

## Brave Principles

THE ACCUSATIONS and name-calling in the ANC-led alliance are triggered by a common worrying factor – corruption. From labels such as “political hyenas”, and “predatory state” to “tenderpreneurs” and “ZEE”, all these point to a rot in our body politic.

As much as they are a disturbing trend, it is heartening when they are exposed by alliance leaders themselves even though the motive is not always noble. This is why it was commendable to hear Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi announcing plans to set up a not-for-profit unit to investigate corruption in the government and private sectors. Corruption is a threat to our democratic foundation and has a corrosive effect on our moral values.

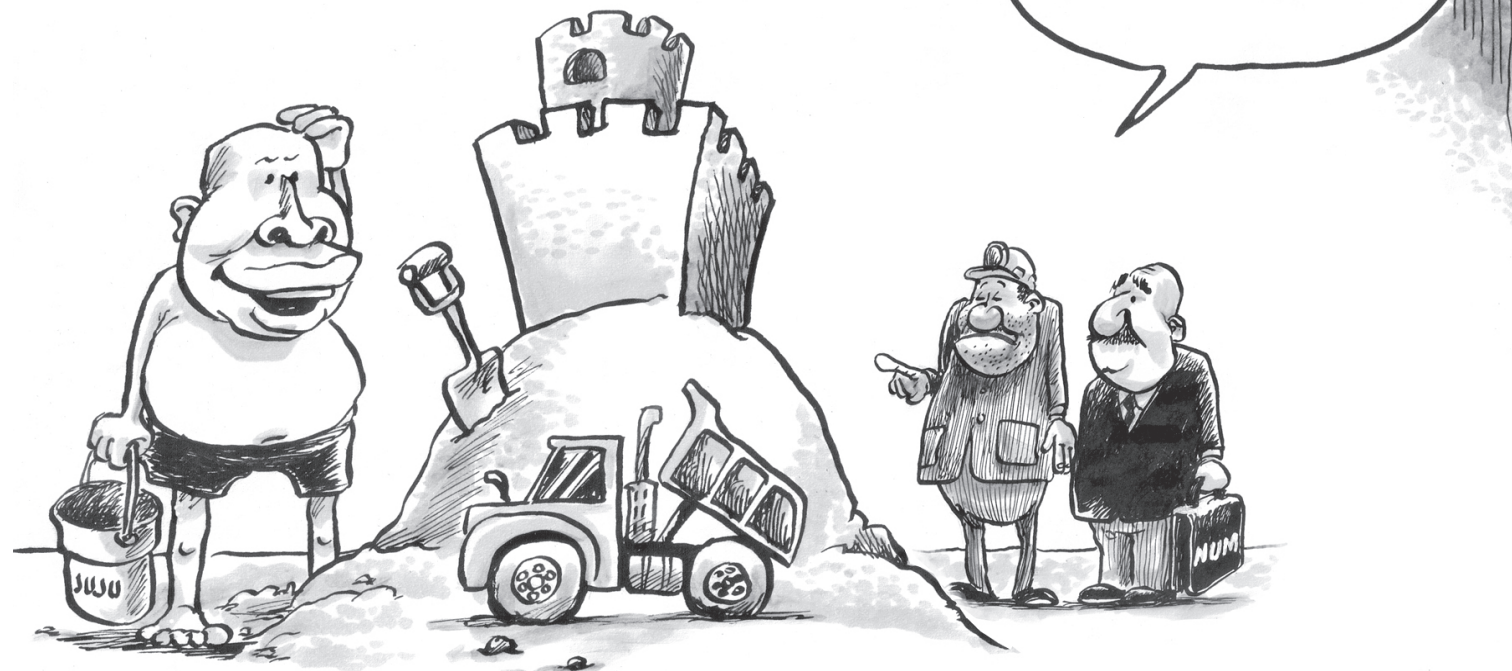
Vavi has – rightly so – pointed out that President Jacob Zuma’s government does not compel ministers suspected of corruption to account. Despite efforts by several law enforcement agencies, departmental anti-corruption units and constitutional watchdog bodies, corruption continues to undermine any efforts to transform society and provide quality services, hurting the poor in the process.

Public Service and Administration Minister Richard Baloyi has also announced a new anti-corruption body, 16 months after Zuma announced a presidential hotline to deal with – among other things – complaints from the public, including corruption.

The rationale behind replicating anti-corruption efforts makes no sense. Some of the current accusations were sparked by infighting in the alliance and had little to do with genuine intentions to fight corruption.

Cosatu’s inclusion of civil society groups means that chances of using the unit to wage intra-alliance power struggles are minimal. We hope the body will emulate the work of NGOs such as Transparency International to expose what Vavi described as a “scourge”. However, we hope Vavi – who is also eyeing public office through the ANC – will continue with such brave and principled ideas even when he is in power.

*AGOBHOZI*  
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**You & Me**  
**ROD SMITH**

**Q:** “CHILDREN at school call my son, 8, hurtful names. He is not a rough, sports-crazy boy. He is soft and gentle and is used to being with two sisters.

“The name-calling is disturbing for him because he has no idea why it is happening. He doesn’t understand any other way to be a boy, so he finds the taunts very confusing. Please help.”

**A:** Visit the school and do what is possible to protect your son. Alerting school authorities, while necessary, is unlikely to achieve much as mean children are difficult to police.

Coach your son to stand up for himself. The sooner he learns that he is able to speak up and defend his innocence, the better he will be equipped to do so for as long as it is necessary.

Create role-plays and games where he can use and hear his voice and become accustomed to the idea of speaking up on his own behalf. Having done such an exercise with a few children, I know its power to defuse bullies and make your son a formidable, appropriate opponent of all who would try to belittle his strengths.

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

# Young people could lick country back into shape

*Even as Julius Malema rants and raves, there is reason to believe that the future of South Africa is bright*

**W**HEN the tail wags the dog it is time for some serious therapy. I recall a case – which we dubbed the “cocker spaniel therapy” – involving a woman in a catatonic state of mental and physical inertia. She just lay in bed for weeks on end refusing to do anything. Psychologists made house visits to no avail.

The house was in a mess and her husband had abandoned her out of desperation to save himself. The only loyal friend was the cocker spaniel who lay at the helm of her bed. As the snow piled up, the dog ran out to play and upon his return jumped on to her bed with cold and wet paws and licked her face passionately. She jumped out of bed at long last. The cocker spaniel had succeeded in getting her out of her stupor.

If we had to draw this analogy to ourselves as a nation we would need firstly to get out of our Julius Malema stupor. Like the woman in bed, South African politics is in serious need of some therapy. From the press to the

politicians in government and the electorate and the general populace of this country, we are all responsible for allowing a borderline personality disordered and functionally illiterate newcomer with no real political credentials other than a capacity for verbal diarrhoea to govern us.

In between this saga our elders choose to play emotional football with poor Malema. While the president kicks, the mother of the nation caresses. Can we blame him or do we blame ourselves? Actually, when one thinks about it, Malema is not really at fault. His intuitive insight into our behaviour makes a mockery of the SA political scenario.

He raves and rants, a by-product of his borderline condition, and makes his opponents run for cover. In turn, we in the media (and I am aware of my own weakness as well) are constantly reinforcing his behaviour by capturing his every word – giving him front page coverage and hence inadvertently making him into a national force while seriously neglecting the real power of



*Devi's Diary*  
**DEVI RAJAB**

our country’s youth.

Youthology is the emerging study of youth which developing nations are now beginning to take serious note of and which we in South Africa ignore at our peril.

South Africa’s future lies in its youth, but not of the Malema mould.

Like mines, our treasures lie deeply hidden and are definitely not to be nationalised. Instead, the new generation of South Africa is more open to innovation and change than any other generation. They are at the cutting edge of new trends and are vigorously independent.

With the “death of distance” through technology, a local youth culture that shares the same goals and aspirations as their global contemporaries is fast emerging. According to the findings of the Trend Youth Study, conducted by the UCT Unilever

Institute of Strategic Marketing and Youthdynamix, South African youths are optimistic about the future.

In forging a clear and powerful South African identity they are in the process of defining our culture and building a society that is racially inclusive. One of the biggest new trends emerging from the research is “Mzansi Mense”, literally meaning South African people.

South African youth appear to embody the spirit of the New South Africa and wholeheartedly embrace the “Proudly South African” ethos which came so beautifully to the fore at the World Cup.

According to the survey, racial and gender equality are becoming more of a reality and shared interests have more appeal than shared skin colour.

Young people seem to have

a set of common, altered and negotiated values and attitudes. The survey predicts that in the years to come, they will create a new country in which their new values will be everywhere and where they can feel at home and comfortable.

South African youths believe that local is lekker and are mad about South African music, fashion, brands, icons and role models. In the study *Black Diamond 2007 – On the Move*, it was noted that the youths are optimistic about the future of this country, with 80 percent of young adults believing that they are better off than their parents – and that their children will be even better off than they are now. It is not surprising that black youth are generally more optimistic than whites.

South Africa’s black middle class has grown by 30 percent in just over a year, with their numbers increasing from 2 million to 2.6 million and their collective spending power rising from R130 billion to R180bn.

South African youths are aware and proud of their

heritage, yet do not want to be pigeon-holed or stereotyped. Instead, they want the freedom to continually redefine and recreate themselves as individuals and as Africans.

Because of their first generation wealth status it is not surprising that their skewed attitude towards money is a dominant factor in their daily transactions. The youth generally believe that having a lot of money will make them happy. What is of concern is their use of drugs and their cavalier attitude to unprotected casual sex without emotional attachment.

However, if through education and guidance we can avoid the pitfalls of youth, South Africa’s young generation show fantastic promise for creating a progressive, hardworking and accountable society based on the advancement of human rights and freedoms. Indeed, if the youth of our country are our future, then the future does look bright.

But first it seems that we need to call in the cocker spaniel to lick us back to our senses.

## Alerts Are Not Helping

**L**AST week’s reports that terror attacks are being planned in Europe on the model of the atrocities committed in Mumbai in 2008 have prompted action from the US authorities. The State Department at the weekend issued a “travel alert” to all US citizens planning to visit Europe, warning them to be vigilant. And the British Foreign Office followed soon after, suggesting that there is a “high threat” of an attack on the continent.

The intelligence reports which prompted these alerts should be taken seriously. But the US alert is an unhelpful overreaction. If the reports had suggested US citizens were a specific target, the alert might have been justified. But they did not.

Yet these sorts of alerts give the damaging impression that Europe is somehow unsafe in general. The Foreign Office’s latest advice is even more misguided, since the UK is surely just as much a target as France or Germany.

What is most distasteful about the US warning, however, is the lack of solidarity it implies. America is hardly without its own domestic terror threat. Yet if European governments were to issue a travel alert on America, the US would, understandably, be irritated.

Terror threats are, sadly, now a fact of life across the Western world. Governments should, of course, act on specific information and warn their citizens accordingly. But issuing vague and slightly panicked travel alerts merely exacerbates a climate of fear and helps do the terrorists’ job for them. – The Independent

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

## King could do much with cubs

THE Mercury reported that King Goodwill Zwelinzima was presented with two lion cubs (September 27). I am not sure if these are just token gestures or if the king plans to keep them for show or entertainment, or tame them as pets.

I have no problem with whatever he chooses to do with them as long as they are not abused or abandoned or killed at some later stage.

If the facility is fully equipped to deal with the King of the Beasts and they are introduced to other free range lions, all the better.

While it must indeed be a privilege to own a lion, the continued upkeep and devotion required by these animals is not a simple task.

It is in fact a full-time job. He could consider education as one of the reasons for keeping such animals to promote animal anti-cruelty by donating some of his vast land resources to a reserve for lions where schools and interested parties can visit and take a hands-on approach including the ultimate reintroduction to the wilds. Much like the cheetah reserve in the Western Cape. There is a lot of potential there in those two bundles of joy he has been given, how uplifting it would be to see a step in the right direction, by a man of his stature.

MARY ANN GRAFETSBERGER  
Durban

## Steep charges hurt schools

THANKS for publishing the story about sewage charges (The Mercury, October 4).

The charge is too high. Our water account rose from about R9 000 a month previously to R14 180 in August although the volume of the water we use has not increased.

The cumulative effects of electricity and this cost are adverse for schools as fees and state support have not risen.

DAVE SMYTH  
Principal, The Browns’ School for Special Needs  
Pinetown

## HOOIGANS DESTROY BEACHFRONT

IT APPEARS that many people are not proud of our new beachfront and are willing to destroy it.

On Sunday morning last week, areas north of the casino and all the way up to Blue Lagoon were no-go areas because of the broken glass and litter everywhere, not to mention the stink of alcohol, urine and faeces.

By 9.30am, the municipal cleaners were not yet close to

finishing their unenviable job and people were already arriving for a day on the beach. Even the new paved promenade near the stadium had broken glass on it.

Meanwhile, drunk hooligans were still being loaded into taxis under the apathetic eyes of metro police personnel.

What part of our heritage is it to get so drunk in public, to hurl bottles

everywhere, to make fires anywhere? And why are the police unwilling to control the problem?

They managed very well during the World Cup. It is too late to arrive in small numbers the morning after the mayhem.

This has been an on-going problem for many years. The last answer I received to the same complaint many years ago

was that the metro police were outnumbered by the hooligans and could therefore not cope.

The success of the newly upgraded beachfront is at risk. The promenade is a major attraction in its own right, but it will not attract people if they risk cut feet and punctured tyres.

RICHARD SALMON  
Durban

## ANC arrogance alienating voters

IT IS quite interesting to see ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe as a serious voice of sanity among the noise and clutter that has engulfed the ruling party (The Mercury, September 22).

His frank admission that while they may have gained support among the Afrikaner community, they have lost support among coloured and Indian voters to opposition parties is a truism.

Fascinatingly, the NGC was held in Durban and this city would provide perfect examples

of how to lose support and alienate voters. One example is the street name-changing saga, where people who opposed it were given all sorts of derogatory labels, yet nobody has objected to any new road being named after a struggle hero, for example, Dumisane Makhaye Avenue in Riverhorse/Newlands.

While the delegates were in Durban, a textbook example of how low the ANC has stooped played itself out through the Early Morning Market saga. This matter has been

handled far more poorly than the Group Areas Act and is going to be a major rallying point among opposition politicians to the detriment of the ANC, more so in the light of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in South Africa.

This is a textbook example of cronyism and arrogance. It is factors such as these that have alienated many supporters.

MUHAMMAD ISMAIL OMAR  
Durban

## Punishing schools that do a good job is spiteful

IT IS a rather shortsighted view on the part of the municipality to burden those schools which generally have an inherent sense of worth, instilling discipline, value and strong moral pupil education with increased rates “Let private school rates rather go to scholarships”, (The Mercury Forum, September 28.)

There are hardly any strikes, which, I’m sure, does not serve the unions’ purposes too well but does the continued

job of educating pupils in a reliable manner. By crippling these schools, the Education Department is adding to its dismal record at the expense of its credibility which is already in shreds. This is a very spiteful manoeuvre and should be fought tooth and nail because its motive is politically inspired.

CHRIS KNAGGS  
Durban

## Where are the airport signs?

WHEN travelling north on the M4 from Durban there is not a single sign indicating how to get to the new airport.

Surely the powers that be have enough savvy to realise the need for signs, or do they just not care?

At least three signs are needed: one before the Umdloti glide-off, one at the top of the glide-off and one before the glide-off on to the N2.

MIKE NORRIS  
Umdloti

## Ramos not well suited to righting moral wrongs

WITH reference to the report on Maria Ramos entering the fray to right the moral wrongs of South African rugby (The Mercury, September 28), about 80 000 pensioners of Transnet, who were cheated out of pensions by her and Transnet, doubt her moral standards.

She virtually sentenced thousands to an untimely death with her maximum 2 percent a year pension increase ruling. Transnet owes its pension funds about R60 billion due to what MP Manie van Dyk described as “administrative

fraud” in his presentation on Transnet pensions to the minister of Public Enterprises last Wednesday.

Ramos admits that “Absa raised concerns in the interests of our group and our brands”, but goes on to say “we did so because we care deeply about rugby”.

If Absa really cares about rugby, it has to support the principle of selection by merit, not colour.

ROGER LAYZELL  
Durban