

The vote for Pietermaritzburg will cause a backlash

Capital issue isn't over

MANGOSUTHU BUTHELEZI

IRRESPONSIBLY, and without appreciating the ramifications of the matter, in two of its recent editorials *The Natal Witness* has ridden the wave of excitement over Pietermaritzburg becoming the seat of the legislature. I did not enter this debate until now, waiting for serenity to return. However, I can no longer refrain from pointing out the facts of the matter.

The venue of the provincial legislature is a matter of history and development. In both respects, the wrong choice has been made. The premier has now decided that Ulundi is the administrative capital of KwaZulu-Natal and effectively its capital, much as Pretoria is the capital of South Africa by virtue of being the seat of government. Pietermaritzburg has been made the seat of the legislature. This is unsatisfactory.

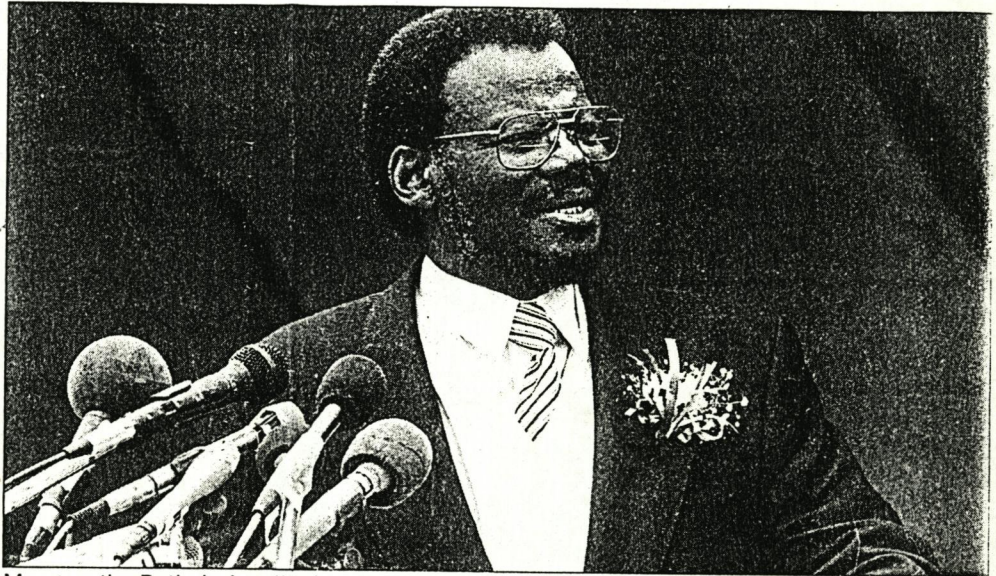
This outcome stems from a broken promise. The ANC and IFP agreed to respect the recommendation of the Cadman Commission and rotate both the meetings of the legislature and those of cabinet between Pietermaritzburg and Ulundi pending a possible referendum. Accordingly, the IFP did not unilaterally declare Ulundi the provincial capital, when the interim Constitution and its majority allowed it to do so.

This decision was motivated by a complex assessment of developmental needs, historical considerations and government logistics. It was not perfect but necessary. The ANC unilaterally toppled it, not because of a different assessment in respect of development strategies or government efficiency, but merely to play and win what it, itself, turned into a political tussle, notwithstanding my constant appeals not to politicise this issue. The decision was taken not in the interest of the province but to score politically, which sets a low standard in leadership and governance which, if upheld, will end up afflicting those who are now rejoicing in this decision.

This decision was taken a few days after the highest level ANC-IFP 15-a-side committee decided that it would be dealt with through negotiations, to be completed the subsequent week. This style of doing things does not show much honour or integrity and those who rejoice in the decision must realise that they are embracing a standard of political morality much lower than the one I have always tried to promote in our province.

As if the two editorials on Pietermaritzburg were not enough, a few days earlier you published an editorial entitled "Buthelezi blow-up", which attempted to portray me and my party as instigators of tensions with the ANC. Clearly tensions are being created, but they are not coming from us. Would your paper prefer that we were silent and passive witnesses to what is wrong and dishonourable? In the end it is our freedom, liberties and good governance that will suffer.

It is ironic that an old newspaper in this province should attempt, as you are doing, to tar me with the violence brush when I refused to take up arms and join "the armed struggle" when the ruling party asked me to do so. Had I done so in my capacity as the leader of Inkatha and/or as the



Mangosuthu Buthelezi ... 'In the end it is our freedom and good governance that will suffer.'

traditional prime minister of the Zulu nation, you would probably not have had the opportunity you now have to throw mud at me from your ivory tower. This beautiful country would probably have burned to ashes.

The decision about Pietermaritzburg was wrong because it was not made within the context of a long-term developmental strategy and a vision of how governance should be structured. It also compounded the legacy of historical wounds that are still open, angering our people. As it stands, the issue of Pietermaritzburg and Ulundi remains open. As much as the compromise of 1910 carries the legacy of three capitals for our country, this decision is creating a split between two centres of our province. Your newspaper brushes aside the fact that a referendum was not held — and, in fact, tacitly advocates that the voice of the people need not have been heard in this way — and calls valid concerns for the future of development in our province "sectarian fanaticism".

I have never been sectarian or a fanatic, often having suffered because of it. I look beyond the tip of my nose. Anyone who is not sectarian would see the enormous social and economic imbalances in our province and care about them. Anyone who is not a fanatic would realise that the existing tensions can only be defused through showing some respect for those who have for so long been treated with contempt. History will record this as a decision that was not made with a caring heart, but with short-sighted greed.

There are many misconceptions that are just not correct, such as that government can be run more efficiently from Pietermaritzburg. Not so, if government is also to care for those who need it most. Similarly, it is not true that the legislature can be run more cheaply from Pietermaritzburg, which has inadequate facilities and accommodation, which will need to be built at great public expense,

leaving those in Ulundi unused.

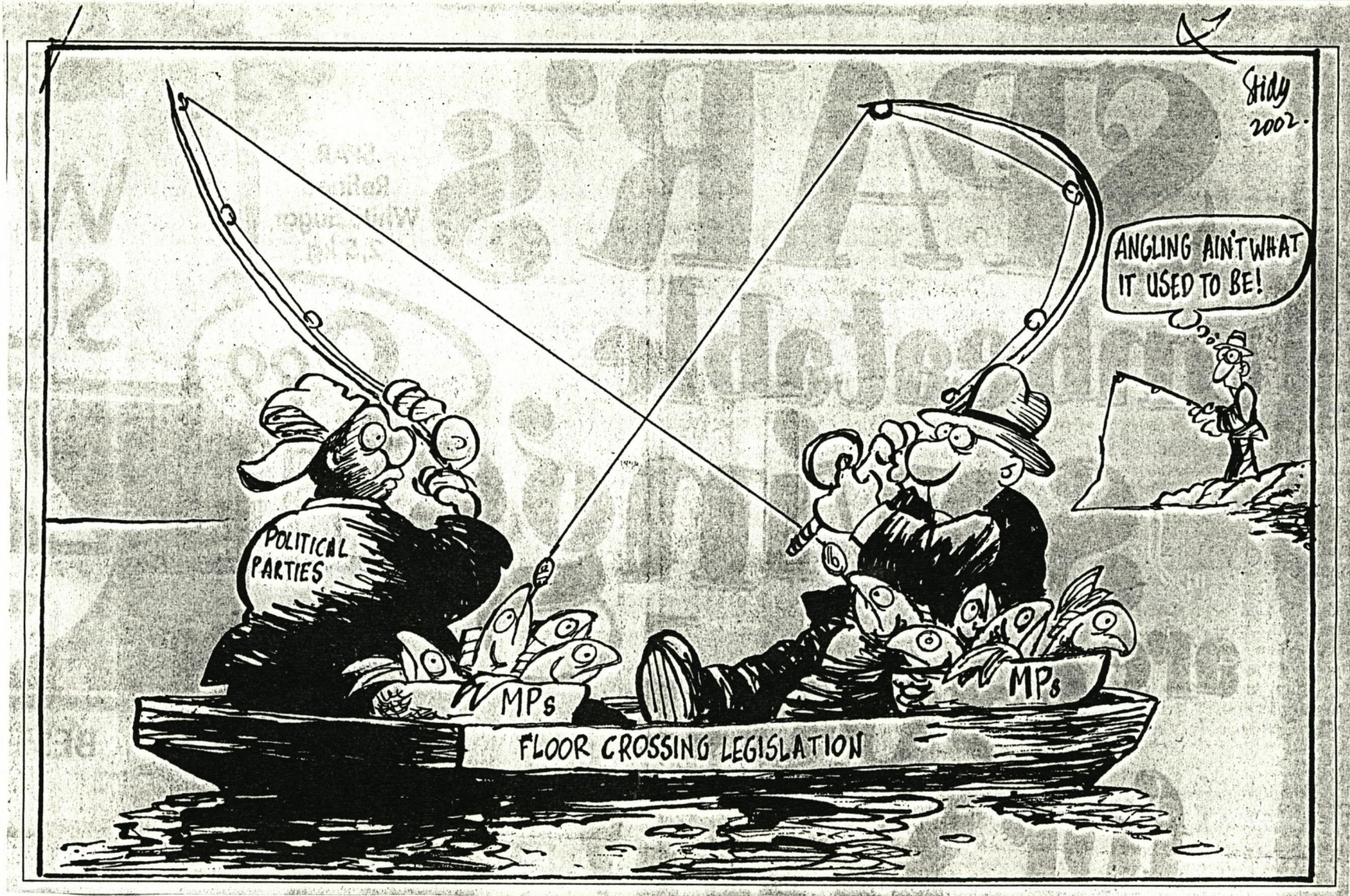
It is not true that developing areas such as Ulundi is not in the most pressing interests of a region such as Pietermaritzburg. Surely it is not true that black empowerment and reconciliation may be boosted by this decision.

Let us be honest, as the people of Pietermaritzburg and I have held a frank dialogue for about 40 years. How much of this decision has to do with not wanting to be in, or deal with, a less developed, mainly black, mostly rural city? How much has it to do with certain white and black people alike disdaining the notion of a Zulu Kingdom as much now as they did a mere 121 years ago? How much does it have to do with arrogant snobbery? The truth is that we must start from Ulundi because together we must overcome these very attitudes if we are to succeed together. There is just no alternative. The decision on Pietermaritzburg will create a backlash, perhaps not now and perhaps after I and many of my contemporaries have gone. There was the possibility of dealing with issues now and in the right way, and it was missed, leaving to our posterity an even more incomplete and contentious agenda for reconciliation.

I am committed to true reconciliation for the benefit of our country, not feigned reconciliation for any one party's benefit. It is time for serenity to return to this debate. As the journalistic flood subsides, the damage to our province will be revealed. The issues of development, efficient government, social justice and the relevant historical considerations are still outstanding and unresolved and perhaps some of the highfalutin and prosperous opinion-makers who have thus far spilled so much ink in the capital debate may wish to begin addressing the real underlying issues.

• Mangosuthu Buthelezi is Minister of Home Affairs and president of the Inkatha Freedom Party.

OPINION & ANALYSIS



OUR READERS WRITE

Robben Island

THE article by Nina Hassim on her re-visit to Robben Island (*Witness*, June 11) brought back memories of my own visit there a year ago. Unlike Hassim, I have never had cause to be on the island before, but its almost mythic place in South African history made a visit essential. And, like Hassim, I returned profoundly disappointed.

Moreover, I had a point of reference by which to judge my visit. Two years previously I had spent an afternoon going around the old prison in Fremantle, Western Australia, a grim Victorian pile which had been in use until the mid-eighties when riots by its inmates forced the authorities into a long-overdue process of penal reform. Our party was small, the pace unhurried, the guide well-informed, the whole visit memorable. By contrast, the Robben Island experience came a very distant second.

Yet Robben Island has far more going for it as a tourist site, indeed as a place of pilgrimage. The former inhabitants of the Fremantle Prison were all felons; many of those on Robben Island were there because of their principles, martyrs for the sake of righteousness.

Hassim refers to the "showbiz glitz" of the departure terminal. It gets worse. The whole tourist package is structured to cater for the "Gee whiz, gosh, golly, been there, done that" type of tourist. Get photographed under the window of Nelson Mandela's cell to show the folks back home and then buy a coldrink and a postcard while you wait for the ferry back to the mainland. Tourists are marshalled and frogmarched around like the prisoners of old and given no opportunity to explore on their own, to look round the little chapel or the leper cemetery, to walk along the shore, to watch the penguins, to look across to Table Mountain, to imagine what it must have been like in the limestone quarry, to try to empathise with those who had been incarcerated.

I was unaware of the deeper levels of misrepresentation and propaganda that Hassim highlights. But I saw enough to regard my visit as a repellent tourist con that does nothing for the memory of those incarcerated on the island or the democratic ideals for which they suffered.

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Palestinian aid

A FIVE-MILLION-RAND South African humanitarian mission to assist the civilian population of Palestine has been obstructed by the Israeli government. In spite of having been given prior notice on May 3 and having supplied all the relevant documentation as per Israeli protocol, the goalposts have shifted continuously.

The entire negotiation with the Israeli government has been carried out by the South African Department of Foreign Affairs through their mission in Ramallah and Tel Aviv and through the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria — to no avail. The Israeli Deputy Director General of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli ambassador to South Africa were reminded of the intended mission once again on June 7, by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad, who will lead the delegation to Palestine via Ben Gurion Airport in Israel on a special hired cargo flight. In spite of sending out additional staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs to Israel to conduct negotiations with the Israeli government, they were given the run around, having been promised that clearance would be issued on May 27, then May 29, then May 30, then June 2, now June 9 and we are still waiting. Pahad has altered his diary four times already to enable him to lead this humanitarian delegation to Palestine.

The humanitarian mission has been funded by the Gift of the Givers Foundation and includes state of the art equipment for a theatre and intensive care unit, ultrasound, general medical equipment, medicines, intravenous fluids, sutures, water purification tablets etc.

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(by e-mail)



Erosion of freedoms

ON Monday U.S. authorities announced that they had captured a suspected American Al-Qaeda operative carrying out reconnaissance for an attack with a radioactive "dirty bomb". Although Abdullah al Mujahir (formerly Jose Padilla) is a U.S. citizen, he is being held by the Defence Department as an "enemy combatant". In announcing this, President George W. Bush praised the vigilance of U.S. intelligence-gathering and law enforcement.

And immediately, international observers began questioning the timing of the announcement. Could it have been timed to offset recent claims that incompetence on the part of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies had been at least in part responsible for the success of the September 11 terror attacks? And how real was the threat posed by Al Mujahir? Certainly, he had travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and was reported to have been trained in terrorist techniques and to have met with senior Al-Qaeda officials. But did he have a bomb in his possession? Or the materials to build it? No. Indeed, the only evidence there seemed to be of his involvement in a proposed attack was confined to plans on paper.

However, if they and the shadowy organisation that seems to be behind them are serious in their intentions, Al Mujahir and his ilk could be very dangerous to the U.S. and very difficult to stop. "Dirty bombs" are devices that, without causing much physical destruction, spread radioactive matter over a wide area, creating a Chernobyl-like effect. If, say, Manhattan were targeted — a small, densely-packed area crucial to the country's economy — the effect could be devastating: many would sicken and die, the entire area would have to be shut down, and perhaps even razed and left as a radioactive wasteland. If such areas in cities throughout the U.S. were attacked, the entire country could be crippled. Further, the materials necessary to construct such weapons do not need to be brought in secretly from abroad, but are readily available in academic and industrial research laboratories. How vulnerable the U.S. must now seem to many who live there, and how fearful and incomprehensible they must find the actions of those who, instead of loving and clinging to life, rush to embrace death in the service of a cause.

And so paranoia festers under the surface, and Americans begin to collaborate in the erosion of the freedoms of which they are so proud. Already the September 11 attacks have substantially curtailed freedom of movement both within the country and beyond its borders. How much of a blow against democracy is the dirty bomb threat? Will academic freedom be assailed by government control of laboratories, government approval of research programmes, government registers of personnel? Will personal freedom be further infringed by Big Brother tactics? Has the Bush leadership the capacity to encourage vigilant preparedness without creating the kind of public panic that would actually play into the hands of those planning further terror attacks?

OPINION & ANALYSIS



THE NATAL WITNESS, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2002

Youth structures enter the floor crossing fray

AS the floor crossing legislation faces its acid test in the Constitutional Court early next month, political bickering continues unabated with youth structures of the political parties entering the fray.

"The defecting politicians have stolen the votes ... given to their respective parties. If they had one shred of honour they would resign," said IFP Youth Brigade KZN chairperson Mntomuhle Khawula.

Khawula said the defection law represents a "naked attempt by the ANC to impose one-party rule by seducing unscrupulous politicians with the sweeteners of patronage".

He said it is a direct contravention of the will of the people, and "IFP youth will not succumb to the attempts by the ruling party to subvert the principles for which so many of our people fought in the struggle for liberation".

"The question becomes what is in it for me, rather than the plight of the people." He said the ANC should have waited until the Slabbert Commission investigating a new electoral system had made its findings.

Political analyst and Durban sociologist Dr. Ashwin Desai described the floor-crossing law as an "end of ideology in organised politics".

Desai said the ANC are behaving like they are playing the computer

game Pac Man, where the aim is to swallow everything on offer. "It will lead to the erosion of multi-party democracy in favour of totalitarianism," he said.

But the provincial ANC Youth League's chairman Sihle Zikalala disagreed, saying the law complements democracy. "If a politician can no longer pursue democratic ideals in his or her party, the politician has a right to defect so as to continue serving the masses."

The KZN New National Party approved the laws. "We are dismayed at the behaviour of the IFP in opposing the legislation. They are trying to hold on to power, but it is clear they are losing out," said KZN chairman Dumisani Shelembe.

Meanwhile, the IFP's Blessed Gwala said it is time people were told the truth, as "it is evident the move of the capital to Pietermaritzburg is not financially sound". He quoted a figure of R1,5 million proposed by the parliamentary executive board to purchase a building to house legislative staff. "The building needs to be renovated to the tune of R3 million."

He claimed the board is considering leasing offices for about R290 000 a year. "The question is for how many years can we afford this?" — Political Reporter.