

27.05x28.14	1	4	עמוד	the jewish chronicle	13/11/2015	50516827-4
משכנות שאננים - 13040						

BORIS JOHNSON IN ISRAEL



From left: Boris Johnson in Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem; riding with Ron Huldai; cooking with Assaf Granit; and playing football with Reuven Rivlin

Bikes, fish and one very slippery BDS row

**BY NOGA TARNOPOLSKY
 JERUSALEM**

▶ IT STARTED out as the kind of universal bear hug that only Boris Johnson can deliver.

Whether it was his off-script comments during his bicycle ride with Tel Aviv mayor Ron Huldai, out-staring a grey mullet in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market, or prompting bursts of laughter during his Winston Churchill memorial lecture, the indomitable London mayor lavished on Israel his usual combination of humour, wit and erudition — and it went down a treat.

On Wednesday, however, the conflict caught up with him.

Comments he had made during his tour attacking those behind the BDS movement prompted Palestinian activists to make threats against him on

social media, and most of Mr Johnson's planned engagements with Palestinian groups were then cancelled over security concerns.

Mr Johnson's backing for this correspondent — who was banned from attending one meeting because of my Israeli passport — added to the furor.

Israel, on the other hand, greeted Mr Johnson rapturously.

Ploughing tirelessly through two 15-hour days, the mayor rung open the Tel Aviv stock exchange and wandered through Jerusalem's Old City, from holy site to holy site, enjoying face recognition afforded few foreign mayors.

In the Muslim quarter, one man, opening up his shop, shouted out "Prime Minister! Prime Minister!" As

the familiar blond mop approached the Kotel, another passer-by shouted out: "Good job, Boris! Follow after David!"

In Tel Aviv, Mr Johnson held a public conversation with Israel's former president Shimon Peres, who urged a few hundred Arab and Jewish youths in attendance to create "twitter storms".

Mr Johnson held private meetings in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem with high-tech entrepreneurs and rode another bike through the drizzling rain to highlight the advantages of Mobileye technology, which is now preventing vehicles from running over pedestrians in Ealing.

After a mini-van equipped with the technology dodged the helmeted mayor, a Mobileye executive claimed humorously: "We saved the mayor of

Israelis greeted the London mayor rapturously

London!"

During his Churchill memorial lecture at Jerusalem's Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Mr Johnson massaged his audience like putty, drawing laughs and bursts of applause. He stressed the qualities that Winston Churchill shared with Israel — "daring, audacity, derring-do, and indomitability".

He added that Mr Churchill "was sometimes wrong, as in the gold standard, abdication crisis and over India".

Perhaps with one eye on the next day in Ramallah, an ebullient and garrulous Mr Johnson issued a warning about Palestinian rights.

Mr Churchill, Mr Johnson said, had told Jewish audiences they had "the chance to create a land flowing with milk and honey", but he warned that "every step that you take must therefore be for the moral and material benefit of

all Palestinians".

"I think today we have to admit that the present situation does not entirely accord with that Churchillian vision — not yet," Mr Johnson said.

The speech ended a day that started with a sombre visit to Yad Vashem, and included a raucous visit to Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market; fish-wrangling and polenta-whisking with chef Assaf Granit, of Soho's Palomar; and a brief pause at a muddy football pitch for a match with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and Arab and Jewish 10-year-old boys signed up to a coexistence scheme sponsored by the British Embassy.

The tour's stated purpose had been trade. For Israel, the mission was a clear success. For the Palestinians, it was a missed opportunity.