

THE MERCURY

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Seeing The Light

LO AND behold, the lift does sometimes go to the top floor at the city hall. The eThekweni municipality's about-turn on the Christmas lights saga is a refreshing sign that city officials actually do sometimes listen to their constituents.

The decidedly insensitive decision to replace the traditional Christmas lights in Dr Pixley KaSeme (West) Street with bees, butterflies and flowers did not sit well with Durban residents. Their vociferous complaints, however, were brushed off by city lighting department manager Viren Ramprith. His explanation was that the child-friendly lights reflected a conscious decision to avoid "Christian-related decorations and any association with any religion".

Following outrage from Durban church leaders who said the lights should reflect a Christmas spirit or be taken down, Ramprith said the choice of lighting was not a move away from Christmas, but merely a theme to "bring in the holiday spirit".

Either way, said Mercury readers, the decision was insensitive and demeaned the importance of the religious holiday. Others argued that the city was merely being impartial by ensuring that no one religion was favoured over another.

But last Friday it was the more popular view which held sway as the bees and butterflies came down and bells and stars lit up the city sky.

It seems sanity prevailed, largely thanks to councillor Visvin Reddy who, as chairman of the municipality's infrastructure committee, has political oversight of electricity issues. In a letter to The Mercury he made it very clear that he shared the concerns of irate Durban residents.

He "agreed wholeheartedly" that the lights had no bearing on the Christmas period and should never have been erected.

Blaming city officials who acted on their own accord, without consulting councillors who are representatives of the public, Reddy promised that "attempts are under way to rectify the situation".

True to his word, the city's traditional Christmas lights are back and in the true spirit of Christmas we can now focus on the positive aspects of forgiveness and sharing.

Saturn's Secrets

ASTRONOMERS have always been fascinated by Saturn, our solar system's second largest planet, which was named for the Roman god of agriculture. In 1610, when Galileo first turned his rudimentary telescope on Saturn, he could see the planet and its rings.

He thought that the rings might be two large moons stuck to either side of Saturn. It was not until Dutch mathematician, astronomer and physicist Cristian Huygens used a better telescope that he realised Saturn had rings.

Since then, a lot has been discovered about this cosmic wonder that has 60 moons, including Titan, the second largest in the solar system. Only four spacecraft sent from Earth have visited Saturn. The first was Pioneer 11, in 1979, Voyager 1, in 1980, Voyager 2, in 1981, and Cassini, in 2004.

Saturn's magnificent rings have gripped the imagination for centuries. Planetary scientist Robin Canup proposes a new theory for the origin of Saturn's ring system, published in Nature this month. Based on computer simulations, Canup suggests that a moon about the size of Titan drifted too close to Saturn. Tidal forces pulled ice from the outer portions of the moon before the rocky core crashed into the planet 4.5 billion years ago.

Has the planet's rings mystery been solved at last?



You & Me
ROD SMITH

A READER writes: "My husband does not love me anymore. I am a jealous person and I have accused him of affairs and he always denies it. Last night he told me that we needed to be fair and that I needed to leave. It scares the living lights out of me when I imagine my life without him."

"He has been gone for most of the day. I don't want to call. I know that will probably make him angrier and more distant. I noticed also he is not wearing his wedding ring. It really hurts to be told that you are not loved when you still love the other person."

"I am in no shape, way, or form a perfect person. I have a temper just like he does. I would love to seek therapy, but he thinks that kind of thing is silly. I really think I've lost him forever. We have been married for eight years. I guess I am really feeling hopeless right now."

A: Victimhood is most unattractive – get yourself out of it. To assist you, please read *This Is Not the Story You Think It Is* by Laura Munson.

I would suggest it is essential reading for anyone (male or female) living in a threatened relationship.

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

Race, class and the Dewani case

Anni Dewani's murder speaks volumes about social abandonment of the poor, vulnerability to media racism, fear and prejudice

THE ANNI Dewani case has gripped the attention of the nation and generated an incredible media frenzy.

Of course, we cannot come to any final conclusion until all the allegations and counter-allegations have been tested in court. But although there may yet be surprises to come on the basis of the information currently in the public domain, it certainly seems that the police have a strong case against Shrien Dewani.

Parts of the case that are still not clear are explanations around how an educated Swedish woman had become so docile, not being party to any decision about the trip. Should we include in the entire dynamic that she was not as docile as he would have liked and this contributed to her being murdered?

This case also tells us a lot about our society and world. For a start if Dewani is guilty, this murder would be a transnational version of various American murders in which white people have driven to a black neighbourhood and shot their wives on the assumption that the police and general

public would automatically assume that black men must be responsible.

Racism is also present in the way in which some of the British media have responded to the case assuming that our police must be incompetent and that an upstanding British subject like Dewani could not possibly have planned such a diabolical act.

If Dewani is guilty we have every right to be furious that he thought that he could cover such a heinous crime by making sure that it happened in Gugulethu.

In a sense that would mean an assumption that racism would be an alibi. But there is also the reality, the absolutely shocking reality, that there have been 700 murders in the past five years in Gugulethu.

In addition, a high number of women are murdered and raped in Gugulethu and other townships, often not even reported by the media.

This is where class enters this story. If there had been



IMRAAN BUCCUS

700 murders in the past five years in Umhlanga Rocks or Sandton, the media and civil society would be up in arms. But in a class society, our lives do not count equally and all these murders in Gugulethu pass without much response.

This is one aspect of what the brilliant Hungarian scholar Anna Selmecei has called the "social abandonment of the poor" in South Africa.

The unequal state of school education systems, the persistence of informal settlements and so on are other symptoms of this broader malaise.

By treating some lives as less valuable than others we have, as a nation, made ourselves vulnerable to the racism of the British media and, perhaps, Dewani too.

And the fact that one of the

suspects has alleged police torture, which is increasingly being normalised in post-apartheid South Africa in both criminal and political cases, has hardly helped our standing as a genuine democracy.

Class also enters this story in that while there were moments during the apartheid struggle, especially in the days of the United Democratic Front, where many people took equality seriously, we have very quickly collapsed into a rather extreme version of the sort of class society that equates money with virtue.

But you don't have to look for people eating sushi off naked women to find this conflation of wealth and virtue.

It is, for instance, endemic in civil society where it is

routinely assumed that middle-class activists will enlighten the benighted and unwashed masses.

It is also quite common in the media where the virtue of middle-class people is often assumed while that of poor people, especially poor black people, has to be proved over and over again.

The shock that some people have shown at the idea that a rich man could be a killer, and the resignation that some people have shown at the idea that ordinary residents of Gugulethu could be killers, indicate how deeply these irrational prejudices have infected our society.

The reality is that while rates of some sorts of crime are higher in poor communities, this is simply a result of a lack of opportunities in these communities.

Rich people placed in the same situation would make similar choices.

Moreover, even though rates of crime are high in

places like Gugulethu, most people in these sorts of places would never dream of committing a crime and are, despite their difficult circumstances, entirely decent.

Until we can separate our fear of crime, which is just one manifestation of our deeper fear of evil, from our prejudices around race and class, our thinking about the reality of human evil will continually be infected with irrational prejudice.

The reality is that you can be rich and British and be deeply evil.

You can also be poor and African and be an entirely decent human being.

If we were without prejudice, every murder in Gugulethu would get the same attention as Anni's killing. But that is a world apart from the reality of our society.

We have a long way to go before we can call this society just or decent.

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URGENT ACTION NEEDED ON MISLAID POLICE FIREARMS

TO DATE, South African Police Service members have "lost" their firearms with impunity – indeed in less than 1 percent of cases of loss or theft were any charges brought against the member.

Over the past five years, SAPS members have "lost" 13 438 firearms – the vast majority of which remain unaccounted for, and nestled in the hand of a criminal near you.

This problem of SAPS officers losing their firearms is neither new

nor insignificant; indeed last month the SAPS admitted to me that they had lost 3 226 in the past year; a 17 percent increase over the previous year.

Only now does the minister, on receipt of my latest questions (The Mercury, December 8), suddenly announce that SAPS members will be fired from the service if they are seen to have been negligent.

How? He has certainly never

succeeded in doing it before today.

The SAPS has reached a stage where it ignores 80 percent of Independent Complaints Directorate recommendations in respect of police criminality – but prefers to deal "internally" with such matters.

It seems there is one law of the land for citizens and, increasingly, another for SAPS members who perform criminal acts. Currently only one case arises for every 100

SAPS firearms "lost", and there are even fewer convictions.

In January the SAPS spent R16 million on 4 000 new pistols – just to replace the ones that had been "lost".

As such, this shoddy firearm management has been doing nothing more nor less than fuelling the illegal arms trade.

With legal firearm holders having to jump through hoops to re-licence their legal firearms, that

R16m could have been better spent in sorting out that sorry situation.

Meanwhile, there are questions to be answered such as: how does one lose a firearm? And are there serial offenders, who are actually selling the firearms out the back door to boost their income?

The minister is currently all talk, but, Sir, where's the action?

DIANNE KOHLER BARNARD
DA shadow minister of police

Stop rhino slaughter

HOW LONG is this country going to tolerate the horrors of rhino slaughter?

Are there top government officials who have sold their souls to the miscreants, otherwise units of the SA army, who spend most of their time sitting on their backsides, would have been called in to support SANParks staff by now. Not really a difficult decision considering the seriousness of the situation. It

should be made known to potential poachers that they stand to lose their lives if caught. It is already known that certain veterinary surgeons have been involved, which I find especially depressing being a retired vet myself.

Carry on like this, SA, and I promise your main draw for tourists will dry up.

PETER HILL
St Lucia

Christmas feeling restored

I AM pleased that the "Rites of Spring" decorations have come down and been replaced with decorations more appropriate for the Christmas period.

I also notice that the reason given for the abysmal decorations was that no particular religion is to be represented.

To this nonsense I say get over it. This period is the celebration of Jesus's birthday and has been so for ages.

If there are any other "religious celebrations" in this period, let them also be represented, but the act of taking Christ out of Christmas is heresy and preposterous. Thanks for allowing reason to return and replacing the ridiculous lights with those more appropriate to the period being celebrated.

JOHN KNOTTENBELT
Durban

Not really 'a better life for all' is it?

ISN'T IT true that the ANC promised "a better life for all", and I presume that was meant especially for their own supporters?

But it would appear that the ANC councillors are getting so scared that Durban is considering providing personal VIP security guards at

a massive additional cost to the ratepayers (The Mercury, December 1).

And who are they scared of? What sort of society has been spawned by the "better life" ANC?

VA VOLKER
Pietermaritzburg

Deliberately misled?

WHILE I agree that the ICC's beverages are a fiasco, they are not to blame for "lack of sales" (The Mercury, December 8).

But at least when Big Concerts see that sales are not going to be profitable they have the sense to cancel in good time.

The Beach Boys' concert was advertised on East Coast Radio, but to the promoter's detriment, listeners were told on December 2 that "you must hurry if you still want tickets, as they are selling out fast" and then we were slapped with a cancellation on the eve of the show.

Some people were already on the road to Durban on the Friday and we had bought our tickets as soon as the show was

advertised and have had to forego the interest that money could have been earning.

This was poor planning on the promoter's part. I have worked for many shows and have experienced the situation where an artist arrives, but refuses to go on and do their gig if the money does not change hands.

An interesting thought... was East Coast Radio "set up" to give us false advertising on the Thursday?

While I know that Durban residents are notoriously lethargic when it comes to sales, they are not necessarily at fault here.

MAUREEN DONALDSON
Durban

No going back on preserving Vetch's

ARTHUR Konigkramer, writing about Vetch's Pier (The Mercury, November 26 and December 1) reminds me of a leopard that has lost its spots.

He was once the environmental reporter at the Daily News and published pleasant articles about the Vetch's area, and was also a critic of polluters and those that degraded the land and sea shore.

Konigkramer must be reminded that the Vetch's area is a sensitive, pristine, officially registered, proclaimed marine reserve where many species of

exotic and endangered fish and other marine animals find shelter and breed.

This area should remain untouched and be declared a heritage site.

Records at the Environmental Affairs Marine and Coastal Pollution Unit in Cape Town document my involvement when Vetch's was proclaimed in the late 1970s.

The laws of the land do not allow a marine reserve to be deproclaimed.

MIKE BLOXHAM
Durban

Cost of higher wages

PERHAPS a chartered accountant or financial wizard is better qualified to offer a solution to the severe problem of unemployment that bedevils thousands of families in our country.

There is no room for empty or loose politically motivated promises that will not put food on the table of these victims of want and poverty.

We are a developing country and not a First World one.

Our world view should therefore be different and our problems demand our own solutions.

I hope labour unions will consider modifying or tempering their demands for

higher wages that inevitably lead to huge problems.

It is logical to conclude that employers, for fear of crippling strikes, are forced to accept the demands of unions and often not of the striking workers.

In order to safeguard their own survival they will cut back on labour costs by simply reducing numbers.

Is it not better to have 1 000 jobs that will support 1 000 families and their dependants than 500 higher-wage-demanding workers who will support only 500 families and their dependants?

Just asking.
R MUNISAMY
Isipingo Hills