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South African Jewish Report

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Ramaphosa signs support for convicted terrorist

TALI FEINBERG

President Cyril Ramaphosa is the first sitting head of state to sign an international petition demanding that Israel release convicted terrorist Marwan Barghouti.

Ramaphosa chose Freedom Day, 27 April, to sign a statement that calls for the "immediate release" of Barghouti, who was found guilty of leading and planning multiple terror attacks against Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada.

An Israeli court convicted Barghouti in 2004 on five counts of murder and one of attempted murder, sentencing him to five consecutive life terms plus 40 years in prison.

But the pledge Ramaphosa signed says Barghouti is "an elected representative unjustly imprisoned for 23 years, who is widely recognised as a Palestinian 'Mandela' figure". It says his imprisonment "constitutes a grave injustice and stands as a major barrier to peace".

The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation (AKF) announced Ramaphosa's signing of the petition, saying his endorsement "reinforces South Africa's duty to stand for justice, human rights, and international law", and that it aligns with South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Barghouti was a leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which were responsible for numerous suicide bombings and shooting attacks during the Second Intifada. He is accused of orchestrating, financing, and facilitating terrorist acts. He's been imprisoned

for the murder of a Greek monk in Jerusalem in 2021, the killing of a woman in the West Bank in 2002, and three murders in Tel Aviv in 2002.

The AKF called on heads of state, parliamentarians, and political leaders to "follow Ramaphosa's lead, sign the pledge, and publicly demand Barghouti's release".

Executive Director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, Benji Shulman, says Ramaphosa's support

of Barghouti is not new. When Ramaphosa was deputy president in 2017, he and a number of Cabinet ministers embarked on a 24-hour hunger strike in support of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including Barghouti.

"Proponents of Barghouti's release like to try compare him to Nelson Mandela. However, Barghouti was imprisoned for his role in the murder of Israelis during the Second Intifada," says

Shulman. "Nelson Mandela was never convicted of murdering anyone, and, in fact, said that 'terrorism inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it, undermining any public support it might otherwise garner'."

"The violence of Barghouti haunts the campaign [for his release] and those associated with it to this day," says Shulman.

Ray Hartley, who leads the Platform for African Democrats, says, "This

is yet another unwise escalation of South Africa's partisan approach to international relations, and it will aggravate an already strained relationship with the United States. Ramaphosa should ask himself why he is the first head of state to sign this. Perhaps others are judging this more wisely."

Former senior White House official Lawrence J Haas is a senior fellow for US foreign policy at the American Foreign

Policy Council think tank. He told the *SA Jewish Report* that "the notion that any head of state would sign such a petition to support a convicted terrorist who is serving multiple life sentences is morally reprehensible".

However, "while outrageous", it's not terribly surprising in light of South Africa's decidedly anti-Israel activities in recent years, says Haas. "I don't know that it will significantly affect US-South Africa relations, simply because it's another step down the path that South Africa has been walking openly for years."

David May, a research analyst at US think tank the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, says that comparisons between Barghouti and Mandela are not only false, but "tarnish Madiba's legacy".

"Mandela should not be associated with the mastermind of the Second Intifada, a wave of terrorism that claimed the lives of more than 1 000 Israelis," says May. "Perhaps South African politicians should focus on protecting their constituents from violence, rather than subjecting Israelis to it."

He says Barghouti's popularity on the Palestinian street is an indictment of Palestinian political culture. "Domestically, Barghouti's role in killing Israelis is an asset, not a liability. Perhaps this is a good opportunity for African National Congress (ANC) leaders to shine a light on the ramifications of Palestinian violence, an important angle intentionally erased from the

Continued on page 3>>

Gearing up for Olympics



Photo: Israeli Olympic Committee / Oded Kami

Olympic hopeful Naama Noyman has been training in South Africa

See story on page 3

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Ahavat Yisrael. What the world needs now



RABBI DAVID MASINTER

OPINION

Before 7 October the world seemed to be getting better. Especially through Jewish eyes. The Abraham Accords, a greater sensitivity to kindness and human rights, and a prosperous and proud Israel. But 7 October changed everything. We all realised antisemitism is alive and well. In London, Sydney, Toronto, all over the United States. Maybe the world gave us a break after the Holocaust, but just 80 years later and it's back with a vengeance.

How should we respond? Unity, unity, unity! It's our secret weapon! To put it simply, it's all about observing two essential mitzvot in the Torah: The mitzvah of not hating another Jew, and Ahavat Yisrael, loving your fellow Jew. To elaborate, it's not just about being nice to one another, caring and sharing, or visiting the sick, which we should be doing anyway for everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. Rather, it's about understanding that there is something unique about Am Yisrael, the Jewish people – that we are truly one, as Kabbalah explains, our bodies



may be separate but spiritually we are one. Ever wondered why when a member of any other faith is accused of doing something wrong, their entire faith and its adherents don't stand accused, but when a Jew is involved, the world literally places all Jews and all of Israel on trial? The answer is, because we are one. We know it and the whole world knows it! We may have disagreements and differences of opinion. We are entitled, and in fact encouraged, to disagree with each other. But hatred, hurting one another, back-stabbing or gossip, bearing grudges

and the like, only tear our souls apart. That's why the great sage Hillel said of the mitzvah of Ahavat Yisrael that it is the whole Torah and all the rest is just commentary. If we are doing every other mitzvah, but not this one, we are blemished and Hashem's blessings cannot descend. As we say in our daily prayers, *Barcheinu avinu kulanu k'echad*, Hashem blesses us when we are one. Join the Ahavat Yisrael campaign to bring unity, to bring blessing, and to bring Moshiach immediately.

• Rabbi David Masinter is the director of Chabad House in Johannesburg.

Greek choir refuses to sing with Jews in Bondi Beach benefit

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

A concert to raise money for the victims of the shooting attack on a Chanukah party on Sydney's Bondi Beach has been cancelled after the Greek choir that was to take part voted not to sing with a Jewish choir.

Most of the 50-member Australian Hellenic Choir "politically objected" to singing alongside the Sydney Jewish Choral Society. Others said they did not feel safe in a joint performance with Jews. "I was not expecting this to happen at all as we'd performed with the Jewish choir without issue in 2022," the Greek choir's founder and president, James Tsolakis, told *The Australian* newspaper. "The Jewish people are all into it, I'm into it, but the Greek choir was a bit anti doing it because of the political climate."

The Concert for Hope and Unity, which had

government support, was to have featured *The Ballad of Mauthausen*, about a romance between Greek and Jewish prisoners at the Nazi concentration camp. The groups performed together in 2022, but the reaction to the Gaza war has changed perceptions of Jews across Australia, including, Tsolakis said, within his community.

"There's a bit of antisemitism in the Greek community; I didn't realise the extent of it. Unfortunately, we have a lot of people in the community blaming the Jewish community for what's happening in Israel, Palestine ... that's not correct," Tsolakis said. "You want to hate [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu? Hate Netanyahu, but what have the Jewish people done to you? The whole antisemitism thing has got to be wound back."

Following the Bondi Beach massacre, in which 15 people were killed, the Australian government

established a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion to examine policies and practices that have contributed to anti-Jewish sentiment in the country.

The Jewish Choral Society has made an official complaint to the royal commission. Choir chairperson Anne Spira told *The Australian* that the incident reflected a broad dynamic that many Australian Jews have experienced. "The result is, like many other Jews in the arts since 7 October, we have been cancelled," Spira said. "We have been deplatformed and it is deeply upsetting for us and for the broader Jewish community, who have been the target of anti-Jewish racism in this country for two and a half years."

The *Greek City Times*, an Australian publication, called the choir's vote "embarrassing". *The Australian* said in an editorial that the incident was an appropriate topic for the royal commission. "The vote to opt out of the event almost beggars belief," the editorial said. "In light of antisemitic tensions that have reared their ugly head in Australia since 7 October 2023, those who didn't want to be associated with a Jewish choir event have displayed an alarming lack of historical empathy and understanding."



Community members gather outside Bondi Pavilion following the deadly shooting at a Chanukah party on 15 December 2025

Photo: Gregory Richardson/Getty Images

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The thought doesn't count

This week's parsha teaches us about one of the most important mitzvot in the Torah, Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name through our actions. The Torah presents this mitzvah with the verse "I will be made holy among the Jewish people". Unlike most commandments in the Torah, which are expressed in direct, active language – "you shall do", "you shall take" – this mitzvah is written in the passive voice. The question arises: Why is this so? Why does the Torah not command explicitly, "You shall sanctify My Name", but instead states, "I will be made holy"?

This nuance reveals a profound insight into the nature of Kiddush Hashem. In most of the 613 mitzvot, the emphasis is placed squarely on the action itself. A person is commanded to perform a specific deed, and the fulfilment of that command lies in the act. Whether it is putting on tefillin, giving charity, or observing Shabbat, the mitzvah is defined by what one does.

However, Kiddush Hashem operates on a fundamentally different level. Here, the Torah shifts the focus away from the action and onto the outcome. The passive construction "I will be made holy" teaches that the ultimate concern is not merely what we do, but what our actions produce. The sanctification of G-d's Name is not measured by intention alone, nor even by the action itself, but by the effect it has on the world around us.

This distinction is crucial. In life, we often engage in behaviours with the best of thoughts and intentions, believing we are acting correctly. Yet we cannot always predict how our actions will be perceived or what consequences they will yield. A deed that seems righteous in isolation may, in a broader context, lead to misunderstanding or even desecration of G-d's Name (*Chillul Hashem*).

The passive voice underscores that this mitzvah is not entirely within our control in the same way as others. We are responsible for acting with integrity, wisdom, and awareness, but the final "sanctification" occurs through the impression we leave on others. It is a relational mitzvah, one that exists in the space between ourselves, other people, and G-d.

This perspective challenges us to think more deeply about our behaviour. It is not enough to ask, "Am I doing the right thing?" We must also ask, "What impact will this have?" How will this reflect on Torah values? Will this action bring honour to G-d's Name or diminish it?

In a world where every action is visible and often amplified, this teaching is especially relevant. Each interaction becomes an opportunity to either elevate or obscure the

Torah Thought

Rabbi Ryan Goldstein
Muizenberg Shul



Divine Presence. The Torah's choice of the passive voice reminds us that holiness isn't only something we perform, it's something that emerges through us, shaped by the way our actions resonate in the lives of others.

Ultimately, "I will be made holy" is both a statement and a responsibility. It calls upon us to live with heightened awareness, recognising that our lives are not only personal journeys but also reflections of something far greater.

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Workers' Day on 1 May honours the fight for workers' rights, recognising those who struggled for fair wages and better conditions, and the role workers played in ending apartheid. It's also a reminder to reflect on progress and keep advocating for fairness.
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Israeli mountain biker makes SA her Olympics training ground

LEE TANKLE

Israeli professional cross-country mountain bike cyclist Naama Noyman is making a name for herself in South Africa, having been unable to return home because of the war in the Middle East. She came 10th in the Cape Epic from 15 to 22 March.

She will now begin her campaign to make it into the Olympics team for next year.

On Sunday, 26 April, she placed second in the UCI Mountain Bike Continental Series – SA XCO Cup, and on 18 April, she won the Nedbank Namibia XC 1 + UCI XCO Junior Series race, a high-level international mountain bike race held in Windhoek.

The latter was her first international win in two years.

“It was amazing, it was super cool. I haven’t won abroad in two years,” Noyman said. “I’m very happy to win now and to be back on my form. It was very exciting. It was emotional.”

Just before she was set to fly to South Africa on 5 March to race in the Cape Epic, the war with Iran began, making leaving Israel complicated. She had to travel through Egypt, as she was determined not to miss out on riding the biggest mountain bike race in the world.

“It’s a race that’s on the bucket list of any mountain biker,” Noyman told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “And last year I finished third in a very big race in Europe, and it secured an invitation from the organisers to be a part of the elite in the Cape Epic. I hadn’t planned to do it this year, but I got the invitation,” she said.

“It’s not like you can postpone it by a year. So, I had to go for it. I said yes immediately. It has been my dream to do it since I learned about mountain biking. And it was actually a very good time to do it because it’s right before the beginning of the Olympic campaign. It’s a great physical challenge.”

The Olympic campaign, she said, is the criteria she needs to follow to qualify for the Olympic team. She starts it on 1 May and it continues until May 2028. During this time, she must complete between 40 and 50 races to collect the necessary points to compete in the next Olympic Games.

For Noyman, coming 10th in the Cape Epic was a massive achievement. But it meant even more than that to her. She said she felt it connected her with the roots of mountain biking and with what made her fall in love with the sport in the first place.

“I’m grateful for it because it set me in a mental place to start the Olympic campaign in a very high place for me. I’m feeling so connected to my path and to my bike now,” she said.

However, after finishing the Cape Epic, it became clear there was no way for her to return to Israel to continue her training because of the war. So, she and her coach decided she would continue training and racing in South Africa and launch her Olympic campaign here.

“My coach and I came up with a plan of continuing racing in Africa for now. Because in Europe, it’s still a bit of off-season for racing. And here it’s the beginning of the season. Here, there are some good races to do. So, I did two races in Namibia. And now I have races here in Johannesburg.”

When the Jewish National Fund South Africa and the Israel Centre found out that Noyman was effectively stuck in South Africa, they took her under their wing. They helped her connect with the South African mountain



Naama Noyman racing in Johannesburg on Sunday 26 April

biking community so she could keep up with her rigorous training schedule. The Capri Wheelers Cycling Club hosted an event for her on 23 April to support her campaign to get to the Olympics.

This is Noyman’s second Olympic campaign. In her previous one, she just missed making the grade, reaching first place outside of the qualification. Which means she was next in line, within a very small margin.

Once she makes it, she will make history, as the first Israeli woman mountain biker to perform at the Olympics.

“In this Olympic campaign I come with much more experience, I’m also in a better shape, and I’m much more in the right mindset to do it. I have no doubt I need to make it happen for me and for Israel.”

Noyman said the prospect of racing in

South Africa was exciting for her, not only on a personal level, but also to represent Israel. However, because of the war, her kit for the national championship didn’t arrive in time, so she had to race with a black kit with only her sponsors’ names on it.

“I don’t go in the streets and shout that I am from Israel, but I also don’t hide it. And in the cycling community, it’s very safe. And also, everybody knows me. Everybody knows my story.

“They know I’m from Israel. They know my brother is serving in the army. And they know that I moved down south in Israel two years ago and work with youth affected by 7 October in the Gaza envelope. Everybody knows my story; I’m not hiding it. What I get from the cycling community is nothing but empathy,” she said.

“I was very sad that I still didn’t have my special Israeli kit with me. I’ve been wearing my black kit, but I will be getting the one with Israel on it when I get back,” she said.

Keeping up her training routine in a different country isn’t unusual as she’s always adjusting her routine to wherever she is in the world. On average, she rides 20 to 25 hours a week on her bike, with running and strength training added to the mix.

“My discipline is the cross-country discipline, the Olympic discipline on mountain bike. And it’s very tough to train for this because we use all of the energy systems in the body. You have anaerobic and aerobic. I race for an hour and a half. And I go full gas, but it’s an hour and a half. It’s not a 100m sprint. We do both long rides and moderate pace, and we also do short intervals with very high intensity.”

Noyman grew up in Misgav, a town in the north of Israel, which she described as being the best place in Israel for cycling, as there is a mountain biking club and an excellent coach there.

“The path was almost laid out for me, I had older riders to look up to, and they were already competing abroad,” she said. “My coach took me under his wing. He saw my potential early on and helped me secure sponsorships, because while my parents supported me as much as they could, they weren’t able to do so financially. He made sure I had the best equipment and took me overseas to race, putting me on this path.”

Ramaphosa signs support for convicted terrorist

>>Continued from page 1

ANC’s lawfare campaign against Israel at the ICJ and beyond.”

Elliott Abrams, a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at a prominent non-partisan think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC, has criticised *The New York Times* for calling Barghouti “a Palestinian leader and parliamentarian”, ignoring his terrorist ties.

Abrams told the *SA Jewish Report* that the US government will probably pay little attention to Ramaphosa’s signing of the petition, but “for those in the US who do pay attention, they will note that Ramaphosa is the only head of government to sign this petition on behalf of a convicted murderer, and it will lower their opinion of him. Terrorism remains a great danger throughout the world, and his apparent indifference to it is contemptible.”

US foreign policy expert Michael Walsh says Ramaphosa’s signing of the petition will be “strongly opposed by some Israeli political factions and US special interest groups”.

However, it is “unclear what the long-term impact will be on US-South Africa relations” because “last year, Trump indicated that he might be willing to call upon [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to release Barghouti despite the potential domestic political blowback”.

Walsh explains that “at some point, the US is going to have to fill the leadership vacuum in the Palestinian Territories. When that time comes,

the Trump administration may be willing to make the same kinds of trade-offs that were made to fill the leadership vacuum in Syria.”

Yet Democratic Alliance spokesperson on international relations and cooperation, Ryan Smith, says that “it is telling that President Ramaphosa has signed a petition for the release of Barghouti, but not for the release of opposition politicians in his own region such as Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Uganda; and all the while, turning a blind eye to the massacre of innocent civilians in Iran”.

For Smith, “This is no sign of solidarity, it is yet another reflection of the ANC’s highly selective and performative morality, which it applies exclusively based on how much political mileage it can get.”

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) condemned the AKF for championing the petition. “Barghouti was convicted on multiple counts of murder and attempted murder and is serving five life sentences. That record is not contested; it is established in a court of law,” says SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks.

Yet the AKF “has chosen to lend its name to a campaign that elevates a convicted terrorist. This is a wholesale abandonment of principles”, says Marks. “It tells victims of terrorism that their suffering is negotiable. It signals that the deliberate killing of civilians can be excused, repackaged, and even celebrated. And it drags South Africa’s already strained moral credibility even lower.”

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How Jewish organisations are tackling South Africa's job crisis

CLAUDIA GROSS

Unemployment isn't just a statistic. It's a daily reality for millions of people searching for work and finding none. In the final quarter of 2025, the official unemployment rate stood at 31.4%, with about 7.8 million people out of work.

More than 17 million people are unemployed, but millions more have given up looking for jobs and aren't training or studying.

Behind these numbers are young people locked out of opportunity, often without the skills needed for a changing economy. South African Jewish organisations are among those working to help.

At ORT SA, the focus is clear. "It's really about educating for life," says Chief Executive Ariellah Rosenberg. She said the organisation's mission has remained constant over decades, centred on employability and job creation.

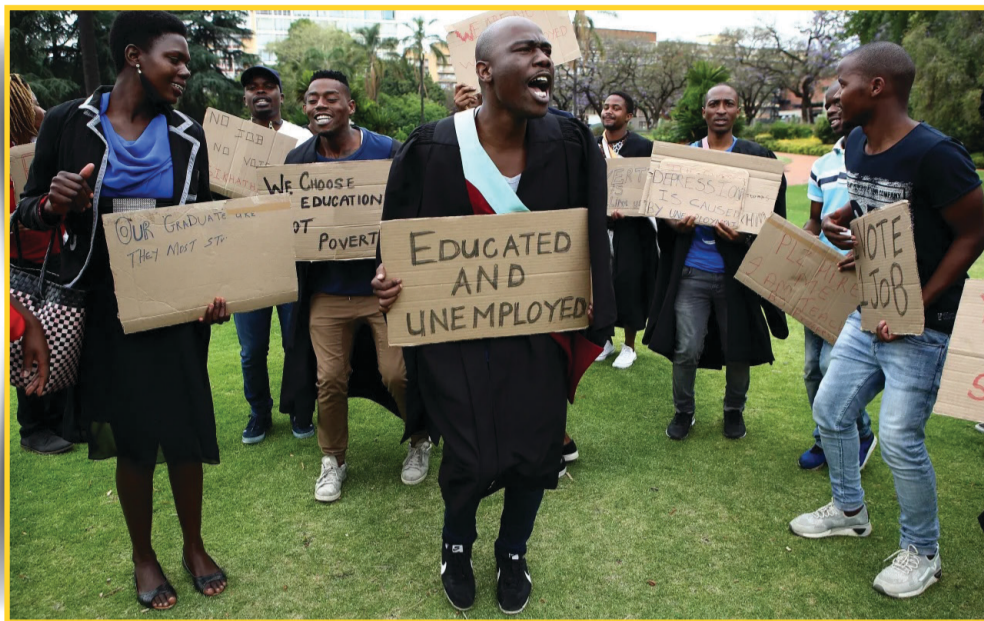
Rosenberg says the challenge isn't only limited jobs, but a mismatch between education and the needs of the labour market. She said ORT SA works to identify in-demand skills and align training accordingly. This includes programmes in coding and robotics, as well as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education initiatives. The aim is to give students skills that employers need.

ORT SA Cape, while affiliated, operates with a distinct focus on teacher training and support.

The organisation trains between 2 500 and 3 000 teachers each year, particularly in early childhood development. Alongside

this, ORT SA Cape runs programmes for unemployed youth. These include learnerships that lead to formal qualifications and internships that provide work experience.

Chief Executive Beverly Da Costa said participants are placed in schools as teaching assistants, or in small businesses.



They receive training in soft skills such as communication and time management, as well as mentoring and psychosocial support. She said the goal is to improve employability and give young people a foothold in the job market.

Education is also central to the work of the Maharishi Institute. It focuses on what founder Dr Taddy Blecher calls a demand-driven model, working with employers to identify scarce skills and training students accordingly.

"We've had a 95% job placement rate over two decades," Blecher said.

He said more than 25 000 students have been educated through the institute, with more than 22 000 placed in jobs. Training areas include artificial intelligence, data science, and cybersecurity. These reflect the changing nature of the economy and the need for future-focused skills.

Blecher said education was key to breaking cycles of poverty. He pointed

to the long-term earning potential of graduates as evidence of impact.

Within the Jewish community, Staffwise plays a more targeted role in addressing unemployment. The organisation focuses specifically on reducing Jewish unemployment through placement, networking, and career support. It connects job seekers with opportunities, offers career guidance, and works with businesses on recruitment and workforce planning. Its approach centres on building a strong employment network within the community while supporting long-term economic stability.

Beyond the Jewish community, large-scale national initiatives are also tackling unemployment. The Youth Employment Service is one of the most significant of these. It is

a private sector-led initiative that partners with businesses to create 12-month paid work experiences for unemployed young people. They gain practical experience – in often their first entry into the workforce – while helping companies build future talent pipelines.

The programme has created hundreds of thousands of job opportunities in multiple sectors. It aims to bridge the gap between education and employment by ensuring that young people gain real workplace exposure, which significantly improves their chances of securing long-

term jobs.

Organisations like Afrika Tikun, under the leadership of Marc Lubner, are also addressing unemployment through long-term interventions. In a recent statement, the organisation said many young South Africans feel that opportunity is out of reach. It pointed to a growing gap between education and the job market, particularly in areas such as digital skills.

Afrika Tikun's cradle-to-career model aims to support individuals from early childhood through to employment. The focus is on building both skills and confidence, while connecting young people to real opportunities. The organisation stressed that no single entity can solve the unemployment crisis alone. Partnerships between government, business, and civil society are essential.

This view is reflected across the sector. Initiatives such as Business for South Africa also play a role in coordinating efforts between companies to support economic recovery and job creation. Together, these efforts highlight a broader ecosystem aimed at tackling unemployment from multiple angles.

For Jewish organisations, the work is rooted in both community responsibility and practical impact. Rosenberg said ORT SA's approach is shaped by an understanding of economic realities and a

commitment to equipping people with relevant skills.

Da Costa emphasised the importance of support beyond technical training, particularly for vulnerable youth. Blecher pointed to measurable outcomes, including high placement rates and long-term employment.

Despite different approaches, a common theme emerges. Education alone is not enough. Skills must align with demand, and support must extend beyond the classroom. In a country where millions remain unemployed, these organisations are working to turn potential into opportunity.



Too few workers to celebrate Workers' Day

OPINION

Every year unemployment in South Africa rises and the number of people on social welfare grows exponentially. The sociologists tell us that every person working is, on average, supporting at least five others.

In other words, even those with jobs aren't able to put money aside for savings that would translate into a roof over their head and education for their children. It's sad to hear in parliamentary debates how members of the African National Congress refer to this nightmare as "black tax".

As we celebrate Workers' Day on 1 May, it needs to be borne in mind that there are many more people in the job queue than those actually working.

The system has, to a large degree, contributed to extreme unemployment and enormous poverty. It is almost impossible to call Workers' Day a celebration, and even Freedom Day is a problematic concept. We might have political freedom, but the majority of South Africans don't



have financial freedom.

The harsh regulatory environment across the board, and in particular in the Department of Employment and Labour, has acted as a hand brake on job creation and, in fact, put us on that slippery slope of unemployment. Retrenchment is the order of the day and an investment strike in the business community has exacerbated the problem.

I sat in the Portfolio Committee on Employment and Labour in June 2019 when the Department of Labour, as it was called then, changed to fit in with this new

mandate to help create jobs. But a name change alone doesn't help in any way to create jobs.

We have nine million South Africans under the age of 34 who are not employed.

We keep hearing speeches about "growth and jobs" from every single political party. The sad thing is that their rhetoric has somehow succeeded in fooling the people.

Job creation will require extremely hard work to improve this situation. It starts with better education and, in particular, the structuring of education, which would make people "fit for purpose"

for the workplace.

I am often involved in the reduction of red tape in the Western Cape and numerous schemes to help employers hire more people. We need these structural reforms urgently.

We all know that economic growth in South Africa has not supported job creation. Many of our larger employers are looking for jobless growth using computerisation, mechanisation, and outsourcing.

Here in South Africa, we are expert in setting up commissions and national dialogues. Sadly, these structures and debates never result in any actual effort on the ground. I speak to small businesses every day in my capacity as a labour lawyer and invariably hear that investors aren't interested. Economists tell us that almost R2 trillion has been invested elsewhere. We need to understand that the system is rotten, and the rot unfortunately emanates from the top.

On the brighter side, we are seeing some results through

both Nedlac (the National Economic Development and Labour Council) and the Government of National Unity. In essence, small changes in our labour law and regulations have been supporting the growth of small business. But the reality is that changes are incremental and too slow. The Western Cape government's experiment of deregulation and cutting of red tape for small businesses is bearing fruit. The green shoots are there, but time will tell how much they grow.

There is an ongoing debate in Parliament about changes to the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. These proposed changes are to a large degree positive. They will encourage the business community to start employing. I am hoping that these amendments go through quickly and some of the more onerous regulations are removed.

• Michael Bagraim is a labour lawyer, member of Parliament, and spokesperson for employment and labour in the Democratic Alliance.



MICHAEL BAGRAIM

Chief rabbi faces blowback from Pope critique

TALI FEINBERG

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has angered and upset Christian groups, especially Catholics, by declaring that Pope Leo XIV's "hands are dripping with blood".

Goldstein said this at the Yom Hazikaron commemoration in Johannesburg on 21 April, in response to the Pope's Palm Sunday speech in which he'd said G-d does not hear the prayers of those who conduct war because "your hands are full of blood".

The chief rabbi countered that it was the Pope's hands that were "dripping with blood" because he "makes no distinction between good and evil. He makes no distinction between the barbarians of Hamas, the genocidal maniacs of Tehran, and the noble and brave soldiers of the State of Israel who are defending civilisation itself."

He said that for the Pope to "lack the moral insight to see a difference between good and evil" is to "disqualify yourself from religious leadership in your essence and in your soul. Only a religious leader who has lost his soul can say such a thing."

This is not the first time the chief rabbi has criticised a Pope. In December 2023, he called out Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, over his stance on the Gaza war, saying he was "colluding with the forces of evil who seek to annihilate the Jewish people".

WE BELIEVE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF GOODWILL WANT TO SEE PEACE PREVAIL.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) – comprised of Catholic Bishops from South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini – published an open letter at the time, saying, "We believe the allegations you present as proof of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church's hatred of Jews lack truth and objectivity, and have an air of mistrust and character assassination."

Father Hugh O'Connor, the Secretary General of the SACBC, told the *SA Jewish Report* his organisation is "saddened" by the chief rabbi's recent comments.

"We believe that all people of goodwill want to see peace prevail," said O'Connor. "Pope Leo XIV is an advocate of peace, as he does not want violence and war to be the fate of anyone, regardless of ethnicity, religious affiliation, or nation."

O'Connor says the Pope's consistent call for peace "is deeply rooted in our belief that G-d has a dream for humanity, that there would be equality, justice, and peace. Pope Leo has invited anyone who wants this to be a reality to join him. We hope

and pray that Rabbi Goldstein will unite with people of goodwill everywhere and help us bring about G-d's peaceful reign."

Other Christians were also upset about the chief rabbi's remarks. Father Russell Pollitt, a parish priest in Johannesburg,



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein speaking at the Yom Hazikaron event in Johannesburg

wrote that "to suggest that a call for peace makes one complicit in bloodshed must be denounced by any person of faith who values the truth".

He said Goldstein "risks compromising Jewish-Catholic dialogue", and "we cannot, at this time, ruin the fruit of goodwill in Jewish-Catholic relations".

But South African Friends of Israel spokesperson Bafana Modise said his organisation supports the chief rabbi, and believes his message has been quoted out of context.

"It is very clear that the chief rabbi is calling for moral clarity from the Pope as a spiritual leader. Iran is a regime of evil. Forty thousand protesters were killed in two days in Iran. Thousands of young people have been executed. If the Pope is not willing to call it out and wants to resort to political correctness, this is not what we expect from a spiritual leader."

Furthermore, the Church "must be on the side of good, to dismantle this regime, to safeguard the world from a nuclear Iran, and to safeguard the world from radical jihadist groups that are funded by Iran, which has caused thousands of deaths and destruction to communities in the Middle East", Modise said.

For the Pope to "assume a politically correct position at a time where the world needs a leader like him to be firm against Iran, is truly appalling", he said. "We support the chief rabbi in saying, 'This is the moment when the Church should take a position protecting our Judeo-Christian values.'"

Local senior Anglican priest, Reverend Canon Peter Houston, told the *SA Jewish Report* he doesn't agree with the Pope's sentiment. "There is a long-held 'just war' theology in Christianity," he said.

However, "I would not disagree with the Pope's view in the manner that the chief rabbi did. He attacked the man – his essence, his soul – and not the message, his argument that G-d is a pacifist, and war does not bring about peace. To speak ill of a person and not simply their ideas is

a weighty matter," Houston said.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner said the SAJBD disagrees that the Pope's

hands are "dripping with blood", and considers these comments "unsubstantiated and inflammatory rhetoric".

She said the comments "crossed a clear red line, both in their lack of factual grounding and in the divisiveness and hurt they have caused to fellow South African citizens".

Roughly 80%–85% of South Africa's population identify as Christian.

Over the past two and a half years, said Milner, "we have witnessed deepening polarisation across South African communities. It is the responsibility of

leadership to foster robust debate on difficult issues without allowing that debate to degenerate into offensive slurs. This weight falls particularly on religious leaders."

She said the SAJBD has a "long and consistent record of speaking out against divisive rhetoric, from whatever political or religious quarter it originates, whether aimed at our community or at others. We categorically reject any attempt to drive wedges between South Africans."

Religious communities "have the potential to be powerful forces for healing and reconciliation", said Milner. "The SAJBD believes that interfaith is a space for respect, tolerance, and engagement. We remain deeply committed to meaningful and respectful dialogue with the interfaith community."

Pollitt said the chief rabbi's words seemingly sanctified war and violence, and did not call for peace, but Goldstein did emphasise that Jews "pray for the end of war" and "for when no one will have to die for their country".

He noted that if the soldiers of the Allied forces had not fought against Nazi Germany, "the world would be engulfed in darkness forever".

The chief rabbi did not respond to the *SA Jewish Report's* request for comment.

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South African Jewish Report

No cause to celebrate

We have a whole day set aside by the government every year to honour workers and their rights. It supposedly celebrates the working class and trade unions, highlighting their role in achieving democratic, fair, and safe working conditions.

Sounds great, except we have an epidemic of unemployment in this country so there really is no cause to celebrate. Instead, this government should be doing everything in its power to turn this horrible trajectory of failure around.

We have one of the highest, if not the highest, official unemployment rates in the world, with almost one-third of our adult population without work.

That's roughly 7.8 million adults who don't have jobs, nor any prospects for jobs. As for the youth, the numbers skyrocket to 43.8% of people younger than 35 of employable age. What are the chances of such people, struggling to find jobs in the first 15 years of their working lives and careers, suddenly becoming gainfully employed? Exactly!

Perhaps you think these figures don't sound so bad. Well, let's compare our situation with other countries. The global average unemployment rate is 5%. So, we are more than six times higher than the average.

Countries that exceed South Africa's rate are generally war zones, extremely unstable, or in a state of collapse.

The only countries with close to the same official unemployment figures as ours are Sudan, which is in a state of conflict and economic collapse, Libya, Yemen, and Namibia. In most countries with seriously struggling economies, there is between 8% and 12% unemployment.

However, our economy is mostly stable and considered a middle-income to developed economy, and we aren't in a state of war. Among economies like ours, there is no comparable unemployment rate.

Among the 11 countries involved in the BRICS bloc, Brazil has 5.6% to 6.6% unemployment, China just above 5%, India 3% to 5%, and Russia between 2% and 3%.

What is astonishing is that we are not seeing our government doing anything radical to change the situation. How often do you hear ministers even talking about unemployment or a plan of action to address it? How frequently is it even acknowledged that this is a problem?

Surely when you have one of the biggest unemployment problems in the world, you don't look at anything other than how to fix it. It's hardly as if we don't have lots of work available. You just have to look at the massive potholes and infrastructure problems in Johannesburg to know there is much work to be done. Yet nobody is doing it.

I read a post by the wise South African writer and public intellectual William Gumede, who wrote, "It is critical that voters get to understand that no matter how good anti-poverty and job creation may be, if governing political leaders and public servants are corrupt, incompetent, and uncaring, these policies will never be effectively implemented."

He went on to say, "Corrupt, incompetent, and uncaring governing political leaders and public servants simply do not have the skills, intention, and will to implement policies, no matter how good these policies may be."

I couldn't have said or written it better. Which is why we are in the unemployment crisis we are in. We have a government that focuses on wars in the Middle East and fighting against Israel, while seemingly forgetting the crises in its own backyard.

Such massive unemployment – if not turned around soon – will just escalate and lead to yet another generation of jobless individuals. When most people finish school, they have big dreams of a good job, having their own home, and starting a family. Perhaps they strive for a university education, but there is no question they want to acquire skills they need to do the best they can.

However, when these dreams keep being scuppered and, try as they may, they cannot find work, it is tough to stay focused on trying. And while I know crime is not a natural choice, when a person is desperate to feed their family, it may be inevitable.

So, we continue down a spiral.

However, when considering why we have massive unemployment, the problems don't seem insurmountable. According to experts, it is mostly a structural issue. In other words, it emanates from how the economy and labour market are set up.

Many more people enter the job market every year than there are new jobs. The schooling system produces low literacy, numeracy, and technical skills, and employers have difficulty finding candidates with job-ready abilities. So, employers seek out people with more experience to fill fewer jobs. In South Africa, there are relatively high wages for entry-level jobs, so employers hire fewer low-skilled or inexperienced workers. A major problem is ensuring that people are adequately trained for the available jobs, rather than for sectors where there are none. These are just some of the issues.

However, by making it easier for small businesses and the informal sector to grow and develop, jobs will be created. The government can help make it cheaper and safer to employ first-time workers. It is vital for the country to fix the skills pipeline to ensure the right abilities are out there. We need to strengthen heavy labour-absorbing sectors, like tourism, agriculture, construction, and green energy, to name but a few.

In our community, there is an inordinate number of people doing whatever they can to help upskill and get young South Africans working. They have plans. I am just not sure how much support they get from the government.

While I am certainly no expert in this, I do believe we have great minds in this country who could solve unemployment. If they and legitimate leaders care enough to change the way things are in this country, they can fix this crisis.

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Seeco betrayed Houghton Golf Club's foundational kindness

OPINION

MUZI KUZWAYO



Antisemitism hurts us all, and the bullies who thrive on it must be forced to pay a heavy price.

One morning, I woke up to the fake and hateful news that a man known as Louis Seeco, who was purported to be a Houghton Golf Club member, had been banned by the club for displaying the Palestinian flag in the parking lot.

The national TV channel eNCA broke the story and it was then farmed all over social media to cause maximum damage.

Seeco has never been a member of Houghton Golf Club, which was founded more than 100 years ago by Jewish golfers who were barred from playing on other golf courses because of antisemitism. As a result of this history, kindness is as part of the club as the trees and the grass. It is exactly that generosity Seeco sought to exploit.

Ten days or so before instigating his babel of hate, he wrote to the club, requesting old golf balls and clubs for a new golf academy to teach young black golfers in the nearby Alexandra township. Houghton members generously donated their used equipment to inspire the dreams of the next generation, so that they too could start a romance with what Harvey Penick, then golf coach at the University of Texas, once described as "the most mysterious, most cerebral, most frustrating and supremely satisfying of all games that can be played by one person alone".

I joined the Houghton Golf Club 15 years ago, and seven years later, I was elected to its committee to head up marketing and the recruitment of new members. How Houghton Golf Club transformed itself from near bankruptcy, as South Africa experienced Jewish exodus, to one that returned to its glory of hosting international tournaments, is a success story that should be taught at business schools. The club has since become diverse and a bustling hive of activity, with its facilities hired by people from different backgrounds for weddings, parties, golf days, commercial activities, and much more.



Within 10 days of fetching the members' donations, Seeco was back at Houghton Golf Club like an evil spirit, seeking attention, wanting to cause trouble, and counting on the acquiescence that comes from belching the word "Palestine". He unfolded his flag and went to play. While he was out on the course, someone approached the club's general manager and complained, citing the club's rule and custom of non-partisanship. The general manager went outside, folded up the flag, and asked the security guard to alert him when the player returned so he could explain the club's rules to the man.

When Seeco came back from his round of golf, and the rules were explained to him, he

refused to respect the general manager and used microaggression language, claiming freedom of speech, regardless of the fact that he was on private property. If Seeco was honest then why did he stuff his flag and principles in his back pocket when he came to fetch the donated golf equipment?

Seeco knew that Houghton members are kind because he has played on this course numerous times before and was treated with utmost respect by the staff, as with all members and their guests.

It is the black staff members of the golf course who bore the brunt of racist abuses that followed Seeco's stunt. I was standing at the counter when a man with an Indian accent phoned and started abusing the person manning the front desk. The staff member put the phone on speaker so I could also listen.

I decided to intervene because I have studied Indian racism and classism, called the caste system. I've read Munshi Premchand, the Indian author who opposed the system, and so I knew how to deal with the racist caller. In the caste system, black people are considered the "untouchables", meaning they are at the bottom of the race pyramid and will be regarded as inferior for as long as they are alive. I dealt with the racist Indian man like a black cat dealing with a racist mouse. Township humour will humble anyone. I gave him a light sprinkling of it. He got spicy as he vomited more racism.

On Saturday, after confronting Seeco on social media about his dishonesty, I went to play golf at our club. The anger and disappointment of the black staff against him were palpable.

Golf may be a pastime to most players, but for the staff at a golf club it is a full-time job. If the course closes down, as many have, they lose their jobs. Small wonder they were so angry at lying Louis.

Blue is the colour of the sky, and white are the clouds of hope, but rain comes from the dark clouds, so let not the flashes of lightning and the explosions of thunder drive us into despair.

Something good is about to come down on us, and like the last storm, this too shall pass. Peace is on the horizon and let us dare not allow those who thrive on chaos and corruption obscure its warm rays.

When you are on the tenth fairway at Houghton

Golf Course there are three trees on the right that were planted by a member who has since passed away. His name was Jack Cohen. He was a lawyer. During apartheid he gave the caddies his home number so that should any of them be stopped by the police for passes they could call him at any time. They did, and he kept his promise every time. That is the spirit of Houghton Golf Club, a step into the extraordinary, and an extraordinary Jewish legacy.

• Muzi Kuzwayo is the chairperson of South Africa's Promise, a non-profit company that works with young people across the country to help them unleash their potential.

The campaign against Jewish life in SA is antisemitic, anti-democratic, and unconstitutional



MZOXOLO MPOLASE

OPINION

In any constitutional democracy there is a distinction between protest and intimidation. Protest is directed at power, policy, and public institutions. Intimidation is directed at people, their spaces, and their sense of safety and ease in ordinary life.

In South Africa, activism around the Israel-Palestine conflict is usually presented as belonging to the first category. It is described as solidarity with Palestinians, moral opposition to Israeli conduct, and part of a broader democratic culture of international advocacy. On the face of it, that appears straightforward enough. Citizens are entitled to hold strong views on foreign affairs and to campaign around them.

However, a more troubling pattern has emerged. Increasingly, the activism in question isn't directed at the state, foreign policy, or institutions of actual political power. It's directed at spaces associated with Jewish South Africans, their symbols, their religious observance, and their environments. What is emerging, then, is a politics of targeted discomfort directed at Jewish communal life.

That distinction matters. Once activism shifts from public argument about a foreign conflict to the disruption and politicisation of local Jewish life, the issue is no longer only Palestine. The issue becomes whether Jewish South Africans are to be allowed an ordinary place in the country's civic and social life, or whether their presence is now to be treated as permanently contestable.

Much of the energy in this politics now finds expression in places where Jews gather, shop, commemorate religious holidays, educate their children, and live communally.

Recent examples illustrate the pattern. When Pick n Pay's Norwood branch in April 2025 temporarily removed elements of its Pesach décor after social media agitation and activist pressure, the issue was plainly not South African foreign policy. It was whether Jewish religious visibility in an ordinary South African retail environment

could be made controversial. The practical message was that even the public expression of Jewish religious holidays could be transformed into something politically suspect if sufficient pressure was applied.

A 2015 incident at the Virgin Active gym at Old Edwardians in Houghton revealed the same logic in another form. The gym was turned into a site of confrontation through the wearing of Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions apparel bearing the words "In solidarity with the Palestinians, against Israeli apartheid" in circumstances that suggested not spontaneous expression, but staged provocation. Again, an ordinary space was converted into contested political ground.

The Houghton Golf Club matter last week belongs to the same terrain. There, a visitor displaying a Palestinian flag at a club with a substantial Jewish membership was told that political and religious symbols were not permitted on the premises. The ensuing controversy was framed as a freedom of expression dispute. But that framing is too narrow. In the present climate, conflict symbols don't enter such spaces innocently. They form part of a wider pattern in which spaces with a known Jewish character are increasingly made to absorb the pressures and antagonisms of a foreign conflict.

The Roedebeek School episode in February 2026 took this logic into an even more serious setting, school sport and the participation of Jewish children in institutional life. Roedebeek refused to play King David because it was a Jewish school, then later apologised and acknowledged the hurt caused to the Jewish community. That matters because it lays bare the principle at stake. When a school becomes objectionable not because of misconduct, but because of its Jewish character, the issue is no longer political dissent. It is discrimination.

Taken together, these incidents reveal the same development. Jewish spaces are increasingly treated not as ordinary parts of South African life, but as available

sites for agitation, symbolic incursion, and pressure. The common feature isn't simply disagreement over Israel. It is the relocation of that disagreement into the daily environments in which Jews live as Jews.

This is why the campaign is antisemitic. Not because all criticism of Israel is antisemitic. It is not. But a campaign becomes antisemitic when Jewish life as such becomes the practical object of pressure. When Jewish symbols, Jewish religious observance, Jewish schools, and Jewish communal spaces are repeatedly made to carry the burden of a conflict elsewhere, the line has been crossed.

Jewish spaces are increasingly treated not as ordinary parts of South African life, but as available sites for agitation, symbolic incursion, and pressure.

It is also anti-democratic. Democracy requires more than the formal protection of speech and assembly. It depends on coexistence. Minority communities must be able to gather, celebrate, educate their children, shop, and associate without those ordinary activities being subjected to recurring political encroachment. Once a style of activism depends on unsettling the daily life of a minority, pressure starts to replace persuasion, and intimidation begins to masquerade as conscience.

And it is unconstitutional. The Constitution's guarantees of dignity, equality, freedom of association, freedom of religion, and cultural life aren't ornamental. They exist precisely to ensure that communities don't have to negotiate their right to ordinary existence each time public passions rise. Jewish South Africans are citizens of South Africa, and must be able to enjoy those rights in

substance, not merely on paper, no less than any other South African.

That means Jewish spaces must be allowed to remain spaces, not become permanent stages for activist intervention. Jewish religious observance must be allowed to remain religious observance, not be recoded whenever convenient as a political offence. Jewish communal and educational life must be protected not only against formal prohibition, but against the steady erosion of the peace necessary to exercise constitutional rights meaningfully.

A just cause doesn't sanctify intimidation. Political passion doesn't authorise the social targeting of a minority. Solidarity with one people doesn't require the making-uneasy of another. If activism on Palestine is to remain democratic and legitimate, it must remain directed at argument, policy, and power. The moment it begins to derive meaning from making Jewish communal life uncomfortable, it ceases to be a democratic practice and becomes something uglier, and constitutionally indefensible.

What is emerging in South Africa is a campaign to make Jewish life less secure, less normal, and more contested in the public sphere. That campaign is antisemitic because it directs pressure at Jews as Jews. It is anti-democratic because it substitutes intimidation for coexistence. And it is unconstitutional because it erodes the substantive enjoyment of rights the Constitution exists to protect.

If South Africa cannot draw that line clearly, the failure will be South Africa's, not the Jewish community's.

Mzoxolo Mpolase is the managing editor of Political Analysis South Africa and writes on power, governance, political strategy, and the forces shaping public life. This article was first published in Political Analysis South Africa.



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When exercise tracking takes a toll

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

If it becomes more about breaking down the numbers than building up your fitness and well-being, monitoring your exercise habits can become obsessive. While the proliferation of fitness tracking tools can serve as effective motivation for sustaining your workout routines and goals, they can also lead to unhealthy behaviours.

Wearable fitness technology and apps like Strava – a social fitness platform that enables people to track, analyse, and share their running, cycling, and other workouts with a community – have transformed exercise habits. “On the positive side, they’ve increased awareness, accountability, and consistency,” says private mobile personal trainer Evan Hesselberg. “People are more likely to move when they can track their steps, heart rate, or sleep, or earn rewards like Discovery points. Gamification has made fitness engaging and measurable.”



The downside is that exercise has become highly data-driven and externally validated, he says. “Instead of training based on how they feel, many people now train based on numbers – calories burned, pace, weekly

from something nourishing to something compulsive.”

Clinical psychologist Lauren Jacobs agrees. “Moving our bodies is a necessary and positive part of life,” she says. “Yet when exercise becomes all-consuming and is no longer enjoyable, it’s problematic. It’s not a clear-cut causal relationship, but for certain people who are prone to anxiety, low self-esteem, obsessive thinking, and perfectionism, exercise apps and fitness culture feed the all-or-nothing thinking, the rigidity and competitive, goal-oriented mindset. Certain people will become entirely focused on workout outcomes, which feed the ‘not good enough’ body thoughts and the need to strive for unrealistic metrics.”

These measurements can also minimise your achievements, says physiotherapist and aquatic exercise instructor Stacey Lewis. “Many have lost the ability to discern without the feedback from the app whether this was a difficult exercise session and whether they’ve pushed

themselves hard or not. I’ve often observed people in my classes who’ve worked hard and they’re sweating, but they’ll gauge their response based on the score on their watch.” Sometimes these numbers may be inaccurate or simply not reflect what your body is feeling, she says. “What a pity to base whether your workout was successful or impactful on a number on a watch.”

Yet Lewis does acknowledge the positive side of fitness trackers. “They’ve built an increased awareness of how much exercise we’re doing and have motivated far more people to become active who wouldn’t have otherwise,” she says.

Ultimately, it’s your mindset and how you interact with fitness technology that determines your outcome. For recreational runner Jared Waters, these tools have been largely positive motivators since he started running. “I use both Strava and Garmin Connect to assist in measuring progress and performance, especially in training for a race,” he says.

It’s about keeping performance tracking and comparisons in perspective, Waters says. “What’s important is that while most of us are competitive and it’s great to see how our

friends are doing with their running, Strava specifically should be used to measure your own progress and performance. It’s not about feeling pressure when others appear to be doing better. We’re all built differently and should truly applaud others for just getting out there and running as opposed to trying to compete with each other.”

Amanda Blankfield-Koseff, a member of multiple running groups, also uses apps and wearable fitness technology to track her running performance and earn Discovery points. While her experience has largely been positive, she says there are potential pitfalls, especially when you’re on track to reaching certain milestones or earning rewards through loyalty programmes.

“I know a lot of people who will exercise even when they are sick, just because they don’t want to miss out on a particular milestone,” she says. “I’ve been one of them, although when I’ve been really sick, I have taken a rest week, which you can do if you have enough points. Yet it’s difficult because you feel major FOMO (fear of missing out) and you feel like you’re letting people down.”

She says that one looks at “personal bests” when it comes to running, encouraging a philosophy of competing with oneself. However, Blankfield-Koseff acknowledges that community apps like Strava can lead to comparisons, making you judge yourself for not measuring up. “Then you sometimes overtrain and can become injured.”

We need to stay in touch with what our bodies are telling us, Lewis emphasises. “Exercise isn’t a nice to have, it’s mandatory. There are so many benefits but we’re in it for the long game. We’ve got to look at sustainability, exercise is just a tool to enhance your life, and it only works well when you listen to your body. There’s a balance between a watch and one’s inner compass – with which we should never lose our connection.”

Both Lewis and Hesselberg recommend scheduling intentional untracked workouts to maintain a healthy relationship with exercise. “Awareness is key,” Hesselberg says. “One must recognise that the tech is a tool – not a judge.” He also suggests building non-negotiable rest days into programmes and focusing on performance goals that include recovery markers.

“Shift from calorie-based thinking to strength, mobility, and longevity,” he says, “and practice rating workouts by effort and feeling instead of numbers. Sometimes a short break from tracking entirely can reset someone’s relationship with movement.”

“Exercise should enhance energy, confidence, and mental clarity,” Hesselberg says. “If it starts producing anxiety, chronic exhaustion, or obsession, it’s time to reassess. Technology can be an incredible ally, but it should serve the athlete, not control them.”

Jacobs also stresses the need to understand the underlying causes when exercising and monitoring associated stats becomes all-consuming. “It’s both necessary to understand the reasons why one has developed an obsession with exercise, as well as address the repetitive thoughts and compulsive behaviours,” she says.

“Learning to challenge thoughts and change responses to them is part of the work. One needs to break the cycle and allow for uncertainty and feelings of distress and discomfort. In practice this may involve reducing the number of workout days and changing type of exercises, and not focusing on exercise as being goal-oriented. It’s best to do this with the help of a mental health practitioner. Ultimately, one needs to develop an entirely different relationship to exercise that is balanced and fun.”

A look at the proposed new history curriculum

OPINION

JOCELYN ANGEL



At a meeting of Independent Examinations Board (IEB) history teachers a few weeks back, we had the opportunity to consider the proposed new history curriculum.

Published in the 20 March Government Gazette, the draft curriculum is described as “a new African-centred curriculum for the 21st century South Africa” and aims to “develop in the African child a strong foundational knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the continent, and its relationship to the world”.

The meeting was abuzz with questions and answers, some of which I will attempt to deal with below.

Does the IEB have to follow the Department of Education’s policy and curriculum?

The answer to this is a definite yes. While the IEB is independent, all educational policy and curricula are dictated to us by the Gauteng Department of Education.

What is the timeline for implementation of the new curriculum?

None has yet been given. But it will be a lengthy process.

Does the “African-centred approach” mean all discussion of Europe and the West ends?

I do not believe that all engagement with Europe and the West will now be “phased out”. The Grade 8 syllabus shows a commitment to understanding the history of Southern Africa. But it also looks at the arrival of the Dutch Boer settlers at the Cape, the impact of the 18th century Industrial Revolution in Europe, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, as well as the 1880’s Scramble for Africa. Colonisation, the British Empire, and the import of Chinese and Indian labourers to the African continent will make for interesting discussion and debate in that year.

Has the rise of Hitler and the Nazis been scrapped?

We need to look past the media hype to the Government Gazette. I believe the Grade 9 syllabus will still be interesting and vibrant, and I don’t agree with former University of the Free State rector Professor Jonathan Jansen’s sentiment on News24 that the content is “anti-intellectual and soul deadening”. The Grade 9s will continue to have a whole section on “Pseudo-Science, Racism, and the Entrenchment of Social Inequalities during the 19th century”.

Social Darwinism is always interesting to pupils, as is macabre Eugenics, and Europeans’ fascination with Africans such as Sara Baartman, the Khoi woman exhibited around Europe in the 19th century.

As a precursor to World War II, pupils will study World War I, the Peace Treaty of Versailles signed afterwards by Germany, and the ensuing German economic depression, compounded by the US Great Depression of 1929.

The study of the rise of Hitler and the Nazis remains in-depth. There is still a section on Hitler’s steps to war, beginning with his inauguration as Chancellor in 1933, right until the seizure of Austria in 1938 and the invasion of Poland in 1939. The Nazi SA and SS are studied, as are the

concentration camps, the genocide, and the Final Solution. There is still a heavy focus in Grade 9 on apartheid and the coming to power of the National Party in 1948.

Visits to the Apartheid Museum as well as to the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre are hinted at in the Gazette, where teachers are urged to expose their pupils to a wide variety of sources, from written and archaeological to discussions with family members and friends.



Apartheid in South Africa and the rise of the Nazis in Germany remain core pillars of Grade 9 history.

The impact of women in history

This is a category emphasised in the draft curriculum. The Grade 9 discussion on apartheid has been widened to include emphasis on the role that African, coloured, and Indian women played in the mobilisation against apartheid. The 9 August 1956 Women’s March to the Union Buildings, in which more than 20 000 women participated, is highlighted. Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, and Sophie Williams are named and celebrated.

To classify the new syllabus as being simply “African-centric” at the cost of everything else would be to ignore the fascinating emphasis that the draft places on ancient civilisations in Egypt, China (Ming Dynasty), South America (Incas, Aztecs, and Mayas), as well as the Mughal (Indian) people.

African empires such as the Songhai and those in Ghana and Mali also find their place, as do precolonial African kingdoms such as those found in Zimbabwe.

The French Revolution is out

While the French Revolution may be “out”, European dynamics are still very much included. Grade 11s continue to delve into the Spanish and Portuguese explorations of the 15th to 18th centuries, focusing in detail on the colonisation introduced in the younger grades. The social, political, environmental, and health impact of the Dutch and English “voyages of discovery” to Africa and the Americas is still firmly in place.

Slavery is expanded on, as well as slave resistance and the Haitian Revolution of 1791. A discerning teacher would

make pupils aware that this revolution was a result of the 1789 French Revolution.

The syllabus does indeed still include a mention of both the French and American Revolutions of the period, and the fact that they resulted in the basic tenements of modern democracy. “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” is still mentioned in the draft syllabus – which will lead to much relief among educators.

America is out for matric

I have had matric pupils in the past question the almost “obsessive” focus on America in senior history. We used to examine the Cold War in detail, spend weeks dealing with the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and concentrate on the Vietnam War.

The US-Soviet Cold War is still a theme in the draft. Pupils will still be taught how the Superpowers arose after World War II, had competing ideologies, and a Cold War spanning more than four decades resulted. However, the syllabus greatly summarises this, explores how these politics impacted South Africa, and how

both African and Afrikaner nationalism arose in this 1950s to 1980s era.

The impact of Cold War dynamics on independent Africa is also emphasised. There does seem to be more of a focus on individual leaders such as former Prime Minister PW Botha and former African National Congress President Oliver Tambo. The impact of anti-apartheid activists has been expanded. The coming of democracy in South Africa (1990-1994) remains a coherent theme, allowing for movies and discussions on Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. US civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X don’t appear anymore, and there is increased focus on local activists such as Robert Sobukwe, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, and Joe Slovo.

After spending some time poring over the Government Gazette, my overall impression of the draft syllabus is a positive one. I believe it does indeed “investigate historical questions about Africa through its interactions with the rest of the world”. A balance has been achieved between focusing on the African continent but not ignoring massive historical events.

I think it’s a pity to lose out on learning about popular civil rights heroes in the American context, but perhaps there has been too much focus on US dynamics in the past few years. Possibly delving into the ancient civilisations of Egypt, China, and India will prove as interesting and enlightening as the document promises.

• *Jocelyn Angel is a history teacher and deputy principal of King David High School.*

From Johannesburg to Jerusalem, Hirschson fights a digital war

CLAUDIA GROSS

There is a moment in every war when the battlefield shifts. For Paul Hirschson, that battlefield is no longer defined by tanks or borders, but by timelines, algorithms, and attention spans. Hirschson, a South African-born Israeli diplomat, has spent more than two decades in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Today, he leads a team shaping Israel's global voice on social media.

Hirschson grew up in Johannesburg and studied at the University of the Witwatersrand before moving to Israel about 40 years ago. His early career was in high-tech "In the decade that I worked in the high-tech sector in Israel, I started doing business development between Israeli companies and the Arab world," he said.

He joined the Foreign Ministry in the early 2000s and was part of the first Israeli diplomatic presence in the United Arab Emirates, years before the Abraham Accords. Hirschson later served in the United States, as a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, and as ambassador to West Africa.

More recently, he spent four years as Israel's Consul General in Montreal, Canada. His posting coincided with a dramatic shift in global dynamics following 7 October. "The first two years were more about economic diplomacy," he said. "Then of course 7 October happened, and things became a little different." His role shifted to addressing rising antisemitism and advocating for the hostages in Gaza.

After returning to Israel, he moved into digital diplomacy, overseeing content across multiple platforms and languages. He now manages messaging that reaches audiences in English, Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, and other languages. "At the heart of it all is the conversation in English on X," he said.

The scale of that work is vast. During the recent war with Iran, Hirschson said the Foreign Ministry's social media output went viral. "In those six weeks, we had more than a billion views of our posts in all languages from Jerusalem," he said.

He divides the digital effort into two main areas. One is the work done centrally in Israel, and the other is carried out by embassies and consulates around the world, which operate with relative independence. "They're largely running their own show," he said of overseas missions, though they work within official policy guidelines.

The second division is linguistic. While English content is created centrally, other language teams adapt and translate it for their audiences.

Hirschson described social media as both a challenge and an opportunity. "What we've learned from lots of research is that social media does not reflect public opinion," he said. "But that doesn't mean that it will not impact future public opinion."

He believes the volume of hostile content online can be misleading. Much of it, he said, comes from a relatively small but vocal group. "It sometimes looks ugly," he said. "But the vast majority of people who see our work just see the post. They're not interested in the talkback."

Hirschson argued that negative engagement can amplify Israel's message due to how algorithms work. "The more replies you get and the more reposts you get, the more the algorithm will distribute your post," he said. "The anti-Israel people are the biggest engine for

distributing Israel's voice."

At the same time, he acknowledged serious risks. Misinformation spreads quickly, and verifying facts takes time. "We do our absolute best not to compromise on fact," he said. "The challenge is how to be fast."

He described the difficulty of responding to viral claims during conflict, when information is incomplete and verification requires coordination with military sources. "If you're not first, sometimes you don't exist," he said, but added that accuracy must come first.

Another challenge is the presence of bots and coordinated campaigns. "You have no idea what's a person and what's a bot," he said. "There are hundreds of thousands, millions of accounts that aren't people."

Despite this, Hirschson remains optimistic. He sees the current conflict as part of a longer historical trajectory. "We've moved from armies attacking us to terror attacks to intellectual campaigns to hatred," he said. "That's all that they've got left."

He linked this shift to broader diplomatic developments, including peace agreements with Egypt, Jordan, and countries involved in the Abraham Accords. "In parallel, we signed peace treaties and agreements," he said. "We're moving towards more peaceful relationships."

Hirschson also spoke about the impact of global tensions on Jewish communities outside Israel. "One of

the worst parts is that diaspora Jewry is really feeling the heat," he said.

He reflected on how his career has shaped his own media consumption. Years working closely with international journalists left him sceptical of both traditional and social media. "You learn how to read a newspaper not less by what's not printed than by what is printed," he said.

He described social media as "shallow and polarised", but said he believes audiences will eventually recognise the difference between noise and substance. "People aren't stupid," he said. "The message gets across."

His experience in Montreal reinforced a distinction between public discourse and economic reality. While public sentiment often appeared hostile, he said business leaders remained confident in Israel. "Whenever I spoke to somebody from the business community, I left absolutely confident that things are going to be good," he said. He pointed to economic indicators in Israel such as a strong currency, rising employment, and increased exports.

Although Hirschson has lived in Israel for decades, he said his connection to his South African roots remains. "You never replace childhood," he said. "There's always a soft spot."

He expressed hope that South Africa would improve its trajectory, describing it as a country with significant potential. For Hirschson, the world of diplomacy has changed beyond recognition. Yet his approach remains grounded in persistence. On his wall is a simple message: never quit. "We're on the right side of history," he said.



Paul Hirschson

Can we separate books from their anti-Israel authors?

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

They transport you to magical places, humanise foreign cultures, make your heart beat faster, and open your mind. But when the authors of the books we love issue antisemitic statements, refuse to have their books translated into Hebrew, or accuse Israel of "genocide", how do we approach their work?

"Even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason," a beloved children's author once said.

With his tales from a magical chocolate factory to a great glass elevator to a giant peach, British author Roald Dahl continues, even posthumously, to capture the imagination of generations of young readers. But the man himself was well-known for his anti-Israel and antisemitic views, an aspect of his personal story currently being explored on Broadway in the critically acclaimed play *Giant*. While his family issued an apology

– where we denounce public figures based on their socially "unacceptable" views – should we ignore the work of such literary greats?

"No," argues Leveson. "What is gained? And how much is lost? There is no comparison."

"Roald Dahl doesn't express his antisemitism in his writing, so why deprive children of his wonderful imagination?" she says.

Publisher, editor, and host of *The Book Mark* on ChaiFM, Batya Bricker agrees. "The delight of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Or *The Twits*," she says. "I wouldn't want to have missed out on that, despite Roald Dahl's odious reputation. For me, the story sits apart from the author's views and choices."

International bestselling author Joanne Fedler, a South African based in Australia, has a different perspective. "There is a deep paradox and mystery in the fact that hateful racists can produce works of great craftsmanship, some may even say of beauty. But I think there's a difference between a work with soul or heart, and one that is simply 'masterful'. Each of us has to grapple with the pull of appreciation against the discernment of our moral values. There are as many great writers steeped in humanity, tolerance, and open-mindedness as there are bigots."

Yet, we cannot expect all the artists whose work we consume to adhere to our moral code and values, Bricker argues. "An accomplished author is merely a master of words and expression, not necessarily a role-model for living. Yet, as with all reading, the reader must be critical of what is read and what is consumed. Is it true? Is it laced with bias? With rhetoric?"

Bricker says that closing yourself off to brilliant writing or thought-provoking work is counterproductive, ultimately hurting you more than the author you're trying to punish. This is also the case in consuming the work of more contemporary writers like Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy, she says. Roy, a prominent Israel critic, recently withdrew from the Berlin International Film Festival when jury members suggested art should be separated from politics in addressing the Gaza war.

"I have been deeply enriched by reading Roy's recent memoir," says Bricker, "even if I don't support her politics, or some other, unrelated choices she has made in her life. Admiring her work doesn't mean I admire all of her."

But Fedler says her thinking around this issue has

changed. "Before social media and the cult of celebrity politics, it was easier to separate art from its creator," she says. "But since 7 October, the waters have parted for me on many fronts."

"I can no longer watch movies with Susan Sarandon, Javier Bardem, or Mark Ruffalo [in them]. And I will no longer purchase or read books by authors who are openly antisemitic or have been vocal in ways I have found disturbing in the past few years." This includes Irish author Sally Rooney, an active member of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, who, in 2021, refused to sell Hebrew translation rights for her novel to an Israeli publisher. "There are enough books by authors I respect. I now go out of my way to buy books by Jewish authors. As readers, we can choose whose thoughts we want to consume and careers we want to support."

Fedler, however, believes that nothing constructive is achieved by cancelling or censoring anyone. As a Jewish author, she has been subject to hatred. "Before 7 October, my Jewishness was 'on the side' of my literary identity. Then I was doxxed as part of a Jewish WhatsApp group of creatives. We were labelled the 'Zio-600' and called 'genocidal baby killers'. It was a gross misrepresentation of who I am, what I stand for, and my values. But it has clarified for me that my Jewishness is at the centre of who I am. Everything I write is the result of 5 000 years of persecution and survival. I cannot influence or change how others perceive me. If I am cancellable, unpalatable, unacceptable because I am Jewish, I offer them ... Roald Dahl and Sally Rooney."

As victims of past and current boycotts ourselves, contemplating our approach to the work of those with whom we disagree has this added element. "One thinks of the Nazi banning of Jewish books, plays, art, and people," says Leveson. "Where does it stop? Why ban or boycott things you don't like? You can read and disagree or feel uncomfortable, but that's your choice."

Bricker agrees, stressing the dangers of closing our eyes to thought-provoking ideas and different ways of thinking. "Surely we have to read all sorts of views to know what we ourselves think?"

Nevertheless, she and Leveson argue for the need to call out those who spread lies or messages of hate, overt or subtle. "Where something written deliberately incites hatred, is untruthful, or propagates action against Jews and/or Israel – other than expressing the author's viewpoint, which may be different from yours – you have a right to object," says Leveson.



for his antisemitic statements in 2020, this came 30 years after his death.

Highlighting the transformative power of books like Dahl's, World Book Day took place on 23 April. Yet in a climate where anti-Israel sentiment informs the attitudes of many leading arts and culture figures, it's often hard to ignore the politics of authors we previously celebrated. This has increasingly become an issue since 7 October but as is the case with Dahl, there have long been prominent writers with antisemitic or anti-Israel leanings.

"So many writers in the 19th and early 20th century in England were antisemitic," says academic and editor Dr Marcia Leveson. These include the Bloomsbury writers, including the likes of Virginia Woolf, EM Forster, and TS Eliot. In a world where "cancel culture" is rife

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Documentary brings Winnie alive for future generations

LEE TANKLE

Few figures in South African history elicit as much admiration as well as unease as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Because of this, business mogul and philanthropist Ivor Ichikowitz wanted to tell her story and the story of South Africa through her eyes.

"Winnie Mandela was a very complex individual and she had an incredibly important role to play in the South African story, says Ichikowitz, the executive producer of Netflix's *The Trials of Winnie Mandela*, which premiered on 23 April.

"I was privileged to have had Winnie's trust and been allowed to tell Winnie's story in her own words. And this is the first time that that's ever happened."

In the documentary series, Madikizela-Mandela's life isn't presented as a closed chapter but as something that challenged the way history sees powerful women versus powerful men.

Ichikowitz was inspired to tell South African stories, like Madikizela-Mandela's, by the work Steven Spielberg has done in keeping alive the memory of Holocaust survivors, in the USC Shoah Foundation, though. Spielberg understood that there would come a moment when the voices of Holocaust survivors would fall silent,

leaving future generations to piece together history without those who had lived it, says Ichikowitz. He saw a similar urgency in South Africa.

Ichikowitz worked with two-time Emmy Award-winning Jewish South African director Mandy Jacobson as series director.

"I realised that South Africa had come through one of the most tumultuous revolutions in history. And that story would need to be told," he says. "And if future generations didn't get to know and understand people and their personalities, and what made them unique, there would never be an understanding of that history."

He recognised that Madikizela-Mandela was one of the many people involved in the liberation struggle whose story had not been told in the context of her life, not just in the context of time.

In that context, *The Trials of Winnie Mandela* becomes something more intimate than a historical documentary. Threaded through the series are intimate conversations between Madikizela-Mandela and her granddaughters HRH Princess Zaziwe Manaway and HRH Princess Swati Mandela-Dlamini, who also serve as producers of the series.

One of the granddaughters says in an episode, "How do you ask your grandmother, are you a murderer? Or if she

cheated on your grandfather?"

Ichikowitz speaks of working on the documentary as a "genuine journey for these remarkable young women". It was also, he says, "a metaphor for the current generation of young South Africans who didn't live through apartheid, who didn't witness Winnie in action, and who frankly have completely forgotten where we came from, have completely forgotten the complexity of our struggle".

The work began more than 11 years ago and had Madikizela-Mandela's full support. "I think that this whole process was cathartic for Winnie because it made her confront elements of her past," he says.

While in post-production in 2024, Jacobson passed away following an illness. This prompted Ichikowitz to work even

harder to get the project finished in order to dedicate it to Jacobson.

Similarly, when Madikizela-Mandela had passed away in 2018, the team had felt even more compelled to tell the story of this very

discussed. And, therefore, we had literally hundreds of small stories that we had accumulated.

"Winnie was a woman of incredible energy, and she was doing 10 things at a

time, and 10 stories were unfolding literally at the same time. So, we really did have a tough time.

Largely, Mandy, who was a very disciplined filmmaker, was quite careful in keeping to relevant stuff. And I was pushing her constantly to record the subplots and the substories, and we kind of got a good balance of the two. In the finished product, we cover

the major issues, and a lot of issues that flesh out her personality."

Ichikowitz says Madikizela-Mandela's story is about the complexity of the time. It's about her resilience and the fact that she feared nothing but at the same time was extremely caring. He explained that although he got to know Madikizela-Mandela pretty well, there were still some unexpected discoveries.

"Like most people in South Africa, nobody really knew Winnie well. Firstly, she didn't trust many people, and for very good reason. Secondly, behind that very strong, tough exterior was this very human, very remarkable woman who truly did change history. I didn't go into this knowing what to expect. I didn't know whether we were going to find the ultimate saint or the ultimate sinner. And I think that many of the stories that came out of this were a surprise to me.

"The disconnect between appearance and reality was probably the biggest surprise for me. The extent to which the apartheid propaganda system succeeded in turning Winnie into the ultimate villain was a huge surprise to me. And what was really a surprise were the admissions that were made by the apartheid-era spies on what they did and how they villainised Winnie.

"I was also really surprised at how scared they were of her. I could understand that they were using her and manipulating her, but I never got my head around how scared they were of her, because they realised that she herself was the tinderbox that could have set off a revolution that could have completely overthrown the government."

For Ichikowitz, the most important part of the series is that it sparks debate and starts conversations.

"We are at a critical moment in South Africa's history, and in the world, where a new generation must step into leadership in an increasingly divided society. To do that, we need a clear understanding of where we come from: what worked, what failed, and what it cost. Yet many young South Africans are losing faith in the very democracy that was fought for less than 40 years ago – the belief that one voice matters. Challenging that disillusionment is essential.

"This is about showing that individual voices still count, while reminding a new generation what the struggle demanded and what was sacrificed. It is also about confronting the full, complicated truth – beyond media narratives, misinformation, or labels – and allowing people to make up their own minds," he says.



Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Ivor Ichikowitz

The cultural DNA of 702 was Jewish

With *The Story of 702 – In Touch, In Tune and Independent* recently launched, the SA Jewish Report speaks to its publisher, **Batya Bricker**.

Why and how do you believe 702 changed the face of radio in SA?

It pioneered talk-back radio, which had been virtually unheard of in South Africa at the time. Instead of passive listening, audiences could call in, participate, and shape the conversation. It gave ordinary people agency and a voice.

At a time when the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was widely perceived as biased, 702 stood out by offering opinions across the political spectrum. It became a space where different ideologies could be heard and debated openly, a revolutionary development in a highly controlled media environment.

The station also redefined the relationship between media and community through initiatives that changed the face of South African society. Think of the Concert in the Park; or Operation Hunger telethons; problem-solving platforms, like helplines and civic engagement projects; and even the introduction of regular traffic reports.

What was the gap that the visionary Issie Kirsh exploited to create 702?

He set up shop, as it were, in one of the so-called "independent" homelands, which was, in many ways, both opportunistic and ingenious.

Under apartheid, South Africa tightly controlled broadcasting through the SABC. There was effectively no space for independent commercial radio in "white" South Africa.

But because the Bantustan homelands were technically separate states, they were not bound by South African broadcasting monopoly laws. By placing his transmitter in Bophuthatswana, Kirsh created a commercially driven, independent radio station that spoke to South Africans while operating just outside the system meant to control them.

What was Kirsh's vision for the station, and how did he make it happen?

His vision was to create a station that mattered in every sense of the word – not just a place to listen, but a place to engage, to question, to connect, and to act.

What made this vision so powerful was how deliberately it was built. Kirsh created a space where politicians, public figures, and ordinary citizens could meet on equal ground, each able to speak and be heard. In doing so, he gave shape to something South Africa had not yet experienced: a genuinely open forum, one that reflected the country's complexity rather than a single, controlled narrative.

At the same time, he anchored the station in a deep sense of community responsibility. This wasn't radio for its own sake; it was radio that could mobilise help,



Issie Kirsh, Henry Howell, and Sol Kerzner – key figures in the 1980 launch of 702

respond to need, and make a tangible difference in people's lives.

Crucially, Kirsh paired this idealism with sharp commercial instinct. He ensured that the station understood its audience intimately, marketed itself boldly, and built robust sales systems. The result was a station that could be both principled and profitable.

In bringing all of this together, Kirsh didn't just launch a successful radio station. He created a new model for broadcasting in South Africa.

People speak of 702 as having been a Jewish station and a Jewish success story. What do they mean by this?

To call 702 a "Jewish station" is, at its heart, to point to the cultural DNA that shaped it from the inside out. It reflects the fact that the station was built and led by figures like Issie Kirsh and others from Johannesburg's Jewish community, who brought with them not only networks and entrepreneurial drive, but also a particular way of seeing the world and engaging with it.

It's no coincidence that 702 became the home of talk radio, a format that thrives on debate, multiple perspectives, and the constant testing of ideas. In this sense, the station's culture of being curious, argumentative, open-ended, can be understood as an extension of that intellectual culture.

At the same time, there is an equally strong thread of responsibility to community.

And layered onto this was a distinctly entrepreneurial, outsider energy, the ability to operate beyond the dominant structures of the time, to take risks, and to build something bold and independent in a tightly controlled media environment. What began as a relatively small, even improbable venture became, through vision and tenacity, a defining force in South African broadcasting.

What was the magic of John Berks and why was he such a phenomenon?

What made him such a phenomenon was this extraordinary balance he held: he was both an entertainer and a listener, a strong on-air personality and a generous facilitator of others' voices. He knew when to lead and when to step back, when to inject energy and when to hold space.

Berks also understood, almost intuitively, the emotional rhythm of radio – how to move between humour and seriousness, between lightness and depth – keeping listeners both engaged and invested. This range, combined with his openness to unpredictability, gave his show a feeling of aliveness that was both compelling and addictive.

What made Berks so different to Stan Katz, another 702 luminary, who became Stan to his Laurel?

What made them different is exactly what made them powerful together.

Berks brought the spark – the immediacy, the humanity, the emotional connection that made listeners feel part of something alive. Katz brought the structure – the vision, discipline, and commercial intelligence that turned that spark into a lasting enterprise.

Together, they embodied two sides of the same idea: that great radio needs both heart and architecture, and that when those two are in balance, something truly enduring is created.

Why did Kirsh want this story written? What did he want readers to know?

Kirsh was clear that 702 was never a one-man show. He wanted readers to see that it was never just a radio station; it was a community in motion, shaped by many hands, many voices, and a shared desire to do something worthwhile.

Also, and importantly, recording the 702 story preserves a unique moment in South Africa's history. The story of 702 is intertwined with a period of profound national change.

Kirsh wanted to document how a small station, with limited resources, became part of the country's social fabric and even its democratic evolution.

What the elephants don't know



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

remote dirt road, with no signal, we found ourselves stuck behind a mother and her calf. And she was, if you will excuse me saying, a rather big cow, who refused either to be rushed or step aside. And so, in the dark, without Instagram to distract me, I sat with my discomfort and waited until she decided it was time to move on.

Which she finally did.

It took the rest of the drive home for me to realise that the elephant did not know I was afraid of it. It had no file on me, no memory of that evening, no particular feelings about my presence in its vicinity. And yet, I have spent decades carefully maintaining a fear that exists entirely on my side of the equation. The bull himself was in musth temporarily, chemically not himself. It passed. He moved on. He was, in all likelihood, much like other males, thinking about succulents within the hour.

There is a very Jewish instinct to hold on. We remember because we have learned, across generations and continents, that memory is survival. We do not forget the bull at the dinner table. And mostly, far from it being neurosis, it is actually hard-won wisdom.

But watching an animal of genuinely prehistoric indifference finally amble past without a glance in my direction, I found myself wondering: what else am I carrying that has long since forgotten me? What fears, what grudges, what carefully maintained anxieties are still taking up space, while their original cause is somewhere in the bush, eating leaves, thinking about mud baths?

I haven't fully resolved this. I am still, if I'm honest, keeping a watchful eye on the treeline. But last night I was happy to have dinner outside. Under the stars, long table, candles. And I stayed for dessert.

No elephants appeared.

I'd like to think they knew better. I'd like to think I did too.

I have never forgotten. And never forgiven the elephant. Not that he has any idea.

It was many years ago, at a lodge not unlike the one I'm sitting in now, gin in hand, pretending to be relaxed. We were in the middle of a theatrical bush dinner that lodges do so well, long table under the stars, candles flickering, starters arriving, when he suddenly appeared. Angry and aggressive. A large bull, almost certainly in musth, which is essentially elephant testosterone poisoning.

What followed was not, as a family, our finest hour. Mothers grabbed toddlers, dignity was largely abandoned, and at least one grandfather made it to safety with a turn of speed that was, under the circumstances, impressive.

My 13-year-old son, who to his eternal credit and my lasting pride had actually listened to the safety briefing, found the kitchen, found the radio, and called for help while the rest of us were busy catastrophising.

When the rangers arrived, they encouraged the bull, with considerable patience, some vehicles, and a shotgun in case, to seek whatever he was looking for elsewhere. We were asked to remain indoors. Not that we needed to be asked twice.

Since that evening, the elephant and I have had an understanding. He would continue to roam southern Africa, enormous and odorous and completely unbothered. I would continue to exist at a safe distance from anything weighing more than a small car. It worked for both of us.

Where this might sound reasonable on paper, for a South African who enjoys the bush, the practical implications are somewhat consequential.

Which is why I considered revisiting this particular neurosis this trip round. When our ranger asked if there were any animals we particularly loved or feared, I was quick to answer. I did so with little emotion, very much like one lists "don't like tomatoes" on a food preference survey.

Which is why it was unsurprising that last night, on a

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Choice and accountability



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

We are saddened to learn of the passing of Dr Edith Eger at the age of 98. Sent to Auschwitz at 16, she lost both her parents on the day of their arrival, and survived horrors that most of us cannot begin to fathom. And yet, what Dr Eger chose to do with that suffering is nothing short of extraordinary. She spent decades as a renowned clinical psychologist, devoting her life to helping others heal from trauma, and transforming the darkest of human experiences into a lifelong act of service. Her 2018 memoir, *The Choice*, and its central message that we cannot always choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how we respond, carries a meaning that we should all take onboard.

At a time when Holocaust memory is under sustained assault, when survivors' testimonies are being weaponised, distorted, and denied, the life of Edith Eger stands as the most eloquent possible rebuttal. I remember fondly how she addressed the Gauteng community during COVID-19, telling us that she loved South Africa and imploring us to remain realists and not idealists!

Dr Eger did not survive Auschwitz to become a symbol of victimhood. She survived it to become a healer. May her memory be a blessing, and may we honour it by refusing, as she did, to be imprisoned by hatred or despair.

It's heartbreaking to realise that the number of Holocaust survivors is decreasing and that soon we will be without anyone who experienced this tragedy

firsthand. It is crucial that we use our opportunities to engage with these most precious people while we still have access to them.

I must also address a matter that has required the Board's attention this week. An element of a speech delivered by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has caused great upset to a fellow faith community. During his address, the chief rabbi said that Pope Leo XIV's hands are "dripping with blood". These comments went beyond criticism, were not substantiated, and caused hurt to fellow South African citizens.

Over the past two and a half years, other faith groups, including the South African Council of Churches and some of its affiliates, have caused genuine hurt to the Jewish community through statements, postures, and silences. As the Board of Deputies and as the South African Jewish community as a whole, we rejected attempts to demonise or cause offence to our community, and called out leaders who were the source of this hurt. That same standard must be upheld when the source of divisive rhetoric is one of our own community leaders. The use of such terms can be harmful to the Jewish community, whose safety and security we have an obligation to protect.

In the coming weeks we will be reaching out to the Catholic Church in South Africa in a spirit of open and honest dialogue.

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Joburg goes the whole Nine Yards

LEE TANKLE

There's a deep thirst among Joburgers for safe, green, eco-conscious entertainment spaces. This is clear when trying to find parking at Nine Yards in Parktown North, which is being inundated even though it only opens officially within the next month.

Two years ago, the owners of Nine Yards, Marc Lubner, Arnold Forman, Timothy Sammons, and Mike Hunt, put their heads together to create a suburban sanctuary rooted in heritage and community. It would offer bespoke food and shops, wellness, art, and culture, in an unhurried environment.

Lubner told the SA Jewish Report this week that they wanted to "build the Johannesburg we all aspire to. Because if you think about it, why do we live in Joburg? There's crime, poor services... We live behind closed doors, and we don't socialise the way we used to. Why don't we all pack up and go live in Cape Town? Why don't we all go and live on the Garden Route?"

"Joburgers have this spirit that we want to integrate, we want to be social, we want to be outdoors. And we have the best weather in the country for that. But there wasn't a safe space for it," said Lubner.

Ubuntu, "I am because we are", was central to their thinking. This means that everyone who comes to Nine Yards becomes a part of the community.

"We want people who are sensitive to the

environment. We don't want to see pollution all over. And people who are also sensitive to other people. So, you know, if you're going to come here with your DJ booth blaring, that's insensitive to the people who don't necessarily want it. If you're going to come with a dog, come with a doggy bag to pick up after it. It's that kind of consciousness," said Lubner.

"We want the Johannesburg we always thought about. We don't want the Johannesburg that you see on the streets, of crime and pollution. And it seems that everyone has bought into that vision."

Sammons, Chief Executive of Cadastral Capital, said, "Nine Yards is built around a simple but powerful idea: Johannesburg deserves places that feel human, hopeful, and full of possibility."

The property on which Nine Yards stands has been in the Lubner family's property portfolio for decades. When deciding what to do with it, the family opted to develop it.

Plans for a retail property, and later office blocks, didn't come to fruition. Lubner and Forman, together with Sammons and Hunt from Cadastral, came up with the idea of making a space like the popular Oranjezicht City Farm & Market in Cape Town.

"From the outset, the vision was to create a lifestyle environment rather than a traditional retail centre. The existing nursery is inherently seasonal, and we saw an opportunity to build something more consistent and

experiential around it. Working with our project team, Cadastral, the idea evolved into repurposing the existing residential homes into retail spaces, allowing us to create a neighbourhood offering within a garden setting," said Forman.

Nine properties were joined, one of which houses the Garden Shop, owned by Lubner's uncle and cousin. "The first step was to buy the Garden Shop. And then the idea was to build a fruit and veg," he said, "We wanted a different kind of fruit and veg shop, not bulk and cheap, but something curated, with exotic produce and a real sense of discovery."

The old Bunches florist space was revitalised into Garden Fresh, introducing fresh produce, while expanding the flower offering. This created a more complete and complementary experience alongside the nursery.

That thinking shaped the entire development. "We chose tenants you wouldn't typically find in a mall. Even with Doppio, it wasn't about the standard Doppio Zero - we were interested because they were piloting Doppio Bistro. The focus was always on places that feel distinctive, considered, and a little unexpected."



Designed by Matthew Miller (Milarchi), with landscape architecture by Patrick Watson, Nine Yards blends adaptive reuse, contemporary design, and garden-led urbanism to create an experience that is human, hopeful, and distinctly Joburg.

Security was a main target. Lubner said he

was adamant the space had to be safe not only from crime, but also for children to run around in.

Along the central walkway, nine different coloured tiles lead to different zones. "So you can say to your child on his bicycle, 'Follow the blue zone, and I'll meet you at the blue zone in 15 minutes', and you don't have to worry about them," he said.

"My whole dream is that we create a community here. We want people to frequent the facilities. We want people who are coming here to have a mindset that it's a healthy environment. The community we want to attract is that community that aspires to live healthily, both emotionally and physically."

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