



## Making Her Mark

**S**OUTH Africans yesterday got their first real sense of what kind of a Reserve Bank governor Gill Marcus is going to be.

She has presided over an interest rate decision announcement before, but this time the long shadow of her predecessor was nowhere to be seen, and she put her own stamp on proceedings.

The main difference between Marcus and Tito Mboweni, who ran the bank for the past decade, is that she is clearly more open and is far more willing to entertain questions than he was.

For example, when asked the standard question about the unanimity of the seven-person Monetary Policy Committee's decision to keep interest rates on hold despite calls from trade unionists that a 2 to 3 percentage-point cut was essential, Marcus acknowledged "it was not a unanimous decision. There were very strong views ... (but) in the end we agreed that the prevailing view was to hold". She went as far as saying that while nobody had advocated a rate hike, "there were definitely views for an interest rate cut".

Mboweni was always far more coy about the level and vehemence of debate within the MPC and refused to discuss any differences that its members might have had with the final decision.

The other thing Marcus did which Mboweni would certainly not have done was address issues unrelated to the MPC's interest rate decision. Mboweni would have kicked questions about nationalisation of the Reserve Bank into touch, but Marcus took time to discuss them.

None of this means that Marcus is any more flexible than Mboweni was, or that she is going to fold in the face of pressure from politicians, business and trade unions to reverse the sensible stance that the bank took under him. She proved this yesterday by making a sound, albeit unpopular, decision in the best interests of the South African economy.

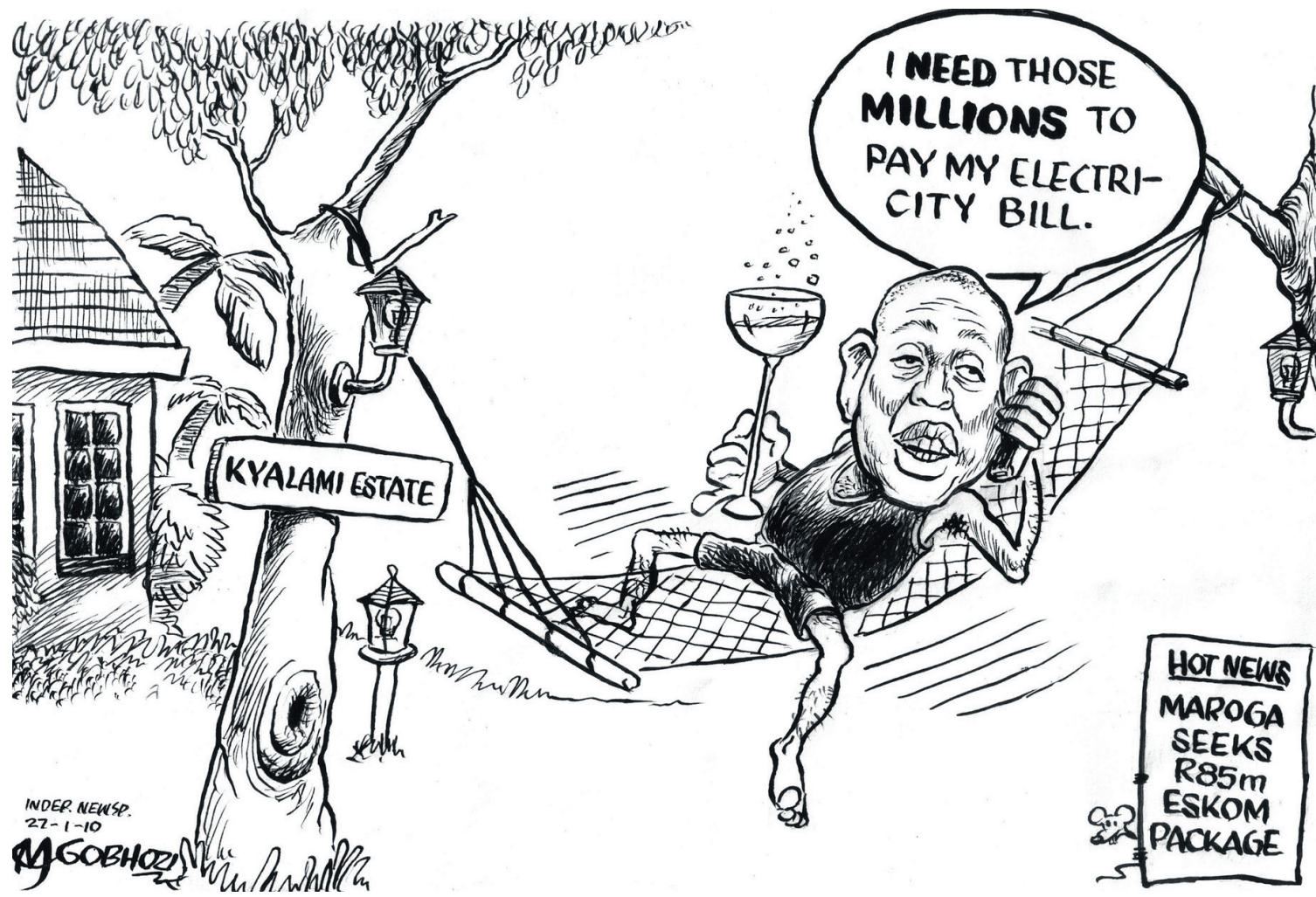
What it does suggest is that we will have a clearer sense of why certain decisions were taken and the process by which they were arrived.

Ultimately this will be good for both the bank and the country, and should be welcomed.

## Socialist Revolution

**H**UGO Chavez is nothing if not a man of his word. The Venezuelan president promised to remove obstacles to his Bolivarian socialist revolution, and that's exactly what he has done. He has squeezed out his opponents in congress, and the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Council, which supervises elections, are stacked with his loyalists. Last year Chavez pushed through a referendum eliminating presidential term limits, and his next order of business was muzzling the press. To that end, Venezuela continued its slide into authoritarianism on Sunday when the administration ordered cable television operators to stop broadcasting Radio Caracas Television, a critic of the president.

RCTV director Marcel Granier protested that the government was in violation of Venezuelan law. Perhaps he is correct. But if the country's laws were subverted, not to worry; Chavez can have them rewritten in the name of the socialist revolution. After all, that's what he has promised to do. - The Los Angeles Times



You & Me ROD SMITH

A SON writes to his mother:

Dear Mother:  
I am 40 and I really am no longer "your baby". Please try not to refer to me in this manner. It sounds completely ridiculous, even though I know what you mean. I am a married man and the father of two children.

While I am at it, let me remind you that I adore my wife and would really appreciate it if you worked harder at not treating her as if she were some kind of outsider, intruder, servant or secretary. Remember? You were at our wedding. She's very much part of our family - and I am part of hers.

By the way, her parents are not "those people", but a man and woman whom I love and who have embraced me far more successfully than I think you have embraced their daughter. I know you are going to resent hearing this, but I have to say it: I cannot drop everything and run to your assistance every time you phone.

Mother, there are plumbers, electricians, doctors, lawyers, bankers, and an endless list of places for you to get your car repaired - and really, there's very little you cannot afford. With love (yes, love)  
Your son

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

# Haiti must be allowed to decide its own destiny

*Ever since it made a successful stand against slavery, this Caribbean nation has been punished by colonialists. What it needs most is the right to democracy*

**H**AITI is not, as a newspaper recently claimed, "the island of the damned". In fact, Haiti is the island of the oppressed.

For a long time Haiti was the most prosperous of all French colonies. But just over 200 years ago slaves in Haiti rose up against the slave owners and three European governments and successfully fought for their freedom.

The revolution was literally incomprehensible even to the most radical European intellectuals - just as much of academia today is often unable to comprehend the political agency of poor black people.

But when the reality of the slave revolution finally sunk in, the response of Europe, later joined by the US and Canada, was to do everything that they could to undermine the first black republic in the modern world.

The French went so far as to send in their warships to demand that the Haitian government pay back the "value" of all the slaves that had liberated

themselves. This "debt" of 150 million gold francs was only paid off by 1947.

The US first took over the job of containing Haiti when it sent in the Marines to occupy the country in 1915.

Since then the US government, in alliance with local elites, has run the country in the most brutal and oppressive manner. The violent alliance between the US state and Haitian elites turned Haiti into one of the poorest countries in the world.

The first glimmers of hope since the slave revolution began to shine with the formation of a poor people's movement called Lavalas (the flood) in the 1980s.

In 1990, that movement reached the point where it was able to elect a radical priest and scholar, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to power.

The US, then under George Bush sr, promptly organised a violent coup following which



IMRAAN BUCCUS

more than 4 000 Lavalas members were murdered.

In 1994, partly as a result of the euphoria around our own transition to democracy, Clinton decided to restore Aristide to office.

But although he had been elected in 1990 on a huge majority, the Americans restored him to office on the strict condition that he followed neo-liberal economic policies.

Aristide stuck to the agreement but still managed to make some progress. For instance, he built more schools in his term of office than had ever been built in the entire history of Haiti.

But George Bush jr would not stand for a radical priest

Paul Farmer, Peter Hallward and others.

And yet much of the South African media keeps reporting the lies of the Bush regime as if they are fact.

One would think that after the lies about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, journalists would have learnt to be sceptical of any claims made by the Bush regime about countries that they had taken over.

But here, in a democratic South Africa, the forces of imperialism, together with some think tanks, are taken much more seriously by much of our local media than the Haitian people - of first-class independent scholarship.

In recent years, the SA government's support for the right of the people of Haiti to choose their own leaders was a position that we can all be proud of and one that resonates strongly with our own history.

But of course it must be remembered that at the same time Mbeki was supporting the Lavalas in Haiti, he was repressing poor people here in South Africa.

Haiti was so vulnerable to this earthquake because of years of domination and violence from authoritarian US-backed regimes.

It is time for Haitians to be allowed to elect their own leaders and to chart their own future. In the midst of the disaster, large crowds in Haiti have been demanding that Aristide must be allowed to return.

This is a demand that we should all support. Charity is important in times of crisis. But democracy and the right of a people to elect their own leaders and to make their own decisions is also important.

● Imraan Buccus is Research Fellow at UKZN and at the Democracy Development Programme. He is also attached to Southern Insight - a group of research, training and development consultants.

E-mail merletter@ml.co.za, fax 031 308 2715, or post letters to: The Editor, PO Box 47549, Greyville 4023. Letters must carry the author's signature, name and address.

## forum

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.

## Independent auditors?

THE REPORT "Auditors probe Zikhulise" (The Mercury, January 26) quotes mayor Obed Mlaba as saying that "the internal auditors would be drawn from the city's auditing department and the external auditors were independent individuals with the necessary qualifications".

Could these be the same type of people with the "necessary qualifications" who were employed to produce, at great cost, the property valuations for rating purposes?

The whole thing smacks of a cover-up.

BRIAN KENNEDY

Durban

## If the hat fits Cele must wear it

BHEKI Cele may yet live to regret his claim in attacking the controversial e.tv programme that flighted last week by saying "a friend of a criminal is a criminal" (The Mercury, January 22).

It could be he may find he too is a friend of someone who has been involved in a criminal act.

His problem is that he has become part of the ANC's new gung-ho policing and its new brand of Malema-type politics which spells a nasty future for South Africa.

R.L.LEGG

Hillcrest

# IT'S TIME FOR TEACHERS TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE

THE SITUATION that many schools find themselves in has been exacerbated by an imbalance in resources "Exodus threatens KZN schools" (The Mercury, January 26).

It is sad that poor parents who cannot afford better schools have no option but to enrol their children in distant schools.

I would like to challenge the Department of Education, education unions

and all concerned citizens to do a basic analysis about these schools:

● How many teachers are going to be affected in these schools?

● Do they have school-going kids as well?

● Which schools are their own children attending?

● How many of them enrol their children in the same schools at which they are teaching?

This will serve as a

barometer to show that even those teachers who say they are concerned about being redeployed are the major culprits.

Their children are attending former Model C schools, but they believe other parents should entrust their children with them when they cannot even trust themselves to give their own children the best education.

When I was at school, the last time we had any

teachers' children attending was before Model C was an option.

Immediately these schools were available the teachers took their children to those schools and now we are supposed to sympathise with them.

These are the fruits of their commitment as professionals.

These are the results of spending 95 percent of their time in the staff room rather

than in classes, because they knew their children were getting the best education.

They should teach their own children first - then we will see they are proud of their schools and their ability as teachers.

If they take their children to former Model C schools, or best performing schools, I as a parent will follow the trend.

MISA MADLALA  
Richards Bay

## Nuclear power is one solution to energy problems

WHILE debate about Eskom's proposed increased tariff rages on, it would be prudent to consider other aspects of the generation of electricity that appear to have been overlooked.

One must question the government's headlong rush to build coal-fired power stations. Other than for the nebulous claims of climate change due to carbon emission, there is ample proof of the negative effects of acid rain.

However, there is an even more pressing problem that needs to be considered, as reliable reports show that South African coal reserves, at the present rate of consumption, will be exhausted

by 2020. What then?

Due to the geomorphology of South Africa there is little scope for the generation of hydro-electric power. Until mankind can properly harness the potential energy of wind, sea and sun to produce large amounts of electricity the only alternative is nuclear power.

There is some urgency to finding alternative sources of energy and should not academic departments of chemistry, engineering and physics be compelled to allocate some of their time and funding to such a cause?

KEVIN MEINEKE

Manor Gardens

## Eskom hikes will short-circuit

WITH ALL the hype surrounding the request by Eskom asking for a 35 percent increase in tariffs each year for three years, there is a fundamental economic reality which is being overlooked - what is recognised by economists as "The Law of Diminishing Returns".

In summary, this law states that with fixed input costs there is a point where adding more variable costs, e.g. labour costs, tariffs etc, does not increase production or profits.

A corollary to this law is that there comes a point when a revenue body which aims to charge more rates does not necessarily increase its expected income. Those asked to pay these

rates make other arrangements to circumvent these punitive costs. In the case of Eskom consumers will more than likely use less electricity and use alternative sources of power.

The net result will be that its projected increase in income will not be realised. The only consequence of such a misguided tariff increase will be to hamper economic growth without resolving the underlying funding needs.

In this context the Law of Diminishing Returns should be read together with the well known Peter Principle which states that "in a corporate hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence".

What this means is that in a corporation members are promoted as long as they work competently.

Sooner or later they are promoted to a position in which they are no longer competent, i.e. in time every position in a corporation is occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out his or her duties.

The ex-CEO of Eskom, Jacob Maroga, who has been employed by Eskom for 14 years and who was dismissed, apparently after mismanaging this corporation, may be an example of the Peter Principle.

JOHN EALES

Southport

## We can't play with the health of fish eaters

THE WILDLIFE and Environment Society of South Africa and their Coastwatch Project were very concerned to see the mercury levels that have been found in fish caught off the coastline in the study being undertaken by a researcher from the CSIR (The Mercury, January 21).

While we believe and welcome this long overdue study, we are concerned for the health and well-being of those who harvest and consume marine resources as their main source of protein.

We are discharging pollutants, including heavy metals and persistent organic compounds, into the ocean through marine pipelines and storm water; through

discharges by air, groundwater or via our rivers. We are told that we have a very active coastline and this all conveniently "goes away".

However, these pollutants don't just "go away". They all end up somewhere and, in this case, it seems that "somewhere" might be in the fish that are caught and eaten.

We would like to see further investigations into the level of these pollutants, a health risk assessment undertaken and ways found to address this as a matter of urgency.

We cannot afford to play with the health of our people.

Environmental Co-ordinator  
Wessa KZN Region

ID DOLD

## Is this just another system going down the drain?

THE orange waste bag system was a fantastic idea, but not even a year later and what has happened to it?

We even labelled a bin with our orange bag campaign, for plastic and paper, and were so proud to be doing something for the environment. These were collected on the same day as the normal household waste, and eThekweni thanked everyone for helping in the recycling campaign.

I ran out of orange bags and phoned eThekweni to find out about the non-delivery of the bags. I was told that the relevant department would be notified after my name and address was taken.

Two weeks later and still no bags have been forthcoming. So now, has this campaign been shelved?

ESTELLE FENECH

Durban