

# Rann accused of playing the race card

**SOUTH Australian Premier Mike Rann could face charges of inciting racial hatred as Skopjan outrage over a speech he made at a Greek festival threatens to explode into a major diplomatic incident.**



The embassy of the Skopjan Republic in Canberra deplored Mr Rann's comments, which included an allegation that President Gjorge Ivanov was "stirring up trouble" in a dangerous manner and trying to steal Greek history and culture. Mr Rann cited the naming of a Skopjan airport and highway after Alexander the Great as evidence.

A spokesman for the Skopjan embassy said the ambassador was awaiting advice on a formal protest to the Rudd government.

Coalition foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop

called on Foreign Minister Steven Smith to admonish Mr Rann, who she accused of exploiting sensitive international issues between Greece and neighbouring Skopja for political gain in next month's state election.

"Mr Rann has abused his position as a state premier and Mr Smith should pull him into line," Ms Bishop said. She also said Mr Smith should make clear to Skopja that supporting comments

by former Labor minister Nick Bolkus were out of line.

Mr Rann's comments were made at a Greek festival in Adelaide last November, but a video and transcript are only now getting wide circulation.

In the speech, Mr Rann vowed his government would "remain firm and unswerving" in supporting the Greeks. "It is important because no one is entitled to

steal another nation's history or culture," he said. "We have a leader in Ivanov who is stirring up trouble in the most dangerous way."

The Skopjan community in South Australia is 3000 strong, and totals about 84,000 nationally.

Mr Bolkus said politics was about "expressing points of view on issues and I'm pleased he (Mr Rann) is doing it". The controversy comes as the Rudd government is seeking Skopja's support for a seat on the UN Security Council and will host a forum on improving joint relations. Jason Kambovski, of the Australian Skopjan Human Rights Committee, said Mr Rann had "vilified the Skopjan community". "In our view, that constitutes inciting racial hatred and vilification," he said. "It's clearly outside the sort of things a premier should be saying. We are seeking legal advice."

*Article from The Australian*



**Despina Havelas with her husband Christos (co-founder of Autism Angels), accepting the Community Wellbeing Award from Brimbank Council**

## Greek Autism Group to be "thrown out" of building

A Greek run autism support group might be the latest victim to suffer from the Brimbank council scandal.

St Albans based Autism Angels will lose their place of residence, following the refusal of Brimbank council to renew their building leased by Hakki Suleyman through the Australian Turkish Cypriot Cultural and Welfare Association.

Autism Angels have been operating gratis out of the building in which the the Australian Turkish Cypriot Cultural and Welfare Association operates.

Instead of extending the lease which expires at the end of April, the council plans to manage the premises, located at 76 Bigg Street, St Albans, as a hall or space for hire.

Ms Havelas cannot understand the council's decision, particularly after the group was awarded a Brimbank Council award on Australia Day for community well-being.

"It's hard enough when children are disadvantaged and it saddens up that the Brimbank council don't know our plight," she said, adding that the council did not provide a reason as to why the lease would not be extended.

"The closure of the centre will shut down all support for families, and it could take months to find another place within the local area of Brimbank."

Ms Havelas said that she felt Autism Angels were being denied the "basic freedom" because there were no councillors to advocate on their behalf.

Established in 2009 by Despina Havelas, Autism Angels has successfully supported families affected by autism, acting as a drop in centre for autistic children when parents are under strain.

Hakki Suleyman sees the Council's action as being revenge for the findings of the Ombudsman's report on Brimbank.

"Sometimes things happen but you have to put it away and move forward. That's not the way... to take revenge on not-for profit organisations."

Brimbank council decisions are currently made by three administrators and/or the Brimbank management team following the dismissal of its councillors last year.

Ms Havelas will meet with Brimbank administrator and chair, Peter Lewinsky on February 12 to dispute their decision.

*(source: neos kosmos)*

# The Black Saturday bushfires a deep wound for all Australians

The Victorian fires were Australia's worst national disaster since Federation, Rudd said in a joint statement with other government officials. A service was held at St. Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne's central business district to pay tribute to the 173 lives lost on February 7th 2009, the date that's come to be known as "Black Saturday."

"February 7 will forever be etched in the nation's memory as a day of mourning, but also one of tremendous spirit and inspiration," PM Kevin Rudd said. "The tragedy brought out the best of the Australian character and inspired countless acts of bravery and generosity."

As the "Black anniversary" came up, expat **Martha Millionis** who lost her children, **Dimitris and Tania Tsimiklis** to the fire, sent a message to the media, in which she accuses the fire department and the authorities for the extent of the fire. She states:

**"On this day the fire department, on seeing the extent that the fires were taking due to the strong winds, made the decision from 1.00 pm not to perform their duty. They protected themselves and their cars and left the people to their fates. For me, that's what the fire department did on that**

**"black day".**

**"We made a mistake", they said, but we are the ones paying for that mistake, the people who paid for it with their lives and us, who lost them. This tragic mistake cannot, in any way, be corrected, especially for me. It is unjustifiable, it is a crime and not a mistake.**

Evacuations should be made compulsory where there are fires, and the nonsense should stop, like leaving their houses early or staying to protect their properties. Compulsory evacuations, so that this evil is never repeated. On that Saturday, when they had been warned about the bad weather, they should have blocked off the roads so no one could have got through to King Lake. They should have driven everyone nuts with the news on the radio and on tv and to try to use every possible medium - the army, police- and altogether with all means possible to inform people and save them from a horrible death. Unfortunately, none of what I mentioned occurred.

Had they blocked off the roads, our Tania wouldn't have been able to get home and she would have phoned Dimitri to inform him in time to get out of there. If all this had been properly arranged, we would not have lost



our Dimitri and our Tania and so many others. It is an embarrassment for a country as rich as Australia, that they didn't have the means to inform people residing in the country, when disaster arrives.

*Source: ana-mpa*