

Daily Dispatch

OUR OPINION

Harping on race spoils it

FREEDOM Day yesterday was an opportunity for us as a nation to reflect on 17 years of democracy and take stock of how far we have come. A cursory glance at our scorecard will show that there is as much to be grateful for as there is to lament.

On the positive side, millions more of our people have access to housing (albeit of inferior quality), water, sanitation, electricity, education and medical care.

More importantly, South Africans enjoy unfettered freedom to express themselves politically, notwithstanding relatively minor anecdotes of intolerance such as "no-go" areas.

A lot of promises to improve the lives of the people have not been met, largely because of endemic corruption within government. Where such corruption has been detected, the media has exposed it fearlessly and called for punitive measures. That freedom of the press has continued to rankle sections of the government, the result being a threat to introduce a press media tribunal – a move which would seriously curtail an important, hard-won freedom.

The threats notwithstanding, for the first time government and even the head of State, can be criticised and challenged openly without fear of reprisals – which in the past could even result in death at the hands of the State.

These are freedoms that might be taken for granted, but which came at a huge cost.

Liberation itself is not the end. It is what we do with the freedom we now enjoy that will determine if we build a country that will yield a better life for all – or if we sink it like "just another African basket case".

In this regard, we are drifting backwards allowing this country to be racially polarised. The political discourse in the run-up to the forthcoming municipal elections is fraught with racial rhetoric, and if we do not snap out of it, we are headed for a large conflagration that will consume all our gains and leave in its wake a wasteland. Political debate is robust in its nature. Political opponents the world over throw barbs at one another and it is all in the nature of their business. South Africa is no different.

However, we have failed to formulate a common national identity that cuts across race, so our political debates are grounded on race, almost by default. It would be foolhardy to expect full integration after just 17 years, but we delay it when we continue to emphasise our differences where we should be building on what we have in common.

Leadership is sadly lacking in this regard, with those who are supposed to be uniting us as a country pandering to party politics and fanning the flames of racial polarisation. The problems we have – and there are many – can be better tackled if we confront them as one free nation.



ANC leadership rotation poses risk to policy implementation

THE ANC leadership selection system has a negative effect on government's stability and policy implementation.

In democracies, political parties are the best known institutions through which political leadership of a country – the selection of the President and therefore the cabinet, for example – takes place.

Owing to the proportional representation system that positions party politics at the centre of the country's leadership selection process, the ANC's internal party mechanism through which we get to receive the country's President, and subsequently his or her cabinet, has justifiably become a point of contention for South Africans.

The greater the degree of instability within the ANC, or any other political party that stands to field a president in South Africa for that matter, the more likely that these would be reflected in policy formulation and implementation.

Given these types of institutional arrangements, the reality in South Africa is that as a nation, we are at any point in time either emerging from a leadership tussle or headed into one, with the ANC playing host to the most dramatic episodes. The dust has barely settled since President Jacob Zuma's watershed victory in Polokwane.

Yet, we are almost on a full swing to the 2012 elective conference, which seems to have a potential to oust Zuma as party president and thus deny him a second term as President of the Republic.

This could be the worst thing to happen to the President, with significant im-

INSIGHT Ralph Mathekgga

plications for policy implementation.

The first presidential term is usually about announcing a political arrival and engraving a signature on policy framework, either by changing the substance of policy through substantial pronouncement or rhetoric.

The second presidential term is about the legacy; how a president wishes to be remembered long after he is gone.

Zuma desperately needs the second term partly because of his "underwhelming" first term, though he needs to show that the country desperately needs him for a second term.

Should he fail to get a second term, he may have to console himself with the idea that even US President Barack Obama is not guaranteed a second time, given the loss of popularity of his Democratic Party, as shown in the last congressional elections.

But the difference between Obama and Zuma's predicaments is that Obama launches his second term presidential campaign with the support – but not dependence – of his party, while Zuma's fortunes are entirely dependent on his party.

Even if Obama does not win the forthcoming presidential elections, the institutions and policy implementation in the country would, by and large, continue in a relatively stable manner because of the political balance between the Democrats and the Republicans.

However, if Zuma fails to secure the second presidential term within the

ANC, he would therefore not stand any chance of becoming the SA president.

That would raise alarm bells as to possible policy shifts, as the newly-elected president would be taking the helm of power while Zuma still has until 2014 to complete his term as the country's president.

This is why the leadership tussle within the ANC is of great national significance.

The possibility of major policy shifts would not be an issue if the institutions in place afforded a countervailing force to balance and neutralise the anxiety for a radical shift in government priorities, whenever a new leadership emerges within political parties. But the ANC's system of cadre deployment allows for the new party leadership to install a new group of loyalists across major centres of power within the State, giving an impression of new policy twists.

Perhaps it could be worthwhile for the ANC to consider aligning its leadership rotation with a two-term government timeline, to avoid intermediary shifts that may happen in government whenever the party leadership changes.

This would be a short term solution to save embattled leaders such as Zuma, to ensure they are at least given two terms to fully implement their policies.

Or even better, we need to build institutions that would be sufficiently resistant to radical party leadership turnarounds, which may impact government's stability to the point where there is a negative impact on service delivery.

That said, it is necessary to contend with the principle that government institutions and policy mechanisms need

not be too rigid to resist leadership changes that take place within political parties. This is because the processes of leadership changes within political parties are expressions of constantly shifting political preferences in the country.

It is a concern that in the past two presidential terms in South Africa, much valuable time seems to have been devoted to internal succession squabbles within the ANC, instead of focusing on policy implementation and ensuring some level of stability in the implementation of government's priorities.

The reshuffling of personnel (political appointees including ministers) is also indicative of the past succession battle, and the looming ones, as leaders are appointed on the basis of who they supported in the previous leadership battles, and who they are likely to support in the forthcoming ones.

The election of leadership within political parties is, in many instances, a democratic process par excellence. However, democracy also needs to yield some level of stability to ensure the implementation of the mandate by those who have been democratically elected into power.

Democracy cannot always be consensual with processes of electing and selecting leadership.

The ANC leadership tussle, as seen with the party's elective conferences, poses a challenge to government's performance, as it does not provide a room for proper policy implementation.

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BRIGALIA BAM

SA battles signs of teen years

WHILE democracy, unquestionably, is a positive force, it cannot exist without a multiparty foundation and a basic respect of human rights of all people.

Without these foundations in place, a democracy will collapse. Without multiparty tolerance, democracy will slide into a theocracy, and without a respect for human rights, democracy will slide even faster into the tyranny of the majority.

The foundations of multiparty politics and respect for life, as well as different views, must stand above the majority's wishes.

From the onset, each political party must be willing to compromise and work together.

The established democracies consolidated and deepened over time, with continuous struggles by people and political parties to make their polity responsive and participatory.

Our past elections have brought the world wonderful examples of how democracy is supposed to work; they have also shown that the majority of people in the world truly desire it.

Sure, our country has had problems: struggling economy, political intolerance, and other challenges.

But all those problems are slowly diminishing as democratic principles gain more control of the nation – a prospect that is bound to occur as long as democratic elections continue.

Our elections are examples of democracy's resilience. South Africa was polarised and was hated as a pariah State.

But despite all these, our nation has been able to hold fair and free elections. The majority of voters dictate the direction in which they want South Africa to go, ensuring the very essence of democracy is fulfilled.

Why mention all these democratic successes? Why is what seems like such a mundane occurrence so important? Because a successful democracy brings a happy and thriving nation.

While democracy may be a work in progress and will not happen overnight in the Middle East, for example, it can – and will – triumph if given the opportunity.

Countries like Japan, Italy, Germany and Russia have emerged from painful histories to become democracies. Although it is not easy and many countries, such as Russia and others are still struggling from the transformation, it is possible and worthwhile to achieve and sustain democracy.

We will do well to cast our eyes across the continent, particularly the Arab world, to see that democratic principles are far from being entrenched.

In our country, pluralism has always outweighed the expectations of individual ambition.

Apartheid made our country the world's largest social engineering laboratory.

The process of its decommissioning is well under way, but remains far from closure. It is still early in the life of the new South Africa, and just like any 17-year-old, signs of maturity and adolescence seem to be competing with one another.

Our democracy is entrenched when the judiciary is strong to protect it. Some parties have taken us to court. Sometimes they win, sometimes we win. This demonstrates democratic maturity and the importance of the rule of law we all respect.

We are mindful of the fact that a free and fair election can only be possible if the environment is conducive.

Peace, stability and political tolerance are critical factors that can make this possible.

As reasoned thought and experience have shown us, there needs to be a system in place to protect the freedom of speech.

That is why our electoral law has established a code of conduct, which all parties are expected to sign and adhere to.

The code promotes conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections, including tolerance of democratic political activity, free political campaigning and open public debate.

Dr Brigalia Bam is chairwoman of the Independent Electoral Commission. This is an edited version of a speech she gave at the conference for the signing of the electoral code of conduct ahead of the May 18 local government elections

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | Write to PO Box 131, East London 5200. FAX 043 743 5155. E-mail: letters@dispatch.co.za

Grim service: when common sense is no longer common

WELL said, Mr Editor (*Poor service culture is to EC's detriment*, DD April 27). As an East London resident travelling regularly to various parts of the country, I concur that the customer service in our part of the world leaves much to be desired, generally speaking.

Although I do believe that it is common sense to attend to customers sooner, I have also come to the grim realisation that such sense is no longer common.

One question, however, always bothers me when I am faced with similar situations: Business owners will not hesitate to upgrade the physical attributes of the business to attract clientele, but what good is that if no resources have been allocated to training the staff to retain clientele? — *Thayn Niemand, Tecoma*

ANOTHER frustrating trip to the Hemingways Mall. On Tuesday, I arrived just after 9am, collected my ticket, parked and walked in. Surprise, surprise – no electricity so no shops open. No – not a surprise – it's happened before. No notification at the entrance – indeed no one seemed to have any information.

I phoned the number listed in the directory and got the message "The number you dialled does not exist". Shops come and shops disappear. When one speaks to the shop owners, it appears that as they have signed a contract, they have no redress at all.

The mall owners get their money regardless of the service they provide!

So the impression is gained that the mall owners do not care. We, the customers, can vote with our feet, but pity the poor shop owners.

I would demand my rent returned to me! And we all looked so forward to the mall coming to our town. — *MD Middleton, Berea*

What happened to euphoria?

I AM observing with total desolation how the local government elections are becoming a real symbol of bad things to come for our people.

To hear members of the community expressing gloom for the future is actually depressing. I wonder what actually happened to the euphoria of 1994 when we expected elections with glee and merriment?

Maybe we have lost our dream and belief in ourselves as a nation. The American motivational speaker, Denis Waitley, describes belief as the "ignition switch that gets you off the launching pad".

We are probably despondent because promises made during elections never come to fruition and have begun to view elections as a launching pad to paucity. We seem to have lost hope.

Our leaders are viewed as so arrogant it's frightening and the way people are treated during service delivery protest marches does not even ignite a modicum of guilt in our leaders.

People are treated as radicals who need to be dealt with in the most barbaric terms possible.

I wish we could wake up from this nightmare with the hope of a better future for our beautiful nation. We need to do some introspection and retrace our steps and develop some kind of humanity that put people first rather than being seen as hyenas on the carcass of society.

When you read about people spending copious amounts of taxpayers' money on frivolities and in the process hide behind apartheid's Ministerial Handbooks, you ask yourself, what happened to revolutionary spirit of the likes of OR Tambo, Chris Hani and Nelson Mandela?

Please, think about those who don't have, those living in squalor and stop the self-aggrandisement.

That's the only way we can get the majority of our people to reclaim their dignity and hope. — *Kholekile Vulindlela Tshaka, Mdantsane*

Pirates need better players

I AM an Orlando Pirates fan and I want to advise our coach Ruud Krol not to be scared to ask his boss Irvin Khoza to buy better players.

It will be in line with Khoza's norms and values to have a strong Bucs team.

He should let goalkeeper Senzo Meyiwa and recent signing Jacob Mokhasi go. They should be playing in the lower grades of our football.

Krol, just point to a first-class goalkeeper and Khoza will easily buy him.

Remember Bucs is not a dustbin and must have the best players. — *Bashin Qobongoshe, West Bank*



East London shoppers are often frustrated at the poor service culture.

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