Miss SA future uncertain as Israel hatred boils

NICOLA MILTZ

It’s touch and go whether Miss South Africa will get on a plane to Israel to compete in the Miss Universe pageant next month, after a week of high drama in which the South African government bizarrely withdrew its support for the young university graduate.

The government had the anti-Israel lobby licking its lips at the prospect of her dreams being crushed. This lobby was determined that Lalela Mswane would never compete on an international stage in the coastal town of Eilat.

There are many who want her to go to Israel and represent her country, learn, engage, and prosper and there are those – a bunch of Israel haters – who are pulling out every stop to prevent it.

So far, the 24-year-old KwaZulu-Natal beauty has stood her ground. She is due to meet about 70 of her counterparts from all over the world – in the Holy Land in a few weeks’ time.

Just how long she, the private Miss South Africa organise, and its chief executive, Stephanie Weil, can withstand the heat created by the small but predatory anti-Israel lobby is anyone’s guess.

It appears from thousands of social-media posts that many more are in favour of her fulfilling her dreams and wish her well than not.

The drama started with a statement issued on Sunday, 15 November, by the department of sports, art, and culture announcing that it would no longer support the pageant because of Miss SA organizer’s “insensibility and disregard” of advice against sending Miss SA to Israel, which it said would have a negative impact on her reputation and future.

The ministry, headed by Nathi Mthethwa, has come under fire for its lack of compassion for struggling artists during COVID-19 and the minister’s general indifference together with his department’s mismanagement of funds.

The African National Congress (ANC) made it clear on Thursday that it would not withdraw its support for Mswane. The Democratic Alliance’s deputy shadow minister of sports, art, and culture, Veronica van Dyk, told the SA Jewish Report, “Miss SA is a private company, and as such must deal with the government as it sees fit. We don’t intend to be drawn into a fight between the two. A beauty pageant should never be politicised, and this is exactly what the ANC is trying to achieve. We should be wary not to fall into their trap.”

Department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) spokesperson, Clayson Monyela, said this week that in spite of all of the anti-Israel rhetoric, South Africa had “no intention of suspending any diplomatic relationships with Israel.”

He told The Citizen, and later repeated to the SA Jewish Report that Mthethwa’s announcement reflected the government’s stance on the matter falling under his portfolio, “but didn’t indicate any intentions of cutting ties with Israel.”

“We have diplomatic relations with both Israel and Palestine. What has happened with Miss South Africa cannot be anywhere close to cutting diplomatic ties. We can’t do that because if we do that, it means we can’t engage with Israel so are excluding ourselves from being part of the solution to the conflict, because if you cut ties with a country, it doesn’t have to engage with you,” said Monyela.

However Miss SA’s future hangs in the balance, as negotiations behind the scenes continue ad nauseam.

Zev Krempel, the national vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, lambasted the anti-Israel lobby to its bullying and intimidatory tactics, and said Miss SA was being used as a political scapegoat.

“Miss SA is a young woman, she is an easy target,” he said.

South Africa, he said, participated in various team sports, namely baseball, tennis, and soccer, against Israel, and where was the outrage?

Speculation has it that the signing of the Abraham Accords could eventually lead to Israel co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup with its Arab neighbours.

“Do you see South Africa pulling Bangladesh out?” No, this is pure bullying of a young woman, it’s outrageous,” he said.

He said he was bitterly disappointed in the government

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Lithuanian city halts bike path near mass grave

Lithuanian authorities in Lithuania have halted the construction of a bike path near a mass grave of Jewish Holocaust victims, according to a rabbi who raised the alarm about the project.

Rabbis Kaveh Kreml, a former chief rabbi of Lithuania, posted on Facebook a picture of a bike path that was being built in Siauliai, a city situated about 100 miles (160km) northwest of Vilnius, “Next to the city of Siauliai in Lithuania, there is a forest where Nazis killed Jews, Soviet soldiers, Lithuanians and others,” Kreml wrote. “Today, the paving of a bike path started here.”

Kreml said construction had been suspended after he and others raised concerns about the project, which could risk the risk of unsettling the graves of the murder victims. The future of the bike path remains uncertain, he said.

New plaques reveal Nazis buried at Dutch cemetery

At the cemetery in the rural Dutch town of Ysselsteyn, the bodies of Nazi soldiers lie alongside Dutch civilians and troops.

To some, this makes Ysselsteyn a symbolic reminder of the horrors of war, and commemorations are held annually there. But others say the commemorations equate World War II victims with perpetrators like Julius Dettman — the Nazi officer responsible for sending Anne Frank and her family to death camps — who is buried at Ysselsteyn. In the past, German ambassadors to the Netherlands have attended the ceremonies.

On Sunday, Dutch chief rabbi Binyomin Jacobs visited the site for the first time, marking a turning point in the public debate over new plaques were unveiled, acknowledging that it’s the burial place of war criminals. “I almost feel like a traitor, because this cemetery also contains horrific murderers who are responsible for the fact that 80% of our family didn’t return,” Jacobs said.

“All briefs supplied by JTA

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for withdrawing its support of Miss SA saying it was “on the wrong side of history, and while the rest of the world opens up and benefits from relations with Israel, including several Arab nations, South Africa is determined to remain on the sidelines of progress”.

People from all over have weighed in on the controversy. The former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Arthur Lenk, tweeted, “Wait, Governments offer support for this non-governmental context. And the SA government made no decision whatsoever. A single ministry stated a viewpoint. Where is the story here other than the hateful noise the anti-Israel lobby is peddling?”

Author Khaya Dlanga took to Instagram saying that the government had “crossed the line” by withdrawing its support for Mswane, and had thrown her under the bus.

“They have put a young woman in an impossible position,” he said. “This government hasn’t imposed sanctions against Israel or travel restrictions. Instead, it’s grandstanding on the shoulders of a young girl. Why throw her under the bus when it isn’t made meaningful commitments?”

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) said it was “appalled” that the government was “self sabotaging” the country’s hopes and chances of participating and shining in Miss Universe just because it happened to take place in Israel. “Our country is isolated and irrelevant on the world stage,” it said.

The government had been silent on serious human rights abuses occurring in many other countries where South Africa participates in sports and contexts but “self-righteously reserves its opprobrium for the world’s only Jewish state”, the SAZF said.

“If our country were interested in bringing peace to the Middle East or carrying any moral weight in playing a mediatory role between Israelis and Palestinians, we have now ensured that our one-sidedness and unilateralism will prevent us from doing so,” the organisation said.

Meanwhile, the South African Miss Universe Organisation broke its social media silence this week with a post about Miss SA 2020, Shudufhadzo Musida’s, participation at Miss Universe in Puerto Rico on 16 December.

While Miss SA seemingly had the world at her feet just weeks ago, it remains to be seen if she will participate in Miss Universe.
Rabbi pays it forward with life-saving kidney

Nicola Miltz

A few minutes before undergoing life altering surgery, two men laid eyes on each other for the very first time and burst into tears of hope and relief.

This was the moment when Johannesburg businessman Rabbi Mark Friedman, an altruistic kidney donor, met the recipient of his soon to be donated left kidney in one of the hospital wards at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre this week.

It was emotional, said the handful of people present, when Friedman, 41, was ushered into the recipient’s ward on 15 November to embrace him before they were both wheeled into the four hour long surgery.

In a bid to help, Lance Abramson of Hatzolah started the Life2Life programme, which tried to find a community based donor for Aubrey. When this proved difficult, the family searched further afield. Miraculously, he was matched with a farmer in Wilkmsburg, New York, who donated his kidney to Aubrey, who has never looked back.

“The transplant saved my dad’s life, and completely transformed my family’s life. Doctors told my father he didn’t have much longer to live. The transplant has given us years of life with our dad,” Friedman said.

He said his parents spent months in New York for the operation and recovery, and were adopted by the Crown Heights community during their stay.

The grateful Friedman family gifted the American altruistic donor, Chaim Yosef Sterngold, 29, at the time of the operation with an artwork of the grandchild's hand prints.

Friedman visited his father in New York and while there, put himself forward should a future patient be in need of a kidney. When he returned to South Africa, he received a call from Abramson saying there was someone in the community in desperate need of a kidney and asking if he would still be keen to donate.

“Definitely, absolutely,” Friedman said, relieved to give back following his father’s successful return to health.

“I knew the effects of dialysis. My father went into renal failure and suffered for years. He was completely sick, and had no quality of life. He would have dialysis three times a week for hours and would feel terrible. There was a lack of hope and despair because there’s this feeling you are living on borrowed time and the clock is ticking,” said Friedman.

“No one needed to convince me that I needed to do that, that change for someone,” he said.

Friedman and his recipient were matched a while ago, but several factors delayed the process including the onset of COVID-19.

“We finally get the go ahead, and I’m grateful because this has been on my mind for years,” he said.

Though he didn’t know the identity of the recipient until moments before surgery, he had been given his Hebrew name in order to pray for him.

Friedman said he decided to go public with his story to raise awareness of the millions of people worldwide who suffer from this debilitating illness.

“Unlike other diseases which are incurable, kidney disease can be treated extremely successfully and through kidney donation, a person is given a new lease of life.

“My father always gave the impression that he was fine, but he told us after his transplant that in spite of putting on a brave face, he was losing hope.

“When a complete stranger gave me my father one of his kidneys, it saved his life and changed ours forever. This act of selflessness has inspired me to pay it forward. This is my way of closing the circle,” said Friedman.

Well known American rabbi, Dr Shmuly Yanklowitz, the president and dean of Valley Beit Midrash in Phoenix, Arizona, and the founder and president of Uri L’Tzedek, a Jewish social justice organisation, also donated a kidney in 2015.

Yanklowitz, who has visited South Africa twice, explained

“As much as my dad protested, I tested to see whether I could be a potential match, but sadly, we weren’t matched,” he said. It was a huge disappointment for the family because they were mindful that there weren’t many others willing to raise their hand to do so.

Meanwhile, dialysis was brutal on their father, who grew weaker each day.
I a major step for kashrut in South Africa, a Pick n Pay product with a Montreal Kosher (MK Kosher) hechsher added to the retailer’s shelves this week, hot on the heels of the certifier announcing its expansion in South Africa last week. This is a sign of the times, pointing to a rapidly evolving kosher landscape on the southern tip of Africa?

On a call from Montreal, MK Kosher’s Kalman Emanuel explained that the Pick n Pay items – rice cakes and corn cakes – were produced in an MK-certified facility. “With the rising demand for MK Kosher certification in South Africa, we expect that consumers will absolutely start seeing more MK labels on the shelves of major retailers,” he says.

In October 2020, a furore over the costs of kosher certification with the United Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) Beth Din exploded in the South African Jewish community. It included complaints about high prices, inconsistencies across the market, and convoluted processes that apparently left companies stressed and frustrated. Since then, a number of businesses have moved to the MK Kosher hechsher.

But the chairperson of the UOS board, Kenny Rabson, says a lot has also been happening behind the scenes at the UOS. “After the Stan & Pare incident in 2018, we brought out the OU [Orthodox Union] and CRC [Chicago Rabbinitical Council] to assess everything kosher in South Africa: our restaurants, bakeries, everything kosher in South Africa: our CRC [Chicago Rabbinical Council] to assess brought out the OU [Orthodox Union] and λερ Son says that a lot has also been struggling. Since then, a number of

In addition, Rabson says that Beth Din kosher department Managing Director Rabbi Dovi Goldstein was at Kosherfest in the United States last week, resulting in two other hechalim looking to collaborate with the UOS. “Time will tell if these come to fruition.”

He explains that internally, the UOS has formalised governance in a variety of ways, including setting up remuneration and audit committees that meet regularly. It has also appointed a new director for the Beth Din office, Rabbi Shmuel Slasky, who will soon be formally introduced. He will assist dayanim with procedures, services, communication, and administration.

And, the UOS is looking to appoint a head of human resources, to “really focus on staff.” A new UOS website is to be launched in the first quarter of 2022, which will make the application process easier.

After last year’s events, Rabson says the UOS “sought an independent ombudsmen, including an actuary and a lawyer, to review concerns about pricing. In the end, only one company came forward. While it was found that they had no grounds for complaint, we were advised to lower their pricing in light of the current economy, and we did,” Rabson says.

He emphasises that the UOS has an “open-door policy”, and concerns can be brought to the organisation or even to him personally. “Especially in the current economy, we will always try to make a plan. People shouldn’t consider change without a walk-through the pros and cons. We wouldn’t want people to give up our hechsher, which is unanimously accepted by the whole country, for the wrong reasons. We will apply our minds to all queries that are raised.

Other hechalim in South Africa isn’t a bad option at all. We are the most independent. We aren’t with larger companies.”

Moshe Amoils, the managing director of the Chocolate Tree and Nu Tree health food company, was one of the first in South Africa to approach MK for certification.

“With the official announcement [last week] of Rabbi Yossi Baumgarten now working with MK, it has given MK further legitimacy in South Africa,” he says. “Working with the calibre of Rabbi Baumgarten has been of the biggest benefit. His 40+ years of knowledge in kashrut within the manufacturing arena is one of the biggest advantages. He goes over and beyond his regular facility inspections.”

He says since he moved to MK, his relationship with the UOS has remained positive. “There have been situations where they have assisted with a few issues locally, especially after the sudden passing of Rabbi (Desmond) Maizlish. I’m glad to see that they have improved in certain areas. Hopefully it will be beneficial for manufacturers, facilities, and consumers alike.”

Amoils is in the process of working with two international customers in the United States, “and they have both expressed a satisfaction that I have an international kosher certification. MK went above and beyond in helping me with one customer. I will be working with MK [Kosher executive director] Rabbi [Saul] Emanuel this coming year on further export opportunities in Canada.”

Amoils says “there has been an overwhelming response from the community” in support of his move to MK Kosher, “to the point that community members have come up to me to say that they now exclusively support my brand because of this.”

“There were those at the beginning who didn’t know of MK. However, with marketing support from MK, which it provides at no extra cost, the community was quickly educated. Pesach was our first big experience with MK, and it went extremely smoothly.”

Another business owner who has switched to MK is Jessica Berman, whose anonymous call on ChaiFM made a big impact in October 2020. Her company, Dynatea, makes coffee enhancers, cocktail mixes, syrups, dessert purées, ic tea-centrals teas, and milkshakes that are sugar free and vegan.

When a digital kosher online system, which is the most unbelievable process you’ve ever seen,” she says. “Our sweeteners are used across multiple products. For a lot of small brands, like MK, when you’re going to add it to a new product or flavour, you’ve got to re-submit the same sweetener ingredients thirty times for thirty different products. With this online system, you submit an ingredient once. There’s no export fee, and they don’t charge you per flavour.”

She says the community has welcomed her new hechsher. “People are happy to see diversity. We dramatically dropped our pricing once we changed to MK.”

Emanuel says the certifier is in discussion with about six or seven companies in South Africa, and “there seems to be tremendous interest.” He emphasises that it isn’t aiming to be in competition with the local Beth Din, and isn’t working with establishmens like Chabad or underwrite infant health care. “We have a great relationship with the UOS, but not with large companies.”

Says Rabson, “We have a great infrastructure and team on the ground, and are pushing ahead with building our organisation. For more than 80 years, the UOS has served the community in every sphere to allow a Jew to live halachically in South Africa, and we will continue to do so.”
TALL FEINBERG

Miss SA cartoon shows ugly face of antisemitism

A mid the violent reaction from the South African government and media to Miss South Africa choosing to compete in Miss Universe in Israel, one cartoon took the criticism a step too far, delving into classic antisemitic tropes.

In its 18 November 2021 newsletter, titled “Miss Anti-Serious”, the local online newspaper Daily Maverick sent out the cartoon, ironically under the headline “Pageantry”. The cartoon depicts the Miss Universe organisation, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, and a man representing the “Zionist lobby” at a beauty pageant. In the drawing, the Miss Universe organisation is awarded “Miss Anthropic” (misanthropic), possibly representing the “Zionist lobby” at a beauty pageant. It’s a vicious image, redolent with classic antisemitic stereotypes.

While this is a classic antisemitic trope, the point is emphasized even more by giving Bennett an opulent jewelled crown and an oversized hooked nose. Not to be outdone, the “Zionist lobby” proudly wears a yarmulke. The idea of Jews being untrustworthy is a classic antisemitic trope.

Local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, Milton Shain says, “The cartoon is particularly perfidious: the three inscriptions are classic antisemitic stereotypes that are not in the figure identified as ‘Zionist lobby, Miss Information’. From the skull cap and hooked nose, there can be no doubt that this cartoon represents Jews as a whole, rather than an individual group or with whom the cartoonist has any connection.”

The cartoon was certainly discriminatory, and a disgrace. It’s a vicious image, redolent with classic antisemitic stereotypes.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn’t lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland. Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all.

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendents of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only. The most important things is the understanding that prior to the end of WWI, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of northern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizens didn’t exist. Therefore, since applications for reinvestment of these citizenships can only be based on whether one’s ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, who is a descendant of an ancestor who (all Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible).

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WWII, one’s eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains, “Before borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the result of effect for descendents of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved.”

 Sephardi: This ad refers to Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendents of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK. Most descendents of Sephardic Jews (who were expelled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applying, an official certificat certifying such eligibility, on the basis of which an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Hores is an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws. Hores resides in Isreal – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Advis Hores closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for the successful applications of reinstatement of EU citizenships.

My next visit to South Africa is planned for the end of January/beginning of February 2022.

WhatsApp me on +48 783 953 223 • Email Avi Horesh advi.avi.hores@gmail.com
A trumpped national crisis

apparently we have a major crisis in South Africa — or so it would seem. A 24-year-old beauty queen — who recently became Miss South Africa — is scheduled to compete in an international pageant in Israel. Can you believe this is a crisis? I feel embarrassed by this fracas — or is that just me projecting? I mean, I am embarrassed by this. De Klerk was both an oppressor and a liberator. It’s the same flaw that judges Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela and De Klerk remained completely justifiable. In 1991, after Israel lifted economic sanctions on South Africa, the government minister had made what appears to be a veiled threat to this young woman. He “suggested” as a national minister that if she didn’t withdraw it could prove to be disastrous for her future and public standing as a young black woman. Really?

Is it a crime to participate in an international beauty pageant? For goodness sake, this woman has put her all into becoming Miss South Africa, and now all she wants to do is compete internationally. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a handful of women in the world. And while the world has turned and the rest of the Israeli haters makes her the scapegoat for their political shenanigans! This same minister, Nathi Mthethwa, was oh so quiet during lockdown when the theatres were closed and actors, singers, and everyone in the entertainment world and aligned careers were left in the lurch. He did nothing to help them when he could. Yet he has no problem in bullying a young woman who has done nothing wrong and simply wants to compete in a once-in-a-lifetime pageant.

I do find it interesting that Naledi Pandor, our minister of international relations and cooperation, actually suggested this. Minister Pandor, who most of us know is the more effective and intellectually superior minister, has chosen not to put her political footprint on something that shouldn’t be politicised. In fact, her department has made it clear that it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a handful of women in the world. And while the world has turned and the rest of the Israeli haters makes her the scapegoat for their political shenanigans!

De Klerk's “apology” didn't go anywhere near far enough. Botha's apology comes too late. In 1991, after Israel lifted economic sanctions on South Africa, the government minister had made what appears to be a veiled threat to this young woman. He “suggested” as a national minister that if she didn’t withdraw it could prove to be disastrous for her future and public standing as a young black woman. Really?

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Making people healthy – a winning strategy for Discovery

PETRA KROST MAUNDER

Discovery Global Chief Executive Adrian Gore believes his company’s role in the rollout of the vaccine illustrates how well-public-private partnerships can work in South Africa.

“I’m most proud of the role that Discovery has played in being there when people needed us. We’ve been proud of the role Discovery has played and am humbled by it.” However, for him the public-private partnership that led to the rollout of the vaccines was a high note, which “so clearly illustrates how the country can work together. Partnerships have formed and bridges have been built between the private sector and government.”

The country started vaccine procurement late but put that on the back foot, but once we got that done and started rolling out in May, we rolled it out quickly. Who would have thought the issue holding us back would be hesitancy not to roll it out quickly. Who would have thought the issue holding us back would be hesitancy not to roll it out quickly.

Regarding the most challenging part of writing the book, Benatar says, “Although I don’t shy away from controversy it’s the consequence of expressing unpopular views that need to be expressed, I don’t enjoy it at all. Not for seeking conflict, but rather not being willing to avoid it by allowing dominant, vicious narratives to be expressed without somebody countering them.” He knows there may be a backlash. “I hope that the backlash won’t be as bad as the ‘tire lash’.”

The Fall of the University of Cape Town: Africa’s leading university in crisis is available on Amazon as an ebook. It’s not yet available in South Africa, but will be within the next two weeks.
**OPINION**

On Sunday, the government announced that it had withdrawn its support for Miss South Africa to compete in the Miss Universe competition. The competition is due to be held in the sunny southern city of Eilat in Israel on 12 December.

The anti-Israel campaign has been hard at work, trying to bully Lalela Mswane and the Miss South Africa organisation to pull out of the pageant. So far, the latter have stood their ground. But why is the South African government so obsessed with demonising Israel that it will lend its support to such a cheap and nasty campaign?

For instance, in its statement on 14 November, the department of sport, arts, and culture said, “The atrocities committed by Israel against Palestinians are well documented and government, as the legitimate representative of the people of South Africa, cannot in good conscience associate itself with such.”

South African government loves using emotive words like “atrocities” when referring to Israel. If anything is atrocious, it’s this department’s utter neglect of artists, performers, and heritage sites that it’s supposed to fund and support, especially during the pandemic. It chooses, instead, to channel time and political energy into trying to ban a beauty queen from competing in the Universe competition. The competition happens in Israel through its own historical experience in South Africa, where pandemics, atrocities, and yes, I’ve always condemned apartheid. But the government chooses to turn a blind eye to these.

The list of anti-Israel actions by the government is long. Most recently, the government fought tooth and nail to reverse the granting of observer status to Israel at the African Union in June. It has rallied southern and northern African states to this cause. South Africa recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv in May 2018 during unrest on the Gaza border, and hasn’t replaced him. The ANC took a decision at its 54th national conference in 2017 to downgrade the embassy to a “liaison office”, which hasn’t officially happened. But the absence of an ambassador is a de facto downgrade. We’ve also seen increasing support by high-profile ANC figures for hateful anti-Israel organisations and campaigns, a refusal to consider language squarely blaming Israel for all the problems that it has caused in the Middle East.

The government spends a disproportionate amount of time and energy trying to demonise Israel. It regularly supports��tic criticism of Israel in the United Nations Human Rights Council, but abstains or votes against any resolutions on other country specific situations. And not a whisper about human-rights violations by its friends, Iran, Saudi-Arabia, or China, or many other countries in Africa. It seems to ignore any wrong that it or anyone else does – it has much more important relationships. The government gives so much ammunition to Israel’s enemies.

You can be sure that if Miss Universe was in Iran, Zimbabwe, or Afghanistan, Miss South Africa would be free to go, no questions asked.

Steven Gruzd is a political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg.

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**SA JEWISH REPORT**

**STEVEN GRUZD**

**OPINION**

Anti-vaxxers display Holocaust symbols outside Jewish politician’s office

**BEN SALES — JTA**

**Antivirus display Holocaust symbols outside Jewish politician’s office**

**HEIDI DINOZOT**

On Sunday, the government announced that it had withdrawn its support for Miss South Africa to compete in the Miss Universe competition. The competition is due to be held in the sunny southern city of Eilat in Israel on 12 December.

The anti-Israel campaign has been hard at work, trying to bully Lalela Mswane and the Miss South Africa organisation to pull out of the pageant. So far, the latter have stood their ground. But why is the South African government so obsessed with demonising Israel that it will lend its support to such a cheap and nasty campaign?

For instance, in its statement on 14 November, the department of sport, arts, and culture said, “The atrocities committed by Israel against Palestinians are well documented and government, as the legitimate representative of the people of South Africa, cannot in good conscience associate itself with such.”

South African government loves using emotive words like “atrocities” when referring to Israel. If anything is atrocious, it’s this department’s utter neglect of artists, performers, and heritage sites that it’s supposed to fund and support, especially during the pandemic. It chooses, instead, to channel time and political energy into trying to ban a beauty queen from competing in the Universe competition. The competition happens in Israel through its own historical experience in South Africa, where pandemics, atrocities, and yes, I’ve always condemned apartheid. But the government chooses to turn a blind eye to these.

The list of anti-Israel actions by the government is long. Most recently, the government fought tooth and nail to reverse the granting of observer status to Israel at the African Union in June. It has rallied southern and northern African states to this cause. South Africa recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv in May 2018 during unrest on the Gaza border, and hasn’t replaced him. The ANC took a decision at its 54th national conference in 2017 to downgrade the embassy to a “liaison office”, which hasn’t officially happened. But the absence of an ambassador is a de facto downgrade. We’ve also seen increasing support by high-profile ANC figures for hateful anti-Israel organisations and campaigns, a refusal to consider language squarely blaming Israel for all the problems that it has caused in the Middle East.

The government spends a disproportionate amount of time and energy trying to demonise Israel. It regularly supports systemic criticism of Israel in the United Nations Human Rights Council, but abstains or votes against any resolutions on other country specific situations. And not a whisper about human-rights violations by its friends, Iran, Saudi-Arabia, or China, or many other countries in Africa. It seems to ignore any wrong that it or anyone else does – it has much more important relationships. The government gives so much ammunition to Israel’s enemies.

You can be sure that if Miss Universe was in Iran, Zimbabwe, or Afghanistan, Miss South Africa would be free to go, no questions asked.

Steven Gruzd is a political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg.

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**SA JEWISH REPORT**

**STEVEN GRUZD**

**OPINION**

Anti-vaxxers display Holocaust symbols outside Jewish politician’s office

**BEN SALES — JTA**

**Anti-vaxxers display Holocaust symbols outside Jewish politician’s office**

**HEIDI DINOZOT**

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Bassin’s ‘buggies’ save lives in rural areas

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Marilyn Bassin has dedicated her life to bettering the lives of indigent children, so she didn’t mind spending the past six months repairing, tinkering, retrofitting and inventing wheelchairs because they enable children with cerebral palsy to live their best possible life.

“This veteran children’s rights activist”, as the Daily Maverick has dubbed Bassin, has turned her mother’s ‘buggies’ into Baby Buggies Venda in Limpopo on the first weekend of November 2021 to fit the children with heads in danger of being shaken so they would be able to sit up for the first time ever.

She says a lot of them die before getting there, thus being unable to obtain a buggy for a few years.

“They are my absolute best. They just say, ‘G’d bless you’ so many times, and they've been able to walk early in the morning, knowing they're getting this prized possession.”

Bassin, self-described as an “eternal optimist” and labelled as a “truly selfless individual” by the king David Schools Foundation, learnt about destitute people living in rural areas when she was working as a social worker in the UK.

By then, she had met Dr Connie Louw, who looks after thousands of starving children in Limpopo. Meanwhile, Jerry Bernardo was making toy tables and footplates for Lorraine Srage: the principal who grew with KDL.

“Perhaps Jerry that he was going to come with me in June to the rural areas and hand out ‘buggies’, recalls Bassin.

Saul Bernardo contracted COVID-19 and died a week before that meant to happen.

“I was in awe at 65,” says Bassin, “I can’t do a massive intervention in their names in your area. Let’s honour your brother, you, and Jerry for the work you've all done.”

So, Bassin's buggy programme has six locations, eight to four places, with Thobohony Dundu and Venda the latest and the biggest.

It was the beginning of an intervention which began on Zoom, Connie told me her brother had died of COVID-19.

“I think it’s about everyone doing their part to make sure that children have a safe environment, to be able to get to school. It was really beautiful for them, to be able to sit up for the first time ever.”

Taking centre stage: the principal who grew with KDL

Rosenfeld's fellow KDHL student at the time, Szewach says Srage has always kept “an eye on her students’ needs, and an eye on her students’ growth.”

Lorraine Srage, appointed principal in 2015, says Freedman’s commitment has been demonstrated by her determination to complete four Comrades Marathons, her support of KDHL's sporting teams, and her encouragement of students in their academic endeavours.

“Lorraine has ensured that the inimitable spirit of King David Schools lives on,” says Bassin.

The name King David conjures up a powerful image and evokes admiration for the dynamic foundation schools the late Lorne Lomax has built. She is without doubt the greatest professional asset to the South African Board of Jewish Education.”

provoke a reaction about a football team, the subject one teaches, or anything that’s far from me. All in the name of harmless banter, a unique characteristic.

“His name King David conjures up a powerful image and evokes admiring independent schools because of the foundation Lomax has built. She is without doubt the greatest professional asset to the South African Board of Jewish Education.”

Lorraine Srage
Absa, in collaboration with Qhubeka, provides opportunities by making children’s lives easier as they commute to and from school by bicycle.

Africanacity is the driving force behind everything we do at Absa, which aligns with Qhubeka, which means to move forward.

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Join the movement for change.
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The photograph shows two carefree teenage girls ice-skating on the frozen canals of Amsterdam. The one escaped the Nazi and went to America before coming back to the Netherlands. The other went into hiding, in a secret annex, and perished alongside her more famous sister in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

The photograph was taken by Otto Frank in December 1938. It shows my late mother, Hetty Ludel (left), with Margot Frank, says Jeffery Zurel from his home in Johannesburg. Zurel's mother emigrated to South Africa in 1947, and married his father, Mark Zurel, who she knew from her childhood in Amsterdam. Zurel and his brother, Bryan, were born in Johannesburg in 1950 and 1953 respectively, and grew up there. Meanwhile, Otto Frank was trying to pick up the pieces after losing his two daughters, wife, and family in the Holocaust. He corresponded with people all over the world, including Robin Shissler from the CTHGC, who later donated his letter to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC). When Zurel saw coverage of this in a recent issue of the SA Jewish Report, he decided to share the photograph of his mother and Margot with the newspaper.

But how did he come upon the photograph? “Well, out of the blue, a large envelope marked ‘Richard Pfeffer’ landed on my doormat in Johannesburg,” says Zurel, who lived in Belgium for 35 years before returning to South Africa in 2006. “Along with the explanatory note from the foundation, was the photo of my mother and Margot, with a stamp across it saying ‘archived’. In 2006, while axing to relocate to South Africa, I got wind of a book, written by Margot’s sister, Anne, which turned out to be ‘Margot Frank en de Anderen’ [autograph book] which contained dedications to her, Hetty, and Margot. She also showed him correspondence between Otto Frank and a fellow schoolmate, a certain Mrs de Knijff, from after the war, discussing the whereabouts of Margot’s former classmates.

“She somehow knew the exact address of my mom who was married and living in South Africa at the time. I see that ‘my Margootje’s’ memory lives on in the hearts of her school friends,” he says.

“I’ve got a question about this” or “More of that please”. He regularly uses social media to engage his community in meaningful discussion about Judaism, even passive recipients of information, says Goldstein.

“Real communication is about a conversation and an exchange of messages that counts.”

The project's concept of keeping Shabbos together is fostered by social media, says Rabbi Levi Avtzon from his home in Johannesburg. “Any barrier you can take down with the rabbi directly, “ he says. Although he admits that social media is relentless, bombarding a rabbi with messages 24/7, he believes senior rabbis should be first in line day after day at the American Embassy in Amsterdam, talking to Margot and her brother, Bryan, who had been taken away from her by the Nazis. Zurel’s mother passed on to him before she died. Now, he carries this small slice of history and the legacy of a girl who has always been overshadowed by her sister, but had the potential to be ‘short done’; but naturally not in my eyes.

Rabbi uses WhatsApp to communicate with his community. “Any barrier you can take down with the rabbi directly, “ he says. Although he admits that social media is relentless, bombarding a rabbi with messages 24/7, he believes senior rabbis should be first in line day after day at the American Embassy in Amsterdam, talking to Margot and her brother, Bryan, who had been taken away from her by the Nazis. Zurel’s mother passed on to him before she died. Now, he carries this small slice of history and the legacy of a girl who has always been overshadowed by her sister, but had the potential to be ‘short done’; but naturally not in my eyes.

The photograph, letter, and autograph book that Zurel has in his possession are copies of the original. The recent coverage of the Otto Frank letter being housed at the CTHGC led him to correspond with the centre so that these items may also find a place there.
It was top class. I was nervous to come back given my experience in the army's spokesperson's unit. But she had to fight for a place in the public diplomacy, and the media, the press, Gaza is always portrayed in a more sensitive way than Israel. It's hard for us when you think about it we give information as fast as we can, and it's amazing the impact we have. It's key to winning an online war. Odes works behind the scenes, setting up interviews with reporters and editors, and responding to requests that run the gamut from benign to outright hostile in an effort to get the IDF's voice out there. Often, it's an uphill battle. Though she wouldn't go as far as to call it an information war, she believes information is key. “It's key to winning an online war. During Operation Guardian of the Walls (the most recent Israel/Gaza flareup) we released as much information as we could all the time. But unfortunately, in the press, Gaza is always portrayed in a more sensitive way than Israel. It's hard for us when you think about it we give information as fast as we can, and it's amazing the impact we have.”

My experience in the unit has been absolutely incredible. It's challenging because specifically on the internet, the public diplomacy, and the media, the public is very hostile towards the IDF and media, today the situation is different. There's also more coverage about the group committing war crimes. She attributes this in part to the success of the spokesperson's unit, but admits there's still a general bias against Israel that she finds difficult to explain. “No matter the efforts from Israel, from the ministry of foreign affairs, and from every pro-Israel group to try and push up the image of Israel, there's an inherent bias out there. One could call it anti-semitism.”

“The goal of the press is to expose a truth, and everyone's truth is different. We [the IDF] often don't get enough of a chance to speak. We give responses, but only some of them are used or are used in a twisted way. It's a constant uphill battle. Though she wouldn't go as far as to call it an information war, she believes information is key. “It's key to winning an online war. During Operation Guardian of the Walls (the most recent Israel/Gaza flareup) we released as much information as we could all the time. But unfortunately, in the press, Gaza is always portrayed in a more sensitive way than Israel. It's hard for us when you think about it we give information as fast as we can, and it's amazing the impact we have.”

The battlefield has moved online and into social media, where news can go viral, regardless of whether it's true or not.

“One influencer with millions of followers can say something, and most people won't even check to see if it's based on fact. That really gives us problems as it's so hard to get real facts to go viral when there are fake facts going around. People are trying to get slogans and headlines out so they can push notifications that are strong. Very few read the whole article anymore.”

The recent Gaza war kept her on her toes. “It was crazy. I started on night shift and would sleep in the day. But you can't really sleep in between sirens and everyone messaging you. Journalists have my personal number, so they'd call me constantly. It was also the first time I'd ever heard a rocket, so I'd be running to a shelter and holding my phone up to get signal to try and tell the world what was going on.”

Odes' service ends in March next year, and she says she's been thinking about extending it and becoming a commander. She's also thinking of the idea of working in the prime minister's office or foreign affairs department in policy making or security. Her time in Israel has taught her “nothing is impossible; to always keep pushing for what you want”.

It helped with learning Hebrew because even though Odes had obtained a distinction in matric, she wasn't fluent. But she had to fight for a place in the army's spokesperson's unit. “I had to push and beg for it. I'm really lucky because in the army you can't have to be motivated to keep going, no matter what the world tells us no, and it's amazing the impact we have.”

Odes points out that whereas 10 years ago there was little mention of Hamas as a terror organisation in the mainstream media, today the situation is different. There's also more coverage about the group committing war crimes. She attributes this in part to the success of the spokesperson's unit, but admits there's still a general bias against Israel that she finds difficult to explain. “No matter the efforts from Israel, from the ministry of foreign affairs, and from every pro-Israel group to try and push up the image of Israel, there's an inherent bias out there. One could call it anti-semitism.”

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Odes’ service ends in March next year, and she says she’s been thinking about extending it and becoming a commander. She’s also thinking of the idea of working in the prime minister’s office or foreign affairs department in policy making or security. Her time in Israel has taught her “nothing is impossible; to always keep pushing for what you want”. We’re likely to hear a lot more about Odes in the future!
I feel sorry for Julius Malema. This is why.

A few moments after the death of FW de Klerk, Julius Malema tweeted an article that contained the announcement of his passing. This was immediately followed by a tweet, “Thank you G-D” along with a few dancing emojis. Although the tweets weren’t linked, the message was clear. It was also clarified in the column that followed.

Although I’m no defender of the former president, and cannot even begin to comprehend what he evoked in those who lived under apartheid.

The holds that it had over my family continued for decades. The German genocide wasn’t the first. Thousands of years before that, Jews were told that we were enslaved in Egypt. The conditions were apparently horrendous, with male children being thrown into the Nile whilst their parents built the cities. And so, to celebrate freedom from slavery, each year on Passover, Jews across the world gather in families and at dairies to retell the story. Passover is in essence a celebration of freedom.

The Seder evening begins with recounting of the horrors of our bondage. The story then shifts, with Moses arriving on the scene and bringing with him the chapter of the plagues. When we speak about this, we pour out some of the wine from our glass onto a plate next to us. The reason we do this, we tell our children, is because no matter how terrible the Egyptians were to us, we still don’t respawn in their suffering. The fact that they went through the plagues and then died in the Red Sea needs to detract from our joy. We cannot be unequivocally happy when someone suffers.

Even it’s our enemy.

I thought Malema had arrived at the festival of freedom. Not just physical freedom but also spiritual and emotional freedom. Jews haven’t been slaves in Europe for thousands of years. That’s something to celebrate. But it’s equally as important to celebrate freedom from emotional bondage. By showing that we don’t take joy in the death and suffering of our slave masters, so we indicate that we are truly free from that slavery. Both physically and emotionally.

By now my point should be obvious. My late grandfather and father might have physically survived Hitler’s Europe, but that didn’t mean that they were free of the impact of that time. Hitler might have ultimately lost, but to some extent, he still had a hold over the people who defeated him.

My initial reaction to Malema’s “Thank you G-D” tweet that immediately followed the death of FW de Klerk was to be appalled. I reported it to Twitter, knowing that as the tweet stood alone, nothing would be done about it. By the time Malema tweeting that Twitter had found nothing wrong with his tweet, instead of being angry, I felt sad. Much like I did for my grandfather. Because no matter how many dancing emojis Malema included in the tweet, the fact that he needed to celebrate the passing of FW de Klerk, meant that the power still rests with De Klerk. And that he’s not truly free. And that’s a terrible pity.

Karen Milner

- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

A t the time of writing, we are hopeful that Miss South Africa, Lalela Mowane, will represent our country at the Miss Universe pageant in Eilat in spite of the vicious campaign to prevent this from happening. Regrettably, this is the media, we have seized every opportunity to point out the thuggish behaviour of BDS agitators, whose modus operandi when people refuse to unban anti-apartheid movements is to browbeat them into submission and, should that fail, intimidate. This is something we stress continuously to our own community being maligned, threatened, and other policy and opinion makers.

When we speak about this, we pour out some of the wine from our glass onto a plate next to us. The reason we do this, we tell our children, is because no matter how terrible the Egyptians were to us, we still don’t respawn in their suffering. The fact that they went through the plagues and then died in the Red Sea needs to detract from our joy. We cannot be unequivocally happy when someone suffers.

What is heartening, however, is that it has been apparent that the majority of South Africans vehemently oppose BDS and Minster Nathi Mthethwa’s call for Msowane to withdraw from the Eilat pageant. We have seen this in the comments sections in the media, in posts on social media, and in polls conducted by the SABC and Newroom Africa, where there is overwhelming support for her to participate.

Something that has provided a degree of reassurance during this difficult week was a statement issued by the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) confirming that South Africa remains committed to maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel. As Dirco spokesperson Clayson Monyela rightly observed, were it to sever these ties, South Africa would only exclude itself from being part of the solution to the Middle East conflict. We remain hopeful that for all the BDS-generated noise around the Miss Universe competition, this sensible, realistic approach will continue to underpin government policy in this area.

- Karen Milner

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

What I can somewhat relate to is my own experience. As Jews, we’re familiar with prejudice and hatred. My father, until his passing last year, wouldn’t buy and drive a German vehicle because of what the Nazis had done to his family. My mother’s comments that followed.

In our various comments for the media, we have seized this opportunity to highlight the BDS movement’s inflammatory rhetoric and bullying policy in this area.

Karen Milner

- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Dear Mr. Finkelstein,

I am writing to you as an individual, and as a member of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

The BDS movement’s inflammatory rhetoric and bullying does not merely target the Israeli state, but inevitably leads to our own community being maligned, threatened, and intimidated. This is something we stress continuously in our engagements with the government, media, civil society, and other policy and opinion makers. We have seized every opportunity to point out the thuggish behaviour of BDS agitators, whose modus operandi when people refuse to unban anti-apartheid movements is to browbeat them into submission and, should that fail, intimidate. This is something we stress continuously to our own community being maligned, threatened, and other policy and opinion makers.

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New burial section consecrated at Westpark

The Chevrah Kadisha and Beth Din on 12 November consecrated the rest of the new burial section at Westpark Jewish Cemetery in Johannesburg. Situated on the south east side of Westpark, Section E comprises 40 000m² and consists of six sub-sections, the first of which, Section EA, was consecrated in March 2020.

The consecration ceremony involved walking around the entire section three times while reciting tehillim and other prayers. Rabbi Jonathan Fox, the group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha and Beth Din on behalf of six sub-sections, the first of which, Section EA, was consecrated in March 2020.

The ceremony concluded with the recital of a communal memorial prayer for all those buried in Westpark Jewish Cemetery.

Walking around the new section to consecrate it

On Monday 15th November, the new burial section at Westpark, including a communal section, was consecrated.

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Walking around the new section to consecrate it

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