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# South African Jewish Report

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## Board joins outcry against changing Israel’s Law of Return

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has joined an international call to stop the Israeli government from changing the more than 70-year-old Law of Return that gives all Jews the right to emigrate to Israel.

“We’re taking the Israeli government’s proposed amendment to the Law of Return, and how it could affect Jewish communities in the diaspora, extremely seriously, and have been engaging on this important issue with international and local role players and advocacy groups,” the SAJBD wrote in a letter emailed to members of the South African Jewish community on 21 February. “The SAJBD is committed to protecting the civil rights of all South African Jews.”

Israel’s Knesset passed a law in 1950, beginning with a few simple words that defined Israel’s central purpose: “Every Jew has the right to immigrate to this country.” This became the sacred Law of Return (LOR), ending 2 000 years of wandering and exile.

Currently, the LOR grants Israeli citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent provided they don’t practice another religion and pose no danger to public health, state security, safety, or the Jewish people as a whole. Essentially, all Jews everywhere are Israeli citizens by right.

But religious parties in the new Israeli government are looking to revoke this “grandchild clause” and

limit the LOR only to those who are Jewish according to *halacha* and their children. According to *halacha*, someone is Jewish only if their mother is Jewish.

On 1 January 2023, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAI) and heads of top international Zionist groups sent a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressing the importance of Jewish unity and raising “deep concern” that his government could undermine that by altering the LOR.

The SAJBD has joined this call, endorsing the JAI letter in the message it wrote to the community. “The JAI’s mission is to ensure a secure, diverse, and thriving Jewish people united by a shared heritage and commitment to Israel. The SAJBD shares this mission and fully endorses the points and concerns raised.

“The LOR speaks deeply to our Jewish identity, and brings together world Jewry as a united, global community. We’re confident that together, we can find respectful, inclusive, and constructive solutions to the challenge at hand without harming the delicate fabric that holds us together. To this end, the SAJBD will work together with the Israeli government and all stakeholders to ensure the continued well-being of the entire Jewish people.”

SAJBD National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner explained why the SAJBD had taken this on. “The proposed changes to the LOR have been discussed across diaspora communities, and there has been concern from within our own

community about how these changes will affect us. We felt it was important that our community knows that we take its concerns seriously regarding such a fundamental matter that goes to the heart of Jewish identity.

“It’s hoped that any changes will be made in consultation with diaspora communities and in a way that ensures they are inclusive,” says Milner. “The Israeli foreign affairs minister certainly suggests that this will be the case. But given how sensitive this issue is, it’s important

to make our voice heard on anything that could potentially negatively affect our community. We’re also in contact with the Israeli ambassador on this issue.”

The SAJBD therefore joins a mix of Israelis and diaspora leaders who signed the JAI letter, namely Doron Almog, the chairperson of the executive of the JAI; Mark Wilf, the chairperson of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors; Steven Lowy, the chairperson of the World Board of Trustees of Keren Hayesod; Sam

Grundwerg, the world chairperson of Keren Hayesod; Eric Fingerhut, the president and chief executive of the Jewish Federations of North America; Julie Platt, the chairperson of the Jewish Federations of North America; and Yaakov Hagoel, the chairperson of the World Zionist Organization.

“It’s our duty to share with you our deep concern regarding voices in the government on issues that could undermine the long-standing

Continued on page 12>>

### After the floods



See story on page 5

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## Jewish groups against Netanyahu's judicial reform

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

In a rare comment on internal Israeli politics, the umbrella organisation for local Jewish federations is urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to drop one element of his government's controversial plan for judicial reform.

On Tuesday, 21 February, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) sent an open letter to Netanyahu and Yair Lapid, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, opposing a proposed change that would allow a bare majority of Israeli legislators to override Supreme Court rulings. Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has 120 seats, and one piece of the plan would allow 61 members to negate court decisions that strike down laws. Lapid opposes the plan.

It's the first statement by a large American Jewish umbrella group opposing the court reform. The proposed changes have sparked mass protests across Israel, and warnings from a chorus of public figures that they will damage Israel's democratic character.

Some elements of the proposal, though not the override clause, just passed a major legislative milestone in the Knesset. A bill approved in an initial vote on Tuesday would hand the Israeli government full control over judicial appointments and bar the Supreme Court from ruling on Israeli Basic Laws, the country's closest parallel to a Constitution. Following the vote, the value of the Israeli shekel plunged.

The group's letter also encourages the parliamentary coalition and opposition to enter into negotiations over the content of the reform, as proposed by Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

"We urge you to make clear that a majority of just 61 votes of the Knesset isn't sufficient to override a decision of the Supreme Court," the letter said. "The essence of democracy is both majority rule and protection of minority rights. Such a dramatic change to the Israeli

system of governance will have far-reaching consequences in North America, both within the Jewish community and in the broader society."

The federations' letter doesn't include promises or threats of further action. But a separate statement by JFNA Chief Executive Eric Fingerhut and Chairperson Julie Platt suggested that they feared the court reform could hurt Israeli religious-pluralism activists.

Passing the override clause would mean "complete power would be in the hands of each temporary majority created after each election", said Fingerhut and Platt's memo. "This concentration of power is a cause of great concern on many issues that North American Jews and our allies across the broader society have always cared about."

The memo and the letter didn't say which particular issues of concern would be affected by the change, but the court has been instrumental in protecting the rights of minorities, including non-Orthodox religious streams and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community.

The letter joins a growing list of public exhortations against the legislation. This weekend, new letters were distributed by the Conservative/Masorti movement of Judaism, 200 American Jewish scientists, and Arab Israeli leaders. Some of those opposing the court reform are staunch defenders of Israel in other circumstances, including Bret Stephens, the conservative *New York Times* columnist; Alan Dershowitz, the celebrity lawyer; and Abe Foxman, the emeritus chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League.

Last month, the head of the largest federation, UJA-Federation of New York, also expressed his alarm over the proposed reforms.

On Tuesday, Netanyahu again rejected a call to freeze the legislative process, saying he would speak to the opposition but without "preconditions".

## Divine sanctuary means healthy self-esteem **Torah Thought**



**Rabbi Danny Sackstein**  
– Sunny Road Kehilla

Our capacity to carry the presence of G-d within us should be the foundation of self-esteem. This liberating idea is the cornerstone of self-worth and confidence.

In this week's Torah reading, Terumah, G-d commands the Jewish people to build a sanctuary in which G-d's presence will reside. The Ramban (1194-1270) explains that redemption from Egypt wasn't complete with the physical departure from the land of Israel's enslavement, nor with the giving of the ten commandments, even though the revelation at Sinai was the goal of Exodus.

Exodus hadn't achieved its purpose until the heights that the nation had achieved temporarily at Sinai were made a permanent part of existence by means of the sanctuary.

When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, G-d's presence remained within the Jewish people through miniature sanctuaries (Ezekiel 11:16) in the form of synagogues and study halls (Megilla 29a). It's through them that the attachment to G-d and the teachings of Sinai are perpetuated within the Jewish people.

The Malbim (1809-1879) writes that in Hashem's command to Moshe (Shemos 25:8), "They shall make a sanctuary for me – so that I may dwell among them", the verse doesn't say, "so that I may dwell in it", but rather "in them", an allusion that every person must build a sanctuary within themselves. Each one of us must provide in our hearts a residence for G-d's presence.

The Torah is empowering every individual to raise themselves to be a vehicle for the divine presence. There can be no greater compliment to a human being.

By living a life in which we rise above self-indulgence in the material world and follow the commandments of the creator, we have the potential to elevate ourselves and carry the divine presence within us.

We're all made up of body and soul. Often the body is so dominant and powerful that the soul is completely drowned out, without any voice. When we hold back the body and allow the soul to control our appetite for power and pleasure, we create a space for G-d's presence.

This insight into the nature of a human being should be a powerful source of self-

esteem for all of us. Furthermore, when we work to apply this principle in our lives, the automatic consequence is a feeling of purpose and accomplishment that leads to a natural self-confidence and self-esteem. The converse has the opposite effect. When we constantly give in to the powerful urges of the body, we push G-d away, and doubt our relevance and purpose.

May we all be successful in following the guidelines of the Torah, and creating a place for G-d in our lives, thereby accessing the best version of ourselves and living with a healthy sense of our greatness within.

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**This week's Parshah, Terumah, means "Offering"**

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute 13 materials: gold, silver, and copper; blue-, purple-, and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices, and gems. G-d says to Moses, "They shall make for me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them."

## South African Jewish Report

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# Israeli diplomat’s ejection from AU causes furore

STEVEN GRUZD AND PETA KROST

The Israeli government is fuming and frustrated after a senior Israeli official was forcibly removed from the opening of the annual African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the weekend.

Sharon Bar-Li, the deputy director general for Africa at Israel's ministry of foreign affairs, was filmed being marched out of the Nelson Mandela Hall at the AU headquarters by security guards. The video went viral, having first been aired on Hezbollah television in Iran.

Israel criticised South Africa, Algeria, and Iran – which has observer status – for orchestrating this diplomatic crisis.

An Israeli foreign affairs representative confirmed that Bar-Li had official accreditation and a photo-badge, without which it would have been impossible to enter the AU campus. Israel has denied allegations that this was a fake badge, or that Bar-Li was responsible for inducing this drama.

According to the Israeli foreign affairs representative who spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* this week, "Israel's accreditation was granted in 2021 and it was never taken from it. Last year, in February 2022, there was a petition from a few countries to decline Israel's observer status, and a committee was set up to deal with this. Observer status was never cancelled. It was apparently left hanging, which is why we got to this situation."

As part of its increased engagement with African countries, especially spearheaded by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel has sought observer status at the AU for two decades. It used to have this privilege at the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but this was rescinded in 2002 when the OAU became the AU, at the insistence of the then-leader of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi.

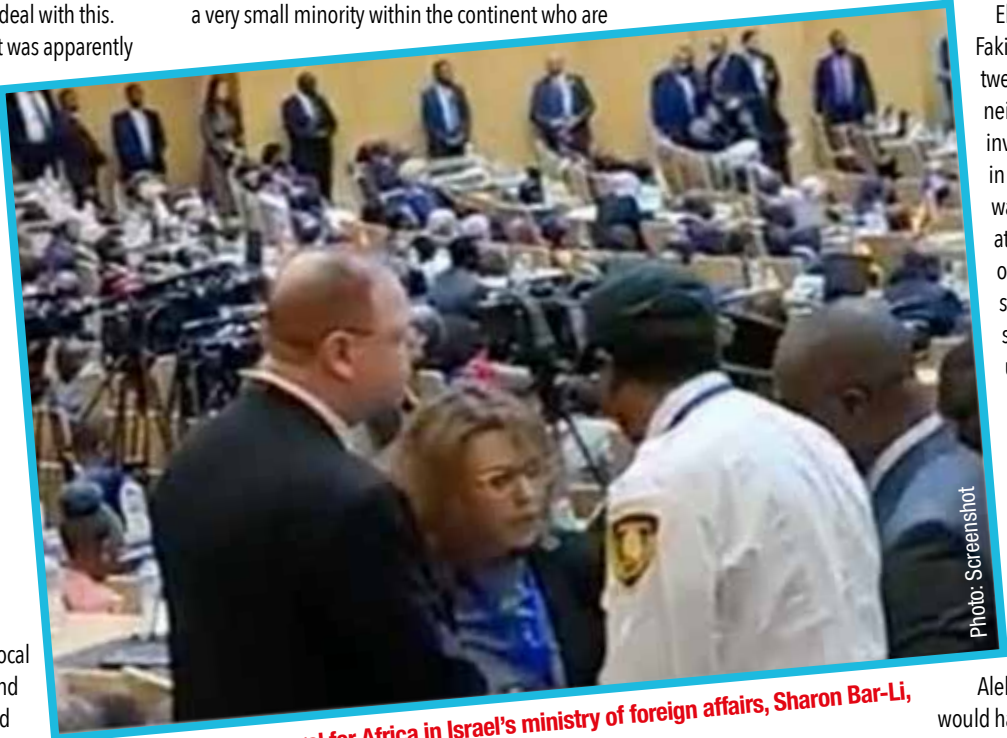
Israel was then granted observer status at the organisation by AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat in mid-2021, sharply dividing the membership of the AU. Vocal opponents of Israel like South Africa and Algeria claimed that Faki had erred and overstepped his authority in giving Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia permission to observe AU events such as the summit. They claim that Israel snuck in through the back door as it would never have been accepted had the member states been consulted, due to its treatment of the Palestinians. Faki hit back with a full written justification of his actions.

The issue came to a head at the AU's 2022 summit. Unable to decide, the AU set up a seven-member ad hoc committee of the heads of state of Algeria, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa to deliberate on the matter. This committee has never sat.

There's a sharp difference in the interpretation of this decision. Israel maintains that it remains fully accredited until officially informed otherwise. The AU holds that Israel is suspended, pending the decision of the committee.

The Israeli official said, "Of course we got an invitation. On the AU website, Israel is listed as an observer and we received accreditation. And name tags for the delegation ... [Sharon Bar-Li] was sitting in an observer seat left for Israel. Someone from the secretary of the organisation came and asked her to leave. When she said no, they brought security to escort her out of the hall forcibly. It was all co-ordinated by the Algerian representative, the South African representative, and the Iranian observer, who were there. One of them filmed everything. It was all orchestrated by those three, who were all very close by."

The official continued, "They didn't give her a reason. The whole situation is terrible. They were very rude. This is a diplomatic event, and they were acting anything but diplomatically. I don't think this is the way to treat a guest, especially an observer for the organisation. Especially when Israel has done so much for the continent, and continues to do so much. Africa benefits a great deal from its relationship with Israel. Unfortunately, a very small minority within the continent who are



The deputy director general for Africa in Israel's ministry of foreign affairs, Sharon Bar-Li, being removed by security at the African Union

motivated by hate and the influence of Iran are trying to kick Israel out and to hurt their own people just to serve the goals of the Ayatollah regime. South Africa and Algeria are a major part of it, but they are co-operating with Iran. It's not a coincidence that the first place this video of Sharon Bar-Li being kicked out was shown was on Hezbollah's television channel."

At the post-summit press conference, Faki disagreed. "Israeli is suspended until this committee decides," he said. "We didn't invite Israeli officials to our summit. We have noticed that there is a person who has entered

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the room and naturally, we have asked him (sic) to leave the premises. We are in the process of making the necessary investigations, because it is a personality who does not reside here, who came from Israel. When someone arrives here, if he is invited, he is invited by the chairperson of the AU Commission. We have not invited any official, and naturally, having noted this, we will investigate and determine who is responsible. This is not a hidden issue. The issue has been publicly debated, and when the heads of state will decide yes or no, in this moment, Israel will be an observer or not." Faki's statement was translated from French, and tweeted by researcher Ueli Staeger.

Ebba Kalondo, Faki's spokesperson, tweeted, "The AU neither authorised nor invited the individual in question, who was duly ejected, to attend the opening of our summit. The state of Israel's status at the AU is under review by a committee of heads of state. This incident will be taken into account." When asked whether Israel's Ethiopian-born ambassador, Aleligne Admasu, would have been allowed to

observe, Kalondo told the *SA Jewish Report*, "He didn't attend because he was fully and officially aware of the decision regarding the suspension."

The day before the opening, a senior AU staff member said that Israel had been politely asked not to attend. He didn't say whether Israel would agree to this. To do so would have been tantamount to conceding to its detractors.

When put to Kalondo that Israel understood it was still an observer, she said, "What it thinks and what it knows clearly seems to constitute two different things."

South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor was adamant when

speaking to Al Sharq, a Saudi news service, that while she was dead against Israel having observer status, she was not personally involved in having the Israeli representative kicked out.

"I read about this removal of a person who was not authorised to be in the assembly opening ceremony and was very surprised to hear the reference in very pejorative words to South Africa because I am not a security official at the African Union, nor do I work for the administration of the commission. so the notion that I would stand up and remove any person in a hall is quite insulting and demeaning," she said. "I believe the Israeli colleague is probably aware that we have objected to the commission chairperson's unilateral decision to grant Israel observer status in our union."

The African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's governing party, issued a statement on 18 February saying that it was "encouraged by the ousting of Israeli representatives" from the summit. "This occurred against an attempt to undermine the current AU summit from considering a report that is supposed to guide discussions on whether Israel must be granted an (sic) observer status."

This is patently false, as the committee has never convened let alone produced any report. If the committee never meets, the issue may never be resolved.

Reaction was also swift from bodies like the South African Friends of Israel and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). The SAZF said on 20 February that it "notes the ANC's shameless support" of the ejection decision, saying that "Israel was rightfully and legally in attendance". The SAZF called it "unconscionable" that the ANC's call to remove Israel came in the same week that South Africa was conducting military exercises with Russia. It called for "uniformity" in South Africa's foreign policy, saying the ANC was out of touch with what most South Africans and Africans think in this regard.

"I hope the African Union will see the importance of having Israel as an observer there, and we can continue our relations," the Israeli official said. "It's very unfortunate, South Africa's part in it. This isn't for the benefit of the organisation nor the member states. We expect more from countries with diplomatic relations with us."

It remains to be seen what action Israel or the AU might now take.

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**NICOLA MILTZ**

Pete Sickle, the chief executive of TAH, said he hoped SARU would comply by disclosing the relevant documentation and “proceed in the manner that’s required by both the law and the spirit in which international sport is

Earlier, a New Zealand High Court barrister, Ian Dunwoodie, filed a formal complaint with World Rugby in his personal capacity. The *SA Jewish Report* has formally requested information about the decision in terms of Section 53 of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA). SAFI has also written to SARU asking for the meeting minutes and the names of stakeholders that were consulted by SARU in making its decision. It has also submitted a PAIA request according to its spokesperson, Pamela Ngubane.



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# Lucky to be high and dry after Kruger floods

TALI FEINBERG

Benji Jassinowsky loves spending time in the Kruger National Park and even has a home there. But this month was the first time he has ever been trapped by raging rivers.

He and his wife, Zareen, were caught in the floods that ravaged the park in early February, both evacuating separately because of the rising waters.

“I was in Sabi Sands at the time with some friends, which has the Manyeleti River in front of it. Zareen was at our house in Malelane on the Crocodile River,” he says.

“On our arrival on 8 February, the Manyeleti was a dry river bed with a few pools in it, and by 9 February, it was a river. It was amazing to see. It turned into a major river, which covered all trees and bushes, reached about 30m in width, and was very deep. We were basically trapped in Sabi, as the only way out was to cross either the Manyeleti or Pungwe River.

“On 13 February, we were told that if the rain continued, we would be stuck there for a few more days,” he says. “We drove down to the river crossing to see a tractor that had been sent to repair the game fences had been washed off the low-level bridge by the force of the water. On 14 February, the rangers told us it had subsided, and being in a Land Rover Discovery, we might be able to get through and should be ready to leave if they called us.

“They then called us to get to the river, where a tractor was waiting to tow us through for safety reasons. It took us about three hours to do the 60-odd kilometres from Gowrie Gate to the tar road. Rivers and bridges were overflowing, and roads were destroyed, closed, or pure mud.

“One couple had to get home and chartered a helicopter to get out. Two couples – one from Mexico and one from New York – were at the lodge, and had to leave on the Wednesday to attend a wedding in Cape Town. Their trip to Sabi, after all the planning and expense, was effectively ruined by the rain, as most roads in Sabi were closed and driving off road to follow game wasn’t allowed.”

Meanwhile, his wife was at their house, which usually overlooks a peaceful Crocodile River far below. But after the rains, “the river rose, to the point that the Democratic Alliance councillor for the area arrived at the house on Sunday to advise that the river was at dangerous levels and they should pack their bags and be ready to evacuate should they hear a warning siren. She also advised that somebody should watch the river throughout Sunday night.” At that point, the river was a raging, muddy torrent, threatening to burst its banks.

But all turned out well, “and they left early on Monday morning. The river has since subsided slightly. However, all sand roads in southern Kruger remain closed, and the road between Lower Sabie and Skukuza is closed due to the road being washed away near Luby Luby. There was a landslide on Schoemanskloof Pass, which forced the road to be closed on the Sunday, and the alternate route was also closed for a few hours on the Sunday due to mudslides and road damage.”

Says Nadav Ossendryver, the chief executive of Latest Sightings, “The park covers an area of more than 19 000 square kilometres, and is home to numerous rivers, including the Limpopo, Olifants, and Sabie. The flooding hasn’t just affected tourists and park employees but also the wildlife that relies on these rivers for survival.

“The flooding is particularly problematic because many of the roads are made of sand and are prone to getting washed away or becoming impassable,” he says. “This has made it difficult for vehicles to traverse the park, leading to visitors becoming stranded, and park authorities are forced to close the roads for their own safety.”

Ossendryver was in the park with tourists on the day the heavy rains began. “I was on my way out the park, and it had been raining all night, but because nothing was flooding yet, all the sand roads were open.

“So I went on the sand roads, but we found ourselves sliding around every corner. Because we were so deep in the sand, in the middle of the park, far from any tar road, we were trying not to get stuck. We tried to get to the closest tar road. We got back okay, but it took a long time because we had to drive extra slowly. And outside the park, highways were going at 60km per hour. By that afternoon, when I was back in Joburg, the park had started flooding.”

Anton Gillis, the chief executive of Kruger Gate Hotel, says, “Fortunately, our hotel sustained minimal structural damage. From our hotel, guests could still enjoy game drives. Floods of this magnitude are few and far between, and watching the rivers in full flow is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.” However, he notes similar events took place back in 2003.

“Sadly, the rural villages surrounding the hotel where our staff live were affected. We’re assisting them to rebuild,” he says. “In

addition, we’re anticipating heavy rain this coming weekend. To prepare for it, we inform all our guests ahead of time about what they can expect, and we offer the option of changing their dates without penalty.

“From an infrastructure perspective, we ensure that no guests are allocated our low-meter-mark rooms. All furniture is off the floor, and sandbags are put all over the place to divert the water to drainage areas. We also ensure that our roads are accessible.”

Marlon Lewinsky owns Nyaleti Lodge & Villa, a bed and breakfast in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate between the Kruger and the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. He says they weren’t badly affected, and had many requests for last-minute bookings from tourists who couldn’t access their accommodation.

His father, Milton Lewinsky (85), lives



Damage caused by the flooding at the Kruger National Park

Mark Fox, who owns Foxy Crocodile Bush Retreat on the banks of the Crocodile River, told the *SA Jewish Report* on 20 February, “The storm seems to have blown over. The rivers have dropped, and the Crocodile Bridge is opening up for the first time in two weeks, so we don’t have to drive all the way to Malelane, which is a 100km round trip, and difficult for guests. The only gate that was accessible from where we are was Malelane. We’re not sure if any dirt roads will be open.

“The rain did quite a bit of damage to the lodge, but we have good erosion control, and it’s already repaired. The roads are really a mess in and around us. We’re also off the grid, so all the power failures didn’t affect us.”

He says his wife, Gail, “had bags packed and was ready to evacuate” but “I would have been happy to be stuck in the Kruger with the animals!”

“The devastation had an impact on all livelihoods



Benji Jassinowsky's vehicle being towed across the Pungwe River

close by, and Marlon had to fetch him by crossing a road that was flooded. He tested the floodwaters first before driving back through it with his elderly dad. A video of their crossing shows his Suzuki 4x4 making its way across as the water almost reaches the windows and windscreen.

around the Kruger,” he says. “People couldn’t get to work, everything came to a standstill. Half of our staff was on site, while others couldn’t get there. We all got stuck in, cleaned up, and looked after the guests. Everyone put in a massive effort to keep the lodge operating.”

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# Jew against Jew

There’s a frightening split among Israelis right now that’s deepening and growing. Former allies are becoming enemies. While one group of people are celebrating as the prime minister and his colleagues move to change fundamental laws and policies, his former allies are distraught about the dire implications for the country.

The president, Isaac Herzog, who hails from a family of Zionist leaders, called on the prime minister not to go ahead with legislating the judicial overhaul before holding discussions with those leaders opposed to his plans.

However, though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has agreed that there needs to be discussion, he’s not stopping the process for such talks. In fact, it seems the incumbent leadership has ignored the massive weekly protests, digging in its heels, and pushing forward with its agenda.

Obviously, it believes that it’s doing what’s right for the country, and that it has the people’s blessing to do so.

However, Israel is at fever pitch right now. We know Israeli politicians can be fiery, but on Wednesday this week, Knesset members Yitzhak Pindrus from the United Torah Judaism party and Israeli Labour Party leader Gilad Kariv publicly clashed at the Kotel before the Rosh Chodesh morning prayers. This was over the fact that Kariv was bringing a Sefer Torah to the women’s area.

Was this worth a public spat between fellow Knesset members? I think not. It just adds to the great divide that’s harming the country.

And for the first time, people are talking about the potential of a civil war in Israel. How horrifying! Jew against Jew is unconscionable, not least of all in the Jewish state.

Israel and the Jews have enough enemies in this world without being so self-destructive. It’s essential that the new government listens to its people, and ensures that it does what’s best for all its citizens. Surely, this isn’t negotiable and, whatever you may believe or whose side you take, everything possible must be done to ensure that Israel’s democracy is secured and its people are heard.

Now, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has joined many diaspora Jewish communities in calling on the Israeli government to rethink changing the Law of Return that allows all Jews to emigrate to Israel.

Once again, I cannot think of a time that we have pleaded with an Israeli government not to do something. I could be wrong, but it appears to be something no Jew does lightly in such a public way.

The impact of allowing only those who are halachically Jewish to make their home in Israel is massive, it will change the face of aliya and Israel’s growth and, ultimately, the connection between Israel and the Jewish world. We need to be united and not sweat the small stuff. We don’t need to be our own enemies, we have enough enemies as it is.

Speaking about Israel’s enemies, we find ourselves amid a diplomatic crisis following Sharon Bar-Li, Israel’s foreign ministry deputy director general for Africa, being forcibly removed from the African Union (AU) summit opening last weekend.

I find the misinformation and fake news about this being disseminated by anti-Israel lobby astonishing.

Africa4Palestine has even turned it into an antisemitic incident, which it clearly wasn’t. When nobody had said anything about this being an anti-Jewish thing, this nasty group took to social media and made it such with the statement that, “Israel said South Africa was antisemitic and extreme for kicking it out the AU. South Africa’s foreign minister responds.”

Its post shows a screengrab of foreign minister Dr Naledi Pandor having her say. Only, Africa4Palestine clearly didn’t listen to what she said, because she made no mention about anything like that. But I guess its agenda isn’t the truth, but whatever works for its ugly cause.

Having said that, that example may have been the most extreme, but it wasn’t the only one to twist the facts.

Many claimed Israel wasn’t invited and/or the wrong person was there to represent Israel and – the best one – Israel created the scene to cause trouble at the AU.

Have you ever tried to get into an international event like a government summit with the wrong accreditation? I’m a journalist. I have. It’s nigh impossible.

Sharon Bar-Li was invited, was accredited, and had the right name tag with her face and even the correct spelling of her name. There was a special seat for her, which she was sitting in when she was forcibly made to leave.

Why would Israel and Bar-Li lie about this? They have absolutely no reason to.

The other side, however, has every reason to be horribly ashamed and embarrassed about forcing someone who was legitimately there to leave.

So exactly who do you believe? To me, this is a no-brainer.

Once again, Israel is thrown under the bus because it’s the Jewish state that a minority of AU member countries – which unfortunately includes our own South Africa – don’t want to have to deal with.

It’s their right not to agree with everything Israel does. Hell, right now we’re not all on the same page with what’s going on politically in the country – and that’s okay. Like any country, Israel isn’t perfect.

However, when we’re talking about human rights, way too many countries involved in the AU or its observers – consider Iran – have far worse track records than Israel by hundreds of kilometres.

This isn’t a contest, but this diplomatic spat is about a country that has done so much good in Africa, intends to do far more, and simply wants to be acknowledged as a respected observer at the AU.

Surely those, like our own government, should see that to oust Israel from the AU isn’t beneficial to our continent? Oh well, we’ll watch this space to see what happens.



# Israel on slippery slope of state capture with judicial reforms



OPINION

PROFESSOR DAVID BILCHITZ

An independent judiciary played an important role, along with the public protector and the media, in preventing the collapse of South African constitutional democracy into a system designed simply to serve the corrupt interests of a political and business elite. Unfortunately, we see a similar pattern of state capture at play in Israel – the Israeli government is engaged in an unprecedented attempt to undermine its judicial system as well as any other breaks on abuses of power.

Israel’s first Knesset sitting was supposed to draft a constitution for the fledgling state. Due to a failure to agree on its core principles, it was decided to adopt one in stages, in the form of “basic laws”. This work has not been completed nearly 75 years on, and Israel’s constitutional framework remains partial and weak. A Knesset majority of just a single vote can change much of the constitutional structure of the country.

The right-wing coalition government, formed in the wake of the November 2022 elections, will introduce to the Knesset this week one of the most important proposed revisions to these basic laws – a bill that seeks to change the manner in which judges are appointed.

Similar to South Africa, but with a slightly different composition, Israel has an appointments committee tasked with selecting judges. It is finely balanced with nine members that, in essence, combine elected representatives with judges and representatives of the bar association. Appointments to the Supreme Court require seven members of the committee to agree. The current composition and rules, while not perfect, ensure that there’s a large measure of consensus on the merits of the appointee, and are designed to prevent individuals from being appointed purely based on a political or personal agenda. The proposed reform seeks to shift the balance on the committee to enable the coalition of the day to appoint whichever judges it wishes.

That is a terrible idea, and will potentially undermine the independence and legitimacy of the judges as well as the separation of powers. Part of the whole point of a judiciary

desperate to avoid conviction, and has shown himself willing to undermine the judicial system to ensure he is acquitted. If judges with personal connections to Netanyahu are appointed now and could eventually rule on an appeal of any conviction in the future, Israel is on that slippery slope to state capture at the highest level.

The second dimension is the ultra-Orthodox segment of the coalition. It has always adopted an approach to the state based on how to extract the maximum for its constituency. With a religious perspective that they know the ultimate truth and may impose it on others, the ultra-Orthodox MKs are not committed to individual freedom or allowing for diverse expressions of Jewish identity. In the early 1990s, the ultra-Orthodox parties prevented the basic law, which contains many important fundamental rights from recognising a right to equality. Courts have placed limits on their demands, and sought to balance interests in Israeli society: preventing gender segregation in buses, for instance, and requiring there to be a segment of the Kotel where women and men can pray together. Undermining the court system and separation of powers could remove constraints on their power, allowing for widespread gender segregation and religious coercion by the state.

The final and perhaps most worrying force is the moral corrosion of Israel caused by more than 55 years of occupation and the concomitant rise of the settlement movement and ultra-nationalist right. The famous Orthodox thinker and Torah commentator, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, spoke prophetically in 1968 of the “corrupting” influence of occupation and how Israel could not be called a democracy if it deprived more than 2.5 million Palestinians of civil and political rights. The traditional riposte has been that Israel is temporarily occupying these territories pending a peace agreement. Yet, when Prime Minister Netanyahu says that Israel intends to settle all areas of the West Bank, and there’s no good-faith effort on the part of Israel to end the occupation, the only conclusion is that the government intends to continue to rule over the Palestinian people there perpetually without granting them any political rights.

Moreover, to maintain the occupation, there will be a need for continued use of significant force, with large numbers of Israeli youth already becoming accustomed to staring down another people at the barrel of a gun. Any semblance of the rule of law is undermined by settlements, which are grave violations of international law and essentially legitimate theft and dispossession of Palestinian land, which some landowners have held for centuries. The erosion of basic democratic norms do not remain confined to the West Bank but cross over into Israel within the green line – consider how relatively little protest ensued when surveillance techniques used on Palestinians were turned on Israel’s own population during the COVID-19 pandemic. The judges in Israel have unfortunately also multiple failings in not addressing the excesses of occupation and failing to declare settlements illegal, yet, on occasion, they still place some constraints on what may be done. If the current constitutional “changes” succeed in ensuring the judiciary is made up wholly of ultra-nationalists, these limited restraints will disappear.

The upsurge of protest in Israel against these grievous “reforms” is heartening. They show us that there remain a sizeable number of people concerned to ensure that corruption – ideological and personal – does not become embedded in the foundations of the state. Economic and international pressure may yet succeed in weakening these measures. We should hope they do. One of the seven laws of Noah drawn from our Jewish tradition is that all peoples are supposed to establish independent courts of law. A state without an independent judicial system will neither be Jewish nor democratic.

• *Professor David Bilchitz is a professor of Fundamental Rights and Constitutional Law at the University of Johannesburg and the University of Reading, director of SAIFAC (the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, Human Rights and International Law), and vice-president of the International Association of Constitutional Law.*



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Photo: JTA via Getty Images



# Proudly part of Israel’s ‘madding crowd’

OPINION

DAVID E. KAPLAN



“What are you doing this Saturday night?” For many Israelis, the answer is simple and obvious.

It’s a long time since so many thousands upon thousands of Israelis collectively knew in advance how they were going to spend their Saturday nights. Whether in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Beersheba, Haifa, or my home city of Kfar Saba, it won’t be inside, visiting friends, or at restaurants or pubs, but outside to city crossroads screaming “*de-mo-cra-tia*” (democracy) and “*busha*” (shame), while holding aloft Israeli flags. These crossroads are a metaphor of where the country is today – at a crossroad. Anxious about the future character of their country as it threatens to mutate into something dreaded, people of all ages in chilly weather will stand for hours on the soles of their feet for the soul of their country.

I’m proud to be one of them.

People say, “What’s the point of protesting?”, “What do you hope to achieve?”, “They’re just going to ignore and proceed anyway. Why bother?”

Well, for one thing, a lot of important folk have joined in “bothering”. These include judges and jurists; Israeli generals and former security chiefs; bankers; titans of hi-tech; and leaders of Israel’s opposition parties, joined by world leaders like the presidents of the United States and France. All have one thing in common – they have Israel’s interests at heart. They can’t all be “misguided”, as I have been called.

On the contrary, more and more think the prime minister and his government are “misguided” in forcing the country down a dangerous road with a reckless driver behind the wheel. Whether reckless or proverbially carjacked with a gun to the head from coalition partners, the prime minister is seemingly disregarding all the warning signs, reminiscent of one Marie Antoinette, blinded to the reality outside the palace walls and arrogantly saying, “Let them eat cake.”

We know how that story ended!

And then – news flash – the state president, from his residence in Jerusalem, announced that he was going to address the nation.

When? We learned only hours away, at 20:00, in what his office called “a special address to the nation ... in fateful days.”

“Fateful days” in Israel is war talk, but we’re not at war. Or maybe we are – at war with ourselves.

We feel that we’re in uncharted terrain. The situation must be beyond serious if the president, knowing that he didn’t have the approval of the prime minister or any in his coalition to proceed, was still determined to do so. The state of the nation, he felt, demanded that he intervene. It was largely unprecedented in Israeli history for a president to address the nation and warn the people not against a foreign danger, but a danger from within and from the highest echelons of power – the prime minister and his coalition government!

People across Israel sat glued to their TV’s when President Isaac Herzog walked solemnly up to the podium.

I reflected as he began to speak that this was a far cry from when on 17 March 1949, Chaim Weizmann was sworn in as Israel’s first president. Recognising that his coattails were somewhat clipped by Ben Gurion and that his position was largely ceremonial, he was heard to quip cynically, “The only place they will allow me to poke my nose into is my handkerchief.”

Breaking the protocol of the presidency, Herzog was undaunted about poking his nose into Israel’s current affairs of state. On 12 February 2023, Israel’s state presidency



Former Minister of Defence, Benny Gantz, addresses protesters in Kfar Saba on 18 February

was as far removed from ceremonial as it has ever been in its history of 74 years.

In his prime-time address to the nation, the president made a passionate appeal to the government less to halt – noting that “change” and “reform” were legitimate pursuits – but more to suspend its hurried legislative process to pave the way for negotiations with the opposition on a broad compromise.

With deepening rifts between right and left, secular and devout, the president cautioned, “I feel – we all feel – that we’re a moment before a confrontation, even a violent confrontation. The powder keg is about to explode, and brothers are about to raise their hands against brothers.”

In his heartfelt address, he brought the full weight of his office in his appeal to a government hellbent on bulldozing its judicial

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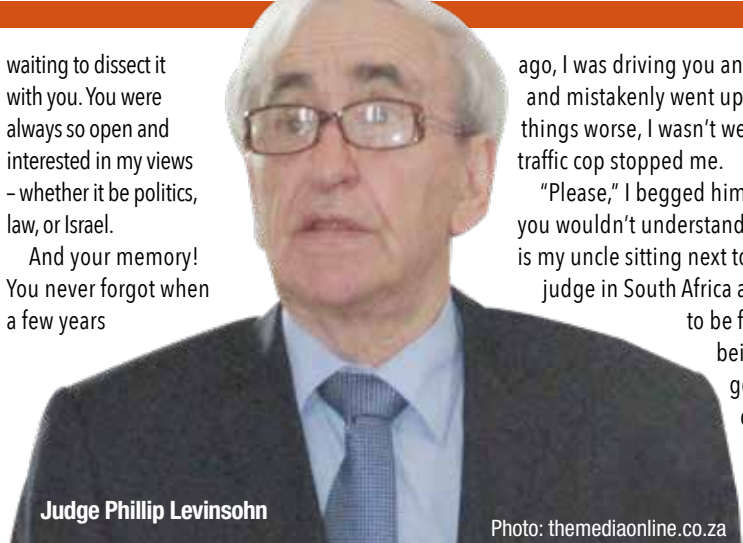
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# Esteemed judge and devoted uncle – farewell to Phillip Levinsohn

TRIBUTE

PAULA SLIER



**Judge Phillip Levinsohn**

Photo: themediaonline.co.za

But how do you pay tribute to a giant of a man whose heart and mind spoke volumes, even though he was often quiet and reticent?

Judge Phillip Levinsohn, a doyen of the Durban Jewish community and the South African legal world, passed away suddenly on Tuesday, 21 February.

Words fail me.

Death is always a shock, even when one expects it. But perhaps more so when one doesn't. This time last week, my uncle Phillip was busy as usual, a pile of papers and books his constant companions. Retirement didn't slow him down one bit. He went into hospital a few days ago – and never came out. Three hours before he died, I spoke to my aunt, who said he was due home that day, but had been given a sleeping tablet the previous night that had spiked his sugar levels. And then the call came ...

Phillip was hugely respected and deservedly so. Born in Alberton, he was admitted as an advocate in Natal in 1971, and took silk in 1988. Two years later, he was appointed to the Natal Provincial Division Bench, where he served as deputy judge president from 2006 until his retirement in 2009, completing almost 20 years of service. While at the Bar, he served as a member of the General Council of the Bar Board of Examiners and on the Bench, he became the longest-serving judge moderator of the Board of Examiners. He's the only South African judge to have been invited to continue as judge moderator after his retirement, a testament to his abiding interest in developing aspiring advocates. In recent years, he served as chairperson of the Press Council of South Africa, and it was during his trips to Johannesburg to adjudicate or mediate on matters that I'd most often see him.

Perhaps one of my cousins should be writing this. They knew just how much of a "mensch" he was and how much we all loved him. A private man, he was devoted to his family – his wife, four children, eight grandchildren, sister, and brother.

My last memory of my darling uncle was this past December, when we were all on holiday in Uvongo. He'd seated himself comfortably – for days – in front of the television set, remote control in hand, watching his beloved horse racing and only getting up to compete in his other love – online bridge competitions. He'd so successfully mastered the art of ignoring the incessant mindless chatter of six Jewish women surrounding him, we sometimes even forgot he was there – only to be reminded when he'd occasionally shout out a fact or memory that one of us had got wrong!

Uncle Phillip, how can this be true? I've been wanting to tell you that I finally bought, on your recommendation, Israeli journalist Caroline Glick's latest book, and was

waiting to dissect it with you. You were always so open and interested in my views – whether it be politics, law, or Israel.

And your memory! You never forgot when a few years

ago, I was driving you and Phyllis around in Israel and mistakenly went up a one-way street. To make things worse, I wasn't wearing a seatbelt and a traffic cop stopped me.

"Please," I begged him in poor Hebrew, thinking you wouldn't understand, "Don't give me a fine. This is my uncle sitting next to me. He's an important judge in South Africa and I will be so embarrassed to be fined in front of him!" Israel being Israel, the cop let me go and for years, you would chuckle about the incident.

Phillip loved Jewish history and Israel. He also had a keen sense of

personal history, always visiting his brother and, with him, their parent's graves when he was in Johannesburg. At the recent funeral of his brother-in-law, esteemed Durban eye doctor Gerald Phillips, he and I walked around the cemetery musing about the meaning of life. Who would have thought you'd be next? I don't quite recall what we said, but I remember we hugged and with a tear in your eye, you told me how much you missed Gerald. Now there are tears again, and it's all of us missing you. The world is a poorer place with you gone.

• Paula Slir is a seasoned journalist, and Phillip Levinsohn's niece.

## Exhibition reveals Germany's hidden 'queer' history

HANNA RESNICK

"Being unseen, unrecognised, invisible to others, is really the most existential form of disrespect," said German author Carolin Emcke. Emcke was quoted by Dr Mirjam Zadoff, the director of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism, who spoke about the omission of the persecution of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people from historical archives, particularly during the Holocaust.

Zadoff said the Nazi regime's discriminatory laws persisted for many decades after the war, ensuring that "the history of queer life remained untold". She was speaking at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 9 February.

Zadoff was in South Africa to share part of an international exhibition, "To Be Seen. Queer lives 1900-1950" that "narrates the diversity of queer life in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century and its subsequent eradication between 1933 and 1945".

The exhibition is in partnership with the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre and GALA Queer Archive, an organisation set up to preserve South African queer history and amplify LGBTQ voices.

This year's Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January 2023 was the first time that the German government officially recognised queer people as victims of the Holocaust, Zadoff said.

Most of what was previously documented about queer people, particularly homosexual men, covered their lives only during and after prosecution. Their own testimony and

personal documentation wasn't properly archived. "Much has disappeared or was deliberately never documented, written down, or visually recorded," said Zadoff. The exhibition is predominantly composed of items from the personal archives of family and friends of victims, collated by queer people to preserve the memory of those who came before them.

"We have chosen to document what existed before the Nazi regime destroyed it," said Zadoff. As far back as 1871, the German Empire's criminal code ruled that



Queer life in Germany before the Holocaust

men having sex with men or animals were punishable by imprisonment or loss of civil rights. This continued into the Nazi regime, under which gay men and trans women were classified as sexual deviants, along with paedophiles and zoophiles.

"Feminism, gender studies, or queerness were denigrated as a threat to traditional ideas of masculinity," said Zadoff.

However, in some cases, the stricter the laws, the more

the upswing in activism. In the early 20th century, there was an upsurge of queer culture in Germany. The Weimar Republic, which was known for its celebration of artistic freedom, allowed queer people to find self-expression.

"Nearly 200 subcultural venues are documented in the imperial capital between 1919 and 1933," Zadoff said, including 80 lesbian bars in Berlin alone. There was also dedicated infrastructure for "transvestites" (an outdated term describing cross dressers).

"Magazines would contain references to these meeting places as well as relevant contacts. They risked being banned and labelled as 'trash texts', so they would use euphemisms, like finding 'ideal friendship' or 'friendly exchange of ideas' to refer to lesbian and gay connections," Zadoff said.

As Germany became harsher towards those it deemed different, there was an alternate emerging scientific interest in gender and sexuality, and the

field of sexology became increasingly popular. In fact, some Jewish doctors who were denied jobs in traditional medical fields would work in sexology clinics.

Magnus Hirschfeld was a Jewish physician and "champion of decriminalisation" who founded the Institute of Sexology in 1919. "As a Jew, social democrat, and homosexual activist, he became a target of right-wing extremist and racist forces at an early stage." He aimed to create a refuge not only where queer people could get necessary medical treatment and counselling, they could also find work.

"With the advancement of sexology, new notions of the body, gender, and intimacy were finding expression in art and culture," said Zadoff. "Literature, theatre, film, and the visual arts offered an opportunity to question gender stereotypes and create new roles and body images." Art that emerged from this period provides a framework for what's perceived today as "queer aesthetics".

In 1933, when the Nazi party came into power, avant-garde works were denounced as degenerate and confiscated, banned, or destroyed, and only the work of artists who immortalised traditional gender images were permitted, Zadoff said.

Queer communities were widely dismantled, and queer relationships confined to private spaces. "During the first major Nazi raids against homosexuals on 20 October 1934, 145 men were arrested in Munich alone."

In June 1935, paragraph 175 of the German criminal code was intensified, ruling that acts between men bearing any sort of "sexual suggestion" were punishable. Within Nazi concentration camps, gay men were identified using the infamous pink triangle denoting "sexual deviants". Throughout the regime, "about 57 000 homosexual men were sentenced to prison, and between 6 000 and 10 000 of them were deported to concentration camps, of whom at least half were murdered".

Continued on page 13>>

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# Uprising around UCT a just cause, say students

TALI FEINBERG

From the outside, the protests at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in mid-February appeared to be needless disruption and the campus-wide shutdown added to questions about whether the chaos was justified.

Unlawful acts that were part of protest action on campus between 13 and 15 February included the blocking of roads, disruption of classes, and intimidation of non-protesting members of the UCT community. Peaceful protest also occurred, including a night vigil.

But South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) Western Cape chairperson and UCT Student Representative Council (SRC) Deputy Secretary General Erin Dodo believes the reasons for protesting are valid, although she doesn't condone violence, intimidation, or vandalism.

Funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for student housing is simply not sufficient, she says, especially in light of Cape Town's high living expenses. In addition, "Students came to university, they had residence offers, they went to their residences, and all of a sudden, they had no place to sleep. The way that it was described to us by management is akin to when flights sell too many tickets and at the gate, they ask you to get off the plane."

SAUJS put together 150 food packs for financially-excluded students or those going through the housing crisis. "They went in a minute. There are so many students struggling even to get basic nutrition," says Dodo.

In addition, "Students have been

financially excluded often at doctoral or masters level, or in their last year of study," she says. "They often have historic debt and can't afford to return or register. This is all due to cuts in funding. There's no scheme or long-term solution to assist them."

"The SRC decided to conduct a campus shutdown based on no student being left behind. So, if one student can't continue, then none of us should. This resulted in academic activity being moved online. We reached agreement with management that it couldn't record non-attendance because not all students have access to technology or Wi-Fi."

The shutdown led to more engagement with management. "It's been difficult to communicate with management," says Dodo. She's not actively protesting, but is involved behind the scenes.

"I understand the plight of students," she says. "They don't have any other method of voicing their concern because no-one will listen if they don't make a noise about it. In a lot of ways, they did achieve their goal of getting management's attention. I don't believe UCT can solve this alone. It goes to national and government level."

Students and parents have voiced their frustration and concerns about the situation. "The biggest thing I can suggest is empathy. This goes far beyond us and our university careers. I understand that students are frustrated, I would be too if I didn't look through a different lens. It's important to recognise our privilege, how lucky we are to have our community, and to understand that a lot of people don't have what we do."

The protests came against the backdrop of reports on 22 February that Vice-Chancellor

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng had resigned from the university.

"Many Jewish students have access to generators or people and places to help us to study online during load shedding, so I don't feel too affected," says Brad Gottschalk, a SAUJS committee member in his second year of a Bachelor of Arts. "It's just a bit annoying going online – there's nothing like in-person education. Although I don't agree with the way the protests have taken place, the reasons for protesting are just."

"I'm not sure that the logic of if the university won't let them on campus, they won't let anyone on campus is the right approach to take, but people who are in the middle of their courses aren't being let in. They want to do drastic things to get the university's attention. They also feel like there's no allyship from the student body. They aren't inherently harmful, and it's a lot less violent than in previous years."

In a statement on 19 February, UCT's management said it would commence face-to-face teaching on 20 February 2023. "While the right to lawful protest must always be upheld, it's equally important to act when any incidents are outside the boundary of what's legitimate protest action," its statement read.

"For this reason, the Western Cape High Court was approached for an interim interdict in order to restore order on campus and protect the rights of all in our UCT community. The interdict requires lawful conduct, and provides that law enforcement agencies enforce the court order. UCT will always



Protesters holding a night vigil at the University of Cape Town (UCT)

A separate statement from the UCT executive notes that, "The university has taken all reasonable measures to ensure that as many academically eligible students as possible receive funding support. This has been difficult to attain, given that UCT is operating on a deficit budget this year, and that the cumulative historic student debt currently stands at R413 million. The university has established a partnership with a financial institution to provide funding on favourable terms. Other banks have recently made funding available to designated students. This effort resulted in R1.1 million being made available to clear 2022 debt."

They said there had also been additional progress with regard to accommodation. "The university has successfully made arrangements with an off-campus service provider to accommodate a specific group of students without the required three-months-upfront deposit."

"This is in addition to previous measures where students who were in vacation accommodation were allowed to remain in residence while they were engaging with the finance department to reduce their fee debt or with their relevant faculty on Readmission Appeals Committee decisions affecting them. The university also provided emergency accommodation to a number of students in spite of them not yet having settled their debt."

• The SA Jewish Report reached out to NSFAS for comment, but didn't receive a response by the time of going to print.





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# As Ukraine war grinds on, world feels the chill

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD

Exactly a year ago, on 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Well, it reinvaded. It had been conducting military operations in eastern Ukraine unabated since 2014. Russia’s “annexation” of Crimea was recognised by only nine countries, including Cuba, North Korea, and Venezuela. On the anniversary of the current invasion, it’s important to look back at the major effects of this war around the world, including on South Africa and Israel.

On the ground, it has been violent and devastating. According to the Embassy of Ukraine in South Africa, Russian casualties in this war amount to about 142 000 people. The embassy also said Russia had lost 3 310 tanks, 6 545 all-purpose vehicles, 298 aircraft, 287 helicopters, and 18 warships or boats in the past year. According to the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), about 7 100 Ukrainians have been killed with more than 11 000 injured. The UNHCR also said about 19% of the Ukrainian population had been displaced, about 18.6 million had left the country, and 10.3 million had returned to Ukraine.

Ukraine’s infrastructure has been laid waste by Russian bombardment, with electricity supply in the freezing winter months especially targeted. Ukrainians have remained resilient and determined to fight for their freedom and sovereignty. Arms supplied by Western states, particularly members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have certainly helped, as Russia launches a new spring offensive. To the surprise of many, Ukraine wasn’t overrun in days by a Russian *blitzkrieg*. With both sides still convinced they can win on the battlefield, negotiations look a long way off. This war is likely to continue throughout this year.

The conflict has also shown that not all countries see the world the same way. While Western states and their friends have condemned Russia, instituted tough sanctions, and sought to isolate the Kremlin, many in the Global South have tried to sit on the fence or supported the Kremlin. About half of all African states haven’t supported four Western-backed United Nations General Assembly votes on the conflict since March 2022, through either abstaining or not being present to vote.

They claimed they are non-aligned, not wanting to be drawn into someone else’s conflict. With this war pushing up the global prices of fuel, fertiliser, and food, no region has remained unaffected. Africa has borne the brunt more than others. This posture of non-alignment is South Africa’s official line, and indeed, it has supported its BRICS partner Russia and abstained on all four UN General Assembly votes. South Africa has hosted senior Russian and American diplomats in the past six months.

But increasingly, it looks like Pretoria has taken sides. Apart from a single statement calling on Russia to remove its troops from Ukraine on the first day of the war, South Africa has refused to condemn Russia. Senior government and military officials toasted the Russian invasion at a party on 24 February 2022. The

defence minister attended a security conference in Russia last August. And from 17 to 27 February 2023, South Africa is conducting naval exercises with Russia and China off the KwaZulu-Natal coast. These combat drills will coincide with the anniversary of the invasion and will attract a lot of attention to South Africa. The government has maintained that these exercises are an expression of sovereignty, and that South Africa will choose its friends as it sees fit. It’s likely that Russia will use them as a massive propaganda opportunity to show that it’s not isolated or crippled by Western sanctions.

Israel, too, has trodden carefully. It’s home to more than a million Russian-speakers, many making aliya in the 1990s as communism crumbled. There are deep family ties with Jews remaining in both Ukraine and Russia. Before his brief stay on the opposition benches, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Russian President Vladimir Putin more than any other world leader. After Russia’s intervention in the Syrian conflict in 2015, it has been important for Israel to keep in Russia’s good books as Israel co-ordinates attacks on Hezbollah and Iranian targets in Syria and Iraq. This made former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett reluctant to call out Putin, while his then-foreign minister, Yair Lapid, was more publicly supportive of Ukraine’s plight, and more so once he became prime minister. Israel was playing a delicate double game.

Iran supplying arms to Russia has further muddled the waters, but Israel has consistently refused to give or sell weapons to Ukraine. The new right-wing Israeli government has said it would “talk less” on the conflict, and Netanyahu has stated he would consider a mediation role if asked by both sides.

Not to be forgotten is how Israel took in more than 15 000 new *olim* from Ukraine since the start of the war, according to *The Jerusalem Post*. They are mainly women and children as fighting-age men are conscripted to the Ukrainian army. About 28 charter flights carrying Ukrainian *olim* have arrived in Israel. It has also received thousands of *olim* from Russia in this period.

The conflict has jolted the international system.

The UN Charter has been abrogated by Russia invading a sovereign state. Does this mean that other aggrieved countries can simply redraw borders through force, unprovoked, in future? The UN Security Council has been deadlocked due to the rivalry between the West and Russia and China for several years. This is now exacerbated by one of the veto-wielding countries – Russia – being a belligerent. Russia has accused the West of egregious double-standards.

As this war grinds on with no end in sight, the world will continue to feel the blowback

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



# “Don’t forget us”, Jews of Ukraine urge one year on

TALI FEINBERG

The life of Sana Nelina, who grew up in the Jewish community of Odesa, was forever changed on 24 February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, unleashing a war that’s still raging one year on.

Nelina has called on the world not to forget the horror that she and her fellow Ukrainians have endured, and to help put an end to an invasion that should never have happened. Living on her own in the Ukrainian port city, Nelina, who is in her 40s, doesn’t know what the next second, minute, hour, or day will bring for her or her people.

“This year taught us many new skills – like how to distinguish the sounds of a missile from our air defence,” she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “We can find the safest places in every corner of Odesa. They say that there are no more children in Ukraine because every child had to grow up fast. They lost almost three years of their childhood because of COVID-19, and today, they are living through a war.”

South African filmmaker Ronnie Apteker was living in Kyiv when war broke out. He had to flee the city in the first week of the war with his wife and toddler son. Just before the anniversary of the invasion, he wrote on his blog, “We were in shock for a long time. This evil war sometimes feels like it will never end, and then there are days where we are filled with optimism. We believe we’ll return to our home but we have no clue when that might be, and that’s an unsettling feeling.”

Apteker and his family are now in South Africa. “I sometimes think of my stuff in our apartment in Kyiv. I was hoping the Bunster [his nickname for his child] would one day explore some of these things. But what if we cannot return? Do we start again?”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from the Joint Distribution Committee office where she was able to connect to the internet, Nelina said, “I’m not sure if there’s power in my apartment. Last month, we had power for two to four hours a day. This means you need to be ready to choose what you need more: to charge your cellphone and laptop; do laundry or cook; do housework or homework with your children; warm yourself; or fill bottles with water. You don’t know exactly when you will have those two hours because there’s no exact timetable.”

As her elderly father lives in Mykolaiv, two hours from Odesa, which was bombed during the first days of the war, she hasn’t been able to see him since the war began.

Though Nelina has stayed in Ukraine, many Jews have fled. “More than 70 000 people have come to Israel as a result of the war. It’s a staggering number,” says Dov Lipman, former Knesset member and the founder and chief executive of the organisation Yad L’Olim. “We’re working morning, afternoon, and night to help these *olim* with bureaucracy, to find a place to live, and to provide them with clothes, food, and household items.”

One unique role they play is helping professionals who are now refugees get licences, accreditations, and jobs in their field. They also host Hebrew conversation clubs for those who cannot go on *ulpan* because there aren’t enough *ulpanim* for refugees to attend.

He says *olim* are still coming but these days less from Ukraine and more from Russia and even some from Belarus. “Hebrew and housing are their main challenges. The government has given grants to help them financially and we’re working hard to make sure that they are renewed.”

Ilya Bezrucho, a Kyiv-based entrepreneur and representative of the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry in Ukraine, is one of the Ukrainian Jews living in Israel, “but it’s a temporary solution”, he says. “My parents are still in Ukraine and not willing to leave.”

Bezrucho has spent “90% of this year of war in Ukraine”, and says “there’s no safe place in Ukraine:

a rocket attack on your city or street is just a matter of time. Once, I felt safe in Lviv [where he fled to from Kyiv when the invasion began], but the next day, rockets hit the gas station a few kilometres away. I thought Kyiv [where he returned after a few months] was secure, but on 10 October, rockets hit the city centre, killing at least nine people.”

While he was in Kyiv, his daily routine didn’t change from peace time. “The only thing that changed was that I carried all my documents in a backpack and had a bulletproof vest and helmet in my trunk in case of heavy shelling or any other urgent situation.” He and his family plan to return to Kyiv in the spring.

“The most challenging thing is to accept that the life we had before 24 February 2022 will never again be possible,” Bezrucho said. “I’ve met dozens who joined the volunteer movement to help needy people. We assist the army and work together, creating initiatives to make Ukrainian victory a reality.”

On this anniversary, he says, “Partner with Jewish initiatives supporting Ukrainian refugees and people in the country. Explain to your politicians that the war in Ukraine isn’t just a local conflict. It may lead to famine in other parts of the world, including Africa, because Ukraine isn’t just the breadbasket of the world, but a prominent supplier of a number of food products.”

Rav Meyer Tzvi Stambler, the chairperson of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, estimates that there were 400 000 Jews in Ukraine before the war. “About 30 000 left at the beginning of the war, but many have come back,” he says. He never left, although his family went to Israel until the end of the high holidays last year. “We’re now all at home in Dnipro.”

He describes the situation as tolerable, but says, “Our most important work is to help people survive. Every Jewish family needs support. People who used to give *zedakah* are now asking for food packages.”

Keeping Jewish life alive is also a crucial part of his work, and “we have baked *hamentashen* for Purim, and will be distributing 50 000 *mishloach manot*.” They are also importing grape juice for Pesach, and distributing *seder* kits. “Our job used to be help Jews get back to their roots – only about 15% to 20% of our work was humanitarian. Now it’s the other way around.”

Life continues to be in limbo for Apteker. “We’re leaving South Africa at the end of April, and heading to Wroclaw in Poland,” he writes. “There’s a big Ukrainian community there and we can go to Kyiv by train. We believe we’ll be back in Kyiv by autumn. And if this war doesn’t end this year, we’ll have to think what to do. February 24 will be behind us soon, and I’m confident that Ukraine will still be there. Come May, we’ll hopefully be there too. I can’t wait.”

To support the Jews of Ukraine, visit [www.fjc.org.ua/donate](http://www.fjc.org.ua/donate)



Photo: Yad L'Olim



Ukrainians have remained resilient and determined to fight for their freedom and sovereignty



# Rock-solid Daniel conquers cancer and aces matric

NICOLA MILTZ

When you chat to Joburg teenager Daniel Rock, 19, you would never guess that he has been to hell and back. A few times. He's funny, witty, loves animals, computers, playing video games, reading about the stock market, and contemplating his future. Sounds like many 19-year-olds. However Daniel's story is different. In spite of beating cancer three times and staring death in the face, Daniel recently completed matric, and he did so with a bachelor's pass against all odds. Last year, he experienced the first year uninterrupted by hospital visits and chemotherapy since he was diagnosed 11 years ago.

"We're over the moon," said his mother, Michelle, who said her son has made the family so proud.

"There was a time when we were told that he wouldn't make it. Daniel pushed through the worst of times imaginable, and continues to surprise us with his strength and resilience," she said.

At the age of eight he had a seizure on the way home from a December holiday. Followed by headaches and discomfort, it was the start of a medical journey through hell as doctors diagnosed him with a brain tumour. The once happy-go-lucky little boy who loved playing with his twin brother, Michael, and big sister, Nicole, had no idea what lay before him. News of his condition shattered his family's once perfect world and sent shock waves through the close-knit community where he lived, touching hearts far and wide as it spread through the community and abroad.

He first had brain surgery in 2011. The community closely followed his progress but sadly, his cancer returned two years later, plunging the family into a second wave of grief with a new diagnosis of medulloblastoma – a fast growing cancerous brain tumour that starts in the cerebellum, the lower back part of the brain. This required specialised chemotherapy treatment available overseas.

It resulted in the family being split between South Africa and New York City, as Daniel received intensive treatment at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He was treated there for a year, and spent 20 weeks in intensive care. The treatment was so intense, he faced numerous health complications and debilitating side effects. It was a surreal world of endlessly beeping machines, multiple organ failure, feeding tubes, MRIs, scans, stem-cell transplants, blood transfusions, and continuous fear and uncertainty.

"In spite of this, he never complained and was always positive," said Michelle.

He went to New York twice for life-saving treatment.

To boost his moral during his second visit, a close family friend arranged for Daniel's role model, radio presenter Darren "Whackhead" Simpson who was then at 94.7 Highveld Stereo, to visit him at his hospital bed in the United States. A moving radio interview was broadcast, capturing the hearts of thousands of listeners as the two struck up a conversation. Simpson and the radio station helped to arrange flights and accommodation for Daniel's father and siblings to travel to New York to visit him and his mother after not having seen each other for eight months.

Daniel's cancer returned for the third time in 2018, followed by more invasive procedures and medical trials.

He came back to South Africa in 2018, and a year later, the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to his family, Daniel missed three years of school and many friendship-building opportunities.

However, he put his mind to his studies last year, and came out tops.

Battle scarred but brave and determined, Daniel relishes his time at home, cancer-free, surrounded by his family and pets.

"I feel great, I've come through a dark tunnel, and I feel good now," Daniel told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He describes the past few years as "blurry", in which he had bouts of homesickness and loneliness but he said, "I'm so thankful to my family. I cannot imagine what they were going through. In many ways, it was harder for them."

"I don't think I would have got through it all without the love and support of my community and all the different medical staff and patients who were my family away from home. I'm particularly grateful to the Chai Lifeline counsellors, who volunteered hours of time to keep me company and entertained," he said.

Daniel now volunteers at the SPCA, combining his



Twin brothers Michael and Daniel Rock

love for animals and his wish to give back in his way to the countless people who helped him and his family along his journey.

His twin brother, Michael, said, "When I was 11 years old, my understanding about what was going on in my brother's life was vague. All I knew is that Dan had lost his hair, and his body had become fragile. My twin brother, who I used to go everywhere with, became bedbound and left me to face the world alone as we entered the hardest chapter of our lives. Never did I think we would be where we are today. I'm so proud of Dan."

His sister, Nicole, said she has learnt so much from her brother, describing him as one of the strongest and bravest people she knows.

"Being the oldest sibling, I felt a lot of pressure to try keep everyone's spirits up and my brothers positive. My family was split across two continents, trying to stay as one unit. Dan never complained, and he was actually the one holding us all together. Through his bravery, he has shown us what true strength is," she said.

She recalls one time when things were really bad.

"I was 14, on Bnei Akiva summer camp while my family was in New York with Dan. I had no idea what they were going through, but I was pulled out of camp 10 days in and was confused and scared. I flew alone to New York City, not knowing what had transpired. When I got there, I found Daniel on a ventilator in intensive care, and I thought we were there to say goodbye. That was nine years ago. Growing up, Dan spent more than half of his life in and out of hospital. It was extremely difficult for all of us, and I had to grow up a lot quicker than most of my friends. We have all overcome so much as a family, and I'm so proud of Dan for achieving a matric bachelor's pass and always remaining optimistic. I can't wait to see Daniel take on the world."

"My experience has strengthened me and taught me that anything is possible," Daniel said. "I'm excited for the future."

## Proudly part of Israel's 'madding crowd'

>>Continued from page 7

overhaul and imposing it on a highly polarised Israeli society. In urging a pause to the judicial shakeup, the president proposed a five-point plan.

The immediate reaction from the government wasn't encouraging. Justice Minister Yariv Levin, who is the prime minister's point man to drive this judicial overhaul, sounded more like the proverbial Marie Antoinette when he shrugged off the president's appeal on Channel 13, saying the legislation wouldn't be halted "even for a minute".

Herzog reiterated his calls to calm public discourse around his proposal. Where is this leading?

Well, if the government was ignoring its state president, not so former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who called for a presidential committee on the government's proposed judicial "reforms" that should begin with a 60-day freeze on all legislation connected to it. Addressing the Knesset, Lapid said, "Sixty days is the blink of an eye in the life of a democracy", and called for a "proper process" for how such a committee would work. "We waited 74 years. Nothing will happen if it takes another few weeks, during which we will save the nation of Israel from a terrible crisis."

Also positively responding to the president's call to save the nation from "a terrible crisis" were 400 ex-senior security officials, including former heads of the police, Shin Bet, and Mossad, who signed a letter urging Herzog not to agree to any laws that contradicted Israel's core democratic values as part of his efforts to mediate a compromise. The letter reiterated the president's concern that the proposed legislative steps would "constitute a judicial revolution that will cause damage for generations to come".

Signatories to the letter of appeal include former Shin Bet Chief Nadav Argaman; former Mossad directors Tamir Pardo and Danny Yatom; former Police Commissioner Shlomo Aharonishki; and former National Security Adviser Uzi Arad.

Is this government even ready to listen?

If not, it will probably also ignore the full-page personal appeal appearing in Israeli newspapers addressed to Herzog by seven Jewish Nobel Laureates – six of whom are Israeli. They are Professor Aaron Ciechanover (2004 chemistry); Professor Avram Hershko (2004

chemistry); Professor Daniel Kahnerman (2002 economics); Professor Roger Kornberg (2006 chemistry); Professor Michael Levitt (2013 chemistry); Professor Aryeh Warshel (2013 chemistry); and Professor Ada Yonath (2009 chemistry). Their appeal is based on the negative impact Netanyahu's government's proposed legal "reform" will have on scientific research and higher education.

"We call on the president of the state of Israel to take a clear stance against the proposed changes, on the prime minister to return to the positions he himself advocated until recently, and on the members of the Knesset to hear our voice and halt the proposed changes to the legal system," they wrote.

How is it that Israel – the "Start-up-Nation" – prides itself on being such a small country with so many Nobel laureates, but when the time comes that these same prized laureates warn the country, this government ignores them because it believes it knows better?

These are troubling times if every Saturday night in the calendar is blocked off to go and protest. After seven consecutive weekends of protest, at the latest demonstration in Kfar Saba, addressed by former deputy prime minister and former Defence Minister Benny Gantz, it was announced that almost a quarter of a million Israelis were joining in the demonstrations at more than 60 sites across Israel. This includes the almost 135 000 people in Tel Aviv, who marched from Dizengoff Center to Kaplan Street.

Where to next?

The setting reminds me of two great medieval armies standing ready on a European battlefield, only a brief gallop apart.

To avoid an impeding societal clash, we hope the wise appeal of the president will prevail in time.

Is Israel unravelling? There are enough people who love it to ensure it doesn't. In the meantime, the protesters will continue and I will be among them as a proud Zionist.

• *David E. Kaplan is a freelance writer, public speaker, editor of magazines, and the cofounder of multi-media platform Lay of the Land, in which this article first appeared.*

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# War and protest: the major trends for 2023



HARRY JOFFE

With so many “black swan” events having occurred in the past few years, most commentators are staying away from predictions this year. Instead, they offer a list of major trends to watch out for in 2023. Here are my big five:

### Ukraine and Russia

Obviously this is still the major issue to watch in 2023. It has become the core of all things risky and troublesome in the world. First, it’s a primary source of inflation – although, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to that as well – in the world today through food shortages and the energy crisis it has caused. This has led to a sharp rise in food and energy prices, and although energy prices have come down recently, they are still high. The resulting high inflation has led to instability, riots, and strikes throughout the world, from Europe to South America. In addition, it has led to increasing global geopolitical tension, as the war has, in effect, now become a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) versus Russia proxy war, with NATO increasingly providing Ukraine with more sophisticated weapons. The most recent addition to Ukraine’s arsenal has been the supply of German, American, and British tanks, although the exact number is still not entirely clear.

The general consensus is that the current situation will remain until the spring, although it’s by no means quiet in the east of Ukraine, with fierce fighting and heavy casualties, but there are as yet no major offensives from either side. This will probably change in the spring as the weather improves. Everyone is predicting a major Russian offensive, which is why there has been such a rush to supply Ukraine with Western tanks in time. No one is sure, however, what the outcome of the spring offensive will be, and which side will emerge stronger. The most likely case is a continuing stalemate, but of course, that’s by no means certain. The spring offensive will be a key trend to watch.



Turkey’s incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

### Iran

The past year has been a difficult one for Iranian leadership. The huge protests that erupted over the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman arrested for not wearing her headscarf properly, posed the biggest threat to its authority since it took power. It has managed to quell the protests by arresting nearly 20 000 people and sentencing dozens to death. University campuses, which were the centre of the protest, have become heavily guarded.

Iran’s economy, however, is in a shocking state. Inflation keeps rising. When the government inevitably has to reduce its petrol subsidy and prices of that key

commodity rise, there will, no doubt, be renewed protest. Iran is key to the geopolitics of the Middle East, and instability there affects the whole region. Ongoing protests there are a key trend to watch.

### Turkey

Turkey borders important countries in the Middle East, Europe, and the Black Sea. It’s a vital strategic country. It has also now become key to NATO expansion, by in effect holding veto over the accension of Finland and Sweden to NATO. It has played an important role as an intermediary to both sides in the Ukraine war.

Turkey is meant to hold an election in May, although there’s now talk of it being postponed due to the devastating earthquake that hit the country recently. If the election goes ahead, and is fair, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan might lose, although the opposition has yet to unite around one credible candidate. If the opposition is able to put forward a dynamic and popular candidate, Erdoğan will face a serious challenge for the first time in many years. If the election does take place, May will be a very interesting month in Turkey, and another key trend to watch.

### Israel

As has been discussed in numerous articles in the *SA Jewish Report*, Israel is going through a serious constitutional struggle between the executive and the judiciary. The proposed parliamentary “override law”, which will fundamentally overhaul Israel’s judicial system and which seems designed to directly protect Shas leader Aryeh Deri, has caused great unhappiness in Israel. The proposals have even led to the Bank of Israel as well as financial behemoth JP Morgan and some Israeli hi-tech executives warning that the proposed reforms will have a negative impact on the Israeli economy. Even more worryingly, a number of corporates

have begun to move their money out of Israel in preparation for the proposal’s potential passage through the Knesset. Many Western leaders have also voiced their concern about the effect of the proposals on Israeli democracy.

The proposals and their passage through the Knesset are an important trend to watch this year. It’s hoped that common sense will prevail, and that those in power will ensure that the Israeli judiciary remains independent and an important guardrail against the excesses of parliamentary authority.

### Africa

Finally, closer to home, some interesting trends in Africa include elections in Nigeria on 25 February, the biggest economy and most populous country in Africa, with an extremely fractious democracy. What’s interesting about this election is that one of the candidates, Peter Obi, a wealthy businessman and not from one of the two main parties, is riding high in the polls and getting huge support on social media and among Nigeria’s youth. If he wins, it could lead to a new trend in Africa of wealthy, independent businessmen winning elections, just as happened in Lesotho last year. It could also be a portent of what might happen in South Africa’s elections next year, with Herman Mashaba’s party also rising fast in the polls.

There are also elections this year in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with a candidate who had a Jewish father showing strong support in the DRC. These three elections this year will set the trend for whether Africa is able to change from its current sclerotic leadership to something more dynamic, effective, and energetic.

2023 promises to be no less interesting and unpredictable than 2022!

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

## Board joins outcry against changing Israel’s Law of Return

>> Continued from page 1

status quo on religious affairs that could affect the diaspora,” the Jewish leaders wrote. “Any change in the delicate and sensitive status quo on issues such as the LOR or conversion could threaten to unravel the ties between us.

“We know that the unity of the Jewish people is as important to you as it is to us,” they wrote. “It’s this unity that explains the miracle of our survival as a people and as a nation for more than 3 000 years. It allowed us to maintain a strong and cohesive sense of belonging to each other and to our common national home.

“We expect to be part of any future discussions or dialogue regarding possible changes to the status quo,” they wrote. “We’re determined to work together with you and your government to ensure the continued prosperity of the entire Jewish people, and we’re sure that together, we can find respectful, inclusive, and constructive solutions to every challenge at hand without harming the delicate fabric that holds us together as one united people.”

The coalition deals signed by the incoming government agreed to make some change to the LOR. The government is required to form a committee to hash out a Bill to amend the LOR and get it passed before the budget is approved by the end of March. If such a change is introduced, an estimated three million people around the world – about two-thirds of them in North America – would lose their right to aliya.

Says South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) National Chairperson Rowan Polovin, “A key mandate of the SAZF is the promotion and facilitation of aliya for South African Jewry. We have closely followed discussions about potential changes to Israel’s LOR, and are in ongoing contact with our partners at the JAI, the Israeli foreign ministry, and ministry of diaspora on this issue.

“We note that, at present, no substantive legislative processes have been initiated by the Israeli government. Should these begin, we will, in consultation with our affiliates, make the South African Jewish community’s views known

to the Israeli government and public as we have done previously on numerous issues that affect the relationship between Israel and our community.

“We note Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen’s recent letter to diaspora communities, in which he references discussion about the LOR and says, ‘You are our brothers and sisters, and nothing is more important than placing your concerns and reservations at the top of our agenda.’”

JAI representative and director of the Israel Centre, Liat Amar Arran, says, “We support the JAI letter and we’re glad the SAJBD is supporting it and standing with us.”

The rabbinic team of the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation says it’s “deeply concerned” that changes to the LOR would “threaten the Jewish status of millions of Jews that live in Israel and the diaspora, and would severely harm the relationship between Israel and the Jewish world”.

“This will put Jew against Jew, something no-one wants to see. The Temple was destroyed for similar attitudes,” says Rabbi Malcolm Matitiani. “How will this serve or help the Jewish people?” asks Rabbi Greg Alexander. “All it does is make more suspicion, hatred, and fear. This contradicts basic Jewish values.”

In 1970, Israel’s LOR granted automatic citizenship not only to Jews, but to their non-Jewish children, grandchildren, and spouses, and to the non-Jewish spouses of their children and grandchildren. This addition not only ensured that families wouldn’t be broken apart, it also promised a safe haven in Israel for non-Jews subject to persecution because of their Jewish roots.

Eliminating the “grandchild clause” would primarily affect would-be immigrants from the former Soviet Union, largely due to cultural norms in those countries in which ethnicity is patrilineal. This probably explains why the Likud party is hesitant to change the law, as many of its voters hail from the former Soviet Union and support the LOR in its current form.

## Soweto entrepreneur churns blue and white for Israel

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Soweto based entrepreneur Thando Makhubu is known for starting an ice cream business three years ago on just R700 in social-grant payments. Now, the enterprising businessman has teamed up with the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) to make Israel-themed ice cream to celebrate the Jewish state’s 75th anniversary.

Makhubu’s customised pale blue and white ice creams were recently served at his premises to representatives of SAFI and the South African Zionist Federation to kickstart celebrations of Israel’s anniversary. “This is a start of a number of cultural events around this theme that SAFI will be running this year,” said Bafana Modise, SAFI communication and media liaison.

Makhubu is a fan of Israel. “He’s a Christian who supports peace in the Middle East, and he’s fascinated by Israel’s innovation,” Modise said.

Makhubu’s extraordinary story began in August 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. His venture, according to *SowetanLive*, started out as an experiment. Makhubu applied for a social grant of R350 in March 2020, and received the first payment in May, which he used on his family.

He then saved his next two pay-outs (for June and July), and used the R700 to buy ice cream-making tools. He started selling the product to friends and family, and after some well-known people arrived to support him and posted about it on social media, word spread about his product. From the initial outlay, Makhubu made a profit of about R5 000, which he

used to buy more stock.

“Since alcohol was banned at the time, people bought a lot of ice cream,” Makhubu told *SowetanLive*.

But Makhubu, who operates the business from his mother’s house, became really famous when he was mentioned in a tweet by President Cyril Ramaphosa in response to the State of the Nation last year. “Mr Thando Makhubu from Soweto received the R350 grant for seven months last year and saved it to open an ice cream store that now employs four people,” Ramaphosa tweeted, causing an avalanche of response.



Israel-themed ice creams in honour of the Jewish state’s 75th anniversary



Thando Makhubu

However, Makhubu’s business has since been struck by load shedding, and he’s struggling to stay open. He’s using a generator, but it adds to his costs, and he’s investigating alternative sources of energy such as purchasing an inverter and solar options. SAFI assisted him by donating material for ice cream and funding.



# Failure to launch or happy family nest?

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It's not uncommon to find adult children in their 20s, 30s, and in some cases older, still living with their parents. Whether it's through financial necessity, safety concerns, avoiding loneliness, or a deeper issue, this phenomenon shows no signs of abating.

Living with parents into adulthood is relatively common in South Africa, where students usually attend university locally unless they study abroad and many remain at home once they've graduated. But this trend has become increasingly prevalent overseas too, in some cases fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. Though some families thrive in such living situations, others face increased conflict or growing concern about adult children becoming unable or unwilling to enter the real world – a phenomenon known as “failure to launch”.

Clinical psychologist Liane Lurie says there are a myriad reasons for staying at home. “On a religious level, the norm may be to stay in your parents' home until you're married and ready to begin a life of your own,” she says. “The security and familiarity offered by your family may also feel easier than being on your own as you decide what's next.”

Financial concerns often come into play. “Young adults may want to build themselves up financially and save before venturing into the establishment of their own lives. They may also doubt their capacity to make it on their own in the big, wide world.” They may either return home or decide not to leave out of a sense of duty and loyalty to their ageing parents, or for fear that their presence is keeping their marriage together, she says. “Their parents, in turn, may also encourage this move to stave the potentially dreaded feelings of an empty nest.”

Michal Stein\*, 35, who lives with her mother and 41-year-old brother in their family home, says it's due to a combination of these factors. “The arrangement suits everybody. It's easy and comfortable and means I'm able to save money,” she says. “I also feel like it would be lonely for me to live on my own.”

Stein is a natural homemaker who contributes towards groceries, does all the cooking, and helps with cleaning. “I enjoy cooking and looking after my family until I have my own,” she says. “I also don't have to worry whether my mom, who is a widow, is ok.” Though Stein is happy at home, she does say that a lack of privacy and having to talk to someone when she simply wants to be quiet can be challenging.

“I look forward to moving out and having my own home when I get married,” she says, pointing to a common factor in adult children staying at home for

longer, especially in the Jewish community. The only other scenario in which Stein sees herself leaving would be if she were to emigrate.

Some parents feel that the closeness they build with their children in such a living situation can have an impact on their decision whether or not to emigrate or allow them to build treasured memories before they do spread their wings. “For us, the longer we can keep them safe with us, making lasting memories together, the better,” says Eliana Weinberg\* whose 21 and 24-year-old children live at home with her and her husband.

“We know that eventually they'll

don't expect their children to pay rent, they do educate them about money. “My husband is always relaying important information to them at home about finances

before they got married. “Telling an adult what to do and trying to control them just messes up the relationship.” However, she does believe in setting boundaries, while encouraging open communication and maintaining perspective, especially when conflict arises.

Create a space where you can both share your feelings, says Marks. “Focus on building a good long-term relationship with your kids. Ask, ‘Will it matter in five years if they didn't help out with the dishes?’ Creating a peaceful and conscious relationship, where you can grow towards having a wonderful long-term relationship where your children want to share their lives with you, was my aim.”

Lurie also highlights the importance of strong communication. “Be prepared to have adult-to-adult conversations about how you feel, what you need, and what your limits are,” she says. “Home is certainly not a hotel. If your child is to start experiencing independence, then division of responsibilities and a clear set of expectations is critical.”

Without these elements, there's the danger that adult kids can exploit this living situation. “Many think that if it's too comfortable at home, your child may never leave,” says Lurie. “If you're concerned that your child is stuck, create a timeline with them, help them to set goals, and hold them accountable for achieving each milestone. While it's certainly hard to let go, there's immense joy in seeing them soar and succeed.”

*\*Names have been changed*



**Living at home into your 30s gives a level of ease and comfort that some find appealing** and teaching them many other life skills. We're both hard workers, and my kids have learnt a lot by being home and observing, as adults, what it takes to be successful in life.”

“When your adult children are living at home, you have to remember that they are adults,” says Eve Marks, a fulfilment coach whose adult children lived at home

marry and have a life of their own, maybe even in a different country. We cherish our time together while we can, and still go away together a few times a year. What's the rush? When they feel ready to move out, or get married and move out, that will be their choice.”

Weinberg argues that adult kids living at home is more of the rule than the exception in our community. “My son and daughter's friends of the same age mostly still live at home, except for those who chose to study in Cape Town, Pretoria, or abroad,” she says. Security concerns could be a possible reason for this. “Here, we tend to be a bit overprotective of our kids, so we're quite happy to have them home where we know they are safe, especially in these uncertain, unsafe times. I don't care if my son comes home at 02:00 or 03:00, at least I know his whereabouts.”

Weinberg also believes it's wise for young adults to save. “Who at their age can afford to rent or buy a place?” she asks. “I would rather they stayed home and slowly built up enough money to be able to do so one day.” Though she and her husband therefore

## Exhibition reveals Germany's hidden 'queer' history

>>Continued from page 8

“If lesbian women and people who didn't conform to their gender were denounced, they were threatened with police investigations, house searches, and interrogations,” Zadoff said. Also “if political opposition, social deviance, or racial persecution occurred, they faced internment in a concentration camp”. To avoid torment by the Nazis, many lesbian women would enter “marriages of convenience” with gay men.

One lesbian couple whose story has been preserved is that of Elizabeth (Lilly) Wust and Felice Schragenheim. The two met in 1942, however, Schragenheim was forced to go into hiding as she was Jewish. She eventually moved in with Wust, and the pair drafted and signed their own marriage contract in 1944.

That year, Schragenheim was transported to Theresienstadt concentration camp. “In the hope of helping her beloved, Lilly Wust travelled to Theresienstadt herself in the fall of 1944,” said Zadoff. However, Schragenheim was transferred to Auschwitz soon after.

Wust searched for her for many years after that, however it's presumed that she was murdered in Bergen-Belsen in March 1945. In an interview in 2001, Wust said, “She was my other half, literally my reflection, my mirror image, and for the first time, I found love aesthetically beautiful, and so tender. I dream that we will meet again – I live in hope.”

Just as antisemitism and racism didn't cease to exist when the war came to an end, homophobia in German society persisted long after the Holocaust ended. While other concentration camp prisoners were freed, homosexuality was illegal until 1969. This meant that many homosexual men were sent straight from concentration camps to regular prisons.

“Queer history was hardly remembered or archived after 1945. To this day, we know only some of the pioneers of the queer emancipation movement. We know even less about the life of those who were persecuted, driven into exile, murdered, or simply remained invisible,” said Zadoff.

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# Montefiore chronicles world history through family tales

STEVEN GRUZZ

In COVID-19 lockdown, while many were baking banana bread, sorting out their sock drawers, or playing Candy Crush, British historian Simon Sebag Montefiore wrote a history of the world.

His mammoth 1 300-page book, *The World: A Family History*, describes the major events on the globe with the intimacy of a biography, using families to tell this majestic story, including the Caesars and the Bonapartes, the Kennedys and the Trumps, the Kenyattas, and the Assads. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to Montefiore before his trip to South Africa in March 2023 to promote the book.

Montefiore also authored *Jerusalem: The Biography*, an immense history of the 3 000-year-old city, told through the triumphs and tribulations of its famous families. It has sold more than a million copies worldwide. He convinced his publishers that he could write a world history in a similar way. “*Jerusalem* was a stepping stone to this book, and anyone who enjoyed that will enjoy *The World*.”

“I had a couple of years when I was anxiously wondering how on earth I would write it,” Montefiore said. “And then I realised that family was the way I told Jerusalem’s stories, and this was the best way. These books use stories of families to tether the book to giant tectonic shifts – of technology, of climate, of ideology, of all the great history of migrations – and so on.”

This latest book took its toll. “This book was an immense struggle to write,” Montefiore said, “more than anything I’ve ever written. It nearly killed me writing it. It was hard and stressful work, but luckily, during lockdown, I was able to immerse myself completely in the material. All my big books were written in a state of obsession.

I was waking up at 04:00 thinking, ‘How am I going to write about Madagascar?’” He got precious little sleep in three years, and his office floor is piled hip-high with history books.

“History writing is so painful and demanding,” Montefiore said. “It’s labour intensive and the writing is agony, but it’s very satisfying when the books come out. I love writing fiction based on history, and about love and intrigue. I’m a voracious reader. I got to read very widely, which is how *The World* came about.”

“I was nervous about how it would be received, first because it’s such an ambitious project, and second, because of its size,” Montefiore said. “So far, the reaction has been really positive and in Britain, it’s received rave reviews. It was rated Book of the Year by *The Times* and *The Economist*. Critics have said there isn’t a dull page or paragraph.”

Montefiore has written seven major award-winning historical books, with a focus mainly on Russia, plus three novels set in Moscow. “My mother’s family all came from the Russian Empire, some were from Moscow, Lithuania, Poland, and Odesa,” he said. “I’d grown up fascinated with these places, with these people, and their stories. That’s really how I became interested in Russian history and literature.”

In terms of Jewish history, Montefiore said it’s interwoven all the way through the book. “I’m always aware of being a historian and a Jewish historian. My ethnicity is important to me. There are all sorts of things we need to correct, and priorities we need to reassert. One is the joy of Jewish culture and life, another is the experience of anti-Jewish racism, especially in the past two centuries. The Holocaust is described in considerable detail and very carefully. And so is the foundation of Israel.”

Montefiore has been in India and the



**Simon Sebag Montefiore**  
Netherlands promoting the new book, and has upcoming visits to Spain, South Africa, 12 cities in the United States, Germany, Brazil, Portugal, Serbia, Croatia, Romania, and Türkiye, among others.

He’s being brought to South Africa by the Jewish Literary Festival and Jonathan Ball Publishers. Montefiore will be headlining at the Jewish Literary Festival at the Gardens

Community Centre in Cape Town on 21 March. He will speak at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 22 March, and at the Gordon Institute for Business Studies on 23 March. There’s also an event at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre at the Great Park Synagogue on 26 March. His talks are not to be missed.

When asked why South Africa was on his itinerary, Montefiore said, “I believe this is the most diverse history of the world ever written, and it’s certainly the most African history of the world. So, South Africa plays a big part, but so does Morocco, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and West Africa. The book tells the history the world, with much less about America and Europe and much more Africa, Asia, and South America. There are a lot of Africans in the book. So it’s entirely appropriate that I should come to South Africa.”

Speaking of famous families, many may know of Montefiore’s Windmill in Jerusalem. “That settlement was founded by my great-great uncle, Sir Moses Montefiore, and it was the first area outside the Old City walls. Recently, I reopened it with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after they renovated it. I love that windmill!”

• *Simon Sebag Montefiore will be the special guest at the Jewish Literary Festival 2023 in Cape Town on 21 March. To book or find out more about the festival and special hotel offers, go to [www.jewishliteraryfestival.co.za](http://www.jewishliteraryfestival.co.za) or call Beryl on 082 490 6652.*

## From Linksfield and back again – Opera’s Greatest Hits celebrated in Jozi

REVIEW **HOWARD SACKSTEIN**



Johannesburg resonated to the sounds of classical music as some of the giants of the genre gathered at the Linder Auditorium to celebrate *Opera’s Greatest Hits*.

With a collapsing currency and a failing economy, access to international performing artists and world-class talent is becoming increasingly scarce for South Africans.

Driven by Colin Schachat, one of South Africa’s greatest classical exports, the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra performed before a packed audience, with some of the most talented names in the opera world. Under the baton of conductor David Sebba, the music director of the Israeli Opera’s Meitar Opera Studio, the Festival Orchestra achieved its zenith.

Schachat began his musical career in Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s stage production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and played clarinet in the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra. Since moving to Israel in 1992, Schachat has become an internationally renowned opera baritone, performing with opera legends including José Carreras and Andrea Bocelli.

The Israeli contingent was rounded off by one of Israel’s leading sopranos, Yael Levita, who has performed as a soloist with the Israel Symphony Orchestra Rishon LeZion, the Haifa Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Chamber Orchestra, and the Jerusalem Baroque Orchestra.

Giving a platform to local talent was integral to Schachat’s vision, and South African Bongive Nakani gave a remarkable performance, as did world-class tenor Siyabonga Maqungo.

Nakani joined the Vienna State Opera in 2016, and Maqungo is a member of the ensemble of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin.

“I love performing in South Africa,” said Schachat, “There’s an energy and appreciation which is refreshing



**Colin Schachat, Siyabonga Maqungo, and David Sebba**

and inspiring. Performing in the country of birth is always nostalgic, moving, and special.”

Performing in South Africa is about more than just music, he says. “Where there’s cultural interaction, human barriers and preconceived dogma fade quickly. This is true in my field, and I’m sure equally applies to most other art forms”.

The repertoire for *Opera Greatest Hits* was determined by Maestro Richard Cock, who hosted the event. While the artists send their preferred repertoire to Cock, he cobbles together a programme balancing styles, arias, and ensembles with the musical taste of the local audience.

South Africa is fast gaining fame in the wider classical music world. Many local singers are doing remarkably well in Europe, and some have even made it to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The leading international vocal arts competition known as Operalia, hosted by Plácido Domingo, will take place later this year in Cape Town.

“One of my most memorable performances was at the opening of the President Peres Conference in Jerusalem,” says Schachat, “Amongst the 2 000 guests were legendary international personalities like Tony Blair, Henry Kissinger, and Bill Clinton. After that performance, Peres invited me to have coffee and a chat. He was intrigued that a South African immigrant would be performing classic Israeli hits.”

But the highlight of Schachat’s career was when he entered the stage in front of 23 000 people with superstar Andrea Bocelli a few months ago in Tel Aviv. Says Schachat, “I did think of my late dad, who would have been proud of the career I’ve built. It’s a long way from being a choir boy at the Linksfield Shul.”

• *Howard Sackstein is chairperson of the SA Jewish Report.*

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## Israel’s top cantor wows Joburg Jewish community

Well-known Israeli cantor Shai Abramson held the community enthralled with an evening of music at the Yeshiva Mizrahi Shul in Glenhazel on 13 February.

The Shai Abramson Concert was a collaboration between the South African Zionist Federation, You Realty, Yeshiva Mizrahi Community, Mizrahi SA, and Yeshiva College schools.

Accompanied by pianist and music-arranger Raymond Goldstein, Abramson's wide repertoire of songs included cantorial and classical music, Hebrew, and Israeli songs, even popular and rock music.

Abramson was born in Jerusalem, and was exposed to the world of cantorial music from a young age. In 2008, he was appointed chief cantor of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Abramson serves as the representative cantor of the state of Israel, and participates in this capacity on formal state occasions and ceremonies.

"The night was well attended," says Spencer Swartz, the owner of You Realty. "Shai had a standing ovation a couple of times, which was amazing."

"He sang a number of popular songs including Frank Sinatra's *My Way*, as well as the prayer for the state of Israel, and concluded the evening with *Hatikvah*. It was definitely a celebration of the 75 years of Israel." Swartz says.



Photo: Trevor Sachs

Shai Abramson

Over the past few years, Abramson has presented his cantorial repertoire to numerous Jewish communities in the United States, Canada, South America, Australia, and Europe, with the intention of strengthening ties with Jewish communities around the world and intensifying connections with Israel and the IDF.

"I'm thrilled to perform once again in front of the Jewish communities in Johannesburg and Cape Town. It's a great pleasure and honour to salute the state of Israel for its 75th anniversary," he says.

Abramson has produced two CDs that include recordings of Israeli music and songs derived from Jewish sources, together with symphonic arrangements of classical cantorial and liturgical selections.

## KDL debaters attend mock UN debate in New York

Four pupils from King David High School Linksfield participated in a Model United Nations (UN) debate in New York in January 2023, the culmination of a one-year Zoom programme to promote Holocaust education.

The programme, in which Nazi psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin was put on a hypothetical trial, gave the pupils the opportunity to hear from judges, lawyers,

psychiatrists, historians, and Holocaust educators, facilitated by their history teacher, Jocelyn Angel. It was organised by the Social Education Forum of the UN.

Participating in the week-long event with students from 10 different countries was memorable for the students, who stood out for their empathy and articulateness.



Ben Ginsberg, Jessica Hirschowitz, Jemma Karan, and Jordan Meyers

## KD careers expo offers local and international options



Director of Education Exchanges Support Foundation Daiva Sutinyte and Lithuanian Ambassador Dainius Junevicius

King David's annual careers expo at the Sandton Shul on 20 February hosted local universities as well as technikons, gap-year options, and institutions from South Africa, Israel, and Lithuania.

"The education space is constantly evolving and presenting new opportunities for students. It's important for them to keep up with these changes and be open to exploring new and emerging fields," said Gita Lipschitz, counsellor at King David High School Victory Park.

There were nine Lithuanian universities represented there promoting study options there. One of their drawcards is there are large subsidies for those holding Lithuanian passports.

"King David schools understand the importance of giving students access to a variety of tertiary study options, locally and internationally, so that they can make educated career choices," she said of the event for Grade 11 and 12 students and their parents.

## Yeshiva Grade 5s meet school kids from Hadera

Yeshiva College Grade 5s had the opportunity to meet kids their own age at school in Hadera, Israel, on 16 February. The meeting, held virtually, is part of a programme run by the education department that the school is thrilled to take part in this year. The children saw their counterparts on a big screen, asked questions about life in Israel, and answered questions about their lives in South Africa. The meeting gave the children a feel for life in Israel from children of their own age and stage.

## Women’s Trial victory – a bridge to world championship

Sharon Lang and Roz Bernstein, and their partners Vanessa Armstrong and Carol Stanton, won the South African Bridge Federation Women's trials from 5 to 10 February. The winners will be representing South Africa at the Venice Cup, the world championship to be held later this year.

Eight teams of four players competed to represent South Africa in a round robin format, consisting of 112 boards, followed by a semi-final of 48 boards and two-day final of 96 boards.



Sharon Lang and Roz Bernstein

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## Law of Return – a global Jewish issue

As reported on the front page of this issue, earlier this week, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies briefed the Jewish community on the Board's response to potential changes to Israel's Law of Return and how the Board, as the representative voice of South African Jewry, is engaging on this issue with its international counterparts and the Israeli government.

The Law of Return, which declares that "every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh* [immigrant]" and gives Jews, people with one or more Jewish grandparent, and their spouses the right to move to Israel and acquire citizenship, is an issue of concern to world Jewry. For that reason, we're taking it extremely seriously, as are all diaspora communities, and hence have been engaging on it with international and local role players and advocacy groups. The Jewish Agency for Israel is one of the foremost global Jewish bodies that have conveyed their concerns to the Israeli government. In our community letter, we provide a link to the relevant correspondence in this regard, and fully endorse the points and concerns raised. Israel's minister of foreign affairs, Eli Cohen, has since sent a letter addressed to leaders of Jewish communities and organisations assuring diaspora Jewry that Israel, as the national home of the Jewish people, remains committed not only to its own citizens but to "every Jew

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

### ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



in every corner of the world". He further underscored his own "absolute commitment to strengthening the bond between Israel and the diaspora".

It's in such a spirit that the Israeli government and international Jewish leadership is addressing this sensitive matter. We're therefore confident that together, we can find respectful, inclusive, and constructive solutions to the challenge at hand without harming the delicate fabric that holds us together as one united people.

### African Union misses opportunity

We were also asked this week to issue a statement on the removal of Israel's representative from the African Union (AU) summit opening ceremony. A core mandate of the AU is peace-making, and it's well placed to mediate in conflicts within and around our continent. It's such a pity that it missed an opportunity to place itself in a position to contribute in a meaningful way to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We call on the AU to convene the committee it committed to at the 2022 summit to confirm Israel as an observer at the AU.

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

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# Bad news – Barney’s back

“I’m sorry to have to tell you this,” I said solemnly. “I have something difficult to tell you, and I need you to listen.” My children looked up from the game that they were playing in anticipation of the bad news I was going to deliver. “Barney is dead,” I said gently. “He died tragically. And suddenly. But he’s no longer.”

Barney was a purple dinosaur of someone’s imagination. He was irritating and well behaved, loved everyone, and always cleaned up. He was humourless, but laughed all the time.

I’m convinced that he’s the reason Americans shoot each other with automatic weapons whenever they have a bad day. The Barney generation was taught that being pathologically well behaved is an aspiration. Which is why they have no idea how to behave when things aren’t pleasantly purple.

The act of telling my kids that he was dead seemed extreme. But in my defence, I didn’t want them to grow up to be serial killers. Needless to say, my wife was unimpressed with my strategy, but she knew that she, too, would benefit from a house free of, “I love you, you love me, we’re a happy family” playing incessantly in the background.

And then. If 2023 wasn’t challenge enough, it’s been announced that Barney is back.

According to CNN, Toy giant Mattel announced that Barney, the friendly – and, let’s be honest, cringe-worthy to a large group of millennials who watched him as pre-schoolers and their parents – purple dinosaur is making a triumphant return to TVs and toy shelves next year.

“With our modern take on Barney, we hope to inspire the

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



next generation to listen, care, and dream big,” says Mattel. One can only imagine what that means. Following my logic, if Americans treat conflict with semi-automatic weapons because of Barney V1, it’s not difficult to imagine what the next generation would be capable of.

The creators of Barney have also announced that he – not sure if “he” is Barney’s preferred pronoun – will have a new look. He appears as though he’s fresh out of gastric bypass surgery, having been slimmed down, sporting a new nose, and much bigger eyes.

Unfortunately, that voice is likely to remain the same, and I anticipate that the message will be even more “goody two shoes” than ever before.

The danger with Barney is that the show values the boring. It sends a message that in a perfect world, everyone behaves, loves each other, is always polite, and cleans up after themselves.

The truth is the opposite. The world is messy, fun, and full of humour. And although we might strive to love each other, we don’t do so all the time. In fact some of the time we don’t even like the people we love.

As Jews, we believe that in messianic times, there will be resurrection of the dead. Let’s have Barney stay where he is until that time.

## Letters

### SA RUGBY’S CAPITULATION TO BDS SETS DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

Well done on your coverage of the withdrawal of the invitation to the Tel Aviv Heat to play in the Mzansi Challenge rugby tournament.

Without doubt, this is the most disgraceful decision ever made by SA Rugby.

There’s no doubt that SA Rugby President Mark Alexander didn’t have the backbone to stand up to both the African National Congress and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition.

The questions asked by the South African Friends of Israel and New Zealand-based lawyer Ian Dunwoodie need to be answered with honesty by SA Rugby.

The fact that a small minority group like BDS can dictate to SA Rugby sets a dangerous precedent. It shows a total lack of backbone from our rugby administrators, in particular Alexander. Also, our useless Sports Minister Nathi Mthethwa, an avid supporter of Palestine, should be sanctioned. Although hopefully he’ll be one of those who gets fired in the expected cabinet reshuffle.

I urge you not to let this matter be ignored, and to pursue the truth to the end.

BDS will use this so-called victory to its advantage. We need to resist it with the contempt that it deserves.

– Brian Sacks, Cape Town

## Sunday 26 February

• Chev Bereavement Services hosts its *Growth from Grief* support group. Time: 10:00. Venue: Sandringham Gardens. Contact: sheilaf@jhbchev.co.za or 011 532 9653

## Wednesday 1 March

• Community Security Organisation Cape Town launches its 13-week basic security course. Time: 18:00. Venue: Oranjezicht, Cape Town. Cost: No charge. Contact: training@cscape.org.za or 087 820 4949

## Thursday 2 March

• Women’s International Zionist Organization Johannesburg hosts a talk by Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky at its 109th annual general meeting. Time: 10:30. Venue: West Street Shul. Contact: wizojohannesburg011@gmail.com or 076 040 9614

• ORT SA hosts a talk by Ian Mann called *Strategy That Works*. Time: 08:30. Contact: admin@ortjet.org.za or 011 728 7154



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