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Rasool – a hard sell for SA in Washington

NICOLA MILTZ

South Africa's recently appointed ambassador to the United States (US), Ebrahim Rasool, known for his anti-Israel advocacy, faces an impossible mission – selling South Africa to Washington while aligned with ideologies that potentially undermine American interests and national security.

A growing body of information has recently surfaced claiming Rasool's links to extreme Islamist organisations and terror-linked individuals. Rasool, who is now starting his second term as South African ambassador – his first was during Barack Obama's presidency between 2010 and 2015 – allegedly supports extremist organisations such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

His longstanding hostility toward Israel is no secret. As a prominent advocate for South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, he has accused Israel of apartheid and consistently aligned himself with anti-Israel and anti-Zionist movements. His connections to groups with extremist ideologies such as Hamas has raised critical questions about how he will represent South Africa on the global stage, especially Washington, where Israel is a key ally.

Rasool, 62, presented his credentials to then President Joe Biden on 13 January, a week before President Donald Trump was sworn in. He said at the time he was looking forward to strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. South

African leadership is concerned that Congress will carry out the threats made by Republican and Democrat legislators to rescind South Africa's benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The AGOA programme gives South Africa and other sub-Saharan African countries duty-free access to the US market for many of their products. AGOA expires later this year.

Last year, the House of Representatives passed legislation

which would demand that the US administration review US-SA relations because South Africa was seen as too friendly to Russia, China, and Iran and openly hostile towards Israel.

Tony Leon, the former leader of the official opposition and former South African ambassador to Argentina said, "The key job as an ambassador is to be a salesman for your country and the sale is going to be hard.

"Rasool will be on a hiding to nothing

if he repeats the talking points of DIRCO [the department of international relations and cooperation]. He is smart enough to realise this, but unfortunately there is a huge paper trail that precedes him," he said.

Rasool has publicly criticised Trump, which won't garner him any favours.

South Africa hasn't featured on US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's list of countries to call following Trump's inauguration, and, as Leon said,

"From this you can draw your own conclusions."

"His alleged ties to Hamas and PIJ raise serious concerns about his ability to represent South Africa's interests without compromising the nation's international standing," political commentator Kenneth Mokgathe wa Kgwadi said in a recent article. "Through his influence within the African National Congress, Rasool has been accused of advancing a narrative that demonises Israel while promoting the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood," he wrote in *Lay of The Land*.

Political analyst Steven Gruzd said, "Rasool is obviously a veteran African National Congress politician and loyal to the party and to South African foreign policy. He has said that South Africa is a 'moral superpower', and he will be pushing that notion in Washington. Bilateral relations are strained at the moment. The US already has South Africa's closeness to China, Russia, and Iran under the microscope, as well as with Hamas, the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] and many other Iranian proxies. I would hope Rasool wouldn't let his personal views on the Middle East and his faith overshadow his professional role."

One political commentator who wished to remain anonymous told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Rasool may be in the firing line of the Trump administration, especially with his alleged links to Islamist organisations. The world is also very different from when he served as ambassador in the

Continued on page 3>>



SAJBD president Zev Krengel; Hawks national head Lieutenant General Godfrey Lebeya; and Cape SA Jewish Board of Deputies Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson following the Board's meeting with the Hawks. See story on page 2.

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Israel to open embassy in Zambia

ETGAR LEFKOVITS – JNS

Israel will open an embassy in Zambia in the latest outreach by the Jewish state on the continent, Israel's foreign ministry announced on Tuesday, 28 January.

"Zambia is a friend of Israel, and this is an important step in strengthening bilateral relations," tweeted Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar after a conversation with his Zambian counterpart, Mulambo Haimbe, in which he informed him of the decision and invited him to Jerusalem.

"It's part of Israel's process of tightening relations with African countries, and one of our strategic goals for 2025," wrote Sa'ar.

Zambia and Israel re-established ties in 1991, and the southern African nation opened an embassy in Tel Aviv in 2015.

An Israeli diplomat serves as a non-residential ambassador to Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

"Israel indeed needs to increase its diplomatic footprint in Africa so that both Africa and Israel can



advance their historic and longstanding friendship," Dennis Nethumbi, Africa director of the Israel Allies Foundation, told JNS on Wednesday. "I urge African nations to consider Israel as its closest and most vital friend in a new future together."

He called the Israeli decision to open an embassy in Zambia "a gift from G-d" to the African nation for its "great acts of bravery and courage" in supporting Israel in the international arena.

After the ceasefire with Hamas came into effect on

15 January 2025, Israel's top diplomat made a point of including his African colleagues in a wave of phone calls with foreign ministers around the globe.

Earlier this month, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel met Ghana's newly elected president, John Mahama, in Africa after attending his inauguration.

"This visit, my first as deputy foreign minister, reflects the high value Israel places on its relationship with Ghana and the African continent," Haskel said.

Last year, with the help of African allies, Israel thwarted an effort by South Africa and Algeria to deprive it of observer status in the African Union.

Also last year, 35 African legislators gathered in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa in a show of faith-based support for Israel, including parliamentarians from Zambia and Ghana.

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Hawks update Board on Cape terror probe

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) met Lieutenant General Godfrey Lebeysa, the national head of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, known as the Hawks, and his team on Wednesday, 29 January. The meeting was held, according to an SAJBD statement, to get feedback about the improvised explosive device that was thrown over the wall of the Cape Jewish community centre on 5 December 2024.

"They confirmed that a full investigation is under way into this serious matter, and they will keep in constant contact with us," according to the SAJBD.

"We have always had full confidence in the security cluster in upholding the Constitution and protecting all sectors of society. We therefore distance ourselves from any suggestion to constitute or invite a parallel counter-terrorism task force."

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD said, "The meeting included numerous different members of the security cluster who brought us into their confidence in regard to the investigation thus far. They appear determined to find the perpetrator of this incident, and to do what is necessary to secure our community."

Pharaoh's final solution – stifle the children Torah Thought



Rabbi Yossy Goldman
– Life Rabbi Emeritus,
Sydenham Shul and
President of the South
African Rabbinical
Association

A wealthy businessman presented his nephew with a siddur for his Barmitzvah, and the nephew was most disappointed. From his rich uncle, he was hoping for a substantial monetary gift. When the uncle passed away, in his will he had left a note for his nephew saying, "I know he is disappointed with my Barmitzvah gift. Otherwise, he would have opened it and cashed the \$1000 check inside."

I know this sounds cynical as many Barmitzvah boys have indeed made genuine transitions to maturity and earnestness. The sad reality, though, is that your average Barmitzvah boy is only too pleased to be done with his work and preparation and isn't necessarily back in shul next Shabbat.

Sad indeed. Because Jewish people are utterly dependent on the next generation taking their place in our ongoing destiny. And if they don't, who will?

This week, we read in *parshat Bo* of a fascinating conversation between Moses and Pharaoh. It's after the first seven plagues have struck Egypt, and Pharaoh's servants are urging him to let the Israelites go before all of Egypt is lost.

So Pharaoh calls back Moses and Aaron, and says to them, "Go and serve the L-rd your G-d. Who exactly will be going?"

And Moses tells him they are all going. "With our youngsters and our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and our cattle shall we go."

Let me paraphrase Pharaoh's reply.

No way, Moses! Don't be ridiculous! There's not a chance that I will allow the children to go. You may take the adult males. Now, get out of here!"

Indeed, Pharaoh and every antisemite in history has known that our children are the key to our survival. Stop the children from participating in Jewish life, and you will suffocate the growth of our people.

During the bad old days in Communist Russia, Stalin and his successors closed Jewish schools, yeshivas, and Talmud Torahs. Many religious teachers were arrested, imprisoned, and even executed. My wife's own grandfather was a mohel. One day, he was taken away by the Soviet police and never seen again.

Yes, they allowed the big shul in Moscow to remain open as a photo

opportunity for foreign visitors. But who was there? Ten old men who made a *minyana*! That was no threat to the atheist authorities. The old men would soon die out. But a school for children? Out of the question!

Sadly, they were successful in destroying Jewish life, which is only now being revived and rebuilt.

Pharaoh may have been the first, but he certainly wasn't the last of our enemies who knew that if you stop children from learning about Judaism, you'll wipe out any hope for a Jewish future.

I make no apologies for promoting Jewish schools. And the more Jewish the better. We need the next generation to open the siddur and know how to use it.

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UCT 'gave up hospital' to pursue anti-Israel agenda

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town's (UCT's) executive council (exco) didn't tell council members that the university stood to lose up to R750 million in donations, including the donation of a hospital, if they adopted two anti-Israel resolutions, according to a supplementary affidavit filed in the Western Cape division of the High Court of South Africa in mid-January.

Professor Adam Mendelsohn's supplementary affidavit, comes after he filed a lawsuit in August 2024 asking the court that the council's two anti-Israel resolutions, passed on 22 June 2024, be declared unlawful, unconstitutional, and invalid, and are reviewed and set aside. UCT will oppose the application.

"Since I delivered my founding affidavit, I learned [from meeting records] that members of the council's executive committee deliberately failed to disclose relevant information at the council meeting of 22 June 2024," stated Mendelsohn. "They failed to disclose this deliberately, in bad faith, and in breach of their fiduciary duties."

Therefore, "Council had no idea of the profound ramification[s] when it passed its resolutions," stated Mendelsohn. "It failed to consider how this could cost UCT half a billion rand and a new hospital which would serve as a training facility for doctors. Had it conducted even a cursory inquiry, it would have learned that its decision would jeopardise one of the most significant donations to UCT in recent years, aimed at serving the broader Western Cape. The council's failure speaks to a lapse in governance of severe proportions."

The resolutions call for the rejection of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, and that no UCT academic may enter into or continue relations with "any research group or network whose author affiliations are with the Israel Defense Forces or the broader Israeli military establishment".

The supplementary affidavit filed by Mendelsohn, who is the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, also details how on 11 November 2024, he was suspended from his role as head of UCT's history department, "pending an investigation".

UCT is "censoring freedom of expression and academic freedom, so much so that it retaliated against the mere bringing of an application that asserts the constitutional right to freedom of expression", stated Mendelsohn. His affidavits say the resolutions curtail research and have profoundly negative implications for academia and the survival of UCT.

Dr Susan Tager, trustee of the Donald Gordon Foundation (DGF) and chief executive of the Wits (The University of the Witwatersrand) Donald Gordon Medical Centre, provides a supporting affidavit. It details how the DGF was in recent discussions to buy the UCT academic hospital – not owned by the university – for UCT, or to provide the funds for UCT to establish a hospital replicating the Donald Gordon Medical Centre. The DGF was seeking to donate R400 million to R500 million to UCT to this end.

However, Tager's affidavit describes how discussions broke down as a direct result of the council's resolutions, breaching a contract with the DGF by rejecting the IHRA



definition. The resolution to reject the IHRA definition was proposed by Professor Leslie London, the chairperson of public health medicine at UCT, whose work will now be impacted by the loss of the hospital.

The affidavit describes how on 23 May 2024, the council's exco met, including council Chairperson Norman Arendse; then-Vice-Chancellor Professor Daya Reddy; and six others. At this meeting, the vice-chancellor informed the exco that the DGF considered UCT in breach of a contract of donation, and that another donor, the Dell Foundation, was suspending funding to UCT because of the resolution to boycott Israeli academics.

But during the council meeting in June, "exco members sat silent", allowing the council to vote on a resolution without saying that doing so may cost the university millions, stated Mendelsohn.

The council also failed to consider the impact on staff and students. A letter dated 20 November 2024 from UCT's Neuroscience Institute (NI) laments that the council's resolutions "have directly jeopardised donor confidence in the NI", and that its "very future" is now threatened by the council's decisions. "The termination of funding from charitable foundations will [also] have a direct impact on students," Mendelsohn said.

He said the suggestion that donors "bully" or "strong-arm" UCT misses the point. "The point is that the council should know the financial implications of its decisions. In this case, it simply didn't."

In addition, "UCT's compliance with zero tolerance for antisemitism, as defined by the IHRA, was a term of the DGF donation contract signed by the chairperson and then-vice-chancellor, and therefore pre-dated the council resolutions," said Mendelsohn. "There can be no suggestion of UCT being 'strong-armed' when it breached terms of an existing contract to which it had agreed."

Meanwhile, the UCT council had conceded in correspondence that it had failed to consider relevant documents at its meeting of 22 June 2024, which Mendelsohn said "suffices to set aside" the resolutions.

Trevor Norwitz, who resigned as chairperson of the UCT Fund in 2023 in protest against the university's anti-Israel stance, said, "To read the details behind the council's anti-Israel decision is more shocking than the appalling decision itself. It lays bare that this wasn't just a betrayal of UCT's ideals and its Jewish constituents, but

a gross breach of fiduciary duty, knowingly undertaken."

Sara Gon, the director of the Free Speech Union of South Africa, said, "to suspend Professor Mendelsohn for exercising his constitutional rights and duties is a derogation of his rights to freedom of speech, academic freedom, and the exercise of his professional obligations."

"To show their 'principled' stand against Professor Mendelsohn as head of the history department, his staff members simply refused to attend departmental meetings with him," said Gon. "UCT should have



Professor Adam Mendelsohn

supported Professor Mendelsohn and warned staff they would be disciplined for insubordination." Instead, UCT allowed a professor who complained about Mendelsohn's lawsuit to become its new head of department.

David Benatar, emeritus professor of philosophy at UCT and the author of *The Fall Of The University Of Cape Town – Africa's Leading University In Decline*, said Mendelsohn's supplementary affidavit "reveals ongoing mismanagement at UCT. The university should be ashamed, not that one of its professors is seeking to defend his constitutional rights, but that it has both made that defence necessary, and then retaliated against him. UCT's pursuit of its boycott against Israel is doing much more harm to UCT than it will ever do to Israel."

"This case has very little to do with Israel and the legality of its conduct in Gaza," said Mendelsohn. "It concerns the council's statutory duty to govern UCT; whether it acted in the best interests of the university; whether the council's process leading to the resolutions accords with legality, good governance, and fiduciary duties; and whether the council can limit academic freedom. These are issues of principle and process."

UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola told the *SA Jewish Report* that UCT couldn't comment on Mendelsohn's suspension as human resources-related matters at UCT are confidential.

As for the council exco deliberately failing to disclose information regarding donations, he said, "UCT has noted the allegation. It is the subject of high court proceedings, and UCT will address it through the appropriate legal processes as part of those proceedings."

Rasool – a hard sell for SA in Washington

>>Continued from page 1

Obama administration. Will his being a radical Muslim be like a red rag to a bull for Trump? Why would South Africa want to add this layer to our already difficult relationship with the US?"

Sam Westrop, who writes for *Focus on Western Islamism* described Rasool as a "terror-connected Islamist diplomat" and said Rasool had "shown a consistent willingness to embrace terrorists and radicals for decades", even possessing a signed scarf given to him by late Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

Irina Tsukerman of The Washington Outsider Center For Information Warfare, writes that "Rasool's record reveals deep ties to global Islamic networks aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly through his personal relationship with the late Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. His alignment with Hamas-related narratives and promotion of 'lawfare' against Israel at the International Court of Justice [ICJ] have drawn scrutiny." Tsukerman also questions his capacity to navigate relations with Trump after his forceful criticism of the man in his previous administration.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), said the Board, especially the Cape SAJBD, had an amicable

relationship with Rasool, especially when he was premier of the Western Cape. "That said, we're shocked to learn of clear and expanding information linking Rasool to the Muslim Brotherhood. These linkages render him unfit to serve in this role."

"South Africa's misguided and libellous lawfare campaign against Israel has fundamentally damaged its relationship with Washington. It's crucial that it takes the necessary diplomatic steps to try to repair the damage with an ambassador best suited to serve its interests," she said.

Spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation, Rolene Marks said Rasool's appointment was "deeply problematic".

Rasool's stance directly contradicts US policies, especially the Abraham Accords, which normalised Israel's relations with four Arab states. While the US seeks to build on these agreements, groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran aim to dismantle them, often through violence, Marks said. Rasool's alignment with these forces undermines South Africa's credibility on the global stage.

With a Republican administration in power, patience with South Africa's hostile foreign policy is likely to be thin. Rasool's appointment sends entirely the wrong message at a critical time, said Marks.

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SA diplomat's profanity, bias at UN causes outcry

NICOLA MILTZ

Calls for an investigation into the questionable and reckless conduct of Tlaleng Mofokeng, the QwaQwa-born United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the right to health, appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Despite calls for her removal following her recent conduct online, including a profane tweet of "F**k him" directed at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nearly two weeks ago, there has been no response from UN Secretary-General António Guterres or High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk.

She swears, she curses, she belittles, and she refers to Israel as "Israhell". She accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, defiantly tweets that "Hamas are not terrorists", and dismisses her critics with profane, vulgar insults.

Mofokeng is a medical doctor who studied at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. She is known in South Africa for advocating universal health equity, HIV care, and family planning and has an impressive resume. However, her trajectory to the highest echelons of the UN, where she oversees UN human rights experts in her role on the coordination committee, now appears mired in controversy.

With criticism over her online behaviour, which includes multiple profanities, and calls for her removal, questions are yet again being raised about the UN's credibility and impartiality. In South Africa, she is known as Dr T, the author of *Dr T: A Guide to Sexual Health and Pleasure*. Within the UN, she is a staunch supporter of "Hamas-apologist" Francesca Albanese, the UN's controversial anti-Israel Special Rapporteur for Palestinian Human Rights. Both have consistently defended Hamas's actions on 7 October 2023 as legitimate resistance. This week, the pair were set to deliver jointly another report accusing Israel of genocide.

Mofokeng's recent tweet directed at Netanyahu sparked an outcry. Posted in response to Netanyahu's decision to delay a Gaza ceasefire over Hamas's refusal to name hostages for release, the post was later deleted, but not before it ignited a firestorm of criticism.

Israel's ambassador to the UN office in Geneva, Daniel Meron, demanded that Mofokeng be condemned.

Hillel Neuer, the executive director of UN Watch, a non-governmental organisation that monitors the UN to ensure it holds up to its founding principles, condemned her comments as unbecoming of a UN official. When Neuer called for her to be disciplined, Mofokeng escalated the situation, launching a series of vile personal attacks. She referred to Neuer as "evil

scum", a "bastard", and repeatedly emphasised his identity as a "white man", while dismissing his criticism as speaking into the void. Interestingly, one of Neuer's tweets in response gained more than a million views, amplifying the scandal and drawing attention to her unbecoming conduct.

Neuer posted, "Doubling down on her violations of the UN code of conduct, which require her to act with probity, integrity, and good faith, Mofokeng unleashed a rant against me replete with racism, obscenities, and insults." He said her actions brought the UN into disrepute and that Guterres shouldn't stay silent.



"Any individual who resorts to racism, obscenities, and insults is demonstrably unsuited to serve as a human rights expert or in any other position at the United Nations," said Neuer.

This isn't the first time Mofokeng has courted controversy. In addition to labelling Israel "Israhell", she has repeatedly denied Hamas's designation as a terrorist organisation despite its recognition as such by the United States, European Union, and numerous other nations.

"Armed struggle against colonisation is not terrorism" and "That Hamas are not terrorists is fact" are among her posts.

Neuer said that in 2021, "When someone disagreed with her about taking

a COVID-19 vaccine, the response of Mofokeng – the UN special rapporteur on the right to health – was, 'Shove it up your ass.'"

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) has condemned Mofokeng's conduct on social media, describing it as a "disgraceful violation of diplomatic protocol and her responsibilities as UN special rapporteur on health".

"Her use of profane language against Prime Minister Netanyahu is shocking and unacceptable," said SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks.

"Moreover, her verbal abuse of UN Watch's Hillel Neuer, calling him 'evil scum', further exemplifies her unprofessional and biased behaviour."

The SAZF said Mofokeng's inflammatory rhetoric not only revealed a profound bias but "deliberately misrepresents the facts". Addressing her claims regarding the ceasefire delay, the SAZF highlighted that it was a direct result of Hamas's violations, including continued rocket attacks and failure to comply with hostage-release terms.

"A UN representative, particularly one from South Africa, should understand the paramount importance of impartiality and truthful discourse in conflict resolution," Marks said.

Despite the widespread condemnation, Mofokeng has found defenders in groups such as anti-Israel lobby group Africa4Palestine, which declared, "Hands off Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng," congratulating her "for saying what everyone is thinking".

Critics argue that such support only reinforces concerns about her lack of impartiality and suitability for a UN role.

The controversy surrounding Mofokeng places the UN in a precarious position. Long accused of bias against Israel, the organisation faces mounting pressure to act.

"The entire UN human rights system is morally bankrupt for appointing her and for enabling her reckless and inappropriate conduct. We are urging @antonioguterres & @volker_turk to exercise responsible leadership and remove Mofokeng now," tweeted Neuer.

Mofokeng remains defiant, claiming her behaviour stems from her "deep pain" over the situation in Gaza and the deep suffering she sees in her role.

But Neuer said the UN code of conduct requires her "to show restraint, moderation, and discretion so as not to undermine the recognition of the independent nature of her UN position", and "not to be seen to be taking sides with one party to the conflict".

Mofokeng was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in July 2020 for a three-year term. In 2023, her term was extended until 2026.

She had not responded to requests for comment at the time of going to print.

Six myths underpinning the Expropriation Act

OPINION

MARK OPPENHEIMER



The African National Congress's plan to change the property clause in our Constitution to allow the state to expropriate property without compensation (EWC) failed. However, President Cyril Ramaphosa has just signed the Expropriation Act which provides for nil compensation to be paid for land.

- Where the market value of the land is equivalent to, or less than, the present value of direct state investment or subsidy in the acquisition and beneficial capital improvement of the land.
- The government alleges that EWC is necessary to restore land that was stolen during apartheid; to redistribute land

has resolved more than 95% of the claims that have arisen. More than 1.8 million individuals have received compensation either in the form of land or money, and fewer than 3 500 claims remain unresolved.

Myth two: home ownership is skewed along racial lines

Amidst the cry for land reform is the claim that we need to have a more equitable distribution of land based on the country's racial demographics. We should be suspicious of racial demographic thinking because it's exactly what the apartheid government specialised in. However, for those who are sympathetic to it, the home ownership data demonstrates that racial groups own homes in almost perfect proportion to their numbers.

Myth three: people are crying out for land

When South Africans are asked about the country's most serious unresolved problems, unemployment, crime, and education are at the top of the list, while racism and land reform are at the bottom.

When people win their land-claim cases, they are given the choice of receiving land or financial compensation. In 92% of cases, people choose money over land. This shouldn't come as much of a surprise because money translates into freedom. Beneficiaries can use that money to start businesses, pay off debts, or invest in the market. The facts show that land isn't a burning issue for ordinary citizens. It's an issue being capitalised on by a few radicals with big loudhailers.

Myth four: anyone can be a farmer

The government spent more than R1.4 billion buying farms in the Eastern Cape to

redistribute to aspirant farmers. Of the 265 farms purchased, only 26 remain viable. In 90% of those cases, once thriving farms that produced food and employment are now in ruin. Being a farmer isn't easy. It's a technical job that requires an enormous amount of time, expertise, and money.

Myth five: the Constitution impedes land reform

Section 25 of the Constitution provides a roadmap for land reform while ensuring that no-one is arbitrarily deprived of property. It empowers the state to expropriate property in the public interest, which includes land reform. A classic case would be the construction of the Gautrain project, which needed to run through privately owned land; or the acquisition of land to build RDP (reconstruction and development programme) homes. The Constitution recognises that in such cases, private owners deserve compensation and the following test is used:

The amount of the compensation and the time and manner of payment must be just and equitable, reflecting an equitable balance between the public interest and the interests of those affected, having regard to all relevant circumstances, including, the current use of the property; the history of the acquisition and use of the property; the market value of the property; the extent of direct state investment and subsidy in the acquisition and beneficial capital improvement of the property; and the purpose of the expropriation.

Myth six: EWC won't damage the economy

This is akin to saying that a vow of celibacy won't affect your sex life. Unfortunately, life involves trade-offs. You can't remove property

rights and have a flourishing economy. Foreign investors won't risk having their land confiscated in South Africa when they can pick any number of other nations that will protect their investment.

One doesn't have to look at Mao's Cultural Revolution or the horrors of Stalin's regime to know how bad this idea is. When Mugabe implemented EWC in Zimbabwe, it led to the world's worst case of hyperinflation. It wasn't just the original land owners that were hurt, the average man on the street was left destitute after the economy was annihilated.

Once the above myths about land reform have been revealed, the following becomes apparent. Almost all victims of land dispossession have been compensated. Homeownership matches racial demographics. Barring a few opportunistic politicians, almost no-one views land reform as a burning issue. The transfer of functioning farms to ill-equipped beneficiaries has been a spectacular failure. EWC has been tried in communist regimes around the world, and it has wrought riches for a few elites and devastation for everyone else. Ramaphosa's resurrection of this terrible idea endangers the continuation of the Government of National Unity, and may ultimately lead to a vote of no confidence in his presidency being called.

- Mark Oppenheimer is a practising advocate and member of the Johannesburg Bar. He is the president of the South African Institute of Race Relations.

*All statistics have been sourced from the Institute of Race Relations.

Table 1, 2018 IRR field survey

The top priority for the Government (from list supplied by the interviewer)	Total	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
Creating more jobs	26%	27%	32%	19%	13%
Fighting corruption	14%	10%	19%	31%	34%
Improving education	11%	10%	9%	19%	18%
Fighting crime	10%	9%	18%	0%	11%
Building more RDP housing	10%	11%	10%	6%	1%
Fighting drugs, drug abuse	9%	11%	3%	6%	0%
Fighting illegal immigration	7%	8%	0%	0%	4%
Improving healthcare	4%	4%	3%	12%	5%
Speeding up service delivery	3%	3%	5%	0%	3%
Fighting racism	2%	2%	0%	6%	5%
Speeding up land reform	2%	2%	0%	0%	4%
Speeding up affirmative action	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%

The act includes a list of cases, but is open ended.

However, it makes clear that no compensation will be paid where land is expropriated in the public interest under certain conditions. These include:

- Where the land isn't being used and the owner's plan isn't to develop it or use it to generate income, but to benefit from the appreciate of its market value;
- Where an organ of state holds it and it's not being used for its core functions and is unlikely to require the land for its future activities in this regard, and the organ of state acquired the land for no consideration;
- Where the owner has abandoned the land by failing to exercise control over it despite being capable of doing so; and

so that home ownership matches racial demographics; and to appease an electorate that's crying out for land.

President Ramaphosa not only claims that EWC won't hurt the economy, but that it will bring more people into the fold by helping beneficiaries become farmers. Before adopting such a radical policy at a time when our economy has been devastated by the pandemic and lockdowns, we should do some much-needed myth busting.

Myth one: land hasn't been given back to its rightful owners

South Africa has a dark history of land theft. Justice requires that the wrongs of the past are addressed by awarding compensation to the victims of land dispossession. Over the past 30 years, the land claims court

School's Habonim camp cancellation on shaky ground

TALI FEINBERG

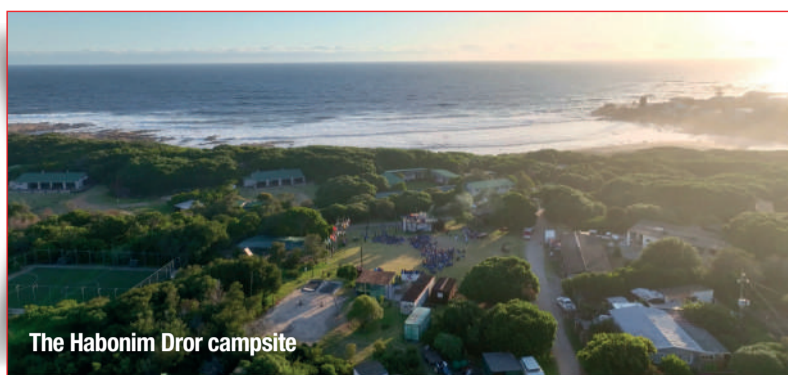
The Habonim Dror campsite in the Western Cape has for years been used by a range of groups from schools to non-profit organisations, as it provides top-class facilities in an idyllic location. But, for the first time, a school – the International School of Cape Town (ISCT) – has chosen to cancel a camp there after some parents objected to it being held at a Jewish youth movement's campsite.

Sarah Smith*, a parent at the school, isn't Jewish but was deeply concerned at the decision. "By relocating the camp with no discussion, the school validated the toxic notion that Jewish spaces are inherently controversial, unlike those of other faiths or cultures," said Smith, who asked to remain anonymous on the specific request of her children, who anticipate a backlash at school. "This echoes historic marginalisation of Jews, and rewards those who weaponise anti-Zionism to target Jewish identity."

Smith is married to an Israeli, has lived in Israel, and has children identifying as Jewish. The camp in question is a Year 8 (Grade 8) camp that was to take place in the last few days of January. The school has since moved it to a different site, and parents now need to pay a higher fee.

"It is clear that this decision was made as a result of external pressure," Smith said. She feels the school "capitulated astoundingly quickly" to "pressure from a set of parents with strongly held and public beliefs".

Said Habonim Dror National Chairperson Brad Gottschalk, "Our beautiful campsite has hosted tens of thousands of South Africans from all walks of life over the past 20 years.



The Habonim Dror campsite

Habonim has contributed much to the South African fabric. Our members fought in the anti-apartheid struggle and have been involved in vital non-governmental organisation work across the country. The school should have engaged with campsite management before making uninformed decisions."

"This incident is the latest in a documented series of antisemitic events at the school, spanning years," said Smith. "However, it's easily the most troubling. ISCT is stating that the choice of a Jewish campsite is controversial. This reflects deeply ingrained antisemitism."

Addressing parents about the decision to cancel the Habonim booking, ISCT Head of High School Philip James, stated, "We are deeply committed to inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and respect for all our students and families. These principles guide every decision we make, including school activities. We are aware of the current context surrounding the Middle East crisis and the sensitivities it entails.

"The selection of the Habonim campsite was made without any intention to align the school with any political stance," he

said. "The decision was based solely on the logistical suitability of the camp."

Smith noted that the school has held camps at venues associated with the Christian community, but is now allowing parents to dictate that events cannot be held at Jewish community sites.

"A procedural failure has taken place," she wrote to James. "To make this decision, no community engagement took place, no due process was followed, and the decision wasn't transparent. It was made under pressure of a vocal group. It has rewarded those who conflate Jewish institutions with geopolitical conflicts, a tactic long used to ostracise Jews.

"If inclusivity is truly a core value of the school, then the school must demonstrate equal respect for all cultural affiliations, including those tied to Jewish heritage," she emphasised. "Failure to do so will confirm that this decision was about appeasing prejudice."

Smith is also concerned that a "disturbing and dangerous precedent has been set, incredibly easily. It is clear that prejudice against the state of Israel, and Jewish organisations, has been normalised at

ISCT." She also noted that the school made the decision to move the camp without consulting Habonim or the Jewish community.

She requested comprehensive changes at the school, including reversing the camp relocation decision, antisemitism-awareness training, formal oversight with Jewish community representation, and measures to prevent future incidents. The school asked for time to implement these measures.

After Smith wrote to school leadership, ISCT held a hastily-convened meeting with parents to share the process when planning school activities. Smith asked Principal Kascha Reed in verbal communication to provide a mediator for the discussion or to allow time to consult with Jewish groups before making a decision about the camp. Both requests were denied.

At the meeting, the school explained and apologised to parents for initially choosing the Habonim campsite. Smith experienced the meeting as "profoundly hostile and one-sided", and was accused by other parents as being "unnecessarily divisive".

While the school said that political viewpoints wouldn't be discussed at the meeting, Smith said political statements were made freely until she objected. Habonim was referred to in disparaging terms that implied "duplicitous", while parents used veiled language about "affiliations" and "culture" to reference Jewish or Israeli connections without stating their meaning clearly.

Smith notes that the school allowed this ambiguity to continue. "You neither contained the discussion nor required people to be clear about their positions,"

Smith wrote to Reed. "Organising this meeting with less than half a day's notice and no mediator has only created further harm. Your failure to see the need for mediation to protect all participants reflects a continued fundamental misunderstanding of the issues at stake."

Writing to Smith, Reed stated that "We are deeply committed to inclusivity and will actively explore ways to ensure we act in accordance with this. I will raise this with our Board of Governors and directors in our next board meeting to receive feedback on the best way for us to do this."

Speaking to the SA Jewish Report, Reed said, "When it came to our attention that the campsite has a political association, we reassessed the situation. After careful consideration, we decided to relocate the camp to ensure it remained an inclusive experience for all students.

"This decision was made with the logistical constraints and timeframe in mind and with the best interests of our students at heart," Reed said. "We remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering an environment enriched by diversity, where every individual feels valued and respected."

Moving forward, "We will continue to engage with all parents, including our Jewish families, to refine our processes and strengthen our mission of inclusivity," Reed said. "We welcome constructive dialogue as we continue to embrace our diversity and build inclusive spaces."

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies Executive Director Daniel Bloch said, "We are investigating the matter further and are engaging with all affected parties."

*not her real name

SA JEWS OF LITHUANIAN & POLISH HERITAGE ARE ELIGIBLE TO OBTAIN EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP & EU PASSPORT



A common misconception people have is that European citizenship and EU Passport can only be obtained if one has documents proving lineage. **The fact is that not having documents proving lineage, does not lead to your disqualification of eligibility.**

In many cases the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin!



Having European citizenship offers more than one benefit, besides the fact that it makes traveling far easier than with a South African passport...

As we are all fully aware of the current situation in South Africa where we face many uncertainties not just for today but for our children's future too.

While we are still having it relatively good here. We know that the time will come where as Jews we will look for alternative options. **Then having a**

European citizenship will be that tool we are looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore you are now entitled to reinstate it and obtain your EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is understanding that prior to the end of WWII, the European map was very different from the one we know today.

Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and till 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Great Russia Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe.

Until 1918 residents of these territories were of Russian citizenship – as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships did not exist. Therefore applications

for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on if one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen.

However, a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 – will not be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after WWII, one's eligibility for a Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the City from which his/her ancestor lived in. Where borders shifted and cities changed nationalities Jews who left Vilnius and its region will be declined where as a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

With only a 4 hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius this enables me to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I closely collaborate with local professionals in assisting me trace required documents for your successful applications to reinstate you as an European citizen.

"Having lived in Poland for 7 years I have great in-depth understanding of European immigration laws."

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every 3-4 months which will allow us to meet in-person.

I will be in South Africa From 17 February until the end of the month. Johannesburg and Cape Town - Book a consultation now!

YOU CAN REACH ME ON:

+48 783 953 223,

adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

Together we will prevail

A young man I know and respect who has recently come across antisemitism first hand, reiterated something that seems so clear to me. His views are possibly left of mine in terms of Israel. He certainly doesn't support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and doesn't believe settlers should be on the West Bank or Judea and Samaria.

He made the following analogy about the reality for Jews today. Two Jews walk into a pub, one is far-right in his views, the other far-left. They aren't friends; in fact they don't like each other at all. This is understandable because they can't agree on much. They rarely say anything positive about one another, and mix in very different circles. They both go for a drink, and sit on opposite sides of the bar. The barman tells them both to leave because the pub doesn't serve Jews.

Yes, this is only a story, but it clarifies the fact that our differences have become irrelevant in the bigger picture, be they political, religious, or otherwise. Whether we're in South Africa, the United States, or Israel, to the world out there, we're all Jews.

When Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, its terrorists didn't check what those they murdered or raped believed about Palestinians or the Israeli government, they didn't care. They were destroying Jews, even if those same Jews had been defending Palestinians all their lives.

During the Holocaust, the Nazis didn't ask how Jews felt about anything. They didn't check political or religious affiliation. In fact, they didn't care if you had spent your life supporting the Nazi party. If you were a Jew, you were a Jew. In their minds, that meant that you were vermin and needed to be annihilated.

This is an important leveller for all of us. It's time we set aside our differences in the face of what is happening in our world. Whether you think Trump is G-d's gift to humanity or the devil, it doesn't matter. We can think and say what we like about the Israeli government, but whether we like it or not, the world still sees us as Jews. So, in truth, it's pointless attacking or destroying each other over this. We're all on the same side, even if we think we aren't.

There are those among us, actually they have mostly sidelined themselves, who call themselves "anti-Zionists". They are born Jewish, and I believe our haters find them most useful in their antisemitic escapades. Our haters use these folk to make themselves feel good, saying, "See, there are Jews who are against the Jewish state, so we aren't wrong about how disgusting it is." Those few anti-Zionist Jews are seen as "good Jews", and the rest of us – by far the vast majority – are all bad.

I'm sure those Jews believe that they are right and we are wrong. So be it. However, when push comes to shove, they are still seen as Jews. And hatred for Jews is conveniently twisted today to be hatred for Zionism or Israel. But the truth is that hatred for the Jewish state and everything it does is antisemitism because it's about the desire to destroy a country housing Jews. If it weren't, then there would be far more outcry about other wars or mass murders in other parts of the world. But nobody really seems to care unless Jews are involved.

And our haters, who refer to good and bad Jews, never actually want to know what Jews feel politically. If they did, they would realise that much like in Israel and every country in the world, there are people who have so many varied and different views. In fact, few Jews have the same view.

There are those, like my young friend who I mentioned above, who think Netanyahu is the worst thing for Israel. But when it comes to hating Jews, nobody is asking him or any of us what we think of the prime minister.

No, our haters want to hate us and will anyway. Let them, but let's not hate each other. Let's try to recognise that we are in this together and united we will stand, divided we could fall. Let's not allow our differences to break us apart.

I accept that you may disagree vehemently with my views. That's your right, but we are brothers and sisters and are united in standing up for ourselves.

We can argue. We can debate, but at the end of the day, we need to agree that politics and religious affiliations aside, we are family. We are one.

The analogy of family is a good one because, in this unit, invariably we can have lots to say about a brother or a sister, uncle, or aunt. But don't let anyone else from outside the family dare say anything ugly about them.

At the SA Jewish Report, we have had readers challenging us for being too right-wing and others claiming we're too left-wing. Some say we have too many religious articles, and others say we have too few. The point is that on this newspaper, we aren't trying to please any specific group of Jewish people. Instead, we're doing the best we know how to cater to the whole South African Jewish community.

Sometimes, we might get it right and other times, we may get it wrong. Suffice to say, our heart and soul is the local Jewish community, and we go all out to give you what we believe you need to know.

We believe that the community is strongest when it works in unison, and that together, we will always survive.

This community is lauded around the world for its intrinsic bonds. So many visitors and people around the world wish they had a community like ours. They see us as united, and admire what we do as the community for the community. We are all that, but as in any situation, we could be stronger and more united.

We are never not going to argue. We are Jews after all, and debate and discussion is in our nature. Just as long as we all stand united against those who hate us. Helping those who hate us because supporting the Jewish state is unfashionable, that's not acceptable.

Beyachad nenatzeah (Together we will prevail)!

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



DeepSeek and TikTok: unlikely duo has world in thrall

OPINION

ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK



A few hours ago, a "thought leadership" press release crossed my desk titled, "What's coming in tech in 2025". It was one of dozens I've received so far this year, but this one came at an unfortunate moment. It had clearly been approved a day or so earlier, and couldn't have foreseen the earthquake that shook the high-tech world a few hours later. Then again, it should have at least foreseen an earthquake of some kind.

Even if it's only the end of January, the relentless pace of big news tells us to keep expecting the unexpected in 2025.

The fascinating aspect of the two tech earthquakes of January is that both feed into a jumbled mess of narratives driving a geopolitical crisis in the form of a trade war between China and the United States (US).

For the first three weeks of January, the narrative was framed jointly by the US Supreme Court and President Donald Trump. The former upheld a ban that President Joe Biden had slapped on video sharing network TikTok in April 2024, set to commence on 20 January. A last-minute appeal to the US Supreme Court failed, and TikTok went dark in the US, but with a placeholder message reading, in part, "We are fortunate that President Trump has indicated that he will work with us on a solution to reinstate TikTok once he takes office".

Trump instantly came to the party, declaring that he would give the Chinese app a stay of execution, and not penalise any service providers hosting its content. The ban lasted barely half a day. Few seemed to notice that the new president was merely invoking a provision in the previous president's ban that allowed a grace period of up to 90 days if it appeared TikTok was making progress in finding an American buyer. Trump gave it 60 days.

At that stage, it was clear that the US was calling the shots in the trade war. Trump had banned Google from supplying technology to Huawei back in 2019, igniting a tech trade war between the

AI development paradigms and the tens of billions they required had become meaningless. DeepSeek said it had spent only \$5.6 million (R104.9 million) on its model. The next morning, the markets all but collapsed.

So, faster than we can say "algorithm", we have two names that have emerged as the unlikely villains of the digital age. One is a cutting-edge AI company pushing boundaries, and the other is a social media platform that has some of us dancing weirdly in our living rooms. Before long, as they each evolve, you won't know which is which. And both have managed to strike fear into the hearts of governments, parents, and conspiracy theorists.

For some Americans, DeepSeek is the AI overlord they didn't see coming, and TikTok is the dancefloor of doom, about to suck in the youth.

With its addictive short-form videos and endless scroll of content, TikTok has become a cultural phenomenon. But beneath the surface of lip-syncing teens and DIY hacks lies a darker narrative that has governments and parents alike clutching their pearls.

Rumours swirl that the app collects an alarming amount of user data, from location tracking to device information. The US Supreme Court believes the argument that this data could be accessed by foreign governments, by which they mean China, turning harmless videos of the latest dance craze into a national security threat.

But let's be real: the true terror of TikTok lies in its ability to make time disappear. One minute, you're watching a video of a cat playing the piano, and the next, it's 03:00 and you've just spent four hours learning how to fold a fitted sheet (spoiler: you still can't do it).

While DeepSeek and TikTok may seem like polar opposites, they share a common thread: their ability to make us question the future of humanity. DeepSeek represents the fear of losing control to machines, especially foreign machines, while TikTok

embodies the fear of losing control of our attention spans. Together, they form a perfect storm of existential dread.

Now, pile on top of that the idea that China has caught up with the bleeding edge of American technology at a thousandth of the cost, and the issue is magnified into a national security disaster, not to mention a stock market fiasco.

The investors who pumped billions into AI companies are furious – although for now directing their fury at the Chinese for having the effrontery to show them up. Neal Khosla, the son of legendary venture capitalist Vinod Khosla, who has put \$50 million into

OpenAI, acted almost as a proxy for the investor community when he railed on X, "deepseek is a ccp state psyop + economic warfare to make american ai unprofitable they are faking the cost was low to justify setting price low and hoping everyone switches to it damage AI competitiveness in the us. dont take the bait"

AI clearly didn't write that, and readers quickly added "context", saying, "There is zero evidence that Deepseek is a psyop. The post does not provide any sources and presents the opinion of the OP (original poster), whose father is a major OpenAI stockholder, as a fact."

Psyop, or psychological warfare, is one of the last resorts of conspiracy theorists. They forget that technology is what we make of it. Whether it's an AI company or a social media app, the power ultimately lies in the hands of its users. If all else fails, the cats of TikTok can keep us entertained while the robots take over.

• Arthur Goldstuck is chief executive of World Wide Worx and editor-in-chief of Gadget.co.za. He is author of The Hitchhiker's Guide to AI. Follow him on Bluesky on @art2gee.bsky.social



The future of TikTok remains in the balance

US and China. Under Biden, the US banned the supply of any technology to companies supplying computer chips to China.

Trump then took over an America with a surging tech sector, driven by artificial intelligence (AI) from any number of giant players and the Nvidia chips that made AI more efficient. Silicon Valley turned into sycophant valley as once liberal billionaires paraded their right-wing credentials for the president in the hope he would spare them his arbitrary decrees – or pour his largesse over them.

He could call on any number of investors to drop a few tens of billions of dollars to build vast new data centres, and buy out a TikTok or two, and, oh, anything that popped into his head while he was high on coffee or power or global domination.

But something else happened on 20 January. On that day, a Chinese start-up called DeepSeek, barely two years old, officially released an AI model called R1. Over the next week, media coverage built up, highlighting R1's performance on a par with the likes of OpenAI's advanced version of ChatGPT, called o1, but also that it achieved this at a fraction of the cost.

By 26 January, the world realised that existing

Trump proposes resettlement for Gazans in first flurry

OPINION

In his first week back in the White House, President Donald Trump lost no time shaking up United States (US) policies on the Middle East. Most agree that it was Trump's pressure that finally secured the brittle ceasefire in Gaza under which by the end of last weekend, seven Israeli hostages had been released along with about 290 Palestinians from Israeli jails. More controversially, Trump has mooted the transfer of millions of Palestinians to Egypt and Jordan, given the decimation of Gaza. This is music to the ears of the Israeli right-wing and anathema to Israel's many foes. Israel was also affected by the deluge of executive orders he signed on day one.

Trump told journalists on Air Force One that he had spoken to Jordan's King Abdullah II about the transfer of Palestinians to that country, and was planning to discuss the issue with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as well. He said, "I said to him that I'd love you to take on more [Palestinians], because I'm looking at the Gaza Strip right now and it's a mess, a real mess. You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing and say, 'You know, it's over.'" Trump said Gaza was "literally a demolition site", and he would rather people lived safely "in a different location", that is, in Egypt and Jordan.

It's doubtful this would fly with either country or the international community, which staunchly oppose any population transfer. But Israeli right-wingers are buoyed at this prospect. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said, "After 76 years during which the majority of Gaza's population has been forcibly kept in harsh conditions to preserve the aspirations of destroying the state of Israel, the idea of helping them find other places to start new, better lives is an excellent idea. Only out-of-the-box thinking and new solutions will bring about peace and security."

On X, former Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir commended Trump's suggestion of "voluntary emigration", and said Israel should implement this policy.

Moving back to Trump's first-day actions, in one executive order that will send shockwaves around the world, he declared a 90-day freeze on and review of American foreign aid. This would include payments to



US President Donald Trump signing an executive order

Photo: Facebook

the highly anti-Israel United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), with several of its workers linked to Hamas. Aid to Israel and Egypt are exempted from the freeze.

Trump revoked Executive Order 14115, issued in February 2024 by former President Joe Biden, which imposed sanctions on settlement residents accused of perpetrating violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Another executive order reinstated sanctions on the International Criminal Court, which has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Trump's measures also sought to block US entry visas to individuals who support foreign terror organisations.

Former US diplomat and writer, Brooks Spector, said, "The Trump administration has got off to a fast start, trying to reorient and reshape his nation's foreign policies. But it's not necessarily true that fast is the same as useful or effective. Now on the job for the second time, he is encountering the complexities of foreign policy and the ways domestic and foreign issues can intertwine."

Not able to fulfil his boast that he could end the Ukraine conflict in a day, "Any American influence and capabilities in bringing the warring parties to a negotiated settlement may actually be pretty close to rocket science," Spector said. Imposing tariffs on foes and friends will similarly prove tougher than a campaign

promise.

Spector said, "In the entanglements of the Middle East, the new administration is hoping that, somehow, the ceasefire for Gaza can be expanded, ultimately, to encompass a broader and more all-encompassing security architecture for the region. The current limited ceasefire had been achieved in the final days of the Biden administration with the participation of a representative of the then president-elect. But moving from this to a much larger regional version of the Abraham Accords, so far, remains out of reach. Nevertheless, the Trump administration now owns the peace process and any momentum – or lack of it – and will be judged on such progress."

Israeli journalist Rolene Marks said, "President Trump has hit the ground running, especially with regards to the Middle East, by ensuring that the terms of the ceasefire are abided by. Quite controversially, he has approached both Jordan and Egypt to absorb about a million and a half to two million Gazans, saying that Gaza is basically levelled and it will take time to reconstruct. From Israel's perspective, the Trump administration is certainly working to support our country."

Marks noted that the lifting of US sanctions on the delivery of some powerful weapons for Israel "is a positive development, as is the positioning of the US national security adviser and defense secretary firmly behind Israel". Marks also welcomed the appointment of Elise Stefanik as the US's United Nations ambassador, who made her name in opposing antisemitism at Ivy League universities. "She's expected to deliver a firm message that the anti-Israel sentiment at the United Nations certainly won't be tolerated by the new Trump administration," Marks said. "So, while Trump remains a polarising figure, certainly as far as foreign policy towards Israel is concerned, it looks largely favourable."

Whether what's good for the right-wing Netanyahu government is necessarily good for Israel will be tested in the coming months.

• Steven Gruzid is a political analyst in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



STEVEN GRUZID

SA-born David Sacks appointed Trump's crypto czar

LEE TANKLE

United States President Donald Trump last month appointed South African-born entrepreneur David Sacks as his artificial intelligence (AI) and crypto czar.

"It's significant that David Sacks was appointed, but I think Elon Musk was the fuel," said Steven Sidley, author, crypto technologist, and professor of practice at the Johannesburg Business School at the University of Johannesburg. "This position could have been given to a whole slew of candidates within and without PayPal."

Sidley said Musk must have said to Trump, "My buddy, David Sacks, from Cape Town, he's perfect for this. He's invested in AI companies, he was my partner at PayPal, and he's made \$200 million [R3.7 billion]." Sidley said he believed this would have impressed Trump, and forced his hand.

Born in Cape Town, Sacks was just five when he and his family immigrated to Tennessee in the United States. He attended Memphis University School before earning a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Stanford University in 1994. He obtained a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Chicago Law School in 1998.

He was part of the early stage of start-up Confinity,

which later became PayPal, with fellow South African, Musk. He was the company's first product leader, and then became its chief operating officer.

With all this success at PayPal, Sacks joined Musk to become part of the so-called "PayPal mafia", a group of former PayPal employees and founders who have since founded and/or developed additional technology companies based in Silicon Valley.

In 2008, Sacks founded enterprise collaboration company Yammer, which was one of the first

software-as-a-service start-ups to apply consumer growth tactics to enterprise software. As

founder/chief executive of Yammer, David grew the company to roughly \$60 million in sales and 500 employees. In July 2012, Microsoft acquired Yammer for \$1.2 billion.

Subsequently, he founded Craft Ventures, a venture capital firm based in San Francisco.

"Sacks is now in the court of the president with one of the most

important roles there is," said Sidley,

"This is because he's in charge of the two most important technologies of the 21st century."

Sacks is in charge of how the US handles cryptocurrency, "which is the redefinition of trust and ownership, which humankind has never known before" and AI, "which is the first technology that we have ever invented that can learn by itself. And we

don't know what that means, we don't know what that portends," Sidley said.

"Sacks has been asked to make sense of it and give input for policy direction," Sidley said. In a perfect world, the person best qualified for such a thing is an academic, but Americans don't tend to appoint academics. Sacks has a successful business record in all sorts of technologies."

After Trump announced the appointment on 5 December 2024, he wrote on his social media site, *Truth Social*, that Sacks would be taking up "two areas critical to the future of American competitiveness."

Trump further wrote that Sacks would "safeguard free speech online" and steer the US away from "big tech bias and censorship."

Sacks's mandate would also include a legal framework for the US crypto industry so that it had the "clarity it has been asking for", Trump said.

"Trump essentially created this position [of AI and crypto czar]," Sidley said. "It's recognition of these two technologies as transformational, both for American economic interests and American intellectual or research and scientific interests. And it's recognition that somebody needs to be able to talk into the president's ear about their direction."

According to Reuters, Sacks has been a huge hero for cryptocurrency, telling CNBC in 2017 that he believed the rise of Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency, was revolutionising the internet.

Sacks stood behind Trump as he signed an executive order to deregulate the cryptocurrency industry, reversing a policy made by President Biden.

Sacks was involved in Trump's campaign, even hosting a \$300 000-a-head fundraiser for the Trump campaign in his home in San Francisco in June.



David Sacks

Photo: The Genesis Prize Facebook page

LAUNCH PHASE 2

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'Time doesn't erase anything' – Holocaust centre honours victims

STAFF REPORTER

The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC) marked the International Day of Commemoration of the Holocaust on Monday, 27 January, and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, by bringing together diverse communities to honour the memory of victims. The commemoration was also meant to promote awareness of genocide and how to prevent it.

It began with a guided tour of the *Some Were Neighbours: Collaboration & Complicity in the Holocaust* exhibition, which explores the roles of ordinary people in the Holocaust, both collaborators and rescuers. This thought-provoking display highlights the complexity of human behaviour during one of history's darkest periods, and will remain on view at the CTHGC until the end of February.

CTHGC Director Jakub Nowakowski reflected on the significance of the commemoration, saying, "We honour the victims of Auschwitz, but also remember all those who fell victim in other places across Nazi-occupied Europe and beyond, like the Jews who were persecuted and killed by the Vichy government in what is today Senegal. No place was too remote,



The candle-lighting ceremony at the CTHGC with six candles commemorating the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust

no community too small to be spared. Over the course of the war, in what we call today the Holocaust or *Shoah*, six million European Jews were killed. Millions of others were murdered too: the Roma and Sinti, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, homosexuals, people with disabilities, and others. Year after year, across the globe, people gather as we do today to mourn and commemorate those who were murdered. The Holocaust has become a part of global history, a universal legacy of humankind. But there was nothing universal about the victims of the Holocaust. They were targeted, persecuted, and killed only because they were Jewish."

A candle-lighting ceremony followed, during which six candles were

lit by Holocaust survivors and their families in memory of the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. A seventh candle, symbolising solidarity and shared remembrance, was lit by a representative of the Rwandan community in honour of the victims of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda.

Nowakowski emphasised the importance of remembering not only those who perished, but also the survivors. "Time doesn't pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it. I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz, but no-one knows it," Nowakowski quoted one of Auschwitz's former prisoners as saying after the war.

"In those haunting words lies a truth we often overlook," he said. "The survivors were liberated from the fear of death, but not from the fear of life. Today, we are honoured by the presence of survivors and their families. Though some couldn't join us in person, their children are here to light candles on their behalf. Let's cherish the time we have with them. Let's spoil them. And finally, let's learn from them, not forgetting that among the many lessons they can teach us about the past, perhaps the most profound is the lesson of forgiveness."

The evening concluded with an online presentation by renowned photographer and blogger Christian Herrmann, titled *Beyond Auschwitz: The Vanished World of Eastern European Jews*. Herrmann's powerful work documents the remnants of Jewish life including synagogues, cemeteries, and other historical sites, and examines their evolving significance in post-Holocaust landscape of Eastern Europe.

Holocaust distortion 'more dangerous than denial'

LARRY LUXNER – JTA

As the world marks 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, one of Germany's most prominent Holocaust scholars says twisting the facts about the Nazi extermination of six million Jews is far more harmful than outright denial, and that such distortion is "a stepping stone from antisemitism into the mainstream".

Kathrin Meyer, the secretary-general of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) said she considered Holocaust distortion particularly dangerous, especially as the number of survivors dwindles with each passing year. This week, when the world focuses on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, only 50 survivors took part in ceremonies at the Nazi death camp in Poland, down from 300 just five years ago.

"Obviously, it's an insult to the victims, but it's also a threat to our democracy because you won't find a single radical, anti-democratic, nationalistic, imperialistic group ideology that doesn't have a distorted view of the Holocaust," Meyer said. One example Meyer offered is that of Russian President Vladimir Putin's vilification of neighbouring Ukraine as a "Nazi government" despite the fact that Ukraine's Jewish president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was democratically elected. "It's always those who attack freedom, liberal views, diversity, and pluralistic societies," said Meyer, who is stepping down from her position after two decades. "They use Holocaust distortion for their political gain."

Meyer, who isn't Jewish, has led the Berlin-based IHRA as the definition of antisemitism it developed became a flashpoint.

While many Jewish groups and a number of governments and municipalities have adopted the definition to identify antisemitism, some critics say it could stifle free speech by chilling or criminalising legitimate criticism of Israeli policy.

Meyer recalled that it took the IHRA three years to adopt a definition of antisemitism that satisfied all its members, which include 35 member states; eight observer countries; and nine global partners including the United Nations, the European Union, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), and the Claims Conference.

That definition, Meyer said, is now "one of the most important tools ever" in the fight against Jew hatred.

"Before the adoption of this definition, I was confronted time and again with statements like, 'Oh, in our country, there's no antisemitism.' We don't have this discussion any longer," said Meyer. The IHRA defines antisemitism as having a "certain perception of Jews that may be expressed as hatred" toward them. That perception includes certain kinds of rhetoric and action aimed at Israel and its supporters, for example, denying Jews the right to self-determination or calling Israel a "racist endeavour".

Proponents of the definition see those examples as an important response to events like the sharp rise in vandalism of synagogues and cemeteries, verbal and physical attacks against Jews, and "anti-Zionist" incitement since the 7 October 2023 invasion by Hamas and Israel's subsequent war in Gaza.

"The events of 7 October have tragically proven us right. The dramatic increase in antisemitic incidents came right after the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust. The fact that this didn't lead to more solidarity but to more antisemitism shows how deep this hatred goes, and how irrational it often is."

The IHRA was founded as a temporary task force by then-Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson. Along with Britain's Tony Blair and United States President Bill Clinton, he organised a Stockholm forum held 25 years

ago, on 27 January 2000, that was attended by 46 heads of state and foreign ministers. There, they signed the Stockholm Declaration and committed their countries to support Holocaust education, remembrance, and research.

"That was revolutionary, because until then, it was mainly Jewish organisations that had commemorated the Holocaust, but it was never really seen as a governmental responsibility," she said. "We had very few member

countries at that point, but the others were invited. Soon it became an international institution with 35 member countries and global impact."

One of Meyer's biggest concerns is the immense power of Big Tech, she said, citing "the problems we face just with Meta getting rid of fact-checking" on Facebook, and the increasing virulent hate speech spread on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

A recent UNESCO study of 4 000 pieces

of content collected in June and July 2021 showed that 10% of such content on Facebook, 15% on Twitter (now X), and nearly half on Telegram either denied or distorted Holocaust history.

"There's no question artificial intelligence [AI] brings huge risks," Meyer said, but it also brings great opportunities, because AI cannot only be used by the bad guys. It can be used by us too, for example, in keeping the memory of survivors alive," she said.

A gift shop at Auschwitz? New films and a graphic memoir explore the contradictions of 'dark tourism'

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL – JTA

In a fraught moment in the film *A Real Pain*, Kieran Culkin, playing the more volatile of a pair of Jewish cousins who go on a roots tour of Poland, berates his fellow travellers for riding in a first-class train car in a country where so many Jews rode cattle cars to their deaths.

A few scenes later, after breaking away from the tour group, he happily sits in first class, essentially telling his cousin, played by Jesse Eisenberg, "Screw it. We're owed this."

"I love that scene," said Ari Richter, the author and illustrator of *Never Again Will I Visit Auschwitz*, a "graphic family memoir" describing Richter's own visits to the places where his Holocaust survivor grandparents lived and suffered. Richter said that in the train scenes, *A Real Pain* expertly captures the contradictions felt by second and third-generation Jewish visitors like him on pilgrimages to a grim Jewish past.

In his book, Richter describes a visit to the Dachau camp memorial, where he is both impressed by the efforts made by the German curators to focus on "the nexus of German cruelty and Jewish suffering" – unlike the Polish guides at Auschwitz, where he learns "mostly about the suffering of non-Jewish Poles" – and touched by small gestures, like the "kosher-friendly options" on the menu at the Dachau café.

And yet ...

"In a way, I know they seek my absolution," Richter ruminates back at the hotel, "and I resent that I offer it by accepting their kindness."

Richter's is a multilayered book, published last summer, about his grandparents' and great-grandparents' imprisonment in Dachau, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz; the lives they made in America, including Tampa, Florida, where Richter grew up; and what Richter calls the safe "white American identity" he inherited.

Between his grandparents' stories, Richter asks if his relatives' survival and second chances give him license to put the past aside, and what lessons about Jewish life and survival he'd like to pass on.

His book arrives at a perhaps not coincidental moment

that includes the release of two films about such roots trips – *A Real Pain* and Lena Dunham's 2024 film *Treasure*. They join a genre that includes Jonathan Safran Foer's 2002 novel *Everything Is Illuminated*; Francine Prose's 1997 novella *Guided Tours of Hell*; and screenwriter Jerry Stahl's 2022 memoir *Nein, Nein, Nein!*

So-called "dark tourism" has even spawned its own academic sub-specialty. In her 2014 book *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places*, anthropologist Erica Lehrer describes encounters between Jewish tourists and Polish locals and their halting and occasionally hostile attempts to understand each other. In *Dark Tourism, the Holocaust, and Well-being*, three academics offer an almost comically understated review of the literature.

Comedy isn't the first thing that comes to mind when you consider visits to death camps, but if there's one thing the popular treatments of the visits share, it's a mordant sense of humour. Foer's novel, and its 2005 film adaptation, is about the Jewish author's journey to Ukraine in search of the woman who saved his grandfather's life during the Nazi liquidation of the family shtetl. Perhaps the best known character in the book is a local handler who speaks a comically broken English.

Prose's novella is about an obscure playwright enduring a tour of a concentration camp led by a flamboyant and much more successful writer who himself survived the camp. The tone, like the title, is satiric and pitch black.

And in *Treasure*, playing a journalist who accompanies her survivor father on a trip through 1990s Poland, Dunham goes for bittersweet comedy before the inevitable visit to Auschwitz and her father's stolen home.

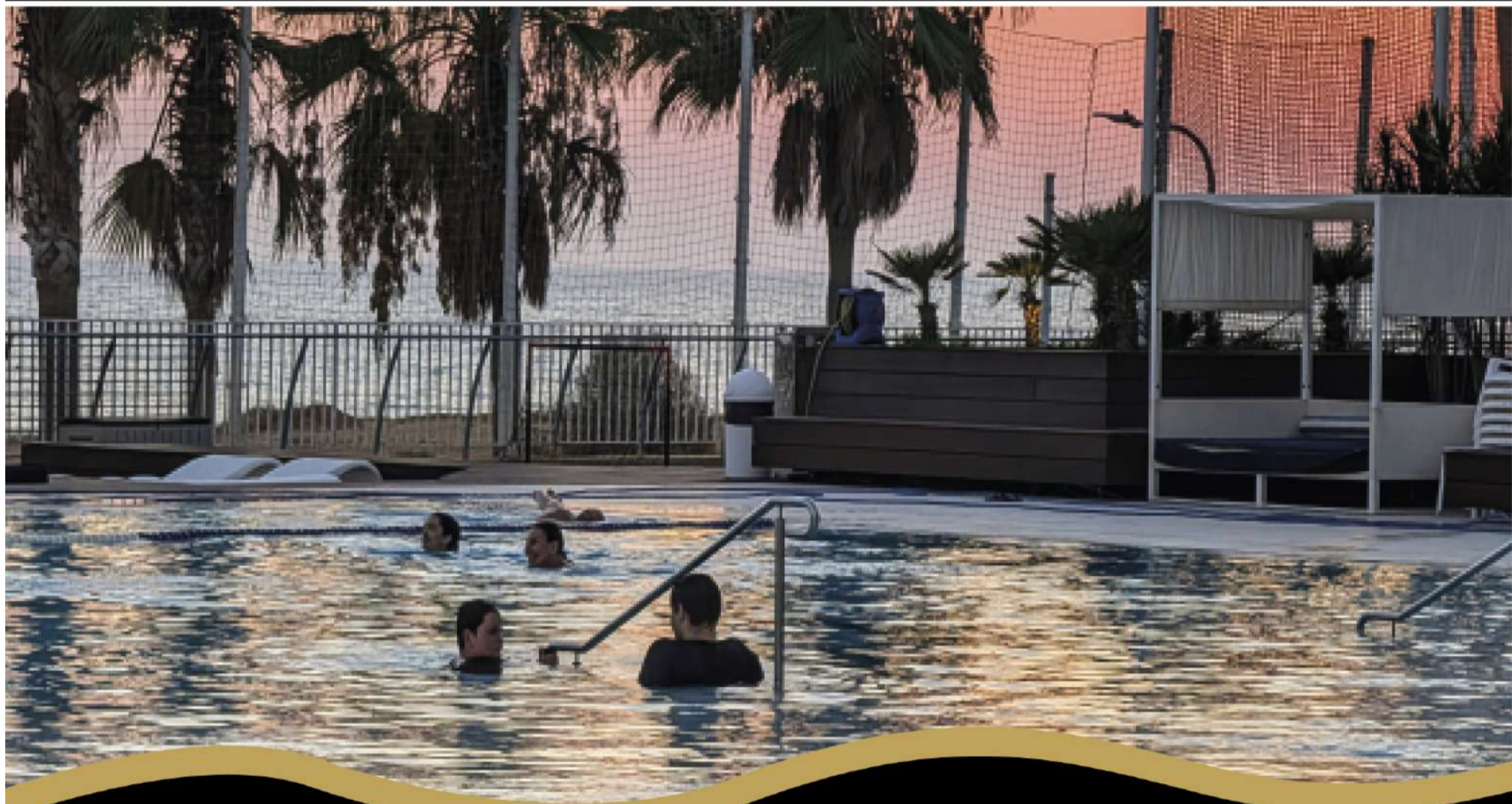
The humour could be a distinctly Jewish response to tragedy, or a choice to make morbid material more palatable to a wide audience. The very idea of death camps being turned into tourist sites, with gift shops and snack bars, is the sort of "ludicrous" incongruity that everyone from Freud to Schopenhauer to Mel Brooks include in their theories of laughter. Eisenberg told interviewers that *A Real Pain* was inspired by an advertisement promising a "Holocaust tour, with lunch."



International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Executive Secretary Kathrin Meyer

Photo: Darren Walsh Chelsea FC via Getty Images

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Pain in Poland – why roots trips are worth it

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Released in local cinemas just days before the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz this week, *A Real Pain* tells the story of cousins who visit Poland to honour their grandmother. But it's not just the stuff of Hollywood screenplays, South Africans have many stories of journeying to Poland to connect to their roots. They share some of them.

"The SS [Schutzstaffel] pushed 80 people into the cattle trucks, closed the doors, and the nightmare journey to Auschwitz began. We had no facilities for anything. We couldn't move, and people were sitting on top of each other. There was no air, and we couldn't breathe properly." These are the words of late Holocaust survivor Ervin Schlesinger. While reluctant to discuss his traumatic Holocaust experiences for much of his life, Schlesinger documented his story in later years.

"Like most Holocaust survivors, my grandfather couldn't speak about his experiences," says his grandson, Liran Assness. While Schlesinger revealed only snippets of his story to his family, when he read an article by a Holocaust denier, he decided to speak up to counter such gross misinformation. He wrote about what happened to him, was interviewed by the Schindler Foundation, and gave a handful of talks in closed forums, says Assness.

Born in Petrovac, Yugoslavia, in 1927,

Schlesinger was taken to Auschwitz at the age of 16. Here his entire family, aside from his sister with whom he later reunited, was killed. After surviving the war, he ultimately became a diamond dealer in South Africa.

When the idea of visiting Poland came up, Assness was initially disinterested in it. "I always thought we grew up with a Holocaust survivor, we know what happened, we don't have to go. There's also some generational trauma that's

days in the country were difficult as he battled feelings of anger and irritation. "I settled into it though, and it was then a different experience," he says.

Assness says the trip left him feeling a deeper connection to his grandfather,

to Poland to date, says that for him, every one of these journeys has changed him in some way. While he has no direct family links to Poland, he has felt a deep connection to the Holocaust since childhood.

"I always had the desire to go to Poland," he says. Initially going as a participant, Ash now helps conduct annual JRoots trips. "For me, it's not a tour, I call it a journey, and I come back a different person every single time."

"It's not a tour about the Holocaust, it's a tour about the Jewish people," he says, "tracing the country's rich Jewish heritage from Warsaw to Auschwitz to Lublin and more." In Judaism, he says, we believe in *yizchor* or *zachor* [memory] rather than history. "Memory means that it's mine. So all of this is really about our connection, upliftment, and transformation," he says. Regardless of your direct connection to Poland or the Holocaust, it's a personal journey for every Jew.

Monica Solomon planned a unique trip to Poland in 2007 to trace her father's early life in Breslau. Originally in Germany, the city was annexed by Poland after World War II, and is now called Wrocław.

"My husband and I went with the intention of finding as much as we could about his life there from 1910 when he was born, to 1933 when he moved to the Netherlands," she says. Understanding the looming danger for Jews, Solomon's father then fled to South Africa in 1935. His mother, brother, and sister later went to South America, while his father died in 1939 in a hospital in Berlin.

Before everything changed, his life in Breslau was happy. His family lived in a magnificent apartment which housed a music room where visiting musicians would play for their guests. Solomon had the address of the apartment, and was delighted to be allowed into the building.

"We saw what is now one third of the apartment that my father lived in. Each original apartment in this building has now been turned into three large apartments. We could still see what he had described to us about the communal garden and the homes across the road."

Solomon also visited her father's school, where a mock classroom was still on display to give visitors a taste of its history. While the shul where her father studied with the chief rabbi of Breslau was undergoing renovations, she saw the pool where her father, a swimmer, had trained, and visited the beautiful university he studied at.

"It's just something special. You somehow feel part of their lives by tracing your parents' roots," she says. Wrocław is today a university town and its huge student population adds to the bustling energy of the city. The fact that her father's time there was happy meant that the trip lacked the traumatic undertones of those with a different fate.

Being joined by her sister, Michelle Bako, made the journey that much more impactful, Solomon says. "It was overwhelming to be there together. Of our siblings, we are the most like our father and followed in his footsteps by going into the commercial world. Just being at his apartment was incredible. It's a feeling that can't really be explained – the connection to the past and a bygone era. It's something everyone should do if they can. It's all very well your parents telling you stories about their lives and how they grew up, but it isn't real until you've seen it."



Liran Assness at Auschwitz

His bravery and resilience have always inspired Assness, who today is a successful businessman. When he travelled with his wife to Poland on a JRoots journey in 2024, Assness read his grandfather's words while he and his tour group stood in Auschwitz. "It was very moving for me, a special moment," he says.

passed down, so you almost want to avoid it in a sense."

Assness says it was the relaxed attitude of Rabbi Eitan Ash, who co-runs the JRoots journeys from South Africa, which made the idea of going to Poland more palatable. Nevertheless, he says, he was disengaged before the tour. His first few

and was ultimately life-changing. "Just the mere fact that you are alive and able to practice your Judaism gives you a lot of appreciation and perspective. There's so much gratitude that you were born in a different era, otherwise, just by default, you probably would have been killed."

Ash, who has taken eight JRoots trips

'I was victorious – I'm still here'

Ella Blumenthal is a Holocaust survivor and at 103 years old, lives in Cape Town. She was born in Poland, and survived the Holocaust and three concentration camps, including Auschwitz. To commemorate International Holocaust Memorial Day, the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the *SA Jewish Report* speaks to her.



What do you want the world to know on the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz?

That history repeats itself, that tolerance and understanding is the only way to move forward, and that if we tried to understand each other, we would find that we have more in common than what divides us.

What do you want the Jewish people to remember on this anniversary?

That remembering the Holocaust is even more relevant given that the second Holocaust has just happened in Israel.

Your survival has made you an icon for South African Jewry. What's your advice for those who have been through hell in this regard?

Never give up, not ever. Enjoy every day, and believe that tomorrow will be better than today.

What do you believe got you through the Holocaust?

I had faith in G-d, and a strong will to live – it was burning in me. I wanted to see the sun come up the next day.

For some, hope is meaningless. What would you say to the person who feels that?

Hope is everything. Hope means that you can try and try again. Throughout my life, I have always had a sense of hope, and that's what has got me through every day.

Over the past two weeks, we witnessed young women hostages returning home to Israel. What are your thoughts about this? What would you say to them?

My heart is full of happiness to see the young women back with their families, to see them back with their loved ones after the hell they've endured.

I want to tell them that I have been following their progress every day, and that I feel like they are like my own children. Like any mother, I really wanted to hold and protect them.

Looking at Israel today, with the hostages, soldiers, and others who have been through hell, what is your advice about moving forward?

I know that Israel and her people are strong, and together, we'll win. As in the Holocaust, we faced terrible hardships, but I believe that we Jews will always survive.

During the Holocaust, we Jewish people didn't have a mother, now we have a mother, the state of Israel.

Looking at your life to date, what were your finest and darkest moments?

My darkest moment was when I was standing in the gas chamber in Majdanek looking up at the shower heads, waiting for the gas to come out. Waiting for a sure death, and telling my niece not to worry, at least death would happen quickly.

My finest moment – and I have many – would be the victory that I've had over the Nazis. I won, and I'm still here. I get to celebrate every day with all my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Why is it so important for us to tell the story of the Holocaust?

Because the hate is here again. Hate is occupying the world. The lessons of the Holocaust haven't been learnt.

What are your thoughts about rising antisemitism in the world today. How should we deal with it?

I see it happening all over again, and it scares me. It scares me because I know where this is leading to. I've seen it, and I've been a victim of it. When hatred is allowed to fester, the whole world will suffer.

With 80 years having passed since the liberation of Auschwitz, what are your abiding memories of that deadly place?

I went back to Auschwitz with my daughter and son-in-law some years ago. I walked on the train tracks. I remembered where my bunker was. I walked through with my head held high. I was victorious. I was here. I am here.

What would you like to tell South African Jewry today?

I want to thank this warm community for taking me in and allowing me to live my life to the fullest. I feel privileged to be part of this wonderful community which has been so generous and hospitable.

Ella Blumenthal



Meshoe Washington a ‘true warrior’ who fought for unity

CHARISSE ZEIFERT

“Powerhouse”; “tenacious spirit”; “courageous visionary”; “leader”; “barrier-breaker” – these were just a few of the adjectives used to describe the late Olga Meshoe Washington at her memorial in Vosloorus on 26 January. Meshoe Washington passed away on 6 January, aged 43, following a month-long battle with lupus.

The South African memorial service for Meshoe Washington was held just one week after her

Meshoe family also acknowledged the honour of Meshoe Washington being buried in Israel, the country she loved and called her home.

The Washington and Meshoe families met through the work that they did respectively for Israel. Both families are outspoken advocates for the Jewish state.

Speaker after speaker reflected on Meshoe Washington’s courage and commitment to fight for Israel and defend it against the apartheid slur. She did so at a time when it wasn’t popular to do so, representing

Israel in the media, in Parliament, at churches, and on university campuses. She bravely spoke out, and often she stood alone. But she stood for what she believed in.

Bafana Modise, the

head of communications for the South African Friends of Israel, said Meshoe Washington became a Zionist when it wasn’t fashionable to be a Zionist. She emboldened Christian support for Israel. Modise cautioned against Christians attempting to rewrite history. He quoted Esther in the Bible, saying, “If I perish, I perish.” Meshoe Washington’s fearless support for



Bafana Modise from the South African Friends of Israel speaking at the memorial service for Olga Meshoe Washington in Vosloorus

Photo: Nosalia Silus

was fine, when she clearly wasn’t. He asked for assistance, and she was admitted into a hospital in the United States. It was there that her husband met and was with her as she took her final breath. Meshoe said she was weak on the outside but strong on the inside. He couldn’t have imagined that it was the last time he would see her.

The Jewish

community was well-represented at the event, with representatives from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies; South African

Friends of Israel; and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) among others present, as well as regular community members who just wished to pay their respects.

Avrom Kregel, speaking on behalf of the SAZF, described

Meshoe Washington as a magnificent human being. She was inspirational, he said, and “we’ll never ever forget what she did for the Jewish community. She had been one of South Africa’s great young leaders”.

Israel has allowed us to speak out, he said.

Deputy Israel Ambassador Adi Cohen-Hazanov also commended Meshoe Washington for her courage in speaking the truth in South Africa, where Israel didn’t have friends. In fact, Cohen-Hazanov said, she “showed the friendly face of Israel. She brought all of us together: Jews, Christians, Israelis, and Americans. She fought for unity, and this will be her legacy.”

Meshoe Washington was a mentor to many young people, who were attracted to her warmth, love, radiance, goodness, strength, and light. She had an ability to make everyone feel seen and cared for. She was also a daughter, a mother, and a wife. Her husband, Joshua Washington, spoke of how he and their young sons, Judah, 6, and Ezra, 3, still needed to process their grief.

Meshoe Washington’s younger sibling, Joshua Meshoe, described his sister as “a true warrior”. Few could do what she did,

he said. He would remember her by her creed, “You don’t stop when you are tired, you stop when the work is done.” He

reminisced how he and his sister had initially been rivals but eventually become each other’s greatest supporters. Meshoe was tasked with accompanying Meshoe Washington on her flight back to her family in the United States. He could see that she was weak, despite her evoking the family tradition of saying she



Commiserating with Joshua Washington, Olga’s husband

Photo: Nosalia Silus



The Jewish community pays their respects

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

funeral at the Tel Regev Cemetery in Rekhasim in Haifa, Israel. Speaking at the service, her father-in-law, Dumisani Washington, the founder and chief executive of the Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel (IBSI), remarked how Israeli President Isaac Herzog had made it possible for Meshoe Washington to be buried in Israel. “The Jewish people never forget a friend” he said. The



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Oscar nomination confirms *The Last Ranger's* relevance

LEE TANKLE

If Cindy Lee hadn't been recording herself when she found out that the short film she directed, *The Last Ranger*, was nominated for an Oscar on 23 January, she would never have believed that it had happened.

"We were sitting on a massive Zoom call with all of the cast and crew, the Thanda Choir, and all our American friends with Kindred Films with anticipation and nervous energy," said Lee, "They announced it so quickly and all of a sudden, the short film category came up, and we were announced fourth. By that time I was just screaming."

For Lee, to be nominated for her film is an award in and of itself. "It just proves that African stories mean something to the world. The film is in isiXhosa, it's 28 minutes long, it's about rhinos, and the world gives a shit about that. They want to see South African stories in our language. For me, that's the biggest validation possible because I want to keep telling South African stories."

The short film, based on a true story, tells

the story of a young Xhosa girl, Litha (Liyabona Mroqoza) who works with the female game ranger Khuselwa (Avumile Qongqo) at the Amakhala Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape to combat rhino poaching.

Their journey takes a tragic and unexpected turn when they are ambushed by poachers, leading to a battle to protect the rhinos, which uncovers a devastating secret.

This short film is part of a 24-part anthology with American film company Kindred Films which is centred on making 24 films from 24 countries around the world. *The Last Ranger* was the second film to be debuted in this anthology.

"This film could only have been made here" said Lee. "It's in isiXhosa, it's shot in the Eastern Cape, and it's about one of the important creatures to South Africa, the rhino. You can't get more South African than this story."

Lee is the daughter of Moonyeenn Lee, a famed South African casting director, talent agent, and producer. She and her brother, David Lee, the film's screenwriter were brought up in an environment that embedded a love for storytelling and how it can have an impact on a



community.

The script draws on the first-hand experience of David when he accompanied a wildlife vet, Dr William Fowlds, the founder of the Amakhala Game Reserve and head of the

African Rhino Conservation Collaboration, to the site of a rhino poaching, and saw the tragedy of Thandi the rhino who survived a poacher attack.

"My brother was so upset and overwhelmed by the experience that when he asked Dr Fowlds what he could do to help, he said go back to Hollywood and write a script, and he leapt at the chance," said Lee.

Not only was the script written by her brother, Lee was drawn to the project because of her passion for wildlife conservation.

"When you get up close and personal with one of these animals and you see the devastation they go through, it's hard not to feel compelled to want to do something about it," she said.

For her, the most devastating thing about it is that a rhino's horn is practically worthless because it's made of keratin. "It's like your nails, it does nothing. And these beautiful beasts are being destroyed for no reason at all."

To be nominated for an Academy Award, a short film has to have won the overall short film category at one of the Oscar-qualifying film festivals.

The short film was submitted to every film festival they could think of so that they would even have the possibility of getting onto the radar of the Academy of Motion Pictures.

"We got into only a third of the festivals we entered. We didn't get into any of the big festivals – we didn't get into Cannes, Sundance, or Telluride," Lee said.

The film was given a lifeline to Oscar fame when it won Best Short Narrative at the 2024 Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles.

Once they qualified, the film was then longlisted to be one of 180 other short films, and then shortlisted as one of 15.

The Academy then watched all the films and voted again, and *The Last Ranger* was selected to be one of five to compete to get that gold Oscar statue.

Lee said that when she screened the film in Los Angeles a month ago at an Academy screening, the voters came out of the screening speechless.

"They said they had no idea that rhinos were being poached, let alone one every 15 hours, so by doing this, we're putting a spotlight on what's happening in this country, and we're trying to urge the government to make sure that legislature is put in place to hold poachers to account."

Furthermore, though the film showcases the devastation of what rhino poaching can do, it has a political message to stop rhino poaching, Lee said.

At the end of the film, viewers find out that Thandi the rhino has had five babies, and is pregnant with her sixth.

"A rhino dies every 15 hours, so we'll never be able to keep that up, but Thandi is now pregnant for the sixth time so there's hope in that," Lee said. "We see the little girl take up the mantle of being a game ranger. She's now the protector of Thandi. If we can encourage South Africans to do that, and the youth want to protect the rhino, we can save the rhino."

Trend or habit: when to cancel anti-Israel celebrities

LEE TANKLE

It can be deeply upsetting when your favourite international star comes out as anti-Israel on social media. But is one of two negative social media posts reason to boycott that celebrity outright?

South African-born Ari Ingel, the executive director of Creative Community for Peace (CCFP), believes once-off sharing of anti-Israel social media is more a sign of people following a trend because supporting the Palestinians is far more fashionable than supporting Israel.

It's far more concerning and warranting of action if the celebrity makes a habit of destroying Israel on social media, Ingel said, like actors Mark Ruffalo, Susan Sarandon, and Pink Floyd founder Roger Waters have done.

It's important for celebrities to understand their power and reach

on social media, Ingel says. "There's a certain responsibility that comes with having so much influence these days. If you are going to be an activist and you do want to speak out about a topic, that's fine, but make sure you're educated about it and not just reposting 'Free Palestine' or some other statement that somebody else you saw has shared."

He says the likes of Sarandon, Ruffalo, and Waters constantly post horrific sentiments and claim they are educated about the topic, even if they spew misinformation. "True activists like that are obviously extremely problematic, and they deserve all the condemnation that comes their way."

"Anti-Israel sentiment posted on social media is typically grounded in misinformation and divorced from facts and history," says Rolene Marks, spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation.

"Whether it's your favourite celebrity or neighbour, if their posts contain false information and you feel strongly about it, you should counter any claims they make by responding with facts," she said.

Raquel Nathan, a 2024 South African StandWithUs Emmerson Fellow, says the only way to counteract the negativity of those "activist celebrities" is to report them and boycott any future projects and their social media pages. "We need to send them a message that what they are saying isn't okay. That can be through people en masse reporting inaccurate posts and information and unfollowing those spouting this hatred."

Ingel agrees, saying that in terms of Waters, who clearly exposed himself as an antisemite, CCFP approached the company that puts out

his music, Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG), to convey the fact that it was inappropriate to work with an antisemite like him. BMG severed ties with Waters and Pink Floyd as a result.

When there was a public outcry over Kanye West's antisemitism, his sponsor, Adidas, cut ties with him.

Ingel reiterated that if a celebrity posts a once-off post on social media that is anti-Israel, they are doing so because it's a trend. "Many are just posting 'Free Palestine' because it's the thing to do," he said. "These people don't know what they're posting about, they don't understand what's going on there, and they are misinformed by being in this echo chamber of disinformation."

For example, he cites musicians Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell, who wore red enamel pins to the Oscars last year associated with the organisation Artists4Ceasefire, a collective of artists and advocates who called for a ceasefire to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Some in the anti-Israel camp purposefully miseducated people about what these pins signified, Ingel says. The pin, with a red hand in the middle, is a symbol of the murder and capture of two Israeli soldiers in Ramallah in 2000. The image is based on the terrorist coming to the window and proudly displaying Israeli blood on his hands. However, Artists4Ceasefire said the pin was a symbol of community and a call to save lives.

"They wore the pin proudly not because they are necessarily antisemites but because they didn't understand what that pin really signifies," he said, "All they were told was that that pin signified that they don't support children dying. They don't know that behind that pin is an anti-Israel movement not wanting Israel to respond to the 7 October massacre, and for the Jewish state to capitulate to Hamas."

However, despite this, Ingel doesn't place Eilish and O'Connell in the same category as Ruffalo and Waters. They are "stuck in echo chambers of information, where you start seeing only one side of a story – which is invariably the anti-Israel side", he says.

"They are constantly seeing pictures of dead children and whatever anti-Israel information is out there, and there's a lot. And all the horrors in the world that aren't accurate, but that's what their social media feed looks like."

Former South African content creator Josh Buchalter compares the feeling to how the Jewish world felt after the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel. "There was that friend, acquaintance, or colleague that you almost expected to show some kind of consideration for the challenges that the Jewish people and Israel were going through but, instead, there was absolute silence and then three months later, there was just criticism against Israel," he says.

Buchalter says he can still engage with the art of some of these artists, but there's a line he won't cross.

"You can still follow them and listen to their music, but there should be that awareness that there's only so far they can go. It's about being true to yourself, and understanding that you can still benefit from whatever the celebrity influence or musician gives you."

Red enamel pins from Artists4Ceasefire worn by some celebrities at the 2024 Academy Awards

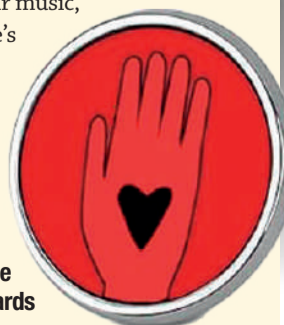


Photo: Roger Waters Facebook page

Pink Floyd founder, Roger Waters

Instructor brings Jews in step with Israeli dance

ELKA COHEN

From a young age, Christel Kamffer was captivated by the art of dance. The 32-year-old Afrikaans-speaking Christian woman from Pretoria initially pursued dance as a personal passion, but what began as a hobby soon blossomed into a calling that led her down an unexpected path.

At 15, Kamffer discovered Israeli folk dance, sparking a connection to a tradition that would shape her future. Today, she's one of South Africa's few Israeli folk dance instructors, dedicated to igniting interest in this vibrant tradition, particularly within the Jewish community.

Her journey into Israeli folk dance took a pivotal turn in 2012, when Miriam Jacobs, a respected local instructor, invited Marcelo Marianoff, a Jewish Israeli dance teacher from Argentina, to South Africa to host Machol Jozi, a workshop in Israeli folk dance.

"Marcelo didn't just teach us the steps, he brought the history, the music, the culture. Every part of it spoke to my soul," Kamffer recalls. The experience was life-changing, inspiring her to deepen her connection to the art form and even volunteer on a kibbutz in Israel to learn more about the culture firsthand.

Despite Kamffer's enthusiasm, Israeli folk dance has struggled to gain a strong foothold in South Africa, particularly within the Jewish community. "It's been almost non-existent here," says Jacobs, who hopes that a new generation will rekindle the community's interest in the dance's spiritual, cultural, and joyous offerings.

Jacobs, who moved to South Africa from Haifa 33 years ago, is no stranger to the challenges of promoting Israeli folk dance in this country. "I brought Marcelo here at my own expense," she says, having spent more than 20 years dedicated to the dance form only to face limited support from the local Jewish community.

For years, Jacobs has tried to engage Jewish religious organisations, schools, and synagogues with little success. "Our schools offer ballet, but not Israeli dance," she notes, pointing out that most invitations to teach and perform come from Christian communities in support of Israel.

Celia le Roux, 69, another local instructor who attended Machol workshops in England, Vienna, and

France, went on to teach small groups of Christian women in Cape Town and Hermanus. Like Jacobs, Le Roux is disheartened by the lack of participation from the Jewish community despite its global popularity and spiritual significance. "It's disappointing how few Jewish people come to dance," she said.

Jacobs attributes the lack of interest from the community to resistance, particularly to the practice of mixed-gender dancing. "In Israel, I taught both secular and religious communities, adjusting my approach by teaching men and women separately," she said. She also notes that many women in Johannesburg are discouraged from attending evening classes due to safety concerns.

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks believes it's unpopular for another reason – lack of exposure. "South African Jews haven't shown much interest in Israeli dancing primarily due to limited exposure," she said. "Without dedicated academies, the dance might not carry the 'cool factor' necessary to attract young enthusiasts."

Jacobs, however, said she's hoping younger instructors like Kamffer will help bring Israeli folk dance into the mainstream because "it's time to hand over the baton to the next generation".

Kamffer is determined to change the narrative. Her time on Kibbutz Ein Hashofet, where she met Helen Arbel, a revered Israeli folk dance teacher, solidified her passion for the dance. Arbel taught Kamffer about the significance of Shavuot, a Jewish holiday celebrated with dance on the kibbutz, an experience Kamffer describes as life-changing.

"In 2020, during the global lockdown, I had the privilege of dancing with kibbutz residents on Shavuot,"

she said. "It felt like I was part of something far greater than myself, and it deepened my desire to keep the tradition alive."

Kamffer's connection to Israeli folk dance also grew as she learned about its origins in the kibbutzim back in 1944, when it was created to help establish Israel's national and cultural identity. A rich history, combined with the communal and joyous nature of the dances, resonated with Kamffer on a personal level. "Like Ruth in

community, celebrating life, and connecting with one's heritage. It's also about improving health and fitness and bringing joy to people of all ages."

Kamffer's vision is to found the Hatikvah Dance Academy, a school dedicated to promoting Israeli folk dance. "I want to bring Israeli dance to Jewish schools in Johannesburg, where it's currently not offered as an extracurricular activity," she says. "Cultural dance is for everyone, but it has to start with children."

Her dream is to offer classes for all ages within the Jewish community. "We need to create spaces where everyone feels welcome, regardless of their level of experience," she said.

While Kamffer's journey is unconventional in being a Christian woman teaching a Jewish cultural tradition, her passion for preserving Israeli folk dance is undeniable. As she continues working tirelessly to reintroduce this dance form to the South African Jewish community, there's hope that Israeli folk dance will once again find

its place in the hearts of those who have lost

touch with it.

"The beauty of Israeli folk dance is that it's more than just movement," says Kamffer. "It's a celebration of community, identity, and life. It has the power to bring people together."

With Kamffer's unwavering dedication, there's optimism that Israeli folk dance can be brought to life and possibly even thrive as part of South African Jewish life, uniting generations through rhythm, joy, and a shared heritage.



the Bible, I've adopted a culture and people that are not naturally my own," she reflects.

Kamffer's commitment to the art form remains unwavering. In 2023, she became the first South African to complete the online International Markidim Course, a folk dance teacher's course from Israel.

"The lack of support here can be overcome by educating our community about the rich spiritual and cultural history of Israeli folk dance," Kamffer said. "It's not just about learning the steps, it's about building

Jewish postwar epic 'The Brutalist' picks up 10 Oscar nominations, with 'A Complete Unknown' close behind

ANDREW LAPIN – JTA

A postwar epic about a Holocaust survivor; a contemporary comedy about Holocaust tourism; and a biopic of a Jewish musical legend helped lend a formidable Jewish presence to the Oscar nominations on 23 January.

Meanwhile, nominations for a documentary about the West Bank and a docudrama about the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre of Israeli athletes also kept Israel in the conversation.

The nominations announcement, delayed multiple times by historically destructive Los Angeles wildfires, arrived amid calls in some corners to cancel the Oscars altogether out of deference to the fire's victims.

Whether or not there is an awards ceremony this year, *The Brutalist*, a three-plus-hour historical drama starring Adrien Brody as a fictional Hungarian Jewish architect inspired by real Jewish designers, is well positioned with 10 nominations, tied for second most of the year. Those included the major categories of best picture; director; lead actor for Brody; original screenplay; supporting actress for Felicity Jones; and supporting actor for Guy Pearce. The film was also nominated in the categories of original score, for work by British Jewish composer

Daniel Blumberg; cinematography; editing; and production design.

Directed by 36-year-old Brady Corbet, filmed in Hungary as a substitute for Philadelphia, and steeped in details of the Jewish immigrant experience, the film has been heavily lauded this awards season. It could repeat the success of last year's heavily nominated epic about a Jewish genius, *Oppenheimer*, which went on to win best picture and numerous others.

The Brutalist has also been the subject of some late-breaking controversy as members of the film's crew recently admitted to using artificial intelligence (AI) to craft some aspects of the movie, including perfecting the Hungarian accents for Brody and Jones, a crucial detail of their performances. The revelation came after voting for Oscar nominations had already closed. Corbet has defended what he said was a very limited use of AI, and said the actors' performances were "completely their own".

Brody, who spoke Hungarian for the role and is a favourite in the best-actor category, is the son of a Jewish father and Hungarian artist mother. He also won in this category in 2002 for playing another Holocaust survivor, in *The Pianist*. Jones,

Continued on page 14>>



Jewish actor Timothée Chalamet portrays Bob Dylan in *A Complete Unknown*

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A Jewish Trump would be a right *faribel*



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

I went cold at the thought. Imagine a Jewish president of the United States trying to work out who to invite to the inauguration, who to place on stage for the event, and which rabbi to honour with the prayer?

It would be a disaster. The event would last a minimum of four days, with speeches accounting for 63% of the time, complaining and advice 17%, and about 20% spent begging the crowd to switch their cellphones off. No venue would be large enough, and the “marathon” would unquestionably conclude with no-one speaking to him or to the family for the next two generations. And that’s even before getting started on the choice of caterer, the standard of kashrut, the menu, and the décor.

Donald Trump is blessed not to be Jewish. He might think he has challenges ahead with a belligerent Iran and a combative Putin, but that’s only because he has never had a face off against the head of the ladies guild in search of her missing cheesecake. He might think that a China trade war is complex and adversarial, but that’s only because he hasn’t tried to collect shul fees and donations ahead of the high holy days. He might naively believe that the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America is a formidable undertaking, but it hardly registers when compared to the renaming of the Abe and Fanny Goldschmid Recreation Centre to the new Storm and Stacey Abel Padel Facility, following a redesign and rebuild – paid for by Storm’s late father, Solly Abelman, of blessed memory.

Trump might be gifted with a Jewish daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, but he clearly doesn’t have a Jewish mother-in-law. If he did, she would have overseen seating and then delivered the inauguration address herself. She also would have quite quickly provided a pashmina to Lauren Sánchez to cover herself, because this wasn’t going to be that kind of inauguration. And because some men in the room can’t be trusted to avert their eyes.

Much has been said about the group of people assembled behind Trump at his inauguration. Much has been contemplated about the power of the leaders in technology, and what this means to freedom of expression, media, and the focus on the future of innovation.

Significant things were said about Melania Trump’s hat, her obstructed eyes, and the fact that Trump needed to plan a strategic path to plant a peck, following his address.

What hasn’t been sufficiently discussed is the delicate choreography that must have unfolded behind the scenes to decide who earned a spot on that prestigious stage – and, perhaps more tellingly, who didn’t. Every invitation or omission probably came with a ripple effect of grievance, alliance, and long-standing grudge, each with a lifespan longer than most presidencies.

All this being said, one takeaway from the inauguration is crystal clear: America isn’t ready for a Jewish president anytime soon, or at least not until his wife, mother-in-law, and a coalition of rabbis agree on the seating chart, the menu, and a suitably neutral events co-ordinator. And even then, it’s anyone’s guess whether the event would make it past the first speech without a mutiny over the kugel.

King David courts athleticism with new sports complex

SAUL KAMIONSKY

When Hersch Klaff offered to make a donation to King David High School Linksfield, Principal Lorraine Srage felt it was the school’s opportunity to introduce a special place for sport.

It culminated in the Klaff Family Sports Complex, opened on 17 September 2024, and named after Klaff, who matriculated at the school in 1970.

Srage wanted the complex to help take the school’s sports teams to greater heights and, more importantly, make sport accessible to all students.

“We had arrived at the point where we really needed to create an environment where students felt like they were athletes, that there was a place where they could go and train,” she said.

The complex includes a volleyball court, basketball court, netball court, and gym equipment such as weights, stationary bikes, and treadmills.

“We’ve always had a gym, but this was a vision of a complex where students could have a gym, they could play on an indoor volleyball court, an indoor netball court, a basketball court, an indoor tennis court, plus a tennis multi-purpose court outside. We also have two padel courts. We looked at the space holistically. We really wanted all students to be able to enjoy exercise, not just those who play sport.”

Srage said the complex made state-of-the-art equipment accessible to all students, including those who don’t have access to private gyms. “We want families to come and play on a Sunday, to really make the space a King David family environment. I guess my vision ultimately is that it would become a community centre. Maccabi could run out of here, Jewish children and their parents could come.”

The project was initiated when the King David Schools’ Foundation contacted Srage to inform her an alumnus was offering a donation, and asked her, “What would you like?”

She responded, “It’s time for something to do with sport.”

She was emboldened by her love for sport and the fact that between 2021 and 2023, the school built an arts, drama, and music centre, called the Yard, and an open space with a library for students to study, known as the Studios. The latter, she said, “facilitates our elective system because we have a maker’s room and all our CAT (Computer Applications Technology) classrooms are upstairs.”

“With these two buildings in mind, when this particular donor said to the foundation, ‘Well, the principal must phone me and she must motivate what she

wants,’ I was very lucky. I told him, ‘Look, there would be two things.’” One was enclosing the school’s swimming pool, and the other was the sports complex. She felt the latter needed to come first.

“There are many more children who play a range of sports other than just swimming,” Srage said. “I felt that if there was a sizeable amount of money going in, I would want the school to make possible the vision of a healthy all-round child, not just focused on academics or the cultural sphere.”

Because of this, there is also a physiotherapist at the complex and a dietician and biokineticist on call. The complex contains two ice baths, and a dance studio. A coffee shop is in the offing.

“Our sports offices are also there,” Srage says. “We have a boardroom and a broadcasting room.” The latter offers students a place to stream a game and commentate.

“Even if you can’t play rugby, you can come and work out in the gym,” says Srage,



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

a four-time Comrades Marathon medallist and proud Manchester United supporter. “Anybody can play padel. Basketball is as big a thing at the school as netball and tennis.”

Srage, who describes the complex as “magnificent” and “absolutely beautiful”, envisions “parents, who bring their kids to sports or dancing in the afternoon sitting and having coffee, a sandwich, or whatever while their kids are having their lesson or playing a rugby match”.

She believes the complex gives sports a context. “If you play in an area where it looks professional, the sport is given a context. If you’re working in a gym that looks like a gym. It really creates motivation.”

Jewish postwar epic ‘The Brutalist’ picks up 10 Oscar nominations, with ‘A Complete Unknown’ close behind

>>>Continued from page 13

who isn’t Jewish, plays his character’s wife, who is a Hungarian convert to Judaism; Pearce plays a WASPy (white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) industrialist who employs Brody’s character while letting slip some sinister views about Jews and immigrants.

The Brutalist isn’t the only Jewish movie this year with Holocaust ties to earn awards attention. *A Real Pain*, which follows two Jewish cousins on a tour of Poland to commemorate their survivor grandmother’s passing, received two nominations: supporting actor for Kieran Culkin; and original screenplay for the film’s writer-director-star, Jesse Eisenberg.

Eisenberg based the film on his own experience reconnecting with his family’s Polish Jewish heritage. His co-star, Culkin, who isn’t Jewish, is heavily favoured to win the supporting actor trophy.

Nominated films about Israel and the Palestinian territories, meanwhile, took on new dimensions in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war.

September 5, a docudrama about the journalists who covered the 1972 Munich Olympics hostage crisis and massacre of Israel’s athletic delegation by the Palestinian terror group Black September, was nominated for original screenplay. The film was shot before 7 October, but its hearkening back to another Israeli hostage crisis has led to the film being accused in some corners of being “Zionist propaganda”, including by a Brooklyn movie theatre union that unsuccessfully petitioned its employer not to screen it.

Notably, the best documentary category nominated *No Other Land*, co-directed by an Israeli-Palestinian filmmaking collective. That film, which chronicles the Israeli military’s orders to destroy the Palestinian villages of Masafer Yatta in the West Bank from the perspective of the villagers, was also shot almost

entirely before 7 October. But it has become a rallying cry of sorts for Israel’s critics in the movie world. Its directors have decried Israeli “apartheid” in awards speeches, and the movie remains without a distributor in the United States despite racking up prizes across the globe.

Another Israel-themed documentary contender, *The Bibi Files*, was shortlisted for the category, but not nominated. Meanwhile, in the international feature category, *From Ground Zero*, a movie shot in the Gaza Strip, also failed to make the final list of nominations after clearing the shortlist.

In lighter Jewish stories, the Bob Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown* strummed its way to a surprising eight nominations, including for best picture. Lead actor Timothée Chalamet, who has notable Jewish heritage and does his own singing as Dylan, was also nominated, as were co-stars Edward Norton as Pete Seeger, and Melissa Barbaro as Joan Baez. The film also received nominations for best director, costumes, sound, and adapted screenplay. It was based on the book *Dylan Goes Electric* by Jewish author and musician Elijah Wald.

The film itself is light on Jewish content, but does include a brief glimpse of Robert Zimmerman’s Barmitzvah before he became Dylan in a photo album as a symbol of the life he left behind to become a folk singer.

In the lead actress category, Jewish performer Mikey Madison scored a nomination for playing a stripper and sex worker who is descended from Russian immigrants in *Anora*. Neither the character, nor the young son of a Russian oligarch with whom she jumps into a whirlwind marriage, are explicitly defined as Jewish, but a stray menorah plays a key role as a weapon in one scene. Jewish *Saturday Night Live* cast member Sarah Sherman recently revealed an “Anora menorah” prop

that was cut from a sketch on the show.

Meanwhile, Jeremy Strong, who has Jewish heritage, was nominated for best supporting actor for playing the virulently anti-Communist Jewish lawyer and Donald Trump mentor, Roy Cohn, in Trump-critical biopic *The Apprentice*. His co-star, Sebastian Stan, was also nominated in the lead actor category for playing Trump, for a movie the now-president had tried to stop from being released.

Other nominees had notable Jewish connections as well. Jewish super-producer Marc Platt was nominated for producing *Wicked*, a best picture contender, for which Jewish composer Stephen Schwartz, who also wrote the Broadway musical’s original music, was also nominated for original score. And in the best original song category, Jewish songwriter and erstwhile nominee Diane Warren, who has now been nominated 16 times without winning a competitive Oscar, received another nod for the World War II film *The Six Triple Eight* about the US military’s only all-black female regiment to serve in the war.

Jewish composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein also has a connection to *The Only Girl in the Orchestra*, nominated for best documentary short. The film focuses on bassist Orin O’Brien, who became the first woman in the New York Philharmonic when Bernstein hired her.

The nominations were announced by Bowen Yang and Rachel Sennott, the latter a non-Jewish actress who has carved out a niche playing Jewish roles in films such as *Shiva Baby* and *Saturday Night*.

The year’s most-nominated film, the Netflix drama *Emilia Pérez* – a Spanish-language French musical about a trans cartel boss, which picked up 13 nominations – also has an unexpected Jewish tie-in. The doctor who performs the gender-reassignment operation on the main character is Israeli, and sings a Tel Aviv-set duet with nominated actress Zoë Saldaña.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Survivors' story is our responsibility

I'm in Poland to attend the 80th commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz. It has been an absolute honour and privilege to represent the South African Jewish community at this solemn event, alongside South African Jewish Board of Deputies Vice-President Mary Kluk. Dignitaries from across the world, including King Charles III and leaders from Germany, Ukraine, Poland, France, Italy, Spain, and others, have come here to pay tribute to both the survivors and the millions of innocent victims who were murdered. We have come together to reaffirm the dual pledges: "We Remember" and "Never Again".

Yet, what's most noticeable is the immense dignity and presence of the remaining survivors. It's impossible to imagine how they must feel to be back at the evil site where they suffered so terribly, but, old and frail as they are, they came to commemorate their liberation, grieve, and with immense bravery, share their stories. I salute them all – the ones who came, the ones who, for various reasons, couldn't join us, and the ones who have sadly passed on.

I'm writing this column in the car on the way back from a further visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. How do I find the words to speak in the face of the unspeakable? Yet find the words I must. We have a duty to find our voices and raise them on behalf of the 1.3 million souls, of whom 1.1 million were Jews, who were murdered in that place. Even 80 years later, the air still reeks of

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



evil. With the images of the destroyed gas chambers and crematoria so fresh in my mind, it's hard to believe that we live in a world that seeks to deny, minimise, or exploit the six million dead in the *Shoah* for political agendas.

As a professor at a university, I couldn't help but reflect on how universities were among the first places for Hitler's Nazi ideology to take root. I was particularly chilled to hear of a PhD – a PHD! – written on the waste represented by not removing Jews' gold teeth after their murder. Intellect, rationality, and education won't protect us from such evil ideologies. Only compassion and recognition of our common humanity.

The number of *Shoah* survivors has always been painfully small, and now, time has done its work, and those who remain are even fewer. I want to say to our beautiful, brave survivors in South Africa and around the world that their stories will live on. As long as we live, we'll teach them to our children, and we'll ensure that they teach them to theirs, forming an unending chain of memory. We carry this responsibility. It's our steadfast commitment. Never Again.

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

A column of WIZO South Africa

WIZO – the mast in Israel's storms

The uppermost thought in our mind is the hostage deal and return of all the hostages to Israel. At the time of writing, we were overcome with emotion as the first seven hostages were released. Watching them embracing their families felt like we were all holding them close, and we wait with bated breath for the homecoming of the rest of them. The period ahead will bring challenging and traumatic moments, as we have seen with past deals since 7 October, but bringing all the hostages home is now an unequivocally clear goal.

The Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) is a Zionist movement connected by vision and passion for building and supporting feminism, social justice, and gender equality. We embody Judaism for all the principles it stands upon, and this is WIZO's driving force.

From the start of this heinous war, WIZO was first on the ground, and mobilised our staff in support of the families of spouses who were, and are, serving in the reserves. Trauma and resilience counselling was high on the agenda as post stress disorders fluctuated. Domestic violence intensified, and WIZO's service to help those who lost everything in the war was at an all-time high. This included building bomb shelters for children in the sensory rooms of their day care centres. With all of this, WIZO provided unwavering and iron clad services, and stood in solidarity with Israel as it faced its most challenging time ever.

Today, WIZO continues to make a valuable contribution to Israeli society as we drive positive

This column is paid for by WIZO South Africa.

WIZO South Africa
Women's International Zionist Organization
Shelley Trope-Friedman
President, WIZO
South Africa



change. Our projects uplift the Israeli people to the highest possible standards. Our resources, which include day care centres, youth villages, support for women in every shape and form, as well as a home for the elderly, meet the needs of the Israeli people as we lead, innovate, and revolutionise. With all of this, WIZO empowers the Jewish people and strengthens their identity and sense of purpose. Their resilience and recovery is our super power, and this confirms WIZO's inevitable continuity.

WIZO continues to focus on the advancement of women, and works with the Israeli government to make sure that their needs are met. Our gold rating on the Maala ESG (environmental, social, and governance) Index for corporate responsibility is a true indication of our commitment, hard work, and outstanding results.

WIZO was there from the beginning, and it will be there to the end, facing storms in support of Israel's recovery. Together and united, we are much stronger than we could ever imagine. WIZO supports the Jewish principle of life, which has the highest value. Whether it's being there for every Israeli at every stage of their lives, ensuring that no-one falls between the cracks, or waiting with bated breath for the safe return of every hostage, WIZO is proudly there!

I pray that the Operation Wings of Freedom hostage deal brings peace, healing, and rebuilding as we continue to hold all the hostages, soldiers, and people of Israel in our hearts and prayers.

We will dance again!
Am Yisrael Chai.



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King David Sandton prays for hostage return

King David Sandton gathered in the school's Hostage Memorial Garden on Tuesday, 21 January, to give thanks for the return of the three hostages and pray for the return of all those still held in captivity. The ceremony ended with the singing of *Hatikvah*.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver
King David Sandton paying tribute to the hostages

King David Victory Park commemorates Holocaust and liberation



Photo: Yael Gordon
King David High School Victory Park commemorating International Holocaust Remembrance Day

King David High School Victory Park marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Monday, 27 January, coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz camp. The assembly was attended by staff, students, and special guest Josh Sevitz, Head of Jewish Life at the South African Board of Jewish Education.

Letters

JEW HATERS CAN KISS MY TOCHAS

My name is David Gow. I'm employed at Pinelands Jewish Cemetery in Thornton, Cape Town. I've been here for 18 years – my *chai* year – and I have to set things straight once and for all regarding the opinion of people who say that "Jews treat people badly and they control everything."

Yes they do own and control everything – they own kindness and respect for others, and they do control everything – they control decency and love for others.

I'm a "gentile" and call myself "Dovid Ben Yok", a term most Jewish people don't like me calling myself, but I need to let people out there know that if it wasn't for Jewish people and their love and kindness towards me and my family, I wouldn't be around today. They have shown me kindness not even my own people have shown me.

So to all these *shmocks* saying that Jews are to blame for everything bad and sinister in this country and even abroad, I have one thing to say, "Kiss my *tochas!*" You're jealous of Jewish people because no matter what, G-d has ordained them as His chosen people and through them, G-d blesses all nations. So, stop this hatred towards the Jewish people and look for the faults inside

yourselves, and then you'll start to embrace and love the Jewish people for the blessing they are to us all.

The biggest privilege in my life has been the opportunity to work here at the Jewish cemetery as a security guard, to protect the Jewish people that I have come to love as much as my own family. May Hashem destroy all enemies of the Jewish people and of Israel, and may He always look down on them with love, favour, and care. Lots of love from the "Yok".

– **Dovid Ben Yok, Pinelands Jewish Cemetery, Cape Town**

Sunday 9 February

• Second Innings hosts a talk by Dr Karen (Kiki) Marx on *Anaesthesia and Pain Management*. Time: 10:00. Cost: R60 (R30 members). Contact: greciagabriel1@gmail.com or 082 561 3228

Sunday 9 March

• The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society hosts *In Conversation with Gareth Cliff*. Time: 18:15. Cost: R220. Contact: office@jwbs.co.za or 011 485 5232

Sunday 2 March

• The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society hosts its R40 book sale. Time: 09:00 to 14:00. Contact: office@jwbs.co.za or 011 485 5232



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