

Richards Bay- The dream harbour Gatsha wants to keep



KwaZulu is casting envious eyes at this rich harbour. The port is a natural sea outlet for the territory and should be under black control. But will this logic win the battle for the Zulus

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Gatsha Buthelezi... will he finally go for Richards Bay?

April 1, 1976, was D-Day. The Safmarine flagship SA Vaal broke the ribbon, and Richards Bay came of age. The Safmarine flagship SA Vaal broke the ribbon, and Richards Bay came of age.

This once sleepy, hot and humid village on the north coast of Natal earned its stripes to become the thirty-fourth town in the province to gain borough status.

And now Richards Bay has become the buzz-saw industrial giant, the fishing resort, and a bird sanctuary. The harbour has become a burgeoning giant that should wink at the riches of the world in the near future.

This futuristic port, set to be South

Africa's major import-export harbour, provides all the reasons why Gatsha Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu, is gunning gunpowder and guns for it. And this rich harbour is all the reason why Pretoria won't let go.

The South African Government might squirm under a decision to hand over the harbour - if and when the Chief Minister makes strong strides to annex it to his territory, in line with his embryonic "Zululand alternative" to the Pretoria-type "independence." But Richards Bay is on the borders of Zululand, hotseat of Chaka's battle forces and citadel of Zulu nationalism. Will the Zulus go all out to grab Richards Bay, and will they succeed? That's a million-dollar question.

In the meantime, Richards Bay is growing in a land where the majority of white voters are conservative English speakers who have refused to fall in behind the National Party. And, as a result, the South African Government has, over the years, adopted an attitude of tolerance to this "last bastion of

British colonialism."

Suddenly Natal has become the focal point of political debate, because the National Party's policy is that of partition and an independent KwaZulu - outside of Richards Bay - and Gatsha says no. Recognising growing black political frustration, militancy and discontent, Chief Buthelezi initiated the Buthelezi Commission.

The commission is to recommend a unique system of multiracial power-sharing, providing for a merger of the Natal Provincial Council and the KwaZulu Cabinet. The 43-member commission has been working on a draft which would finally, effectively, provide a blueprint for an all-race constitution in Natal.

In the meantime, Richards Bay and neighbouring Empangeni are growing industrially at a remarkable rate. Almost overnight Richards Bay has become the hub of political and socio-economical growth. Hundreds of purse-proud immigrants are steaming in on a daily



*Above Left: Blacks having a good time at the "blacks only" part of the Richards Bay beach, and above, the new black urban township, Esikhawini — the "Soweto" of Natal.
Below: The only international hotel in the area.*

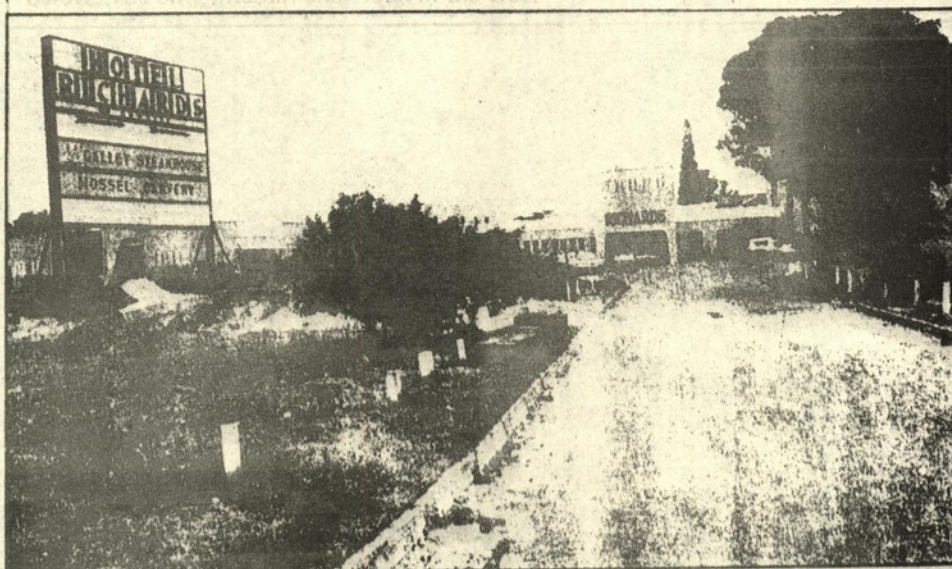
basis to strike deals. Hundreds of people from neighbouring Natal areas that are rather stark, dry, and uncompromising, have converged on Richards Bay to seek employment.

This has led to a population explosion and a housing shortage. And the town clerk, Mr J P J Truter, has been quoted as saying that the demand for houses had proved in excess of predictions.

It has been predicted that in the near future the port will rival Durban in importance and size, that by the end of the century Richards Bay will have a white population of over 100 000 and a black population of over half a million. Richards Bay is only 180 kilometres away from Durban, but now hardly sounds that remote.

Life there has suddenly become fast, vast and frenetic. Thousands of blacks have taken up employment there, and this has resulted in the development of a massive black urban complex called Esikhawini, Natal's own "Soweto."

When the sun rises, women, men and children from Esikhawini wake up and go about their way to work at Richards Bay and Empangeni. When dusk comes, that familiar black cloud of smog and smoke in the black townships — caused by chimney smoke — envelopes Esikhawini and night life begins. As in Soweto and elsewhere, Esikhawini has, since its birth as a black growth point, experienced its share of shebeen explosion. Shebeens serve as vehicles of social life and entertainment. The folk down there have

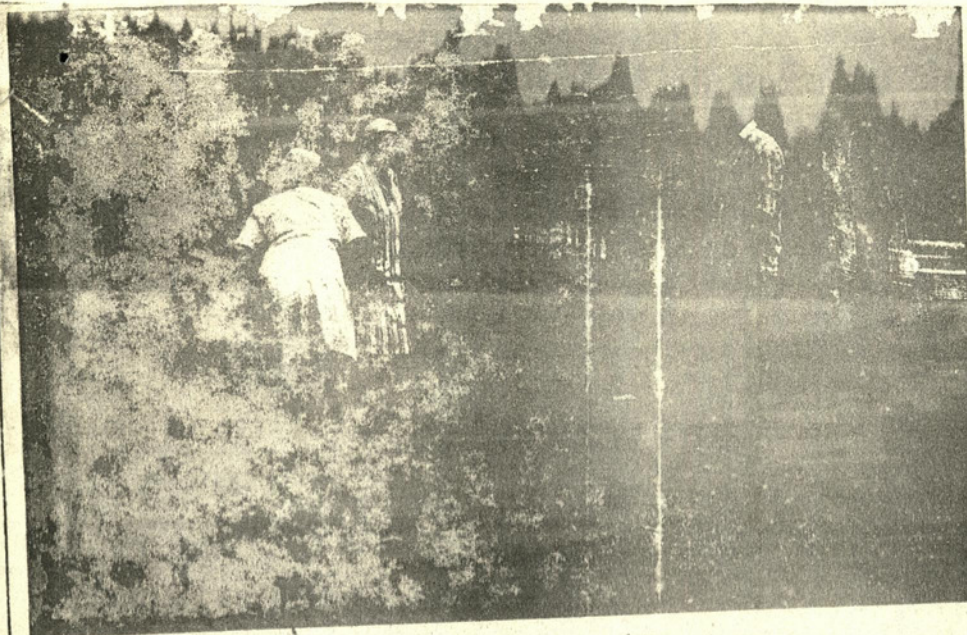


two alternatives — either to be at the beach or at the shebeens, to imbibe, love and socialise.

We called on this buzzing black township complex, and we also called on an area known colloquially as simply "Fourteen." This place has its own

buzzing, strutting, and cacophonous love-and-booze syndrome — a concrete slab of booze and fun and games.

All the while, the erstwhile fishing resort and bird sanctuary buzzes with pioneer pride. The town itself is some kilometres away, at the bay head. Thus



carriageway tarred roads with wide traffic islands. The street names acknowledge the fishing background of the place: Cod Cove, Bream Hill, Anglers Rod, Dolphin Rise, Bonito Bay, Crayfish Creek.

KwaZulu has cast envious eyes at this fertile village — and still is — pointing out that it is the natural sea outlet for this Bantustan and should therefore be under black control. The logic is on the side of Gatsha and the Zulus. But will this logic win the debate?

Richards Bay, like her neighbouring sister, Empangeni, are "white" towns. Empangeni is worse. In the words of a black cashier who works in one of the town's banks, the town is "tragically white." The place smacks of petty apartheid, at the parks, restaurants, bottlestores, tennis courts, even at some supermarkets. There is not a single hotel for blacks in this town.

While working there, we had to drive 49 kilometres away to Richards Bay to get hotel accommodation. At a motel some kms from Empangeni we were told "sorry, we are not international, we don't take bantus." Then the receptionist said further: "We have to telephone Pretoria first and get permission."

Richards Bay has one international hotel, The Richards. It is here where you rub shoulders with Italians, Japanese, Germans and Chinese who are in town for business.

The Richards, a rather lavish haven for a three-star hotel, is a beehive of activity. You bump against the immigrants at the bar, the dining room, the poolside, the resident steakhouse and at reception. Communication with these foreigners proved worthless. In one incident in the dining room during breakfast, I left my table to join four gentlemen who spoke a language that sounded to me like Portuguese. I wanted to find out why they were in town, and how they found the place. There was a communication breakdown. The next thing they all scooped up their purses and briskly left the room. They had heard so much about muggers and robbers.

But allegations of crime, bizarre dabblings into the supernatural, acts of homosexuality and other perversions by a cult of devil worshippers, which had shocked the people living in Richards Bay, have long been dismissed as unfounded.

Such wierd acts were said to have been performed by both blacks and whites. Senior members of the local Dutch Reformed Church, social workers and Bantu Affairs officials conducted their own investigations after startling revelations that had come out in a sermon delivered by Reverend Nic Grobler, of the N.G. Kerk.

A Methodist church minister, who had asked to remain anonymous, had claimed he had helped children who had been actively involved in the macabre cult proceedings. He had told of a boy who foamed at the mouth and became violently ill after a cult meeting.

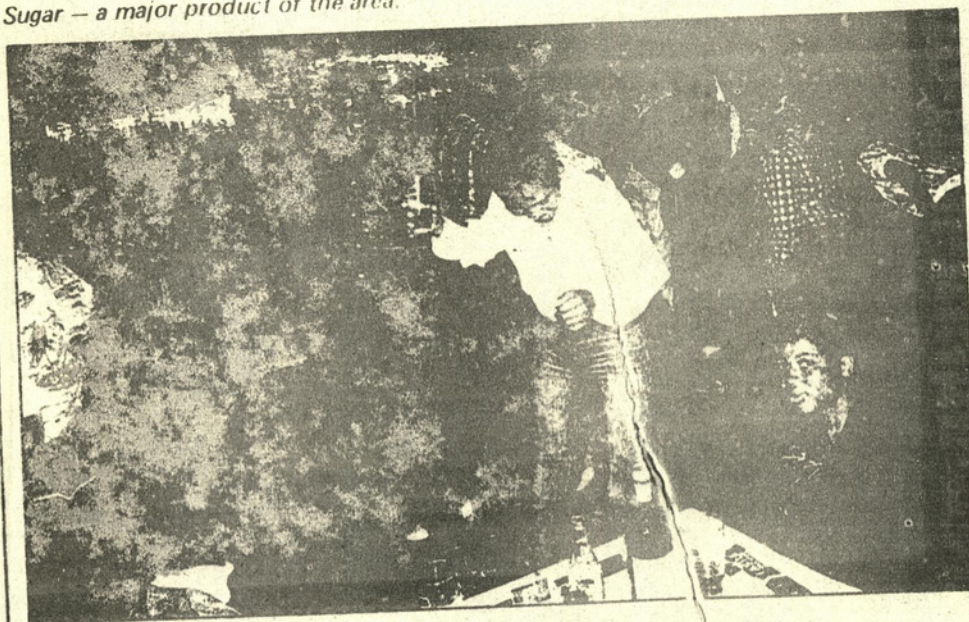
But now, none of this remains at Richards Bay. The town is reeling under industrial activity and has attracted people from all different walks of life. It is peaceful, lovable and evergreen. We neither saw nor heard evidence of claims of love-across-the-colourline.

The manager of The Richards told me categorically: "We have not experienced that sort of thing here. All our patrons are clean business men who are here solely on business, and so far we have not had any mixed couples checking in here."

Trade is booming, there's lot of odds and ends for tourists.



Sugar — a major product of the area.



Doing whoopee at a shebeen at Esikhawini.