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# South Africans take nerve-wracking trips to get home

**NICOLA MILTZ AND TALI FEINBERG**

Scenes of exhaustion and relief unfolded at OR Tambo International Airport this week as more South Africans arrived home after gruelling 30-hour journeys from Israel amid continued widespread Middle East war travel disruptions.

At about 07:00 on Wednesday, 11 March, an EgyptAir flight from Cairo carried at least 40 South Africans returning in a group from Israel after what many passengers described as an "insane journey".

Among them were several sets of young parents travelling with small babies and toddlers, and many wedding guests, including families of brides and grooms and retinue members desperately trying to make it back to South Africa for at least three weddings taking place this week.

For some, the race against time didn't end when the plane touched down.

Two sisters went straight from the airport to prepare for a photoshoot ahead of their sister's wedding later that day. Their original fight from Jordan had been cancelled the night before it was scheduled to leave, forcing them to book another flight, from Egypt.

The chaotic journeys have become increasingly common as air travel in and out of Israel remains heavily disrupted. While Ben Gurion Airport has partially reopened, flights remain extremely limited, and many foreign airlines have suspended their services, forcing travellers to find alternative routes out of the country.

For Wednesday's group, the journey began at about 04:00 when members left Israel by bus, heading south to the Taba border crossing with Egypt.

The crossing, usually a 20-minute exercise, proved to be the most stressful part of the journey, said some travellers.

"Border officials wanted to charge us double for our visas," said one yeshiva student, "They were refusing to let us leave. Time was running out and we still needed to drive about three hours to get to Sharm El Sheikh International Airport to catch our flight to Cairo."

Travellers were delayed for hours as officials demanded additional cash payments, causing long queues and confusion.

Travel expert Kim Kur, of Community Circle SA, said, "We will be investigating why this happened. It is usually a smooth process."

"I was frantic," said one Johannesburg mother. "The uncertainty about whether they would make the flight, or whether there would be further glitches along the way, was incredibly nerve-wracking."

When they were finally cleared, the travellers piled into taxis and sped across the Sinai Desert in a desperate attempt to reach the airport before the flight departed.

"It was very beautiful scenery, but it was pretty hairy not knowing if we'd make it in time," said one. "I think the driver was communicating with airport officials and travel agents to make sure the plane didn't leave without us."

EgyptAir's local office worked with airport officials and travel coordinators, Shana Chrysler of Emunah Travel, and Israeli *oleh* Rabbi Gary Rogoff to ensure the passengers could still board their connection.

"It was very stressful but EgyptAir was amazing," said Chrysler, who has been coordinating complex travel routes with Rogoff for stranded South Africans.

Behind the scenes, the two were tracking the group's progress minute by minute as they raced to the airport.

The passengers arrived just minutes before the plane was due to take off.

They boarded the short domestic flight to Cairo before connecting to the overnight EgyptAir service to Johannesburg, where things ran smoothly.

For many passengers, the stakes could not have been higher.

"My son has two special weddings this week and wanted to be home for Pesach," said a mother. "I haven't seen him since June so became very emotional when he arrived home. My 18-year-old daughter is due to come back from seminary the same way later this week, so the stress and anxiety continues. We've had to make alternative travel plans for her as well. Professional travel coordinators are essential as they are able to speak directly to airlines and airports and relay vital communication."

Another group of about 50 South Africans is expected to attempt the same journey on Thursday, including yeshiva students trying to return home.

"It's hectic," said Chrysler whose son, a yeshiva student, made it home on Wednesday after his flight from Amman, Jordan was cancelled, forcing her to rebook him a flight home from Egypt.

While many South Africans are scrambling to leave Israel, travel in the opposite direction has become nearly impossible for South Africans.

One family hoping to attend their son's wedding in Israel next week remains stranded because they hold only South

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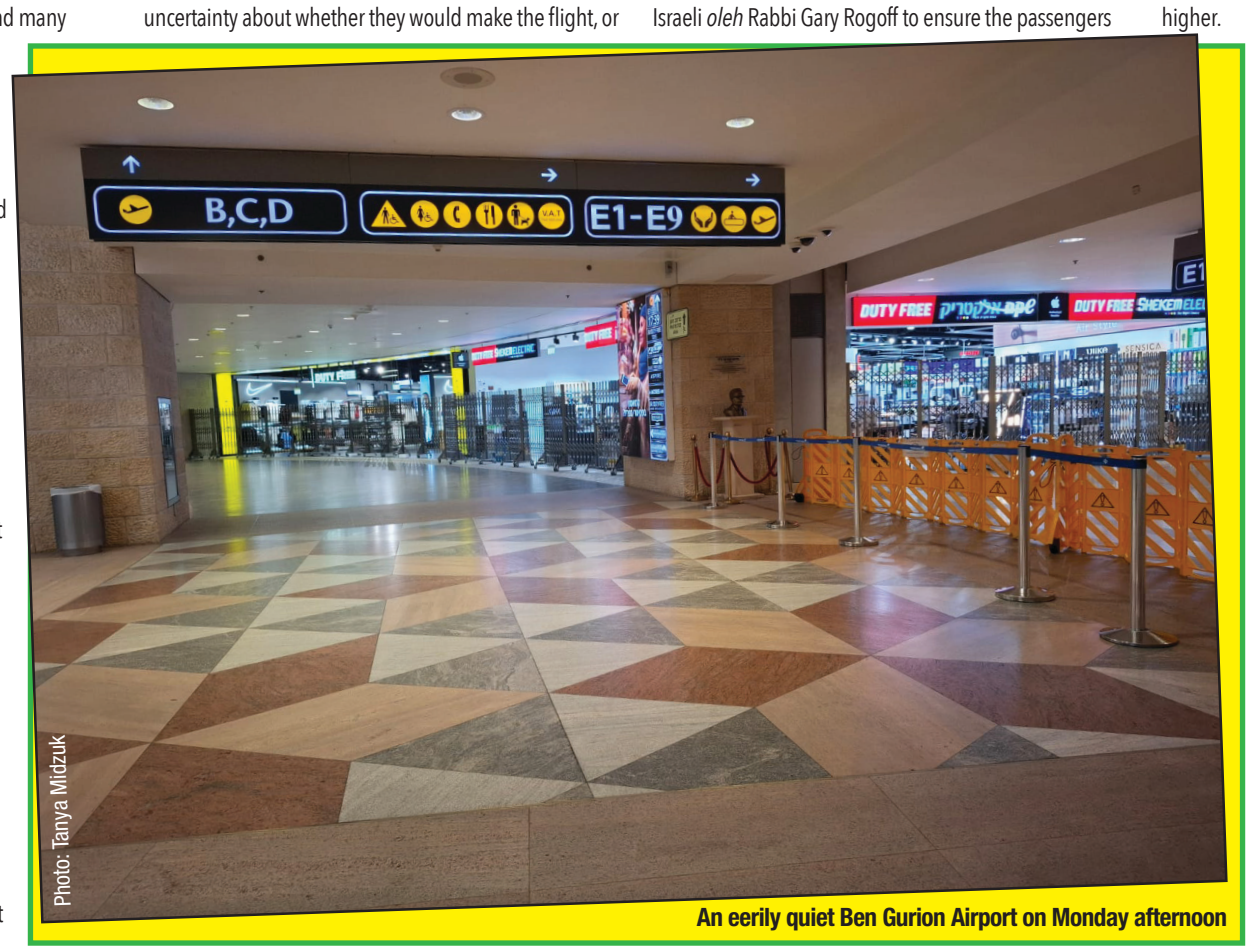


Photo: Tanya Midzuk

**An eerily quiet Ben Gurion Airport on Monday afternoon**

# Generative AI goes to war. And Iran is discovering what it's like to fight without it.

OPINION AMIR MIZROCH


Debris from an Iranian fighter jet destroyed over Iran

The Iranian pilot never saw the missile that killed him.

His Russian-built Yakovlev Yak-130, a jet trainer first flown in 1996 and introduced into service in 2010, was flying over Tehran when the aircraft simply disintegrated. The explosion appeared sudden, inexplicable. There was no visible attacker. Just a flash, then debris falling through the sky.

Debris from the Iranian fighter jet destroyed last week over Iran.

The same thing happened hundreds of kilometres away to the sailors aboard an Iranian naval frigate returning through international waters. One moment the ship was underway. The next it was torn open by a torpedo launched from a submarine no-one ever saw.

The weapons themselves weren't extraordinary. A missile from an Israeli F-35I Adir, the Israeli version of the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II. A torpedo fired from a submerged American submarine.

What mattered was the system behind them.

The F-35 is often described as a fighter jet. In reality, it is a flying sensor network, a data centre with wings and bombs. It collects data from its radar, infrared sensors, satellites, and other aircraft, fuses the information, identifies targets, and presents the pilot with recommended actions. The human still authorises the shot, but the machine increasingly decides everything that leads up to it.

For the Israeli pilot, the kill was incidental. The aircraft's systems flagged the target, calculated a firing solution, and suggested engagement. The pilot approved. The missile launched and guided itself. The pilot then moved on to his main target over Iran.

Iran is discovering what it looks like to fight a war against militaries that are quietly integrating generative AI into the machinery of combat.

The United States military is integrating large language models such as Anthropic's Claude into the Pentagon's Project Maven intelligence platform. Israel operates its own artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted targeting systems developed during years of conflict with Hamas and Hezbollah.

The objective is identical in both militaries: compress the time between information and action.

Modern military systems now ingest enormous flows of information: drone feeds, satellite imagery, intercepted communications, logistics movements, radar tracks. AI systems process that data continuously, identify patterns, and recommend targets.

Human commanders still approve strikes, for now. Against an adversary that does use AI in war (like Russia and China) that "human in the loop" decision could change. We are entering the age of autonomous weapons of war.

Even small product features in commercial AI hint at the direction of travel. Anthropic recently announced an experimental "auto mode" for its coding tools that allows Claude to run extended tasks without constantly requesting permission from developers. In software development that eliminates interruptions. In warfare it reduces pauses in analysis.

**But the battlefield is fighting back**

The problem is that the battlefield itself is becoming hostile to data.

Electronic warfare now saturates modern conflicts. Jamming, spoofing, and signal denial are constant features of the environment. Systems dependent on global positioning system (GPS) navigation or external communications often fail once those signals disappear.

The war in Ukraine shows that drones that function perfectly during testing frequently fail once exposed to sustained electronic warfare. GPS signals vanish. Command links collapse. Guidance systems malfunction.

Autonomous systems therefore need to navigate and operate independently, using onboard sensors, cameras, and AI models rather than external signals.

But that autonomy introduces another vulnerability. Machines depend on data. And data can be manipulated.

**Poisoning the machine**

AI introduces a new domain of warfare: data integrity.

The same generative AI tools that help Western militaries process intelligence can also be used by adversaries to corrupt it.

Future conflicts may involve:

- synthetic communications traffic;
- fabricated satellite imagery;
- manipulated sensor feeds;
- adversarial attacks designed to confuse targeting algorithms; and
- poisoned data sets inserted into intelligence systems.

A machine trained on corrupted data can draw the wrong conclusions with perfect confidence. Instead of hiding from sensors, adversaries may increasingly attempt to feed those sensors misleading information. The battlefield becomes not only contested but deceptive.

**Two war machines**

The result is a collision between two fundamentally different models of warfare.

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# Up close and meaningful

Torah Thought

Rabbi Alon Friedman
Yeshiva Mizrachi

When people look back on an enjoyable holiday or a family gathering, they often forget the challenges that went with it. The suitcase that was lost, the child who fell ill, the jet lag, the long airport queues, moments that felt frustrating at the time somehow fade from memory.

For others, the opposite happens. A wonderful holiday can be overshadowed by a single unpleasant experience at the end. Perhaps an argument just before leaving the airport or an encounter with a rude passenger on the flight home, it colours the memory of the entire trip.

Why does this happen?

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman explained that we should think of experience and memory as two different things. Experience is how we live through an event in real time. Memory is how we remember that event once it is over.

Our memories aren't perfect recordings of what actually happened. Instead, they're shaped by emotion, perspective, and especially by the way an experience ends. The story we later tell ourselves about an event can become more powerful than the event itself.

In life, everything has both an experience and a memory. Ideally, we want the two to align – that the experience itself is meaningful and that the memory we carry forward is positive too.

This week's Torah portion describes one of the most powerful collective experiences in Jewish history: the completion of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary built by the Israelites in the desert.

The Mishkan was far more than a construction project. It represented the Jewish people creating a space in this world for the Divine Presence. The entire nation participated. Men and women, artisans and donors, leaders and labourers, each person contributed something.

Yet the Torah uses an intriguing phrase when describing those who actually did the work. The verse tells us that Moses called Betzalel, Oholiav, and every wise-hearted person "whose heart inspired him to come close to the work, to do it" (Exodus 36:2).

Why does the Torah say their hearts inspired them to come close to the work? Why not simply say they were inspired to do it?

Building the Mishkan required effort, skill, and dedication. Any meaningful project – whether spiritual, communal, or personal – demands the same. At times the task can seem overwhelming.

The Torah teaches an important principle: before we can truly do something, we must first draw ourselves close to it.

When we approach a task with curiosity, openness, and a sense of connection, the work no longer feels distant or burdensome. Instead, it becomes something we are part of.

Sometimes the hardest step in an endeavour is simply getting started. But once we come close to the work, it often begins to pull us in.

And when that happens, both the experience and the memory become meaningful.



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# ‘Our country has been held hostage for decades’: Iranian Jews in SA react to Israel-Iran war

CLAUDIA GROSS

“I and my family members in Iran are so grateful to the governments of Israel and America for helping Iran,” says Sarah*, an Iranian Jew now living in South Africa. “For more than 40 years my country has been held hostage.”

For Sarah, the war has heightened her anxiety about loved ones still living in Iran, while simultaneously reinforcing her belief that the regime in Tehran must come to an end.

She says communication with relatives in Iran has become increasingly difficult. “The regime attacks its own people,” she says. “They cut down any form of communication we have with our family in Iran.”

So as explosions rock Tehran, and the conflict with the US and Israel intensifies, Sarah and other Iranian Jews in South Africa are watching with a mixture of fear, relief, anger, and hope. For many in this small diaspora community, the war is not only a geopolitical crisis but a moment that could determine the future of the country they left behind.

Across conversations with ex-pat Iranian Jews, a common theme emerges. Many believe the conflict has exposed the deep divide between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people, and some see the current escalation as a potential turning point after more than four decades of Islamic rule.

Sarah says her greatest fear is not foreign attacks on Iran but the “satanic plans of the regime”.

For her and many others in the diaspora, the war has reopened long-standing wounds tied to the Iranian revolution of 1979, when the Islamic Republic came to power and many Jews and other minorities left the country.

Reza*, an Iranian Jew who has lived in South Africa since that year, says he’s built a life in a new country, but his emotional connection to Iran remains strong. “I have been in South Africa since 1979. I have a business here and have raised my children here,” he says.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Watching the war on Iran

Even after decades abroad, the situation in Iran continues to weigh heavily on him. “The Iranian people are suffering. The regime is evil; it’s bad for the whole world and not representative of the Iranian people.”

Reza describes Iran as a country that has been held back by its leadership. “The people at large are pleasant, welcoming, intelligent. It’s a wealthy country kept poor because resources are diverted away from citizens.”

Like many Iranians who left during the revolution, he says he still dreams of returning. “I want the regime to end and things to go back to how they were before the revolution,” he says. “I have enjoyed my life in South Africa, but I yearn to go home.”

Members of the Iranian Jewish community say the distinction between the Iranian people and the Iranian government is important, particularly at a time when tensions between Iran and Israel dominate international headlines. Several emphasise that many Iranians have no hostility towards Israel or Jews, and that the government’s rhetoric does not necessarily reflect the views of ordinary citizens.

For some Iranian Jews living abroad, the war has also sparked debate about what Iran’s future leadership might look like if the current regime were to collapse.

Shervin Ghorbany, another Iranian Jew living in South Africa, says many Iranians are focused first on ending the current system of government, even though opinions differ on what should replace it. “It’s complicated,” he says. “It’s not an easy situation to fix.”

Discussions about Iran’s future often centre on whether the country might return to some form of monarchy, with supporters of the exiled royal family advocating for the son of the last Shah to play a role in a transitional government. At the same time, many Iranians remain wary of new political structures emerging during a period of instability and conflict.

For members of the diaspora watching from abroad, the emotional impact of the war is profound. Many spend hours following news reports and trying to reach family members inside Iran. Cities that appear in war reports are often places in which relatives still live. As the conflict escalates, those ties make the news feel intensely personal.

For Sarah, the war represents both a painful moment and a potential opportunity for change. “This is the time for revenge,” she says. “It’s not finished with Khamenei. The rest of the leaders need to be held accountable too. We know their names and there is evidence of their wrongdoing, including killing innocent people.”

Yet her thoughts ultimately return to the possibility of reunion with family and friends in the country she left behind. “My message to my fellow Persians is: Long live the Shah, stay safe, and soon we will be holding hands in Tehran once more.”

For Iranian Jews in South Africa, the unfolding war is therefore far more than a distant international conflict. It touches their identities, their memories, and their hopes for the future of the country they still consider home.

From Johannesburg to Cape Town, members of the community are following every development closely, waiting to see whether the current crisis will reshape Iran’s political future or deepen the uncertainty surrounding it.

For now, they continue to watch from afar, balancing concern for those still inside Iran with the hope that the events unfolding today may one day allow them to return to a different country than the one they were forced to leave.

*Interviewees have asked for their names to be changed as they fear for their and their families’ security.

## South Africans take nerve-wracking trips to get home

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African passports and cannot transit through Europe without a Schengen visa.

Although airlines are allowing travellers to change tickets at no additional cost if they depart from European cities, South Africans cannot easily obtain the visas required to transit those routes.

The result is that some families may miss their own children’s weddings.

“For all the tea in China,” Chrysler said, “we just cannot get them there.”

Israeli Elisheva Surovsky-Miletsky is trying to get back to her older daughter and husband in Israel. She was in South Africa with her baby for a wedding and started making plans to return to Israel as soon as the war began.

She and her child first flew to Addis Ababa and then on to Athens, where the emergency flight they were waiting for to get home was cancelled two days after arriving in Athens. She said it has been a “hectic” journey, but the closer she gets to Israel, the more relaxed she feels.

As for flying from safety into a war zone, she said, “In Cape Town, my passports, credit cards, identity document, and driver’s licence were stolen from my car, and I had to fly to Pretoria to redo my passport. So I don’t feel like South Africa is so safe.”

In addition, “I prefer being with my family, to go to the shelter together and so on. It’s not the best experience, but I think it’s better.”

South African *olah* Georgia Daniel was on holiday with her daughter in Italy when the war broke out. Her husband and two other adult children stayed home. She continued the trip while constantly checking for return flights. “In Rome we met many other stranded Israelis, with no real solutions between us. I was having sleepless nights, worrying about my family in Israel and the uncertainty of how long we would stay in Rome.”

They were eventually able to get a flight to Taba airport, “which is basically a hut with a runway”, says Daniel.

From there, “we got a taxi from the airport to the border. Egyptian border control tried asking for bribes to fill out their border forms. I refused. On the Israeli side, the Ministry of Transport supplied buses back to Tel Aviv via Beer Sheva.”

They travelled for five hours, which included two pit stops and a missile attack.

For many the journey to reach loved ones is far from over.

# Pro-Israel church groups and activists rally outside Cape Union Mart

**CLAUDIA GROSS**

Pro-Israel activists gathered outside Cape Union Mart at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town on Saturday, 7 March, in response to weekly pro-Palestinian protests that have taken place at the store for more than two years.

"This demonstration marked a significant turning point," said Pastor Thierry Mufishi.

He described the rally as an expression of unity among different communities. "For the first time, the presence of a diverse group of protesters reflected what felt like a victory of unity and resilience."

Mufishi, who represents the Grace for Grace Family Church, said the more than 60 participants included friends and supporters of Israel, church groups and expat Iranians "openly expressing support for the Israel Defense Forces".

The demonstrators said they were challenging allegations against Cape Union Mart, expressing support for Israel,


and highlighting the evils in Iran.

Some of their banners carried messages aimed at countering narratives misrepresenting Israel.

"Many held posters conveying messages focused on truth, countering what they perceive as misinformation and propaganda from Hamas," Mufishi said.

The pro-Israel presence consisted of four groups, according to those involved: members of Simunye Israel led by Pastor Thom Thamaga, Concerned Clergy of South Africa, Christians United for Africa, and activists identifying themselves as Iranians for a Free Iran.

They gathered against the backdrop of the ongoing dispute between Cape Union Mart and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC).

Since November 2023, PSC supporters have staged regular protests outside the retailer's stores, accusing the company's executive chairperson, Philip Krawitz, of supporting Israel's military. Krawitz and the company have denied the claims and taken legal action to try interdict activists from protesting and making the defamatory allegations.

Participants in Saturday's rally said their presence reflected growing frustration with the ongoing demonstrations.

Mufishi said his participation was also informed by his faith. "From a Christian faith perspective, I believe there is an urgent need for more Christians to recognise the spiritual significance of Israel's existence," he said. "In my conviction, without Israel, the foundation of our faith and our understanding of G-d is deeply compromised."

Mufishi said the demonstration strengthened his commitment to speak publicly on the issue. "This experience strengthened my resolve to advocate for truth, peace, and moral clarity," he said, adding that his hope remained "for peace in Israel and, ultimately, peace throughout the world".

A small group of Iranian activists also attended the rally. One, who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons, said they primarily wanted to draw attention to political developments in Iran.

"The main reason Iranians were present was not related to the Cape Union Mart case," the participant said. "The purpose of being there was to show our support for the people in Iran and for the ongoing situation there."

The activist said the group wanted to make clear that they didn't consider themselves enemies of Israel or the United States.


They said participating in demonstrations can carry risks for people with ties to Iran. "The Islamic government has already announced that if we participate in any march supporting Israel, our assets in Iran could be confiscated, and we could face execution or be accused of treason."

Several attendees said they had taken part in previous counter-demonstrations at the V&A Waterfront and believed tensions between opposing groups had intensified over time.

Adie Lee, a Sea Point resident, said she has participated in several pro-Israel demonstrations in Cape Town. "I have stood numerous times against the lying and libels that are being perpetrated against Israel and Jews."

Lee said some encounters had been confrontational. "I've experienced members of the anti-Israel group behaving in a most threatening way by photographing me, coming up and screaming right in my face, making gestures like they will slit our throats, shouting '*Khaybar Khaybar*'," she said.

The phrase refers to a historical battle involving Jewish communities, Lee said. "They use these intimidation tactics to try scare us."

Participants in the pro-Israel rally said their intention on Saturday was to demonstrate peacefully. They initially stood silently with banners and flags, later singing and chanting messages of support.

The weekly demonstrations outside the store typically take place on Saturdays between 12:00 and 14:00. Those who oppose the protests say they have led to increased security at the V&A Waterfront during demonstration times and adjustments to the area's layout to separate opposing groups.

The outcome of the court case against the PSC is expected to shape how demonstrations outside Cape Union Mart stores may proceed in future.

For those who gathered on Saturday, their message was solidarity with Israel.

"The demonstration held on Saturday represented, for me personally, a moment of activation," Mufishi said. "Unity, faith, and truth must prevail over hatred, misinformation, and intimidation."





## Generative AI goes to war. And Iran is discovering what it's like to fight without it.

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The American-Israeli system is built on information dominance. Sensors collect vast quantities of data, software platforms fuse the streams, and algorithms help commanders decide what to strike. Its strength is speed and precision.

The opposing model is designed to make that system blind.

Instead of advanced networks, it relies on concealment, decentralisation, tunnels, cheap rockets, and human couriers. Its objective is not technological superiority but opacity.

High-tech militaries attempt to map the battlefield. Asymmetric adversaries attempt to make the battlefield unreadable.

**The next phase of AI war**

For now, the technological advantage remains firmly with the US and Israel. Our systems process intelligence faster, identify targets more efficiently, and coordinate complex operations with unprecedented speed.

But the decisive contests of the next decade may not be fought only with better algorithms. They will be fought over the integrity of information itself.

Future wars may hinge on which side can poison the other's data, manipulate its sensors, or deceive its machine-learning systems. In earlier eras, the key question of warfare was who possessed the most powerful weapons.

In the era of AI, the question may become something more subtle.

• *Award-winning writer, editor and host of* The Dejargonizer *podcast, Amir Mizroch was born in Israel and raised in South Africa (Krugersdorp), studying journalism at Rhodes University. He worked at the* Mail & Guardian *before making aliya in 2000. In Israel, he worked at* The Jerusalem Post *and* Israel Hayom *and was later director of communications at Start-Up Nation Central. He was also tech editor EMEA for* The Wall Street Journal.

# Zille says: You don't have to like me; just love Johannesburg

**NICOLA MILTZ**

Democratic Alliance (DA) mayoral candidate Helen Zille has thrown herself into Johannesburg's chaos with the energy of someone half her age.

"You may not like me," she told *SA Jewish Report*, "lots of people don't. You may not like the DA either. You just have to love Joburg."

For Zille, the stakes couldn't be clearer. "If Joburg fails, South Africa fails," she says.

The veteran politician is mounting an aggressive campaign to take control of the City of Johannesburg in the coming local government elections.

On the morning of our interview she had already met with a water engineer, inspected failing infrastructure in the inner city, and done an interview with *The New York Times*. Later she would head out to meet residents of ward 102 during a by-election, which the DA went on to win convincingly.

"I'm not here for fun," she says. "I'm here because I love a massive challenge. It has to be big, hairy and difficult. I love having a purpose, and I love Johannesburg."

At 75, her campaign trail has taken her from pothole-ravaged streets and broken traffic lights to areas with chronic water outages, refuse-strewn pavements, and rolling electricity failures.

She township-hops, watches football in shebeens, and sits down with city engineers, business leaders, and frustrated residents.

Just as visible as her street-level campaigning is her combative online presence. Her social media feeds are packed with pointed jabs at the failures of the African National Congress (ANC): videos of her directing traffic at dead traffic lights, photographs of her perched on the edge of a gaping pothole with an umbrella, as if sunbathing at a dam, and biting commentary about collapsing infrastructure.

One of her most viral digs came after Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi admitted he showers at hotels during water outages, while residents are left with dry taps. The DA turned the remark into billboard fodder, political theatre designed to highlight how out of touch the ANC leadership is with ordinary residents.


Helen Zille

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

But behind the theatre is a serious political calculation.

Zille believes in Johannesburg, and that it can be saved.

"They turned around Detroit," she says. "So we should be able to turn around Joburg. It's entirely possible."

Her connection to the city is both personal and historic.

Zille was born at the Princess Nursing Home in Hillbrow and grew up in Berea, spending much of her childhood at her grandmother's home in Orange Grove. She studied at the University of the Witwatersrand and worked as a journalist for the *Rand Daily Mail*, where she was part of the team that exposed the death in detention of anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko.

"My Joburg roots run very deep," she says. "I feel passionately about this city. It's well worth fighting for."

Her family ties remain here.

"I have my children in South Africa who want to be here," she says.

Still, Zille acknowledges that fixing the city won't be easy, and that the first hurdle is getting elected.

"Our biggest problem is DA voters who don't vote," she says.

In the 2021 local government elections, only 42.6% of registered voters in Johannesburg cast their ballot.

For the DA to govern the city outright, it will need a majority in the 270-seat council: 136 seats.

"That's the magic number, 50% plus one," Zille says.

She estimates that roughly 485 000 voters would need to back the DA on both ballots to reach that threshold.

Her warning to voters is blunt: "Every vote for a small party takes a vote away from us.

"The question voters must ask themselves is simple: do they want a repeat of the chaos?"

This past weekend, Zille formally launched the DA's Johannesburg election manifesto at City Hall.

She delivered a stark diagnosis of the city's decline.

"Joburg is not failing because of bad luck," she said. "It is failing because of corruption, incompetence, and years of political chaos. The ANC's brand is corruption, crime, and collapse.

"Once elected, we will stop the rot, fix what is broken, and rebuild Joburg into a city its residents can be proud of."

The DA's plan centres on five key priorities.

The first is restoring reliable water and electricity, two defining crises for Johannesburg residents. The party proposes ring-fencing revenue collected from water and electricity tariffs to ensure it's spent directly on maintaining those services.

The second pledge focuses on repairing failing roads and infrastructure.

"We will fill potholes within 72 hours, get 95% of traffic lights working," Zille said. Broken traffic lights and pothole-damaged roads have become daily frustrations for commuters across the city.

"We will use modern technology to protect major intersections, and stand up to rogue taxis."

The third pledge is perhaps the most ambitious: creating 200 000 jobs by restoring investor confidence in the city.

"Failing governments destroy jobs," Zille said. "In the last three months of last year, Joburg lost 49 000 jobs."

The fourth pledge is a tougher stance on crime, including reclaiming hijacked buildings and preventing illegal land invasions.

"We will be tough on crime," Zille said. "We will listen to whistle-blowers, protect them, and fire corrupt officials."

The final pledge focuses on governance: hiring competent professionals in the city administration and restoring accountability in municipal departments.

"We will reward good performance and punish poor performance," she said.

Ultimately, Zille believes the future of Johannesburg lies in the hands of its voters.

"Politics broke Joburg," she says. "The choices that voters made in the past broke Joburg, and only the voters can get Joburg working."

Her pitch to residents is simple.

"Do they want water or don't they? Do they want electricity or don't they?" she asks.

"Do you want a city that works or don't you?

"It's a simple question.

"And remember, you don't have to like someone to vote for them. You just have to love Joburg."

## Honouring Lekota as a loyal friend

**STAFF REPORTER**

Mosiuoa Lekota was a friend who remained present, not only in easy moments but also in times of challenge and adversity, said South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn after hearing of the death of the politician this week.

"Lekota earned an honoured place for himself in the history of South Africa through the significant role he played in the struggle against apartheid and in helping usher in a new era of non-racial democracy," said Kahn, who attended the memorial ceremony for Lekota, freedom fighter, former Robben Island prisoner, and former minister of defence, at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto on 11 March.

"In the years that followed, he continued to serve the nation with distinction ... Whether in government or later on the opposition benches, he remained steadfast in his commitment to the people of this country and to the advancement of their well-being," said Kahn.

Lekota joined the African National Congress (ANC) as a young activist and was imprisoned by the apartheid government for his political activities, spending time on Robben Island. After the transition to democracy in 1994, he was first premier of the Free State and later became ANC chairperson.

He served as minister of defence under President Thabo Mbeki from 1999 to 2008, before leaving the ANC and help found the Congress of the People in 2008.

Kahn spoke about Lekota having met with Jewish leaders on many occasions and participated in many Jewish events. "He recognised and respected the Jewish community's historic and emotional connection to the State of Israel. His approach to this and related issues was always fair, balanced, and constructive, reflecting his broader commitment to mutual respect and understanding."

Kahn emphasised that Lekota supported the Jewish community even when it wasn't popular to do so. "At times when others in public life chose to distance themselves from the Jewish community, he continued to engage with us with openness and integrity. He recognised that the Jewish community is an integral part of the fabric of South African society. He stood with us in times of celebration, but perhaps more meaningfully, he stood with us during challenging times. That loyalty, that moral courage, and that friendship will always be remembered and deeply treasured by the South African Jewish community," she said.

"In many ways, this reflected the very ideals upon which our democracy was built, that people of different backgrounds and communities can stand together in mutual respect, dignity, and shared citizenship in the great and diverse nation that is South Africa."

south african Jewish Report

# No easy route home

For most people, the idea of getting into and out of Israel during a war could pose a minor inconvenience when the skies effectively close to air transport. Only, in the case of this war with Iran, the skies are closed because there are ballistic missiles flying en masse towards Israel many times a day.

Iran has fired around 500 such missiles at Israel since the beginning of March. Each of these missiles can destroy entire city blocks or military bases and kill many, many people. And Iran hasn't been firing one at a time; it has been firing at least 10 or 20 at a time, sometimes more. In this war, it has been reported that 50% of the Iranian missiles have been armed with cluster warheads. These split into smaller explosives before hitting the ground, enabling each one to do damage to an area the size of several football fields. They are known to indiscriminately spread dozens of submunitions, each with several kilograms of explosives, over a radius of around 10 kilometres.

The only reason Israel hasn't been decimated is because of the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and the Arrow Missile Defence System. These intercept as many missiles as possible mid-air. However, they aren't fool proof and so far, 13 to 17 people in Israel have been killed in the war. As many as 2 339 civilians have been evacuated to hospitals, with 95 still being hospitalised. Sixteen people have been wounded in Hezbollah missile fire from Lebanon.

Israel has reportedly managed to stop 80% of the missiles fired at its civilian population. With this in mind, let's not for one second imagine that Israelis are 100% safe. They are not. They are in a volatile war zone and are literally running backwards and forwards from shelters. They are trying hard to get on with a semblance of normal life, but it's not easy. Israelis, however, have an apparent knack of being able to just deal with it and make it look easy.

People are getting around Israel by car and public transport, but they do it knowing they are taking a risk because when the sirens go off, it's not for nothing. And when they hear those loud booms, those are mass military killers either being stopped in the air or causing damage somewhere. When they see the sky streaked with white lights, it's those mass killing machines again. People may make light of it, but there is nothing light-hearted in or about this war.

Like most of you, I have close family and friends living in Israel. This war, one of my most precious people was stuck in Israel for more than a week. I say stuck, but, while the running backwards and forwards to the shelters was trying, she was with her family and there was undoubtedly an element of contentment in being with nearest and dearest in the situation. However, she and her husband needed to get back here for important reasons.

Their original flight home via Ethiopia had been cancelled and then a second one they managed to attain was also cancelled. Getting worried and antsy, they considered the alternative routes.

Getting a bus to Taba in Egypt and flying from there, or crossing the border into Jordan and making their way out of there, were among the options. None of the routes was simple, nor were they totally safe. And the idea of a long bus ride with the many sirens being sounded was specifically nerve-wracking because of a recent experience they'd had.

They'd been travelling between Ra'anana and Jerusalem by bus and a siren went off. All aboard the bus shouted to the driver to stop, but he wouldn't. When he eventually did, everyone tumbled out, crawled to the side of the highway and lay on the ground as they watched the missiles being intercepted above them. It may have looked amazing, but the real threat of the missile debris or fragments falling wasn't lost on them. They were not happy to be outside of a safe room or bomb shelter.

So, a long bus ride into a foreign land was not high on their cards, but their choices were limited. Eventually, they managed to secure a two-and-a-half-hour flight out of Israel to Greece. Yes, from Ben Gurion Airport on Monday evening.

Except the skies above Israel were still effectively closed, with a few special flights being allowed. They were excited because they got seats, but weren't sure what that meant about suitcases.

Nevertheless, they got to the airport. The security personnel asked the familiar question: Have you left your bag unattended at any point? My loved one said: Of course not. Ten minutes later the siren sounded, and they were all told to leave their luggage and head to the underground shelter.

We were on a video WhatsApp call and she took me with her. I could feel the stress of the people in a crush, trying to get down the four flights of stairs. And when they got down, everyone seemed to be worried, and, of course, they were all on their phones. Then we heard the "boom", "boom", and "boom". It was loud and felt close.

As she said, she wondered if the missiles had been intercepted or hit the ground somewhere nearby. All I could think of was that she was going to be in that same airspace soon, but I said nothing. I didn't want to make her more stressed.

After the siren, she and her husband made their way back to customs. Lots of questions and queries. At one point, they weren't sure if they were to be turned away or not.

Then there was another siren. Another flight downstairs. Then, they got on the plane to leave.

We had no more comms until she was in the airport in Athens. My family and I stressed until we knew they were safe. The images I kept pushing from my over-imaginative mind weren't fun. I can only imagine how stressful it was for them until they knew for sure they were out of missile range because, now that it's over, I don't even want to discuss it.

I am just grateful she is halfway home.

And I wish all our loved ones in Israel safety and security. May this war end soon so that Israelis can feel safe again.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**

**Editor**

# Antisemitism won't stop us being Jewish and South African

OPINION KAREN MILNER

It's no secret that antisemitism has risen precipitously in the wake of 7 October 2023, subjecting Jewish communities worldwide to levels of open hostility not seen since the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. Fellow diaspora communities have endured firebombings, shooting attacks, physical assaults, vandalism, and harassment at unprecedented scales. In South Africa, we too witnessed a significant spike in antisemitic incidents in the months following 7 October. While our recorded incidents have since decreased substantially, they continue to occur, and we have witnessed a troubling resurgence of online hostility in recent weeks.

To understand contemporary antisemitism, we must first grasp what the term means and how its manifestations evolve over time. We call anti-Jewish hatred "antisemitism" not because Jews are uniformly Semitic (we encompass many races and ethnicities), but because the term was coined in 1879 by German agitator Wilhelm Marr to rebrand crude Jew-hatred (*Judenhass*) as pseudoscientific racial ideology. This whitewashing of irrational prejudice as rational opposition established a pattern that persists today.

Antisemitism rarely announces itself crudely. One of the most troubling features of recent years is how it increasingly enters public discourse wearing "respectable attire". It presents as "antizionism", "political protest", or "just criticism"; as "providing context", or "asking difficult questions"; as the need to "acknowledge both sides"; or as pre-emptive defence against accusations of bias. Antizionism has become one of antisemitism's most effective modern vehicles precisely because it allows ancient prejudices to be repackaged as contemporary political discourse.

It's crucial to understand that our history has created particular sensitivities within our community. This is true for every population that's endured injustice or systemic discrimination. Historically, Jewish acceptance has almost always been conditional on a disavowal of our peoplehood. During the French Revolution, we received civil rights as individuals but were denied collective recognition, captured in the declaration: "Everything must be refused to the Jews as a nation, and everything granted to Jews as individuals." In the Soviet Union, antisemitism was formally condemned while Zionism was attacked as illegitimate Jewish nationalism. Jewish existence was permitted; Jewish peoplehood was not. Does this sound familiar?

South African Jewish Board of Deputies protesting outside the Department of Justice in 2024

We've been marginalised, ghettoised, and turned into refugees throughout history; we're conditioned to react with the utmost seriousness to any attempts to other or exclude us. The modern manifestation of this exclusion, demanding conditions for our acceptance, has become increasingly evident in South Africa and represents one of the primary battlegrounds for our community and for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in particular. This contemporary form insists that Zionism is uniquely evil and must be rejected. Jews, therefore, must publicly denounce Zionism to gain entry into the "community of the good".

In effect, Jews may join only through a loyalty oath that includes antizionism: performing a rejection of half of our own people in their sovereign state. We're asked to undertake an action that is profoundly anti-Jewish and historically dishonest.

In South Africa, we have witnessed this dynamic across professional, academic, social, and cultural spheres. In the past year alone, the SAJBD has assisted members of numerous professional bodies, from medical doctors to advocates, in confronting hostile environments. Jews have also faced pressure at sporting events, cultural performances, and public gatherings. In this way, antizionism functions less as an ideology and more as a sorting mechanism: Jews are compelled to declare their ideological purity to remain acceptable. All of these confrontations represent clear attempts to sideline members of our community, effectively ghettoising us to the margins of South African society.

When one looks plainly, we see that antizionism demands Jews accept perpetual minority status, while being blamed for the consequences of that vulnerability. No other indigenous people are told that prolonged exile voids their connection to their homeland, or that survival itself now constitutes injustice.

Within this framework, Jewish trauma is treated as suspicious, manipulative, or fabricated. Antizionism demands that Jewish safety always come second to someone else's ideological comfort. And when Jews object, we're told that we're proving the point. In this binary framework, Israel is the perpetual villain. The villain can never be the victim. Acknowledging discrimination against Jews would cause this edifice to collapse, and so our suffering, no matter how acute, must be denied, inverted, or attributed to Jews ourselves. Even antisemitism is blamed on Jews – if it's bad, it must be the Jews' fault.

This distortion is aided by a tiny minority of Jews who reject Zionism. Those who constantly preface their statements with the term "as a Jew", suggesting that the mere fact of their birth gives them authority to speak on issues on which they hold no expertise and on which they represent no-one but themselves. These activists insist that Jewish identity is merely religious, erasing the foundational connection of Jewish law, language, calendar, prayer, and collective memory to the Land of Israel. The attempt to separate Judaism from Zionism is a denial of authentic Jewish tradition.

The token Jew functions as a fig leaf concealing the ugly antisemitism that underpins much of the antizionist movement. By elevating fringe Jewish voices, movements hostile to Jewish life and self-determination claim Jewish endorsement while dismissing the views of the vast majority of Jews as corrupted, brainwashed, or morally illegitimate. Being born Jewish doesn't excuse their bigotry, nor does it launder anybody else's hatred.

Despite these pressures, we, the vast majority South African Jewish community, refuse to allow others to define our identity. Zionism is an integral component of Jewish peoplehood. Zionism is defined as the belief that Jews have the right to self-determination in our ancestral homeland. Anyone who tries to reinterpret Zionism in a way that adheres to their particular ideological position is at best mischievous and at worst deeply malicious.

This is why we respond forcefully when antisemitism surfaces. When someone posted on Facebook that the SAJBD offices should be "fumigated", implying that Jews are vermin and evoking the most catastrophic chapter of our history, when our people were gassed, we refused to look away. We took robust and immediate action. Likewise, we didn't remain silent when a school refused to play our children in a tennis match, nor when others dismissed this blatant antisemitism as acceptable political protest. We live in a country with robust protections for minority rights, and we must continue to assert them vigorously.

When then Minister of Justice Ronald Lamola stated that Jews "exist among us", as if we were some foreign entity, we protested. We equally reject broadcaster Redi Tlhabi's statement on social media that "The lie will be told for years. The goal has been achieved, convincing a section of society that they're victims and hated by everyone in a country that has shown so much grace". The implication that the country in which we're equal citizens has "shown us grace" is discriminatory and unacceptable in a democracy.

For centuries, Jews survived by adapting to powerlessness. The miracle of our existence isn't merely that we survived but that, despite everything arrayed against us, we continue to be Jews. But we're no longer powerless. We live in a constitutional democracy that affords us our full position and rights in South African society. The SAJBD, together with all communal organisations, exists to ensure the proud and active continuation of Jewish life in this country. But this can only occur if we, as a community, choose to remain in the public sphere as contributing South Africans and as Jews.

• *Karen Milner is the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.*

# Debate over the legality of the Iran war is about politics, not law

OPINION

ANNE HERZBERG

From the moment it was announced that Israel and the United States (US) had launched a joint attack on the theocratic Iranian regime, commentary revolved around the strikes' legality. A host of left-leaning commentators, academics, and diplomats stridently criticised the US and Israel, alleging they acted in "violation of international law". In particular, they asserted that Iran posed no "imminent threat" and therefore, Israel and the US could not be considered to be acting in legitimate self-defence.

In the US, members of the Democratic Party overwhelmingly called the moves "illegal and unconstitutional", while almost all Republican members argued the opposite. Despite long-standing tensions with President Donald Trump, the governments of Canada and Australia issued statements supporting the US on the basis that it was "acting to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and to prevent Iran continuing to threaten international peace and security". United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister Keir Starmer went before the media to announce that the UK had not participated in the operations and had not allowed the US to use UK bases, and claimed that his government's actions were "in line with international law". Starmer was immediately panned by large swathes of the UK public for harming national security. When, within hours of his statement, British bases and nationals came under attack in the Gulf and in Cyprus, Starmer quickly reversed course, allowing the US to land at and launch additional strikes from UK bases.

In contrast, the Gulf States, which had heavily condemned Israel and the US during the 12-day Iranian conflict in June 2025 as illegal, now quickly directed such sentiments toward the Iranian regime. Instead of trying to play both sides, these countries were now being impacted by hundreds of ballistic missiles and thousands of drones launched at their territories.

For its part, Russia, which is entering the fifth year of its invasion of Ukraine, hypocritically called the operation an act of "unprovoked aggression". China, another country aggressively asserting its military presence throughout the Pacific region, claimed the attack "tramples on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter". South Africa, which has cultivated close ties with the ayatollahs, "condemned the unlawful attacks on Iran by Israel and the US, which violate Article 2(4) of the UN Charter". But, as the country is also increasingly dependent on financing and oil from the Gulf, "expressed deep concern over the escalating crisis in the Gulf" and the "subsequent retaliatory strikes by Iran".

These responses are illuminating regarding international law. First, they demonstrate that while international law lays down generally accepted norms and principles, such as in the UN Charter, its interpretation is highly ambiguous and hinges largely on what factual information is part of the analysis. If one ignores the decades of regional predations of the Iranian regime, its building up of a terror proxy ring of fire around Israel, its murder of 30 000 of its own citizens in January, and its deceptions regarding its ballistic missile arsenal and acquisition of nuclear weapons, and simply narrowly viewed the strikes as unprovoked, then one can characterise them as an illegal act of aggression. If one factors all of this history into account then the argument for legal self-defence is clear-cut.

Second, the divergent reactions regarding the law also highlight that characterisation of the war and its legality largely depend on one's politics. If one is generally hostile to Israel, the US, and/or the Trump administration, then one will call the strikes a violation of international law. If supportive of Trump and long-standing Western alliances, the operation is valid and legal. If, like Starmer, one is roundly criticised for one's stance, it might be enough to lead to a change in position. In the US, if according to polls the attack proves widely popular, Democrats will quickly shift their messaging. If the war features heavy losses and support for Trump drops, expect the legal discourse of "illegality" to accelerate.

Third, reliance on international law as a basis for policy formation is often tied to matters of national security. If serious risks are posed, one will be more likely to reject certain constraints of international law. For example, Israel views the Iranian regime and its actions as an existential threat to the Jewish State. It believes it had no choice but to attack, regardless of the legal criticisms that might be thrown its way. Both the Gulf States and Starmer reversed previously articulated policies, ostensibly predicated on international law, when their own countries and military assets came under attack.

In other words, while it is important to establish and support international norms to promote and maintain global stability, liberal democracy, and rights protections, it is questionable the degree to which they are universally understood and are binding. The discourse invoking international law, therefore, generally serves a primarily political function. The appeal to settled law is often a means to gain credibility and influence for one's positions. By couching a preferred policy stance in terms of legality, the hope is it will garner public support and will become seen to be inviolable, thus shutting down any possible opposition or legitimate debate, while at the same time mobilising action.


Since Hamas invaded Israel on 7 October 2023, committed unspeakable atrocities, and sparked a regional war, much complicity has been exposed and conventional wisdom has been upended. This includes revelations of the extent to which the UN and humanitarian aid groups were exploited by Hamas to build up its war machine; that the terror group could be moderated; that Hezbollah was an unstoppable fighting force; that Syria would remain in the hands of Assad; and that Iran's nuclear ambitions and threats to the region could be controlled through diplomacy. Yet another myth, that international law is explicitly clear, non-debatable, and can realistically moderate existential threats, has now also been laid bare with the launching of the strikes on Iran on 28 February. We are all better for it.

• *Anne Herzberg is the legal advisor of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institute.*

# African relations with Israel resilient despite Iran war

**STEVEN GRUZD**

For the past decade, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ratcheted up relations with Africa.

These ties have withstood the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Gaza, and, so far, the current hostilities with Iran.

The Israel-US attacks on Iran from 28 February, and Tehran's retaliations, have elicited a mixed or mooted reaction from African capitals. African governments worry about surging oil prices, the soaring cost of living, and trade disruptions. Apart from pro-Palestinian diehards like South Africa and Algeria, comments on the conflict have been measured, critical of Tehran's counterattacks, or not made at all. Responses have largely focused on the threat to global stability, trade, and the legality of the strikes.

Predictably, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation condemned the attacks on Iran as "unlawful", saying they violate the United Nations (UN) Charter, but also that Iran's counter-strikes on Gulf states went beyond the bounds of self-defence. The African National Congress sent its first deputy secretary-general, Nomvula Mokonyane, to mourn the Iranian dictator former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

The Algerian Foreign Ministry described the initial strikes as a "flagrant violation of sovereignty" and "American-Zionist aggression".

Others have been more even-handed. The African Union expressed "deep concern" about the strikes, appealing for "maximum restraint". It "strongly condemned" Iran's attacks on Gulf states, calling them "a clear violation of sovereignty". It also warned the war would adversely affect Africa's energy markets, food security, and economic resilience.

The three African countries (A3) on the UN Security Council (the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, and Somalia) said "all parties should exercise restraint and responsibility, uphold international law, and avoid any action that could escalate tensions or threaten regional stability". The A3 supported efforts for "a peaceful, inclusive, and lasting resolution in Iran".

Benji Shulman, director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, said most African countries' reactions were driven more by Tehran's attacks on other states than opposition to Israel. States close to Washington, like Kenya and Morocco, have expressed qualified support for the war. States in the Horn of Africa, like Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somaliland, are wary of Iran and of being dragged into this conflict, Shulman said. Their statements focused on Iran, not Israel.

Shiri Fein-Grossman, chief executive of the Israel-Africa Relations Institute in Herzliya, noted the range of reactions. "The overall picture is more nuanced than a simple pro- or anti-Israel divide. Most African governments have taken a cautious approach, emphasising restraint and de-escalation. South Africa stands out for its strong criticism of the strikes and its broader political opposition to Israel's actions. Overall, the dominant African response has been pragmatic: urging de-escalation while avoiding alignment with Iran, and in many cases quietly maintaining or strengthening ties with Israel."

Rolene Marks, Israeli journalist, said, "We haven't heard very much from African countries, with the exception of South Africa. A lot of African countries understand the threat that Iran poses to them and their security by funding the Islamist terror entities operational in their countries, threatening their citizens."

Shulman said Africa matters to Israel. The Horn "is a breeding ground for terrorism" and poses threats to Israel's security and global shipping. He cited the reopening of the Israeli embassy in Lusaka, Zambia 52 years after it closed as evidence that Netanyahu's courting of Africa is paying off. Ties with the DRC have strengthened. "Israel is operating effectively in southern Africa, which South Africa sees as its domain", adding to bilateral friction.

Marks said, "The African continent is a strategic frontier for Israel. We're focused on growing those ties. We also understand that there's a race for Africa between China, Iran, and the West, and Israel is perfectly positioned to help African countries."

Fein-Grossman said the last 10 years of Israel's Africa outreach has produced "uneven" results at the multilateral level, while strengthening many bilateral relations. She noted growing support at the UN for Israel from Cameroon, Rwanda, Togo and, at times, Malawi. Yet the broader picture reveals African country positions that "often remain aligned with broader Global South and pro-Palestinian consensus".

Nevertheless, "a lot of African countries don't see the need to take a partisan position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict even through the Gaza war. The only question is why South Africa doesn't seem to get the memo for this," Marks said.

"Africa is increasingly seen in Jerusalem as a strategic diplomatic and geopolitical arena rather than a peripheral one" said Fein-Grossman. This was reflected in the foreign minister's 2025 announcement that strengthening relations with African nations would be "a top priority" for Israel.

Fein-Grossman mentioned trips by the foreign minister to Ethiopia and Somaliland, and President Isaac Herzog's visits to the DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Zambia. African leaders continued to visit Israel after 7 October 2023, indicating resilient relationships. She also emphasised the increasing strategic importance of the Horn, leading to Israel's recognition of Somaliland. She urged keeping perspective, though; Jerusalem's ties with Washington remain paramount.


Photo: Amos Gershom (GPO)

Israeli President Isaac Herzog with African Muslim leaders in Israel

"Overall," Fein-Grossman said, "African voices may not be the decisive factor in Israeli decision making, but their importance in Israel's diplomatic and strategic calculations is clearly growing. The trajectory of relations points toward deeper engagement in the years ahead."

She said that if the war with Iran remains limited and relatively short, Israel-Africa relations are unlikely to change dramatically. If the government in Tehran changes

**Continued on page 10>>**

# An evil regime is being toppled

**LEE TANKLE**

For Iranians, in Iran and elsewhere, this war isn't only a war, but a rescue mission for the people of Iran.

"No-one is happy that our motherland is under bombardment. We're not happy about it. But many of us feel it's the only choice. It's like sending someone you love into surgery, you know the risks and the pain. Still, you do it because the cancer has to be removed." So said Iranian activist Sam Nik, on a webinar about the war hosted by the South African Zionist Federation on 9 March.

Nik fled the Iranian regime and came to South Africa five years ago because of the increasingly unsafe conditions created by the government. To protect herself and her daughter, she left a society where women often face severe discrimination and where, tragically, violence against women occurs with little accountability.

Nik emphasised that for her, and many Iranians, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "wasn't an Iranian leader. He was the head of the snake. He founded all the terrorist groups around the world", and that his assassination has been celebrated.

Photo: Screenshot

The demise of Khamenei isn't the only major win of the war. Major Liad Diamond, head of public diplomacy in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), explained that at day 10, the IDF has neutralised more than 300 missile launchers.

"Once you take out the launchers, the missiles become useless because they can't be fired," he said. "A major achievement, particularly for the Israeli Air Force, has been tracking down and destroying active launchers. At the same time, we've been targeting the broader ballistic missile production chain in Iran, including multiple sites where the missiles are manufactured. One major complex we struck, known as 'Missile City', contains several factories that produce components for ballistic missiles."

Diamond explained that there are three major goals of this war: to make sure Iran never has nuclear weapons, to irreparably damage its ballistic missile programme, and to stop the proxy programme.

He explained that due to its successes, the IDF is now starting to target the financiers in surgical strikes, to neutralise the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and Hezbollah liaison.

He also explained that the IDF is seeing collapse within the regime.

Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Hirsch, a leading expert on international law and terror financing, explained, "I don't think there's been any clear statement on a goal to tear Iran apart. I think the opposite has been true. There has been a very clear statement, both from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and from President Donald Trump, that the goal of the war is to avert the imminent danger that existed from this regime, but to maintain to the best extent possible the territorial integrity of Iran. Iran is for the Iranian people.

"We're not at war with the Iranian people. We're at war with the Iranian terror regime. And once they've gone, we wish the Iranian people peace and harmony in their homeland."

Hirsch explained that this war comes as a result of a pre-emptive strike to dismantle the regime, which has been threatening Israel for years.

"It's part of a plan. This is why Iran and Ali Khamenei, the Iranian regime, and this Axis of Terror, spend $100 billion [R1.6 trillion] developing their nuclear weapons programme. It's not only developing the sites, but the upkeep every single year," said Hirsch. "It's ensuring that every single year more and more centrifuges are imported, more and more uranium is enriched to get to that position where you are already a nuclear power. What are they using nuclear power for? They're not using it for friendly reasons. They're using it to threaten and to annihilate Israel. That is their stated goal."

Hirsch explained that 7 October 2023 was a watershed moment, where we were able to see Iran working from Gaza through Hamas, and then other Iranian proxies like Hezbollah, the Houthis, and then the IRGC itself entering the fray. This all necessitated the current war.

"They're openly attacking Israel from sovereign Iran and directly attacking the civilian population in Israel predominantly. They're not attacking military sites. They're attacking anything that comes around," he said. "Just today, we heard the disastrous news that several Israelis had been killed by cluster bombs fired by the IRGC, which just spread and covered an entire region. That's something that, when used against the civilian population, is a flagrant breach of humanitarian law, the laws of war."

Diamond asserted that while Israelis have been under attack since 28 February, there's a resilience and morale that can be felt across the country.

"There's a special home front situation right now. Most of the people are at home, there's no school, and people still have to be near shelters. But the Israeli resilience is unbelievable. Everybody's listening to the Home Front Command, which is important because it saves lives.

"The spirit of the people is unbelievable. It's in ranks in the military, our pilots, our men and women that are operating these amazing machines, and the ground crew and aerial defence systems. The morale is high, which is important because we're not finished yet. This is not the end. We're in the middle."

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# Jewish South Africans ride for endurance, health, and friendship

**CLAUDIA GROSS**

"I actually started crying right there on the bike," says Michelle Christian. "It wasn't just about finishing a race." Christian was among the Jewish South Africans who took part in the 2026 Cape Town Cycle Tour on Sunday 8 March. For some riders in the community, the event has become a long-standing tradition repeated over decades. For others, it represents a personal milestone reached after years of change.

Gail Blacher completed the race for the 26th time this year. Cycling became part of her life when she was living in Johannesburg and joined a group of friends who regularly went mountain biking. "At first it was really hard," she says. "But it got easier."

The group would meet on weekends to ride together, often followed by coffee or lunch. Blacher says the routine quickly became something they looked forward to each week. Within a year of starting to cycle, she travelled to Cape Town to take part in the Cycle Tour for the first time. "I saw that I could do it and I haven't missed one for the past 26 years," she says.

Nevertheless, Blacher says cycling has always been more social than competitive for her. She rides regularly throughout the year and continues to meet friends through the sport. "After the ride you talk about how you felt, and you always have that in common," she said.

During this year's race, one moment stood out. Her chain slipped off her bicycle and she struggled to put it back on. Another rider stopped to help. "She got off her bike and helped me put the chain back on," Blacher says. "That's the camaraderie you get from fellow cyclists."

Blacher says the Cycle Tour has also taken on a charitable dimension for her. She now rides to raise money for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Her brother, Colin Blacher, also rode the race this year. He has been cycling for about 30 years and has taken part in the Cycle Tour more than two dozen times.

Cycling became his primary sport after a long period playing squash competitively. In his younger years he played provincial squash and later spent time coaching the sport in Israel while travelling. As he got older, injuries made squash more difficult. He began cycling instead and gradually built up a routine of regular rides with friends.

"It's just become a way of life really," he says. Blacher now lives on the West Coast and rides frequently to maintain his fitness. He says he believes regular cardio exercise is important as people get older. "I try and keep myself in condition throughout the year," he says.

This year's race came shortly after he tore his Achilles tendon and had surgery in December. After a period in plaster and rehabilitation, he was unsure he would be able to take part. "I actually thought I wasn't going to ride," he says.

He eventually returned to the saddle and completed the race, although he says he felt the effects of the injury during the ride. At one point along the route he stopped briefly in Scarborough with friends for coffee before continuing to the finish. "Just bumping into people I hadn't seen in a while was really nice," he says.


Colin Blacher, Larry Mallach, Ryan Jossel, and Neil 'Sanchez' Schaffer

Jacob Hirschmann's connection to the Cycle Tour also stretches back decades. He first heard about the event many years ago and decided to attempt the distance, even though he had not ridden seriously since he was a child cycling to school. "I thought if other people can do it, so can I," he says.

He bought a bicycle, trained, and entered the race. Hirschmann recalls that finishing the event left a strong impression. "The only unhappy part about the ride was when I crossed the finish line, because that means it's over" he says.

Over the years he became involved with a cycling group that travelled widely to take part in events across southern Africa. Their rides took them through Namibia, Botswana, and various parts of South Africa. Hirschmann has also completed international rides, including a journey from the north of Israel to the south on mountain bikes.

For him, mountain biking remains particularly appealing because of the environment in which it takes place. "We're in the open, we're in the bush," he says. "It's a whole different world out there."

This year's Cycle Tour came after an injury that forced him to stop training for several months. He resumed training only in mid-January, leaving about six weeks to prepare. "I had no idea whether I was going to be able to make it," he says.

He approached the race cautiously, pacing himself and focusing on steady progress along the route. Hirschmann says he divides long rides into smaller sections to make them easier to manage mentally. "It's me against the road," he says.

Michelle Christian represents a newer generation of Cycle Tour riders whose journeys into cycling began more recently. She started cycling during the COVID-19 lockdown as a way to exercise and improve her health. "What started as a simple idea to be more active quickly became something I looked forward to every day," she says.

Her first attempt at the full 109 km distance ended when she missed the cut-off time. She returned the following year to ride the shorter route, before attempting the full distance again this year. "For me, this year was about unfinished business," she says.

Christian says preparing for the race involved both physical training and mental preparation. She trained consistently over several months to build up the distance. "Preparing for a 109 km race is as much about what happens in your head as it is about the hours in the saddle," she says.

Her participation is also linked to a broader health journey. Several years ago, she weighed more than 147kg. During a visit to Dubai to celebrate her son's 21st birthday, she and her wife decided to change their lifestyles. "We realised our size was stopping us from truly living and celebrating that milestone," she says.

Since then, both have lost more than 70kg and focused on improving their health. Cycling has become central to that change. When she reached the final stretch of the race this year, the emotions of the journey became overwhelming. "That feeling when you see the finish line after conquering Chappies and Suikerbossie is something I'll never forget," she says. "Completing the Cycle Tour is the ultimate proof that I have reclaimed my life"

Across these riders' experiences, the Cycle Tour remains a shared point of connection. Some have returned to it year after year for decades. Others arrived more recently through personal change. Each rider faced the same route around the Cape Peninsula and the same challenge of reaching the finish line.

# Tessa Barlin's journey from the Kalahari to the Saftas

**CLAUDIA GROSS**

When Tessa Barlin saw the title of her documentary on the South African Film and Television Awards (Safta) nominees' list, her first feeling was not triumph, but disbelief. "I had to give myself a proper pep talk," she says. "Being nominated is already a big deal. You have to show up."

Barlin has been nominated in the documentary short category for *Fading Footprints*, a film that traces the lives and knowledge systems of a San community in Botswana.

The Safta awards ceremony takes place on 13 and 14 March.

The nomination places her among five filmmakers competing in one of the country's most prestigious industry events, which recognises excellence across film and television. For Barlin, the moment is both professional recognition and an opportunity to expand the reach of a story she believes carries urgent global relevance. "I do believe in the film and I do believe in the message," she says. "Entering the Saftas was about giving it a platform for furthering the conversation."

The documentary was filmed in 2021 by a small crew of five and released in 2024. Barlin directed the project, working alongside cinematographer Moses Tau; fixer and location manager Dan Myburg; photographer Bridget Uttar Kornetzky; and a local cook, Olivia Mojakwe, who supported the team in the field.

The production began with a very different concept. Barlin originally intended to explore humanity's relationship with the stars and the shared idea that people are made of stardust. That changed once filming began.

"While we were there, we realised we were with a group of people who are the last custodians of indigenous hunting and gathering knowledge," she says. "If we don't start talking about it now, that knowledge and that lineage will be lost. That would be the biggest loss to humanity."

*Fading Footprints* documents not only daily life but a sophisticated understanding of the natural environment that has developed over generations. Barlin believes this knowledge is essential at a time of accelerating climate crisis. "We need to be centring indigenous voices in the fight against climate change," she says.

The project has always extended beyond the screen. A fundraising screening at Cape Town's Labia Theatre enabled Barlin to return to the San community with the completed film for a local showing. "That was the whole purpose," she says. "To take it back to them."

The response there shaped her sense of responsibility towards the people who appear in the documentary. If it wins, she hopes to send something tangible back to the community. "I've thought about whether there is prize money and what I would do with it," she says. "Even if there isn't, I would like to give them something they've been wanting, like a film projector."


Khava Keharara, Tjivita Xwii, Tessa Barlin, Xgao Gomme, Dam Komtsae, Nxuoka Kgao

Barlin's connection to the story is also personal and rooted in her Jewish identity. She describes a strong sense of recognition in the San experience of landlessness and displacement. "The biggest link is the notion of landlessness," she says. "My ancestors didn't have land either. I felt connected in that sense." That connection also led her to reflect on the tension between settlement and nomadism.

"Just because Jews have now settled in Israel, South Africa, or America doesn't mean that's the right way for everyone," she says. "We should still be advocating for the San and the Khoi to be able to practise their traditional way of life and not force them to settle in one place."

She has recently extended her research into the early history of agriculture in the Middle East, and how ancient farming developed from the environmental knowledge of hunter gatherers. "The only reason people were able to start planting food is because they had such an intimate knowledge of the vegetation that was already there," she says. "That comes from a very interconnected relationship with the land."

For Barlin, that historical link deepens the sense of continuity between ancient Jewish experience and the contemporary San world.

Although she previously worked on the Safta-winning documentary *The Water Dancers*, she wasn't present when that award was received. This time, she plans to attend the Saftas. The nomination itself has already shifted her perspective on her career. "I'm trying to think of it like a silver medal," she says. "Being nominated is something many people never get to say."

For a documentary short, a nomination can significantly extend its life, opening doors to new audiences, funders, and collaborators. Barlin hopes the visibility will bring attention not only to her work, but to the community at its centre. "It's about the conversation continuing," she says.

Her approach to filmmaking has been shaped by in-depth conversations with audiences after screenings, where questions about representation, ownership, and environmental responsibility come to the fore. "That's where the real growth has happened for me as a filmmaker," she says.

As the ceremony approaches, she is balancing anticipation with perspective. "There's a 20% chance of winning," she says. "But the nomination itself means the film has been seen."

Whatever the outcome, the journey from a remote landscape in Botswana to one of South Africa's most visible cultural stages marks a significant moment for a filmmaker whose work is grounded in listening to the voices of people often overlooked.

## African relations with Israel resilient despite Iran war

>>Continued from page 8

significantly, relations could even improve, including with South Africa. The United States and Israel are working on trilateral cooperation with African states, and perhaps adding more African countries to the Abraham Accords.

"Israel is increasingly perceived by many African governments as a capable regional power with concrete benefits to offer in areas such as technology, agriculture, security, water management, and innovation. That practical cooperation continues to shape relations more than ideological positioning in many capitals," said Fein-Grossman.

"Like any international relationship, momentum can slow during periods of conflict or crisis, and we have seen that happen at different moments. But the underlying trajectory remains positive," Fein-Grossman said.

She said, "Africa's strategic importance is growing rapidly due to its expanding population, vast arable land, and its significant share of critical minerals and natural resources.

"At the same time, regions such as the Horn of Africa have become strategically important for Israel, particularly in the context of Red Sea security and broader regional dynamics. There is also a foundation of shared experience and values between Israel and many African nations, including histories of state-building, development challenges, and the pursuit of technological and agricultural innovation. Strengthening these relationships requires consistent engagement, long-term investment, and respect for each country's sovereignty. When that approach is sustained, the partnership has clear win-win potential. Looking ahead, if the regional landscape changes significantly, including potential shifts within Iran, Israel's role as a partner for African nations could expand even further."

# Celebrating the story of 702

**DAVID SAKS**

The compelling story of the innovative and in-your-face Radio 702 had never been properly told. The saga of how it came into being, the impact it made, and the legendary personalities who were part of it. That deficiency has now been made good by the lively new book *The 702 Story – In Touch, In Tune and Independent*.

Many years in the making, the book was officially launched last week at the headquarters of Primedia in Sandton. Those in attendance included a sizeable number of 702 veterans who were household names in their day, among them Stan Katz and Jenny Crwys-Williams, as well as members of the Kirsh family.

Mushe Kirsh speaking at the book launch with John Perlman in the background

It was the late Issie Kirsh who founded the station in 1980 and led it in its formative decades. The evening was also framed as a tribute to him and everything he accomplished.

The event, emceed by well-known 702 presenter John Perlman, commenced with a welcome message by the station's long-serving programme manager, Alastair Teeling-Smith. Then, Mushe Kirsh spoke about her late husband and how he had put his unique stamp on a radio station that for him was always much more than just a commercial enterprise. For him, she said, it had from the outset also been a vehicle for doing what he loved to do, which was to help others and perform acts of kindness. Among the path-blazing social outreach initiatives he headed up were the 702 Helpline, the Crisis Centre in Hillbrow, and the unforgettable Concert in the Park, organised to raise funds for Operation Hunger and attended by more than 120 000 people of all races, a first for South Africa.

Kirsh thanked the book's authors and its publisher Batya Bricker, who both guided the project through the production stages and organised its publicity, including the official launch.

The main event of the evening took the form of a conversation between Perlman and Williams, who was first brought in by Issie Kirsh to write the book and wrote its first draft. Williams, a reporter in the 702 studios in its early years, emphasised how 702 had been something everyone talked about and how it was the station that up-and-coming broadcasting talent across the country wanted to be part of. The original title of the book, he said, had been *The Only Show in Town*, and for the local radio scene at the time that had literally been the case.

The evening concluded with closing remarks by Issie and Mushe's eldest son, William, founder of the media juggernaut Primedia, of which 702 has from the outset been an important component. William recounted how he had gone about realising his vision of establishing the company, and the highs and some considerable lows along the way. Throughout this time, he said, he had been able to rely on his late father's unswerving support, guidance, and wisdom, both in the business field and in terms of always being his role model for living an upright and moral life.

# Not all heroes wear capes

**INNER VOICE**
*Howard Feldman*

It sounded more fun than it was.

"When you come upstairs," I called down to my wife, "please bring disposable gloves and a plastic packet."

She didn't need to ask who it was for. Only what had happened that required those particular items.

Penny, our French poodle, had gifted me with a bird she had sacrificed in my honour. And rather than leave me to discover her offering by chance, she had delivered it directly to my room and carefully placed it on my bed.

I am not proud of the way I screamed. Or behaved. I was not brave. Or manly. But over the years I have come to accept my shortcomings. I have accepted that I am no warrior when it comes to animals. Living or dead. No matter their size or their ability to eat my flesh.

Which is a bit weird. Because I am perfectly comfortable taking on bigots and haters and am happy to shrug off the daily death threats.

But a dead pigeon is, to me, like a stone to Goliath.

Which is why it was my wife who needed to remove the beast. Either that or we would have had to move homes.

To be fair, Penny looked extremely pleased with herself. She had the posture of a soldier returning from battle. Chest out. Tail wagging. Eyes bright with pride.

And yet instead of gratitude, she got shrieking and a request for rubber gloves.

It was not the reaction she had imagined. Humans complicate things unnecessarily.

Which is perhaps why, as I stood on the far side of the room pointing at the bed as if directing a bomb disposal unit, I couldn't help but reflect on how odd our fears can be.

There I was, a person who will happily sit behind a microphone and challenge politicians, extremists and professional trolls, completely immobilised by a pigeon that had clearly already had a very bad day.

Perspective is everything.

My wife, who has lived with me long enough to know there would be no heroics coming from my side of the marriage, arrived armed with the requested equipment. She surveyed the scene calmly, like a seasoned crime-scene investigator.

"You're ridiculous," she said.

This was not said unkindly. It was simply a statement of fact.

With the efficiency of someone who has clearly done this before – which worries me slightly – she removed the bird, wrapped it in the plastic packet, and disposed of it.

Penny followed the entire operation with interest, her head tilting from side to side, clearly confused as to why her magnificent gift was being treated like biological waste.

And just like that, the crisis was over.

But it got me thinking about the strange bravery that many of us practise in public life.

It's easy to imagine courage as something dramatic: standing up to mobs, speaking truth to power, confronting hatred. And sometimes it is exactly that.

But courage is also deeply selective.

Some people can argue constitutional law on television but cannot change a lightbulb. Others can run into burning buildings but faint at the sight of blood. And then there are those of us who will challenge extremists on social media but require protective equipment to deal with a pigeon.

Each of us has our Goliath. Mine, apparently, comes with feathers.

There is probably a lesson in all of this, though I'm not entirely sure what it is.

Perhaps it's that bravery comes in different forms. Or that the people who appear fearless often have their own peculiar phobias. Or maybe it's simply that in every household there is one person who deals with the pigeons and one who writes about them afterwards.

In our house, the division of labour is very clear.

Penny hunts. My wife cleans up the evidence. And I scream, before reflecting deeply on the human condition.

And turning the whole thing into a column.

**A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies**

# A week of reflection

**ABOVE BOARD**
*Karen Milner*

This week, I'm writing from Australia, where I'm visiting family. While here, I've had the privilege of meeting with Daniel Aghion KC, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Daniel and I spoke frankly about the well-being of the Jewish community in Australia following the horrific Bondi attacks.

What struck me most was learning that there's been a broad understanding in Australia that importing foreign conflicts into local discourse breeds division and hate. While this awareness is particularly evident there, it's a lesson every diaspora community needs to internalise.

**Remembering Mosiuoa Lekota: A friend to our community**

Last week brought deeply saddening news: the passing of Mosiuoa Lekota, a courageous freedom fighter, distinguished statesman, and devoted public servant.

Lekota earned his place in South African history through his significant role in the struggle against apartheid and in ushering in our democratic dispensation. He went on to hold numerous important positions, including serving as the first premier of the Free State. Whether from within the ruling party or later from the opposition benches, he devoted himself tirelessly to representing the South African people and advancing their well-being.

Over many years, Lekota was a warm and steadfast friend to the Jewish community. Jewish leaders met with him on frequent occasions and could always rely on his support, wisdom, and constructive counsel. He participated in many significant Jewish communal events, including speaking at South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) conferences and at multi-party debates organised by the Board to engage and inform the Jewish community ahead of national and local government elections. Lekota recognised and respected the Jewish community's connection to the State of Israel, and his approach to this and related matters was consistently fair, balanced, and constructive.

In an era when such fairness and balance have become increasingly rare, Lekota's example stands out as a reminder of what principled leadership looks like. He understood that one could engage in robust political debate about the Middle East without demonising South African Jews or questioning our place in this country. He embodied the values of our Constitution, treating all citizens with dignity and respect regardless of their background or beliefs.

The SAJBD extends its sincere condolences to the Lekota family and to Lekota's many friends and colleagues across the political spectrum. Our national director, Wendy Kahn, was honoured to give a eulogy at his memorial in Soweto on Wednesday, as we mourn his loss alongside our fellow South Africans and pay grateful tribute to his memory. May his example of principled leadership, fairness, and genuine friendship across communal lines serve as a model for those who follow.

**The Jewish chapter in 702's story**

Last week saw the launch of a book on the history of radio station 702, *The Story of 702: In Touch, In Tune and Independent*. The book was co-authored by SAJBD professional David Saks, an expert on South African Jewish history.

Like so many quintessentially South African stories, 702's origins include a Jewish chapter. The station was founded by the Kirsh brothers, Natie and Issie, originally as a music station based in Bophuthatswana. When it later shifted to talk radio, it became, as David explains, part of a "cultural revolution" that brought communities into conversation with one another.

In this light, the SAJBD vice-president, Mary Kluk, was hosted on the channel for a frank and challenging discussion on Jewish identity and antisemitism. The interview was an example of the power and impact of talk radio at its best, engaging, open, and insightful.

Many of us have vivid memories of the station and the central role it played in creating a platform for the difficult, meaningful debates that shaped the period, our transformation into democracy, and that continue to define our South African experience.

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

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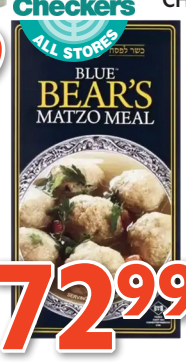


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