



QUICK READ



Zuma ruling

THE Department of Correctional Services has announced that it will appeal against the ruling of the North Gauteng (Pretoria) High Court that nullified the medical parole former president Jacob Zuma. The department said there were prospects of seeing a higher court ruling in its favour as some acts were "misrepresented" by the presiding judge. The court ordered that Zuma be sent back to Estcourt prison in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands where he was booked for his jail term, and that the time spent outside should not count. | IOL



Shell

MINERAL Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe says the government will not withdraw the licence given to Shell to conduct a seismic survey for oil or gas deposits on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape. He noted that the Eastern Cape was the last in development and remained underdeveloped. Mantashe said that opposition to the seismic survey was saying that the Eastern Cape must not be developed, yet there was no answer to the high unemployment rate. The granting of the licence has been opposed with at least one court bid unsuccessful and another on the cards. | IOL

Union battle

LEADERS of another Cosatu affiliate, the Public and Allied Workers Union of SA (Pawusa), are embroiled in a legal battle over the suspension of the union's president, Thinta Mokhonoana. He and eight other Pawusa leaders hauled members of its national executive committee (NEC) to the Labour Court to challenge the suspension, saying The NEC meeting that suspended Mokhonoana was unconstitutional. In October, Labour Court Judge André van Niekerk found that the dispute was between factions and not members of the union. | IOL

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"Reform, to be useful and durable, must be gradual and cautious."
Horace Smith

COALITIONS: CONSTITUTION A GUIDING LIGHT

A new era in local government

WHEN Lewis Hamilton, an icon of excellence in Formula 1 Motorsport, had his 8th title "stolen" right under his nose, there was a loud uproar from many across the globe.

This was the perfect moment to revolt against the entire Motorsport fraternity because the expected result was not attained.

The outcome of the Formula 1 championship, which took a whole season to reach the finale, only to have a new but unexpected champion, mirrors the outcome of the local government election results in South Africa.

The new champion, Max Verstappen, literally upset the perfect photo finish to the year. This is perhaps how the outcome of the local government elections may seem to many. Is this the outcome that we expected? Are we getting the right people? Are we moving forward or backwards?

These are the questions some may be asking. South Africa is a toddler in matters of constitutional democratic governance, with a Constitution that is only 25 years old and a local government system that is 23 years young.

Ours may be a young Constitution, but it has faced several challenges and tests through the judicial system, with well-drafted legislation that is held against the high standard of constitutional supremacy. The most well-known and the oldest con-



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stitutional democracy in the world has been in existence for over 233 years, with a constitution that was written and ratified in the year 1788 and put into operation in 1789. Despite its long-standing reputation, the US constitution continues to be tested to this day but remains a prominent feature of American democracy. We have a long way to go, but we are on a good track with the right set of tyres.

Despite the longer than usual time it has taken to constitute councils across the country, we should be hopeful we have weathered the storms that were blowing against our young and resilient democracy. The new municipi-

pal councils face unprecedented challenges, where there is no historical precedence to learn from.

To weather the storms ahead, these seemingly delicate formations, better known as coalition governments, should observe four key principles to help them navigate successfully through the uncharted terrain.

Their sustainability lies in their ability to "fail fast but fail forward" by applying good governance principles, post-heroic leadership, putting the people of South Africa first and managing the "municipal kitty" well.

Exemplary governance by the newly elected councillors is perhaps the cornerstone of this new form of governing municipalities.

Noting that several councillors in this cohort are entering this sphere of government for the first time, and as such, they will have a steep learning curve and must expeditiously come up to speed with all precepts that constitute local government.

These range from the Municipal Demarcation Act, Municipal Structures Act, Municipal Systems Act, Municipal Finance Management Act and the other Acts that define the "rules of the game" of local government.

New councillors must demonstrate competence in following processes and applying these rules.

The mantra for the new councillors

should be: "Rules are rules, all of us follow these rules, we shall defend and improve these rules whether we are in the office or out of office."

The new councillors must be the catalysts of change and should sooner be in a proud position of presiding over well-run municipalities.

These new leaders, particularly those from the ANC, are probably the first to have been selected through an interview process. We can only assume that the interviews were rigorous and stringent in selecting the right candidates. It is our hope that the new councillors do possess leadership skills that are superior to the challenges that exist in local government.

The sustainability of these coalitions will depend on the quality of leaders and the collective leadership thereof. I would posit that the new councillors must have a visible semblance of post-heroic leadership traits that are ingrained in their functional interaction with issues, people, and resources. The difference between a leader in title and a post-heroic leader is the mindset and style of leadership.

A post-heroic leader is defined in the Harvard Business Review of 2015 as a leader who recognises that the key to success is not adhering to hierarchy but mastering a complex set of seemingly contradictory organisational dynamics. We need post-heroic

leaders who will recognise that the conditions of coalitions are imperfect but must work for the betterment of the communities and their people.

A government exists because of the people who voted for it in the first place. This new municipal government gains its legitimacy and mandate from all the people of South Africa.

The citizens who voted, and those who did not, have spoken through a singular voice that pronounced this municipal government into being.

The new government must, without fail and prejudice, serve the people and not the other way round.

We need a government that will return to the foundation of "Batho Pele" (people first) and all other things thereafter. To some leaders, the Batho Pele principle represents an echo of the past, but to the citizens, this is what they hunger and thirst for.

Service delivery is not a favour that is being done for citizens. It is an imperative that must be a reality.

The actual champion here is neither one of the political parties but our constitutional democracy.

We can go to bed and wake up to any result on the election scoreboard, but what is important is that the Constitution that we have will take us forward. This is our opportunity to write a new chapter in this long and unpredictable race of democracy.

IMAGE OF THE DAY



A SURFER dressed as Santa Claus rides an artificial wave in the Alaia Bay surf wave pool in Sion, Switzerland. The water temperature was 0.6°C, while the air temperature reached 2°C. | EPA

QUICK READ

Red list

THE Department of International Relations and Co-operation has welcomed the decision by the UK government to take the country off the travel "red list". South Africa and other countries in the region were put on the UK red list after local scientists announced the discovery of the Omicron Covid-19 variant. Angola, Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe were removed from the list. Millions of rands were lost in the past two weeks as flights for visitors to SA were cancelled. | IOL

Military veterans

DEFENCE and Military Veterans Minister Thandi Modise says her department and the Presidential Task Team on Military Veterans remain committed to resolving issues with military veterans following the hostage drama in Irene, Pretoria, recently. The minister said the department had developed a transitional model for funding for military veterans' associations. Other issues raised include social relief of distress and immediate payment of the Covid-19 unemployment top-up grant. | IOL

HEALTH

Alcohol restrictions highlight policy failures

ALCOHOL consumption is associated with various public health problems. These include high rates of trauma-related injuries and death.

In South Africa, around 62 000 people die from alcohol-related causes each year. Most of these are personal injury and trauma. Alcohol-related trauma from interpersonal injury and road traffic accidents accounts for a significant proportion of admissions to emergency units in the country.

In countries like the US, policies that restrict provision, acquisition and sale of alcohol are effective in reducing overconsumption and associated social and public health challenges.

But implementing these policies in South Africa has been a challenge. In the past, South Africa has tried to regulate the labelling and advertising of alcohol. But the country still doesn't have comprehensive alcohol policies.

One of the reasons for this delay is strong opposition by the alcohol industry, citing economic impacts.

The Covid-19-related alcohol regulations provided an unprecedented real-world experiment to put alcohol



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regulation on the policy agenda.

Since the start of the pandemic, the government has implemented intermittent alcohol prohibitions and restrictions aimed at easing the burden of people with alcohol-related trauma in hospitals when many patients were being admitted with severe Covid-19. These regulations demonstrated the benefits of reduced alcohol consumption on the health-care system.

The restrictions also highlighted who the influential players were in

the alcohol regulation space – and the strategies they used to protect their interests. In our recent paper we analysed media reports to identify these actors. We also looked at the strategies they employed and what this means for alcohol regulation in the future.

The research involved a content analysis of 142 online news media articles from News24 and SABC News Online. As a national broadcaster, the SABC has a public interest mandate. News24, on the other hand, is an independent digital-only platform. It has the highest reach in South Africa. Together these platforms are widely used and current. They capture the perspectives of diverse actors.

The media platforms that we analysed presented a range of actors: government departments, the alcohol industry (manufacturers, retailers, small-to-medium-sized enterprises), alcohol industry associations, political parties, NGOs and academics.

The government and the alcohol industry were the most prominent actors represented in the media. The news platforms differed in the way

they reported these actors' perspectives and strategies. News24 predominantly reported on alcohol industry-oriented actors and perspectives. SABC News was more government-oriented.

We also looked at the strategies these stakeholders used to influence regulation.

The approach of the alcohol industry was cohesive and well co-ordinated. It presented a consistent message using a wide range of avenues. These included lobbying political parties and representatives, litigation against the government, questioning evidence on the benefits of the alcohol restrictions and proposing policy alternatives. Industry actors used emotive language and framed the regulations as affecting small businesses. The most prominent argument against regulation was the economic impact. Industry repeatedly cited large – and often untested – figures of profit and job losses.

The tactics employed by the alcohol industry are not new. The tobacco and food industries have used similar ploys in the past to block or weaken health policies in South Africa and

internationally. Government actors typically assumed a defensive stance, using evidence, but lacked cohesion.

Different government ministries sought to use the regulations to advance the interests of their own departments. For example, the regulations were introduced to reduce alcohol-related trauma. But the police and transport ministries emphasised the benefits for crime prevention and road safety.

The reliance on prohibition to address alcohol-related problems in South Africa highlights various system failures, including health, road safety, law enforcement and crime prevention.

There was a strong academic voice from the South African Medical Research Council that aimed to counter industry rhetoric with empirical evidence. Academics also tried to present sustainable policy changes as an alternative approach for a post-Covid-19 world.

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