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Smiles And Reality

KWAZULU-Natal Premier Zweli Mkhize had something to smile about yesterday.

From a R4 billion projected overexpenditure in 2009, he was able to announce that the province was now "cash-positive" and resources would be directed to service delivery.

But there were also some harsh realities to face, like how to boost job creation in a province that, by his own account, shed 125 000 jobs in 2010 and whose average unemployment rate for the third quarter last year stood at 19.7 percent.

With these challenges in mind, the premier's State of the Province address was thin on details and new ideas.

Big projects like the King Shaka International Airport, the Dube Trade Port and the Moses Mabhida Stadium have been completed and there has been a massive reduction in the construction industry's capacity to create jobs.

The province, for example, will not be sponsoring mega-projects in this financial year, leaving these to parastatals and the national government departments with existing projects, such as the on-going refurbishment of the Durban and Richards Bay harbours and the Ngula Power Station.

Mkhize did announce, however, that KZN had R11bn to invest in various public infrastructure projects – including road maintenance, housing, schools and hospitals – which will hopefully create "adequate job opportunities".

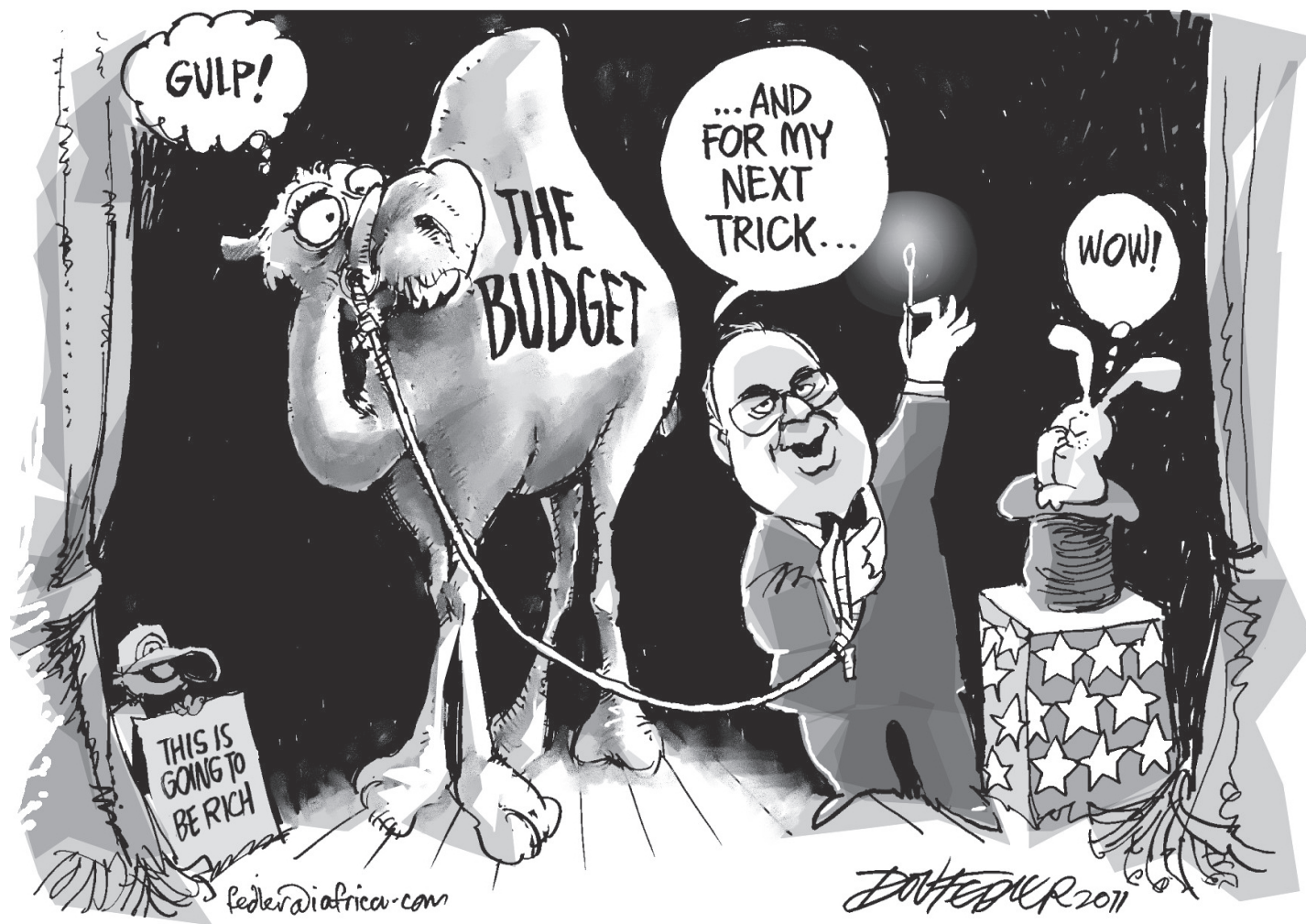
The question remains whether we have the capacity to spend this money free of graft, within budget and on time.

We only have to look at the R200 million under-expenditure for housing in the province, which was returned to the Treasury, to understand this is not a mere question of 'The Mercury' creating scarecrows.

Mkhize says that a cabinet sub-committee of MECs has been established to oversee the delivery of infrastructure, and a crack team of technical specialists has been assembled to speed up quality construction of public infrastructure and eliminate under-expenditure.

We trust that just as the provincial recovery plan was a success, these hands-on measures will help ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent

For it is time to deliver more than just promises and more promises about jobs.



You & Me
ROD SMITH

SAINTLY sane spouse...

Q: I decided to cheat on my husband. I won't give excuses. I had always been a very strong woman. I always thought that any woman who left her marriage and split up her family didn't deserve respect. Well, it happened to me.

I met a man 14 years younger than me. He was shy, sensitive, and handsome. We started text messaging one another late at night and then we eventually started seeing each other.

I became obsessed with him. I moved out of my home and split my five children with my husband. This was the beginning of the end. The relationship with this other man lasted on and off for five years. I became a very angry woman. Anyway, during all of this insanity my relationship with my children was almost completely severed and they all began living with their father. Through this my husband maintained love for me and he's been my friend. I know I love my husband still but I'm not in love with him. How do I re-establish an "in love" feeling with my husband? (Edited)

A: Being "in love" and becoming obsessed with someone are poles apart. Perhaps you can live without the "in love" feeling in return for the stability and sanity your saintly spouse offers.

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

Academics and the real world

The value of intellectual work should be in its contribution to a wider debate and to development, not some incestuous debate that no one else reads

THERE are many things about our country of which we can be truly proud. But now that we have displaced Brazil as the most unequal society on the planet and the wave of popular protest that began in 2004 continues to gain momentum we have to take our developmental failings seriously.

The rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer since the end of apartheid and there can be no doubt that continuing disparities in our society are the great scars on the post-apartheid conscience.

On a related note, the gap between the elite public sphere and that of the struggles of the poor remains huge. It is often impossible for the former to understand the latter. Intellectual life in our elite public sphere is, to put it plainly, impoverished.

Of course there are some important exceptions but on the whole our intelligentsia is focused on a narrow careerism. There can be no social progress without the intellectual creativity to

imagine new paths and the intellectual courage to refuse oppression.

In the 1980s it was quite normal for South African academics to work with liberation movements, trade unions, community organisations or social movements. These days our academics are much more likely to work for the World Bank, a key driver of global inequality and economic imperialism, than any community organisation. No doubt, times have changed. Academics also need to think about third stream income and in South Africa, and indeed the continent, academics have to be producers of knowledge and not mere disseminators of knowledge, and thus publication in academic journals is important. And all countries, in the interests of their development, need to encourage more and more doctorate degrees.

But the problem in the current context is also the almost unidimensional focus on academic publications at the expense of any contribution to development in South



IMRAAN BUCCUS

Africa. While important and an indicator of productivity, a number of academic publications are so densely jammed with technical, convoluted language as to be more or less unreadable.

Interestingly, a couple of years ago an American study revealed that, worldwide, the average academic article is read by one person. The late and great Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, stressed the value of public intellectual work. For Said, what he called democratic criticism could not be confined to academic spaces only. It had to be part of the broader public sphere. Said wrote newspaper articles, spoke at public meetings and was engaged in the Palestinian struggle for his whole life.

Academics have a very privileged life in that they have time to read and reflect, a privilege that is denied to

most other people. The justification for the social investment in their opportunity for contemplation has always been that they should bring their wisdom back to society.

But many quite clearly have no interest in giving back to society. For example, a number of academics who write about poverty have never engaged and made contributions to poverty-stricken communities, except when doing fieldwork of course. And, I'd venture to add, many don't even understand poverty, except in the narrow theoretical and academic sense.

Again, there is no doubt that publishing is important in the life of an academic, but that does not mean that academics need to step back from the public sphere. And we certainly need more women, particularly black women, to enter the public

domain as public intellectuals. For starters, there surely is a need to translate scientific writing into more accessible writing for a broader public, as this will indicate an understanding of the real value of intellectual work.

Universities like the University of KwaZulu-Natal are doing quite well in realising the need for academic work to be written for broader and more popular audiences, and have launched *Research Voices*. This publication repackages journal articles in accessible language in order that scientific writing reaches broader audiences. The real value of intellectual work inheres in its contribution to a wider debate, to our national conversation, and not to some incestuous debate, that no one else reads. And of course the academic life is not just about researching. It's also about teaching. The great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, famously wrote that:

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger genera-

tion into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

How many of our academics are teaching our young people to become critical and engaged citizens of the world? And how many of our academics are just teaching our young people how to find jobs in the oppressive apparatus of a capitalist system that has wreaked havoc around the world?

We really do need to encourage critical and public intellectual contributions to the unjust world we inhabit. Sustaining academic output and serious contributions to development are possible and should certainly be encouraged.

● Imraan Buccus is research fellow in the School of Politics at UKZN and at the Democracy Development Programme.

Conceit And Unity

MUAMMAR Gaddafi's conceit caused him to abolish the conventional state and replace it with an organic system that empowered the masses. Now those masses are rising against him while demonstrating how destructive his rule has been.

In Libya, it is not clear who can provide the necessary core for a transition. The army's cohesion is in doubt; tribal structures are divisive and weakened; and Libyan Islamists have not gone through the same learning experiences which have made their counterparts elsewhere more sophisticated and flexible. The Egyptians are distracted. The Arab League lacks both mandate and means.

In the beginning, Gaddafi's revolution had a certain logic and achieved useful things. It is hardly his achievement, but it is a consequence of his ruthless rule. He has finally given Libyans the unity which had – until now – eluded them. – The Guardian

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E-mailed letters should also include a physical address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters with pseudonyms will only be published in exceptional circumstances.

Cycle race chaos is symptom of our deepening lawlessness

THE REPORT on Sunday's stage of the Tour of South Africa "Tour of SA gets stuck in the traffic", (The Mercury February 21) is as upsetting as it is alarming.

After many years absence we finally have a category 2.2 cycle stage race back on our shores. We are losing a perfect chance to show off our country to the world with extraordinary tourism opportunities.

The fact that the Gauteng traffic authorities and marshals could not control the public traffic, forcing the race

organisers to neutralise the stage for fear of riders' safety, is indicative of the local government's inadequacies and the resultant level of civil disobedience.

This trend goes far beyond a mere cycle race in Gauteng. Locally, daily observations of blatant contraventions of traffic rules abound. It seems the ruling party is losing its grip and ability to govern our country adequately.

GRAY BRAATVEDT
Durban

YOUR COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE NEED YOU NOW

CORRUPTION appears to be the only way to success in South Africa.

Many reports highlight the corruption of government departments. But it takes two to tango. Virtually every industry appears to be, to some extent, corrupt, and often in partnership with government departments.

The cross on the ballot paper has become meaningless. Every day countless thousands are voting for corruption by paying bribes, taking

bribes, and by not blowing the whistle.

Some are scared and prefer not to say anything in order to protect their jobs and families and probably their own proceeds from corruption. This is a vote for the status quo. And, amazingly, some still wish for the status quo ante.

Political parties are meaningless too – ineffective politicians spend most of their time passing the buck or being promoted from one

department to another when their misdeeds become known. They probably don't want to do anything for the people lest they lose their portion of the takings.

As was the case with the World Cup, the scope for corruption within the government and in industry is massive. The larger the industry the larger the scope.

How many small companies, despite better pricing and products, lose deals because they have smaller

entertainment budgets and don't have the right "connections"?

Those at the bottom of the heap have no hope and it appears that many more are joining them on a daily basis. The haves are too comfortable in their lifestyles to be bothered about the have-nots. This is evidenced by, among other things, the poor community attendance at community organisations.

Fellow South Africans, please take a moment to consider joining

or supporting the numerous non-political and non-racial community organisations that are trying to help their fellow human beings. You may even meet your black/blue/green/red/white/yellow (or any other colour not on our flag) neighbour and find out he's not so bad after all! Your country and people need you now!

LEON SCHUTTE
Durban

Estate agents get out only what they put in

WHILE it is correct that estate agent commissions charged in the UK are lower than in South Africa, there is a significant difference in the manner in which they operate "Why do we let SA estate agents get away with it?", (The Mercury, February 18).

In the UK the costs of advertising and marketing are borne by the seller, whereas in South Africa the costs are borne by the agent. A consequence of the UK practice is that if a sale does not result, the seller loses their money.

In South Africa, the policy of "no sale, no pay" has been an integral part of the property industry. It is not unusual for a property to be unsold for many months, during which time the agent carries the marketing costs.

In the UK, the seller shares the responsibility of marketing the property with the agent. For example, potential purchasers are seldom taken to view the property by the agent, who simply provides the listing information and sends them off to the seller to show the

property. If he is interested in purchasing the property, he is referred to a solicitor to prepare the necessary documentation.

In South Africa, the entire process of viewing, showhouses and marketing is handled by the agent.

The commissions earned are commensurate with the effort put in to achieve a sale.

I agree with the letter-writer's disgust at the allegations of impropriety by some of the biggest and most respected estate agencies in

South Africa. If guilty they will be severely punished by the relevant authorities, including the Estate Agency Affairs Board.

The public can rest assured that the overwhelming majority of estate agents in South Africa are hard-working, honest professionals whose dedication and service to their clients is of paramount importance.

VINESH RAMDASS
Chairman, KZN Network Listings Services
Durban

Let me throw the council switches

IN THE article "City staff coin it illegally" (The Mercury, February 18), eThekweni management is quoted as saying the electricity department cannot find enough qualified electricians.

I find this difficult to believe. I am a qualified electrician with more than 39 years' experience in this field and have been applying unsuccessfully to the department for a job since 2005.

DJ PATTRICK
Durban

Two worlds that are poles apart

IT IS surprising that a bill as seriously flawed as the Muslim Personal Law or Muslim Marriages Bill could be released by the Ministry of Justice for comment.

The bill is cluttered with atrocities, both Islamically and constitutionally. There is no way it could go through Parliament. Opposition MPs would roast the government or anyone presenting it, even in a substantially altered form.

The only way would be to ram it through, ignoring whatever constitutional

etiquette there may be in the law-making process.

The project committee has attempted the fusion of two diametrically opposed, mutually repellent systems of life, namely the secular system and the divine religious system of Islam, sharia.

Both sides laboured in their struggle to modify the opposite systems in their puerile belief that a measure could be forged by some hideous amalgamation to satisfy both the constitution and the sharia.

It will be interesting to learn

how much in the way of public funds have been expended in this exercise.

My suggestion to the Ministry of Justice is to scrap the entire process; it is not possible to amalgamate two diametrically opposed systems; and the Muslim community has, by means of a litany of judgments, obtained relief with their "Islamic nikahs" (marriages) being recognised for purposes of maintenance.

A MANACK
Eastcourt