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Community slams Lamola's denial of antisemitism in SA

STAFF REPORTER

The South African Jewish community is calling on South African Justice Minister Ronald Lamola and the African National Congress government to stop dismissing antisemitism and to cease creating an environment that emboldens antisemites.

On BBC *HardTalk* this week, Lamola denied that there was any antisemitism in South Africa in spite of claims to the contrary by the Jewish community, saying it didn't exist and implying it was all in our head.

Lamola was responding to a quote from Howard Sackstein's opinion piece in the *SA Jewish Report* two weeks ago, in which he spoke about not feeling safe as a Jew in South Africa any more.

Karen Milner, the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), contradicted Lamola, saying that in 2023, antisemitic incidents in South Africa had reached the highest level since the Board began compiling detailed lists from 1993.

From October to December 2023, there were 139 recorded incidents compared to 19 over the same period in 2022, an increase of 631%, she said.

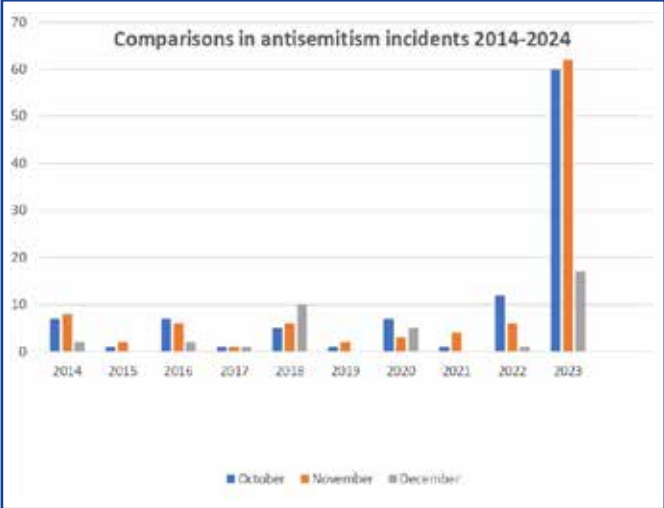
"There was also a sharp increase in physical attacks against Jewish people or property, something which had occurred only rarely in previous years," she said.

"There were six cases of physical assault, whereas the annual average had been only one in the preceding decade. These included two cases of assault outside a Johannesburg synagogue; an attack on a Johannesburg rabbi; and a person being hit over the head with a pole at a pro-Palestine rally in Cape Town."

There was also vandalism, including damage and desecration to Jewish cemeteries in Pretoria and Durban.

The SAJBD monitors and records antisemitic activity in South Africa mainly through incidents being reported to it by community members and other Jewish institutions.

It compares methodology with equivalent Jewish



representative bodies, including in France, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

"South African Jewry has prided itself on the relatively low levels of antisemitism compared to other Jewish diaspora communities," Milner said. "However our government has created an environment where antisemitism can flourish, with Minister Lamola's comments being an example."

On the steps of the Peace Palace in The Hague, Lamola said, "In South Africa, we live side by side with Jews. They run companies and thriving business. It's not about antisemitism."

University of Cape Town Professor Adam Mendelsohn said of these comments, "Lamola managed to imply that Jews are outsiders in South African society – the language

of "us" and "them" – and drew on an old and unfortunate trope by associating Jews with business."

Lamola then went on to say on *HardTalk* that any claims of antisemitism in South Africa weren't "based on any facts". He claimed Sackstein's concern about antisemitism was a "figment of his imagination" and not based on fact.

Sackstein responded by saying, "When Judge David Unterhalter was excluded for consideration for a position in the Constitutional Court because he was a member of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, neither Lamola nor any member of his party stood up in defense of what was clear racist Jew hatred.

"When David Teegeer was demoted as captain of the Under-19 cricket team after having been cleared of any wrongdoing, and for no other reason than that he was Jewish, Lamola and his party never raised a voice against blatant antisemitism.

"As the proliferation of swastikas and references to Hitler has enveloped social media, not a single member of government has stood up in defense of the Jewish community."

Sackstein went on to say that "Lamola has lost his grip on reality and, by his failure to act, he has become complicit in the worst antisemitism in sub-Saharan Africa.

"The victims have become the perpetrators, and Lamola and his government have to take responsibility for their failure to act," said Sackstein.

Milner agreed that Lamola's statements "disregard the voices of those affected, namely South African Jews".

She said that in the antisemitic incidents recorded from October to December 2023, eight cases had already been lodged with the South African Police Service. They include assault, damage to property, and incitement of violence. The SAJBD is also finalising cases of antisemitism which have been brought to the equality court.

Perfectly imperfect

Torah Thought



Rabbi Shmuel Ozhekh
– Ohr Somayach Cape Town, and the founder of Rejewvinate and The Eden Meditation App

Sports psychologist Dr Bob Rotella in his book, *Golf is Not a Game of Perfect*, writes about how golf is inherently a game of mistakes. The winner in golf isn't the player that has the best shot, but the one who effectively deals with their mistakes. Perfectionism on the other hand creates tremendous pressure and anxiety because a person tries to attain something which is impossible.

Dr Patrick Cohn, another sports psychologist, says that perfectionists are their own worst enemies and they self-destruct on the golf course because of frustration and the inability to deal with mistakes.

The parsha teaches us something important as we find another perfectionist in the Torah – Moshe Rabbeinu.

Moshe's father-in-law comes to tell him that he mustn't judge the Jewish people all alone, and must delegate.

Why didn't Moshe realise this himself?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu was aware of the special virtue he had of speaking to Hashem face to face, and thought that there was no-one better to deal with the laws other than himself.

Yisro taught him that perfection is unsustainable, and that good is sometimes perfect.

The most elusive thing about perfection is that we look at others and think they have it perfect.

The key in life – as in golf – is not to be taken in by the thought of perfection and distracted by others' successes, but as Dr Cohn says, stay in the present, enjoy the ball and shot now.

Perfectionism is something we struggle with every

day. We want a perfect marriage; we want perfect children; and we want a perfect career. We want our friends to do exactly what we need when we need it, and for life to follow our predetermined, chartered course. When our desires and aspiration don't materialise perfectly, we become frustrated and upset.

The goal should never be perfection. The goal is great – or even good depending on circumstance. If I expect a perfect marriage, that requires a perfect spouse. No human being can deliver in that way. If we expect perfect children, we're setting them up for failure. If we wait to take advantage of life's opportunities until the perfect one

arrives, we'll miss out on all the great opportunities which present themselves every single day. If we expect perfect results from ourselves, we become disillusioned, aggravated, and ultimately, give up.

Perfection is alluring but not realistic. We must resist the temptation of perfection, and embrace the good, great, and excellent.

Moshe was fortunate to have a Yisro to whisper in his ear. We're privileged to have a Torah which lights our way. May we find the strength to see the goodness in our loved ones, the greatness in our opportunities, and the beauty in ourselves.

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G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments: to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to keep Shabbat, honour their parents, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, and not to bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

SA expat helped children survive massacre from afar

TALI FEINBERG

Arriving at a home in central Israel recently, South African expat Linda Friedland walked towards the covered patio where a little girl was playing. It was raining, almost like tears, as Friedland watched the little girl from a distance, feeling utter disbelief. The child was Avigail Idan, who was orphaned and kidnapped on 7 October while her siblings survived by hiding in a cupboard.

Avigail, who is called “Gooli” by her family, is the niece of Friedland’s own niece, Ella Mor. After about 50 days in captivity, she was returned by Hamas in a deal with Israel on Sunday, 26 November, two days after she turned four.

Avigail’s mother, Smadar, who was murdered on 7 October, is Mor’s sister-in-law. Mor’s husband, Nimi Mor, grew up on kibbutz Kfar Aza, along with their extended family.

Now, it’s the survivors of this family that have wrapped Avigail and her siblings, Micha’el and Amalia, in a cocoon of safety as they start a new life without their *ima* and *aba*, far away from the only home they’ve ever known.

“Watching Avigail from afar, I felt shocked. It was like I couldn’t fathom what this little girl has been through,” says Friedland, who has wanted to come to Israel since the early hours of 7 October, when her niece, Mor, called her screaming, saying that Micha’el had phoned her to say that both his parents, Smadar and Roei, were dead, and he didn’t know where his baby sister was.

Friedland has since discovered that in the early hours of the massacre, when so little was known, she played a role in helping Micha’el and Amalia survive. She says that after Mor called her, she did all she could to help from Perth, Australia. It felt like a long shot, but she called a good friend, Peter Cash, who at that moment was in Dubai and who has many contacts in Israel. He then contacted a woman in Israel high up in the army, who in turn contacted director of the Friends of United Hatzalah, Linor Attias. It was Linor who ensured that Micha’el, hiding in a cupboard and talking on his dead mother’s phone, was contacted by social worker Tamar Schlesinger.

It was Schlesinger who stayed on the phone with Micha’el and his sister for 14 hours, essentially saving their lives. “If it wasn’t for her, they probably would have come out the cupboard after a couple of hours and may have been killed by the terrorists, who came back twice,” says Friedland.

Now, on her trip to Israel, Friedland was able to have long conversations with those who were part of the “seven-phone-call chain” as she calls it, from Mor in Holon, to her in Perth, to Cash in Dubai, to the team in Israel who saved the Idan children. She was also able to see the children and support her niece. The Idan children’s other aunt, Liron, has legally adopted them, and they now have three other siblings.

“Seeing Avigail from afar was almost more dramatic than when she was sitting on my lap,” says Friedland, returning to that moment. “This is the child who crawled out from under her dad’s body covered in blood, ran to the neighbours, and was kidnapped from there. She was held with the neighbours in a back room of a terrorist’s house in Gaza.”

When it comes to the elder two siblings, “You can just see the pain in their eyes,” says Friedland. “Their cousin, who is now their new brother, told me matter-of-factly that ‘I’m lucky, because at least my parents



Linda Friedland with Avigail Idan

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weren’t murdered.’ Yet he also went through the horrors of 7 October and has been displaced from his home. Just seeing the impact of that day on this one family, you get a sense of the enormity of it all.”

Friedland says she sensed the huge amount of grief and yet the incredible sense of unity in Israel from the moment she stepped off the plane. “In the terminal at Ben Gurion, you see these life-sized pictures of the hostages, and it felt so much closer,” she says. When her luggage didn’t arrive for three days, she shrugged it off, with the reality around her dwarfing her own personal concerns.

“The grief, anguish, and anxiety are contrasted with defiant optimism,” she says. “In a way, it felt like a relief, from facing the onslaught of antisemitism on the outside to coming to Israel, where everyone knows this is an existential war. The slogan everyone is repeating is, ‘*Beyachad nenatsayach*’ [Together we’ll win].”

Friedland also visited “Hostage Square” in Tel Aviv and even met former hostages. “It just brought home how these are ordinary people. And you saw how each hostage that’s still held captive has at least five family members awaiting their return. The scale of the loss and terror is brutal. You just hear them shouting ‘*Achshav!* [Now!]’ in desperation.”

At first, Friedland felt unsure about visiting the sites of the massacre in the Gaza envelope, but then realised that it was vital to bear witness. “We won’t see the raw nature of it again. It was like going to Auschwitz two months after the war, knowing there was still DNA and body parts, contrasted with the greenery all around as the area blooms in winter.”

She visited one kibbutz that wasn’t completely decimated, and the juxtaposition between the burned, obliterated houses with intact homes was startling. “You still

see spices on the counter, the sukkah still up in the yard, and the candle sticks from Shabbat. It’s like people are still living there.” She heard about one woman and her husband, artists and peace activists, who had welcomed Gazans in their home to do art, and had helped transport them to doctors. Both were brutally killed and burned.

Avigail Idan

She found visiting the site of the Nova festival harrowing – seeing so many young faces memorialised there, and the enormity of how many were killed. “Festivals in Israel have always been known as safe spaces for women,” she notes, pointing out that this principle was literally decimated as Hamas terrorists invaded.

Ultimately, her trip reminded her of the “resilience of the Jewish people, preserved in our DNA”. She saw this in the Idan children and their extended family, in the Israelis she met, and in the extensive fundraising and humanitarian work in every part of Israel, which she has contributed to through various projects.

Her latest initiative is to help expectant mothers who are now war widows. “We’ve been through massacres and emerged from the ashes, and we’ll do so again here,” she says. “What other alternative do we have?”

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ICJ genocide case leaves both sides claiming victory

STEVEN GRUZD

"The question of genocide is a tricky one," said Jakub Nowakowski, the director of the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre. "In spite of horrible things happening in Gaza, it's not a genocide in my view. There's the important question of intent to consider. Did Israel set out deliberately to exterminate a target group? No. In the Holocaust, there was nothing on earth the Jews could do not to be killed. They couldn't surrender. Unfortunately, it's far too easy to call everything a genocide."

The term "genocide" was in the spotlight in The Hague. The South African government was quick to declare victory last Friday, 26 January, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its provisional judgement in South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide. The ICJ didn't say Israel was guilty of genocide – and wasn't meant to – and it didn't order a ceasefire in Gaza. This was the first prize sought by South Africa. Nevertheless, South Africa has shifted the narrative, and Israel will be tainted by the tag of genocide going forward. Yet the order's wording also gave Israel and its supporters enough to claim a win themselves, and they are speaking out.

Israel's ad hoc judge at the ICJ, Aharon Barak, wrote in his opinion, "Genocide is more than just a word for me. It represents calculated destruction and human behaviour at its very worst. It's the gravest possible accusation, and is deeply intertwined with my personal life experience."

Barak noted, "It's concerning that certain Israeli officials have used inappropriate and degrading language" which will have to be investigated. "However, to infer an intent to commit genocide from these statements, which were made in the wake of horrific attacks against the Israeli population, is plainly implausible."

The key "provisional measure" sought by South Africa was that "the State of Israel shall immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza". This wasn't granted. Nor was South Africa's demand that Israel "take all reasonable measures within their power to prevent genocide". The much-sought-after ceasefire wasn't ordered, allowing Israel to continue its military operations against Hamas in Gaza.

The order did call on Israel "in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, [to] take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts" within the scope of the Genocide Convention, including killing, maiming, causing mental harm, or preventing births. It was ordered to punish those responsible for incitement, provide aid to Gaza, and report to the court within a month.

The ICJ also called for the immediate, unconditional release by Hamas of all hostages – not a measure South Africa sought.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated Israel's "inherent right to defend itself" after the ruling. He added that the "vile attempt to deny Israel this fundamental right is blatant discrimination against the Jewish state, and it was justly rejected". He called the genocide charge "false" and "outrageous".

Said Nowakowski, "Coming from Poland, I spent my life in the shadow of Auschwitz. I've seen the places designed with the sole purpose of killing people. I'm concerned that the Holocaust and genocide are being used as tools to achieve certain goals."

"Growing up in Eastern Europe," Nowakowski said, "I cannot stop wondering if South Africa is so sympathetic and horrified by what's happening in Gaza, why haven't we seen the same response to what has been happening in Ukraine for the past two



years? Why is the South African government not equally audible?"

Gavin Rome, a senior advocate in Johannesburg, said the judgement in general was "unimpressive".

"It was poor," Rome said. "For example, to quote [Israeli President Isaac] Herzog's speech as an example of plausible genocidal intent was to take it out of context and merely adopt South Africa's narrative without regard to Israel's response. The ruling also didn't articulate why the totality of relief sought by South Africa wasn't granted. This could have been a good place to justify Israel acting in self-defence."

Mark Oppenheimer, an advocate at the Johannesburg Bar told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The judgement sounded pretty appalling for Israel as it was being delivered. The court picked facts that were favourable to South Africa's case and ignored the defence of Israel. But by not granting a ceasefire, the relief was entirely meaningless and redundant, as the dissenting Ugandan judge [Julia Sebutinde] wrote."

"To say that the order is akin to a ceasefire is the worst distortion I've ever heard," Oppenheimer said. "It's quite clear if you read the order. It says Israel can't engage in genocidal conduct. It doesn't say to desist from doing it. In other words, it doesn't say stop doing it, because there's no finding at all that Israel has been engaged in genocide."

Jewish communal organisations have heavily criticised the South African government's stance. A South African Jewish Board of Deputies press statement said it welcomed the ICJ's "recognition of Israel's right to defend its citizens by denying the ANC [African National Congress] government's request for a ceasefire. We are saddened by our government not playing a more constructive role in engaging both sides, as it has in every other conflict, to help to bring an actual end to this war."

Rolene Marks, the national spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation, wrote in a press release, "[The] interim ruling by the ICJ is a blow to South Africa's political gambit to falsely label Israel's acts of self-defence as genocide. The court only looked at potential emergency measures, and Pretoria's political stunt will be shown for the farce that it is."

"Hamas's strategy is to use civilians as human shields and then celebrate any resulting harm as propaganda," Marks said. "The measures granted are in fact what Israel has proven to be doing already."

"This [case] isn't something to be proud of," Oppenheimer said. "To my mind, what this is, really, is a cynical exercise to try and accuse Israel of a blood libel – a state that was formed because of a genuine genocide, to accuse it of genocide under circumstances in which it's prosecuting a just war against an internationally recognised terror group

that performed the worst atrocities since the Holocaust. There's also very good reason to believe that there are devious motives behind this litigation" – repeating the

accusation that the Iranians have bankrolled the ANC in exchange for more vocal support for the Palestinians.

Sebitunde wrote in her dissenting

ANC rides pro-Palestinian cause for political gains

TALI FEINBERG

An election manifesto launch is a vital moment in any party's campaign, yet the African National Congress (ANC) appears to have handed over this pivotal event on 24 February to a group called United for Palestine.

"We decided that this show of solidarity would be part of the launch of the ANC's election manifesto for the 2024 election," says one of the group's representatives in a widely circulated video. The representative and his colleague – swathed in the Palestinian flag and keffiyeh speaking in English with Arabic thrown in – were literally inviting the public to the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban for the launch of the ANC's manifesto for the 2024 elections. Their public video invitation was almost as if they were running the launch and planning the whole event around what it could do for their cause as opposed to how they could benefit the ANC.

"We're inviting you for what we believe is the largest in-stadium show of solidarity for the people of Palestine," the two pro-Palestine activists said. "After all, it's the ANC that has been the biggest supporter of the Palestinian cause, and they have been a rock for the people of Palestine. That's something you can't take away from the ANC."

"So, we decided that this massive show of in-stadium solidarity will coincide with the 2024 ANC election manifesto," they said. "You get to experience it when 70 000 people chant together, 'Free, free Palestine – from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.'"

United for Palestine has little online presence and appears to be a tiny group.

However, the video was posted on the Facebook page of the ANC Kwazulu-Natal (ANC KZN) branch on 18 January. Accompanying the video, the ANC KZN wrote, "On 24 February, more than 70 000 voices at Moses Mabhida Stadium will proclaim, 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.'"

This chant, widely accepted as a genocidal call for the annihilation of all Jews in Israel, is in stark contrast to the ANC's official position on the conflict, which calls for a two-state solution.

"ANC, SACP [South African Communist Party], Cosatu [Congress of South African Trade Unions], and SANCO [South African National Civic Organisation] members will be joined by the Palestinian Solidarity Network, religious leaders across all religious lines, and broader civil society as part of Mayihlome Rally at Mabhida," the ANC KZN post continued. "President Cyril Ramaphosa will launch the People's Election Manifesto. On this day, we'll hold hands showing public disapproval of the ongoing onslaught against innocent children and women of Palestine. Let's join hands at Moses Mabhida Stadium, and show a united front."

opinion, "South Africa hasn't demonstrated, even on a *prima facie* basis, that the acts allegedly committed by Israel, and of which the applicant complains, were committed with the necessary genocidal intent and that, as a result, they are capable of falling within the scope of the Genocide Convention. I also must agree that any 'genocidal intent' alleged by the applicant is negated by (1) Israel's restricted and targeted attacks of legitimate military targets in Gaza; (2) its mitigation of civilian harm by warning them through leaflets, radio messages, and telephone calls of impending attacks; and (3) its facilitation of humanitarian assistance."

"There's no question that South Africa has shifted the terms of the debate, and the application wasn't dismissed as Israel argued it should be," said Rome. "South Africa's actions will give wind to the sails of those who claim 'Zionism is racism', and that the creation of the state of Israel is a crime."

Notably, 24 February is the two-year anniversary of the launch of Russia's war against Ukraine, and yet no mention of that atrocity appears to be on the agenda for the event.

On X (formerly Twitter), Mike Barendse posted the video, and wrote, "@MYANC capture! Iran has paid ANC bills, now the Palestinians have taken over the ANC election manifesto launch in Durban. ANC have [sic] foolishly painted themselves into a corner. The tail is now wagging the dog! ANC are [sic] now the Islam party." The tweet was widely circulated.

However, local political analyst Daniel Silke believes the antics are simply about the ANC desperately chasing votes for the upcoming national election. "The ANC has latched on to this particular issue. Of course, historically, it has been in line with the ANC's close relations with the Palestinians. These ties have strengthened, and South Africa's ties with Iran have also strengthened."

"But the ANC latching on to this issue goes beyond the moral injustice perceived in terms of the events in Gaza. The issue is now being brazenly used in electioneering for the ANC – the symbols of the Palestinian state are being used alongside ANC symbols. This is a visual reminder to ANC voters that 'the ANC is on the side of the oppressed peoples of the world'."

"The ANC, devoid of domestic success, has found a foreign policy issue which has fallen into its lap. We've seen the president and the ANC National Executive Committee continue to use the symbols of the Palestinian struggle. This is done to resonate with ANC voters, particularly with potential voters in the Western Cape."



"This is an unusual case of an international-relations issue that's going to be used in local politics. It will be used in an opportunistic way by the ANC. It's going to be milked for all it's worth."

Local political analyst and head of the African Governance and Diplomacy programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs, Steven Gruzd, also thinks the hijacking of the rally for the Palestinian cause is just about votes. "A lot of what the ANC is doing in relation to the Middle East is a vote-capturing exercise," he says. "Certainly, they want to contest the Western Cape fiercely."

Regarding the question of whether Iran is funding

Continued on page 5>>

Embassy closure leaves SA olim high and dry

TALI FEINBERG

When South Africa recalled its diplomats in Israel as a way of censuring the Jewish state in November 2023, it effectively closed the South African embassy in Ramat Gan, which was a liaison office.

Now, almost three months later, that decision has long-term implications for people in Israel and around the world. However, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has managed to arrange consular support. “The Department of International Relations and Cooperation [Dirco] has earmarked Sean Casale to address the consular issues of South African citizens in Israel, and we have been asked to work with him in resolving these matters,” says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn.

“He has advised me that he has been in touch with the home affairs department, and there are 60 documents ready for distribution to community members. They are working to arrange for them to be delivered to the applicants. Furthermore, I have provided him with the details of South Africans needing to apply for documents so that he can assist them. We’ll continue to engage with Dirco to ensure that community members requiring consular support are helped.”

“There’s a mother separated from her two young children indefinitely. It’s horrific,” says Kim Kur, who supports South Africans with travel challenges. “I get loads of people reaching out asking how to register their children and apply for a new passport,” says Kur, whose Facebook group, Community Circle SA, supports thousands of South Africans all over the world.

“I have several who hold only South African citizenship and whose need to return to South Africa is urgent, but they have no embassy to issue an emergency travel certificate to them, short of visiting Ramallah, which holds its own concerns. We have South Africans who entered on their other passport and have overstayed, and now have five-year bans in place with no embassy nearby to assist them.”

Then there’s the question of if and how South African olim will be able to vote in South Africa’s upcoming national elections. “Sudan, Israel, and Ukraine all fall into the category in which the offices are considered by the IEC [Electoral Commission of South Africa] to be temporarily closed as a result of security concerns. But citizens can register to vote as a final decision about the availability of voting stations hasn’t been made yet,” says Kur. “I’ve also been liaising directly with the IEC’s general manager for electoral matters regarding what those in Israel should do.

“No-one can say for sure that the IEC will have a voting station in Israel,” she says. “What we know for sure is that South Africans 16 and up can register online to vote at the embassy. This is essential, as it at least keeps the possibility open. If they don’t register,

then once the election date is announced, and if a voting station is opened in Israel, they’ll lose that opportunity to make their mark and create much-needed change for everyone in South Africa and, dare I say, in Israel. This is a rare example of a case in which voting isn’t just to help fellow South Africans you left behind, but also to stop the ruling party from its destructive anti-Israel propaganda. We have a collective duty [to do so].

“The IEC must work through Dirco,” says Kur. “Only if the government allows a voting station in Israel will it happen. But Dirco isn’t 100% against the idea, so must be given the



opportunity to do the right thing and give our citizens abroad their constitutional right to vote.

“So many South Africans in Israel are understandably disheartened by South Africa’s propaganda against Israel. They speak of renouncing citizenship,” says Kur. “But what’s essential is that they retain their constitutional right to their citizenship. It’s South Africa’s duty to provide a way to ensure that they get consular services, and there are those at Dirco trying to find a way to make this happen.”

Kur says she takes as many cases as she can directly to Dirco. “I get understanding from those I raise concerns with, but not always assistance. Their hands are often tied because of the government’s decision.

“My plea is that South Africans with unregistered children prioritise registering their children at the nearest mission or in South Africa,” says Kur. “Note that only certain home affairs offices can simulate registration of births abroad. We need to ensure that should South Africa choose to remove the 90-day visa exemption from Israeli passport holders, families aren’t locked out of South Africa because of their child being denied access.”

South African olah Skye Danziger is fearful of this exact possibility. “I can’t register my baby’s birth or get her a passport. Due to political issues, I’m worried that at some stage, travel to South Africa will be a challenge with an Israeli passport. So, we’ll have to go to Cyprus to register her birth and apply for her passport. I don’t want to be in the situation where we urgently need to get to South Africa but can’t.”

Asked if she has received any support, Danziger says, “No. In December, when we were visiting South Africa, passport control told us that we must register her [the baby]. We told them we didn’t have an embassy. They said, do it while you’re here, but we didn’t have time. I’m

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not sure about the legalities, but I’m worried about the future relationship between Israel and South Africa, and our family is still there.

“I’m sure there are many people in my shoes,” she says. “Most that I’ve spoken to say they don’t intend to get South African passports for their babies anyway, so they don’t care. While I agree on the one hand, I’m also worried about the long-term implications.”

Telfed Chief Executive Dorron Kline says, “South African olim need to renew their South African passports and South African potential olim need their fingerprints taken for police clearance certificates to make aliya. The consulate is also the source for ordering other essential documents required for aliya. Our community in Israel

now must request these services from South Africa via private service providers. It increases the costs tremendously.

“The SAJBD has been working closely with South Africans affected by the closure of the embassy in Israel,” says Kahn. “We have a list of individuals who have been impacted by this action. Since November last year, I have been engaging with DIRCO to find a suitable accommodation for them.

“Some of the cases we were able to resolve relatively easily, however others are more complicated,” she says. “There has been a huge amount of bureaucracy in finalising the solution.”

• Anyone in Israel requiring consular services can email Sean Casale on casales@dirco.gov.za, copying in segevl@dirco.gov.za.

ANC rides pro-Palestinian cause for political gains

>> Continued from page 4

the ANC and directing its actions and events, Silke says, “There’s no real definitive information on that. However, much greater transparency is required in terms of potential foreign funding not only for the ANC, but for all political parties in South Africa, and particularly the government.

“In a world in which there’s greater polarisation, where there are big players who are trying to set a new alternative global agenda, scrutiny of political parties is more important than ever before, and this applies to all countries,” says Silke. “I certainly would motivate for much greater scrutiny [of the ANC]. The current legislation in terms of the publicity of donors to political parties isn’t sufficient to really understand the potential foreign backing of political parties.”

Deputy shadow minister of trade and industry, Darren Bergman, says, “The ANC has been using the Middle East to exploit the emotions of both Jewish and Muslim voters. This is more about votes and sponsorship than trying to seek long-lasting peace. If the ANC was so sincere in its efforts, it would be trying to broker a peace deal.”

Regarding whether Iran is funding the ANC, Bergman says, “The Iran influence is there, and we’re no doubt a proxy for Iran, but the field is open to speculation until a firm answer is received.”

South African Jewish Board of Deputies

National Director Wendy Kahn says, “There’s no doubt that the tragic war in Israel and Gaza will be used as an election tactic. The IEC [Electoral Commission of South Africa’s] codes call for restraint in terms of hate speech and incitement. We believe that using the genocidal ‘From the river to the sea’ at an ANC rally undermines these basic principles. Though we expect this type of dangerous speech from extremists, seeing the ANC leadership using this rhetoric is disturbing.”

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) National Chairperson Rowan Polovin says, “The ANC, steadfast in its support for Hamas, is exploiting the Hamas-Israel conflict as a strategy for electoral gain, diverting attention from its numerous domestic failures and highlighting the ANC’s disinterest in South Africa’s future. The party misquotes South African icons like Nelson Mandela, who advocated for Israel’s right to exist with secure borders and plans to chant the phrase, ‘From the river to the sea’, which is an incitement for the destruction of Israel.

“Meanwhile, Israel is engaged in a moral and legal war of self-defence against actual genocidares,” Polovin says. “The SAZF urges the ANC to respect the International Court of Justice’s ruling, and focus on the unconditional, immediate release of hostages.”

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Lest we forget

While the war between Israel and Hamas continues unabated and there are more deaths of soldiers and civilians, the world hasn’t stopped debating, arguing, and discussing it, but what of the 136 Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza?

They have been in the hands of barbaric terrorists for more than 118 days. That’s 16 long weeks – almost four excruciating months – in captivity.

It’s beyond my comprehension to understand the horror of what they are experiencing at the hands of those detestable people who could commit heinous war crimes in Israel on 7 October 2023. It’s not hard to imagine the depth of depravity of the people who could cut people’s heads off to show as a trophy, to do the most unspeakable things to women and children, not least of which was burning them alive. All I hope is that whatever the men, women, and children who are being held are experiencing, they survive it at all levels and come home to their loved ones.

As for their loved ones, I was privileged this week to hear of a number of parents or close family members of those who are still being held, and some who have already been released. It gave me an inkling of the pain they have experienced.

One man, Malachi Shem-Tov, whose son, Omer, is still in Gaza, spoke of his anguish, and touched my heart. Before he told us of his boy, aged 21, he asked, “Do you know where your son is now? Do you know where your daughter is now? Do you know if they are eating? Do you know if they are cold?”

As he asked in an agonised voice, I got it. I always know where my children are, but the thought of not knowing where they are for almost four months beggars belief. I cannot imagine what that’s like. Worse, knowing that wherever they are, they’re at the mercy of monsters. And all Omer did was “go to the most wrong festival”, he said.

Shem-Tov described the sense of not knowing whether his son was eating, sleeping, being harmed, or in pain, as “being in darkness”, and the moment when he realised his son was in Gaza as feeling like “someone threw a huge black curtain” over his face.

To add to his anguish, his son, Omer, is asthmatic and was taken hostage without his inhaler. So, for more than 118 days, he imagines that his son has battled to breathe. Omer also suffers from Celiac Disease, an autoimmune disease that, if he eats gluten, his body mounts an immune response attacking his intestines. Shem-Tov rhetorically asks what they’re likely to be giving him to eat? Pita, labane, and bread, all with gluten.

The Shem-Tovs have left Omer’s room as it was, not tidying it, and keep saying that when he gets home, he’ll fix it up.

This soft-spoken man and his family are living in hell while his son is being held by Hamas. The anguish they are forced to live with is just one hundred and thirty sixth of the pain that the hostage families are living with. No news, in this case, isn’t good news! Each hour that the hostages remain in Gaza adds to their danger. Each minute ... We dare not forget them. Like their parents and loved ones, we need to keep their flame alight. We need to not lose hope, and we need to pressure the world to ensure they are sent home soon.

In last week’s finding of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the immediate release of the hostages was ordered. The problem with that order was that Hamas – a terrorist organisation – wasn’t in court, nor was it involved in any way in the hearing. The South African government was doing it all for Hamas at The Hague.

Hamas is unlikely to give two figs for what was said in this international court. It has broken just about every humanitarian law already, so why would it bother to heed anything said in an international court of law?

Israel is bound by what was demanded of it – which really wasn’t anything it wasn’t already doing – but nobody else is bound to do anything. Amazing, isn’t it?

Meanwhile, there’s growing proof of many UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) workers having been involved in the 7 October massacre. How despicable!

And now, as per our front page article, there are allegations that South African banks are being used to fund Hamas’s activities. Again, nobody is being censured for that either. And so it goes on ...

Somehow, though, the narrative of Israel being genocidal and Hamas being the defender of innocents still somehow permeates certain sectors of this country and the world.

I am astonished when I realise how former colleagues cannot see what’s so obvious to me.

But more than that, I’m astonished at how the South African government refuses to see the facts of the ICJ findings.

In a piece in News24 this week, Zane Dangor, the director-general of the department of international relations and cooperation, and Minister Dr Naledi Pandor’s main henchman, is quoted as insisting that the ICJ ordered Israel to suspend the war in Gaza. What script is he reading from? That’s not true. It was specifically not said.

But what was very clearly said was that the hostages need to be released immediately, and Dangor failed to bring this up and was also not asked to say anything about this part of the findings.

The South African government has a real knack – clearly conscious – of not acknowledging the pain caused to Israel or Israelis. It has also never made a big deal about how Hamas broke all the laws of war by taking civilians hostage, among other atrocities.

I agree that there has been too much bloodshed and death and too many innocent lives have been taken. But if South Africa is going to talk about genocide and war crimes, it needs to acknowledge that Hamas – whose side it has taken – has committed horrific atrocities. But, I guess that may be too much to ask.

I mean, now President Cyril Ramaphosa is claiming that third forces following the ICJ hearing might try and stop the African National Congress from winning the elections. Mr President, if you lose these elections – and I really hope you do – it will be because you have neglected your own country and people, and for no other reason.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Why SA’s Zionist dilemma is a Jewish problem

OPINION

MILTON SHAIN



In his 2023 Christmas message, renowned English writer and raconteur Stephen Fry recalled the words of the politician, scholar, and journalist, Conor Cruise O’Brien. “Antisemitism,” warned the Irishman, “is a light sleeper.”

Headlines across the world illustrate this. “French Jews in fear of coming pogrom”; “Jewish cemetery in Vienna targeted with swastika daubings”; “Jewish student harassed by *Harvard Law Review* editor”; “Hamas official promises to carry out October 7 massacre ‘again and again’ until Israel’s ‘annihilation’”. And so it goes. Day after day.

It’s now quite apparent that protests against Israel in the wake of 7 October have lifted the lid covering Jew-hatred. What was once considered unacceptable is now acceptable.

From London to Teheran, and indeed in most major capitals, anti-Jewish chants conjure memories of the 1930s when the rise of fascism and Nazism convulsed Europe. Of course, no two eras are alike and conditions for Jews today – certainly in open and plural Western societies – are different. Most importantly, the existence of Israel ensures a different fate. History doesn’t do reruns.

Nevertheless, the viciousness of Jew-hatred since 7 October is deeply concerning. A new chapter in the “longest hatred” is being drafted – its subject the delegitimisation of the Jewish state.

Keffiyeh-wearing African National Congress (ANC) comrades masquerading as chivalrous and heroic knights tell us much more than at first sight appears obvious. To be sure, limp calls for a two-state solution by a government that talks of a “colonial settler state” and “apartheid Israel” – a government that tells the International Court of Justice that the Palestinians have endured “seventy-five years of dispossession and occupation” – cannot be taken seriously. International Relations and Cooperation Minister Dr Naledi



Pandor clearly displays her colours. A photo-opportunity with Ebrahim Raisi, the Iranian president; a phone call with Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader; and an inability to condemn unequivocally the 7 October massacre in its immediate aftermath have enraged the Jewish community.

ANC hostility towards Israel shouldn’t have come as a surprise. Twenty-five years ago, its chief representative at the United Nations, Dr Neo Mnumzana, put it as follows:

“Jews in South Africa come in many different political colours. There are those who belong to the Zionist movement and represent the same reality which is concretised in the state of Israel, and we disapprove of those members of the Jewish community who have these Zionist affiliations. There are also Jews who belong to the broad struggle against apartheid. We see such members of the Jewish community in a positive light. There are also Jews who belong to the African National Congress, which is the national liberation movement of the South African people. We see them in an even more positive light.”

Little has changed. Under the ANC banner, anti-Jewish tropes abound – from South Africa’s deputy foreign minister, Fatima Hajaig, talking about “Jewish money power”, to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) claiming that the hands of the South African Zionist Federation are “dripping with blood”. Tony Ehrenreich, a trade unionist and a senior ANC politician, went so far as to call on Jewish leaders supporting Zionism to leave the country. “If the Jewish Board of Deputies wants to advance a Zionist agenda, they should leave South Africa and go and advance their agenda elsewhere”, advised Ehrenreich who, in addition, threatened Jewish-owned businesses.

Cosatu has also raised the possibility of specifically targeting Jewish businesses in South Africa. Indeed, there has even been talk, albeit denied, of the ANC considering far-reaching changes to South African citizenship laws, the specific purpose of which was to place restrictions on ties between South Africans and Israel and impose punitive

sanctions against South African companies that conducted business with Israel. More recently, when he addressed a Pan-African Palestine Solidarity Network in Dakar, Senegal, ANC member of parliament, Mandla Mandela, referred to Zionist “chequebook diplomacy”.

Sadly, these well-worn anti-Jewish tropes have been ignored by Cyril Ramaphosa. His silence has emboldened Jew-haters. Calls have been made to close – by force if necessary – a Jewish school in Cape Town; Jews have been intimidated at places of work; Jewish-owned or associated businesses have been targeted; and some Jews have even been threatened in their homes. But not a word from our sanctimonious president.

What does this mean for Jews who support Israel? The answer has become clear in the David Teeger affair. The young captain of South Africa’s Under-19 cricket team found himself in trouble after he praised Israeli soldiers at a private Jewish communal event. Cricket South Africa immediately asked Advocate Wim Trengove to see if Teeger had contravened the speech-code limits. Before the ink of Trengove’s report clearing Teeger had dried – and probably at the behest of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) pro-Palestinian movement, which appears to have an open door to the government, Teeger was removed as captain, ostensibly for “security” reasons.

The reality, however, is that Teeger had dared to express his Zionist convictions, a cardinal sin for the ANC. Surprising? Not at all. Former Secretary General Gwede Mantashe once described the Jewish state as founded on the basis of apartheid “which according to international law and several United Nations conventions is a crime against humanity”.

It’s this mindset that informed the unctuous South African team at The Hague. Why has South Africa never bothered itself with Bashar al-Assad’s massacre of his Syrian countrymen; China’s persecution of the Uighur; the carnage in Yemen; or the genocide in Darfur? Is Israel alone worthy of scrutiny?

Many human-rights-oriented elites – both black and white, Christian and Muslim – consider Zionism – essentially a 19th century ethno-national movement – to be illegitimate. There’s little empathy for ethnic polities in South African thought today that, as historian Hermann Giliomee puts it, is informed by “a dogmatic or intransigent universalism”. “Its point of departure”, he writes, “is that race or ethnicity as a principle of social organisation is essentially irrational and ephemeral and that there’s no need to make any concessions to it. What this

boils down to is the unshakeable conviction that there’s not much more to racial or ethnic identification than the legacy of apartheid classification.”

Such views are widely shared in progressive circles. Certainly, the ANC, dating back to its foundation document, the Freedom Charter of 1955, has had little time for ethnic politics or what it sees as “tribalism”. It has always viewed such politics as a means to divide and rule, manifest in the apartheid project with its proposed puppet ethnic “homelands”. Nobel Laureate Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu went so far as to declare “native” cultural identities as little more than an excrescence of colonial racism – something a democratic nation shouldn’t countenance.

For the critics of Zionism, historic ties between Jews and the “land of Israel” are of no consequence. An important dimension of Jewish identity is thereby fundamentally challenged. The reality of Zionism as a Jewish liberation movement is discarded. The term has been distorted and is now associated with exclusivism, oppression, and expansionism. “It’s a policy that to me looks like it has very many parallels with racism,” said Tutu.

Jewish suffering in the diaspora and the dramatic rebirth of a legitimate, United Nations-sanctioned Jewish state, aren’t acknowledged. Even South Africa’s celebration of cultural diversity – enshrined in its Constitution – seemingly cannot entertain space for its Jewish minority that overwhelmingly – albeit not uncritically – shares the Zionist dream.

Let’s be clear. As a Jew, David Teeger was good enough to be selected as captain of the South African Under-19 cricket team. As a Zionist, he wasn’t. It should now be abundantly clear that South Africa’s “Zionist problem” is in essence a “Jewish problem”.

• *Milton Shain is emeritus professor in the department of historical studies at the University of Cape Town. His latest book, “Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists. Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present” is published by Jacana Media.*

End of runway for EL AL in SA

NICOLA MILTZ

When word got out last week that EL AL would be cancelling the only direct flight between Johannesburg and Tel Aviv from April 2024, it sent the local community into shock and marked the end of an era.

Speculation about this dreaded decision had been swirling for some time, particularly as tensions between South Africa and Israel escalated following the Hamas massacre on 7 October, and South Africa accusing Israel of genocide in the International Court of Justice at The Hague, a claim it vehemently denies.

The confirmation on Friday, 26 January, that EL AL would no longer do this route hit hard, especially given the airline's explanation, citing the "current security situation" and a decrease in demand among Israeli travellers to the country.

For many, it felt like a profound loss, with some feeling abandoned. One passenger shared that "Flying EL AL always filled me with immense pride, as if I were returning to my spiritual home on a Jewish airline." Another remarked, "Despite the security *balagan* and occasional brashness of the crew, I always felt safe, and it was my small way of supporting the holy land."

For many, the non-stop flight was convenient, especially for elderly parents or those who were wheelchair bound, and a fast and direct link connecting them to loved ones and their heritage.

"I know there are other – some would argue better – airline choices, which also offer kosher meals and better entertainment consoles, but there's nothing like that *hamish* vibe and having no-one but an eyelid as men daven together at the back of a plane making a *minyán*," said another.

The cancellation of the bi-weekly flight will mean that there are no direct flights from Israel to South Africa, and is a further blow to the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the two countries.

"Israelis don't want to fly to South Africa. They are cancelling flights, and planes are pretty empty. We understand that it's the situation because it was

different before," *The Times of Israel* quoted EL AL as saying.

"The fact that the Israelis don't want to go to South Africa but do want to go to other places helps us decide that we're pausing that route," the source said.

EL AL said that once it had stopped flying to Johannesburg, it would shift the wide-body aircraft it uses on the route to expand current destinations to North America, Bangkok, and Tokyo, while examining new routes.



Passengers have been offered refunds for flights already booked or vouchers, but some say this is small comfort considering the lasting emotional impact of this decision on the community.

"I've stuck with EL AL for years out of loyalty even though sometimes I bitched and moaned about the rudeness or the fluctuating ticket prices. I guess it's because the airline has an unwavering commitment to bringing Jews to and from the promised land.

"When you touch down at Ben Gurion on an EL AL flight, it somehow feels right. I felt this especially when I flew with my sons for their Barmitzvahs," said another passenger.

The airline was founded in September 1948, when it flew its maiden flight, bringing home Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, from a diplomatic visit to Geneva. In 1949, EL AL participated in Operation Magic Carpet, bringing Jews of Yemen to Israel. In May 1960, EL AL transported the famous Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann from Buenos Aires to Jerusalem for the Eichmann Trial. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, EL AL continued flying, and assisted

in airlifting military equipment.

In 1991, EL AL participated in Operation Solomon, transporting thousands of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. One flight carried more than 1 088 people, including two babies who were reportedly born on the flight.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the South African Zionist Federation said in a joint statement, "During our meeting with EL AL last year, it became apparent that operating a once-a-week flight was economically challenging for it.

Unfortunately, even increasing the frequency to three times a week didn't attract the expected passenger numbers. As a private company, EL AL's operations are driven by commercial viability.

"The potential loss of EL AL's direct flights is devastating for our community.

However, we also acknowledge that the current travel landscape offers multiple alternative options for travel between Israel and South Africa, a significant change from the situation 15 years ago when these flights were last at risk.

"Our ongoing dialogue with EL AL and the Israeli government is open and constructive," the organisations said, and they were proactively exploring various strategies and proposals around the economic feasibility of this route and potentially finding a solution that could result in the reinstatement of EL AL's direct flights in the future.

"Our community deeply values its connection with Israel, and we're dedicated to maintaining and strengthening this bond through all available means," according to the statement.

Dozens of flights to and from Tel Aviv were cancelled by major airlines in the wake of the 7 October Hamas attacks, though many resumed in December and January as rocket attacks from Gaza on the centre of Israel lessened.

Longstanding EL AL general manager of southern and eastern Africa, Roz Bukris, wouldn't comment further.

Rishon LeZion mayor takes down SA flag

LEE TANKLE

The mayor of Rishon LeZion, Raz Kinstlich, made a big show on Sunday, 28 January, of taking down the South African flag in the city's Garden of Leadership, where it has been flown for years.

It was one of 32 national flags that flew in the garden in the city, just 8km south of Tel Aviv.

"There are flags that aren't welcome in my city," Kinstlich said, while taking the flag down in the video. "I won't allow this flag to fly in Rishon LeZion. After this same country accused us of genocide after the massacre of October 7. We won't forget or forgive. As I said, we won't let anyone against our people be in our city."

Kinstlich dismantles the flag himself before it falls to the ground in the video that was posted by Israel's Channel 12.

The statement was made with the backdrop of the South African government taking Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague for alleged genocide in the war against Hamas.

African National Congress (ANC) Secretary General Fikile Mbalula forwarded the video on X, claiming it was removed by "the occupation" in implementing the mayor's wishes following the ICJ lawsuit.

The Garden of Leadership holds tributes to Israel's former leaders as well as a section showcasing the countries that voted in favour of United Nations Resolution 181 to end the British mandate and establish the state of Israel. In this garden, the South African flag was flown alongside Sweden, France, the United States, and Canada.

"After October 7, when we experienced some of our toughest moments as a nation, the rules changed," the mayor said. "We won't apologise for the fact that we're exercising our fundamental right to defend ourselves and our existence, and those who act or will act against the state of Israel won't be allowed to exist either in our

consciousness or on the pages of history.

"Therefore, we've decided that the flag of South Africa that has flown until now together with the flags of the 32 countries that voted in favour of establishing a Jewish state in 1947 will be removed immediately. Zero tolerance towards those who seek to harm us. Our hope isn't lost yet. *Am Yisrael Chai!* [the people of Israel live]."

Moriah Malkah, the spokesperson for the municipality of Rishon LeZion, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Israel is in one of its most difficult times. On October 7, 2023, thousands of Israeli men and women were murdered, burned, raped, and tortured in brutal hate crimes by the terrorist organisation Hamas.

"If after everything that has been done to us, the country of South Africa still decided to file a petition against us at the ICJ in The Hague for committing war crimes, for us, South Africa is no longer a friend.

"It's not worthy that we raise your flag in the city of Rishon LeZion," she said. "Those who show such opacity towards an entire people don't deserve to be recognised. That's why we decided to take down the flag that was placed in our city. The state of Israel has the right to defend itself against those who try to destroy it. I hope peaceful days will come and bring justice to the Jewish people soon."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "The SAZF is concerned about the ANC secretary general's response to the removal of the



Photo: Screenshot
Mayor of Rishon LeZion, Raz Kinstlich taking down the South African flag

South African flag, particularly his reference to Israel as 'the occupation', a term often used in Hamas's rhetoric and by extremists who deny Israel's right to exist.

Mbalula's choice of words is a clear alignment with Hamas's genocidal viewpoint, framing the conflict in a manner that Israel isn't a legitimate state. This stance reflects the ANC government's failed attempts to shield Hamas at the ICJ and delegitimise Israel's right to self-defence."

Sara Gon, head of strategic engagement at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), said the incident could be seen as Rishon's mayor tarring all South Africans with the same brush, but she didn't believe it was.

"It's a protest against the ANC-led government's response – or the lack thereof – to the 7 October attacks, the antisemitism that has been engendered by the government's embrace of Hamas and its cause, and of course the referral to the ICJ to declare Israel guilty of committing genocide against the Palestinians."

IRR head of policy research, Anthea Jeffery, said in an article published on 31 January, "The political importance of the genocide accusation explains why South Africa opted to rely on the 'wrong' international convention in its application to the ICJ. What's more difficult to understand is why the ICJ didn't acknowledge that the Genocide Convention isn't intended to deal with civilian deaths in times of conflict, and why it followed South Africa's lead in ignoring the vital distinction between the horrors of war and the horrors of genocide.

"The removal [of the flag] is a symbolic protest against the government's actions, and South African Jews will understand and possibly even support him," Gon said. "It will go up again when the ANC is removed from power, possibly in the election in May 2024."



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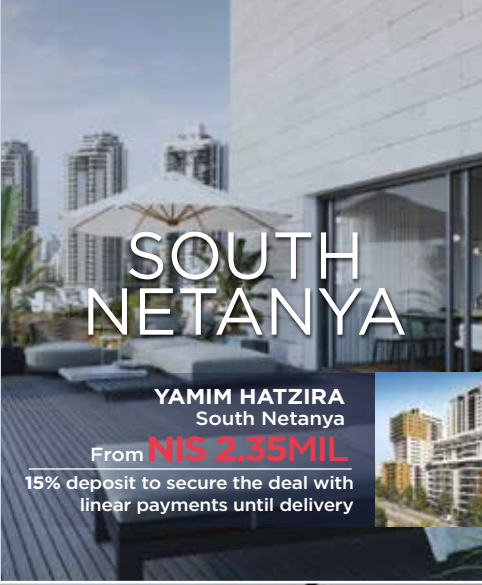


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Isolation of Israel another tactic of war

OPINION DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



Hostile nations have surrounded Israel ever since 1948. Military scientists have coined a term to describe the condition in which nations or armies find themselves surrounded: operating from interior lines of communication. In spite of the serious psychological, physical, and logistical dangers of being encircled, obvious advantages emanate from those operating in these conditions.

Using the art manoeuvre, an agile opponent can assume a defensive position with one or several of the enemy’s attacking forces, thereby delaying their advance with a minimum of their troops deployed in a defensive posture.

Simultaneously, while this portion of the enemy is occupied with defending forces, an offensive can be launched on a single attacking force, applying overwhelming numerical and firepower. Therefore, operating on internal lines of communication allows for the swift switching from defensive to offensive and vice versa.

Manoeuvre warfare demands the utmost skill and daring, allowing enemy forces to be separated in time and space and dealt with individually, in a piecemeal fashion, at a time and place of the attacker’s choosing. The Israelis have mastered the art of manoeuvre warfare while operating from internal lines of communication, and with utmost flexibility and agility, defeated numerically superior opponents in 1956, 1967, and 1973.

Those assuming the posture of encircling, such as Israel’s neighbours, are said to operate from external lines of communication. Encirclement is advantageous if the attackers can advance their forces simultaneously and with equal vigour. Converging forces place the defenders on the horns of a dilemma.

The difficulty for those operating on external lines of communication is co-ordinating different national forces, often separated by many kilometres and possessing conflicting objectives.

defensive position, while it concentrates its efforts on Hamas in Gaza. This is the classic position of one who operates from internal lines of communication.

Hamas, on the other hand, operating from external lines, has done its utmost to cajole the West Bank Palestinians as well as Hezbollah to join in attacking Israel with equal vigour. Therefore, Hamas will do its utmost to encourage a wider war.

Israel will seek to discourage that based on the historical geography and geopolitics governing the conduct of war in the region. Thus far, the Israelis have been successful in containing Hezbollah and dissuading West Bank Palestinians from joining the fray. Iran and Syria seem reluctant to strike Israel directly, and prefer to rely on their proxies. The sporadic attack on shipping by Houthis and the death of three United States servicemen in Jordan via drone attack threatens to widen the war should matters deteriorate.

It’s at the strategic level of war that Israel finds itself most under threat and least able to control the situation. Although Israel and South Africa both claimed victory in the recent International Court of Justice’s verdict, it’s Israel’s image that’s most vulnerable.

The regrettable South African initiative cannot be seen as an isolated enterprise but part of a more extensive worldwide process of delegitimising the very existence of Israel. This is Israel being surrounded and subjected to simultaneous co-ordinated attacks designed to weaken the resolve of allies as well as Israelis themselves through a process of progressive isolation.

The greatest threat to the powers seeking Israel’s political isolation would be the successful consummation of the Abraham Accords. Israel’s opponents are justified in claiming the first round, as the Abraham Accords have either been derailed or delayed indefinitely.

The Accords, coupled with the existing peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, would have broken the ring of hostility surrounding Israel since its birth in 1948. The possible demise of lasting peace in the region is the ultimate tragedy of the current conflict.

So, what’s the endgame? A wider war must be avoided at all costs while eliminating Hamas as a political entity in Gaza. Israel faces the near-impossible task of ridding Gaza of Hamas with the minimum of collateral civilian casualties and the minimum of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) casualties.

The IDF faces the unenviable challenge of maintaining its

resolve in the face of a growing and vociferous enemy clamouring for an end to the conflict before Hamas is defeated.

Restraint is key, no matter how provocative Hezbollah becomes, thereby avoiding a multi-front war. As is her way of war and military tradition, she must confront one enemy at a time.

There’s a desperate need to reboot the Abraham Accords. A creative and bold initiative endorsed by the signatories of the Abraham Accords is urgently needed to provide a roadmap to take care of the political aspirations of the Palestinians. Israel needs to apply its manoeuvre doctrine at strategic level.

• Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.

‘We’re ready,’ says soldier on Lebanon border

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Amid reports of reinforcements being sent to the northern border, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Company Leader Roy Rizel, 31, who oversees three platoons in the Golani Brigade stationed on Israel’s Lebanon border, says his soldiers have long been prepared for this mission.

While the media’s attention remains widely focused on the south of Israel where the country continues fighting Hamas in Gaza, soldiers on the northern front are determined to curtail the serious threat posed by Hezbollah. Many are led by Rizel, who began and completed his military service in the Golani Brigade, one of the IDF’s most decorated infantry units. Today he serves in the brigade as a company leader, heading up three platoons.

After being drafted to the brigade in 2011, Rizel did a commander and officer course and commanded his first in platoon in Gaza in 2014, which gave him the combat experience on which he currently draws. Once discharged, he was drafted in the Golani Brigade’s Reserves Unit. “Our mission is mainly linked to the Lebanese border,” he says. “We’ve been prepared for this for a long time.”

On 7 October, while home in central Israel, Rizel and his family heard the Iron Dome missile defence system kick into gear. “It felt different because there were hundreds of missiles,” he recalls. “I immediately realised that something had happened and by 07:30, I’d already seen the videos of Hamas’s trucks and I told my wife that we were in a war. About an hour later, I got the call to draft my entire company of soldiers and move as fast as we could to our unit in the north. By 20:00, we were all on the border, in our gear, and armed with our guns.”

Rizel says Hezbollah was already on the border when they arrived. “We managed to make massive progress and caused losses to the enemy in the first few days,” he says. “Afterwards, Hezbollah stepped back, which gave us time to spread all over the border in the surrounding kibbutzim and between the villages. Now we’re maintaining a kind of silent war with them every day - they’re shooting missiles at our antennas and bases, and we’re shooting back at them.”

They had, in fact, anticipated an attack from the northern border rather than from the south, when the Hamas massacre took place on 7 October, Rizel says. Though Hezbollah’s involvement remains in question, the fact that Israeli troops arrived at the Lebanon border within hours of the attacks made them rethink any intention of capitalising on the resulting chaos.

“People aren’t aware how much we prepared for this,” Rizel says. “The training that we’ve done for the past 10 years was aimed at the northern border, at the possibility of Hezbollah units crossing here and targeting nearby Israeli settlements. We also have many outposts near the border that the enemy is unaware of.”

Rizel talks of the difficulties of being away from his wife and two children, aged six and eight, for so long, and reuniting with them only for brief visits. “For the first month, it was clear why it was so important, why



I had to do this and be away, but now it’s been more than 120 days, so my kids are starting to question it. Every time I leave, it’s hard on them. My youngest started first grade just before 7 October, and I didn’t take part in any of his school events.”

Yet he remains driven by his mission. He’s also committed to keeping up the morale of his soldiers. “I’m trying to give them as much leave as I can, which isn’t a lot,” he says. He managed recently to arrange a get together with soldiers and their families at a kibbutz in central Israel.

Overseeing a company of soldiers who are reservists and have to be away from their families, jobs, or businesses is challenging, Rizel says. “Even I work a regular, boring day job, I’m a programmer, which is very different to what I’m doing here.” Everything has stopped for his men, he says. “Some have got caught up in debt, so we help them with funds and are working with the authorities to ensure that they don’t take on any damages.”

Operating in cold and mountainous conditions with gear not designed for such terrain can also be challenging. Yet, says Rizel, with his men having served in the brigade before, they are familiar with the region and know how to handle the cold. They find solutions including a generator used to provide heat in an open field beneath the trees where many are deployed by the border.

“At first, we had a hard time getting ammunition because most of the supplies went to the south, but it was quickly corrected by the army after we got drafted,” says Rizel. “Ever since, we’ve become only stronger. We’re trying to find creative answers to challenges – like finding gear that will allow us to carry heavier weights. The army helps us as much as it can. Though most of the funds are going to the south for now, we can see that the centre of the war is starting to shift to the north. Everybody here knows that the main threat is Hezbollah.”

Though Rizel says soldiers sometimes find international condemnation upsetting, they are clear about who they are, and who they’re up against. “We know who our enemy is, we know that they don’t want to talk about peace. I don’t even think that the land matters to them, they mostly want to hurt us, our children, our families, and our friends because we’re free Jews in Israel.

“They aren’t looking for compassion, patience, or any peace at all, not from the south or the north, and we’re prepared for that. It’s a shame that there are some forces in the world that can’t acknowledge that, but the future will tell the story.”



Photo: Tomer Neuberg - Flash90

An Israeli military helicopter flying above the Gaza Strip

Syria and Egypt came closest to defeating Israel with their simultaneous attack in 1973. Israel successfully – albeit with great difficulty and skill – switched forces from one theatre to another, assuming alternatively defensive and offensive postures to overcome the Syrian and then the Egyptian army. These specific laws of war are immutable, and apply equally to Israel’s situation today, just as they did in yesteryear.

At the operational level of war, modern-day Israel finds itself surrounded by hostile populations and militias in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Delving deeper into the battlefield, Syria, Iran, and the Houthi militias in Yemen threaten to widen the war.

Should these somewhat disparate enemies acquire the ability and willingness to launch a co-ordinated attack from all fronts simultaneously, Israel would find itself in a precarious position.

Since 7 October, Israel has contained Hezbollah in the north by assuming a

Heart on sleeve – why Jewish jewellery is everywhere

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

With the proliferation of jewellery featuring Jewish symbols, Hebrew slogans, and the words “Bring Them Home” in reference to the hostages, it’s clear that fashion accessories have become an important way of expressing Jewish pride and solidarity with Israel. Though some may fear visibly identifying as Jewish amidst a global uptick in antisemitism, many South African community members are embracing the trend.

“I felt strongly even before 7 October about never hiding my identity,” says former business owner Stacey Kirshenbaum. “Years ago, when I lived in the United Kingdom [UK], I was offered advice by a lady in a supermarket to hide my Magen David. She whispered to me that she was also Jewish.” Her well-meaning advice had the opposite effect. “I then wore it 24/7, and knew I would never, ever hide the fact that I’m Jewish.”

Though Jews in South Africa and abroad have undoubtedly received similar advice, especially since the 7 October massacre, many more are wearing Jewish jewellery. “I’m wearing more now since 7 October, I have a heart necklace and bracelet from an Israeli designer that has a Magen David cut out in the middle,” says Kirshenbaum. “I’ve seen so many young people say on Instagram that before 7 October, they never acknowledged being Jewish. Now they have almost ‘woken up’, and are wearing everything they can find, including getting tattoos.”

Though she acknowledges that we may feel a false sense of security in South Africa, Kirshenbaum says she’s never felt as unsafe in Johannesburg as she did in London, where she was visiting her children when the war in Israel began. “I witnessed cars with Muslim women hanging out the windows screaming ‘Death to Jews!’, ‘Free Gaza!’ and waving flags.

“I was alone that day in a very busy tourist area, and I was shocked. I had never felt that way before, and quickly returned to my son’s home. I also hate



Jewellery by Personalized by Lara



Bracelet designed by Reuven Kantor

the fact I’m relieved that my kids aren’t wearing any Jewish jewellery in the UK, especially my son in North London.”

Nonetheless, the demand for Magen David jewellery increased by a reported 400% in the UK and United States in the month following the Hamas incursion. Though such statistics aren’t available locally, our community appears to be following suit.

Johannesburg-based teacher Pamela Kantor says that while she and her family have always proudly worn Jewish and Israeli jewellery as a sign of their heritage, they’re doing so even more since 7 October. Kantor’s son Reuven is even making and selling bracelets stating “*Am Yisrael Chai*” and “Bring Them Home Now” at his school.

“I’ve always worn a Magen David necklace and Shema bracelet and ring, but now, I wear even more,” Kantor says. “I just can’t stop buying things. The jewellery makes me feel connected to family and friends in Israel who are so far away. The pieces bring me a type of comfort and strength, and make me feel safer.”

Kantor says she and her family have no reservations about wearing the jewellery. “We’re proud to be Jewish, we love our religion, we love our community and Israel, and we won’t shy away from being who we are and who we were born to be.”

Lara Baskin, who sells personalised engraved accessories says her clients

have always loved getting their names engraved in Hebrew as it’s part of their identity. “After 7 October a client asked me to engrave ‘*Am Yisrael Chai*’ on a bracelet and I advertised that I could do it,” says Baskin.

“Before I knew it, I was busy with orders for these bracelets. I didn’t decide to design so many, it just happened. I also incidentally had a few blank heart necklaces and thought it would be an elegant way of showing “My heart is with Israel”, which I engraved on them alongside an Israeli map. A lot of my clients told me these products made them feel connected to Israel. Jewellery is a beautiful way of showing the world that we won’t hide away, but be proud to be Jews.”

Kara Stoler, the co-founder of luxury jewellery brand Emme & Opal, also understands the power of jewellery when it comes to expressing Jewish identity. It resonates with the brand’s tagline: “Your jewellery introduces you before you speak.” The brand’s Mazel Collective was born out of a desire to identify, celebrate, give hope, and contribute to the community, with a portion of proceeds donated to the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in honour of its dedication.

Including rings, earrings, charms, necklaces, and bracelets, with symbols including chais and Magen Davids, the range symbolises hope and continuity. Yet it also includes more subtle designs that display unity including the Ahava pendant inspired by the Jerusalem sculpture. “Another is our

unity Magen David charm, a more abstract portrayal of a Magen David surrounded by hearts,” Stoler says. “The designs allow our clients to feel pride in expressing themselves in their own way.”

Kirshenbaum says that when she returned from the UK to South Africa in November, she noticed a larger amount of people wearing more jewellery, T-shirts, bags, and caps from Israel. “Our community has grown stronger and prouder,” she says.

That’s why she was upset to learn that friends from Israel were advised to leave such symbols at home when visiting their kids in South Africa. The Israeli government gave a precautionary warning to travellers to avoid openly displaying signs of their Israeli identity, especially

in countries like South Africa which it says poses a moderate threat to Israelis. “I told my friends that everyone here is wearing their Jewish jewellery, but they felt vulnerable, especially in light of how

South Africa has behaved towards Israel,” says Kirshenbaum.

Shira Revach Gewer, an Israeli living in South Africa, is also cautious. “About a month ago, for the first time since I came to South Africa, I told my kids to change out of the Israeli soccer outfits they were wearing and wear Liverpool ones instead as we were going to a dam and my hubby wasn’t with us.”

Jevon Greenblatt, the director of operations at the CSO, however, reiterates the group’s message about the safety of wearing Jewish symbols in South Africa. “The CSO has never requested that our community hide our Jewish identity, and we don’t believe that it’s necessary at this stage,” he says.

“Wearing a Magen David necklace, your kippah, or showing your tzitzit is absolutely ok. While specific situations may require a change in such behaviour, something the CSO will communicate if deemed necessary, it advises community members to go about [their] daily lives, with vigilance, but without fear or apology.”

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SA banks assert compliance with terror funding laws

>>Continued from page 1

To avoid detection, money is transferred in small remittances that don’t raise eyebrows, he said.

“There’s a complete breakdown in law enforcement and intelligence structures, which makes South Africa attractive for dubious business dealings. None of this is surprising.”

A Johannesburg-based forensic accountant, who also preferred to remain anonymous, said, “Recent media reports support why South Africa was grey listed in the first place. There must have been strong indication of cross border money laundering and terror financing. Sadly as a consequence, banks have become extra cautious and it has become difficult for the honest man in the street to transact. However, it still appears as if organisations with criminal intent manage to continue operating. At the end of the day, the banks have a lot to answer for about whether they are taking enough precautions to prevent this sort of thing. All will be revealed if and when South Africa is removed from the grey list.”

Towards the end of last year, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana said the country was making good progress in addressing all the deficiencies identified by the FATF by early 2025. He said, “15 of the 20 technical deficiencies” in the country’s

legal framework to “fight against organised crime and illegal financial flows” had been addressed, and it hoped to be off the grey list soon.

A Nedbank spokesperson told the *SA Jewish Report* that the bank had noted “several unsubstantiated allegations” on different media platforms related to alleged financing of terrorist activity.

“We want to assure our stakeholders that Nedbank has a comprehensive risk management and compliance plan in place which is aligned with international standards to combat money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing. We strictly adhere to sanctions and related legislation, and are confident that our risk management controls and reporting obligations are robust. Should we become aware of any illegal or suspicious activity in client accounts, we don’t hesitate to take the necessary action in terms of our processes and in line with the relevant legislation.”

Standard Bank told the *SA Jewish Report* that it abided by the laws of the jurisdictions in which it operates, including AML and CTF regulation, and took its duty of care with regards to compliance “extremely seriously”.

The banks all said customer confidentiality prohibited the disclosure of clients’ details.

War makes SA olim more determined to ‘go home’

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Capeonian Mark Blumenthal made aliya with his wife in January this year and in doing so, they wanted to show their support for Israel and show the terrorists they weren’t afraid of “returning to our home”. They weren’t alone. There has been a steady flow of olim from South Africa throughout the war. Thirty-nine people made aliya in December 2023 alone, the same number as in December 2022. There were 248 olim from South Africa in 2023. According to Telfed, 77 South Africans have made aliya since the war started on 7 October.

South African *oleh* Richard Bayer made aliya from Johannesburg exactly a year ago. He said that since the war started, though soldiers are more prominent on the streets, there’s more tension, posters up all over of Israeli hostages, and yellow ribbons on cars showing support for them, “our lives go on as normal”. Bayer last week celebrated his first aliya anniversary. Johannesburg-born Shani Chai made aliya on

25 December last year. “All three of my siblings made aliya about 15 years ago,” this Herzlia High School alumnus says. “I always knew that one day I would join my family in the holy land.”

Chai initially hoped to make aliya a few months earlier, but was delayed by the limitation on flights due to the war and the number of reservists being called up.

“I come from a family where my grandparents escaped the Holocaust, and have always believed strongly in Zionism. My late mom always used to say, ‘There’s only one homeland for us and that’s the state of Israel.’ Her greatest wish was for all her children and grandchildren to live together in

Israel. We’ve finally honoured her wish.” Blumenthal, who worked in property management in Cape Town for 15 years, lived in Israel for four years with his family as a child, and he and his wife had travelled there a few times before. “We always had a plan to leave South Africa around the age of 35,” he says. “Our reason was that we don’t believe South Africa is salvageable as a country. We don’t want ourselves or our children to be living there in the next 20 to 30 years, because I believe that something is going to snap at some point, and the only people who will weather the storm will be the ultra-wealthy. I do hope I’m wrong about this.”

Israel was originally last on the list of countries that Blumenthal considered immigrating to. However, he changed his mind amidst the fighting between Israel and Gaza during Operation Guardian of the Walls in 2021. “From listening to and reading news from all over the world, and hearing opinions from the left and right of the political spectrum, I realised that as a Jew in South

Africa, I had been fed a lie. The lie being that as Jews, we’re safe, at least, in the Western world.” Having seen how the world reacted to Israel’s response to the attack on 7 October and the antisemitism that accompanied it, “a switch flipped in my head”, Blumenthal says. “I looked at my wife and said, ‘We need to be in Israel, a Jewish country where we don’t have to be scared to wear a kippah or Magen David necklace.’” The war made Blumenthal and Chai more determined to make aliya. “We saw the level of antisemitism around the world, especially in Cape Town,” Blumenthal says. “We felt we would rather be in a bomb shelter with other Jews in Israel than



Richard Bayer

drive past the Sea Point promenade and see the spray-painted swastikas or listen to the African National Congress declare its undying support for Hamas. Our thought process was, as Jews, we should no longer be living here and paying taxes to politicians who support the killing of Jews.”

Chai wanted to be in Israel with her eldest daughter, Jaime Ruth, who, at the age of 19, made aliya to help protect the country. “She was and still is my own personal hero,” she says.

said that, I’m blown away by the unity and unwavering support of all the people living in Israel. It makes me so proud to be a Jew and even more so when parts of the world condemn our nation for the response to the 7 October attack.” Bayer is aware of the rise in antisemitism and brainwashing around the world. “People see what they want to see. They don’t want the truth.”

Chai says Israelis are appalled that South Africa took Israel to the

International Court of Justice. “Our people in South Africa suffer every day and are robbed of basic needs. There’s absolutely no concern or empathy for its own people.”

In Israel, many apartments and businesses are draped proudly with the Israeli flag, Blumenthal says. “Some businesses have been closed for a while, presumably because the owners or workers are in the army. Speaking to some shop owners and taxi drivers, all say the same thing, that whatever happens, it cannot go back to how it was. They’ve all said the Gaza situation needs to change.”

Bayer offers the same advice for those making aliya during the war as he would

at any other time. “Make sure your qualifications are suitable for jobs here. The school system for mainstream children is different to back home. Do your research about schools, and find out how much Hebrew your family needs. Work out what transport you’ll be using. Talk to South Africans who have lived in Israel for a while. Find out where your local councils are. You need to register for things like electricity. Make sure that you know where to convert your driver’s license.”



Aviv and Mark Blumenthal

Clive Mashishi names son for ‘brave’ David Teeger

LEE TANKLE

When Christian community leader Clive Mashishi, the founder of the Clive Mashishi Foundation and volunteer for the South African Friends of Israel, found out that he was going to have a son, he knew that his son’s name would be very important.

Mashishi spent a long time looking for names. Everything changed when he witnessed David Teeger accepting the Rising Star Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards on 22 October 2023, and saying in his speech, “The true rising stars are the young soldiers in Israel. I’d like to dedicate it to the state of Israel and every single soldier fighting so that we can live and thrive in the diaspora.”

“I fell in love with the spirit of David,” Mashishi says. “That he stood up against all odds to fight for what he believes in as a young Jewish man. It’s rare for someone to get an award and dedicate it to Israeli soldiers, especially at this time, because he knew that was going to be difficult, but for him to take such a step for his fellow Jewish brothers, touched me. I told myself that I wanted my son to be brave for his community and the people of South Africa like David Teeger.

“I want my son to have the same courage and belief in standing strong and defending what he believes in as Teeger has,” Mashishi says. He also hopes that his



David Mashishi

son will have “pride in his nation”. “To support the Jewish community is about the courage that we see and the pride that it has for the nation.” Similarly, Mashishi’s daughter, Zion, who was born on 25 January 2019, shows Mashishi’s love of Israel and commitment to Zionism. “If I forget to love the state of Israel, I will also forget to love my daughter,” Mashishi says.

Holocaust Centre director awarded for promoting religious freedom

STEVEN GRUZD

Tali Nates, the founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), received the United States State Department’s International Religious Freedom Award in Washington, D.C., on 18 January, “in recognition of [her] courage and commitment to promoting and defending religious freedom globally”.

She was one of eight recipients, including from Lithuania, Nicaragua, and Nigeria. This round of awards commemorated the 25th anniversary of the United States International Religious Freedom Act, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1998.



United States Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma and Tali Nates at the award ceremony

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was unfortunately “otherwise occupied”, and the award was presented by his deputy, Richard Verma.

Nates, who is currently lecturing in Flagstaff, Arizona, said the award was recognition of many years of work as a historian in the field of Holocaust and genocide. “I work with amazing people and networks in South Africa and around the world, from Auschwitz to Kigali in Rwanda. This award wasn’t expected, because I just do the work and don’t know other people are watching. It’s good to see that others believe that the work has value and merit. I’m overwhelmed and grateful.”

The award citation noted that “Nates uses case studies from the Holocaust, the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and apartheid in South Africa to teach youth to stand up to antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and all forms of othering. Nates also works to promote reconciliation and healing in post-conflict societies torn by religious and ethnic conflict, and is contributing to a growing body of scholarly work on the African historical experience of trauma.” She draws on her own experience – her father was saved in the Shoah by Oskar Schindler.

“The award recognised the layering of the work that the JHGC does. It’s not just about death, but about the individuals and the lives they led. They had hopes and dreams, and could have done so much for the world. Our work on xenophobia urges us to see refugees as people, not in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’,” Nates said.

“I believe strongly in partnering – it gives hope in our very challenging world. The world is in a difficult place. We have so many ongoing conflicts in Africa – in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan – and we have experienced nearly two full years of war and killing in Ukraine.

“I asked myself why the award was given now,” Nates said. “The decision was made in November 2023, when Israel was already well into its latest war with Hamas. The award recognises the work we’re doing in 13 African countries. We promote human rights, dialogue, and opening spaces.”

She noted that the JHGC has been sought after in this time. “People need a safe space. We’re a historical space, not a political space. A place where people can learn and ask questions. We’ve seen a narrowing of spaces for dialogue in a wounded world. I know people are hurt, angry, and sad, but as human beings, we can rise above this. We must fight ‘othering’, xenophobia, racism more than ever now.”

Nates paid tribute to the late Gerald Leissner for his vision and support for the JHGC. She also thanked Johannesburg’s Holocaust survivors, particularly Veronica Phillips, who passed away in 2021.

Five years after its opening, Nates believes that the JHGC “is something South Africa and Africa can be proud of”. One positive legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic has been how the centre has used technology to connect to dynamic, powerful speakers and like-minded institutions all over the world. “We realised that there was no need to spend hundreds of thousands of rands all the time to have access to the best scholars internationally. Of course, we’ll still bring people out for special events.”

Nates is no stranger to awards for her work. In 2010, she was chosen as one of the top 100 newsworthy and noteworthy women in South Africa by the *Mail & Guardian*. She has won many awards including the Jewish Achievers Kia Community Service Award (South Africa, 2015); the Gratiias Agit Award (Czech Republic, 2020); the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Award (Austria, 2021); and the Goethe Medal (Germany, 2022).

“This award comes at this difficult time of trauma and sadness, great concern, and worry for the Jewish community in South Africa and around the world. Jewish people are facing the aftermath of the massacre of 7 October, a pogrom, and rising antisemitism. We’re feeling under attack. But the award shows that we’re seen, and the Jewish community’s efforts, its museums, memorials, and education are works against hatred. We may think everything is bad in these times and cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. But we must continue to do the work. We’re down, but not out.”

Jews of Lithuanian or Polish heritage eligible for EU citizenship



There’s a common misconception that to get European citizenship and a European Union passport, you need to have documents proving your lineage. **The fact is** not having any documents proving lineage doesn’t necessarily disqualify you from eligibility. In many cases, the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin.

Having European citizenship offers many **benefits** besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we’re looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn’t exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn’t exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one’s ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The descendants of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won’t be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated.

For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

My name is Avi Horesh. I’m well-known in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

With only a four-hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius, I’m able to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I collaborate closely with local professionals in tracing the required documents for your successful application for reinstatement as a European citizen.

Having lived in Poland for seven years, I have in-depth understanding of European immigration laws.

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

I will be in Johannesburg 8, 9 and 15 February and in Cape Town 10 to 14 February.

WhatsApp: +48 783 953 223

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Eylon Levy earns admirers – and reportedly one serious enemy

ELIYAHU FREEDMAN – JTA

Roughly twice as many people have viewed a single instance of Eylon Levy raising his eyebrows as there are citizens of the country he was defending when he did it.

“Does Israel not think that Palestinian lives are valued as highly as Israeli lives?” Sky News journalist Kay Burley asked Levy, a spokesperson for the Israeli government, on live TV in late November, as Israel was in the process of releasing three Palestinian prisoners for each Israeli hostage freed from Gaza.

“That’s an astonishing accusation,” Levy responded, his expressive eyebrows shooting up in disbelief. “If we could release one prisoner for every one hostage we would obviously do that,” he retorted.

He shared the clip in a tweet that went viral, and has now been seen more than 16 million times. It was, he wrote, “The first question that left me speechless – but only for a second.”

It was also a breakout moment for the British-accented Oxbridge graduate who has been called “Israel’s prince of public diplomacy”, known in Hebrew as *hasbara*. Tens of thousands of people flooded to watch him on social media, increasing his follower count on X, formerly Twitter, by more than sevenfold, to 175 000. He has another 178 000 on Instagram. His social media antics gave Israel a powerful weapon in the bruising battles that have become ever more intense since 7 October.

Now, in a sign of how Israel’s wartime unity is fraying, Levy is finding himself embattled – by Sara Netanyahu, the wife of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who reportedly holds it against Levy that he criticised her husband’s leadership before 7 October. An initial report that he would be pushed out of the National Public

Diplomacy Directorate (NPDD) has been batted back, but rumours are still swirling that he could face consequences because of Sara Netanyahu’s famous ire.

Levy’s exit, if it comes, would strip the prime minister’s office of one of its savviest public defenders at a time when international opinion is turning more strongly against the Israeli war effort.

Levy declined to comment last Monday, instead referring questions to the prime minister’s office. The office denied reports that he could be penalised for his politics, saying, “The directorate works according to professional standards.”

Born in London to Israeli parents, Levy studied first at Oxford University, where he was involved in debate. A far-left member of Parliament famously walked out rather than debate Levy, saying he did not debate Israelis. He then earned a graduate degree in international relations from Cambridge, researching the impact of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, including his own grandparents, on Israel’s development.

From there, he moved to Israel, arriving at the end of the 2014 Gaza War. Enlisting in the Israel Defense Forces, he was assigned to the unit responsible for implementing Israeli civil policy in the West Bank and Gaza in co-ordination with the Palestinian Authority and other international groups. After his service, he spent several years as a news anchor on Israeli television before joining the office of Israeli President Isaac Herzog as its international media advisor.

In the middle of 2023, Levy quit his job in Herzog’s office. The country had been torn apart by a proposal from Netanyahu’s right-wing government to overhaul Israel’s judiciary.

As Herzog sought to broker a compromise, Levy sided with the critics, becoming an even more outspoken pro-democracy protester after leaving his



government post.

His personal criticism of Netanyahu continued into the first days of the war. “This will be Netanyahu’s legacy,” he tweeted on 8 October. “Not the COVID-19 vaccines. Not the Abraham Accords. Not judicial reform or the protests. History books will open with one of the deadliest terror attacks in world history, on his watch, after nearly 15 years in charge of our security.”

But he soon drafted himself to the government’s defence, joining the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who set aside their objections to the government in favour of a unified, powerful response to Hamas’s attack.

Levy explained his decision to join the government he once excoriated in an interview with *Globes*, an Israeli magazine. “Like many, I participated in the protests against reform. It’s no secret,” he said. “There was Israel before 7 October, and there’s Israel after. Nothing will return to what it was before. There’s now only one task: to win the war, and for that we must put the wars of the Jews aside and unite.”

Levy’s addition to the government’s public advocacy team came at a crucial time, with the NPDD in a state of disarray. Its leader, Likud Knesset member Galit Distel Atbaryan, resigned on 13 October after being criticised

for speaking English poorly.

By contrast, Levy’s flawless native English made him a successful sparring partner on news programmes around the world. In another sharp viral exchange, Levy took aim at Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on 26 November.

Varadkar had tweeted about the release from captivity of a nine-year-old Israeli girl whose father is Irish. “This is a day of enormous joy and relief for Emily Hand and her family,” he wrote. “An innocent child who was lost has now been found and returned, and we breathe a massive sigh of relief. Our prayers have been answered.”

Levy tore into Varadkar, a long-time critic of Israel. “Emily Hand wasn’t ‘lost,’” he wrote, his disdain dripping from the screen. “She was brutally abducted by the death squads that massacred her neighbours. She wasn’t ‘found’. Hamas knew where she was all along, and cynically held her as a hostage. And Hamas didn’t answer your prayers. It answered Israel’s military pressure.”

Not all of Levy’s viral moments have reflected in-the-moment anger. On TikTok, where he posts videos with the help of a social media team, he has tapped into trends, joking about what’s out for 2024 – “Calling to globalise the intifada and a ceasefire at the same time; the math isn’t

mathing,” he said – and producing a riff on a famous scene from the movie *Love Actually* for Christmas.

Levy has fans in the Knesset, too. On Sunday, after the report first emerged that he could be pushed out, Zeev Elkin, the National Unity Party member who heads the subcommittee of external affairs and advocacy, addressed a letter to the head of the public diplomacy office.

“The importance of *hasbara* for the state of Israel in light of the war is self-evident. In our subcommittee meetings, the name of Eylon Levy was raised, a spokesperson for the National Public Diplomacy Directorate, several times in positive contexts,” Elkin wrote before asking for clarification on Levy’s future employment and if “pressure from outside forces” was being used to end his government tenure.

Sara Netanyahu looms large in Israeli politics, where she’s believed to take extreme measures behind the scenes to protect her husband, sometimes in seeming opposition to his interests. She recently made headlines for reportedly accusing hostages’ families of bolstering Hamas by pressuring Netanyahu to seek an immediate hostage-for-prisoner deal no matter the cost.

While Levy’s role appears to be safe for now, the controversy and the fact that it surprised no-one remains meaningful, Kowaz said.

“What’s most problematic is the entire functioning of the government being driven by the political and personal interests of Netanyahu,” he said.

As for Levy, he returned this week from a quick trip to England, where he helped mark 100 days since 7 October by speaking in Trafalgar Square. He has continued posting without interruption, and last Tuesday, he was in front of the TV cameras for the Israeli government’s daily English-language press briefing for the first time in a week.

Jews have their own language in the Caribbean

DOR SHABASHEWITZ

Yiddish and Hebrew are by far not the only Jewish languages. Jewish communities around the world once spoke or still speak their own versions of local languages, such as Ladino, which is derived from Spanish, and Bukhari, which comes from Tajik.

One of the most unique, albeit little-known, Jewish diaspora languages is still spoken in Curaçao, an island in the Caribbean off the coast of Venezuela and a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Curaçao’s main language is Papiamentu. It’s a creole, a mix of two or more languages, with a very peculiar grammatical structure compared with other languages.

When it comes to the more well-known creole languages such as Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea, we have a good understanding of how exactly they emerged: the indigenous population learned some basic English words used by the British colonisers in trade and administration and began using them in a way they were used to, following the grammatical rules of the local Austronesian languages.

Traces of Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch

The history of Papiamentu is more complicated. Some linguists consider it a Portuguese-based creole that was later influenced by Spanish, while others view Spanish as the primary source language and regard the Portuguese influence as a later layer. Today, the former point of view dominates. Either way, Papiamentu contains traces of both Romance languages and Dutch.

The original inhabitants of Curaçao were the Arawak. In 1499, their island was colonised by Spain, but 135 years later the Dutch conquered it and began bringing slaves from West Africa, where a Portuguese-based creole



was the local lingua franca at the time. Soon a wave of voluntary immigrants followed. Sephardic Jews came from other Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies in the region to trade and work as interpreters on the island.

These Jews quickly learned the language of the island’s majority, the enslaved Africans, and after a while, Papiamentu became their own home language. Today virtually all Curaçaoans, including white Dutch people, speak Papiamentu. But that has not always been the case. According to historians, Curaçao’s Sephardim were the first non-African group to pick up the local creole.

Jews added words from Hebrew

The Curaçao Jews began changing the local language, adding words from Hebrew and creating a new dialect, or ethnolect. As the linguist Neil G. Jacobs writes, the phonetic appearance of Hebrew and Aramaic words used in Curaçao demonstrates their Sephardic origin.

For example, משפחה “family” became *mishpakha* (not *mishpokhe*) and פנים “face” is *panim* (not *ponem*).

That being said, the rule has its exceptions: רחמנות “mercy” is pronounced as *rakhmones* – the accented vowel “o” and the ending “es” clearly speak of an Ashkenazi influence.

The Hebrew words mostly used in religious contexts are not the only difference between the speech of the Curaçao Jews and the “general Papiamentu” spoken on the island. Jacobs mentions varying stylistic preferences. When Papiamentu speakers want to sound more formal or eloquent, they tend to use “pure”, non-creolised forms of words taken directly from Spanish or Portuguese. Non-Jewish islanders generally prefer Spanish as the literary reference language, while the local Sephardim use more words from Portuguese and French.

Judaeo-Papiamentu is now under threat of extinction

Some words in the Jewish ethnolect of Papiamentu differ from the general language regardless of style and context. In many cases, the Jewish forms are closer to

the European source languages. The word for dignitary is *dignitario* in Spanish and Portuguese and sounds exactly the same in Judaeo-Papiamentu, whereas non-Jewish Curaçaoans say *dignatario* – with a different vowel in the middle. One more example is the word that the Curaçao Jews pronounce as *granmersi* and their non-Jewish neighbours as *gremesi*. It comes from French where it means “many thanks”, but has a completely different meaning in both versions of Papiamentu: It is a verb that means “to live on another’s expense”.

The more European-like forms of these words may be explained by decreolisation, the process of a creole vernacular becoming closer to its original source language. In post-colonial contexts, this usually happens when a creole-speaking community gains access to education, and as a result – more exposure to the written language of the colonising society perceived as correct and prestigious. In the case of Curaçao’s Sephardim, it might have something to do with their reading of old books and keeping in touch with Jewish communities in other Romance-speaking countries.

Just like most Jewish languages besides Hebrew, Judaeo-Papiamentu is under threat of extinction. The processes of assimilation, secularisation, and globalisation have caused younger generations of Curaçao Jews to switch to the general variety of the language. Thankfully, Judaeo-Papiamentu has been thoroughly described by the local Sephardic writer and sculptor May Henríquez. Even if it dies as a spoken language, it will live on in her books, which give us an insight into the speech, history, and culture of this little-known Jewish community.

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The calmness of a clutter-free life

LEE TANKLE

“Over our lifetime, we spend two years looking for lost objects,” says Rebekah Saltzman, who makes a living helping people declutter their homes.

Professional declutterer Saltzman started her business, Balagan be Gone in 2012 after discovering the world of decluttering and the intersectionality that it could have with modern Jewish life.

The solution is really to minimise the things you don’t need and curate your best collection of things so that you can find what you need when you need it.

“At first, I thought to myself, ‘It’s just about getting things into the right boxes.’ But after time, I realised that’s not the solution to maintaining an organised, clutter-free life. The solution is really to minimise the things you don’t need and curate your best collection of things so that you can find what you need when you need it, and it’s easy for you to get through life day to day,” said Saltzman.

She first looks at what her client has in a specific category, be that clothes or household items, because “if you can’t find all of [your items], how are you going to know what to use and when to use it?”

“The idea is to get all like items together. And then once you can see everything, you’re able to make good decisions about what you’re using and what you’re not using. Because most of the time, people don’t actually know what they have,” she said.

“Most people don’t use 80% of what they have and, even if they do, they aren’t using it 90% of the time. It’s just not possible to use all of your things so frequently,” Saltzman said.

“We have specific things that we use all the time, and the rest of it is just there for special occasions. Especially in a religious house, we have a lot of things that we wouldn’t necessarily have if we weren’t Jewish and that we don’t use all the time anyway. You don’t use your Shabbos candles every day. You don’t use your challah cover every day. You don’t use your challah knife every day. You don’t use your Seder plate every week, you use it once a year, right? But

you still need to have these things.

“It’s not just about letting go of the things that you’re using only once a year. It’s figuring out what you’re using most of the time so that you can have these other things that are being used only intermittently. Most people come to me and say these are all the clothes they wear. And then the cupboard is full. So, I then ask if they aren’t using anything that’s in the cupboard.”

When it comes to Pesach cleaning, she says, “I’ve noticed that when you declutter before, Pesach cleaning becomes infinitely easier. You don’t need to wait for the last minute. Planning early is what enables you to be more prepared later on.”

In conjunction with her Pesach cleaning challenge, Saltzman has written a book titled, *Organized Jewish Life* in which she gives tips on how people can plan Jewish holidays, events, and everyday life.

She was inspired to do it when, in 2020, she was unable to sit *shiva* with the rest of her family due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and her husband suggested that she make a



list of everything she needed to do. “I thought about it a little bit more, and realised it’s not just while sitting *shiva* that people don’t know what to do. People, whether they’re starting their own family and grew up in a Jewish house or whether they’re new to Judaism, often don’t know what to do for most of the Jewish life-cycle events.

“They don’t know how to prepare themselves for Shabbat and Jewish holidays. And what I see with a lot of my clients is the ones who have ADHD [Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder] know how to prepare in theory, but they need something to bring them in and make the process easier.” Saltzman created checklists for Shabbat, all the Jewish holidays, and Jewish life-cycle events.

There’s also a section in which Saltzman advises how to organise other aspects of the Jewish home – this can be anything from setting up a kosher kitchen to managing papers. “Everybody has resistance [to letting go of things] in all areas because when you think something is useful, you don’t want to let it go. When

you first start to look for the things that you know aren’t good anymore, then it becomes easier to declutter throughout the categories,” Saltzman said.

For Saltzman, the most difficult category of things people are resistant to decluttering is sentimental items. “Sometimes people feel a lot of guilt. For example, if they throw away a letter from someone they love, they might not remember, or feel it’s like throwing away a part of that person. But our memories aren’t necessarily intertwined with these objects. Letting go of the object isn’t a sign that you’re letting go of the memory.”

Whenever clients finish a session with Saltzman, she senses immense relief. “It’s true that the more stuff you have, the more worry there is. Most people say to me that that’s not true, but it is because even if you aren’t thinking about those specific possessions, you’re thinking about getting your house tidy and organised, and when there’s chaos and clutter, it weighs on you,” she said.

Philanthropist extraordinaire Gina Dave gets princely award

LEE TANKLE

When Gina Dave started Grade 8 at King David Linksfield in 2020, she decided to follow in her older sister’s footsteps by participating in the Duke of Edinburgh President’s Award. Never in her wildest dreams did she think it would lead to her meeting and chatting to the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Edward, in the beginning of her matric year.

In recognition of her amazing work, she was chosen to be one of 30 gold-level recipients to attend the Duke of Edinburgh/ President’s Award Reception for Gold Awards (2023) at The British High Commission in Pretoria on 22 January.

“I was convinced I would be nervous on the night,” she said. “My hands were a bit sweaty, but he approached the table and especially me in such a calming manner. [Prince Edward] wanted us to feel comfortable to speak about the President’s Award and our journey through it.”

Dave was given the honour of being asked to present the residential project section of the gold level of her award to the prince; South Africa’s Deputy Minister of International Relations Candith Mashego-Dlamini; and South Africa’s chairperson of the President’s Award, Modise Makhene. She explained her residential project at the Moholoholo Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre to Prince Edward and the rest of the guests at



His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward and Gina Dave at the British High Commission in Pretoria

the ceremony.

The President’s Award is part of an international youth development programme that empowers youth aged 14 to 24 to explore their full potential and find their purpose and place in the world. The award demonstrates a young person’s willingness to be

challenged and to persevere.

It’s a personal challenge, not a competition against others, pushing young people to their limit and to reach their full potential. The award consists of

three levels: bronze, silver, and gold, with increasing increments of skills training with each level and each comprising four sections – physical recreation; special skill; voluntary service; adventurous journey; and in the case of the gold level, a residential project.

Dave spent most of her time on the President’s Award contributing to the community through various acts of service. She raised funds and donated clothes to Kids Haven and Arcadia; ran a sock drive at her school; as well as a Crocs Jibbitz drive for her volunteering section. “It shows you how the Duke of Edinburgh President’s Award isn’t just one thing, you’re doing so much, not just for yourself, but to help so many people around you,” said Dave.

The highlight of her journey was when she took part in a residential project at Moholoholo Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Limpopo as part of her gold-level award. “We had to clean animal cages and de-yolk chicks and feed them to owls. There were also cheetahs and lions. It was an amazing experience.

“As I got there, I thought, ‘I can’t do this. I don’t know how I’m going to survive five days here.’ The conditions weren’t what I was used to. I wasn’t familiar with that way of life,” said Dave. “Even though it was so disgusting at times and really out of my comfort zone, I would 100% do it all again. The people who were there with me started basically as strangers, but by the end, we were friends, always supporting each other.”

On the night she met the prince, she said, “Prince Edward asked everyone questions. I made a scrapbook explaining the residential project, and he took such an interest in it. It felt like he wanted us to speak to him in a more friendly way and not be scared of him because there’s nothing to be scared about just because he’s a prince.”

“I was proud. I wasn’t scared to show that I went to King David. People were interested in the fact that I was Jewish, and no-one there was Jewish besides me,” Dave told the *SA Jewish Report*.



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Israel-SA tennis partners a hit at Australian Open

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African Donald Ramphadi and Israeli Guy Sasson almost achieved perfection without much practice at the prestigious Australian Open tennis tournament last week.

They had barely trained together as doubles partners before the competition in Melbourne, but they surpassed their expectations by getting to the final of the men’s wheelchair quad-doubles event.

The tournament marked the duo’s first matches as doubles partners. They beat a Turk and Slovakian in the quarterfinal stage before a walkover against the top seeds in the semifinal resulted in them being pitted against eight-time major champions Andy Lapthorne from Britain and American David Wagner in the final on 26 January.

“We didn’t really expect too much, and for us to get to the final, it’s actually a good result. We’re happy with it,” says South African-based Ramphadi, who has brittle bone disease which causes his bones to break easily and take longer to recover than normal bones.

The 30-year-old described the 6-4 3-6 10-2 defeat in the final as “painful”.

“In our heads, we knew it was possible. We felt like we were so close to grabbing the title and at the end of the day, it didn’t go like that. At the same time, the mind says, ‘You guys did exceptionally well to get this far in the first time you played together.’”

Ramphadi and American-based Sasson never discussed South Africa’s relationship with Israel. “But Siya, my coach, talked about that when we were going to play the final,” Ramphadi recalls. “I didn’t even know about it until he told me that South Africa and Israel weren’t on good terms. He was worried that if we won, people would come at us.

“Guy is a great player. He just got into the



Donald Ramphadi and Guy Sasson

quad division, and he’s been doing well from the start.”

When Ramphadi was looking for a new doubles partner last year, he saw Sasson and approached him. “We agreed that we were going to start the year together.”

Ahead of the Open, they told each other, “It’s our first time together. Let’s just go out there and showcase our talent and also not forget to enjoy it and see where it takes us.”

They did exactly that. “We just need to work on a whole lot of things so that when we’re playing, we understand each other’s language without even saying a word,” Ramphadi says. “When you play doubles with someone, you need time to get to know them, but looking forward, I see us doing well.”

They are going to compete together in Korea

and Japan.

Ramphadi, who was knocked out in the semifinals with a Brazilian partner against Lapthorne and Wagner at last year’s Australian Open, says his experience of this year’s tournament was similar except for there being 16 players instead of eight this time around.

In the second set of this year’s final, “Ramphadi looked to be enjoying himself out on court, showcasing the skills that took him and Lapthorne to the Roland Garros title last year,” the Lawn Tennis Association noted. Victory would have meant Ramphadi’s second Grand Slam title in the quad-doubles division. In the singles quad category event at the Open, he reached the semis.

Ramphadi was born without a disability. “I used to be an active kid, and I was playing soccer with the elders so you would find me the youngest

in the field. I was that competitive.

“At the age of 12, I got sick with a bone sickness, but I didn’t know what it was exactly because my mother didn’t have money to take me to a better hospital. I was going to a public hospital and doctors were saying different things. There was a point where they gave me Bone TB [tuberculosis] pills, which I had to take for a year, only to find out later that I wasn’t actually affected by Bone TB. After that, they took me to a special school for students with a disability.

“During the time I was sick, my desire to compete faded away because I hadn’t been as active as I

was before. I felt that feeling leaving my body. That was the saddest moment.”

Ramphadi never thought he would play tennis, a predominantly white sport while he was growing up, but a development officer from Tennis South Africa came to his school one day and said they were looking for wheelchair tennis players.

“I was bored. I didn’t have anything to do. I just went to go and try out to see what’s up. I was told that I had talent, which I didn’t really understand. Then, my teachers Mam Mboweni and Mam Shikwambana from Letaba Special School, monitored me in playing tennis. As time went on, they started taking me to camps where you played matches.”

Ramphadi won at his first camp. “That’s when I felt the feeling of competition coming back into my body. I realised I wanted to do this for the rest of my life.”

Ramphadi says he has no complaints about being a wheelchair tennis player. “We’re happy with the coverage we get. Hopefully in the future they will televise us more so that a lot of people will see us in world championships and know that having a disability doesn’t mean we can’t compete.”

Sunday 4 February

- New Beginnings hosts a talk by Yocheved Bacher on *Connecting to that silver lining*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Union of Jewish Women. Donation: R50. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za

Thursday 8 February

- ORT SA hosts a talk by Tracey Bosch on *The Prelude to Basic Computers*. Time: 17:30. R200 (R100 members). Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

Sunday 11 February

- Second Innings hosts a talk by Dr Brian Greenblatt on *The Reduction of Stress, Mindfulness, and Neurolinguistic Programming*. Time: 09:45. Venue: Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost R50 (R20 members). Contact: greciagabriel1@gmail.com

WHAT'S ON

SA duo behind Israel taking cricket to Olympics

LEE TANKLE

The Israel national cricket team are going all out to make their mark in this year’s T20 World Cup, and the two South Africans behind the team’s development will be gearing up to make the team stand out.

Though it may take a while for the team to become a strong power in cricket, the new South African team behind Israeli cricket – Joanne Tankle and the new head coach, who has asked to remain anonymous for his security – are looking forward to the challenge of building up the strength of the national side.

“The best answer to these murders, terrorist attacks, and monsters is to be in the Olympic games with double the amount of people than we originally planned for and have had in the past. When *Hatikvah* plays at the Olympics, it gives the best image of Israel – that we’re a nation of peace. There’s no better way than to develop sport in Israel,” Alon Granot, the chairperson of the Israeli Olympic committee told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Sport is a way we can bring people together again. The government has realised that sport is the best new routine, so we’re going to invest more effort in developing it. Sport is the best way to demonstrate *Am Yisrael Chai* [the people of Israel live]. You can have an Israeli delegation at the United Nations, and it won’t let you speak, but when we’re on the field, in a gym or pool, we’re like everybody else. The Israeli government understands this,” Granot said.

When the Maccabi South Africa junior cricket team won gold at the Maccabi Games in 2021, one of the coaches was approached by the chairperson of the Israeli Cricket Federation, Yefeth Nagavkar, to coach the Israeli national team. This acceptance was on condition that Tankle became a part of the leadership team.

The duo worked to get to Israel a year before officially taking up their role. Tankle and the head coach visited Israel just before the war broke out to start building a foundation for cricket in Israel.

“I got the feeling that the conditions Israeli cricketers play in are almost rural, and I was reminded of the Jewish folktale, *Something From Nothing*, about a loving grandad, a fine tailor, who transformed his grandson’s tattered blanket into a jacket, then into a vest, a Shabbas tie, and eventually a button,” said Tankle.

“During our week in Israel, we met many involved in Israeli cricket as well as Alon Granot, the head of the



Cricket practice facilities in Ashdod, Israel

Israel Olympic committee. We had many discussions regarding the development of the sport in the country and on our return to South Africa, we were informed by Granot that men’s cricket would be included in the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Cricket is gaining momentum worldwide,” the head coach said. “Our visit to Israel made it clear that there’s growing interest in cricket among the youth as well as those who have been playing for many years and are eager to take Israeli cricket to the next level.

“Developing cricket will require the investment of time as well as money. Many different things are needed to grow the sport there, but we all feel that getting a national team through the World Cup qualifiers in June

2024 to play in the World Cup in 2026 is the first step needed. Once we have a national team competing in the world arena, these young men will become our ambassadors for the sport and will create awareness of cricket in the country. They’ll become the people the youth will look up to and aspire to become as they grow older, hence our ball continues to roll,” Tankle said.

“The players eligible for selection into the national team are mostly men with families to support and have no resources to sustain their families as they embark on this journey to bring glory to Israel in the growing world of cricket,” the head coach said.

“The war has changed everything,” Tankle told the *SA Jewish Report*. “Our initial goal was to develop cricket throughout Israel. Now, our goal is only to get through the first round of the T20 World Cup qualifiers in Italy in June this year. Our players are soldiers serving in the army, so intense training is needed. From there, we hope to grow, and for those players to bring more attention to cricket and show people what can be done and be role models for children.

“The Israeli Cricket Federation needs to invest more in development. It needs more facilities like fields, batting nets, and stadiums. There’s talk of getting a cricket stadium and more coaches to improve the knowledge of cricket at local level, as well as more players.

“All of this is aimed at the unique sport permit which will take the Israeli national team to a new level and a chance to be in the Olympics,” Granot said.

“The main problem is funding this programme. We need to prove our skills. The more we do that, the more funding cricket will get. Cricket gets only a portion of what other smaller sports get because of lack of recognition. We have the roadmap, we just need the funds.”

Slapping us into seeing clearly

I'm old enough to remember when men's handshakes were silent. Originating sometime way back when people killed each other just because they could, the handshake was a way to prove that the greeters weren't holding anything sharp or lethal in their right hands. And so, they would press palms, and everyone would breathe. Literally.

Body language experts can spend chapters on the meaning of handshake styles. Whether the shaker's palm is parallel or perpendicular to the floor, the position of the body and feet, among other things, all give us insight into the personality and confidence of the shakers.

Recently, I have noticed the frequency of the loud handshake. Young men are now prone to loudly slap their palms when they shake hands, creating a distinct popping sound. The action results in a mixture of a clap and the firing of a 9mm. The "slap-shake" – my term – is normally followed by a shoulder hug.

The slap-shake is more noticeable in a quiet synagogue. Although once identified, it cannot be unheard. Last week on Shabbat, in fact, the service was punctuated by a series of "pops" and my commenting on it.

My seat neighbour, who had never noticed it before, now couldn't unhear it. And where a moment before, he wouldn't have been aware of the 9mm shots being fired as young people greeted then hugged each other, and not winced every time palms were slapped.

I'm slightly apologetic to make you aware of this. But I need to do so to illustrate my point.

Because we live in a world where those that see, do. And those who don't, can't. Even if it's because they choose not to.

Nothing seems to illustrate this more than the massive divide on social media between the supporters and haters of Israel. So disparate are the narratives, it's almost like they are living in

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



alternative realities.

Where one group stumbles around in the dark and the other walks confidently in full daylight.

Like in the plague of darkness. The strange thing about the biblical plague was that it was said to have had an impact on the Egyptians but not the children of Israel. So, while the Egyptians were unable to see anything at all, for the Israelites, it was as clear as day.

January 2024 is much like living through the plague of darkness. Though the truth of the case for Israel, the integrity of the information, and the pursuit of peace might be so clear to some of us, it seems impossible for those in the dark to see the situation as we do. And no matter how hard we might try to explain what we're seeing, the images seem to remain stubbornly hidden to those who cannot or will not see.

Much like *The Sound of Silence*, in which Simon & Garfunkel prophetically welcomed "darkness, my old friend" and maybe even contemplated a time where on social media, we would talk without speaking and hear without listening.

A plague of our time.

The slap-shake isn't a plague. It's a cute, age appropriate, and notable ritual that once noticed, is always present. The inability to see current events from the Jewish or the Israeli perspective, however, is one. And as much as it might be a choice that's made, the result is a high risk of stumbling unseeing, and living in a world plagued with darkness – where light is an alternative.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Once again, it's hard to be a Jew

For South African Jewry, 29 December, just like 7 October, was another seminal date where everything changed. The news that our own government had just instituted proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), levelling appalling charges of genocide by Israel, came as another hammer blow to a community already deeply shaken and traumatised by the 7/10 massacre and its continuing tragic aftermath. Following the handing down of the ICJ's ruling late last week, on Monday, 29 January, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) hosted a webinar where Judge Dennis Davis unpacked the judgement and clarified its terms and implications. This was followed by brief presentations giving the perspectives of the SAJBD, represented by myself and National President Zev Krengel, Rowan Polovin from the South African Zionist Federation, and Stephen Goldberg from the Community Security Organisation. National Director Wendy Kahn chaired the event.

Prior to the handing down of the ruling, Davis spoke on a webinar hosted by the Cape Board in which he explained the positions of the respective parties and the substance and parameters of the case before the ICJ. We're grateful to him for once again giving of his time and expertise to enlighten our community on this complex and extremely emotive manner. It was reassuring for us to listen to Davis's nuanced, dispassionate, and strictly legally focused analysis of what the ruling actually means in practical terms. From this, one was able to better understand that as difficult as this case has been for us, the outcome has been better than many had feared. This is something that we should all hold onto strongly.

One of the key questions I addressed in my

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



remarks was how we should respond to a world in which, for the first time in many years, it was, as the old Yiddish expression had it, "Hard to be a Jew". In the South Africa we grew up in, antisemitism, though it hadn't been completely eliminated, was low key and infrequent. Sadly, both in South Africa and globally, we're back in a space where it's again ubiquitous and in-your-face. How we respond to a world where it's "hard to be a Jew", I said, was not by denying Yiddishkeit nor hiding our Judaism in any kind of way or context. Here, our community, in spite of the negative environment, has risen to the challenge, affirming and standing up for its beliefs and affiliations. We cannot deny that we're feeling a certain amount of anxiety, but that anxiety cannot lead to us hiding our identity, and indeed it hasn't led to doing so in any way.

A second crucial question was about continuing to be proudly South African as well as proudly Jewish. It's very important that in our dismay at what our government has done, we shouldn't become bitter, nor allow the government to take away the rights that we have as proud South Africans. As our national president, Zev Krengel, put it, "To be a proud South African means to love this country, to work for this country, and to make this country better for all. That, for sure, isn't going to be determined by the African National Congress government or any other government. It will be determined by us as South African Jewry".

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

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





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Environment and resilience the focus of communal gathering

Several prominent organisations came together to celebrate Tu B'Shvat on 25 January with a meaningful seder and tree planting ceremony at ORT SA's headquarters. More than 120 people participated in the event, represented by Limmud Johannesburg, the Israel Centre, Jewish National Fund SA, South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), Partnership2Gether, and ORT SA.

Tu B'Shvat, often referred to as the "Birthday of the Trees", marks the season in which the earliest-blooming trees in Israel emerge from their winter sleep and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle. The festival symbolises renewal, environmental awareness, and the deep connection between people, nature, the Jewish people and their land.



The collaboration among these organisations highlighted shared commitment to Jewish and environmental values. The event's highlight was the seder Tu B'Shvat, involving the eating of fruit, particularly the seven species: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates.

During the seder, the group heard inspirational words from Shlomo Malachi, an olive farmer on the Gaza border about resilience, and how they had ensured that their crop was harvested and turned into olive oil. They also heard from Paul Dubb, a South African *oleh* who runs a wine farm in the Beit Shemesh region.

Michael Kransdorff, JNF SA chairperson, remarked that this Tu B'Shvat came at a time of great sadness and loss for the Jewish people but they were planting these trees in the spirit of rebuilding and with a focus on creating a more sustainable future.

The SAZF provided yellow ribbons for all participants to wear around their wrists to show solidarity with the hostages still being held in captivity.

Israel's agricultural laws focus of Yeshiva Tu B'Shvat



Yeshiva College introduced its Israel Spotlight syllabus on Tu B'Shvat on 25 January, focusing on the country's agricultural laws – the *shivat haminim* (seven species); *bikkurim* (first fruits); the laws of tithing; and what farmers have to leave in the fields for the poor. The school's informal department (YID) taught these laws through an interactive experience, giving children an idea of the importance and holiness of Eretz Yisrael, and some of the special laws which underscore this.

JNFSA highlights link between tree planting and renewal

The Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNFSA) delivered two trees to schools across Johannesburg in a Tu B'Shvat initiative centred on the values of compassion and environmental stewardship, which highlights renewal through the symbolic act of planting "one tree at a time".

The JNFSA project also honoured the resilience and strength displayed by communities in the south of Israel affected by the terror attacks on 7 October 2023. The trees were delivered to participating schools for a special tree-planting ceremony on Tu B'Shvat on 25 January, reinforcing the connection between communities in South Africa and those in Israel.

"The initiative aligns with the essence of the celebration – a reminder of our interconnectedness and responsibilities towards nature. Even in challenging times, the JNFSA emphasises the importance of upholding values of

kindness, generosity, and empathy," the organisation said.

Quoting Deuteronomy 20:19, it said that even in times of conflict, preserving and planting trees signified dedication to the accomplishment and well-being of the people of Israel.



"Tree-planting stands as a tribute to our shared commitment to the environment, community building, and the spirit of renewal for future generations," JNFSA says. "KKL (Keren Kayemet L'Israel)-JNF is already planting trees in Re'im forest, where the Nova music festival was tragically marred by the attack from Hamas terrorists."

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