried the bodies because of administration issues. We will help to get this resolved. The area feels like

a ghost town. We met people who were badly burnt when trying to help, and a mother who lost four of her seven children. Her husband died five months ago.” Wolman paid tribute to the many volunteers on the ground, especially Clive Mashishi, and says they “will probably need trauma counselling”.

Says Fingertips of Africa’s Yehuda Lazarus, “On 25 December, I went to hand out hampers and dresses donated by Limo Asseraf. We noticed the lack of food at funerals, and decided to help this way. We have catered for 12 funerals. Our staff have worked 24-hour shifts to make it happen. We hire unemployed youth.”

Community member Ros Sussman felt an urgent need to comfort people. “I survived a bomb blast in 1983. I remember the fear. For two years after that, I slept in my mother’s bed, and I was an adult. I went to Boksburg on Christmas Day, and you could feel the trauma in the air. I hope this community isn’t forgotten.”

Winik says Jewish doctors have always worked at TMH, and now it’s “time to give back” to a community in need. He will continue his dream of going into sports medicine, never forgetting how life can change in an instant.

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Sunday 15 January

Women's International Zionist Organisation Cape Town will be showing the award-winning documentary *J'Accuse!* by filmmaker Michael Kretzmer. Venue: Labia Theatre. Time: 18:00. Cost: R125. Contact: 082 772 6251 or vmboyd@iafrica.com

Second Innings hosts talk by Alan Browde, the chief executive of SA Harvest, “How we have delivered 30 million meals in three years.” Venue: Golden Acres. Time: 10:00. Cost: R20 members, R20 visitors. Contact: 082 561 3228 or greciagabriel1@gmail.com

Tuesday 17 January

Union of Jewish Women hosts *Brain Boost – A brain stimulation group*. Time: 10:00. Cost: R100. Contact: 011 648 1053 or info@ujw.co.za

Thursday 19 January

The SA Jewish Report hosts webinar, “*J'Accuse! – Lithuanian complicity in the Holocaust and its coverup*.” Time: 20:00. Register: bit.ly/jrlive144 or email editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

WHAT'S ON

Letters

SA JEWS SHOULD SPEAK OUT AGAINST ISRAEL'S ULTRA-RIGHT-WING GOVERNMENT

The South African Jewish community should speak out against the right-wing government that Benjamin Netanyahu appears forced to put together, and make it clear that they don't necessarily agree with what he's doing.

Most South African Jews opposed apartheid, with a minority becoming left-wing activists. Also, most Jews in South Africa are Orthodox and are seen as Zionists, no matter what.

We also know that the ruling party is opposed to Israel, albeit having a one-sided view. In essence, that means that although our Constitution guarantees religious freedom, and though the government pays lip service to South African Jews, there will be many – I would venture the vast majority – of the African National Congress and Economic Freedom Fighters who will have a disdainful opinion of Jews no matter what each Jew stands for. Regrettably, that puts every member of the community in an invidious position.

By speaking out against this far right-wing government, it's hoped that view of Jews of many South Africans, whether supporters of the ruling party or not, will be mitigated.

– Harold (Hal) Goldberg, Durban

Loving farewell to Our Parents Home

“Our Parents Home was a central part of Johannesburg Jewish life for more than 80 years, and we wanted to mark its closing with the appropriate respect and dignity,” Chevrah Kadisha Chief Executive Saul Tomson told 100 community members gathered to say farewell to the iconic Jewish old-aged home in its gardens on 8 December 2022.

The much-loved facility closed at the end of December 2022, but its last residents left in early November. Thirty-eight out of the home’s 41 residents relocated to Chev facilities – Sandringham Gardens or Golden Acres. They were moved gradually over the course of a few months, starting in July, in order to make it easier for them, and the Chev did all the moving for them.

“There was always a magical quality to this warm and happy place, which many of you here today will remember,” Tomson said of the home, which was originally established



Chev Group Chief Executive, Saul Tomson, and Gladys van der Kleij with Sibylle Stern

in 1940 as a refuge for Jewish immigrants fleeing the Holocaust. “Unfortunately, with the passage of time, residential numbers declined until it became unsustainable for the Chev to maintain the facility for so few remaining residents.

“With the changing demographics in the community, it’s incumbent upon the Chev to do whatever we can to preserve a consolidated, vibrant, and sustainable Jewish community,” Tomson said. “We’re mindful of not duplicating services unnecessarily. At the same time, we’re investing in the improvement of the facilities that remain. Our community has halved in numbers over the years, and we believe we need fewer but better facilities – an increase in quality over quantity – to ensure our sustainability.”

Staff and social workers assisted the relocation and reintegration process, and residents were supported emotionally and physically throughout, according to the Chev. Residents are being housed throughout Chev facilities according to their requirements.

“We kept getting lost at first, and they patiently showed

us the way time and time again,” said Clara Taub, one of the former residents, now at Sandringham Gardens. “We said, ‘We need to go left here,’ and they said, ‘No, you need to go right here.’ Everyone has been so kind to us, and most of us are very happy.”

Chev Group Rabbi Jonathan Fox spoke about the shul at Our Parents Home. Rabbi Matzner was the spiritual leader there for many years, after which his son-in-law, Rabbi Ami Glixman, took over. The Sifrei Torah, bima and other parts of the shul’s interior will now be used in the newly refurbished Sandringham Gardens Shul.

Lynette Yach was both the first social worker at Our Parents Home, and the last. Hired in 1983, she worked there for 18 years before moving to Sandringham Gardens to manage admissions for the Chev in 2001. Lynette returned to Our Parents Home last year to help residents relocate. She spoke warmly about her 40 years of service at the home.

The elegant, 101-year-old Sibylle Stern, dressed in a lilac suit, was chairperson of the ladies committee for many years and spoke about her memories.

“This event was moving, respectful, and appropriate to the occasion,” said Freda Neiman, whose mother was a resident at the home. Rose Heyman, who often accompanied her friend Maureen Kusner to the home to visit her mom, the late Lottie Hess, said, “Saul Tomson clearly has tremendous empathy for older people – and he’s so young. It was a pleasure to be here.”

UJW Sewing School empowers five more graduates

Five students graduated from the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg’s Sewing Empowerment School on 14 December, the UJW’s second graduation class for 2022. They arrived not knowing how to thread a needle, and graduated after an intensive four-month course designing and sewing their own graduation garments.

Sewing teacher Chido Tsodzo admitted that although she had taught the class, she had learnt a lot from the students. From aprons to grocery bags to dresses, jackets, cushions, curtains, and more, the students also learnt how to bead. Ariane Heneck, the manager of the school, says she’s proud of the students, who have learnt important skills which can uplift them and change their lives.



A graduating student displaying a dress she made

WIZO and SAFI bring Christmas joy to Eldorado Park

The Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) and South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) brightened up the day for 80 children in Eldorado Park on 8 December with an early Christmas party.

The Christmas party is an annual tradition of WIZO Johannesburg, and this year, it partnered with SAFI to bring joy to one of the communities led by SAFI-affiliated pastor Errol Jacobs.

Jacobs, with his wife, Janice, their daughter, Stacey, their son, Timothy, and his wife, Tasmin, facilitated the event. WIZO Johannesburg organised the gifts, and entertainer Matt the Magical Clown kept the children enthralled. After the food, sponsored by McDonald’s and Nando’s, the children were presented with backpacks full of gifts and Christmas-themed cupcakes made by Sugar Bear Bakery, all made possible by the generosity of WIZO Johannesburg donors.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Prayer and protection of rights

It’s lovely to be back after the December break, which I hope was a time for rest and recovery for all. Although there hasn’t been a column for the past few weeks, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) continued to work through the holiday period on matters of importance for the Jewish community.

I was given the honour of delivering a prayer on behalf of the Jewish community at the African National Congress (ANC) conference held at Nasrec on 16 December. It was a great opportunity to see the ruling party ANC at work and observe first-hand the atmosphere and interactions of those who, at least until the next elections, hold the future of this country in their hands. This was a critical event for South Africa as a whole as well as the Jewish community, and I reflect on it in more detail in an op-ed also published in this edition of the *SA Jewish Report*.

As part of our core mandate of protecting the religious rights of South African Jewry, we work closely with universities to make alternate arrangements for observant Jewish students with exams on *chaggim* and on

Shabbat. The SAJBD has been working over the past four months to find fair accommodation for our University of South Africa (Unisa) students in this situation. As of this week, we have now finally confirmed alternate assessments for all of the 69 exams that were reported to us. Throughout the holiday, our professional team worked with Unisa to resolve the final six exams so that our students will be able to proceed with their studies this year. Last year, our office worked with several universities, private tertiary institutions, and high schools to resolve exam clashes with Jewish holy days to ensure that our community members aren’t disadvantaged due to their religious practices.

Heartbreakingly, last year ended with tragedy for residents and workers in Boksburg. We have all watched in horror as the full extent of the devastation and death toll from the tanker explosion has emerged. Our only comfort at such times is to come together and provide assistance where help is needed. Last Thursday, the SAJBD, The Angel Network, and community members visited Boksburg

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



ABOVE BOARD


Karen Milner

to support our team who have been working tirelessly on the ground to help those affected. SAJBD beneficiaries – The Clive Mashishi Foundation, Fingertips of Africa, and The Sibambisene Foundation – have been helping out with funeral arrangements, preparing food, handing out food parcels, and fixing windows (including of the old-age home). We’re also grateful to trauma counsellor Arielle Susman for volunteering to help those experiencing grief. We visited families who lost loved ones, those who were badly burnt by the explosion, and paid our respects at the Brits funeral for the four siblings who were killed. We’re grateful to all our partners who were able to provide some comfort to those grieving.

Our hearts go out to those who were so catastrophically affected by this tragic disaster.

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

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Crossing over to the other side

For years, I heard my parents going on about people who went on holiday to the “other side”. As a child prone to wild imaginings, I would wonder if the “other side” had something to do with devil worship or the occult. It sounded dangerous and edgy, and something that I would need to try one day. The real meaning, sadly, was significantly duller, simply that they were in Sea Point for December, whereas we were staying on the Muizenberg side of the mountain.

What always followed the “other side” comment was a well-practiced list of unpleasantness that would befall anyone who chose to stay in Sea Point in December, what with all that heat (even at night), the cold ocean water, and how nothing, nothing at all, could rival a good day on Muizenberg beach. My father would always neglect to mention that those days of perfection occurred only once every seven years. And were likely to fall on a Shabbat.

The scorn for “Sea Pointers” was nothing compared to the disdain heaped on those who vacationed in Plett. Little brought more joy than reports of poor

weather on the Garden Route. In which case, my parents would shake their heads sympathetically and wonder aloud why anyone would choose to put themselves at the mercy of the elements. All this while making sure that the car that they had parked outside the Muizenberg flat hadn’t been blown away in the night.

I’m uncertain that times have changed. Where we choose to go on holiday apparently says something about us. It’s not only about geography, it’s also about company. There are those who don’t want to be near anyone in the community and who will deliberately go to Langebaan or Margate because others in the community don’t. There are those who will go only where all their friends are going, and where they know that they have a shul and kosher food. And then there are those who need something in the middle.

There are even some who won’t go anywhere without a Woolworths food store. But that’s another column completely.

Holiday insecurity is a real thing. Over December, we chose to drive from Plett, where we were staying for a few weeks, to

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

Cape Town for a few days. The difference is significant. Whereas Plett was quieter and more laid back, Cape Town was energetic and intense. Whereas both were great, depending on what one might be looking for, I found myself justifying our Plett decision to people in Cape Town. I defended the weather, and then reassured those in Plett (when we got back), that we hadn’t been turned by the new “other side”.

We were, I explained, the same people who drove to Cape Town two days prior, and had returned to finish our holiday as planned in Plett.

Sharks and all. South Africans have holiday issues. We plan the holiday from around March, make sure to have booked by August, and then defend December with our lives from early November. We invest in our choices, double down on the decision, and year after year, we look in disdain at anyone who might choose to venture to the other side.



Triplets Froom to the top at chess championships

Triplets, David, Jacob, and Gabriel Froom started their holiday on a high at the South African Junior Chess Championships at the Wild Coast. All three boys were selected to play for the u12 Johannesburg Metro teams, and Jacob tied first on points and achieved second place overall in the u12 individual Wild Card Chess tournament, which ended on 12 December.

Gabriel, who had just returned from Sri Lanka where he played for South Africa in the Commonwealth Chess Championship, secured bronze in third place.



Jacob, Gabriel, and David Froom

Their Johannesburg Metro u12A chess team placed second in the country in the team championships.

David, Jacob, and Gabriel also all qualified to play in the prestigious South African Closed Chess Championships, to be held in 2023.

Sydenham Shul bids farewell to loyal staffer

Sydenham Shul bids farewell to veteran staff member Abram Molepo after 43 years of loyal service, wishing him success in future endeavours.



Abram Molepo and Jonty Cohen, Operations Director of Sydenham Shul

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5⁹⁹

BAKERS MINI BISCUITS ASSTD FLAVOURS 40G EACH



15³⁹

MAXI BEEF MINCE P/100G



29⁹⁹

MARMITE SPREAD 125G



12⁹⁹

NS BALL PEN MEDIUM 5 PACK



28⁹⁹

SCRIPTO COBRA PENCIL CLUTCH&LEADS 1'S



89⁹⁹

SCRIPTO CALCULATOR SCIENTIFIC 925E 1'S



16⁹⁹

MONTAGU FRUITY BEARS ASSTD FLAVOURS 40G EACH



23⁹⁹

ALL GOLD SUPERFINE APRICOT JAM 450G



14⁹⁹

LIFEBUOY BATH SOAP TOTAL 175G



37⁹⁹

SENSODYNE MULTI CARE T/PASTE FRESH MINT 75ML



9⁹⁹

EXAM PAD 60PG 1'S



83⁹⁹

COLGATE T/BRUSH 360 MEDIUM TP 2'S



9⁹⁹

PENFLEX SOUTH AFRICA



12⁹⁹

NS BALL PEN MEDIUM 5 PACK



28⁹⁹

SCRIPTO COBRA PENCIL CLUTCH&LEADS 1'S



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SCRIPTO CALCULATOR SCIENTIFIC 925E 1'S



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