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SA doubles down against Israel over Rafah offensive

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa has once again designated itself world leader in targeting Israel, this time by making an urgent request to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding a possible Israeli offensive in Rafah.

Displaying a sense of urgency not seen in any other arena of governance, Presidential Spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said on 13 February, "In a request submitted to the court, the South African government said it was gravely concerned that the unprecedented military offensive against Rafah ... would be in serious and irreparable breach both of the Genocide Convention and of the court's order of 26 January 2024. South Africa trusts this matter will receive the necessary urgency."

However, analysts say that there are many other factors at play in this latest request to the ICJ. "It's [out of] genuine concern for Palestinians, but it's also like a poker player doubling down, pushing the victory it thinks it won at the ICJ last time," says local political analyst Steven Gruzdl.

"It may be a ploy to win votes. I predict that the emboldened South African government is going to continue going after Israel through lawfare, buoyed by the last result at the ICJ. I don't see South Africa letting up the pressure any time soon, particularly as the war drags on and if Rafah is invaded."

"It's unclear whether South Africa intends to bring a parallel complaint against Israel and one that's similar in nature to the one that it brought on 29 December, or whether this is an interrelated complaint," says advocate Mark Oppenheimer. "I assume that South Africa is going to claim it has a right to do this because the Genocide Convention entitles all parties to lay claims of genocide."

"It appears that South Africa claims that the Genocide Convention is being breached, which would be a self-standing claim, but also that the court's order, requiring Israel to abide by the Genocide Convention, is being breached."

"The South African government has on a number of occasions claimed that the order granted by the ICJ on 26 January was tantamount to a ceasefire," he says.

"Now, if it really were tantamount to a ceasefire, then Israel's actions in Rafah would be a breach of the court order. Of course, if one studies the judgment carefully, it's quite clear that the court explicitly refused to grant a ceasefire and that Israel is entitled to engage in its war against Hamas provided that it does so within the parameters of the Genocide Convention. So, this will be an interesting test of the South African view as to what the court's order means."

"Israel was able to rescue two hostages [in Rafah], and in the region of 67 people were killed," says Oppenheimer. "It's unknown how many of those were Hamas militants and how many were civilians. But it would appear that there's a legitimate military reason for being in Rafah, which is to rescue hostages."

"There may be some question as to whether the action taken was proportionate, but that's not a question for the ICJ to deal with," he says. "That's a question around the laws of war, not around a breach of the Genocide Convention."

So, time will tell what the court's view is on South Africa's application."

Professor Glen Segell, research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran and Gulf States Research, says South Africa's latest move includes

several factors. "Some in South Africa cannot step back from what they have started against Israel. Some really believe that they are correct, and the legal path against Israel is the most civilised means of expressing it. Then, there are rumours of money involved, going to the African National Congress [ANC] in return for legal actions. Finally, there are some who truly identify with and support anti-Zionism and antisemitism at all costs."

Dr Frans Cronje of the Social Research Foundation says, "The view of the government is that their policy is informed by a deep and abiding commitment to global human rights. An alternative view is that it's informed by very much narrower interests, given that South Africa's foreign policy track record reveals neither a deep nor abiding commitment to global human rights."

Sara Gon, the head of strategic engagement at Institute of Race Relations, says, "We have just had a disastrously disingenuous State of the Nation Address

[SONA]. The ANC's only 'accomplishment' at present is the ICJ decision, giving the ANC pretty much everything it asked for except a ceasefire. So, the ANC is essentially pleading with the ICJ to order a ceasefire. I think it's a political ploy which plays well to the gallery."

"If warfare cannot be conducted if it will harm civilians, the ICJ may make the same shallow finding it made originally," says Gon. "However, I think that ordering Israel to abandon an offensive in the circumstances, which includes Gazans moving to a safe place which the Israel Defense Forces [IDF] will protect, is a step too far. It may just reiterate its earlier instructions to Israel to ensure that no genocide takes place. Anything more would be a stretch, even for the ICJ."

Local political analyst Daniel Silke says, "If South Africa has taken the matter to the ICJ up until now, it's going to continue the pressure. South Africa also wants to keep this issue alive, which gains the ANC some level of

support. It benefits the ANC because there are no domestic successes in spite of what the president said at SONA. Ultimately, this is the one issue that can resonate, although in the end, most voters aren't going to be influenced by foreign policy. Given South Africa's close relations with the Palestinians and Iran, in the ANC's view, the pressure needs to be kept up."

"Once again, the actions of the South African government seem designed more to play into the hands of Hamas than find peace," says South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner. "The ANC government is unbothered by Hamas ignoring the ICJ ruling to release the hostages. It appears that a possible ceasefire deal is on the table, but South Africa isn't part of this as it continues to shout from the sidelines."

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks says, "The ANC government continues to wilfully

Don't ignore antisemitism



Photo: Chana Arenstein

Continued on page 6 >>



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'Jew hater' becomes 'Jewish hatred' at Super Bowl

JACOB GURVIS – JTA

Was the first antisemitism-themed advert to air at the Super Bowl tactful or tasteless? How much did it have to do with Israel? And what's "Jewish hate" anyway?

Those are some of the questions that have arisen after the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, the group founded in 2019 by New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, placed a 30-second advert during the game titled *Silence* that featured Clarence B. Jones, the long-time advisor and speechwriter for Martin Luther King Jr.

The advert shows Jones in his study and then, against his voiceover, displays images of a burning cross and swastika and the hashtag "#hitlerwasright". It then shifts to showing people taking action against recent displays of hate, including Islamophobia and anti-black racism.

"I'd remind people that all hate thrives on one thing: silence," Jones says in the advert, imagining what he'd write in a speech meant for King to deliver today. "The people who will change the nation are those who speak out, who refuse to be bystanders, who raise their voices against injustice. When we stand up to silence, we stand up to all hate."

The advert concludes with the slogan, "Stand up to Jewish hate," which then changes to "Stand up to all hate."

The advert meant to strike a universal tone, and some reactions were positive. The American Jewish Committee called it "powerful", and one Facebook user said it was "the best advert from the Super Bowl".

Others were less impressed. Shmuley Boteach, the Republican activist, author, and self-styled 'America's rabbi' wrote on Facebook that the advert was a "complete failure".

"Why were they focusing on Islamaphobia, racism, bigotry – which, of course, as with all forms of hatred, should be fought – when the issue of the hour is antisemitism?" he asked. His post concluded, "What a wasted opportunity. The ad sucked."

Eve Barlow, a writer and pro-Israel activist, likewise compared the commercial to the "All Lives Matter" slogan that emerged as a rebuttal – or critics would say, distraction – to the Black Lives Matter movement.

"So we spent \$7 million [R132.8 million] 'all lives matter-ing' antisemitism at the Super Bowl?" she wrote to her 71 000 followers on X, referencing the estimated price tag on the ad. "Oy vey!"



A number of people suggested – inaccurately – that the advert that did air was paid for by Israel, and claimed it was a distraction from the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF's) impending invasion of Rafah, a city in southern Gaza. The IDF did conduct a rescue operation there during the Super Bowl that freed two hostages, and the Israeli government bought adverts that aired during the game on Paramount streaming and on social media.

"We give Israel \$10 million [R189.8 million] every day so it can spend \$7 million [R132.8 million] on a Super Bowl commercial to propagandise our population while actively carrying out a genocide," a user on X wrote.

In an Instagram post, a user displayed several comments that referenced the Israel-Hamas war and wrote, "The ad had nothing to do with Israel. This is just more proof that anti-Zionism = antisemitism."

And at least one far-right activist who has spread antisemitism – Andrew Torba, the founder of the Gab platform – suggested that he appreciated the advert because a hashtag praising Hitler, meant as an example of hate, flashed across viewers' screens.

For some, the use of the term, "Jewish hate" – the foundation's preferred term for antisemitism – was perplexing.


There's evidence that the word "antisemitism", which doesn't include a form of the word "Jewish", is confusing to some people. But the alternative people have generally turned to is "Jew hatred" rather than "Jewish hate", which could give an impression of Jews as the haters rather than the hated.

"The phrase 'Jewish hate' seems to be generating quite a lot of conversation here, and perhaps not for the reasons intended," Avi Mayer, the former editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, wrote on X. "The advert was referring to antisemitism – that is, hatred of Jewish people – but some folk seem to think it meant hatred exhibited by Jewish people. Yikes!"

On a lighter note, some users juxtaposed the message of the antisemitism advert with that of other commercials which promoted Christianity and Scientology.

"Religion Super Bowl adverts: Christianity: 'join us!'" comedian Elon Altman wrote. "Scientology: 'join us!' Judaism: 'leave us alone!'"

Lessons from cricket



Rabbi Ari Kievman
Sandton Central Shul

It took much convincing from my kids, but finally I relented and accompanied them to a cricket game. Admittedly, I don't have much personal interest in sport, but the time spent with my boys was rich! Yet, amateur spectator I may be, but there were some ideas that seemed relevant to our lives today.

Entering the stadium, there was a palpable excitement, a certain vibe that was felt among the spectators as much as the players. As we just began the double joyous months of Adar, I couldn't help but feel the cheer inspired at this time of year. Genuine happiness stems from understanding one's purpose and meaning in life, not just from fleeting moments of jollity. When we're filled with purpose, meaning, and connection, true joy overflows, giving us the strength to face any challenge. Without a clear sense of purpose and direction, we become vulnerable to negative influences. To succeed in life's battles, we must embrace joy, which comes from our connection to our higher purpose.

As the game dragged on, I engaged in some people-watching. I noticed three types of spectators. First were the ones that seemed like myself: enjoying it overall, but not particularly attached to the game. Many on their phones, or engaged in conversation, hardly noticing the goings-on on the field below. Next were fans who were watching the game attentively. These can recognise the players and follow the plays as they come about. Not desperately invested, they simply relish in the experience of watching the game. Finally, were the die-hard super fans, passionate about the game, expressing their emotions and noticeably invested in the team's performance. These are the zealous, devoted fans who know each player by name, and can rattle off his statistics and history.

It got me thinking about ourselves – what type of

fan are we in our Judaism? What's our relationship with our *Yiddishkeit*? Do we take a "laid-back" approach, or do we strive for a truly passionate "super-fan" one? Our bond and connection with Hashem should be akin to being a super fan – enthusiastic and all-encompassing!

Consider our brave Israel Defense Forces soldiers entering the dangers of Gaza. Before they deploy, they receive a pep talk from their commander. He encourages them with timeless words from our Tanach, words that have accompanied and motivated our warriors since the beginning of our nation. They speak of the soldiers not entering alone, but that Hashem Himself is accompanying them. The commander blesses them that Hashem lay down their enemies before

them. And then he instructs them each to put a hand on their fellow's head and bless one another. Thus inspired, they go forth on their mission.

In the current Torah portion, we describe the building of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary that accompanied our ancestors in the wilderness. There are so many rigid laws about the precise details of how to do it. More commandments, more rules? It may seem overwhelming.

Let's focus on studying the intricacies of our own heritage and the significance of the *mitzvahs*. Of finding happiness. Of motivating one another with the inspiration that comes from Hashem Himself. We're in the big league now, let's do our part. And let's pray for victory and everlasting peace.

Torah Thought

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When the evil Haman wished to destroy our nation, he staged a lottery to determine the most opportune date. When the lot (called a pur, hence the holiday name of Purim) fell in Adar, he rejoiced. What Haman did not know was that Moses was born and died on 7 Adar, therefore this significant month helped avert the evil decree.

Last-minute plans save SA *olah* from massacre

TALI FEINBERG

Kibbutz Nir Oz resident and South African *olah*, Yael Marcus (34), is grieving for kibbutznik friends killed or abducted on 7 October, but she was saved by going away for the weekend for the first time in ages.

Marcus was so attached to her home that she hardly ever spent a night away from it. But on the Shabbat of 6 October, she and her partner, Gil Binovitch, were invited to a meal in Tel Aviv at the home of the person who had made the *shidduch* between them. Marcus would usually insist on driving home afterwards in spite of the time and distance, but for some reason, she suggested to Binovitch that they visit his parents near Jerusalem after their Shabbat dinner in Tel Aviv and stay there for the weekend. Marcus is still not sure why she made this out-of-character decision, but it probably saved their lives.



Ariel Bibas in the cactus garden

Marcus told the *SA Jewish Report* that after a difficult upbringing in Cape Town, she spent years searching for peace, family, and a place to call home. She finally found that at Kibbutz Nir Oz, where she met her partner, started a new career, and put down roots among people that embraced her as their own.

She lived in a house once occupied by Oded and Yocheved Lifschitz, two of those taken

hostage. The Lipschitz couple planted a giant cactus garden next to the house 50 years ago. Marcus has a picture of four-year-old Ariel Bibas playing among the plants. She often borrowed a barbeque from her neighbour, Ofer Kalderon, and called her other neighbour, Yair Yaakov, a good friend.

All of those people, along with the whole Bibas family and many other people Marcus knows, were taken hostage in Gaza by Hamas on 7 October. She also knew many people murdered by Hamas on that fateful day, including her friend, Tamar Kedem Simantov, who was killed alongside her three little children, husband Johnny, and mother-in-law Carol. “When I heard they were gone, I just screamed,” says Marcus.

On the morning of 7 October, terrorists attacked all of Marcus’s neighbours. Her own house was ransacked. Waking up in Jerusalem, Binovitch told Marcus not to read the kibbutz

WhatsApp groups or listen to the news. But as the day went on, it became clear that Marcus could no longer be shielded from what was happening. She read the increasingly desperate WhatsApp messages of those she knew and loved as they were shot, burnt, and suffocated. Meanwhile, in the days after the attack, the chaos was so intense that those who survived initially thought Marcus and Binovitch had been kidnapped.

When Marcus realised what had happened and that she couldn’t go back, “It was a huge trigger,” she says. “Having not had a stable upbringing and now being an orphan, my home in Nir Oz was the most important thing to me. Losing it like that unhinged me. I regressed to my teenage years. I needed to go home.”

Delving into the past, Marcus says, “My mother died when I was 12, just before my Batmitzvah. She had multiple sclerosis. After that, I had a difficult time, but the Jewish community embraced me.” She especially found refuge in the Habonim Dror youth movement. Later, she says Kibbutz Nir Oz

reminded her of machaneh, which was one of the reasons it felt like a safe space.

After attending Herzlia and Vega School where she studied brand management, she spent eight years in Hong Kong, working on big brands and losing herself in the city. But for her 30th birthday, she was given some money and booked a flight to Israel. “I was in Yafo on the coast, and the view reminded me of Cape Town.

In that moment, I decided to make aliya,” she remembers. Three months later, she officially immigrated to Israel.

“It was at the end of 2019, so that decision also saved me from spending the pandemic in Asia,” she says. In another twist of fate, she took a tour down south to visit a Kibbutz Nir Oz medical cannabis farm. This launched her new career in that industry, and it was also where she met



Yael Marcus holding a photo of her friend Ofer Kalderon

Binovitch, who had also just moved back to Israel from the United States. It was love at first sight.

“We lived quite near the fence of the kibbutz, and it was a simple fence,” says Marcus. “There was just open land and then Gaza. As a South African, I was like, ‘I know what a good fence looks like,’ but no-one else seemed concerned. Still, she ultimately felt safe, even with the rockets flying in from Gaza.

“Life on the kibbutz was structured. You woke up with the sun. You were in tune with the earth,” she says. “It was where I learned to ride a bike and take care of an animal – my cat, Wendy. It was where I healed. It was David Ben Gurion’s



Gil Binovitch and Yael Marcus leaving Kibbutz Nir Oz on 6 October 2023

vision in action – making the desert bloom. The people were true Zionists and also peaceniks.”

Marcus shares a picture of the kibbutz’s Sukkot celebrations exactly a week before the massacre. The sukkah is lit up with colourful

lights as the entire community gathers in the sukkah, a space of warmth, peace, and safety. During the celebrations, Kedem Simantov teased Marcus and Binovitch about when they were going to get married. It was the last time Marcus saw her friend.

“One in four people on Nir Oz was either kidnapped or killed,” she says. “Almost every family was affected.” She’s sharing her story because she hopes it will highlight the desperate situation of the hostages. “They need to come home,” says Marcus. “They need to return the bodies of Judi and Gadi. It’s time for Chaim, David, and Yair to come back. I didn’t know Shiri and Yarden well, but they and their little boys, Ariel and Kfir, need to be here.”

After the massacre, Marcus and Binovitch lived in Tel Aviv, but she found it too traumatic and loud, especially with the many rocket attacks. They then spent time in Caesarea, which was quieter. After that, they joined their Nir Oz community at a hotel in Eilat. Now, the entire community has been moved to new apartment buildings in Kiryat Gat. Though she’s grateful to be there, Marcus says they “need to return to the desert where we belong”.

She admits that it’s difficult to move on with daily life or to have dreams for the future, and feels overwhelmed by the feeling that she was spared for a reason. She desperately tries not to imagine what her friends in captivity are experiencing. She deeply grieves those who were murdered. She feels disappointed that “no-one came to save us”, and that the community ultimately had to fend for itself that terrible day.

What helps her is talking about her home, her friends, and her refuge that were all stolen away in an instant. “We need our people to come back. Please don’t stop talking about them,” she pleads. “Every Jew needs to find their way communicate this message best, whether it’s through art, food, music, or protests.

Just do something.”

Marcus would like to engage with anyone who can help bring her friends home, or who would like to connect with her. Reach out to her at www.linkedin.com/in/yael-marcus/

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SA in US headlights with foreign policy

STEVEN GRUZD

American politicians are calling for the United States (US) to review its bilateral relations with South Africa, which may have dire economic and political consequences for Pretoria and its backing of Hamas, Russia, and China. If the South African government thought that its foreign policy choices were passing unnoticed across the Atlantic, it should think again, according to political experts. For the third time in the past year, little-known backbenchers in the US House of Representatives – one each from the Democrats and Republicans – are introducing a bill critical of Pretoria’s international position. This time, they are calling for a full review of the relationship between the US and the Rainbow Nation. “This is dangerous for South Africa and South Africans,” said Professor Hussein Solomon from the University of the Free State. “But I don’t think the ANC [African

National Congress] understands or cares about the strategic importance of relations with the US. “When we embarked on an action like taking Israel to the International Court of Justice [ICJ] on genocide charges, we should have thought through the consequences. If you are a mouse, don’t go tackle the lion. South Africa lacks a view of where we stand in the pecking order.” The proposed “US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act” contends that the actions of the ANC government aren’t consistent with its stated policy of not taking sides in international affairs and are against US security and foreign policy interests. It mentions South Africa’s “history of siding with malign actors” – those considered evil in nature or effect. On Hamas, the bills said the ANC since 1994 had taken “a hardline stance of consistently accusing Israel of practicing apartheid”. It mentions the government’s actions since 7 October 2023, listing “a

variety of antisemitic and anti-Israel-related statements and actions”, including the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco’s) comments that the attacks were provoked through “continued illegal occupation of Palestine (sic) land, continued settlement expansion, desecration of the Al Aqsa Mosque and Christian holy sites, and ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people”. It also cites President Cyril Ramaphosa’s remarks accusing Israel of genocide. International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor’s phone call with Hamas; her visit to Tehran; and her calls for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court are detailed. It called the ICJ case “flawed” and “a politically motivated suit”. South Africa is too close to Iran and its proxy, Hamas, for America’s liking. The bill also lists South Africa’s “increasingly close relations with the Russian Federation” including the joint military exercises with Russia and China in February 2023; the docking of the US-sanctioned Lady R in Simon’s Town and its arms transfers; Pretoria “reneging on its initial call for the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine and actively seeking improved relations with Moscow since February 2022”; and “dispatching multiple high-level official delegations to Russia to further political, intelligence, and military co-operation”.

On China, the bill criticises ANC and government interactions with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), “who are committing gross violations of human rights in the Xinjiang province and implement economically coercive tactics around the globe”, which it says are inconsistent with the rights enshrined in South Africa’s Constitution and US interests. It cites examples such as South Africa hosting Chinese-government-aligned Confucius Institutes to spread pro-China propaganda; participation in a CCP-funded political training school in Tanzania that targets “the next-generation of African leaders and attempts to export the CCP’s system of party-run authoritarian governance to the African continent”; and support for China’s grand global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative. It also criticises South Africa’s relations with Chinese technology firms such as Huawei, ZTE, and Hikvision, which are said to pose a threat to US security interests.



Analysts are divided over this bill and its effects. Said Solomon, “If the chief rabbi is right, there’s state capture of South African foreign policy by Iran. It was up for sale. The West doesn’t see South Africa as an ally. It sees us as on the decline – our ports, our railways, our electricity grid are dysfunctional. You cannot project even soft power in the world if you can’t get these things right at home. To be frank, I simply cannot explain South African foreign policy at the moment.” Terence Corrigan from the Institute of Race Relations said, “The ANC has for decades seen the US and the West as an essentially enemy force, though in government for the first decade post-1994, it was able to nuance this sufficiently to maintain generally cordial relations. The decline in the capacity of the ANC has resulted in it defaulting to the territory it knows best and on which it’s most comfortable: ideology. This is fundamentally more important to the ANC, and to the government it heads, than trade and investment or socio-economic upliftment. In the BRICS organisation [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates], it has found a thin narrative that allows it to believe – or at least proclaim – that there are economic alternatives to its major trade and investment interlocutors. This bill is probably unlikely to gain significant traction, though it signifies that South Africa can expect a frostier reception in Western capitals. Still, South Africa seems either not to realise or not to care that it has been placing its relationships with the West in jeopardy.” “We have no specific information on this, but aren’t surprised. There are consequences

to the way the US and its allies are treated by South Africa,” said Zev Krengel, the president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Gustavo de Carvalho, a senior researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs said, “I see risks to the US in this bill. It will have a spillover effect in the Global South about how to engage with the US, and will consolidate global divides. The US needs minerals from South Africa, particularly platinum, chrome, and manganese. Obviously, there are economic risks for South Africa, including lost business in minerals and automotive manufacturing. But this bill may have the opposite effect of driving South Africa and other developing countries closer to China, Russia, and Hamas.” Dirco spokesperson Clayton Monyela dismissed the bill as inconsequential. He told *The Mail and Guardian*, “We know for a fact that the US government doesn’t share the views of the individuals behind this bill. We’re confident that it won’t go anywhere. We continue to engage, share information, and co-operate with the US at bilateral and multilateral fora to deepen the already strong ties between our two countries politically, economically, and work together to respond to global developments.” Whether the bill passes or not, it’s yet another sign of South Africa’s complex and strained relationship with the US, partly caused by its foreign policy decisions. There may be serious consequences for millions of citizens if South Africa is frozen out of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which benefits jobs and livelihoods across the country. South Africa’s “free pass” on the international stage may be reaching its expiry date.



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Pandor threat claim – another blood libel, says Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Israel has responded to claims by Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor that the country is out to get her because of the stand she has taken against it, describing it as just “more blood libel”. Speaking on the sidelines of President Cyril Ramaphosa’s State of the Nation address on 8 February, Pandor claimed that she feared that Israel could compromise her safety and that of her family. “I felt that [it would] be better if we had extra security,” she stated. “But what I’m more concerned about is my family, because in some of the social media messages, my children are mentioned and so on, but this is par for the course. “The Israeli agents, the intelligence services, [this] is how they behave, and they seek to intimidate you, so we must not be intimidated. There is a cause that is under way.” On 12 February, *Independent Online* reported that Pandor claimed that she had received “death threats from suspected Israeli agents”, but didn’t elaborate further. This was just one of many times that Pandor has made such allegations since South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December. However, the spokesperson of the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs, Lior Haiat, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “These are baseless false accusations and another blood libel by the foreign minister of South Africa, which serves as the legal arm of the terrorist organisation Hamas. “South Africa is trying to limit Israel’s right to defend itself and its citizens, and promote the interests of Hamas and Iran in the Middle East and Africa,” he said. “The South African government’s support for terrorism and its activities against Israel on the bilateral level and in international organisations are a stain that won’t be erased.” South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) National Chairperson Rowan Polovin said, “One of the ANC’s [African National Congress’s] objectives of the ICJ affair, besides protecting Hamas and delegitimising Israel’s right to self-defence, was to deflect attention from the ANC’s overwhelming domestic failures. “Although the ICJ case won the ANC some support



Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor

Continued on page 5>>

SAJBD takes antisemitism facts to minister’s door

LEE TANKEL

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) delivered a memorandum to the justice department in Pretoria on 12 February in response to Justice and Correctional Services Minister Ronald Lamola’s recent denial of the existence of antisemitism in South Africa in at least two media interviews.

“We need to correct this misinformation, and ensure that not just the minister, but his department is well informed about antisemitism,” said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn, who was one of those protesting in Pretoria.

“This is the ministry that should be protecting South Africa’s Jewry. To do so, we need to make sure that we’re all clear as to what the situation is.”

Lamola insisted on *BBC HARDtalk* on 30 January, “In South Africa, there’s no threat or harm whatsoever to Jewish people. Nothing has happened to them, and nothing will happen to them or any Jewish community on the basis of their creed, sex, or religion.”

However, the SAJBD has facts and figures clearly showing a 631% increase in antisemitic attacks in South Africa in the last three months of last year. The number of attacks went from 19 to 139 from October to December 2023 compared to the same period of 2022.

The SAJBD monitors and records antisemitic activity mainly through incidents reported to it by community members and other Jewish institutions. The Board compares methodology with equivalent Jewish representative bodies, including those 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. However, our government has created an environment where antisemitism can flourish with Minister Lamola’s comments being an example”, said Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the SAJBD.

In response to questions on *HARDtalk* about *SA Jewish Report* chairperson Howard Sackstein’s opinion piece in the paper four weeks ago in which he spoke about not feeling safe as a Jew in South Africa anymore, Lamola said, “It’s a very unfortunate statement not based on any

facts. It’s just a figment of his imagination.”

Lamola doubled down on his statement in an interview on the *Clement Manyathela Show* on Radio 702 on 8 February, when he said, “It’s nonsense”, in response to the SAJBD.

Thereafter, the SAJBD headed for the justice department on 12 February to deliver a memorandum to convey the fact that the number of antisemitic attacks had increased in the aftermath of the war in Israel.

“Our memorandum called for the minister to acknowledge the spike in hate against Jews in South Africa, and to use his ministry to protect and support our community in the same way that all hate in this country is protected,” said Kahn. “The minister assigned members of his office to collect the memorandum, and they assured us that the contents would be brought to the attention of the minister, who is currently in Cape Town.

“Our picket outside the offices of the justice department also provided us with an opportunity to engage with the media present and brief them on the actual situation relating to antisemitism in South Africa,” Kahn said.

Though it was a small demonstration compared to others organised by the SAJBD, comprising only 12 people, “We wanted to deliver our memorandum to our minister urgently. We didn’t want him to use another public platform to deny antisemitism in South Africa. Wearing our t-shirts stating, ‘The Lamola Deception’, and with key messaging on our placards including ‘Rabbi assaulted in Joburg, reported to SAPS 11 Nov 2023’; and ‘Antisemitism isn’t a figment of our



imagination’, among others, we were more than able to state our narrative clearly,” Kahn said.

Kahn said the SAJBD was more than willing to share case numbers with the minister, as Lamola has claimed that “there has been no such thing reported to law enforcement in South Africa” on 702.

“To date, eight cases have been or are in the process of being lodged with the South African Police Service. They include assault, damage to property, and incitement of violence,” said Milner.

“It’s a slap in the face of our country’s Constitution, which calls for all citizens of South Africa to have equal protection by the state irrespective of race, religion, and so on,” said Kahn. “The minister has an obligation to protect us all, and his comments show disregard for our Jewish community.

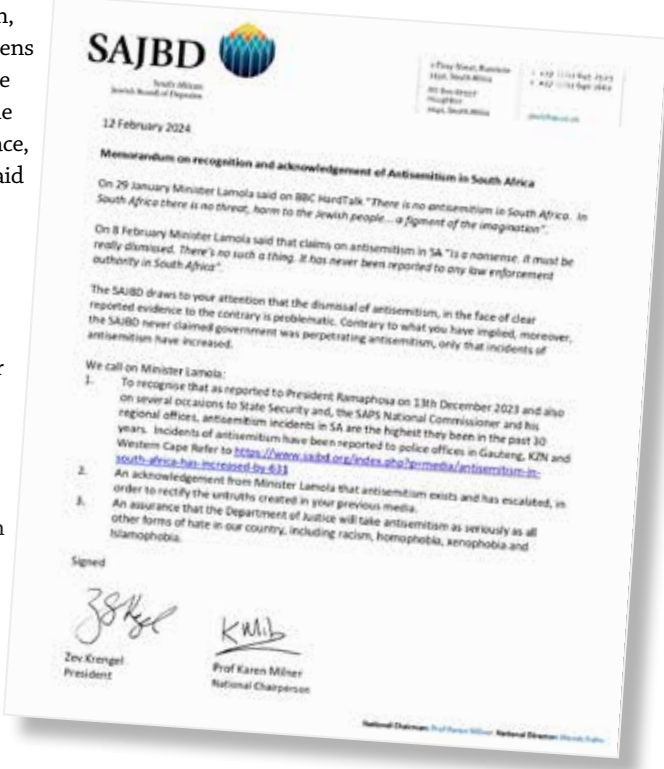
“It’s our hope that the minister will now investigate so that he understands the real challenges experienced by South African Jewry at this time,” Kahn said.

“South Africa’s new Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill is coming into law. This legislation is crucial in protecting all members of our country, and the minister needs to ensure that our community

is protected by these laws,” she said. “South Africa has advanced legislation to protect all its citizens. There cannot be a feeling that they are not applied across the board. Also, it matters that our minister is ignoring the reality on the ground when it comes to our community,” said Kahn.

“There are concerns about global Jewry during times of war in Israel. We continue to be vigilant. While the anti-Israel rhetoric is toxic and hostile, overall, our community is still able to wear *kippot* and function as proud Jews in our country.”

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to Lamola and his ministry, but his office refused to comment.



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Pandor threat claim – another blood libel, says Israel

>>Continued from page 4

amongst a vocal group of Israel-haters and antisemites in the country, it has made no impact on the ruling party’s polling in the upcoming elections.

“Indeed, the much-coveted practice of scapegoating Israel in domestic South African politics has never led to election gains for any party,” he said. “The ANC is now worried about poor polling projections in the upcoming elections. Ramaphosa and others in the ANC have resorted to classic antisemitic propaganda to claim that the Jewish state, and by association Jews who support it, is working towards ‘regime change’ because the ANC’s actions at the ICJ have created ‘powerful enemies’.

“This is a continuation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which claimed a Jewish plan for global domination; the Nazi accusation of Jews of being behind both capitalist and communist plots to control the world; the Soviet claim of ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ – a euphemism for Jews – who inculcate internationalist sympathies against them; Middle Eastern politics claiming that the Zionists ‘manipulate governments’ and ‘instigate regime change’; and modern conspiracy theories of Zionist financial control of the ‘New World Order’ in secretive global governance schemes,” Polovin said. “The ANC’s anti-democratic and antisemitic tactics should be widely

condemned.

“The SAZF strongly encourages all members of the South African Jewish community, regardless of where they are in the world, to register to vote, as this is an important way to work for change in our foreign policy.”

On X, columnist and commentator Ivo Vegter said that Pandor’s claims were “just grandstanding, to vilify Israel. Why would Israel come after her or her family, when there’s nothing to be gained and widespread support to be lost?”

Pandor’s spokesperson, Lunga Ngqengelele, said he couldn’t comment on the matter as it would be “tantamount to defying the whole purpose of the security”.

Meanwhile, Pandor, who is 70, announced that she wouldn’t be making herself available for public office after South Africa’s national elections.

At an ANC event in Cape Town in support of ANC Member of the Provincial Legislature Khalid Sayed, who is the party’s premier candidate in the Western Cape, Pandor said she “wouldn’t hold public office”. Ngqengelele said only that she had already addressed her retirement at a press conference on 31 January, in which she said that she “didn’t know what the seventh administration plans were” for her party.

Good riddance

On reading that our not-so beloved minister of international relations and cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, would be terminating her career in public office after the national elections this year, I wondered if I had somehow misinterpreted or misread it. I mean, it was surely too good to be true. A miracle, maybe?

This minister has become the biggest thorn in the side of the Jewish community in South Africa because she’s clearly obsessed with hatred for Israel and anyone and anything somehow related to the Jewish state.

Her obsession has been exacerbated over the years, and is now at an all-time high, where apparently she can think of nothing else. And when she speaks about Israel or about the Jewish community, she has this irky smirk that appears like she’s looking down her nose at us, boasting about who holds the power.

I have no idea what she’s actually thinking, but I do know that she has made our relationship with the government so much harder than it ever needed to be or could be.

The upshot is that this week, her decision to leave public office was reiterated in the media, confirming that it’s true.

I felt like doing a victory dance when I read it a second time, not because her leaving will change our relationship with the African National Congress. That horse has bolted. However, her obsession has led the government down what looks like a rabbit hole of hatred that knows no bounds.

It’s astonishing that under Pandor’s lead, the government appears to have forgotten to govern South Africa and has become totally focused on spreading hatred towards Israel.

In fact, this last week, she, President Cyril Ramaphosa, Justice Minister Ronald “no-antisemitism-in-SA” Lamola, and two other government ministers apparently had nothing better to do than be sycophantic hosts to the Palestinian soccer team. How happy they all were to receive gifts of Palestinian keffiyehs. Clearly, our president and ministers don’t care that “From the river to the sea” is very clearly a chant to obliterate Israel and all who live there. Talk about supporting genocide!

Clearly, fixing all that’s wrong with our country isn’t as important as the top echelon of government making the Palestinian soccer team feel loved. Meanwhile, we were all dealing with Stage 6 loadshedding after our president promised that the government had handled this issue. So much for that!

To all extents, it appears that the other ministers are following Pandor’s lead in her Palestinian obsession.

I do accept that people may not agree with everything the Israeli government does, but look around us in Africa, there are governments that are doing horrific things to people and South Africa isn’t bothered by that. Am I suggesting it should perhaps worry about what is happening on its own continent? Heaven forbid!



Where was South Africa's outrage when in Darfur from 2005 to 2006, more than 200 000 innocent civilians died because of brutal attacks, starvation, and disease as the result of a campaign of violence at the hands of the Sudanese government? It didn't care for these fellow Africans. In fact, since last year, civilians in Sudan have once again been experiencing mass atrocities, to the point that Darfuri residents face a significant risk of genocide, but the South African government has totally ignored it.

In 2022, the deadliest state-based conflict in Africa was the war in the Tigray region in Ethiopia between the Ethiopian government and the rebel group the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. It's estimated that more than 100 000 people were killed in that conflict.

Do you know that there are violent armed conflicts happening in 35 African countries right now? These countries include Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. And has the South African government even commented on any of these conflicts, let alone taken a stand against them? Not a chance!

So, why on earth is it focusing on a war that has nothing whatsoever to do with it, taking a clearly biased and unfair stand against Israel as if Hamas, an organisation recognised all over the Western world as a terrorist organisation, has done nothing wrong?

This week, Israel managed to save the lives of two of the remaining 136 hostages who have been held by the barbaric Hamas in Gaza since the 7 October massacre. It was a brave and outstanding rescue in Rafah, the Gazan town closest to the border of Egypt.

And on Tuesday this week, Pandor and her cronies decided to run back to the International Court of Justice to stop Israel in its tracks in Rafah.

I don't want to see any more bloodshed. I don't want more innocent people to die, but I do want Hamas to return the hostages, and I do want Israel to be safe from this terrorist organisation in future.

I'm no military expert, and I cannot specifically say that every single Israeli soldier is angelic, but Israel cannot stop the war or agree to a ceasefire until all the hostages are back home. And the pain of continuing the war is also taking its toll on Israel, which is losing some of its best sons. Don't for one minute think that the pain of this isn't carried by the whole nation.

Israelis don't want to fight an endless war, but they also don't want to be vulnerable to another Hamas massacre.

So, I'll celebrate when Pandor leaves government, and I'm assuming she'll take up her rightful place as the leader of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement or a spot in the Iranian government. Suffice to say, she has done well as the number-one Israel hater in South Africa.

However, I'm astonished that she's now claiming to be concerned about her safety at the hands of Israel. It seems obvious to me that Israel has its hands full with a war and doesn't really have time to worry about smirky foreign ministers.

I'm sure, though, that we, the Jewish community of South Africa, will be very grateful when we don't have to listen to her hateful prose about how devilish the Jewish state is. I look forward to that day. Truth is, we don't know who will replace her and, whoever it is could potentially be worse – but I'm not sure that's possible.

Here's to many more miracles!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

ANC's stance on Israel won't sway Muslim vote



OPINION

MARIUS ROODT

The African National Congress (ANC) is facing its sternest challenge since the end of apartheid. For the first time in democratic South Africa, the party's support could fall below 50%, and it could find itself out of government in places like KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. Even in provinces which have traditionally been ANC strongholds, like the Free State, the party is under unprecedented pressure.

Already, there have been dark mutterings by President Cyril Ramaphosa about foreign forces seeking “regime change” in this country, perhaps laying the foundation for excuses should the ANC do poorly in the upcoming election – which will probably be held in May.

But could the ANC's recent decision to take Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the war in Gaza help the governing party shore up its support among Muslim South Africans? Are we likely to see a surge in support for the ANC from South Africans who follow Islam?

First, we must remember that the Muslim community in South Africa is a diverse one. The interests of a Muslim doctor of Indian descent living in Umhlanga won't be the same as a coloured Muslim who lives on the Cape Flats and works as a delivery driver. A recent white convert to Islam in Johannesburg won't have the same concerns as a Muslim immigrant from Nigeria who has recently won South African citizenship.

Just as it's a mug's game to talk about any racial community in South Africa as if it were a homogenous group, when it comes to things like social views and voting patterns, it's similarly foolhardy to talk about any religious community as one homogenous group. Even within the South African Jewish community, there are wide differences of opinion on Israel's actions in the war with Hamas, with some Jewish South Africans thinking Israel isn't going far enough, while others are indifferent to the existence of Israel itself. There's no reason to think Muslims will be any different.

And though there's no polling on the basis of religion in South Africa, it would be surprising if the views of Muslims were significantly out of step with most other South Africans.



Polling from a variety of sources shows that foreign policy is low down on the list of the concerns of South Africans. And it must be asked whether even the most ardent supporter of Palestine in South Africa would vote ANC while experiencing load or water-shedding, the latter, concerningly, starting to become much more common in this country than in the past.

Polling by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) towards the end of last year showed that voters weren't concerned with what was happening abroad, but rather with “bread-and-butter” issues. Most South Africans said

the biggest issues concerning them were things like unemployment, corruption, crime, and problems with electricity and sanitation.

Foreign policy didn't feature.

And the IRR survey isn't an outlier. An Afrobarometer survey conducted last year produced similar findings, with most South Africans saying that issues such as service delivery, crime, and unemployment were more important.

Of course, these surveys were conducted before Israel launched its war on Hamas, following the grotesque events of 7 October, and South Africa's subsequent action in taking Israel to the ICJ, but it would be surprising if the sentiments they revealed have changed significantly.

We can only speculate about whether the vote of Muslim South Africans will be swayed because of the actions of the South African government over the past few weeks, but evidence from abroad could give us some direction.

In the United Kingdom, much has been made of the fact that Muslim Britons are opposed to the stance of the leadership of the Labour Party on the Gaza conflict. Traditionally, Muslims have, as a rule, been staunch supporters of Labour, but the relatively pro-Israel views of its leader, Keir Starmer, has resulted in some infighting within the party and speculation that Muslims could abandon Labour *en masse*.

A recent survey showed that Labour had experienced a drop in the proportion of Muslim support, but this drop was relative, with about 60% of Muslims saying they would still support the party – down from about 72% who supported it in the last general election.

For most Muslim voters, however, bread-and-butter issues were at the forefront. Only 15% said that the conflict in Gaza was the most important issue when it came to deciding how to vote in the next British election, the cost-of-living, the economy, and the National Health Service all being ranked by more people as electoral concerns. It wouldn't be a wild assumption to think that South African Muslims would be the same.

In addition, Muslims are a relatively small minority

in South Africa. People who follow Islam in South Africa make up about 2% of the population. If we assumed they also made up 2% of voters, even as a bloc, they would have a relatively small impact on elections, and it's highly unlikely all Muslims would vote the same way in any case.

It's unlikely, therefore, that South Africa's current stance on Israel will result in the ANC experiencing a significant rise in support from Muslims. And even if all Muslims decided that they would vote for the governing party, it would be unlikely to be enough to stem the votes that the party would lose to other parties because of the shambolic way it has governed over the past 15 years.

If the ANC wants its support to rise once again, its best bet would be to start running the country properly and put South Africa on a sustainable path to development and prosperity.

- *Marius Roodt is a writer and senior researcher at the Institute of Race Relations.*

SA doubles down against Israel over Rafah offensive

>>Continued from page 1

misinterpret the ICJ ruling, which rejected its demand for a ceasefire. It's doing so to protect its ally, Hamas, which is the proxy of Iran. The IDF has destroyed 18 Hamas battalions based in Gaza, however four Hamas battalions remain in Rafah. Intense activity that is to follow in Rafah requires civilians to evacuate areas of combat. Therefore, the Israeli government has ordered the IDF and the security establishment to submit a combined plan. Israel plans to set up 15 areas with 25 000 tents and medical personnel south of Al Mawasi.

“On Monday, two hostages held in Rafah were rescued by Israeli forces, which underscores the need to enter this area,” she says. “The war can end immediately if Hamas

surrenders and returns the hostages.”

Marks adds: “South Africa has still not used its influence to call for the release of hostages, as stated by the ICJ ruling.”

Judge Dennis Davis says one concern is that the matter may now be escalated to the United Nations Security Council, and this may lead to a resolution against Israel. However, he says that if a peace plan comes to fruition, the ICJ's orders would essentially fall away.

“Who knows what results South Africa's request will have?” says Oppenheimer. “The court might explicitly state that Israel has a right to do what it's doing. In which case, it might very well embolden Israel. It's unclear what tactics South Africa will engage in in the future.”

Extra month represents a whole leap forward

OPINION

We're all acquainted with the concept of a leap year. Every four years, an additional day is added to the month of February as a necessary adjustment to the civil calendar.

But our Jewish calendar's leap year adds the entire month of Adar. This year is a Jewish leap year, resulting in Pesach and all the festivals being particularly late in the civil year. How did a 13-month year come to be?

The first commandment that the people of Israel received as a nation was the instruction to count time. The exodus from Egypt began with establishing the month of Nissan as the first month of our Jewish calendar year, determined by the birth of the moon.

It seems simple. A lunar month is about 29.5 days. To accommodate the half-day, the length of a month is either 29 or 30 days.

But simple it isn't. An additional requirement of our calendar is that our festivals fall in particular seasons. Pesach, for example, must fall in spring. The seasons are determined by the cycle of the sun, not the movement of the moon. So was born the complicated but exceptionally precise Jewish lunar solar calendar.

If we were to anchor our calendar only in the cycle of the moon, our year would comprise 12 months of 29.5 days, which adds up to 354 days. But the solar year is 365 days in duration. Every new lunar year would begin 11 days earlier than the new solar year. Over a number of years, Pesach would no longer fall in spring. It would be celebrated in winter!

The solution was to add a lunar month about every three years to synchronise the lunar and solar calendar.

The great Hillel II, in the year 359CE, formulated the scientific perpetual calendar with a 19-year cycle which would include seven leap years, each with an additional month. Following the last month of the year, the month of Adar, an additional month is added and is known as Adar Bet.

Our people are compared to the moon. We humbly recognise that our light is a reflection of a radiance much greater than ourselves.

The waxing and waning of the monthly lunar cycle represents the annals of our history and the ever changing periods of pain and plenitude. At times, the darkness of night is intense. We barely see a slither of moon. But the next day promises hope and optimism as the moon develops and grows until a full ball illuminates and transforms the prevailing darkness. Both Pesach and Sukkot take place on the 15th day of the Jewish month, when the moon is in its fullest phase.

Our solar lunar calendar represents two vital ingredients of the invincible strength, endurance, and vitality of our people.

The sun represents the absolute intensity of light that is not subject to phases and change. It symbolises the anchors of our faith, founded in the eternal values of our Torah and *mitzvot*. The moral compass of generations of Jews is impervious to vogue, fashionable impressions, and the trends of fickle public opinion. The sun represents the beauty and radiance of Shabbat, the discipline of kashrut, and the predictably regular responsibilities of putting on tefillin, lighting Shabbat candles and wearing tzitzit. It's the constant commitment to give a tenth of our earnings to charity, to prioritise *chesed* and our commitment to our spouses and children, and to the blessings of family purity. All of this is set in stone, never being subject to debate, review, and compromise.

The moon represents dynamic change, movement, growth, and regeneration. The phases of the moon remind us that no two days can be allowed to be the same. There's a yearning for more and for a journey inspired by ambition to achieve growth, notwithstanding the losses and failures of the past. The cycle of the moon reminds us to breathe passion, enthusiasm, newness, excitement, and energy into the daily grind.

Our solar lunar calendar reminds us of the stability of the unyielding anchors of the absolute values and teachings of our Torah. At the same time, it drives us to fill every day with personal motivation,

This year (5784), the additional month of Adar Bet is added to the Jewish lunar solar calendar



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We call our leap year a *Shnat Ibbur* (pregnant year). It's a year pregnant with opportunity for newfound growth.

The extra months of Adar are associated with joy and the spirit of Purim. May they usher in a double helping of happiness and optimism, and lead us to the month of Nissan and the festival of Pesach and season of freedom.

May our long awaited redemption bring healing, tranquillity, and peace to our people of Israel, and to the whole world.

• Rabbi Dovid Hazdan is the rabbi at Great Park Synagogue, and the dean of Torah Academy.

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BDS protesters turn on German cultural institution

NICOLA MILTZ

South African haters of Israel have resorted to intimidatory tactics to bully German institutions far removed from the conflict in the Middle East, demanding that the country stop supporting Israel in its war on Hamas.

On Friday, 9 February, anti-Israel activists staged a protest outside the Goethe-Institut in Johannesburg and the German consulate in Cape Town.

Germany has faced criticism for its unwavering support for Israel, which has endured in spite of the ongoing war. Berlin's detractors say guilt over the Holocaust has impelled it to defend Israel in its war in the Gaza Strip.

However, Germany has staunchly defended Israel's right to defend itself, and has opposed calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. It also supported Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where South Africa brought a case accusing the Jewish state of genocide.

Small groups of protesters gathered outside the two venues, and accused Germany of being complicit in genocide. They delivered a memorandum with a list of demands including, among others, that Germany withdraw its military, political, diplomatic, and cultural support for Israel; that German cultural institutions including the Goethe-Institut refuse to police the politics of their artists; that the German state stop conflating criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism; and that Germany revoke its suspension of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

The memorandum said that the Goethe-Institut wielded "enormous power" when it came to policing criticism of Israel.

"Disappointingly and contrary to its stated 'independence', the Goethe-Institut has previously cancelled events of cultural workers who have expressed support for Palestine and/or who have been critical of the Israeli regime," the memorandum stated. It went on to say that this could be viewed as an attack on freedom of expression.

The national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Professor Karen Milner, said this was "a typical BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation] ploy".

"It has nothing to offer in terms of bringing about a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so it organises meaningless protests against cultural institutions who themselves are in no way involved in the conflict," Milner said.

"Rather than play any meaningful role, BDS just engages in bullying campaigns. It attempts to intimidate and silence anyone who holds a different view to its own. It does so also in the hope that it will create an environment of fear for anyone who contradicts its hate-filled narrative."

Rolene Marks, the spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), said Israel was the canary in the coal mine of South Africa's relations with the democratic world.

"The targeting of German institutions follows the Israeli and American embassy protests at the beginning of the war. The SAZF continues to be in contact with all supporters of Israel in the country to work together against the targeting of democratic

interests in South Africa.

"Supporters of genocidal groups like Hamas don't have the authority to dictate the definition of genocide. We thank our German supporters for taking a principled stand in the name of democracy and human rights," Marks said.

Dr Christopher Schmidt, the spokesperson for the German Embassy, said Germany supported "both the right to exist of the state of Israel, and the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Germany is pushing intensively for a diplomatic settlement of the current conflict on the basis of a negotiated two-state solution.

"Israel has a right to self-defence against the unprecedented attacks by Hamas within the confines of international law. At the same time, we see the unspeakable suffering of the civilian population in Gaza. Germany is one of the world's leading supporters of the Palestinian Authority and of the global humanitarian relief efforts for the Palestinian people," Schmidt said.

He said UNRWA's role was vital for the provision of basic services to the Palestinian people, and that though no new funding would be made available by Germany pending UNRWA's investigation into the extremely grave allegations (that staff members participated in the 7 October massacre), Germany's current funding remained unaffected.

"At the same time, Germany is stepping up its humanitarian assistance via the International Committee of the Red Cross; the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the United Nations Children's Fund; and others," Schmidt said.

The Goethe-Institut said it rejected all forms of violence, racism, and antisemitism. "For more than 70 years, we have offered a platform for dialogue, including those that end in respectful disagreement. Often, this open space has been the

last link between civil societies, when even formal diplomacy stalled. Therefore, we don't believe that boycotts or embargos are useful tools in the realm of international cultural exchange. That's also why we keep operating, even in illiberal countries."

It said that regardless of hardening resentment and violence, it wanted to continue to pursue this path, be it at its locations in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Gaza, or anywhere else.

Meanwhile, South African writer and commentator, Malaika Mahlatsi, who is studying in Germany, was last week summonsed by German authorities over what has been described as the "rewarding and awarding of a crime". Mahlatsi has been vocal about her support for Palestine and the South African government's case of genocide against Israel before the ICJ. She was ordered to appear before a hearing this week.

Schmidt said there was no indication that there was any connection between this and the recent BDS protest action outside German institutions.

International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor described Germany serving a South African social commentator with a summons over her stance on the Middle East conflict as "shocking".

"From an established democracy, I find it to be quite shocking, but we know Germany's view – it wrote to us indicating its displeasure at us going to the ICJ and that it would be supporting Israel," she said.

Similar protests by the BDS and aligned organisations were planned for Gqeberha and Windhoek.



‘Israel is in a crisis – let’s not waste it’

LEE TANKLE

"October 7 marked the point of no return," Rabbi Danny Mirvis, the acting chief executive of World Mizrahi, told a presentation at Mizrahi South Africa on 8 February. "We cannot go back to life as it was on October 6.

"This war is different to any other war," he told an audience at Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg. "Instead of turning names into numbers, we're turning numbers into names with the civilian and military casualties. The level of evil that has been expressed is something we've not experienced before."

Mirvis, also the rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue in Herzliya Pituach, Israel, said, "We had the wrong approach to security on 6 October. Our military strategy was wrong. We all thought that a war was going to be in Lebanon. Even Daniel Perez [who is being held hostage in Gaza] wrote to his friends on 6 October that the border with Gaza was boring."

This, according to Mirvis, proves the point made by Rambam, that if there's no diversity of thought and views and everyone has the identical approach to something, something is amiss and needs to change.

"In the right time, Israel needs a different make-up of political leadership," Mirvis said.

He explained that in the biblical story of Joseph, there's an interpretation that says that had Reuven, the oldest son of Jacob,

known that the story of Joseph would be recorded and retold to future generations, he would have taken his brother, Joseph, home to his father instead of selling him to be a slave in Egypt. "Had our biblical characters known they were biblical characters, they would have acted differently.

"The Tanach will be updated, and current events will be recorded," Mirvis said. "What we're going through now is going to be a chapter in this updated version. We're living through historical times, and this is a continuation of our biblical story.

"We need to recognise that if we lose the war and our Jewish identity, the story ends here. We're fighting for our lives and our future."

He said there were two types of people in this world – those who understand history and know we need to change, and those who don't.

"Through people moving to the *mercaz* [centre of Israel], the people of Israel have been forced to unite. Through *chesed* and

tragedy, we've witnessed a unity that previously wasn't thought possible," Mirvis said, discussing the change in attitude of Israelis.

Mirvis was told that his new neighbours, who moved to Herzliya from the south of Israel because of the war, were afraid to do so because they believed "the protesters hate us". "They were made to think that those protesting the government were enemies," he said.

"However, we were never really enemies, we forgot who the real enemies were.

"I'm scared that we'll go back to where we were, and the closer we get to

elections, the bigger the cracks are going to be. We must reject any politician who enabled these differences in our community before 6 October.

"It's okay to question the suffering of innocent people," he said. "It would be pitiful if we were the same as before 7 October.

"As Rabbi Perez says, we must never let a good crisis go to waste. Every Jew is connected to what is going on in Israel. The crisis is true and real, but if Perez can say it, so can we."



Rabbi Danny Mirvis addressing the community at Sydenham Shul

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Ministers chant support for Palestine at soccer ‘friendly’

NICOLA MILTZ

Three South African government ministers and the president joined in the controversial antisemitic Palestinian rallying cry, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free!”; and “Free Free Palestine!” at a soccer match in Cape Town at the weekend.

This before television cameras and thousands of supporters at the Athlone Stadium in Cape Town, marking the start of a friendly match between the Palestine national football team and a local invitational side.

Donning keffiyeh and videoed for the world to see, South Africa’s top politicians, including President Cyril Ramaphosa; Justice and Correctional Services Minister Ronald Lamola; Sports, Art and Culture Minister Zizi Kodwa; and Department of International Relations and Cooperation Minister Dr Naledi Pandor, gathered before thousands of people to show their solidarity with Palestinians, as if there was nowhere else to be.

“The African National Congress



Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor; President of the Palestine Football Association, Jibril Rajoub; President Cyril Ramaphosa; and Sports Minister Zizi Kodwa

[ANC] continues to abuse South African institutions to drive its pro-Hamas activities,” said Rolene Marks, the spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation. “Sport historically has been a tool to unify South Africans. Instead, the ANC has used it to support Hamas and its Iranian allies.”

The Palestine national football team received a heroes welcome last week as crowds thronged the airport to welcome it to South Africa, the country that accused Israel of genocide in the International Court of Justice. The reception

almost matched fans at OR Tambo International Airport on 14 February welcoming back Bafana Bafana from Ivory Coast after finishing third in the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations.

The visiting team played against a Western Cape XI invitational team in the “Football 4 Humanity” match initiated by little known non-profit organisation Sports Stepping Stones in partnership with the South African Football Association (SAFA) Cape Town.

Addressing the crowd ahead of the match, Ramaphosa chanted,

“Free Free Palestine!” and thanked supporters for coming out to support the people of Palestine.

“Today, we celebrate humanity, friendship, but we’re also here to signify our support as the people of South Africa for the struggle of the Palestinians. We want to say the majority of people in this country and the governing party of South Africa, support the people of Palestine.”

This sentiment has been vehemently denied by thousands of South Africans including Jewry, who have consistently said the ANC’s views on Israel don’t represent the people of South Africa.

Said Marks, “At the event, the destruction of Israel was called for through the chanting of ‘From the river to the sea’. Evidently, no soccer clubs could be found to play against the Palestinian team, and an invitational 11 had to be put together for the match.

“Yet the ANC is opposed to South African clubs like Orlando Pirates playing against Israeli teams. Clearly, the ANC shouldn’t support Hamas in the name of ordinary South Africans.” Not too long ago, the ANC

expressed its support for a decision by the South African Rugby Union to disinvite an Israeli rugby team from playing in a local rugby tournament over alleged security concerns.

The party said at the time, “We hope this decision will serve as a reminder to Israel that its illegal occupation of Palestinian land is an injustice that shouldn’t be tolerated.”

The City of Cape Town provided Athlone Stadium for the football match at no cost. When asked about this, Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis said, “The team was invited here by SAFA and the national government. SAFA asked us to zero rate the cost of the stadium hire, which we often do for touring sports teams. And we did so again in this case too.

“The visit was an opportunity to show support for peace, humanity, and the hope for a two-state solution. It was also an important opportunity to address the massive campaign of disinformation that has been waged against the city by political opponents looking cynically to capitalise on this war for local political gain, which has been very effective.”

Israel strikes Lebanon after deadly attack on Tzfat

ELIYAHU FREEDMAN – JTA

Tensions are flaring at Israel’s northern border after a rocket fired from Lebanon killed a woman in the northern city of Tzfat.

Israel reportedly carried out extensive strikes inside southern Lebanon on 14 February in response to the deadly rocket attack from Hezbollah, the Lebanese terror group, which also left eight Israelis wounded. Israel’s strike has reportedly killed four people.

The barrage comes as both countries are under pressure to de-escalate tensions at the border, which has experienced near-daily exchanges of fire since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October.

Hezbollah says it will stop firing rockets only when Israel ceases that war, which began with Hamas’s deadly attack inside Israel on 7 October. The conflict in Israel’s north has led to calls from Israelis, including senior defence officials, to mount a major campaign against Hezbollah.

In Hezbollah’s last war with Israel, in 2006, more than 100 Israeli soldiers were killed in a ground invasion that didn’t end with a clear victor. In the 17 years since, Hezbollah has rebuilt its capacity for another round of conflict, against the terms of the treaty that ended that war. Now, a full-scale conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon is widely understood to pose significant risk for Israelis across the country, especially in the north.

Many northern Israeli border communities

were evacuated soon after 7 October in the face of Hezbollah rocket fire, including the town of Kiryat Shemona. Two people were wounded there in a rocket attack this week.

The mayor of Tzfat, Shuki Ohana, also called Safed, said on Wednesday that he wouldn’t evacuate his city in spite of the increased risk. He called on the government to provide more security for his city.

“There’s a dire shortage of defence in the city,” Ohana said. “The Israeli government needs to help with this issue.”

Tzfat, with a population of roughly 42 000, is home to a major military base and a hospital and is also a historic centre of Jewish mysticism. Many of its residents are affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement of Chassidic Judaism, and they have remained in the past when hostilities have flared.

“Without a doubt, the Torah protects us,” Rabbi Chaim Kaplan, who was injured by a rocket that fell in the city in 2006, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last month. He said his father had been the only one in his yeshiva not to heed a call to head to a bomb shelter when the city faced a barrage of rockets in 1978. “He said, ‘I am in my shelter: the yeshiva, learning Torah. Doing my mission is my bomb shelter. I won’t leave for anything.’”

Kaplan filed a successful claim against Hezbollah in a United States court, which found that Iran and North Korea were liable for damages because of their support for the terror group.

Suffer the Saffer who travels to Israel

OPINION

ILAN OSSENDRYVER



I recall the embarrassment of being a South African when travelling abroad during the apartheid era, especially during the 1980s. Many of us would hide our face or identity when people asked where we were from.

We would respond apologetically that we were from South Africa, with a quick and ready explanation of how we hated the system of apartheid and fought against it, hoping our answer would be believed as we still lived here.

Travelling to Israel this month, I once again experienced those evil looks and turned heads. This is something I would never have thought would happen again as a South African after Nelson Mandela was freed and we had our first democratic elections.

After that momentous time, we could proudly announce to the world that we were South African and proud of the “Rainbow Nation”. All that ended with Nelson Mandela’s death, allowing moral decay to gain hold of the country.

The African National Congress (ANC) government taking Israel to the International Court of Justice on trumped-up charges of genocide, as dictated by Iran – the new Guptas – and the Israel and Jew haters, has derailed the welcome of South Africans in Israel.

South Africans, in lieu of the ANC government, are now considered an enemy collaborating with terrorist organisation Hamas, with Dr Naledi Pandor, the minister of international relations and cooperation, taking

directives from Iran.

I have to say, travelling in Israel was embarrassing.

One evening, we went to a wine bar in Ramat Gan close to the nearly non-functioning South African embassy.

We were speaking English to our friends, and when the waiter came by and asked where we were from, we said South Africa. Time froze. You could feel the stabbing stares. We had to explain our position – that we were totally ashamed of our government’s behaviour.



South African produce in Israel

Sadly, at this wine bar, all South African wines had been removed from the list. The wine sommelier said they would no longer stock any wine from South Africa, no matter how good it was.

Some food chains have started to identify South African products.

Some people have started cancelling

trips to South Africa, which is equally sad because Africa needs tourism, likely to be the country’s biggest source of foreign capital.

One question posed to me while travelling in Israel was why a failed state that hadn’t delivered for its own people basic rights like electricity and water had the audacity to take on Israel.

My answer was that it probably boiled down to money for South Africa, and a lot of clever acting to show that it was concerned.

Sadly, boycotts affect the wrong groups of people – like the Cape wine growers, who depend on selling every single bottle of wine, and our farmers, who depend on exports of agricultural products.

Western democracies especially the United States and some European countries watch how South Africa has taken the wrong turn in international policy, and may also punish the country for it. The result would affect all South Africans, as opposed to just the ANC.

The South African government’s outrageous foreign-affairs games may well have an impact on South Africans not just in Israel but in countries in the West.

So, once again, travelling as a South African abroad, isn’t easy unless you have a pre-prepared apology for our captured government.

Except if you’re travelling in Iran, that is.

• *Ilan Ossendryver is the photographer for the SA Jewish Report.*

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From dating disasters to lasting love

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

"He insults his ex"; "She never shuts up"; "The date went terribly"; "We're just not meant to be." Though sometimes reservations about someone are well founded, in other cases, a negative first impression or disastrous date can lead to a classic love story.

In a case of legitimate reservations, Tanya Jacobs* ensured that her first-date disaster never technically transpired. "After my divorce, the owner of a small supermarket saw that I'd lost a substantial amount of weight and thought he'd be doing me a great kindness by making a *shidduch* between me and the manager of his store," she recalls. "He didn't know my background at all, he simply thought it was a phenomenal idea because the store manager and I were both divorced."

When her fellow divorcee called Jacobs, he told her that they had a lot in common

because, he assumed, they both hated their exes. "He proceeded to tell me about how he fought not to pay maintenance for his child," she recalls. "He then asked if I could fetch him for the date as he had sold his car when he was still paying maintenance and now rode a bicycle and felt that riding in tandem wouldn't be appropriate." Jacobs summarily told him that she didn't feel ready to start dating yet, and cancelled.

However, returning to the supermarket became increasingly challenging. "Every

time I went there, he would stalk me in the aisles," she says. "When I did eventually start dating someone, I was excited, not because I was thrilled about the guy, but because I asked him to come with me to the store and to give me the biggest smooch ever." Needless to say, the aisle stalker ceased his activities.

In spite of some missteps along the way, Hilary and Kevin Kaplan's story had a far better outcome. Introduced by a mutual friend, they first met at a coffee shop. "While we were getting to know each other, I mentioned that I really liked ice skating, and Kevin said he had done it a few times as a teenager," Hilary recalls. "He suggested that we go together."

Little did they know that this would be the setting of an unmitigated third-date disaster. "I drove us there, and we put on our skates and stepped onto the ice," she recalls. "Kevin

was holding onto the side, feeling unsteady. Within five minutes, before we had even done a full lap around the rink, he lost his balance and fell onto the ice. He had dislocated his knee, and I could see the bone pushing out the side of his leg. I screamed for a medic to help us, and he was carried off."

Hilary followed the ambulance to the hospital, helped Kevin fill in his medical forms, and kept him company while the pain medication kicked in. What could have been its demise, turned into a key moment in their relationship.

"That was the night I discovered what his middle name was, his birthday, and the fact that he doesn't have any allergies," Hilary



Dani and Greg Levitan

says. "Throughout the night, Kevin was in pain, but didn't lose his positive attitude as we chatted while waiting for the orthopaedic specialist to come and pop his knee into place." The date ended around midnight, when Hilary met Kevin's parents, who had come to drive him home and pick up his car which he'd left outside her house. "It wasn't the first impression I was hoping to make," she says. Yet, as a result of the experience, she learnt how brave and kind Kevin was. "A year later, we got married and 14 years later, we're still happily married. However, I've never taken him ice skating again."

The first time Dani Levitan met her husband, Greg, she was about to move to Australia. "Friends of mine wanted to set me up with him, and I didn't want anything to stop me from moving," she recalls. Yet she agreed to meet him, with their first encounter taking place on the dance floor at her best friend's wedding. "It was pretty awkward because it was quite contrived," Dani recalls. "We went on a couple of dates though, but I knew he wasn't for me."

Dani says that though the dates weren't bad, she thought Greg was a little nerdy for her. "Instead of the *mensch*, I wanted the bad boy. Regardless, nothing was going to stop me from moving to Australia." Though Greg really liked Dani, his calls to her to wish her luck on the day she moved went unanswered. "I was so horrible about it," Dani recalls. "To this day, he still mocks me."

Dani hated Australia, and ultimately returned to South Africa. Soon afterwards, she ran into Greg at a Rosh Hashanah lunch at mutual friends. "My mother asked who he was, and I said, 'He's not for me.' I thought she just wanted to hook me up with anyone to ensure that I didn't go overseas again. Greg and I chatted briefly, but it was a bit awkward."

Months later, debating whether or not to delete Dani as a Facebook friend, Greg decided to message her instead. After two weeks of mutual messaging, he asked her out. Though she still felt that Greg wasn't the one, Dani thought, "Why not, nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Their second first date – almost two years after the first one – turned out to be amazing. "From there, it just evolved," she says. "We started speaking every day, and my feelings completely changed about him. If I hadn't gone, I wouldn't be in the position I am today, married with two beautiful children. It's always worth giving somebody a chance." She says it was she who needed to change, not Greg. "I always say to him, had we dated properly the first time around, I probably would have messed it up and we wouldn't be together today because I wasn't in the right head space."

Undeniably, there are multiple factors to the process of finding lasting love. *Shadchan* Cindy Silberg says she always suggests that her clients commit to at least three dates before ending things unless they see a bad side of someone or feel unsafe. "In my eight years of experience, I've seen that most first dates don't go as well as the couple were hoping. This is probably due to them being nervous and not knowing the person."

"When people go on at least two or three dates before making a decision about whether to continue or not, they have a lot more insight about their choice," she says. "I've had many couples who were about to stop seeing each other because of a bad first date and I convinced them to go on another one. Often these dates have turned into beautiful marriages."

**Name has been changed.*

War amps up Israel's passion for matchmaking

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

Katie Silver had already mastered volunteering and racing to safe rooms when she hopped on another Israeli wartime trend. Silver, a Pilates instructor in Jerusalem, logged onto a Facebook group called Secret Tel Aviv and announced that she was looking for love.

Like many single 30-somethings, Silver had tried dating apps but felt burned out. But she saw something different in what was happening in the Secret Tel Aviv group, where diverse residents of Israel's hippest city – and, increasingly, others from elsewhere in the country – were furiously posting their personal details and romantic ambitions. In the flood of beach photos and biographies, she detected a national mood that matched her own.

"There's a sense of urgency of creating togetherness, family, community, and bringing more good people into the world with good values ... not to let evil win," Silver told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). "To celebrate life, and have joy and *simcha* and weddings and Barmitzvahs, and of course to make more Jewish babies so the population numbers can go back up."

"Plus, I want to get married before a rocket lands on my head."

According to Secret Tel Aviv's administrator, Jonny Stark, the matchmaking trend began in the first weeks of the war amid daily rocket fire, with posts from people seeking to find "the one to run to the bomb shelter with". Those soon morphed into more general personal ads, which peaked in December, but have continued since, increasingly with humorous twists on the theme.

Stark provided JTA with graphs showing a dramatic increase in engagement and comments as hundreds of posts seeking partners poured into the group. Posters include new members like Liat Admati MacKie from Be'eri, one of the "envelope" communities near Gaza that was hardest hit on 7 October, and veteran members like Ben Raul Maizel, whose humorous post racked up more than 4 000 likes. Maizel's post reads, "I want to take my girlfriend to a B&B in the north. Can anyone recommend a girlfriend?"

Stark said that during past times of conflict, similar trends have emerged in his group, but never on such a scale.

"People are looking for connection," he said. "I'm happy about it. The goal of Secret Tel Aviv is to help people connect, and this is a great example of it happening."

The Facebook group is hardly the only example of wartime matchmaking on overdrive. In the days after Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel, as soldiers massed on the border with Gaza, pictures of soldiers flexing their "miluim mustaches" – using the Hebrew word for reserve duty – punctured the sombre mood. Some noted that they were single, and would be available once they were released from duty.

Just a few days into the ground war, an Orthodox influencer who had been called up posted that his unit had received, among letters of support from people at home and abroad, a note from a young woman who was looking for love.

The woman shared that Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, an influential Chasidic rabbi from the early 19th century, taught that wars "are about moving people around so that single

people can find each other". The message may be apocryphal, but it left a mark on the unit, and later that night, they tried to connect the woman with a friend in the army, Arky Staiman said on Instagram.

"It didn't end up working out, but the message was very interesting," Staiman said, before issuing a charge to each one of his followers to identify three people to set up after the war. "There are girls and guys, single people, who are alone right now, alone in Israel, alone throughout the world. It's probably scary. And this is a perfect opportunity to try and set them up."

Actress Maya Wertheimer, one of Israel's most widely followed social media influencers, has peppered her accounts with singles adverts since the beginning of the war. She has used her Instagram platform to showcase soldiers who are looking for love, sharing their basic details along with pictures of the men in and out of uniform – often submitted by their sisters and friends.

Other influencers, including the American-Israelis Kerry Bar-Cohn, a dancer with almost 30 000 Instagram followers, and Aleeza Ben Shalom, the celebrity matchmaker, have sought to highlight soldiers who are single, as well as comfort the love-lorn.

"These guys, our soldiers, who are out there and they are fighting – a lot of them are single. And when they come back, we've got male and female soldiers, and they're looking for soulmates," Ben Shalom told her followers in December. "So, if you're looking for your soulmate, it just



might be a soldier, so hang in there, they're going to take care of everything and then they're going to come back and marry you."

And in New York City, an Orthodox synagogue launched a matchmaking initiative in November in response to the war. Hundreds of people signed up within days, and at least a few relationships have started there, according to its organisers.

"Everyone's trying to figure out what to do from here," Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, the congregation's co-founder and rebbetzin, told the *New York Jewish Week* at the time. "I felt that the best way to respond to darkness and death is to bring in more light and more love, and to bring people joy. Traditionally, that's the Jewish response to catastrophe."

Stark understands the impulse to find a partner well. One of the reasons he founded Secret Tel Aviv – where anything from parking places, or the lack thereof, to the best ramen

in the city is discussed – was to find a partner. He ultimately found one elsewhere, and now has two children, but his group has taken on a life of its own since its launch in 2010. It has exploded to nearly half a million members, exceeding the size of Tel Aviv's entire population, and at one point even counted Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg among them. The potential for pairing up is huge.

Stark says he knows about at least three couples who met and married through posts on Secret Tel Aviv. Though it's too early to tell if this round of posts has yet had the desired effect, he's trying to stack the deck in their favour: Secret Tel Aviv has partnered with DateNight, a platform that hosts online speed dating nights, and recently attracted more than 150 people to one event.

Members of the Facebook group have reported wide-ranging experiences. Noa Salant, 40, told JTA that she had got direct messages only from "some perverts and a married man". Shlomit Pery, 65, said she had been bombarded with responses to her post, one of the most-liked in the group, but mostly from people who said they were impressed that she had the courage to put herself out there at her age.

In a Hebrew-language post, Silver, who immigrated to Jerusalem from London in 2012, included a brief biography and several photos of herself. She opened the post by quipping that she wasn't having much luck finding love in Israel's capital "because apparently everyone in Jerusalem is married with kids". She clarified that she was searching only for a serious relationship before ending the post with another quip, "I hope you all find 'the one' so that this group can return to being a place to advertise apartments instead of ourselves."

She said she was so overwhelmed with offers of dates that she had to turn off her phone, and when she finally went on a few, she didn't find a lasting match.

"It hasn't led to love yet, but it's been eye opening," Silver said about her experience. "It's also allowed me to be much more honest about what I'm looking for. It removed the stigma. You're no longer too proud or too embarrassed to put yourself out there because you see that we're all in the same boat, looking for love."

Some group members have lambasted the trend, charging that it distracts from the original purpose of Secret Tel Aviv, or is even a catfishing effort by Hamas to collect information about Israelis.

But others say simply watching the posts unfold has kept them connected to others at a challenging time. Limor Stika, who didn't put up a post herself but commented on several others, said it made sense that the war was bringing the trend to the fore.

"In times of crisis and wars, people want support, love, and comfort," Stika said. "Someone to hug and vent to."

With more soldiers returning to their daily lives after being released from reserve duty every day, Wertheimer has intensified the pace of her postings, and even floated the idea of a live dating event for older adults.

Recently, she posted news of a success story. "I must tell you that because of you, I got to know my partner of the past three months," read a note she posted last week. "I thank you very much. There's no doubt that he's the best match for me in the world."

The note came with five heart emojis and a comment from Wertheimer: "*Yalla*, friends, we've waited long enough!"

When the music stopped: documentary reveals Nova horror

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

"Lay on the ground, hands on your head!" These are the words heard by Supernova (Nova) Music Festival attendees who, at 06:30 as sirens sounded, had just begun immersing themselves in the highlight of the festival – the sunrise.

That's according to *Supernova: The Music Festival Massacre*, a documentary that integrates survivor testimony with real-time footage. This harrowing but important film, shown in a countrywide screening last week arranged by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), records the unimaginable fear experienced by those who lived to tell their stories. But their scars remain.

The partygoers recall panic and confusion as they were ordered to leave the grounds as the Iron Dome missile defence system intercepted rockets overhead.

Some drove away only to be delayed by gridlocked traffic. Little did they know they were driving towards an army of armed Hamas terrorists, who shot indiscriminately, filming as they did so. Others simply ran, seeking hiding places as they realised the gravity of the situation. Of the 3 500 Israeli partygoers who attended the festival held at Kibbutz Re'im, close to the Gaza Strip border, 360 were killed, 40 were kidnapped to Gaza, and hundreds were wounded.

Using real-time footage from Hamas's cameramen and GoPros; the mobile phones of victims and survivors; CCTV footage; dash cams; and first responders, the documentary plunges viewers into the terrifying reality of that day.

"It's enormously important to watch footage from 7 October as it turns out that in a world of endless information, people can still try and lie about what's factual, what's in front of them, even when it has been systematically documented by our enemies," said Benji Shulman, the director of public policy for the SAZF, at the screening. "People are already trying to downplay, dismiss, and deny what happened on 7 October." That's why it's so important to be informed and bear witness.

Also addressing attendees at the screening, Israel's deputy chief of mission to South Africa, Adi Cohen-Hazanov, highlighted the contrast between young partygoers getting ready for a weekend of celebration, and the Hamas terrorists preparing to slaughter them.



Photo: SAZF

Israeli Deputy Ambassador
Adi Cohen-Hazanov

can only speak to each other of the extent of the horrors they endured.

One woman speaks of how looking into her boyfriend's eyes got her through her panic and claustrophobia as they hid in a crowded bomb shelter, witnessing another being bombed across the road. Today, looking in his eyes still brings back unspeakable memories.

Another woman recalls her desperation as she fled from a storage room as the terrorists closed in, hid under a military vehicle holding dead soldiers, and eventually held onto the window of a car packed to capacity until she was pushed inside to safety.

A man hired to film the festival says he continued filming even as his leg was wounded, as he knew the images he captured could serve as evidence. He speaks of how playing dead under bodies in a bomb shelter saved his life, and how he discovered that a leg above him wasn't attached to a body.

Ilan Regev, the father of Itay and Maya, who were wounded and taken hostage from the festival, recounts his desperation as he plays a recording of his call with Maya as she tells him she's been shot. He sobs as he listens. He recalls how he battled to get to the site of the massacre, eventually finding out that his beloved children had been kidnapped. The film ends with photos documenting their eventual release in the hostage-

prisoner exchange in November 2023.

After the screening, Shulman interviewed Nova survivor, Yuval Vaknin, who wasn't featured in the film. Speaking on Zoom from California where she was visiting as part of a two-week Nova-survivor programme organised by the Jewish community there, Vaknin was unable to delve fully into her memories of that day, mainly speaking of the struggles she's faced as her healing journey continues.



THEY ALL SPEAK OF THEIR
UNWAVERING WILL TO SURVIVE.

Her kibbutz in the south was also hard hit on 7 October, displacing her and her family, who have been staying at a hotel in Jerusalem ever since. "I've been treated by a psychologist who helped me get a little bit of my life back," she said. Yet, being unable to return home and having friends held hostage in Gaza has hampered her return to normality. She has, however, recently started her engineering studies at university, which were originally scheduled to begin on 8 October.

"Each one of us experienced different trauma at the festival. We all saw different things," she said. "Everyone saw the terrorists, everyone saw bodies on the floor, everyone had a feeling that we must survive, but we all had different points of view. It's hard for me to talk about."

Vaknin said she recently tried to go to another party, which felt strange. "Every time you think of going out, it's scary, the sun rises, and you start thinking, 'What's going to happen?' But I keep telling myself that my friends who died at the party would like us to continue going, living our lives, and being happy. We'll dance for them. This trance music community has made me feel at home all my life. It's my safe place, and I go there to clear my mind. I want that back, but it's a process. I'm taking it step by step."

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Herzlia sportsmen respond to emergency call in Knysna

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Three Herzlia High School water polo players dived into the pitch-black water of the water polo pool in Knysna harbour in the Western Cape recently to retrieve former journalist Debbie Meyer’s phone.

“We did it out of kindness and *menschlichkeit* to help Debbie out,” one of the students, Matt Whitesman, says.

Whitesman, Judd Jocum, and Ben Levin, already in their post-match clothes, were all nearby Meyer when her phone, which she had bought a few months ago, fell into the pool.

To make the matter worse, Meyer’s driver’s license and two credit cards were inside the phone’s cover.

Plettenberg Bay-based Meyer, who worked for 702, e.tv, and eNCA, went with her Cape Town-based brother to the pool to watch her niece, Herzlia Grade 10 student Megan Hurwitz, play for the school’s girls water polo team.

A makeshift water polo pool demarcated by tether-like sidelines was created in the harbour.

“There wasn’t a stand at that particular pool, so I was sitting with my legs over the ledge, and the phone was on my lap,” Meyer recalls. “I shouted, ‘Go Megan!’ and the phone fell into the pool. I said, ‘Oh no! What am I going to do now?’”

Levin, who empathised with Meyer as he had lost his phone in the ocean a few weeks ago, says it was quite frightening searching for the phone in the darkness. “I had to swim down there with my eyes closed and unaware of my surroundings.”

“I know how much of an inconvenience not having a phone is, not to mention the cost. Therefore, I felt it was worth trying to help her,” says Jocum.

“Debbie was shocked and upset, so I thought I had to help her and make her feel better,” says Whitesman.

Meyer, who says she didn’t know these boys “from a bar of soap”, thought it was amazing that they were



Judd Jocum, Matt Whitesman, and Ben Levin

willing to go back to the change rooms to put their Speedos back on and perform this *mitzvah* for a “damsel in distress”.

“Considering we had already played a number of water polo games in the harbour pool, it wasn’t unfamiliar,” Jocum says. “However, diving for the phone was challenging as visibility was limited due to the depth of the water. Even with goggles on it was near impossible to see.

“For the first few minutes, they couldn’t find anything,” Meyer says. “They jumped in and looked and looked. They couldn’t find it anywhere. Just underneath my feet there was a kind of a metal thing that was holding up a walkway. They thought it may have gone in there, but they weren’t able to get into that walkway.

“I said, ‘Oh no, it’s gone forever!’ and I was already working out how I was going to get my credit cards back, how I was going to cancel them, and what I needed to do to get my driver’s license working. All

that was in my head.”

Then, one of the boys got his goggles from his bag and threw them down to Levin, Meyer recalls. “A few minutes later, Ben came up holding the phone. Everybody who was watching the match cheered. I was so relieved.”

“The phone fell into the harbour water under the wooden sidewalk. It was a few metres deep in the water,” Ben says.

Meyer never imagined that the phone would be useable. It had been in the water for 30 minutes, but she was a bit hopeful after her brother told her it was waterproof. “The phone is still working perfectly,” she says with delight. “The credit cards are also working.”

Having already worked out how she was going to get money to buy a new phone, and thinking that the boys had saved her so much, Meyer took out her



Debbie Meyer

wallet and offered them money. “I said, ‘Here boys, thank you so much, go get yourself something.’ Whitesman said, ‘No, mam. We’re not taking a reward.’ The other two boys also refused.”

“What we did doesn’t deserve a cash reward,” Whitesman says. “I would never expect a reward for doing something that makes people feel better.”

Says Jocum, “We didn’t feel it necessary to be rewarded merely for helping someone out. It was never our intention to get something for helping, and therefore it would have been inappropriate to take a gift.”

Later, Meyer decided to give a donation in each of their names to kibbutzim in Israel that have to be rebuilt and whose kibbutznik are suffering psychological trauma following the Hamas attack last year. “They lost so much when the kibbutzim were destroyed. I also phoned the boys’ mums to tell them what wonderful sons they’ve raised.

“I’m so grateful that the money that was offered has now been donated to damaged kibbutzim in Israel in our names,” Whitesman says.

In terms of water polo, “The boys are unbelievable,” Meyer says. “They were unbeaten. They won seven matches, and tied the last one. The girls started off slow. They didn’t practice at the end of last year, but by the end of the tournament, they were playing so much better. I’m sure by next year, they’ll be cooking.

“Herzlia Principal Shane Brorson was there supporting them throughout the tournament,” Meyer says. “He himself was a water polo player, so it was amazing having him there.”

Brorson, who attended the Oakhill Chukka water polo festival in Knysna, says, “I was proud of our students for the way they conducted themselves, but not entirely surprised as, at Herzlia, the Jewish values of *menschlichkeit* run through everything we do.”

Home from Gaza but lost in real life

ELIYAHU FREEDMAN – JTA

When Jonathan came home after 99 days of serving in Israel’s military reserves in and around Gaza and the West Bank, the feeling that stuck with him wasn’t relief or exhaustion. It was anger.

Transitioning back to civilian life was a challenge, as was keeping his emotions in check. He says he began smashing his furniture to express his emotions – breaking two lamps and a desk in his Tel Aviv apartment.

“At first, I was angry,” Jonathan, a sergeant major who couldn’t provide his full name, per Israel Defense Forces (IDF) policy, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency as he waited to board a plane to the United States to surprise his ageing father, whom he hadn’t seen since before the war.

“I’m happy for all the rest and recreation,” he said. “But I feel like I didn’t finish my job.”

Jonathan is one of at least tens of thousands of Israeli reservists who have been sent home in recent weeks as Israel has scaled back its presence in Gaza. Exactly how long they’ll stay there is unclear – negotiations have taken place toward a new hostage-release deal that could pause fighting for months, though they have hit obstacles of late.

At the same time, the IDF has instructed reservists to remain ready. Last week, signalling expectations for a long conflict ahead, the Israeli government proposed extending the length of service for all soldiers, both on active duty and in

the reserves.

The changes would bring many of the challenges facing reservists now into normal times.

“It’s like getting slapped across the face,” said reservist soldier Haim of the proposal, after receiving the news that his unit is scheduled to return for 45 more days of combat this year after completing nearly four months around Gaza. “Which employer is going to employ someone who disappears for 55 days each year?”

Following Hamas’s 7 October attack

formal ceremonies, with barbecues, free massages, and hotel discounts of up to 40% to help ease their transition back to civilian life. Companies trained in the best practice of reintegrating employees. The government has also approved about \$2.4 billion (R45.5 billion) in cash assistance for reservists to ease the financial pains associated with their duty.

But not all soldiers have been happy to be released. Some have expressed frustration at being sent home with the war ongoing and as conflict with

differently – there’s research about it – so it’s a really enormous transition.”

Thousands of reservists have transitioned from battlefield to classroom. Drorit Neumann, the dean of students at Tel Aviv University, said up to 30% of first-year students in some departments had come from the battlefield. “We do see students struggling,” she said. The school has made available counselling services and additional academic support.

Keren, a 42-year old mother of seven children, was one of about 19% of IDF reservists who are women, and was among the 3 000 mothers who were called up along with 115 000 fathers. She received a mandatory enlistment order for her reserve unit in the Home Front only two days before her daughter’s Batmitzvah, and at one point, both she and her husband were away from home.

“The adjustment back to civilian life isn’t easy. Sitting in coffee shops, doing meetings, sending Excel spreadsheets – those are moments where you understand that there are two parallel realities,” Keren said.

The army has instructed reservists “to be ready within 12 hours to be back at base”, said Steve, an infantry reserve soldier who was responsible for protecting Gaza’s humanitarian corridor.

“When you come back and you know that there’s still people in Gaza, you feel useless in some ways because when you’ve been doing probably the most important thing that you could be doing since the foundation of the state of Israel, and all of a sudden, you’re out of uniform,” he said. “You find yourself kind of just roaming aimlessly, walking to the store to buy vegetables, and you feel that you should be somewhere else, and

everything [is] kind of in slow motion.”

Those feelings are to be expected, said Brom.

“What was often said is, you know, you’re free, go and enjoy. And that doesn’t work. You’ve seen people die, you might have seen friends die. And during combat, you actually don’t feel, you don’t think, you’re on automatic mode. So, then people come out. And they have to understand: why, wait, what is this? Where am I? What’s this life about?”

Jonathan, who works as an investor, said he had lost 45% of his clientele while on active duty. He’s torn between trying to rebuild his business and embracing the fact that he’s likely to be called back to duty soon.

Yet the battlefield has accompanied him home, too. “I was in the shop picking up my motorcycle and somebody’s exhaust went off, and I just shot to the ground, to cover,” he recalled. “I flipped around, and everyone in the room was staring at me like I was crazy.”

Research about soldiers returning from war in other countries has uncovered a host of challenges, from post-traumatic stress disorder, to higher levels of domestic violence, alcoholism, and unemployment.

In Israel, the woes of individual soldiers may be compounded by societal challenges, including a shattered sense of safety and redoubled concerns about the effect of haredi Orthodox exemptions from army service. The government proposal to lengthen army service likewise doesn’t apply to that growing population.

“You’re very aware of how alone you are in carrying this burden,” Haim said of those Israelis who serve.



Steve, a reservist who served in Gaza, is now back home

and the outbreak of the war, 290 000 reservists were activated, including 50 000 volunteers who didn’t receive a draft order but reported to their bases anyway. The number amounted to 10% of the Israeli workforce. They were sent to Gaza, as well as to the West Bank and Israel’s northern border with Lebanon. Now, according to Israel’s Army Radio, all but one reservist brigade of about 2 000 soldiers has been withdrawn from Gaza.

Many reserve units were released in

Hezbollah continues to escalate.

The intensity of the fighting in Gaza means that returning home isn’t an easy thing to do.

“It’s quite something to come back from such a horrid world and then have to adapt to something that people call normal life,” said Danny Brom, a clinical psychologist who is the founding director of the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma. “When you’re in combat, your whole body and brain is wired

Friedman’s primal instincts lead to her art ambassadorship

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

An intricately crafted gorilla looking lovingly at the baby in her arms not only reflects ceramicist Mandi Friedman’s love of primates, but also what it means to be a woman. It’s therefore fitting that the piece has landed her a spot as South Africa’s Artist Ambassador at the Art Connects Women event in Dubai this March in honour of International Women’s Day.

Friedman’s entry has many layers of significance. “I seem to have formed a bit of a pattern with gorillas,” she says. “I feel a connection to them.” That’s why she named her piece *Fossey*, in tribute to the memory of Dian Fossey, whose pioneering work with gorillas in Rwanda was globally celebrated.

Friedman had already made her winning piece in 2020 for an auction being held by the World Wildlife Fund but it was ultimately cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. So, when she read about Art Connects Women on Instagram, she impulsively decided to submit the piece for consideration as she hadn’t yet shown it formally. “I didn’t think they would choose it,” she admits, “but now it’s *Fossey’s* time to shine.”

Ever since she received a mail informing her of her selection as her country’s Artist Ambassador, Friedman has been campaigning to raise enough money to attend the event in Dubai. To date, she’s reached half of her R40 000 goal with help from unexpected sources including many of her art shop’s customers.

“I have a plane ticket, so the question is whether I’ll be sleeping on the street and eating at all,” she says. Although she was given short notice, she’s disappointed not to have secured sponsorship from South African organisations, which usually have lengthy processes for such requests.

“Growing up, I wasn’t really interested in anything artistic,” Friedman says, discussing her creative journey. “It really happened only after I matriculated and started making porcelain dolls.” Though she made the dolls for a few years, she later concentrated on her studies and abandoned the hobby.

Her passion was reignited in the mid-1990s, when she started doing a pottery class which laid the foundation for a fulfilling career. “I don’t like traditional pottery” she says. “I don’t make cups, saucers, and plates, and I don’t use the wheel, I only hand build.” With the support of her pottery teacher, Friedman had her first exhibition in 2014, and has been crafting ceramics ever since.

Winning the 2019 Ceramics SA New Signature Award, at which she was recognised as a bright new name on the pottery scene, Friedman says it’s all about the process. “For me, pottery is completely grounding. I can be in the worst

possible mood, and all I have to do is pick up the clay and half an hour later, I’m a different person.” Having run Lollipops Catering for many years before the COVID-19 pandemic halted everything, Friedman shifted gears when she opened her shop, Potted Glass Studio, with a friend in March 2022. Driving around Linden, inspiration struck when she realised there was nowhere to paint ceramics in the area. One thing led to another, and she found a partner, a bisque supplier to front them stock and a shop with just the right energy. The rest is history.

“Now I teach pottery and my friend teaches stained glass, and we do all sorts of weird and wonderful other things,” says Friedman. Though she takes on catering jobs periodically, Friedman spends much of her time working in the shop. “I’m absolutely loving this part of my journey in my creative hub in the heart of Linden,” she says.



Mandi Friedman



Mandi Friedman’s winning piece

Though Friedman says art is subjective for buyers, creating artworks has healing properties. “It doesn’t matter if it’s good or bad or what kind of art it is. It’s a form of meditation. The minute you sit down and focus on something that’s not concerned with what’s going on in Ukraine, Israel, and in South Africa, you go into another space where you’re completely invested in what you’re doing. It lights up your brain.”

Though Friedman is excited to be wowed by Dubai, she admits to having some trepidation about going to an Arab country at this time. “Yet art is a means to bridge gaps, so maybe we can do a little good,” she says. Being the South African Ambassador at a women’s exhibition on a world stage is slightly daunting, she says. “I feel like I’m representing South African ceramic art to the world.”

She aims to use the event as a platform to network and gain international exposure. “I want to make connections and be amazed by other people’s work. I’m looking forward to seeing the level of creativity that’s out there in the world, seeing what happens when women use their voices to put their art out there. One of the things that I’m most excited about is being exposed to 111 other artists from all over the world, including one artist from Swaziland who is also seeking funds.”

The event also celebrates the power of art in promoting cultural understanding, something to which Friedman relates. “It’s interesting to be immersed in someone else’s culture, and to see what’s art in their minds and if the same thing is

beautiful to all of you.” She speaks of the diversity of culture in South Africa alone, where many of us come from different backgrounds and walks of life. “So many have nothing and yet they make art. To me, that’s incredible. That’s why I’m looking forward to meeting the other artists and seeing what drives them and why they do the art they do. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I’m trying to seize it with both hands.” Friedman emphasises the power art has in

opening one’s eyes in a new way. “It’s supposed to give you a different perspective. So, when you look at the gorilla, what do you see? Just a gorilla? Or do you see a mother and the care in her eyes? Do you see the love and strength she brings? She’s a very powerful animal with a very small baby. She’s a backbone of a community. She’s the pillar. She’ll put her life on the line to protect her young.” That’s what women are about, she says. “We’re fierce creatures when we have to be.”

Australian Jews harassed after personal information published

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Australian police are investigating threats against a five-year-old Jewish child amid an uproar over the publication online of a list of hundreds of Jewish creatives’ personal information by pro-Palestinian activists.

Hundreds of Jewish academics and creatives who joined a private WhatsApp group last year had their personal information shared publicly by prominent pro-Palestinian activists this week.

At least one family has gone into hiding amid ensuing harassment, Josh Burns, a Jewish Australian legislator, said during a radio interview on 9 February, prompting shock from the interviewer.

“They were completely shattered by this whole experience, where a sort of lynch mob of people were attacking them,” Burns said. “We’re not talking about people who are in any way connected to the conflict in the Middle East. We’re talking about ordinary Australian citizens who happen to be Jewish.”

Defenders of the list and its release have said that some people on it have sought to silence pro-Palestinian voices in the months since Hamas attacked Israel, triggering a war in Gaza. The feminist writer Clementine Ford, who shared the list with her 250 000 followers on Instagram, said anti-Zionist Jews had leaked the information from the WhatsApp group.

The incident comes amid growing concern among Australia’s Jews about their safety because of the war’s repercussions.

“We’re hearing awful stories about Jewish individuals and families being the subject of harassment and vilification, and we’re aware of instances where Jewish homes and businesses have been targeted and vandalised simply because they haven’t denounced Israel or their people to the standard demanded by some radical *nudnik*,” Rabbi Dovid Gutnick of East Melbourne told the *Herald Sun* newspaper this week.

The newspaper reported that some Jews were moving out of heavily Jewish neighbourhoods in Melbourne to avoid harassment. In one case, the newspaper said, the target was a couple who are Jewish but haven’t commented publicly about the war. They received a photograph of their five-year-old child with the note reading, “We know where you live.”

Alex Rychin, the co-chief executive of the Executive

Council of Australia Jewry, said the list called to mind those created by the Nazis as they sought to murder the Jews of Europe.

“There’s great shock and disbelief that people are once again drawing up lists of Jews,” Rychin said. “It has been said to me by numerous community members that they feel relief that their parents or grandparents who survived the Holocaust aren’t alive to see this.”

The incident follows an announcement by police in the Sydney region that they had determined that protesters said to have shouted, “Gas the Jews” at a rally outside the city’s famous Opera House shortly after 7 October hadn’t actually uttered the phrase, which calls to mind the gas chambers of the Holocaust. They were actually saying, “Where’s the Jews,” concluded a report issued last week.

Rychin rejected the finding, but said that even if it were accurate, it would be distressing.

“Even taking aside the history of the Holocaust and



Pro-Palestinian protesters in front of the Sydney Opera House in October 2023

Photo: Louie Douvis-The Sydney Morning Herald via Getty Images

that context, on a plain reading interpretation of the phrase, ‘Where’s the Jews’ by an angry mob of that sort, clearly they were looking for Jews, and what would they have done had they found them?” he said. “That’s what we think and feel, and that’s what needs to be acted against.”

Burns, a liberal politician whose grandmother was a refugee from Nazi Germany, said he, too, had heard widespread concern. He noted that he shared distress about the Palestinians and would support all expressions of pro-Palestinian sentiment that didn’t infringe on the safety of others.

“If you ask any member of the Jewish community about this doxxing issue, every single member of the Jewish community would respond with how frightening this is, that they have never experienced anything like this, that this social media phenomenon of putting up people’s individual profiles is one of the most frightening and unprecedented experiences of Jewish people in Australia, and it shakes them to the core,” he said.



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 Illovo, Sandton

King David girls hit high note in *Sound of Music*

LEE TANKLE

The hills are alive to *The Sound of Music* at the Teatro at Montecasino, where two budding young actresses from King David Victory Park (KDVP) Primary School, Stella Sallit and Jordanna Valkin, are playing two of the seven Von Trapp children, Gretl and Brigitta.

In the story, the children, with their father, Captain Von Trapp, and their governess, Maria, flee the Nazis to Switzerland.

“The story is about a lady that goes to the captain’s house to teach the children how to sing, she falls in love with the captain, and they escape the Nazis,” Sallit says.

“I do musical theatre, ballet, and choir. I got into a talent evening, and the lady who ran it told me to audition for *The Sound of Music*,” said Sallit. “When they phoned and I said I was going to be in the show, I was happy and excited and called everyone I knew.”

Valkin has been going to Cabaret Kids with Shelley Meskin since she was three years old, so she has always had a passion for musical theatre. Valkin heard that they were looking for children for the production, and thought she would try her luck. “A month later, they called me and said I had got it. I tried to be professional when they called me, but afterwards, I screamed, laughed, and cried from excitement,” said Valkin.

“I always wanted to act and be in shows. I love being on stage,” she said. “I like that Brigitta says what’s on her mind. Maria even says in the show that Brigitta tells the truth, especially if you don’t want to hear it. I also love that I can sing, dance, and act in this role. It was such fun.”

“I like that Gretl gets more lines than Marta. I like that I get picked up a lot and I like the



Stella Sallit

clothing. I’m the only one that has dungarees,” Sallit said.

After three weeks of rehearsal, the girls are ready to share the stage with the other children cast as the Von Trapp children while alternating their roles with three other girls.

To prepare for their roles, both girls watched the movie *The Sound of Music* to learn how their characters act. “I didn’t have any difficulties in preparing [for it]. It was hard work, but my dream come true,” said Valkin. “It was hard to learn some of the lines and some of the dances,” said Sallit.

“The school knows that I’m busy, so it sends work home with my sister, and I do it when I’m at home on the weekends or in a free lesson,” said Sallit.

“While we were rehearsing and on the days that I’m performing, I get work sent home from school. I go to school as much as I can whenever I can, and my school has been very supportive. It will help me catch up,” Valkin said.

“I like the actors but I don’t like the Nazis in the story or the actual Nazis,” said Sallit.

“I love the story because they were one family that stood up to the Nazis and didn’t take their side,” said Valkin.

“We’re thrilled to hear about their participation and achievements,” KDVP told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“We’re immensely proud of Jordanna and Stella for their dedication, talent, and commitment to the arts. Their involvement in such a prestigious production reflects not only their capabilities but also the rich cultural and artistic environment fostered within our school community. We believe that their participation in *The Sound of Music* not only showcases their talent, but also serves as an inspiration to their peers and the wider community. Their success highlights the importance of nurturing creativity, passion, and hard work in our students, and we’re delighted to see them flourish in such a prominent production.”

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

The Lamola deception



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has continued to be active on the media front in response to persistent denials by Justice Minister Ronald Lamola that there has been a rise in antisemitic activity in South Africa over the past several months. In spite of being provided with chapter-and-verse evidence of attacks on our community ranging from hate mail, verbal abuse, and vandalism to serious cases of physical assault, the minister has insisted that this isn’t the case, describing it during an interview on Radio 702 as “a nonsense”.

Another galling aspect of how Lamola has chosen to respond to the Board’s criticism is to blatantly misrepresent what we have been saying. This has included implying that we are laying the blame for these attacks at the door of his own government; are attempting to depict the country as a whole as being a hotbed of antisemitism; and – as has by now become almost a standard response – to accuse the Board of conflating antisemitism with criticism of Israel. As even a cursory reading of the statements we have made on the issue will show, there isn’t the slightest basis to any of these charges. This in turn suggests that Lamola hasn’t even bothered to acquaint himself with what the SAJBD, the elected representative voice of the Jewish community, has to say on the subject.

Aside from making light of the legitimate concerns we have about the steep escalation in attacks on our community, Lamola’s comments have had the effect – quite possibly intended – of portraying those mandated to speak for South African Jewry as being untrustworthy, if not outright dishonest. Coming from any member of government, this would be a serious concern, but it’s truly unconscionable when emanating from someone entrusted with upholding the rights of all citizens to safety, dignity, and equality. It therefore was clear to us that limiting our responses to the media sphere wouldn’t suffice on this occasion and that an additional, boots-on-the-ground

demonstration was necessary. On Monday, 12 February, therefore, an SAJBD delegation comprising representatives from our national, Gauteng, and Pretoria councils held a picket outside the offices of the justice ministry in Pretoria. At the same time, a memorandum was presented to representatives of the minister’s office, in which the Board again provided details of how antisemitism rates had spiked and called on Lamola to take antisemitism as seriously as all other forms of hate in our country were being taken, including racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. The event was widely covered by the media, conveying our community’s categorical rejection of the minister’s misrepresentations and ensuring for posterity that they weren’t being allowed to go unchallenged.

Jewish Affairs latest issue

The journal *Jewish Affairs* has been brought out under the auspices of the SAJBD since 1941, and it has long been regarded as this country’s leading Jewish historical, cultural, and current affairs magazine. This week, a bulletin was sent to subscribers announcing the appearance of the latest issue of the journal, with a description of its contents and links to individual articles.

The latest issue as well as all articles going back to 2009 can be accessed free of charge at <https://www.jewishaffairs.co.za/>. I encourage those interested in Jewish issues, in particular the story of our own remarkable community, to avail themselves of this rich and unique resource.

• 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

Blazing Saddles is controversial, but not cancel worthy

STEPHEN SILVER – JTA

The phrase “that movie could never be made today” has probably been said more about *Blazing Saddles* than any other movie in history.

Mel Brooks’s spoof of Hollywood Westerns is full of the “n-word” and racial and ethnic jokes, and gay stereotypes are played for laughs. There are rape jokes aplenty, and more than one reference to a black man’s endowment. A character punches a horse in the face, and one scene probably broke Hollywood records for sustained flatulence.

Those things, the argument goes, would never be accepted by the sensitive audiences of today, much less greenlit by skittish Hollywood decision-makers.

This may be true. But it’s also true that most of the things that are controversial about *Blazing Saddles* now were just as controversial back when it was first released, 50 years ago last week.

Blazing Saddles arrived in theatres on 7 February 1974 as a sharp parody of the Hollywood Western, borrowing and upending the clichés of a classic genre as well as some of the actors who had worked in it. Hollywood’s Hays Code – prudishly dictating what could and couldn’t be done on film – was phased out only six years earlier.

Thomas Doherty, American studies professor at Brandeis University, places the film in the context of the New Hollywood era of the 1970s, including the way the taboo-breaking directors of that period deconstructed established genres like horror in *The Exorcist*; film noir *Chinatown*; and the gangster flick *The Godfather*.

“One of the things that made the second golden age of Hollywood so exhilarating is

that you never knew what Hollywood was going to throw at you,” Doherty told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

“It was the first time ever that American cinema was virtually free from censorship, so filmmakers were showing things on screen that audiences had never seen before,” he said. “There were few guardrails for race, sex, and vulgarity. You could even blaspheme against the sacred genre of the Western – which we had all grown up with and whose generic conventions we knew by heart – with farting around the campfire, saloon gals who really were hookers, and black sheriffs.”

But there’s another aspect of *Blazing Saddles* that’s timely today: it was made as an anti-racist statement. As Brooks writes in his 2021 autobiography *All About Me!*, “In *Blazing Saddles*, there’s a serious backstory. Racial prejudice is the engine that really drives the film and helps to make it work.”

Directed by Brooks and written by a quintet that included both Brooks and comedy legend Richard Pryor, who was black, *Blazing Saddles* takes place in the 19th-century frontier town of Rock Ridge. The town stands in the way of a railroad that will enrich politician Hedley Lamarr – Jewish actor Harvey Korman, desperate not to have his name confused with that of the bombshell Jewish actress Hedy Lamarr. Scheming to drive its residents away, he gets the dim and drunken governor – Brooks – to appoint a black railroad worker named Bart (Cleavon Little) as the new sheriff, banking that the racist townspeople will clear out.

The all-white residents, all with the last name “Johnson”, react predictably. But soon, the sheriff teams up with a drunk, down-and-out gunslinger known as the Waco

Kid – Gene Wilder, sporting an untamed Jewfro under his Stetson – to foil the plan. Eventually, they marshal a multi-ethnic alliance to defeat a racist army that includes Klansmen and a few anachronistic Nazis. And even the townspeople, up to a point, come around on Bart.

Blazing Saddles is a story about politicians and ruthless capitalists seeking to leverage racism in order to make money. It was made in the same year that the Equal Credit Opportunity Act made it illegal for creditors to discriminate based on race, religion, and national origin. Every time a modern politician gets elected by leveraging a

common clay of the new West – you know, morons”.

Similar to what the late Norman Lear – like Brooks, a Jewish veteran of World War II – was doing on television around the same time with ground breaking shows like *All in the Family*, *Blazing Saddles* threaded the needle between uproarious comedy and social satire. And it’s that balance, much more than the all-around “offensiveness”, that’s made it the standard to which other satires aspire.

Blazing Saddles is one of the great triumphs of one of the top Jewish directors – Brooks – and one of the most beloved

male child in every household.”

“Too Jewish,” the politician replies.

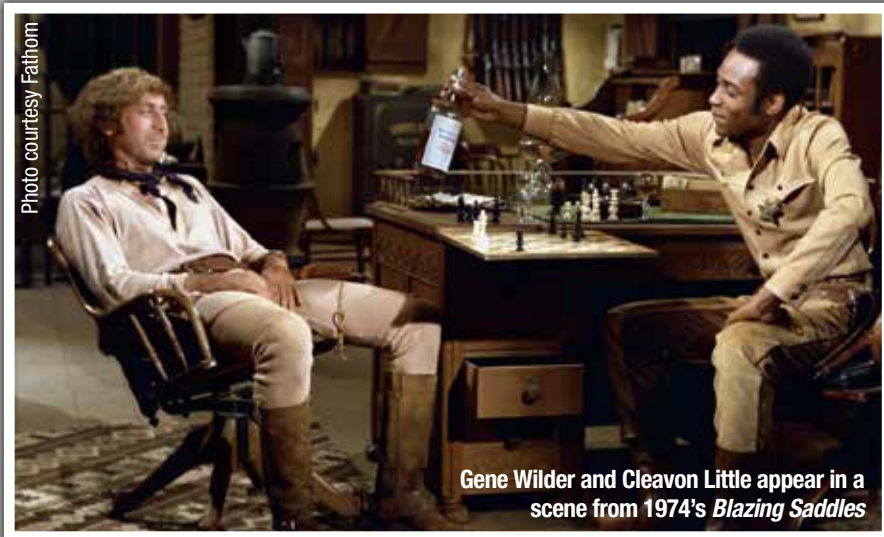
Later, Brooks shows up as a Yiddish-speaking Indian chief – a gag, writes Brooks biographer Jeremy Dauber, that suggests a “kind of racial solidarity”. And speaking of Yiddish, the lisping German seductress played by the Jewish actress and Brooks perennial Madeline Kahn was named “Lili Von Shtupp” – her last name Yiddish slang for her favourite activity.

“I think what Brooks might have been doing with both the black and the Jewish stuff was inserting characters who had traditionally been erased from the Hollywood Western,” Doherty said.

With Wilder in the role, Brooks not only confounded expectations of the gunslinger cliché, but created in Little and Wilder a two-man black-Jewish alliance.

In recent years, it’s often been said that modern-day attitudes will eventually lead to the cancellation of *Blazing Saddles*. But this has never materialised. The network Max, to the chagrin of some viewers, has aired the film with an introduction by Turner Classic Movies host Jacqueline Stewart. *Blazing Saddles* remains available on Max, Netflix, and Paramount+, as well as Video On Demand channels.

Brooks, too, is almost universally regarded as a beloved living legend, a link to a legacy of entertainment that extends from the Borscht Belt to Hollywood to the Broadway stage. No less than Barack Obama gave Brooks, and *Blazing Saddles*, his seal of approval, presenting the director with the 2015 National Medal of Arts and reportedly saying that he was “thrilled with the picture” for suggesting that it was possible for a black lawman to be put in charge.



Gene Wilder and Cleavon Little appear in a scene from 1974’s *Blazing Saddles*

culture war with the ultimate goal of helping big business, they’re in a sense re-enacting the plot of *Blazing Saddles*.

Though *Blazing Saddles* is often described as a movie that “offended everyone”, it mainly denounced people who under the guise of defending “family values” are closed-minded and bigoted. Or, in the famous words of Wilder in the film, “the

Jewish movie stars – Wilder – of the 20th century. And in the fine Brooks tradition, there’s Jewishness sprinkled throughout the proceedings, even if it’s parodying a genre that’s traditionally been mostly devoid of Jews. Before Hedley Lamarr lands on the scheme of hiring a black sheriff, his henchman, Taggart (Slim Pickens), suggests something biblical: “We’ll kill the firstborn

Chev takes over Kosher Mobile Meals

The Chevrah Kadisha is adding the delivery of kosher meals to its comprehensive welfare programme. This is after the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) approached it to take over responsibility for Kosher Mobile Meals as it no longer has the financial capacity to run the project and needs to focus on its other offerings.

Kosher Mobile Meals, also known as Meals on Wheels, delivers ready-made meals to indigent, disabled, and elderly people living alone who are unable to shop and cook for themselves. It has been in operation for the past 50 years.

The Chev says the Kosher Mobile Meals project is essential for those in the community who rely upon these deliveries. Thanks to a donor who has made it possible, the Chev took full responsibility for the operation and costs from 5 February.

"Kosher Mobile Meals fits seamlessly into our home-based care

programme, which reaches more than 165 isolated, most elderly, people living on their own," says Chief Executive Saul Tomson.

"Home-based care provides a variety of services and practical support on a regular basis like visits from our social workers, nurses, care givers, and cleaners. We'll now add the delivery of meals to our comprehensive programme."

As it happens, Kosher Mobile Meals was already prepared for the UJW in the Sandringham Gardens kitchens.

"As community demographics continue to change, this type of welfare-service consolidation is crucial for sustainability as well as to ensure that beneficiaries in the community are well looked after in a holistic manner and that all their needs are being taken care of," says Tomson.



Volunteers packing meals for Kosher Mobile Meals

Hirsch Lyons gives Yad Aharon recipients a date

Hirsch Lyons School donated its inaugural diary to food fund Yad Aharon & Michael for distribution in its weekly parcels. The diary, published by the school, includes a Jewish calendar, candle lighting times, cute quips from the kids, and some fun activities. Some of the Grade 6 monitors took part in the *chesed* of handing over the diaries at Yad Aharon on 5 February.



The Grade 6 monitors handing over the diaries at Yad Aharon

Reading aloud for fun



Ricky Koton and David Kay

On World Read Aloud Day on 7 February, 41 King David High School Victory Park students took time out of their busy schedules to read children's stories to Grades 1-3 at King David Ariel. A global initiative, this day has become an annual highlight on the Victory Park campus calendar. The animated high school story tellers emphasised the importance of literacy and reading for fun, and both high and primary school students enjoyed bonding time on the swings and jungle gyms.

Letters

NOT GUESTS, BUT RIGHTFUL SA CITIZENS

I'm a white South African who happens to be Jewish. In spite of everything negative in the country, I still feel that it's very much part of me. My great-grandparents emigrated here from various parts of Europe in the late 1890s, some of them as refugees, but some simply saw opportunities here. I'm now 75, and my grandchildren are therefore fifth generation South Africans. My family all still live in South Africa with no thought of living anywhere else, a source of pride for me.

I'm no less a citizen of South Africa than any Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist, or whatever. At the same time, I'm proud of Israel as are, for example, the Muslims of Mecca and Catholics of the Vatican. Its mere existence makes South African Jews more South African, as we have the choice to live in Israel. The fact that I choose to stay loyal to my country cements my South African citizenship.

When I was young, English-speaking whites, especially fellow Jews, would say that South Africa didn't belong to us but exclusively to the Afrikaner Nationalists – try getting a booking in the Kruger National Park at that time if you didn't speak Afrikaans! These days,

you hear exactly the same thing from many whites, just a change in description of the ruling authority. In every country, democratic or authoritarian, it should be every citizen's birth right to consider the country in which he was born as his home. There comes a time when people need to fight for this right.

For generations prior to the establishment of the state of Israel when our predecessors experienced antisemitism, the answer was to find refuge in another country, which would also in time become antisemitic and result in another move, perpetuating our continual "refugee status".

How many of those persuaded by Howard Sackstein's piece in the *SA Jewish Report* ("Is it time to go?", 18 January 2024) will actually move to Israel and not to the preferred destinations of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, or the United States?

Surely it's now time that this continual running has to stop, and that we Jews in the diaspora say, as with the Holocaust, "No more!" We're not guests in our countries, but rightful citizens, and if others happen not to like it, well that's their problem. – **Leonard Bert, Johannesburg**

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on our website www.sajr.co.za

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1931 = R500 Up to R3 000
1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000

30

1923 to 1964 = R5
1931 = R10 000 Up to R50 000

Your brak and my brew just don't go together

I don't want to brag, but I do consider myself "gutsy". Gutsy as in brave, not as in flabby in the region of the stomach. I have dangerously little fear of conflict, and I'm not generally concerned about the reaction to an article, statement, or social media post. And yet, this column has me worried. So much so that I'm tempted to write under a pseudonym. And whereas I mostly feel that my family can handle what negative attention I invite into their world, I'm concerned about the impact this might have on them.

But needs must. And what we need is for dog owners to accept that not everyone loves their "furry friends" like they do. What I need is for pet owners to consider that not everyone wants to have a coffee with their pooch when out, and that some of us meet friends at coffee shops to get away from domestic squabbles. They need to know that competing hounds reminds us of children squabbling. Which, if we wanted it in the background, we could have stayed home for.

It's worth remembering that we aren't

Capetonian. Well, the ones of us that live in Johannesburg aren't. The same applies to pets. And so, where sandy, wet, and enthusiastic pets after a walk or game of fetch on the beach is perfectly appropriate in Sea Point or Bantry Bay, the same doesn't apply in the City of Gold. Johannesburg dogs don't have the "live and let live", free spirited, dope smoking, chilled vibe of Capetonian dogs, who prefer to make love not war. No. Johannesburg dogs are the sourly, rough, tattooed, potential mugger types who on a Sunday morning would rather be home nursing their hangover than sipping a flat white with other irritable hounds.

Bottom line is that having other people's dogs at a coffee shop isn't nearly as much fun as pet owners might think it is. Patrons might "coo" and smile, even ask you what their name is and how old they are. They might even ask what breed it is. But they mean none of it. Not so. Deep down, they are resentful and angry and see no good reason why anyone should be licking the table on which they have just placed their cortado.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



I was complaining to a friend about the "dog situation" one Sunday morning, when he told me that he had just experienced the same thing, saying, "We had coffee at a great place just after our run. But there was a dog fight, and the one owner refused to put her dog on a leash. It was insane!"

I'm not suggesting that we leave our pets in the car with the windows up – like we used to – or tied to a pole with a metal chain just long enough to taunt them. I'm not suggesting that we throw rocks – or even little stones – at them or that we rely on the kindness of strangers to hydrate them. I'm just floating the idea that dogs are best left on Instagram where G-d intended them.

Unless of course your dog is a fully fledged Capetonian with the accent to prove it. In which case, I would like nothing better than to share an artisanal almond latte after a game of fetch.

- Monday 19 February**
 - Chabad Longevity Club hosts a memory class with Cynthia Liptz. Time: 09:30. Venue: 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: rak@chabad.org.za
- Tuesday 20 February**
 - The Union of Jewish Women hosts *Brain Boost – A brain stimulation group*. Time: 10:00. Cost: R100. Venue: 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: 011 648 1053
- Wednesday 21 February**
 - The Jewish Learning Institute presents a multimedia workshop on a variety of topics. Time: 19:00. Venue: Sandton Central Shul, 8 Stella Street, Sandton. Contact: jli@chabad.org.za
- Thursday 22 February**
 - Chabad Seniors hosts *Seniors Fun Physiotherapy* with Talya Drutman and Caron Shapiro. Time: 09:45. Venue: 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: rak@chabad.org.za
 - ORT SA hosts a talk by Tracey Bosch on *Navigating Email*

- WHAT'S ON**

Communication. Time: 17:30. Cost: R200 (R100 members). Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za
- Sunday 25 February**
 - Second Innings hosts a talk by Rabbi Alon Joseph on *Why Are We in This World*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Golden Acres, Sandringham Gardens. Cost: R50 (R20 members). Contact: 082 561 3228
- Wednesday 28 February**
 - Second Innings hosts a guided tour of Soweto. Time: 09:30. Cost: R360. Contact: 082 561 3228
- Thursday 29 February**
 - The Union of Jewish Women hosts its *House and Garden Circle* meeting. Time: 14:30. Cost: R50. Venue: 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: 011 648 1053

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