

**THE MERCURY**  
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## Tired Old Excuses

FOR HOW much longer are we to hear that a "lack of capacity" and "skills shortages" are to blame for the backlog in the delivery of basic services?

The two evils are often trotted out when government ministers and public servants are taken to task for not meeting targets.

Last week, our Housing MEC Maggie Govender reverted to this hoary excuse when Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale announced that KwaZulu-Natal had lost R200 million because of a failure to spend its allocated funds.

This when thousands of people still live in shack settlements or other people's backyards and thousands more are regularly displaced because of fires or heavy rains.

The government's task of housing the millions still living informally is a formidable one, which is compounded by several factors beyond its control. And insufficient capacity and a shortage of skills in the housing sector may well be very real problems – but they have been for more than a decade, and can no longer be trotted out as excuses for the slow pace of delivery.

Addressing the capacity and skills situation is long overdue and it is time citizens were told what really is being done to tackle the housing backlog.

Decent housing is a basic human right and is the first step towards restoring dignity to poor and displaced people. For these very reasons, our leaders should also be ashamed of forcing hundreds of people in this day to use plastic bags or communal mobile toilets in low-cost developments because sewerage infrastructure is yet to be connected to the new houses.

Basic infrastructure should surely be part and parcel of any new housing development, and if it is not, then developers and the municipalities dishing out these tenders should be taken to task. Quality, and not just quantity, should be the yardstick.

## Driven Into Hunger

THE BRITISH government science office's latest report, *The Future of Food and Farming*, has an impossibly dry title. But it deals with a subject that will have profound implications for every human on the planet: the ability of mankind to feed itself over the coming century.

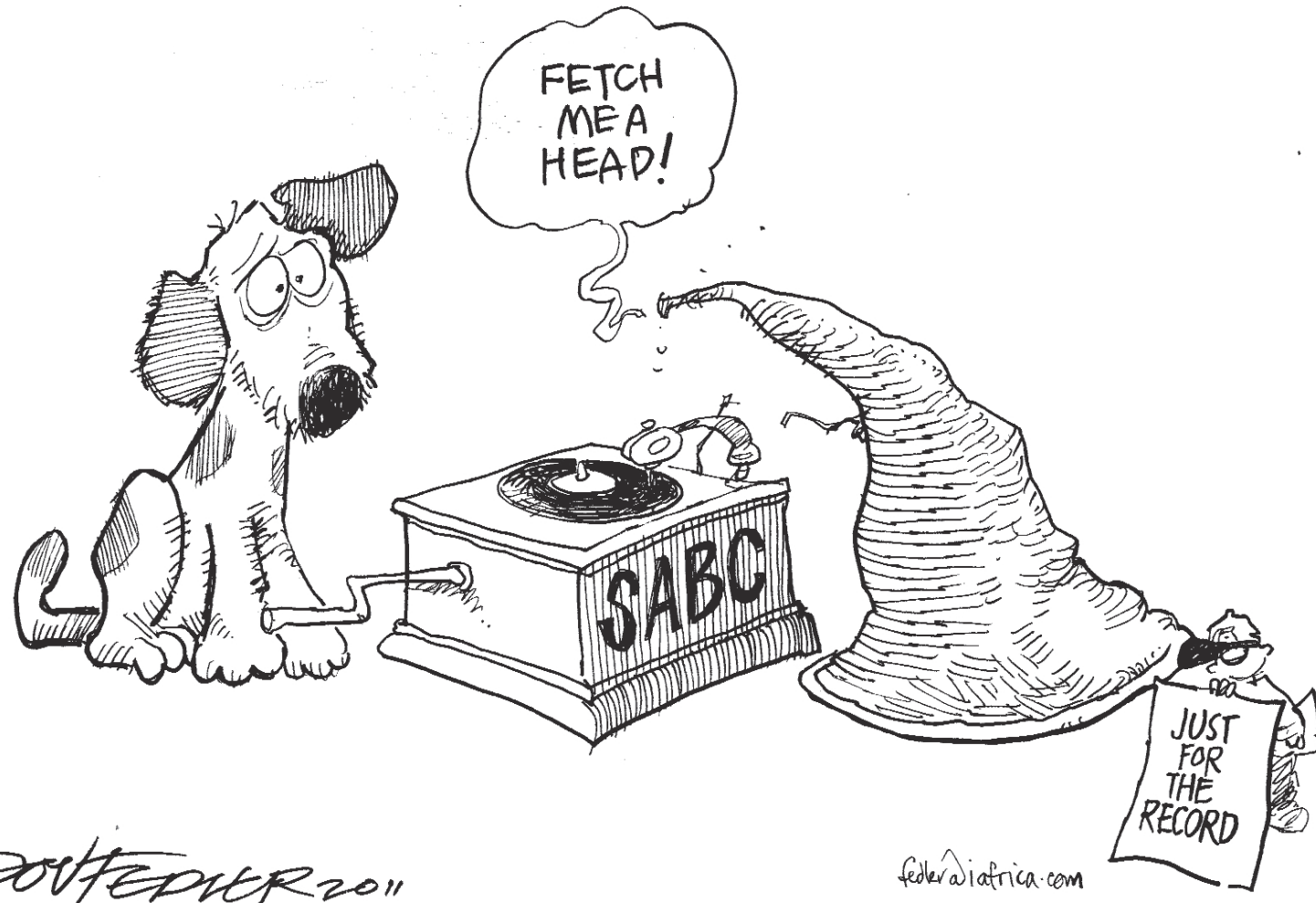
The picture painted by the report of the existing efficiency of global agriculture is depressing. But the report's forecast is that the situation will get bleaker still.

Urbanisation, climate change, environmental degradation, population growth and changing lifestyles will create a "perfect storm" that could drive global food prices up by 50 percent by the middle of the century. Hundreds of millions more people will be driven into hunger if that happens.

Time to avert this grim future is short. John Beddington, the government's chief scientific adviser, argued yesterday that "we have 20 years to deliver something of the order of 40 percent more food".

Genetic modification of crops will most likely need to be a part of the world's response now.

Much of the criticism that the corporate GM sector attracts is entirely reasonable. But outright rejectionism of genetically modified crop technology is not. The potential of GM is vast. A strain of crop, modified to be drought or salt-resistant, could bring vast areas of presently useless land under cultivation. – The Independent



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You & Me  
ROD SMITH

Q: You adopted two children at birth as a single man. You are white and they are both black. Three questions:

1. Did you ever think of your actions as selfish, given that there are thousands of couples trying to adopt?
2. How did you handle the children as infants – men don't usually do that part of rearing babies?
3. Is race an issue? (Questions contracted from several sources into one reply).

A: Thanks for your loving concern. In both instances my children (now 12 and 8) came to me – as in I did nothing to search for children.

1. Thulani's mother approached me. Nathanael's arrival was "out of the blue" when a friend knew he was "alone" and available at the local state hospital. I was present at Thulani's birth and met Nathanael when he was 8 days old.

2. It is a myth that women and not men can nurture a baby. Any reasonable man, given my circumstances, could and would do the same. I loved the late night feedings and all that went with loving infants.

3. Race is not an issue for me.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to [Rod@DifficultRelationships.com](mailto:Rod@DifficultRelationships.com)

## Reflections from Rwanda

*There can be no place in a democracy for any sort of racism, ethnic chauvinism and jingoistic language*

HERE in Kigali, Rwanda, where I write my column from this week, the birds sing with the rising sun, people make small talk in the streets and life seems as ordinary as can be. I feel, as many people do when visiting South Africa for the first time, that the horror of the past seems almost like a spectral nightmare, rather than a reality.

It was in 1994 that the Rwandan Patriotic Front, an army largely comprised of Tutsi refugees, invaded Rwanda from Uganda.

In response to the Tutsi invasion, many Hutu people became radicalised and moved towards the Hutu Power extremists.

Human beings were described as cockroaches on radio stations, ethnic fervour mounted and the Hutu Power group, the Akazu, directed the genocide of up to a million people.

The actual killing was carried out by two Hutu militias associated with political parties: the Interahamwe and the Impuzamugambi.

The term genocide is used

loosely these days. Apartheid was entirely perverse, but it was not genocide. Farm murders in contemporary South Africa are tragic, but they are also not genocide. Genocide is the attempt to annihilate a whole people.

The first genocide of the last century was the mass killing of Herero people in what was then South West Africa by German colonialism.

The Germans then took what they had learnt in Namibia back to Europe and the second genocide of the last century was the Shoah – the holocaust against the European Jews.

In each case the attempt to annihilate a people began by denying the humanity of the people that were targeted.

When we say "never again" we must mean it. Genocide might end with the machetes of the Rwandan genocide or the death factories of the European genocide, but it begins by denying the humanity of a



IMRAAN BUCCUS

group of people.

In our country we have to be very clear that there can be no place in a democracy for any sort of racism, ethnic prejudice or the recklessly dehumanising language deployed by people such as Julius Malema.

When the campaign to elect Jacob Zuma as president showed signs of ethnic chauvinism, it took us a step backwards as a country. The attacks on people from the Eastern Cape in a number of shack settlements around Durban in 2009 showed just how dangerous, and, in fact, despicable, the political mobilisation of ethnicity is. At times the recent commemoration of the 150th year since the first indentured workers arrived in Durban from India

also took on a disturbingly jingoistic edge.

A person's race, their ethnicity and the language that they speak tell you nothing at all about how they are as an individual. Any collapse into the laziness of racism or ethnic prejudice is not just irredeemably stupid; it is also dangerous.

We also need to be acutely aware of the dangers of militarising politics. When political parties start to have their own militias, the democratic covenant has been abandoned. This is far from being unique to Africa – there are, for instance, parts of India where parties, such as the Hindu fascist BJP, have their own armed wings.

If we are to be faithful to the promise of our democ-

racy, born in the same year as the disaster of the Rwandan genocide, we have to be quite clear that there can be no tolerance for any descent into political disputes being settled violently.

It's a fact, not usually taken seriously enough in elite circles, that party politics is often violent on the ground here in Durban and that the elite have seen to have given this violence a degree of consent.

The inimitable Mary de Haas (a violence monitor) has done essential work in cataloguing the increasing political violence at the base of our society, but it needs to be drawn to much wider attention.

But as devastating as it is to consider the full horror of the Rwandan genocide, as well as the war in the Congo and Robert Mugabe's rapacious regime in Harare, Africa is not all bad news. When poor Indian people and poor African people stand shoulder to shoulder in infor-

mal settlements, we know that progressive politics continues to bloom.

And in Tunisia a popular rebellion has left dictators across North Africa and the Middle East quaking in their gilded boots.

If the Rwandan genocide and the war in the Congo have been the biggest disasters in recent African history, the routing of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali has been the greatest step forward for Africa since the end of apartheid.

We have to mourn the tragedies and use them to firm up our resolve to say, with the great Bishop Desmond Tutu, "never, never and never again". But we also have to celebrate the victories and say to the tyrants everywhere that the people will not be defeated forever.

Being in Rwanda, a country with such a traumatic recent history makes you reflect deeply on these issues.

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

E-mail [merletter@inl.co.za](mailto: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.

## WHY DON'T WE HAVE BUSES YET?

THE MUNICIPALITY'S continued bungling of the Durban buses is a disgrace.

What is the reason for this complete lack of delivery? Is it a lack of government funding?

Then how come Cape Town has a functioning bus system? Is it too obvious to suggest that this is because they have a DA-led municipality?

Imagine Durban, the council's long-term planning project, asks us to imagine what we want Durban to be in

the future. As part of their action plan they state that successful cities have efficient, effective and affordable public transport options for their citizens.

A functioning bus system is not a privilege, but a right that all citizens are entitled to now, and not at some point in the distant future.

Public transport is the most basic of services that the municipality should provide and one that is most critical to the poor majority – the very people our democratic government is supposed to

represent. This saga has dragged on for years now. It's a damning indictment of the ineptitude and incompetence of our ANC municipality that they have failed to resolve the issue at all.

Even our current national police commissioner became embroiled at one point and promised to resolve the crisis. That was a year and a half ago. Yet another unfulfilled promise.

Durban  
GARETH LYNCH

## Empowering children to live with difference

THE PITFALLS of parenting loomed large in these, the first days of grade one.

As my 6-year-old granddaughter went gladly and expectantly to her community school of over 1 000 children, there were tears and excitement in the family: out into the big wide world she went. Books, routines, and dealing with a world of difference.

Insular realities were tested as she emerged from the family cocoon. That interminable journey the wrestling with "otherness" began. Take for instance, language and accent.

Home she came with her little stories... "Today I met another little girl, and

mummy, her name is Onion". "The hair of the little girl who sits next to me is very smelly. I want to ask our teacher to please tell her mummy to wash it for her."

How does a parent respond? Wise parenting penetrates to value issues that lie at the heart of the human experience. Encounters with difference highlight the stuff of the human rights stories of each of us, requiring subtle responses.

As we "become" parents in the psychological sense of the word, we are busy "becoming" more ourselves. We are "empowered" as we flesh out the pros and cons of our advice, deepen our insights, integrate

our values and live and test them through our comments and actions.

Enlightenment flourishes with each "best shot" we take at coming to terms with possibility.

To use Richard Pithouse's image (*The Mercury*, January 21, "The Bulldozing of Inconvenient Realities"), it is the earthing of those fragile beautiful butterflies born of our dangerous dreams and illusions.

Such a good foundation requires alignment with what we parents understand about balancing human rights, respecting others and ourselves, living a moral life, all adapted appropriately to the

developmental age of the child – the unveiling of innocence, as epitomised in Voltaire's *Candide*.

"Empowering" is about building inner strength from which flows an inner discipline that guides our actions.

"Empowering" requires an imaginative use of authority of a sentient kind, not of the bullying kind. Easier to train the young in survival habits (those of hygiene, wise eating and diligent study); more demanding to introduce them to living in a social world, to the intricacies of living kindly and successfully with "difference".

Durban  
DESI HALSE

## Taxi owners thumb noses at authorities

I NOTICE that the eThekweni Municipality is still struggling to recover millions of rands owed to them in outstanding traffic fines by errant taxi drivers.

There is something wrong here in that if I hire a car and get caught speeding, the fine doesn't get sent to me personally, it gets sent to the car hire company.

If they cannot track me down, then they become liable for the penalty.

If a person ran a fleet of trucks and employed drivers to operate them, and those drivers

were ticketed by the Road Traffic Inspectorate, the fines would be sent to the employer.

The onus would then be on the employer to make payment to the relevant authority.

When registering vehicles, it is mandatory to provide a valid postal address. Surely the licensing authority would not allow the registrant to leave the address field blank?

If a person has the money to buy a car, it is reasonable to assume that they have enough money to open a P O Box.

It would also be reasonable to assume that if the fines

against that vehicle were not paid, further renewal of the licence would be refused and the vehicle owner would be summoned to appear in court.

So what is the problem? As it is, there appears to be one set of rules applicable to taxi drivers and another for all other road users.

So can we suckers that dutifully pay our fines on time now assume that taxi drivers and owners are exempt from paying traffic fines?

Durban  
PETER WORMAN

## There are none so blind...

TO ROMANIUS Zulu, I say there are none so blind as those who will not see, "Government on the right track" (*The Mercury*, January 19).

A senior minister in the ANC, Trevor Manuel, has finally acknowledged that the government is "failing to deliver quality services to the poor".

He went on to say the government had "failed to monitor performance". His words, not the media's.

The Western Province, run by the DA, is the only province to balance its books (*The Mercury*, January 20). All other provinces, run by the ANC, cannot or will not balance their books. So how is your government on the right track?

Durban  
BARRIE LOVELL

## Monkeys victims of human intrusion

WRITERS of letters regarding monkeys should be aware that the reason why they are coming into suburban gardens on a regular basis is because we, the human race, have destroyed so much of their natural habitat and this is continuing unabated.

The words of the song "They paved paradise and put up a

parking lot" is now sadly true.

People who have problems should contact one of the monkey organisations (some numbers are 031 564 1319; 082 659 4711 (Steve Smit) and speak to them for advice on feeding stations within one's property. These are placed away from the house and have proved successful in keeping monkeys

out of homes.

We live in Africa and wildlife is part of our heritage. If people cannot make the effort to live harmoniously with animals, then we suggest they live in a flat on a city street.

Durban  
CHRISTINE NELSON & LOUISE BENNETT

## Information sought on Gordon Road Girls'

I AM writing the history of Gordon Road Girls' School, Durban, which is celebrating its centenary in 2012.

We are seeking photographs of Florida Road as it looked between 1912 and 1917, and of

Gordon Road from 1917 onwards.

Also, I should like to know where the Glamis Hotel was situated in Florida Road as it was on this site that the original school stood.

I should be grateful for any photographs or information sent to [enquiries@grgs.co.za](mailto:enquiries@grgs.co.za) (for my attention).

Durban  
PATRICK COYNE

## Thanks, all you slow coaches

THIS is just a note of thanks to all those motorists travelling at a snail's pace in the second and third lane from the left on the M45 at peak times.

In so doing, they leave the left lane open for me and one or two others to cruise along at the legal limit (100km/h).

Bluff  
GARTH JOHNSON