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Earn more than above average

Behind the scenes on Iran mission

She was not featured by the media as one of the heroes who were part of the South African Search and Rescue mission to Iran ... but she definitely was one of those people without whom the team from SA would never have left for Iran.

The earthquake, which measured 6.3 on the Richter Scale, hit Iran on Boxing Day last year. The SA mission left on the morning of December 28 following a gruelling 48 hours for the determined 28-year-old Samantha Botsis from Edenvale.

Rescue South Africa, of which Samantha is a member of the board of directors, was immediately placed on stand-by after it was announced that Iran had been struck by an earthquake. Rescue SA is a volunteer organisation and Samantha got involved with the organisation after she assisted in developing its website.

Rescue SA is a member of INSARAG, the international search and rescue advisory group for the United Nations (UN). Iran's government forwarded a request for assistance to the UN after which Rescue SA got the go-ahead to start planning an SA mission to Iran.

Samantha was mainly responsible for the local logistics ... but this sounds like a lot less work than what it really was.

Samantha, in those 48 hours, had to consult on more than one occasion, with numerous local and international authorities such as the Department of Local Affairs and Foreign Affairs.

"You can imagine what a challenge it was ... it was Boxing Day and Christmas weekend and we had to organise the mission with most people being on holiday," said Samantha.

During those 48 hours she also had to get the team of 47 members together, help organise their passports,

food, 750 litres of water and get sponsorship for the team's flight to Iran and an airline that would be prepared to carry 13 tonnes of equipment.

"It was organised chaos. At a time like that there is a lot of adrenalin ... the guys just want to get going and leave but we had to put together the whole mission first ... over Christmas weekend of all times," said Samantha.

It has been estimated that the costs involved in the mission were about R1-million. "It is a lot of money to raise in 48 hours," Samantha told the NEWS.

Mobilise

Due to the help of the Department of Local Affairs the team was able to mobilise fast and leave on the morning of the 28th. After their team's arrival in Iran, Samantha was in contact with team members on a daily basis. But before this there was yet another obstacle to overcome when the team landed 400km from where they were supposed to be. "So again it was a thing of talking to a lot of people like the Iranian Embassy here, the South African Embassy in Iran, the Department of Foreign Affairs and so on," said Samantha, who was also responsible for liaising between team members and their families.

The seven-day mission returned to South Africa as the international team which covered the most ground in Iran.

"Although they were not able to rescue anybody, they recovered 30 bodies and covered the biggest area of all the international teams in Iran. This was a very successful mission. My goal is to decrease our departure time from 48 hours as time is crucial ... I believe that we will achieve this with each mission we do from here on," said Samantha.

Listening to this determined 28-year-old woman, you realise that this goal will definitely be achieved.



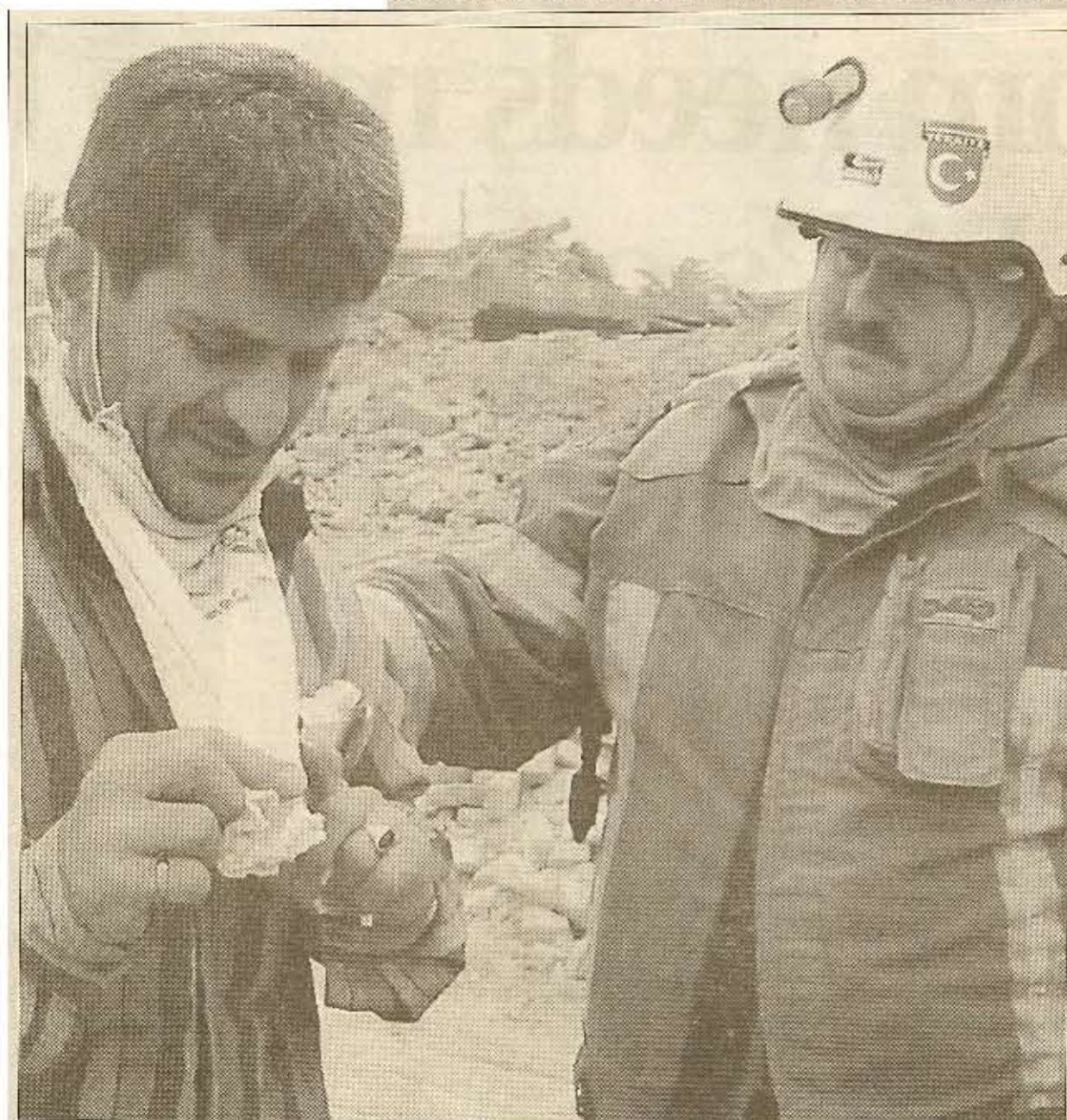
Samantha Botsis.

422-1546/718

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Sorry boet...

An Iranian man, Shahrian, who lost his brother, wife and two children in the earthquake, the devastation of which is visible in the background, is comforted by André Tomlinson. Shahrian is wearing a vest which belonged to his niece with the word "freedom" embroidered on it.