

THE MERCURY
FOUNDED IN 1852

Here And Now

*If you vote for the ANC, you will go to heaven.
If you cast your ballot for the opposition it's a vote for the devil.*

IF THESE comments were made by a small-fry politician, they could be ignored or laughed off.

Unfortunately, it is the view of the president of South Africa and in a nation where Christianity runs deep, it is no trifling matter.

No matter how hard the Presidency or the ANC tried to downplay Zuma's views, the fact is he said it.

And it was insulting to the many South Africans who are Christians but not card-carrying members of the ANC.

Our census shows that close to 80 percent of the country's citizens are practising Christians. We live in a society where the wrath of God and our ancestors is taken seriously. It is not light-hearted to describe opposing political parties as parties of hell.

The SA Council of Churches expressed its concern yesterday and said it hoped to meet the president over his "problematic" statement.

While the SACC noted ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu's view that Zuma was speaking metaphorically, it nevertheless regarded Zuma's weekend comments as blasphemous and "worrying" ahead of an election.

Surely someone in the ANC or the Presidency could have told Zuma that a claim to hold the keys to the gates of heaven would be highly inflammatory.

The association of power and religion is no small thing. History is full of it. It is all too often devastating for the societies in which it takes hold.

In particular, those who arrogate to themselves the right to determine the rules of religions have been shown time and again to be happy to use these to trump the tenets of democracy.

Mthembu is disingenuous over his disdain for those who have expressed concern.

We simply do not need such politicking in South Africa.

To the president we say: rather stick to the here and now – those bread-and-butter issues, including poverty and joblessness, that we face on Earth.

Trust Is Vital

WASHINGTON has been sending hopelessly mixed messages about Egypt since the popular revolt against the repressive regime of Hosni Mubarak began. First the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, declared the Mubarak regime "stable". A few days later she demanded an "orderly transition" of power. This was followed at the weekend by remarks from Frank Wisner, Barack Obama's envoy to Cairo last week, stating that "President Mubarak's continued leadership is crucial".

These muddled messages were widely believed to reflect a conflict between the twin US goals of promoting stability in the region and promoting democracy. But there is a more sinister explanation.

Wisner, a former US ambassador to Egypt, turns out to be employed by an American lobbying and law firm, Patton Boggs, which works for the Mubarak regime and "leading Egyptian commercial families". This is a straightforward conflict of interest.

Perhaps the White House called Wisner out of retirement without subjecting him to adequate scrutiny. A less generous interpretation is that the US is, once again, working covertly to serve its own interests in the Middle East.

Trust is vital. In the light of this revelation about Wisner, the White House has a clear test. It needs to repudiate Wisner's views and apologise for having sent such a compromised representative to Cairo. If it fails to do this, the Egyptian people are liable to draw the conclusion that the Obama administration, despite its fine words about liberty and democracy, is not on their side. – The Independent



You & Me
ROD SMITH

INSIGHT 2: You are a leader. Yes. And the most important person you lead is yourself. If you run a multinational corporation, a family business or the kitchen in your own home, your ability to self-lead will spill over into and influence all your relationships and everything over which you have influence, no matter how grand or humble that may be.

Sound, thoughtful, clear self-leadership is pivotal to improving your level of functioning in your relationships and circles of influence.

When anxiety increases, lower-functioning leaders (more anxious leaders) tend to become authoritarian. They blame others, require scapegoats and become less self-aware and more other-focused. They micro-manage and write new rules, believing that doing so will provide relief.

Action/challenge: Create a private personal plan that is separate (apart) from your prevailing roles, issues and anxieties. In other words, don't allow your roles, successes or failures to determine your identity. Write, draw and make notes about the manner in which you will self-lead, so that blindsiding problems and pressures will be less likely to shape you or dictate your behaviour when anxieties intensify.

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When anger outweighs fear, a regime is in danger

Falling in love with a most idiosyncratic country and its people during a visit to Cairo



Devi's Diary
DEVI RAJAB

IN LIFE, the consequences are often more important than the event and so the question arises: will the will of the people prevail? Will Egypt lose its struggle against militant Islam?

And in the event that this happens in the Arab world's most populous and important state, what would it mean for moderate Islam in general, for Arab-Israeli relations, and American foreign policy in the Middle East? Revolutions just don't happen out of a context. They are made by historical circumstances and by the extent of oppression and by the special character of a people.

The Egyptian people have always been passionate about their leaders. They adored and revered Gamal Abdel Nasser and when he died it took them a while to endear themselves to his deputy, Anwar Sadat, who had made the first inroads into initiating Arab-Israeli talks.

He was the first president to visit Jerusalem, but had not been assassinated who knows how long he would have survived.

After 30 years of unproductive rule, Egyptians are now rightfully tired, hungry and fed up with their plight.

But one may ask the question as indeed most Africans do about Zimbabwe: why did it take so long to erupt? There is the theory that dictatorships are maintained through a strategic balance between fear and anger, which is inflicted on the people through a system of tight policing and fragmented gains.

As long as the fear of the regime's power outweighs the people's anger, its position is relatively secure.

But if and when this balance tips and feelings of anger begin to supersede those of fear, then given opportunity and circumstances it is safe to assume that a regime's days are numbered.

As the battle for the Egyptian future is under way, challenging pre- and post-revolution analyses, my thoughts stray back to the mid 1970s when as a student I went on a visit to Cairo and fell in love with a most idiosyncratic country and its people.

Pariah

As a South African living under Nationalist rule, I was like most of my fellow citizens, black and white, a pariah in most countries of the world then. They did not distinguish between the oppressed and oppressors.

What mattered above race, colour and religion was the nationality of one's passport. South Africa was bad news. My sister and her German husband were lecturing at the American University in Cairo and I was enticed to join them in what promised to be an exotic destination of pharaohs and pyramids.

One glance at my name, sex and status resulted in a blanket rejection. "Sorry no South Africans allowed in Egypt."

"Why?" I asked naively. "Because SA is a racist country," they replied emphatically.

"But I am a black oppressed in my country... why are you discriminating against me?"

The word discrimination did not sit well with the official who was presenting a human rights image.

I was then assigned to a small dusty room with an armed guard. The walls were plastered with large Al Fataar posters.

In the heat and dust of the atmosphere, my guard grew tired and sleepy and so he instructed me to lay my head down on my bag and fall asleep as well.

It was all too bizarre. I soon got a message delivered to me from my brother-in-law to say "don't leave, we have the Ethiopian ambassador and the OAU officials working on the job to get you in".

It was Friday, the equivalent of Sunday in the West. I was then allowed to go to the transit hotel in the airport and spent the night there.

The next morning I changed my attire to a sari and descended to find a completely different reception from the same immigration officials who had badgered me

the day before. I was welcomed and given free coffee and regaled with every Indian film they had seen, replete with songs and names of famous film stars.

They were like their former president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who rumour has it was madly in love with famous Bengali actress Shamila Tagore. After some administrative juggling I was finally allowed to enter Cairo and the month-long experience was absolutely amazing. I found the streets of Cairo to be like no other streets of the world.

Every corner, every crevice, every alleyway seemed to have been inhabited. Crowds of pedestrians mingled with the desert dust which found its way into every aperture of body and clothing.

There were people hanging out of buses. Was it possible, I thought, that over 50 million people making up one third of the Arab world could survive in a small section of the Arabian Desert, grappling with modern times and with one another in their ancient land?

And yet they did so in splendour and in squalor of old Edwardian mansions mostly in disrepair, large unattended lawns, broad avenues shaded by what I recog-

nised to be "Dutch apple" trees which may have been traversed by carriage and horse at one time.

But Cairo is a city of many parts depicting different lifestyles at particular historical periods of its existence.

As one meanders through Cairo's alleys, along with its temples, mosques and pyramids, one goes deeper into the richness of its past with Roman aqueducts, medieval mosques and the famous al-Fishawi's, a Napoleonic era coffeehouse.

We were shown the intricacies of wooden lattice balconies from which women could peer out into the busy alleyways without being seen by outsiders.

Chic

Arabesque inscriptions abided side by side with Coptic crosses in a city which for centuries had been the citadel of Islamic learning and thought – enlightened, civilised yet secular and progressively chic. As a foreigner I observed two sides to this fascinating city.

While life was gracious on the one side of the Nile, where late evening dinner parties were lavishly attended by opulent Cairenes who spoke easily in French, Arabic and English, discussing philosophy and politics with passion and giving one the impression that Egypt was the centre of the universe, life across in the

slums was harsh for the masses. At a given moment one could see 10 adults deftly emerge out of a small house boat on the Nile where large sewer rats were often seen scurrying by.

Here children were raised and cooking and ablutions went on in adjacent spaces.

Each side knew its place and kept a link through the baksheesh system of giving and receiving. There were elements of common ground where they met as equals as they prayed together five times a day, placing their rugs wherever they found a space inside or outside of mosques and Coptic churches. They were loyal and proud citizens.

On one occasion, I recall when we were being hounded by a group of young men trying to make a pass at us, several older men upon seeing this came to us to apologise for this bad behaviour.

They then confronted the boys, slapped them firmly and advised them never to behave untowardly towards foreign guests.

I saw elements of this responsible behaviour on TV recently when women protesters resorted to picking up litter left behind by others, commenting that this was their country.

Perhaps this is the kernel of what makes a revolution happen. When people feel sufficiently unified as nationals, they can determine their fate.

Hopefully they will be able to sustain their national feelings well after the revolution to enable them to rebuild themselves into a vibrant nation. This will not be an easy task.

E-mail merletter@inl.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.

OUR HERITAGE SOLD FOR A SONG

THE ARTICLE on Toyota destroying indigenous trees disgusted me (The Mercury, February 3).

Let's consider that on Arbor Day last year, it was reported that a Toyota executive planted one tree. That's right: one tree.

A company with enough money to plant a million trees and they plant one tree on Arbor Day.

Now some time later it is

reported that they have destroyed part of the Ezimbokodweni coastal indigenous forest for a container storage site.

How they possibly got this kind of deal by paying eThekweni R1 million for our heritage is truly hard to believe.

Surely eThekweni went way beyond their mandate in even considering this. According to the books I have

on hand, many indigenous trees are protected. How did Toyota get past this?

It is stated that the R1m will be used for the restoration and conservation of coastal forests.

However, the amount paid falls far short of replacing even a small part of what they have destroyed. Depending on the age of the forest, they could never give us back the trees or the years of growth.

Someone should have checked the cost of buying and planting trees and seen that R1m for destroying our heritage is a steal for Toyota.

I guess all I am able to do is write this letter and ensure that I plant as many trees as I can to offset the damage that a mighty corporation has done to our beautiful country.

Then again, I can do much more. I will certainly never buy a Toyota product. I will

also talk friends, family and business associates out of ever buying a Toyota product.

Will my actions hurt them? Highly unlikely. I would, however, have done something to counter the damage to our beautiful forests and have made as many people as possible aware.

RON NEL

Balgowan

Replacing Springbok with sponsor's logo is prostitution

THE MIGRATION of the Springbok emblem from the left of the national rugby jersey to the right in favour of the Protea emblem is understandable in the light of our history.

However, the latest bow to Mammon has swamped both

the Springbok and Protea emblems, with the huge "Absa" lettering across the front of the jerseys.

Soon the team will be known as the "Absa" team and not the "Springbok" team!

To my mind this is a form of

prostitution of the worst kind.

Where is the voice of sanity that can reject this usurpation of the national rugby jersey by sponsors?

MARGE MITCHELL

Hillcrest

Telkom really answered distress call

I WISH to compliment Telkom for their speedy, polite and professional service. Our business phone and fax lines in Glenwood went dead on Friday, January 28, which I reported.

On the Monday morning, a Telkom technician identified the problem as cable theft.

On Tuesday, a temporary repair was made of the cable for the phone. On Wednesday, our fax line was repaired.

All along, I was updated via SMS regarding progress.

RICHARD STEELE

Durban

Why no praise for Robert Mugabe?

WHEN will the world wake up and recognise the remarkable leadership and unquestionably huge accomplishments of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe?

This man, who liberated his country from the vile colonial-imperialist Western grasp, is now being vilified by blatantly untrue Western media barons intent on making him appear to be a senile African dictator who has ruined his country!

What nonsense, as how can his country be suffering? Just look at the national health

system, so strong that 120-year-old citizens still make it to the polls to vote for Mugabe to ensure the good governance of their nation! Surely these old veterans would not vote for any opposition if Mugabe was not the only option.

And what of the amazing economic wealth he has created for the population? Every single Zimbabwean citizen is a dollar trillionaire, when before there were not a handful of millionaires! But the tyrannical West goes and devalues the brilliant strength

of the currency to prevent Zimbabweans from buying them out and taking over their economies, which were built on all the Zimbabwean wealth so ruthlessly plundered from Africa's breadbasket nation.

I suggest Mugabe stand for election as UN secretary-general or that he lead the African Union so that we can all become trillionaires who are truly free of Western-imposed shackles.

ROBERT NICOLAI

Howick

Municipality must punish rates defaulters

WHY DOES the municipality tolerate the non-payment of services?

When the limit of a person's deposit has been reached, the service should be cut off, and if the person wants it reconnected, then another deposit and reconnection fee should be paid. We recently

had a situation where tenants defaulted on rent and, as we found out later, also on electricity payments.

Thankfully they left to find other accommodation.

When the new tenant tried to get electricity connected to the unit, they were informed that the outstanding balance

had to be paid before it could be done. As the owners of the property, we had to pay the outstanding electricity account of R12 400 which, when added to the loss in rental income, is unacceptable.

NEVILLE MARTIN

Cowie's Hill