

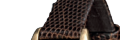


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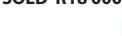
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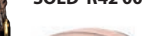
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School's apology flags antizionist stand

"As a secular South African school, our country's stance remains clear: we stand against apartheid and genocide."

which should be apolitical and secular, shouldn't include deeply divisive and contested terms such as 'apartheid' and 'genocide' in this context."

told the *SA Jewish Report*, "During my time at [Emmentaria Primary], I experienced many situations that I found deeply uncomfortable and, at times, antisemitic. These included repeated jokes about Jewish people made by the head of department in my phase.

humanity, compassion, dignity, justice, and respect for all, and the experiences I had as a Jewish teacher within its walls," she said.

show cardboard cut-outs depicting deceased Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on the premises, as well as Hezbollah flags.

Continued on page 3>>



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Dustin Hoffman and other stars celebrate the Jewish connection to Israel

Dustin Hoffman, Gene Simmons, Jon Voight, and Bob Odenkirk were among the Hollywood names who gathered at the University of California, Los Angeles’ (UCLA) Royce Hall on Monday night for *Letters, Light and Love*, a theatrical production celebrating the centuries-old connection between the Jewish people and Israel through letters written by historical figures and ordinary people.

The sold-out 19 October event, organised by the Jewish Federation Los Angeles, blended readings, music, and storytelling to trace that relationship across generations, from Maimonides and Julius Caesar to Golda Meir, Albert Einstein, and Leonard Bernstein. The evening also featured personal accounts of people whose lives and families have been intertwined with Israel.

All ticket proceeds benefited the Sha’ar HaNegev Resilience Centre, which provides emotional and therapeutic support to individuals and families in southern Israel as they work to recover and rebuild after the 7 October Hamas attacks.

For Rabbi Noah Farkas, president and chief executive of Jewish Federation Los Angeles, the event carried particular significance because of its setting.

Less than three years ago, UCLA was the site of a pro-Palestinian encampment where Jewish students reported feeling unsafe. The campus became a flashpoint in the national debate over antisemitism and anti-Israel activism, with buildings and property damaged during the demonstrations.

“This place [Royce Hall] was inundated with protesters during the encampment,” Farkas told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). “It was boarded up. Its windows were broken. There was graffiti everywhere.”

On Monday, the hall had been restored as a gathering place, with UCLA chancellor Julio Frenk and his wife, Felicia Knaul, among those attending and participating in the staged readings.

“The fact that the chancellor himself is here tonight is, I think, really restorative,” Farkas said. “It’s almost like *teshuvah* [repentance] for the campus.”

The celebrity appearances brought an element of Hollywood spectacle to the production, but the evening’s most emotional moment came when Eliya Cohen, a former hostage who spent 505 days in captivity, appeared alongside his new bride, Ziv Abud,



a survivor of the Nova festival massacre. The appearance of the two 29-year-olds drew the night’s only standing ovation.

Abud, who travelled the world lobbying for Cohen’s release while he was held in Gaza, highlighted the shared struggle facing Jews in Israel and those living in the diaspora.

“Our story is different, our challenges are different, but we are not separate stories,” she said at Royce Hall. “The fight for Israel, for the right of a Jewish homeland, is connected to the rights of Jews everywhere to live openly and safely in the countries they call home. A Jew should be able to live safely in Tel Aviv, London, Los Angeles, Paris, or Sydney.”

Musical performances reinforced the production’s themes of Jewish identity, resilience, and hope. Distant Cousins performed Bob Dylan’s *Neighborhood Bully*, a song widely interpreted as addressing the international criticism directed at Israel, before closing the show with Matisyahu’s *One Day*.

Germany reprimands Iran over plot to kill Jewish leader and Israel advocate

Germany’s foreign ministry summoned Iran’s ambassador after a German court convicted two men of spying for Tehran and plotting attacks on a leader of the country’s Jewish community and a prominent non-Jewish supporter of Israel.

A slap on the wrist is not enough, said Volker Beck, president of the interfaith German-Israeli Society, who had been one of the spies’ targets.

Iranian Ambassador Majid Nili Ahmatabadi and most of the embassy’s personnel should be personae non grata in Germany, Beck said.

Hamburg’s Higher Regional Court last week sentenced 54-year-old defendant “S” to eight and a half years in prison and 43-year-old defendant “M” to four and a half years for plotting assassinations and an arson attack. The convicts’ full names have not been publicised.

The court found that the two men, living in Denmark, had in early 2025 carried out orders from Iranian intelligence operatives to spy on Josef Schuster, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and Beck, a Green Party politician and long-time Israel advocate, with the aim of planning an assassination.

S was also convicted of conducting surveillance on a Jewish grocery store in Berlin, for which he reportedly enlisted the assistance of M, the court said.

The convicted men have until 22 October to appeal the verdict

In a statement sent to JTA, Schuster praised the verdict but called the case “the tip of the iceberg”.

“With the now proven commissioning of these two spies, the regime in Tehran has once again shown its true face. The masterminds are in Iran, and the danger they pose to our open society remains great as long as the mullahs’ regime exists,” he said.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

The responsibility to disagree

At the end of last week’s *parashah*, Noah, we are introduced to Avraham, his wife, Sarah, father Terach, and the rest of their family. There is nothing particularly remarkable about this introduction. Noah had been described as righteous in his generation, but Avraham arrives with no merit on record. Yet, at the beginning of this week’s *parashah*, Lech Lecha, G-d suddenly addresses him, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” This encounter marks the beginning of the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.

Why Avraham? What made him worthy of being chosen? The Torah offers no explanation, leaving generations of rabbis to imagine what might have distinguished him from everyone else.

One of the best-known *midrashim* portrays Avraham as a young man who challenges his father’s religious beliefs. Terach manufactured and sold idols. One day, while his father was away, Avraham smashed all the idols in the shop, leaving a stick in the hands of the largest one. When Terach demanded an explanation, Avraham claimed that the idols had quarrelled over an offering of food and that the largest had destroyed the others. His father protested that the idols were incapable of such actions. Avraham then challenged his father to consider why he worshipped objects that he himself

acknowledged had no power.

The story celebrates Avraham’s intellectual independence and his willingness to question inherited beliefs. Yet I have always found something uncomfortable about it. In a tradition that commands us to honour our fathers and mothers, there is something

troubling about a son humiliating his father and destroying his livelihood to prove a theological point. Surely there must be ways of challenging our parents without treating them with contempt.

I find greater inspiration in another *midrash*, which offers a different explanation of Avraham’s uniqueness. Rabbi Yehudah reflects on the description of Avraham as an *ivri*, a Hebrew. Playing on the relationship between *ivri* and *ever*, “side”, he explains, “The entire world was on one side, and he was on the other.” What distinguished Avraham, according to this interpretation, was his willingness to stand apart, even when the rest of the world thought differently.

That image speaks to our time, in which much of what we read and watch is selected for us according to what others already think, and in which disagreement can feel like a threat to belonging, almost a betrayal. Political affiliations, religious communities, and social networks often come with expectations about what we should believe, whom we should support, and which opinions we should condemn. Disagreement can carry a considerable social cost, especially when it comes from within our own circles.

But standing apart is no guarantee of being right. Contrarianism can become another form of conformity, particularly when we define ourselves primarily through opposition to others. What Avraham’s example calls for is the capacity to examine our convictions, to listen seriously to those who

Torah Thought

Rabbi Rogério Cukierman
Bet David Progressive
Synagogue



disagree with us, and to follow our conscience wherever that examination leads us, whether it means reconsidering a long-held belief or defending an unpopular position.

This may be the enduring challenge of being an *ivri*. It is easier to adopt the opinions of those around us, particularly people we admire, trust, or identify with, than to subject those opinions to careful scrutiny. Yet our responsibility to think for ourselves does not disappear when we find ourselves among people who share our values. Indeed, it may be precisely in those circumstances that Avraham’s example becomes most relevant. We must be willing to ask difficult questions even when nobody around us seems to be asking them.

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Violent unrest in France deepens Jews’ fears

CLAUDIA GROSS

South African Jews living in France are fearful for their future there after days of unrest in which streets were set ablaze, businesses damaged, and a Paris synagogue vandalised.

The rioting has spread across major cities, including Paris and Marseille, amid protests initially driven by dissatisfaction with school conditions and the rising cost of living. More than 2 400 people had reportedly been arrested by Monday 19 October.

you’re a Jew in France today, you don’t have the luxury of giving the benefit of the doubt. The psychological blow is the same whether it was targeted or not,” she said.

The Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive, France’s Jewish community protection organisation, said there was no evidence that Jewish institutions or businesses had been deliberately targeted in the rioting. The investigation into the synagogue incident is continuing.

In the meantime, it’s intensified safety

problem here is that in France it’s extremely difficult to reform anything,” he said. “Any time you want to reform anything, people go to the streets and start rioting, and then the government backs down.”

He also expressed concern about growing political polarisation and what it might mean for Jewish communities.

Debbie says the uncertainty has prompted conversations among friends about whether to remain in France. “Community WhatsApp groups are buzzing non-stop: Should we stay? Should we head to Israel? Should we go back to Cape Town?” she said. “Everyone is carrying an exit strategy in their back pocket.”

Mark*, a former Cape Town resident who has lived in Marseille for six years, described a city struggling to contain the violence. Marseille has one of France’s largest Jewish communities and a substantial Muslim population. Businesses across the city were damaged during the unrest.

As a trauma surgeon and researcher, Mark said the consequences of the violence were visible beyond the political arguments surrounding it. “From the hospital floor you don’t see political ideologies. You just see burnt skin, fractured limbs, and young kids choking on tear gas,” he said. “The city felt completely unhinged over the weekend.”

Mark warned against relying on social media accounts that present the destruction as a coordinated campaign against Jewish businesses.

“On social media, people are spinning narrative wars, claiming only Jewish shops were gutted or that it’s an organised intifada against us,” he said. “When you walk down the Boulevard des Dames, the destruction is raw and chaotic. Koshers delis, phone repair shops, clothing boutiques, all smashed up side by side.”

However, he stressed that this didn’t negate the

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While French authorities have blamed radical left-wing groups and criminal elements for the violence, Jewish residents are also concerned about antisemitism and the increasingly polarised political climate.

Debbie*, a former Johannesburg resident who’s been in Paris for 12 years, lives in the 19th arrondissement, close to the Ohalei Yaakov synagogue. The congregation’s temporary place of worship was broken into during the unrest.

She described watching the violence unfold from her balcony. “In Joburg, you lock your gates and watch the crime. Here in Paris, you lock your shutters and watch the state lose control,” she said. “I stood on my balcony on Saturday night, watching flares go off down the street, and I thought, ‘Is this Europe, or is this a scene from 1980s South Africa?’”

The vandalism at the synagogue was particularly distressing.

“When we heard Ohalei Yaakov down the road was broken into and the *siddurim* were scattered all over the sanctuary floor, my stomach dropped,” she said.

Authorities have yet to establish whether the attack was antisemitic or opportunistic theft during the wider unrest. “But when

concerns among Jewish residents. Debbie said she had become increasingly cautious about her son’s appearance in public. “It breaks my heart that I left South Africa to give my kids a secure future, and now I’m hiding their identity in the middle of Paris.”

Laurent Lamy, who has lived in Paris for most of his life, other than the years he lived in South Africa in the 1990s, said he had witnessed the destruction at close quarters. He lives in central Paris, near an area affected by the unrest.

He described shops being broken into and streets filled with police confronting demonstrators. Tear gas and clashes disrupted ordinary activities, including access to local businesses.

Lamy is also concerned about the wider climate facing French Jews.

“We’ve seen lots of antisemitic comments, and there were lots of Palestinian flags among the rioters,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. He added that antisemitic rhetoric had been a growing concern since Hamas’s 7 October attack on Israel.

Lamy believes France’s current crisis reflects long-standing difficulties in addressing social grievances and implementing political reforms. “The real

School’s apology flags antizionist stand

>>Continued from page 1

Emmarentia Primary is a fee-paying public school governed by the South African Schools Act and falling under the Gauteng Department of Education. Public schools may make facilities available for community activities, subject to applicable legislation and policies.

The controversy carries historical significance in Emmarentia, once home to a substantial Jewish community. The neighbourhood has gradually evolved into a more religiously and culturally diverse area, including a growing Muslim community.

A longtime Jewish resident, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said the controversy reflected what she regarded as a longstanding pattern.

“I’ve lived in Emmarentia for more than 20 years. In the past 15 years, the school has become notorious for taking an active anti-Israel stance, and this embarrassing incident is more of the same,” she said. “Why apologise for displaying the flag of a sovereign nation in the world of nations?”

She questioned whether families holding different views on

Israel felt comfortable expressing themselves.

“It’s disappointing that the assumption is being made that the delegitimisation of Israel is mainstream, and everyone approves of it. How is any of this educational or inclusive?”

Johannesburg resident Dianne Kendall expressed similar dismay.

“As a past pupil, I am absolutely disgusted by what has happened,” she wrote on social media. “Children should be allowed to be children. They should be learning about compassion, kindness, critical thinking, and respect for people who may have different beliefs, backgrounds, or identities.

“This is not the Emmarentia Primary I remember.”

In a strongly worded public statement, Pastor Tumelo Thom asked, “Are our schools educational institutions or political campaign headquarters?”

Questions were sent to both principal Variawa and the Gauteng Department of Education, with no responses received at the time of going to print.

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Jewish SA influencer in convoy attacked in West Bank

CLAUDIA GROSS

South African Jewish influencer Bellamy Bellucci was in one of three vehicles that Palestinian teens attacked in the West Bank on Monday 19 October. A group of what she referred to as “children” on motorbikes threw rocks at the vehicles carrying a group of Israel advocates.

The group included social media personalities Cindy Seni, known to her followers as @israelwithcindy, Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, who is standing for election, and Jessy Cohen. Bellucci said Seni was injured during the attack in the Palestinian village of Turmus Ayya, and all three vehicles damaged.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* shortly afterwards, Bellucci said they had been travelling as part of a tour organised by Regavim, an Israeli organisation focused on land policy and planning in areas it considers strategically important to Israel.

The group had planned to visit housing developments in the West Bank, which included seeing mansions. “The closest thing I can liken it to is driving through Houghton,” she said. Bellucci said they were initially taken to locations in Israeli-controlled Area C, but the final stop was in Area B, which is under Palestinian administration.

She said the group had not expected the confrontation that followed. “Our driver told us to put our heads down,” Bellucci said, describing the moment rocks began striking the vehicles.

She said they had noticed children riding electric bicycles and holding up their phones as they had arrived in the village. The situation



escalated when other vehicles began surrounding them. People approached the car at the front of the convoy, in which Hassan-Nahoum was travelling. Bellucci recalled being repeatedly asked whether the group members were Jewish. “We weren’t there to do anything except see the housing,” she said.

Bellucci said the group had become concerned as more people gathered around the cars. They eventually began reversing out of the area after being told to leave. Children on bicycles followed the vehicles, shouting and recording them.

Bellucci began filming the confrontation herself.

She said that those surrounding the vehicles became quieter when they realised she was recording and the children smiled when they realised they were being filmed. As the group attempted to leave, their driver warned them to get down. Bellucci said children on both sides of the road began throwing large rocks at the cars.

The vehicles continued moving until the group reached safety. “All three vehicles were hit and dented,” she said, adding that glass had shattered.

Bellucci said Seni was checked by medical professionals and was doing well. But the experience had affected the group emotionally. “I think mentally everyone’s going through it.”

Bellucci described the confrontation as coordinated, questioning how those present had known the group was coming. However, she acknowledged that she could not explain how the information might have been shared.

The incident occurred in the West Bank, a territory central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Disputes over land, settlement activity, security, and control have contributed to repeated confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis.

Under the Oslo Accords, agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization during the 1990s, the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B, and C. Areas A and B fall under Palestinian civil administration, while Israel retains security responsibility. Area C remains under Israeli civil and security control.

Bellucci said the group had been briefed to

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visit Area C and had already visited two locations before travelling to the final stop. She said she was surprised to find they were going into Area B. She questioned the security arrangements for the tour, saying she had assumed that travelling with Israelis as part of an organised visit would provide adequate protection.

The experience has prompted her to reconsider what she needs to know before participating in similar visits. “I need to ask if I’ll be in a car that is bulletproof? How many people have guns?”

She also expressed concern about how the incident might be portrayed publicly. She said messages were already circulating on Telegram alleging that the Israel Defense Forces had entered the area to provoke an incident. Bellucci questioned how those claims had emerged so quickly.

The confrontation took place during the annual olive harvest, when tensions in parts of the West Bank usually rise amid disputes involving Palestinian farmers, Israeli settlers, and other visitors. Bellucci said she had heard that an earlier incident in the area might have contributed to the hostility towards the group. She maintained, however, that this did not explain what happened to them.

Despite the experience, Bellucci said she intended to continue her work and remain proudly Jewish. She has remained in contact with the other people who were on the tour. “I don’t think anybody was expecting something to occur,” she said. “It just gives me more pause moving forward.”

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South African
Jewish Report

Respect people’s differences

Being different shouldn’t be something we feel the need to hide. Yet being proud of who we are doesn’t always mean feeling safe enough to show it. What should be our strength can become the very thing others use to shut us out.

Last week, I was talking to someone I’ve vaguely known for years. They knew I was a journalist. They knew I was divorced and had two kids. They even knew the area I lived in and where I had lived 20 years ago. But when we were chatting last weekend, they asked where I worked now, and I told them. There were a few moments of silence before they visibly jumped back and blurted out, “So, you are a Jew!” Obviously a little taken aback at this reaction, I said “yes” as if I was offering a piece of information that I had purposely hidden, which I hadn’t.

While they went on to brush over their shock at my revelation, they had quite clearly put me into a pigeonhole with other unsavoury people – those you don’t mix with. The conversation ended fast, before I could ask what their problem was.

I am a proud Jew and a Zionist and I have nothing to hide. If anyone wants to know my political affiliation, I am happy to discuss it. But to many in our South African society, I and we are different. To some, we are an oddity, an “other”. Many people out there don’t know many Jews and some have made clear decisions that Jews who believe in the State of Israel are genocidal maniacs and child murderers. Good news for those people, I have no murderous tendencies nor do any other Zionists I know. We simply believe that Jews have a right to live in peace in Israel, which is our biblical and historical homeland. And judging by the hatred being spewed at Jews the world over, I stand by that even more. Israel is our superstrength, our Kryptonite.

However, being different from the norm is often like running up a cliff. It is often extremely difficult when faced with people who look at your “difference” as if you are evil, bad, subversive, or even a criminal. For this reason, Jews often feel safer and more comfortable with their own. In truth, since 7 October, I have definitely found that to be true, not least that some of those I thought were “friends” in my industry don’t really want to have to deal with me. What have I done wrong? I am openly a Zionist in a time when this is unacceptable to many.

What stayed with me was how quickly a person can become a label. And it left me with an uncomfortable question: when someone reveals a difference we didn’t expect, do we always offer the acceptance we want for ourselves?

The truth is we are all different. Some of us have parts of our lives, or histories, we’d rather not share. That is okay. Keeping something private is not, in itself, evidence of wrongdoing. We remain responsible for any harm we cause, but we don’t owe everyone an account of every part of our lives – whatever social media may sometimes lead us to believe.

If you are a respectable, respectful businessperson who may have an alternative lifestyle, that is your choice and right. It doesn’t mean that anyone has the right to look down their nose at you or dismiss you in your career for this. If you are part of the LGBTQ+ community, what you do for a living should have no bearing on that, or vice versa.

There is someone I know who died earlier this year. He was extremely smart, talented, thoughtful, and respected for his work. However, he had a secret that he didn’t share publicly. Only now is it coming out.

Nothing about this should alter how all the people who’ve respected him and held him in high esteem feel about him. It is nobody’s business but his, and shouldn’t in any way demean him.

In the same way as we despise people who look down at us as Jews, we dare not do the same to people who are different and have secrets they never wished to share. That isn’t who we are and not who we want to be.

Some people avoid telling colleagues they are Jewish because they fear it will affect how they are treated and their careers. We shouldn’t mistake that caution for shame. They have a right to decide what to share, and we should respect that decision. I don’t live in their shoes. I don’t get to decide what they should or shouldn’t disclose.

While I believe it is so sad that anyone feels they have to hide who they are because they are afraid of people’s reaction, I understand it.

In the same way as some gay people choose not to make their sexual preferences known publicly. Again, it is heartbreaking that anyone has to hide something intrinsic to who they are, but it is their right.

Some people keep private the fact that they don’t have a tertiary education or that they have learning difficulties. That need not be an invitation to scrutiny or judgement. Keeping something personal to yourself isn’t the same as misleading someone about a qualification you need for a job.

I want to live in a world where we don’t feel the need to hide anything because we are afraid of others’ reactions to us. I want to live in a world where the term “unity in diversity” is our lived experience. The truth is people’s differences make them interesting. As Jews, we have a lot to teach others. In the same way as a Muslim person has a lot to teach us, if we fully accept their difference.

Our Constitution recognises dignity and privacy as rights, not favours. Yet there is a distance between having those rights on paper and feeling safe enough to live openly.

Accepting someone’s difference doesn’t mean you have to live their lives. It means respecting their dignity, even when you don’t understand every part of their life. That is the acceptance we ask of others. We must be willing to offer it, too.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Bibi, ballots, and a Brazilian



OPINION

BENJI SHULMAN

South African Jews should prepare themselves for an extraordinary political fortnight. Between 25 October and 4 November, four elections across three continents could dramatically reshape the global political landscape in which our community operates.

Israelis will decide whether Benjamin Netanyahu remains prime minister. Americans will vote on whether Donald Trump retains control of Congress and the Senate. South Africans will determine who governs their cities, while Brazilians may replace their left-wing president with the son of one of Israel’s strongest and most Trumpian international allies.

Each election is complicated, each carries enormous consequences, and each will affect South African Jews, whether through our relationship with Israel, our place in South African society, or the international political environment.

Here is what to watch.

Israel: Can Bibi survive again?
When: 27 October 2026
What’s at stake

Benjamin Netanyahu is once again fighting for his political survival. Israel’s longest-serving prime minister faces a challenge from Gadi Eisenkot and other opposition figures seeking to end his remarkable political career.

The election comes after years of war, political upheaval, and extraordinary changes in the Middle East. Netanyahu will be campaigning on his security record despite the failure of 7 October, while his opponents will argue that Israel needs new leadership that will give the nation a chance to heal after the years of upheaval.

But Israeli elections are rarely straightforward contests between two candidates. With a fragmented party system, the winner is not necessarily the politician whose party receives the most votes; it is the one who can put together the most sustainable coalition.

The big question is whether her willingness to go ziplining, swimming, and spinning while personally tackling neglected public spaces can be converted into enough votes to capture South Africa’s economic capital.

What to watch out for

Differential turnout will be the watchword. If disillusioned ANC voters stay home while motivated DA supporters turn out in large numbers, significant political change becomes a serious possibility.

Another wildcard is Jacob Zuma. His health and political visibility could affect the Umkhonto weSizwe Party’s performance, potentially including a sympathy vote if his condition deteriorates.

The results will also shape the ANC’s internal succession battle in 2027. The ANC election campaign has been disorganised, with mayoral candidates not even announced. Regional performances could influence which factions and personalities enter that contest and with what momentum.

More importantly, these elections will provide an early indication of whether South Africa is heading towards something once almost unimaginable: a non-ANC president following the 2029 national elections.

United States: Will Trump lose the Senate?
When: 3 November 2026
What’s at stake

The American midterm elections take place against an increasingly hostile political atmosphere for Republicans.

The House of Representatives, which represents people in the areas in which they live, appears particularly vulnerable, with the Democrats well positioned to make gains and become the majority. The bigger question is whether Republicans can retain control of the Senate, which represents the states.

Should Democrats capture both chambers, the final two years of Trump’s presidency could become

an exercise in political trench warfare, with investigations, legislative obstruction, and constant confrontation between Congress and the White House.

What to watch out for

For Jewish observers, one of the most consequential contests is Michigan, where Abdul El-Sayed, a progressive anti-Israel Democrat, is competing against a security-minded but milquetoast Republican, Mike Rogers.

El-Sayed’s political positions, including his anti-Israel activism, pro-Iran sympathies, and his ties to Islamist organisations and antisemitic online personalities, have attracted controversy,

particularly following a terrorist attack on a Michigan synagogue. While he might be more famous, New York’s Zohran Mamdani looks like a youth movement *madrich* in comparison.

An El-Sayed victory and others in the Senate would represent a significant breakthrough for the Democratic Party’s anti-Israel progressive wing. It could also offer an important indication of where the party is heading ahead of the 2028 presidential election after the end of the Trump era.

And a Brazilian appetiser

Before these three contests, there is an appetiser on 25 October: Brazil’s presidential runoff.

The incumbent left-wing president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, faces Flávio Bolsonaro, son of former president Jair Bolsonaro, one of Israel’s most enthusiastic international supporters.

A Bolsonaro victory could significantly create new tensions within the BRICS bloc of countries, where Brazil and South Africa have frequently found common diplomatic ground in the Middle East. It would also effectively make almost the entire South American continent pro-Israel.

Four elections, 11 days, and enormous uncertainty. For South African Jews, the results will be felt far beyond the ballot boxes. The political world in which we live may look rather different by the first week of November.

• Benji Shulman in the director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute.



What to watch for

The first question is which party emerges as the largest in the Knesset. This can provide an important advantage in persuading Israelis that its leader has the best chance of assembling a coalition.

But the real magic number is 61: the majority needed in Israel’s 120-seat Parliament. Most polls suggest that neither the pro- nor the anti-Netanyahu block has a majority. This will leave the possibility of outside support from the Arab parties for Eisenkot or the opportunity for Bibi to pick up defectors for his coalition. Some of this will depend on whether certain mostly right-wing parties make it over the threshold, giving Bibi additional potential partners.

If neither Netanyahu nor his opponents can assemble a workable coalition, Israel could find itself heading towards yet another election in 2027.

South Africa: Who will control the cities?
When: 4 November 2026
What’s at stake

The municipal elections could mark another historic stage in the decline of ANC political dominance.

The ANC faces the real possibility of failing to secure outright majorities in any of the major metropolitan municipalities. The DA, meanwhile, has opportunities to retain Cape Town and compete for control of Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay, and even eThekweni.

The most important contest will be Johannesburg, where Helen Zille has turned potholes, overgrown verges, and municipal decay into campaign social media sensations.

Fake accounts try to undermine the Israeli election

OPINION

As if Israelis didn't have enough to argue about, the Iranians, it seems, want their say too. With less than a week to go before Israel's election, some of the people arguing most loudly about Benjamin Netanyahu, the war, and the country's future, aren't Israelis at all. Some don't even exist.

The Israeli newspaper *Calcalist* recently reported on an investigation by Spanish intelligence research company Golden Owl that uncovered hundreds of accounts on X masquerading as ordinary Israelis. They had Hebrew names, Israeli flags, and invented personal histories. They discussed politics, attacked politicians, and joined arguments that real Israelis were already having.

Golden Owl assessed 445 of the accounts as linked to an Iranian influence operation, with high or medium-high confidence. Posts from the network attracted at least 4.7 million views between 11 August and 11 October. That's a considerable audience, although views don't tell us how many people believed what they read, let alone whether anyone changed their vote.

I know this game. During my years working for RT, the Russian state-funded television network, whenever I was sent to South Africa, I was encouraged to look for stories that questioned whether the country's new democracy was working – stories, for example, that focused on xenophobia, land reform, and the controversy over expropriation without compensation. When I was sent to Berlin or Paris, the brief was to focus on refugees arriving in large numbers and the damage they were doing to European societies.

I came to understand that the point wasn't necessarily to make people like Russia. That was always going to be a difficult sell. It was far easier to make Westerners, like you and me, question their governments. If viewers could be persuaded that their own countries were failing, Russia might not look quite so bad by comparison.

I see something similar playing out in the suspected Iranian-linked accounts talking about Israeli elections. Whoever is behind them doesn't need Israelis to support Iran, and that isn't their goal. Making Israelis more suspicious of their leaders, their institutions, and one another may be, though. The accounts weren't trying to introduce arguments Israelis had never heard before. They were discussing responsibility for 7 October, the conduct of the war, military service exemptions for the ultra-Orthodox, and Netanyahu's leadership. These are subjects Israelis argue about passionately without any encouragement from Tehran.

So what does it achieve? The idea is that the more often Israelis encounter these arguments, the more they may begin to believe that the country is even more divided than it already is. Anger feeds anger, distrust grows, and the sense that nobody can be believed becomes harder to shake. That, for whoever is behind these accounts, may be a more useful outcome than persuading anyone to vote for a particular party.

One example from an earlier Golden Owl investigation involved an account calling itself Alon Strauss. It appeared to belong to an Israeli political commentator, complete with Hebrew posts criticising Netanyahu. Until April, however, the same account had been posting in Persian about Iranian politics.

When friends and family heard I was bound for Dublin, they looked at me puzzled. Why would you want to go to Ireland? A fair question given the hostility of the Irish government and the antisemitic incidents in the country. It reminded me of the Jewish groups that had contacted me after 7 October asking whether they should cancel their trips to South Africa because of the ANC government's stance on Israel. I encouraged them to come. Firstly, because I still believe that most South Africans don't share this hostility, and secondly, and very importantly, because we need

PAULA SLIER



Golden Owl's wider monitoring also picked up claims about electoral fraud and suggestions that the election might be postponed, although the researchers couldn't attribute every such claim to the suspected Iranian-linked network. This takes the manipulation a step further. It's no longer simply about encouraging Israelis to distrust one another. It's about encouraging them to distrust the election itself. If people are convinced that the system is rigged, the result becomes suspect before a single vote has been counted. That could suit whoever is trying to undermine confidence in Israel's institutions.

But foreign interference is only part of the picture. Some of the attempts to manipulate Israel's online political conversations appear to be coming from inside the country itself. Earlier this month, TikTok reported removing more than 45 000 videos in Israel for breaching its rules on election integrity, misinformation, and misleading content generated by artificial intelligence. Separately, it uncovered a coordinated network of 306 accounts it assessed as operating from Israel and attempting to amplify political messages.

The removed videos and the covert networks were separate findings. But the Israeli-based network raises an uncomfortable question: how much of what appears to be spontaneous political debate is actually being organised within Israel?

And even when the online activity is genuine, it's not always what it seems. Israeli television's Channel 12 recently analysed 368 TikTok videos from eight political accounts, with nearly 10 000 comments on some of the most popular posts. Much of the conversation had surprisingly little to do with policy. People were responding to jokes, personalities, and whatever caught their attention.

Among the examples was a comment on a video involving former prime minister Naftali Bennett and a toasted sandwich. The commenter joked that Bennett's failure to put sauce in his sandwich was enough to make her switch her vote to him. Almost 2 000 people liked the comment. I wouldn't, however, assume those likes meant Bennett had won himself 2 000 votes.

Here in South Africa, we're watching an Israeli election in which many of us feel deeply invested. We speak to family and friends in Israel, follow the arguments, and receive a steady stream of videos, posts, and messages. Often, we're forming opinions about what Israelis think without knowing who produced the material we're watching.

After years of reporting from conflict zones, I've become accustomed to asking who is making a claim, what evidence supports it, and what interest the source might have in telling the story. These questions matter just as much when the subject is an election instead of a war. Israel's divisions are real. They don't need to be invented by Iran, and they shouldn't be dismissed simply because an Iranian-linked network has tried to exploit them. On Tuesday, Israelis will decide who governs them. The fake accounts won't have a vote. But they've already been part of the argument.

- *Paula Slieber is an international journalist, war correspondent, and speaker who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.*

to support Jewish communities in these countries. We need to stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

There were also two practical reasons the envoys chose Dublin for their SECCA meeting. It was hosted by the European Union (EU), whose presidency is currently held by Ireland, and the focus was antisemitism on social media and in artificial intelligence (AI). With Dublin a hub for these platforms, it was the logical venue.

Alongside fellow delegates, I visited TikTok's Transparency and Accountability Centre and met with those responsible for content policy at Meta, building contacts so that I can effectively raise and address issues that arise in South Africa. I was able to share specific local context, which is pivotal to analysing content that comes out of our environment. We also engaged with the executive chairperson of Ireland's media regulator, and with Professor Yuval Shany of the Institute for Ethics in AI at the University of Oxford, on the international legal issues around AI, today and going forward.

It was at a cocktail party hosted by the Irish presidency of the EU at Iveagh House, home of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, that antisemitism was laid bare before envoys, communal leaders, diplomats, and Irish officials.

In his address, Maurice Cohen, president of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, told a story that epitomised the very struggle we had gathered to confront. Earlier this year, while preparing for the conference, the organisers had booked 70 rooms for delegates at the Herbert Park Hotel. Once hotel management learned that the conference would address antisemitism, they had asked him whether the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would be present. A shocked Cohen had explained that it was a conference on antisemitism and had

Continued on page 9>>



WENDY KAHN

Call exclusion of Jews what it is: antisemitism

OPINION

Last week I attended a conference in Dublin, hosted by the World Jewish Congress, alongside government representatives from 38 countries who make up the Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Antisemitism (SECCA), and the Jewish communal leaders accompanying their envoys. As South Africa doesn't have an envoy, I alone took up the seat next to our flag at the table.

Maurice Cohen, President of the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland, and Wendy Kahn

When friends and family heard I was bound for Dublin, they looked at me puzzled. Why would you want to go to Ireland? A fair question given the hostility of the Irish government and the antisemitic incidents in the country. It reminded me of the Jewish groups that had contacted me after 7 October asking whether they should cancel their trips to South Africa because of the ANC government's stance on Israel. I encouraged them to come. Firstly, because I still believe that most South Africans don't share this hostility, and secondly, and very importantly, because we need



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Former Israeli diplomats slam settler violence

LEE TANKLE

Former Israeli ambassador to South Africa Arthur Lenk was one of more than 120 former diplomats and foreign service officials who protested on Sunday, 18 October, against the escalating violence by Jewish extremists in the West Bank. They warned that this is damaging Israel’s international standing and threatening its national security.

Their condemnation follows a series of attacks, including on *The Washington Post* photographer Heidi Levine, who was seriously injured while she covered the Palestinian olive harvest near Abu Falah in the West Bank on Friday 16 October.

The former ambassadors described another attack, involving foreign diplomats, as a “new low” and demanded responses from Israel’s government and security forces.

“I think it’s important for people who are Israeli patriots, who have spent their lives standing up for Israel in some of the most complicated places in the world, including South Africa, to speak out,” Lenk told the *SA Jewish Report*.

In a statement circulated on social media, he and the other former diplomats said, “The escalation of the ongoing harm to both Palestinians and non-Palestinians documenting the rampage is a criminal act targeting innocent individuals and communities and constitutes a moral stain that will not easily be erased. It is causing unacceptable damage to Israel’s foreign relations and international image, not to mention the loss of governance unfolding before our very eyes.

“These abhorrent and indefensible outrages are not Israel’s way, are a profound betrayal of core Jewish values, are an unconscionable affront to basic human principles and dignity, and are

fundamentally inconsistent with the behaviour of an enlightened country.”

The violence by Jewish settlers is not new, but it appears to have reached a new level, prompting the former ambassadors and foreign ministry officials to make their voices heard.

Lenk said just as diplomats spent their careers advocating for their country, they also had a responsibility to call attention to actions they believe are wrong and damaging to Israel, including those of its government.

“The government has been ignoring [the violence], and there are even ministers in the government who support it.

“It would be hypocritical if I only criticised the other side. If you only ever criticise one side, it becomes propaganda. If you want to speak the truth, you also must be willing to criticise your own side when something is wrong. There is so much to love, appreciate, and admire about my country, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t speak out when we believe it is doing something wrong,” Lenk said.

“We are a group of former Israeli diplomats, mostly former ambassadors, who care not only about Israel’s image abroad, which has been tarnished by events in the territories, but also about the moral implications,” said a former Israeli diplomat in a video of their protest outside the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem.

“We were shocked by the attacks on foreign diplomats, and we are shocked by the silence of the people in the building behind us, the Israeli Foreign Ministry. We demand an end to Jewish terrorism in general, and specifically to attacks on foreign representatives, whether diplomats or journalists. We demand that the Israeli government intervene, not on behalf of

the settlers, but on behalf of the people being attacked.”

Lenk explained that perhaps because Israelis are heading to the polls in a week people want to make their positions clear. But even without elections, the government should be held accountable.

“There are people and political parties in Israel going into the election saying that Arabs in the West Bank or Israel should be encouraged to

security,” Lenk said. It’s not known how most Israelis feel about the settler violence, but Lenk believes it will be clearer when the results of the election come out.

“I think anyone who looks at the videos of what has happened in recent weeks and understands what is really going on can see that violence is not our way and should not be our way. Israel is meant to be a country governed



leave, or that we can achieve ‘total victory’. But that is nonsense,” he said.

“I’m not arguing that we don’t need to defend ourselves. I served in the Israeli army, as did my daughters, and after 7 October, Israel obviously needed to protect itself following the horrific events of that day. But defence and the military aren’t enough. You need diplomacy too. They are twin tools.

“I very much believe that Israel needs both security and diplomacy. Being an Israeli ambassador and standing up to the South African government and saying that its claims of genocide are ridiculous is also part of protecting the State of Israel. Pilots, tank commanders, those protecting our borders, and diplomats all play a role. All of those things come together as part of Israel’s national

by the rule of law, and if people break the law or resort to violence, whether they are Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, the law must apply equally to everyone.”

He hopes Israelis across the political and religious spectrums will recognise that respect for the law and shared Jewish values transcend political divisions, and unite in calling for change.

“We want a government that takes responsibility, is accountable, and wants to be part of the international community. That is my hope for Israel – that we can honour all human life and all the people of Israel. Whether that leads to peace is a different question, but I think it’s important to have a government that sees itself as accountable to us and to our people,” he said.

Savadier goes down the pantomime rabbit hole

Award-winning actor and writer **Russel Savadier** plays Lewis Carroll, the author-narrator, in the *Alice in Wonderland* pantomime. The *SA Jewish Report* caught up with him during rehearsals.

What drew you to the part of Lewis Carroll in this year’s panto?

A chance to work with the wonderful [writer-director] Janice Honeyman again. We’ve worked together many times over the past 125 years. I would never say no to anything she asks me to do.

You have done so much work on television, film, and stage, but have you done a pantomime before?

What challenges does it offer?

I’ve done one pantomime in my career. That was so long ago, it was when they were still done at the Market Theatre. *Jack and the Beanstalk* – playing Mayor Mumbly. The major challenge is keeping up with all the extraordinary energy on stage. It’s a whirlwind out there!

Will you be singing or just surrounded by singing? Either way, how does your one deaf ear affect things?

I’m a very good shower singer, but wouldn’t expect anyone to pay good money to listen to me sing! So, I’m surrounded by wonderful singing voices. I was born deaf in an ear and it probably contributes more to my sense of musical timing than the actual notes. I can’t imagine what it would be like to have 100% hearing. I’ve gotten very used to it.

How is your singing voice?

Karaoke friendly! I love musicals though. I collect them.

Tell us about your Jewish or Jew-ish upbringing and life?

My father was an atheist. My mom had a reasonable connection to her Jewish roots. I had a Barmitzvah (as did both my sons), but my Jewishness lay dormant for most of my adult life. Since marrying my wonderful second wife, Diane, I’m far more connected to my Judaism and the Jewish community. You’ll find us doing Shabbat most Friday nights.

What do you love about the *Alice in Wonderland* panto?

Mostly the energy! Being part of this extraordinarily talented group of performers. It’s just such fun – how could you not love it?

Tell us about your role.

I play Lewis Carroll, the author of the original *Alice in Wonderland*. I’m the narrator and the link to the story and all the magic that happens.

What is your opinion of Lewis Carroll and his work?

He was pretty “out there”, wasn’t he? Quite the visionary – his own imagination must have been quite spectacular. Would be so interesting to have a conversation with him now.

There is a beautiful message in *Alice in Wonderland*. How would you describe it and what can our children (and adults) learn from it?

I think the message is to open your hearts and minds, to always keep exploring. To be open to new adventures. Hold on to your inner child – always!

What is the next challenge on your list?

I go straight into rehearsals for *The Bodyguard* next year.

Another musical – where I don’t sing.

Tell us about the gems in your cast and panto team.

There is honestly so much talent in the cast it might be unfair to single anyone out. I will say that Ashley Scott who plays Alice is super talented and she’s going to knock many socks off.

• Janice Honeyman’s *Alice in Wonderland* is at the Joburg Theatre from 31 October to 24 December.



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As Israel rebuilds, it needs our support more than ever

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSDORFF



Three years after 7 October, Israel is rebuilding. Homes are being repaired, communities are returning, and new neighbourhoods are rising from the destruction. But beneath this extraordinary recovery lies a country still deeply traumatised.

On a recent trip to Israel, we witnessed this firsthand.

One of the most haunting experiences was at the Supreme Court of Israel. We sat in on the case of former soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder – some accompanied by their therapy dogs – who were fighting for better recognition of their injuries. One wounded soldier began screaming at the judges from the visitors’ gallery, visibly breaking down before our eyes. These were men who had risked

everything for their country. Now they were fighting another battle, this time to be recognised.

It brought home something that’s easy to forget from thousands of kilometres away. The war may eventually end, but for many Israelis the trauma will continue for years.

Yet travelling through southern Israel, I was struck by something equally powerful: the determination to rebuild.

On the kibbutzim devastated on 7 October homes are being reconstructed and families are slowly returning. Some communities are still struggling with the question of whether they can ever truly go home. Others are determined not simply to restore what existed before, but to build something better.

The most remarkable example is Sderot. A city that endured years of rocket attacks, and was largely evacuated after 7 October, has not merely recovered its population. It has grown. According to its deputy mayor, Sderot’s population has increased almost 20% since 2023, reaching approximately 42 000.

Think about that. After the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, people are choosing to move towards the Gaza border, not away from it.

At Kibbutz Ruhama, we saw another remarkable story. When the residents of Kfar Aza were forced from their homes, Ruhama opened its doors. With the support of Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael – Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), an entire neighbourhood of 120 temporary homes was built to accommodate the displaced families.

But what struck me wasn’t simply the buildings. It was the humanity. One community had taken responsibility for another, providing not just shelter, but dignity, compassion, and a place to begin healing.

There, we dedicated a new playground from the South African Jewish community for the children of Kfar Aza. We also broke ground on a new resilience centre in the south, supported by our community, to help with healing. In doing so, we joined Jewish communities from around the world in the reconstruction effort.

That spirit is reflected in the scale of the work now under way. KKL-JNF

approved NIS 750 million in 2025 for rehabilitating communities in the north and south, and this year a further NIS 859 million (R4.5 billion) over three years for northern Israel.

But bricks and mortar are the easier part.

Israel is now in the middle of a bitter election campaign. Everywhere there are accusations, recriminations, and political attacks. The campaign often seems more about personalities and settling scores than offering a serious vision for the country’s future.

Much of this anger is understandable. Three years on, Israelis are still demanding to know how 7 October could have happened. Why were communities abandoned? Who was responsible? And why do so many of those who suffered feel they have been left to fight for the support they deserve?

After years of war, repeated reserve call-ups, broken families, and exhausted soldiers, there is growing resentment towards the continued exemption of large numbers of ultra-Orthodox men from military service. For families who have buried sons, or whose fathers and husbands have spent hundreds of days in uniform, the argument is no longer theoretical. It is about fairness, and about whether all Israelis are prepared to share responsibility for the country’s survival.

And hanging over everything is the uncomfortable reality that the security threats have not disappeared. Iran, Hamas,

and Hezbollah have all been weakened, but none can be considered permanently defeated. There is a foreboding sense that the conflict is not truly over. Israelis know that rebuilding their homes means little if they cannot be confident their children will be safe in them.

This is the contradiction of Israel today: a country capable of extraordinary unity in moments of crisis, yet deeply fractured in its politics. A people who can rebuild an entire neighbourhood in months, but struggle to rebuild trust in their institutions and in one another.

Perhaps that is the real challenge for the next generation of Zionism: not simply rebuilding houses, schools, and forests, but building a society in which people feel protected, cared for, and united by a common purpose.

For us in the diaspora, there is also an important lesson. Supporting Israel cannot end with defending it on social media or arguing with its critics. It must also mean helping Israelis rebuild their lives. Sometimes the most meaningful expression of solidarity is not a speech or a slogan, but a home, a playground, or a helping hand.

The prophet Amos spoke of a time when the people of Israel would return, “They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; they will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit” (Amos 9: 14).

Nearly 3 000 years later, those words have extraordinary relevance. Israel is once again rebuilding its ruined communities. The challenge now is to heal the wounds of those who live in them.

And that may be the hardest rebuilding of all.

• Michael Kransdorff is national chairperson of the Jewish National Fund of South Africa and was on a JNF SA solidarity mission to Israel.



Kibbutz Kfar Aza’s children in the South African playground

Call exclusion of Jews what it is: antisemitism

>>>Continued from page 7

nothing to do with Israel or the IDF. The rooms were cancelled.

In his powerful speech, Cohen asked, “How quickly does the word ‘Jewish’ change a conversation? How easily does a gathering about antisemitism become associated with the Israeli army? And how quickly can people who were welcome when they were simply 70 hotel guests become something rather different once they are known to be attending a Jewish congress?”

He continued, “Contemporary antisemitism doesn’t always arrive wearing the language of the past. It doesn’t always announce itself with a slur, a threat, or a placard. Increasingly, it can present itself as a question, a precaution, a policy, a request for clarification. It begins by treating Jewish identity as evidence of political allegiance. It turns Jewish people into representatives of a foreign state, Jewish gatherings into security concerns, and ordinary acts of welcome into decisions requiring special permission. That is the danger of antisemitism today: not only that it excludes Jews, but that it makes their exclusion appear reasonable.”

On the flight home, I thought deeply about Cohen’s remarks, and about the conversation we’d had over a Guinness just before I left. I reflected on similar issues in South Africa. Different circumstances, the same rationalising of discrimination and exclusion.

In February 2023, SA Rugby Union (SARU) president Mark Alexander cited security concerns as the reason for rescinding the Israeli team’s invitation to compete in the Mzansi Challenge. Despite complaints filed with World Rugby over the violation of its rules and regulations, and SARU’s failure to substantiate any security threat, the Tel Aviv Heat were excluded.

Similarly, Cricket SA (CSA) stripped David Teeger of the captaincy of the

U19 Cricket World Cup team citing “security concerns”. When the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) met with CSA chairperson Lawson Naidoo and his leadership team, they failed to provide any credible security threat. Again, just a cover story for exclusion.

In September 2024, the New South Institute’s Africa Global Dialogue brought together renowned thought leaders from around the world, from diverse backgrounds and with different perspectives, to address the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A vicious campaign was launched to vilify the conference and pressure speakers and attendees to withdraw, and Constitution Hill cancelled the venue at the last moment. Conference organiser Professor Ivor Chipkin observed that Constitution Hill’s cancellation “betrayed its commitment to free expression, but also emboldened those who seek to suppress ideas that they find offensive or challenging”.

Ireland and South Africa pride themselves on their hard-won democracies. But to truly embrace these values, they need to uphold the principles of diversity and the protection of minorities.

Speaking at the Dublin community’s 7 October commemoration before the SECCA conference, Dr Alexandra Herzog, from the American Jewish Community, said, “A democracy cannot be truly pluralistic if minorities feel they must hide part of themselves in order to belong.”

We have to fight back to retain our spaces, whether in Ireland, in South Africa, or in the growing number of countries trying to exclude us from public life. I know that the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland will not accept the antisemitic move, and I can assure you that the SAJBD will continue to fight every attempt at exclusion.

• Wendy Kahn is national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.



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Colombia’s exit a blow to SA-led antizionist Hague Group

TALI FEINBERG

Extremist anti-Israel diplomatic bloc The Hague Group has been shaken by the dramatic exit of Colombia, which co-chaired the group with South Africa.

In July 2025, Hamas praised the group for resolving to target the Jewish State with legal, economic, and diplomatic measures. But after Colombians voted in a new government just a couple of weeks later, Bogotá radically changed course, re-establishing close ties with Israel.

It closed its embassy in Pretoria in July, and opened an embassy in Jerusalem last week. It was at the opening of this embassy that Colombian Foreign Minister Omar Bula Escobar announced the withdrawal from The Hague Group, which he said “is a group of countries that attacked Israel and worked to isolate it. We oppose that approach.”

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks says, “Colombia did not quietly exit The Hague Group on 16 October 2026. It repudiated it.”

Escobar announced the withdrawal the same day Colombia opened its embassy in Jerusalem, the 10th foreign embassy in Israel’s capital, and formally reversed [previous president] Gustavo Petro’s termination of the Colombia-Israel free trade agreement. “That is not symbolism. It is restitution,” says Marks.

Escobar said that 7 October “was a barbaric attack carried out by despicable murderers from a culture of death”, and that Colombia stands with the truth and with Israel. He said the previous government in Colombia had “behaved disgracefully”, failing to condemn terrorism and opening the door to “an ugly wave of antisemitism”. The Hague Group was advised by

groups supportive of terrorism from its inception.

Escobar described the opening of Colombia’s embassy in Jerusalem as a “historic event” and said, “I’m almost in tears at this event marking the restoration of relations with Israel, which should never have been severed.” He also met with freed hostage Elkana Bohbot, whose wife hails from Colombia, and said that hostage survivors “are an inspiration to us all”.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara at the reception to celebrate the inauguration of the embassy of Colombia in Jerusalem

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies’ David May says South Africa helped launch The Hague Group “to bolster its lawfare campaign against Israel”. But now, four of the nine original members have departed – Colombia, Belize, Bolivia, and Honduras.

“What was supposed to be a global campaign to support human rights has been exposed as an extremist attempt to undermine Israel through political means,” says May. “Their departures have

weakened The Hague Group and demonstrated the limited appetite among third parties for persecuting Israel under the guise of accountability.”

Even the Middle East Monitor, a news outlet sympathetic to Hamas, asked if The Hague Group is “beginning to fall apart” with the withdrawal of Bolivia and Colombia.

The remaining members of the group are Cuba, Malaysia, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa. There is a possibility that Malaysia may take Colombia’s place as co-chair with South Africa.

Executive director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute Benji Shulman says, “Colombia was one of the founding countries of The Hague Group, so its withdrawal shows that The Hague Group is principally a political institution and not one that’s seriously involved with global governance.”

For example, “no one removes themselves from the United Nations because the domestic political situation changed, but that’s exactly what happened here”.

He says the same is likely to happen with other countries, for example Brazil or Spain, if governments change.

“So, it is important, and it does undermine the organisation and show that it’s not a normal international forum, but really a political one with different actors,” says Shulman.

He says The Hague Group can be seen as the “diplomatic version” of BRICS. “BRICS is an economic alliance, but The Hague Group is a way to build up an alternative diplomatic structure in the world to oppose the United States and Israel.”

Therefore, the withdrawal of Colombia is significant, “but not necessarily fatal”, he says.

“South Africa won’t abandon The Hague Group, because it’s of its making and because it fits in with the ANC’s political stances.”

Shulman says Colombia’s pro-Israel shift signifies a wider “geostrategic change, particularly in South America”.

Essentially, “the whole of South America is a pro-Israel continent almost, with the exception of Brazil”, says Shulman. “But there’s a big election coming up on 25 October in Brazil, where it’s possible that a more pro-Israel government will come in. If that happens, then all the major countries in South America – Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and even Venezuela – basically the whole continent, will now be pro-Israel.”

Middle East expert Professor Glen Segell agrees that “a formidable setback to South Africa’s anti-Israel campaign emerges from South American political currents”.

Within the past half-year, “three nations have witnessed triumphant right-leaning electoral movements, Colombia, Bolivia, and Honduras,” says Segell. “For these countries, abandoning their Hague Group membership represents a pivotal transformation in foreign policy, as their political ideology renders sustained participation fundamentally incompatible with their governance principles.”

Now, they are pursuing enhanced ties with Washington and Israel, “recognising these alliances as vital sources of political credibility and global influence”.

The trajectory becomes “unmistakable” for The Hague Group “as these withdrawals illuminate a fundamental weakness: its viability hinges critically on the political longevity of administrations committed to maintaining anti-Israeli stances”, says Segell. “Following these departures, The Hague Group confronts a genuine peril of diminishing political leverage and continental standing. It now finds itself progressively confined to a narrower circle of smaller nations.”

May says that “Israel has become a global political football, a lightning rod for the progressive-conservative divide. Sharp swings among democracies have caused whiplash in how countries approach Israel.”

Marks says Colombia now joins Bolivia and Honduras, both founding members of this bloc, “both gone within the year, each departure following an election that chose cooperation over confrontation. A coalition built in January 2025 to isolate Israel is being dismantled one election at a time by the very governments that founded it.”

She says “South Africa should take note” because “the company it keeps on this file is shrinking, and the governments abandoning The Hague Group are not retreating from principle. They are correcting a mistake. Pretoria has yet to ask itself why.”

How did SA pupils vote in mock Israeli election?

AMIRA KARSTAEDT



Over the past month, Habonim Dror has run mock Israeli elections at King David High School in Johannesburg and Herzlia High School in Cape Town, gaining an insightful snapshot of what young diaspora Jews are thinking and feeling about the 27 October polls.

In partnership with King David’s Judaica and Zionism committee and the South African Zionist Federation based in Cape Town, Habonim facilitated the week-long event. It gave a short informal lesson on how Israeli democracy works, explained the structure of the Knesset, and shared an overview of key issues facing Israelis as they decide who to elect as the next ruling party. Candidates were then selected and briefed on which political party they would represent at assembly. The lineup included Likud, Yashar, B’Yachad, The Democrats, and more.

A week of creative canvassing followed. Sweets, posters, mascots, merch, and theatrics fuelled the campaigns and contributed to a buzzing atmosphere at the schools. Finally, the day of the mock election arrived. The polls opened at breaktime, and pupils swarmed the blue boxes to cast their ballots.

After counting the votes, the results were in! King David and Herzlia produced vastly different results, mirroring the splits in Israeli society on some major issues. The results were as follows:

King David: Yashar (28.81%), Likud (26.78%), Otzma Yehudit (21.36%), B’Yachad (15.93%), The Democrats (7.12%). A total of 295 votes from Grades 8 to 11 were counted.

Herzlia: The Democrats (44.90%), Likud (24.52%), and Yisrael Beiteinu (9.37%). In total, 363 pupils voted.

Ultimately, the results of both schools reflect the desire for some kind of shift in leadership for Israel. While pupils may not agree on the exact direction in which Israel should be headed, the idea that it’s time to make a real change is apparent among young Jews living in the diaspora.

The mock elections made pupils better informed about Israeli democracy. They got to weigh up the candidates and practise their critical thinking skills, while also engaging with, and perhaps even questioning, their personal sets of values.

The mock Israeli elections provided a fascinating lens into how Jewish youth interpret current affairs in Israel. It was an enjoyable prelude to what will be a critical election for the State of Israel.

• Amira Karstaedt is rosh machaneh for Habonim Dror Southern Africa.





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Olim ‘do life’ while remembering fallen soldiers

LEE TANKLE

Rather than holding a sombre ceremony to commemorate lives lost on 7 October, about 100 olim ran along the Tel Aviv Promenade in memory of fallen South African and Australian soldiers.

Australian *oleh* Rami Tal’s Rutz Club in Tel Aviv partnered with Telfed for a memorial run honouring 12 fallen soldiers with South African and Australian connections. Along with the remembrance, the run was also about life, bringing together people from around the world who’ve chosen to make Israel their home.

Tal, whose mother hails from South Africa, moved from Australia to Tel Aviv in June 2022, initially working in high tech. He moved into food content through his online presence, Cooking with Rami, and hosting private dinner parties.

The Telfed run in Tel Aviv



Spending time in Australia following 7 October, he noticed the popularity of social running clubs there and realised Tel Aviv lacked similar casual, community-focused running groups, with existing clubs catering more to serious runners.

So, he started Rutz Club, which runs 5km along the Tel Aviv Tayelet at 07:00 every Thursday and has grown from one or two runners to a group of about 150 who come every week, many of them olim. Although Rutz Club was never intended as a gathering of olim, it has turned out to be a soft landing for them.

“The number of stories I hear and the number of people I meet who decide to come to Rutz Club as their first destination when they make aliya is amazing. They know it’s a place that’s welcoming and where they’ll be able to make friends,” said Tal. “I’ve met so many people whose lives have changed because of the running club, meeting other people, having a place to go for Shabbat dinner. Just finding their community. So even though it wasn’t the goal, it very much became where olim found a home. It’s also a great way for them to meet Israelis because you don’t interact with Israelis intimately every day, and this was definitely one of the places that mixed the two groups together.”

Tal explained that communal events like the memorial run, and the ordinary weekly runs, are important because they signify what his Israeli friends mean when, instead of saying, “Have a good day” or “See you later” when saying goodbye, they say, “*La’asot chaim*”, “Do life”.

“I think that sums up why this is so important. Yes, we need to be sad and reflect, but we also need to continue living. Bringing 100 people together at 07:00, waking up early, choosing to be active, and choosing to be outside, is very much choosing to live. That’s why I think this run was so important – it was about embracing *la’asot chaim*,” said Tal.

As well as going for the run, everyone in the club goes for a dip in the Mediterranean. “We have a little slogan, ‘Run, dip, sip’. We go for a run, have a dip in the water, and then grab a coffee together. It’s a nice social gathering once a week, focused on

doing something a little healthier than going out and partying.”

So, when Telfed was looking for a way to commemorate 7 October and honour fallen soldiers with South African and Australian connections, while bringing people together and reminding them why they choose to live in Israel, partnering with Tal and Rutz Club was a natural fit.

“As a community organisation, we’re seeing more and more young people choosing to make Israel their home,” said Telfed chairperson Maish Isaacson. “There’s something incredibly powerful about coming together, celebrating life, and recognising that together, we can heal and move forward.

“We owe so much to our soldiers, those still defending us and those who made the ultimate sacrifice. We have a responsibility to keep their memories alive, to speak about who they were and what they stood for. Partnering with Rami and

Rutz Club allowed us to honour them by embracing the life and the country they fought to protect,” said Isaacson.

Tal had already wanted to do a commemoration run, since one of his friends, Benjamin Lazarus, was related to fallen soldier Daniel Perez. “It really just made sense to commemorate the lives we lost, to celebrate them as well through moving and community and being in

the holy land,” said Tal.

The run honoured 12 fallen soldiers with South African or Australian connections, Captain Daniel Perez, killed at the Nahal Oz military post on 7 October; Major Sa’ar Margolis, Staff Sergeant Adam Agmon, and Staff Sergeant Regev Amar, who were all killed fighting at Kibbutz Kissufim on 7 October; and Staff Sergeant Shoam Ben Harush, who died of wounds suffered on 7 October. It also commemorated Captain Yaron Eliezer Chitiz, Captain Eyal Mevorach Twito, Master Sergeant (res.) Ido Aviv, Sergeant First Class (res.) Nitai Metodi, Staff Sergeant Zamir Burke, Staff Sergeant Netanel Pessach, and Staff Sergeant Moshe Shmuel Noll, all of whom fell during the war.

The runners got to hear words from Lazarus about Perez, as well as words from Debbie Chitiz, the mother of South African fallen soldier Yaron.

“We began with a commemoration, where I said a few words and read out the names of the fallen soldiers with connections to South Africa and Australia and Telfed. We acknowledged not only those who had fallen, but also the soldiers who’ve spent so much time serving in the reserves and the impact the war has had on everyone,” said Tal. “Debbie and Benjamin spoke and shared some beautiful words about their loved ones before we set off

on the run. Usually, we play upbeat music, but that morning we played beautiful Hebrew music instead.” Isaacson said, “The energy that morning was extraordinary. There was enormous respect and gratitude for our soldiers and fallen heroes, but also this incredible sense of resilience, unity, and love for Israel. Seeing so many people, especially young people, running together and celebrating life in this amazing, vibrant country was a powerful reminder of why we’re here and what we’re determined to protect.”

Café Xoho in Tel Aviv donated breakfast and drinks for everyone after the run. People stayed, ate together, and spent time with one another. “There was just this beautiful sense of togetherness,” Tal explained.



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Balancing the observance scale

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

People with different levels of observance not only make up the wider community but families too. When you live in the same house but are on different religious paths, finding common ground often requires considerable compromise.

This is especially true within a marriage. When Romy and Evan* met almost 30 years ago, they bonded over their traditional Orthodox upbringings. Yet a year later, when Evan decided to become more observant after a tragic loss, Romy was unsure if she could continue the relationship, despite their strong connection.

“His decision came as quite a shock to me as I wasn’t ready to embrace all this,” she admits. “The goalposts had changed dramatically. But we both agreed it was worth the effort.” While the couple decided to compromise, Evan’s family, who were also now more religious, were not as accepting and tried to “convert” Romy. But over the years, they have grown to trust her and respect her different views and strong character.

Now married for more than 25 years, Romy and Evan have maintained their individual religious lifestyles. “Not all of it has been easy,” Romy says. “It takes a lot of tolerance and compromise on both sides. If he had insisted I follow his path, it wouldn’t have worked out as I’m not willing to be that religious and practise all that goes with it.”

Yet in respecting one another’s needs, Romy keeps a kosher home and commemorates all the *chaggim*, which, as a traditional Jew, is important to her too. Evan compromises by eating fish and vegetarian meals at non-kosher restaurants. While Evan keeps Shabbat and goes to shul on Saturdays, Romy generally stays home or goes out with friends.

Sometimes she joins Evan at religious friends or family for Shabbos lunch. This was initially a challenge, she says. “I tried to hide my not being *shomrei* by parking down the road. I no longer do that. I embrace who I am. I do, however, respect their views and customs when I’m with them.” The couple’s secular friends accommodate Evan by arranging kosher meat or fish for him when he and Romy come over for meals.

In raising their daughter, Romy and Evan agreed to give her a Jewish education but left her level of observance up to her. While she ultimately chose a more secular way of life, she spent a gap year in Jerusalem, sometimes observing Shabbat. Today, she occasionally goes to shul with her friends. “She’s managed the process very well with no pressure from either side,” Romy says. “She keeps a kosher home and is very respectful of *frum* customs and dress.”

Although the couple still has disagreements, they get through it without killing each other, Romy jokes. “I think there is sometimes judgement from Evan in that I have not ‘seen the light’. And I often contest his views and say that he is ‘blinkered’ and doesn’t have an open enough mind to see all perspectives. Yet, we’ve made it work very successfully with give and take on both sides.”

Being the parent of a child who adopts a *frum* way of life also requires significant adjustment. Deanne Herson says her son showed an interest in becoming religious from an early age, wanting *tzitzit* and asking to keep kosher. She told him he could make such decisions once he had his Barmitzvah.

“That’s exactly what happened. He turned 13 and became kosher. I

had a kosher section in the house just for him, but he was still eating on my plates and from my oven, and he’d eat fish and pizza out. When my father-in-law passed away, my son was about 14 and there was no one else to say kaddish, so he did it. At that point, he told me he had to be 100% kosher.”

Herson eventually kashered her entire house. Now 22, her son is more observant than ever, she says. “My older daughter is traditional like me and his twin sister is on the other end of the spectrum, not at all interested,” she says. “I’m quite an open-minded parent, and nothing is forced upon anyone from kashrut to Shabbos; it’s their choice.”

However, the family’s different levels of observance sometimes mean they cannot celebrate occasions together, like when someone prefers a birthday meal at a non-kosher restaurant. Her son also spends *chaggim* and some Shabboses with shul friends as his synagogue is a 5km walk from home.

While Herson’s house is strictly kosher, she herself doesn’t keep kosher.

“It’s difficult running a kosher home when you’re not *frum* because there’s a level of trust,” she says. Her son often questions whether she’s following all the kashrut requirements to the letter. “It does put my back up and it creates a bit of tension, so those are the challenges,” she admits. “But generally, he is comfortable eating in the house as he knows that I’m very strict.”

Ultimately, Herson says she’s supportive of her son’s choice. “I’m a Jew and I was brought up in a kosher home, so I’m glad that he’s following our family values.”

Kira*, who is in her early 20s and lives with her parents, is more religious than the rest of her family. Her home has always been kosher and traditional, but at 17 she became more observant through the Bnei Akiva youth movement. “I saw with Bnei that you can be a ‘normal’ person and still keep Shabbos and be observant,” she says. “That’s when it changed for me, but it was a slow and gradual increase in observance, like going to shul more frequently.”

Things got complicated when religious friends would come over to her house on Shabbos and the TV would be on, for example. “I knew my parents didn’t keep Shabbos, but no one stopped me and I didn’t stop my parents from doing anything,” she says. “It’s their house so I just do my own thing and go to my room.”

Kira’s main concern is her sister, who recently moved out and doesn’t keep a kosher home. “If I become more *frum* like I want to, I’ll have to sacrifice eating in my sister’s home. Or I’ll make it uncomfortable for her as she won’t be able to cook food for me in her own pots.”

Her dressing more modestly has also been an adjustment for her family, she says. “I didn’t know how to explain it to them, and my mom still doesn’t really understand it. But we’re constantly trying to help make things easier for each other.” While they may express their Judaism differently, with Kira feeling more connected through *halacha*, she and her family ultimately have the same values in terms of trusting in a higher power, she says.

*Name has been changed due to family sensitivities.



Playing on your phone can now be a *mitzvah*

>> Continued from page 12

perform different *mitzvot* and briefly explaining their significance, with Hebrew, English translations, and transliterations where needed. Each completed *mitzvah* earns donor-funded money that users can allocate to a charity of their choice through their Orah wallet.

To encourage continued engagement, the app uses Duolingo-style streaks and trophies for consistently performing *mitzvot*. It also has a social element similar to Instagram, allowing users to follow one another, share photos and reflections about the *mitzvot* they perform, comment on posts, and give a “shkoyach” instead of a “like”.

In the month in which the app has been active, Orah has reached more than a thousand active users, with about 30 000 *mitzvot* completed globally.

“People are telling me that, for the first time, they actually feel able to practise their Judaism, and that it has changed their whole morning routine,” says Abadi.

“For me, a big moment came when I was on Instagram for work and found myself getting sucked into scrolling for

longer than I wanted to. I closed it and opened Orah, and it felt like a breath of fresh air. It’s such a positive space. You’re doing good, other people are doing good, and you’re supporting and celebrating that. It’s such a contrast.”

When Abadi was in South Africa earlier this year, he showed someone the app, and they suggested getting in touch with the Division of Informal Jewish Education at King David Schools, and they have now entered into a partnership.

“For me, being able to have an impact on the school I attended is incredibly meaningful. They really liked the idea and moved quickly to get involved. We created a personalised version of Orah for King David, with its own incentives and a dedicated Explore page where pupils can find school announcements and Jewish inspiration,” he says.

Abadi realises that the danger in gamifying *mitzvot* is that people will forget the meaning behind why they should do good. However, the whole purpose is to get people doing *mitzvot* and connecting to Judaism, and the game element can only help people become

more engaged, he says.

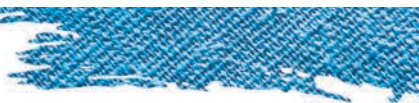
“The Talmud teaches that you should do a *mitzvah* even if it isn’t initially for the right reasons, because ultimately you will come to do it for the right reasons. There’s an element of that here, but ultimately, we’d rather have people doing *mitzvot* than spending that time on Instagram.”

There are basic *mitzvot* that users start with: Modeh Ani, Tehillim, noticing a mezuzah, morning blessings, giving *tzedakah*, blessings on food, an act of kindness, and many more. The *mitzvot* getting the most traction include Modeh Ani in the morning, five minutes of personal prayer or meditation, daily wisdom, making a blessing over food, and one act of kindness. But also included are *mitzvot* connected to everyday life, such as looking after your health.

“We have Shehecheyanu for when you buy a new item of clothing – you can take a picture of it and turn that everyday moment into a *mitzvah*. We also have things like wearing *tefillin*, giving charity, and performing acts of *chesed* [kindness],” he says.



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Sexual dangers lurk everywhere in children’s lives

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“Harm doesn’t always arrive looking dangerous. Very often, it sits inside relationships of trust, authority, and familiarity,” Rozanne Sack, co-founder of Koleinu SA, a non-profit that combats domestic violence, sexual abuse, and child grooming within the South African Jewish community, said at the Koleinu SA Protecting Childhood Virtual Summit this week.

“That’s part of what makes recognition, and disclosure, so difficult,” she said.

Koleinu SA’s School Safe and Teen Safe programmes work in schools to prevent child sexual abuse. “Yet, no single person or programme can create safety alone,” said Koleinu SA co-founder Wendy Hendler. “Protection comes from the entire ecosystem working together, which is why we operate in all the different facets of the community.”

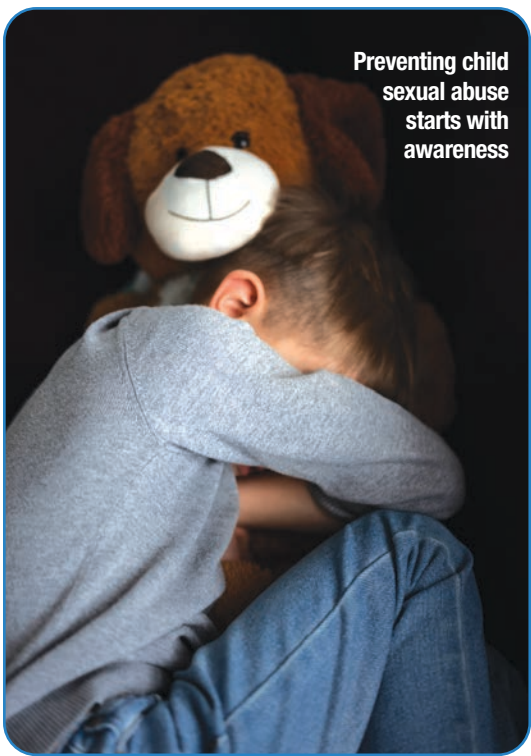
Sharing his personal experience of a cycle of childhood and teenage abuse, speaker Martin Pelders discussed the often hidden, long-term impact of sexual abuse on boys and men. With common beliefs around sexual abuse centred on female victims and male perpetrators, male victims are often left floundering. Yet, according to a South African 2006 study, 44% of boys across all demographic groups had suffered

unwanted sexual contact by the age of 18. “My story is different because it doesn’t fit the societal narrative,” said Pelders. “We only have one side of the story, which excludes so many people from seeking healing.” Amid the turmoil he faced, Pelders visited the Rape Crisis Centre, seeking support. Yet there he faced images of women and little girls, with a heavy fist in front of them. “I was astounded because none of it told my story or said to me, as a boy of 16, that I could be a victim in this community,” he said.

He began examining common narratives around this, which led to him forming Matrix Men in 2011. This non-profit raises awareness and provides support for male survivors of childhood trauma, sexual abuse, and assault. While the laws surrounding sexual abuse are now more equitable, silence about male victims lingers.

“We must look at how we start changing things and shifting the narrative,” Pelders stressed, “because we’re only trying to fix half the problem. We don’t talk about male survivors of sexual abuse, and men don’t feel we’re allowed to be victims, which keeps us isolated.” He said both boys and girls need to be told, in an age-appropriate manner, about sex and what is and isn’t acceptable. There needs to be space for male victims to come forward.

Sarah Hoffman, a social media lawyer and co-founder



Preventing child sexual abuse starts with awareness

are like a Ferrari without the brakes.” “Today, a child doesn’t even have to send a private image to become a victim of sextortion because of artificial intelligence technology,” she said. All a predator needs is one image of the child to generate a deepfake nude, a fake image that looks real. Parents should therefore avoid sharing pictures of children online and teens on social media should boost privacy settings and have only small follower counts. Encourage children to identify a trusted

adult as a go-to person if they’re in a dangerous online situation, Hoffman advised. Victims of sextortion should never pay the money and instead should block the predator and secure their accounts.

“Create joint tech solutions with your children,” she suggested. While boundaries are vital, when your child comes to you to share that abuse has taken place, be curious and not judgemental. “The power of abuse is in the secret, so create an environment that fosters transparency.” Hoffman’s partner in Klikd and clinical psychologist, Pam Tudin Buchalter, said that most children are exposed to pornography, usually accidentally, by the age of 11, whether it be in a group chat link or a gaming session. Shame keeps the child from disclosing and the parent from asking. The appeal of porn, she added, often lies in the considerable dopamine fix it provides.

With repeated exposure, porn becomes the default reference for sex and consent, also changing perceptions around intimacy. This makes it difficult for teens to form real-world relationships and understand what love really looks like. Half of the teens exposed to porn have seen violent content, whether it be depictions of pain or even rape, she said, which can normalise sexual aggression and abuse.

Parents need to provide a counternarrative, Tudin Buchalter said. Should your child tell you they’ve been exposed to porn, consciously stay calm. Tell them how pleased you are that they came to you and casually ask what they saw and how they interpreted it. “Then give an honest, accurate, age-appropriate explanation of what they saw.” Express your family values and teach them that this isn’t what sex is about.

“Ultimately, no filter or parental control app is foolproof,” Tudin Buchalter explained. “Your child must understand that you’re their safety net and will always be the biggest protective factor in their digital lives. Help them to create the missing tools to augment them in the face of this struggle, giving them cyber intelligence, and building their emotional intelligence and critical thinking.”

King David girls score historic soccer victory

LEE TANKLE

For five years, King David High School Linksfield’s girls’ soccer team edged closer and closer to making school history. On Sunday, 18 October, after two nerve-racking penalty shootouts and a last-gasp semi-final winner, they finally did it, lifting the JVV Diamond League Open trophy for the first time.

The victory marked the culmination of a five-year journey that saw the team take girls’ sport at the school to new heights. After reaching the quarter-finals for the first time in the school’s history in 2022, they went unbeaten in the league and qualified for the playoffs in 2023, but were unable to participate because of Jewish holidays. Consecutive third-place finishes in 2024 and 2025 brought them even closer, before they finally claimed the title in 2026.



The King David High School girls’ soccer team after their win

The young King David side made up of five Grade 8s, four Grade 9s, one Grade 10, three Grade 11s, and just two matrics, comprised Ariella Sharp, Chloe Garnitz, Ella Eliyahu, Esti Teeger, Gabi Pogir, Jessica Defries, Jordanna Valkin, Julia Levine, Kayla Taurog, Liya Edinburg, Liya Gruzin, Raquel Bravo, Tamra Sweidan, Taylor Garnitz, and Taylor Goldberg.

After advancing through the group stages unbeaten, they overcame Norkem Park on penalties and Pretoria High School for Girls 2–1 to reach the final against Waterstone College. King David held a 1–0 lead until the closing minutes, when an own goal levelled the score and sent the championship decider to a penalty shootout.

“It was absolutely devastating. We were so close to winning and had dominated most of the game. But I just knew we couldn’t give up. We had worked far too hard to let it slip away,” said Liya Edinburg, the team captain.

The team used the week after the school holidays to prepare specifically for knockout football, focusing on set pieces and penalties. Their preparation paid off, with the goalkeeper saving several penalties and every King David player scoring.

When they realised the game was going to penalties, they knew they had to come together, support one another, and believe in each other, said Bravo. “I think that’s where our team spirit really showed. We encouraged each other and reminded ourselves how far we had come. No one was blaming anyone for what had happened during the game. We put it behind us and focused on what was ahead, knowing we were all in it together,” she said.

Valkin, who took one of the penalty shots, explained that she’d been extremely nervous as she didn’t want to let her team down.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been more nervous in my life, but the words from Coach Claudio and the practice of penalties that we put in and the desire to help the team just helped me to focus and overcome the nerves. The crowd watching slipped my mind; in that moment, I just wanted my team to win, and it was just me, the keeper, and the ball,” she said.

Defries, the vice-captain, who also took one of the final shots, explained, “I was really nervous to take the penalty. Even though we had beaten our opponents on penalties during the quarter-finals, this was a whole different level of pressure. But I forced myself to stay calm for my team because I would have to do it for them.”

Defries said the moment her teammate was going to take the final shot was nerve-racking. “My eyes were closed shut so tightly. I was too stressed to even watch. My eyes were closed, my hand over my heart, the other around my teammate next to me, and I was just praying to G-d that the penalty would go in,” she said.

The second that final shot went into the net, all the girls ran towards each other, jumping and screaming in celebration. “After five years of dreaming about this moment, we had finally done it. I don’t think I’ll ever forget that feeling,” said Edinburg, who was determined to play despite being in the middle of matric exams.

“It was such a proud moment. The support we’d received from the school was incredible, and knowing we’d brought home a historic title made it even more special. I think we’re all still taking it in,” she said.

Being able to captain her team to victory in her final year at school means everything to Edinburg.

“To captain the first King David Linksfield girls’ team to ever win this title, especially in my final year, is something I’ll treasure forever. Knowing that we came out on top of more than 100 teams competing in the league makes this achievement even more special. I’m incredibly proud that we’ve made history for our school,” she said.

Bravo explained that despite the stress of her final matric exams, she’d wanted to play and help secure this momentous win.

“After everything our team had worked towards throughout the season, there was no way I was going to miss this. I knew I had to find a balance between studying and soccer because I couldn’t imagine not being there for my team during the most important part of our season. Looking back, I’m so glad I made that decision. Being part of such an incredible achievement made every bit of extra pressure worth it,” she said.

Defries explained that the teamwork and tight bond between the girls made all the difference.

“I don’t think we would have gotten as far as we did without all those friendships, especially during the quarter-finals, semi-finals, and finals. It’s easy to drop your head when things aren’t going your way, but we were there for each other during the hard times and kept each other motivated to keep pushing. I genuinely believe that the connection between us was what allowed us to win,” she said.

For your own good

It might have been the Tshwane water I didn't drink. The water that apparently went without chlorination for nearly three weeks, while residents were left to assume that drinking remained one of its intended uses.

It might have been something I ate. Or just a regular buggy-virus-thing that comes from nowhere, torments you for as long as it can, and then quietly retreats without so much as a hint of regret.

Whatever it was, it wasn't my finest hour. I was sick and sad and, dare I say it, vulnerable. Aware of my propensity for melodrama, I tried to suffer as quietly as possible, so as not to alarm those who might worry about me.

I needn't have bothered. Because, according to my wife, my stomach bug was my fault. Somewhere between whatever had entered my digestive system and its determined and creative attempts to leave, a finding of personal negligence was made.

And she was angry. Really angry. Through the haze of cramps, I could make out phrases like "You need to get your act together!" and "You need to take your health seriously!"

There might have been more, but the immediate demands of the illness, together with the magnificence of a bathroom door that locks, spared me the rest. For once, my stomach

and I had a shared interest.

I had been hoping for sympathy. Apparently, I was due a performance review.

Once behind the door, I considered how quickly concern can become an accusation. Someone we love becomes ill and we begin assembling the case against them. What they ate. How little they slept. The appointment they postponed. By the time we've finished, the patient could reasonably ask whether they need a doctor or an advocate.

I recognise the impulse. I'm less enthusiastic about recognising it in myself.

It's especially tempting when the person has ignored good advice. There is something satisfying about being proved right, even while insisting that all you want is for them to get better. The trick is to deliver "I told you so" in a tone that suggests medical concern.

But I wonder whether some of the anger comes from being frightened.

When someone close to us is unwell, we're reminded that we have less control than we'd like. Finding something they did wrong gives us something to work with. A mistake can be corrected. A husband can be instructed. Randomness is less responsive to a stern conversation.

We do this beyond our marriages, too.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



When our child trips, we rush to pick them up, check that nothing is broken, and then substitute emotional pain for what might be lacking physically. Someone loses a job, gets scammed, or finds themselves in financial trouble, and we want the details. Sometimes because we care. Sometimes, I suspect, because we're looking for the decision that separates their life from ours.

If we can find it, we can reassure ourselves that we would have known better.

Meanwhile, the person telling us may simply have wanted somewhere to put their distress for a few minutes.

I can't claim to know precisely what was behind my wife's anger. She has access to a substantial archive of my behaviour. She may reasonably object to my presenting myself as a quiet and undemanding patient. Still, even when advice is warranted, there should surely be a small interval in which sympathy gets the floor.

I'm happy to discuss my contribution to the problem.

Preferably once I can leave the bathroom.

Last call to pick your Jewish achievers

GILANA LAB

With just days to go before voting closes for the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards 2026, this is the final opportunity to recognise the people who've made an impact this year.

Voting closes on 29 October. The winners will be announced at the awards ceremony on 1 November, which celebrates this year's theme, "Le Festival des Juifs – A Tapestry of Culture".

The awards recognise individuals who've excelled in business, entrepreneurship, professional fields, community service, humanitarian work, and art, sport, science, and culture. From established leaders who've spent decades making a difference to young achievers just beginning to make their mark, this year's nominees reflect the breadth of talent within the South African Jewish community.

Public voting gives community members the opportunity to recognise these achievements. While the judging panel considers the nominees'

accomplishments and contributions, public votes help inform the final decisions.

Categories open for recognition include the Investec Business Leadership Award, the Eric Ellering Entrepreneur Award, the Europcar Women in Leadership Award, and the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award, which celebrates individuals aged 35 and under.

The nominees have shared their journeys in individual videos, giving the public a chance to learn more about their work, the challenges they've overcome, and the achievements that earned them a place among this year's nominees.

Their stories reflect not only professional success, but also the determination, resilience, and commitment to community that the awards recognise.

With the ceremony fast approaching, there's still time to watch the videos and decide who you believe deserves recognition.

To watch the nominees' videos and cast your vote, visit bit.ly/ja26vote



A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Renewal everywhere

Summer has certainly arrived and with it a feeling of renewal and vitality throughout our special community.

On Monday, at the first sitting of the newly elected South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Council, Danny Mofowitz was unanimously re-elected as chair for the region. She took on the job at an extremely challenging moment, when few were prepared to step forward and fill this role. She has been exceptional, guiding this community with grace and poise, and I am certain that this trend will continue into her second term. She is joined by vice-chairs Sheri Hanson and Jonti Brozin. Hanson is serving her second stint as vice-chair, and Brozin his first. Our board in Gauteng is led by a truly dynamic young team, and I am so pleased that our future is in such capable hands.

On Sunday, Habonim Dror officially opened its new bayit. My own history with Habonim is well known, having had two daughters who were active leaders in the movement. Habonim has a rich history in our community, and over the decades has produced a long list of leaders who have shaped not only Jewish South Africa but the society as a whole. It is wonderful to see the movement investing in its future, upgrading its home, and preparing for the work of educating and leading the next generation. Go up and fulfil.

Also on Sunday, our Cape Board hosted the Great Mayoral Debate in partnership with eNCA, broadcast live on television. It was a fantastic event. The debate was lively and at moments quite adversarial, which is exactly what a debate ahead of a municipal election should be. Congratulations to the Cape Board on an event that encouraged active citizenship and election awareness, not

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



only within our community but well beyond it.

Last week, SAJBD national director Wendy Kahn attended the World Jewish Congress Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Antisemitism conference in Dublin. The forum brings government-appointed antisemitism envoys together with Jewish community leaders and international partners such as the European Commission, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and UNESCO. South Africa has no special envoy on antisemitism, so Wendy represented our country alone.

Envoys and community leaders from 28 countries took part, along with executives from technology companies. Dublin was a deliberate choice. It allowed participants to visit the offices of Meta and TikTok and to build relationships with them and engage directly with companies that have an enormous influence on our daily lives, and on how antisemitism is spread and experienced. Our communal leadership has a particularly close relationship with our Irish counterparts, and we were glad to stand with the Irish Jewish leadership, at what is an extremely complex moment in their country.

Leadership depends on people prepared to step forward and do the work, often when it would be easier to hold back. It's about standing for strong ideology, about supporting fellow communities, about investing in the future. That is how a community renews itself, and on the evidence of this week, ours is in good health.



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Friday nights special for *Mamma Mia!* cast

GILANA LAB

For Dr Lindy Abramowitz Sachs and Jemma Claire Weil, performing in *Mamma Mia!* in Johannesburg has brought together their love of theatre, family, and Jewish identity.

Abramowitz Sachs plays the humorous, outgoing Rosie, while Weil performs in the ensemble and understudies Sophie, a role she's already played four times.

"Rosie is the perfect character for me," says Abramowitz Sachs. "She's funny, likeable, friendly, and kind, and she draws people towards her. When you're playing a character like that, it makes life easier and happier. Art imitates life, and she's brought so much life into mine."

For Weil, being cast meant returning home after six and a half years in London. "When I auditioned for the show back in December 2025, I knew it could be the thing that brought me home to South Africa and reunited me with my family and my fiancé, who I'd been doing long distance with throughout my time in London," she says.

Having performed as Sophie to four sold-out audiences in Cape Town and

Johannesburg, most recently on 20 October, Weil has discovered how closely the character's life resembles her own.

"Playing Sophie is something very close to my heart because we have so many similarities and are going through similar

a love letter to my mom and to all the sacrifices she's made to give me the most beautiful life. I owe so much to her."

Abramowitz Sachs says the audience's response has made the experience particularly rewarding.

"There's a lot of laughter because Rosie is quite funny, and people respond really well to her. They've said such lovely things to me afterwards, and I'm grateful for everybody's comments because it shows that hopefully I'm doing a good



Samantha Peo, Dr Lindy Abramowitz Sachs, and Amra-Faye Wright in *Mamma Mia!*

phases of life. Just like Sophie, I'm planning my wedding and navigating all the ups and downs that come with it. The only difference is that I won't have three dads showing up!"

She also identifies with Sophie's relationship with Donna, having been raised by a single mother after losing her father to cancer when she was 16. "During *Slipping Through My Fingers*, I feel like I'm singing

enough job." Both women grew up surrounded by theatre. Abramowitz Sachs's mother was a speech and drama teacher, and she first performed professionally at about nine or 10 years old. She continued performing while studying medicine and working as a doctor. "I always found a way to balance the two," she says. "So many of my medical school

colleagues are brilliant artists, whether they're painters or musicians. The arts and sciences definitely go hand in hand."

Although Abramowitz Sachs hasn't practised medicine professionally for several years, she has continued working in television, film, and commercials. As a mother of three, she is accustomed to balancing responsibilities, although performing away from Cape Town has meant missing her family.

"The more I have on my plate, the more I manage to get done. There's some magic in the air," she says. "I play padel during the day, and the show at night is a lovely distraction. But I miss my family a lot."

Weil began ballet at four and singing lessons at nine. She attended King David Sandton and King David Linksfeld, where she choreographed school productions and received colours for choreography in matric.

"Growing up, my mom would take me to every show happening in Johannesburg, particularly Janice Honeyman's pantomime at the end of each year," she says. "I also have such fond memories of watching musical films with my late dad."

Both women have received considerable

support from their fellow performers. "This company is phenomenal," says Abramowitz Sachs. "There are a lot of young performers whose work ethic is superb. They bring 110% every night. I watch them from the wings, and they give that same energy to every performance and rehearsal. I've been blown away."

For Weil, that support was especially meaningful when she first stepped into her role. "Finding out I was going on as Sophie for the first time and having everyone hold my hand and say, 'We've got you.' Then there are all the dressing room chats, the laughs, and the little moments in between that make this experience so special."

Their Jewish identities have also become part of backstage life.

"Even when performing on Friday nights, I make sure to create a little Shabbos for myself. Lindy and I always light Shabbat candles together and say the blessings over the challah," says Weil.

"In fact, the cast loves Fridays because I always bring in challah, and we all break bread together. It's become our own little tradition, and it really does make the cast feel like a family."

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