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Horns Of A Dilemma

THE NOTION of hunting a wild animal for sport is abhorrent to many people, especially when the quarry happens to be a white rhino.

So how can a nature conservation agency, charged with the custodianship of our natural heritage, justify taking almost R1 million from a wealthy businessman to kill one of these increasingly vulnerable animals in the midst of an unprecedented rhino-poaching crisis which has led to the illegal slaughter of more than 450 rhinos in SA last year?

Is this not a case of double standards, or morality silenced by the power of money and politics?

Just ask Ezemvelo Wildlife KZN chief executive Bandile Mkhize, whose organisation has been caught up in this very dilemma after inviting tenders recently for a rhino hunt at the Makhasa community game reserve near Mkhuze.

Yet, somewhat ironically, as noted by world-acclaimed rhino conservationist Ian Player, the hunting industry has made a significant contribution to the recovery of the white rhino over the past 50 years by offering financial incentives to wildlife ranchers to provide albeit partial sanctuary for rhinos and other wild creatures – rather than planting cash crops or timber plantations.

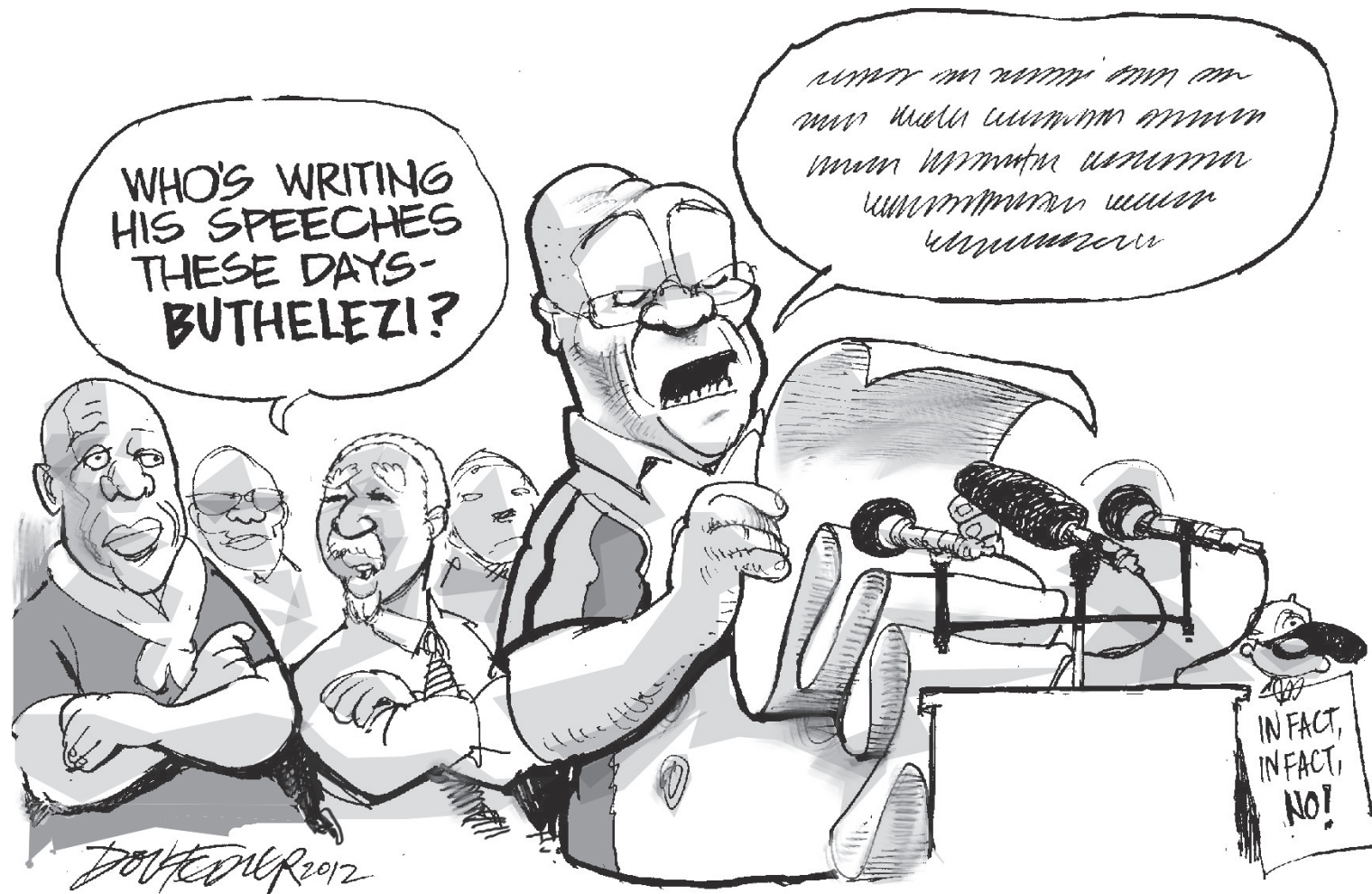
There is also a clear distinction between the illegal and wanton slaughter of rhinos by international criminal syndicates and the legally controlled hunting of a limited number of rhinos to raise funds for state conservation agencies or to ensure an economic return for wildlife farming.

More than 25 percent of rhinos in SA are now owned privately, either for hunting or eco-tourism. That is almost 4 500 white rhinos on more than 22 000km of private conservation land.

And while the hunting fraternity still has its fair share of unscrupulous rogues and criminals, there are also many hunters who care passionately about the future of wildlife and wild places.

Respected conservation groups such as the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Wilderness Foundation warned recently that a moratorium on white rhino hunting could have “unintended and negative consequences” on the conservation of this species in southern Africa.

It is a sensitive debate which demands complete transparency from conservation agencies.



**SUPERHUMAN powers number 3; Imagination:**  
 Among your many superpowers is the power to imagine. This is, in part, the power to see beyond your horizons into the “beyond”.

I do not mean into some other world of life after death, but rather the ability to peer into your future to plan something outstanding. Your capacity to imagine is your innate and superhuman ability to plan a great future, a future more satisfying than your past, a future more satisfying than your present, no matter how exciting each has been or might yet be.

Deploying your imagination propels you into a more spiritual realm. It keeps men and women alive, gives necessary zeal to communities, energises, heals, excites, and rejuvenates.

Of course your imagination may have become jaded or shattered by loss, disappointment and failure, but, given that you are still breathing, it is probably not beyond rekindling. While there is life there is hope. While there is hope there is the power to think great thoughts into daily actions and then watch them come into being.

The walking dead have stopped imagining. Their dreaming has ceased. Their hopes have become limited to what is routine and possible, and they have stopped expecting much from life.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to Rod@DifficultRelationships.com



Fracking Causes Quakes

DOES hydraulic fracturing to obtain natural gas cause earthquakes? Yes. Every time humans apply or remove pressure from rock formations or dig a big hole in the ground, there's at least a small risk of a seismic result.

That does not mean that people should stop extracting valuable resources, just that industry and government should apply some sensible caution.

The technique for liberating natural gas from subterranean shale formations, popularly called fracking, involves pumping water and chemicals into the ground, fracturing the rock below and inducing tiny earthquakes, unfelt, but detectable, directly above.

But seismologists in Ohio have implicated a different part of the process in a series of much more powerful quakes that recently shook Youngstown: disposing of the leftover wastewater by pumping it underground.

Ohio officials shut down suspect wastewater wells after a 4.0 quake on New Year's Eve. Arkansas regulators did the same after earthquakes there.

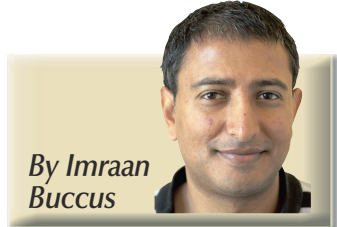
Fracking in the US's massive Marcellus Shale formation could provide a large domestic source of energy with fewer harmful emissions and half of coal's carbon output. It would also provide jobs.

Ohio has geological formations suitable for wastewater disposal. The state has permitted 194 disposal wells.

Extracting unconventional natural gas will have unexpected and possibly unattractive consequences. More study and regulation will be needed. – Washington Post

Survivor Rajbansi – the people's politician

Called brilliant by some, an opportunist by others, this master organiser, socialiser and strategist's legacy will not be forgotten



By Imraan Buccus

THE memory of Amichand Rajbansi, the leader of the Minority Front, will not fade easily. Whether you agreed with his politics or not, there is no doubt that he was one of South Africa's most colourful politicians.

Every political analyst wrote Rajbansi off after February 1990. A new “Rainbow Nation” was in the offing and most thought that “ethnic politics” would die a natural death. But he survived, and in many ways, taught a number of politicians lessons in manoeuvring, strategising, keeping close to your base, calculating and winning – well almost, given the particular circumstances of KwaZulu-Natal.

In fact, his entire political career was a carefully calculated move. In 1974 when he was an executive member of the SAIC, he resigned after the council decided to join the Cabinet council because it excluded Africans. When his party lost the majority in the council, he challenged PW Botha to fire him. Botha did not and the anti-Rajbansi alliance collapsed. He was still The Chief. Some saw it as opportunism while others saw it as political brilliance – but perhaps it was both.

Most people thought that the James Commission findings would finish him off politically. The judge's findings were devastating and his characterisation of the politician, which were splashed

across most media outlets, made any political analyst worth his/her salt pen another obituary for Rajbansi. Corruption, dishonesty – it was all there.

But predictions of the political death of the Raj were, once again, premature.

A number of his supporters wrote recently that he did “a lot” for the Indian community during and after apartheid and there are at least 45 000-50 000 Minority Front voters who would agree with this sentiment. Many years ago, as a young student of political science and society, I followed all elections closely, including a few under apartheid.

There are competing explanations for this but Rajbansi certainly claimed that his working within the system was part of the reason. Rajbansi is even recorded as saying that his participation in the apartheid structures was equivalent to Lenin's participation in the Russian Duma.

I am sure most of his listeners would have agreed. Such was the power of his persuasion.

After apartheid Rajbansi continued to be on the ground far more than most left activists or politicians in rival parties – all of whom scorned

the independent left.

Rajbansi was an organiser and a socialiser who kept close to his supporters in his own unique ways. This included walkabouts in Chatsworth and Phoenix, attending a few weddings per weekend, house visits, and watching Manning Rangers at Chatsworth Stadium.

It has been widely acknowledged that, at least in terms of infrastructure, housing and other such services, Indian communities were often recipients of better services than other oppressed groups under apartheid.

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After apartheid Rajbansi continued to be on the ground far more than most left activists or politicians in rival parties – all of whom scorned

him. In recent times he was very visible in the “Morning Market” struggles against the eThekweni Council and he was a supporter of the indigent Indian fishermen when most activists and parties had not even heard of them.

Rajbansi had a good media machine and, because the MF sometimes held the balance of power, he was a very effective actor in support of these struggles. A sociologist would possibly explain all this in terms of his poor and humble background in Clairwood. An anthropologist would pin his actions to some sort of “ethnic solidarity”.

But life is always more complicated than the simple class reductionism of sociology or the ethnic reductionism of anthropology.

There were, for instance, a few African women standing on an MF ticket. And there are plenty of people who are born to humble beginnings and go on to forget their origins.

As a political scientist, one would have to take serious cognisance of his political and organisational legacy as an MEC of Sport in the ANC-led KwaZulu-Natal cabinet under S'bu Ndebele. There is no doubt the ministry oper-

ated well and there were glowing tributes paid to him by senior ANC leaders, such as Premier Zweli Mkhize and Zihle Zikalala, who acknowledged the desire of the Tiger to locate his party within a progressive political terrain while maintaining an independent position.

On a similar note IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi declared Rajbansi a political giant with a deep commitment to deepening and consolidating South Africa's democracy and as a person with a great passion for the people of South Africa.

Glowing tributes

The DA's Helen Zille called him one of the people who introduced the idea of coalition politics to South Africa by strategically aligning his party with others to achieve his objectives.

Contradicting some of these glowing tributes were a small number of Indian community activists who used the now forgotten Struggle language to belittle him. No one has forgotten that the Tiger was in PW's cabinet or that he supported the tri-cameral system in the face of a massive

nationwide boycott by the UDF. But the fact is that there are other senior members of the ANC who were in PW Botha's cabinet. A number of former IFP leaders jumped ship and rose to positions of real power in the ANC, including the late John Mchunu, the party chairman in KZN. And even our new chief justice is an old homeland functionary.

Rajbansi was often a comic figure but, neither this nor the years of derision that he endured at the hands of the left ever broke his spirit or his support base in Chatsworth and Phoenix. The lesson for political parties and activists is clear: If you want people to trust you then you have to be present with the people day after day and year after year.

You have to forget about grand ideology and take a side with people in their real day-to-day struggles. Perhaps the starkest reminder of Rajbansi's connectedness to communities was a recent tweet that read “We'll miss you at Blue Lagoon”.

You may have disagreed with his politics but he certainly was a colourful character with a real connectedness to the people who supported him under apartheid and after apartheid.

● Imraan Buccus is a research fellow in the School of Politics at UKZN and academic director of a university study-abroad programme on social and political transformation.

Speaking ill of the dead hurts the family

IT IS disconcerting and in bad taste to note that some sadistic individuals have shamelessly elected to denigrate and vilify the dead without first sweeping their own doorsteps.

Amichand Rajbansi, a gallant man and leader, with his own pedigree of expediency in politics, has peacefully migrated into the celestial world and he cannot defend himself when such nebulous onslaughts are directed at him.

If he were alive, these individuals would have got back what they deserved with interest and I am sure they would have been covering for safety and lost for words when he unleashed his wrath. No one would disagree that Raj was never lost for words.

I appeal to those who have been harbouring grudges to stop writing such trivia about him.

Dear human beings, you missed your opportunity to challenge what he has done,

good or bad. It's too late. Rajbansi has left behind a family who are in mourning. Can you imagine the harm, the pain and the agony you are causing to these souls who are grieving for their loved one?

Stop being “armchair critics” and let us see what you can do to contribute to effectively re-engineering the political landscape given the challenges we face at present. Try to emulate, or better, the work the Raj has done.

I will always remember Rajbansi as a dear friend who served people with distinction. He had weaknesses, like all human beings, but the good he has done outweighs his mistakes.

I will always remember him as a politician par excellence, unparalleled in his capacity to leverage constructive change for the benefit of all.

I salute you, my dear friend.  
 KAMAL PANDAY  
 Reservoir Hills

WHERE DOES RECYCLED WASTE GO?

I AM certain that I'm not alone in wondering what happens to my recycled waste. I, as religiously as possible, make a trip with a boot load of separated plastics, paper, glass and metal to the local dump.

Sometimes I use the one at the Pick n Pay Hypermarket and sometimes the one near the Umgeni bird park. This time I chose the bird park, which is not my first choice as they aren't as friendly

and organised as the Pick n Pay collectors. Imagine my dismay when the man that came to my assistance dumped all of the contents of my container into the “mixed” skip.

“Mixed”, for the uninitiated, is where any household waste goes including garden and often rubble waste. He then announced that there “was no problem” as it was all going to the main landfill dump anyway.

What is the point? I told him to stay away from the rest of my waste as I was determined to see to it that it was safely delivered to somewhere that may make the effort to do the right thing.

Sadly not true. The lady at the Pick n Pay collection site also confirmed that even after she has separated it, it all goes to the landfill.

Surely this is not the case? Can someone from

the municipality please enlighten us as to what happens to our waste.

Furthermore, I suggest that they educate their ambassadors at the coalface of the need and relevance of reducing, reusing, and recycling so that they know what an important part they are playing in taking care of our planet.

BRADLEY PORTER  
 Durban

Prices go up and quality goes down

LETTER writer Bryan Tuck has raised an issue that many consumers mull over every time they buy vegetables and fruit “Sour grapes are now common in our shops”, (The Mercury, January 9).

Fruit is the biggest rip-off. The price goes up and the quality comes down. Often

what you see is not what you get. Beautiful red peaches are tasteless. No wonder there are signs forbidding you from tasting the fruit, as this would result in people leaving it where it belongs – on the shelf.

ROB CRONJE  
 Durban

Airline may never take off

SANTACO'S lack of progress with its much publicised airline is pretty much how our government operates (The Mercury, January 4).

Strong on publicity, promises and strategy, but very weak on implementation. As has been proved by

many aspirant Richard Bransons, running an airline is not a business for sissies or novices and it will be interesting to see if Santaco ever flies.

TONY BALL  
 Durban

Education needs attention

THE EDITORIAL “Raising standards” (The Mercury, January 5) refers.

I agree with the statement: “What we need to produce are tickets which guarantee skills in literacy and numeracy which are on par with equivalent countries elsewhere.”

A survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council showed that SA pupils fared worse in literacy and numeracy skills than their African counterparts to the north of us, even though our per capita expenditure is greater than in the rest of Africa.

This disparity must be arrested if SA wishes to maintain its dominant

WAYNE THRING  
 Durban

Why did tiger die for keeper's error?

HOW upsetting and what an outrage to read that a rare Siberian Tiger had been shot dead in eastern China as the keeper had left the cage unlocked at feeding time.

Have they never heard of tranquiliser darts in Wuhu?

YVONNE KOLBE  
 Durban

economic and political role in Africa. Outcomes Based Education was an experiment gone hopelessly wrong. In the US, “the dumbing of the nation” was attributed to OBE before it was unceremoniously booted out.

What we need is a knowledge-based economy, like the Asian Tigers have, where our educational system is able to produce pupils with skills required by the business sector.

Congratulations to those pupils who were successful in their matric examinations, and to those who were not: never give up.