



I am satisfied that he has discredited himself to such a degree in the newspaper community, that he will not find it easy to procure employment in that field again.

JOOS HEFER  
Former SCA Judge



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## EDITORIAL

# Of land and landing on the moon

THIS Thursday will mark a year since the ANC resolved to amend the constitution to achieve land expropriation without compensation.

The announcement came via Enoch Godongwana on the final day of the ruling party's 54th national conference. As the chair of the ANC's economic transformation committee, he was at the centre of deliberations on the issue and it was clear the matter was highly contested, even within the ANC.

Land reform became one of the dominant themes this year. During February, Parliament passed a motion to review the property ownership clause of the constitution to allow for expropriation without compensation. Hearings were held throughout the country, sparking widespread interest and debate. Emotions ran high and, given South Africa's racially divided past, it was no surprise the issue polarised citizens along race lines.

While we were seized with the land issue, so were the Chinese. However, their focus was different.

A week ago, a Chinese rocket blasted off carrying a robot spacecraft called Chang'e 4. If all goes to plan, during the first few days of 2019, Chang'e 4 will touch down on the dark side of the moon, going where no space mission has gone before. We earthlings don't get to see this side of the moon with our naked eye. It was only in the late 1950s that we got a first look thanks to pictures from a Russian spacecraft. But no man-made vehicle has landed on this side of the moon which is what makes the Chang'e 4 mission so significant.

China has made great strides in space exploration and, in 2003, became only the third country to independently send a person to space. But that's just the start. There are plans to land on the moon as well as build a space station and establish a moon base with a permanent human presence.

Thereafter, there are plans to go to Mars and other planets.

While we wrestle with getting a small piece of land on this rock called Earth, there are others putting their focus on how they can own and benefit from entire rocks. Such is our reality which was shaped during colonialism and apartheid and perpetuated during democracy.

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## FOURTH ESTATE

# When motives become the news

*Best defence of good journalism is good journalism, reporting truthfully and factually should always be basis for story*

In 2003, when I was Executive Producer of news at e.tv, we were approached by a high-ranking ANC official with the startling allegation that then National Director of Public Prosecutions, Bulelani Ngcuka, had been an apartheid era police spy.

Given the sensitivity of the allegation, our then Editor-in-Chief, Joe Thloloe (to this day, one of the most respected journalists on this continent), took it upon himself to investigate the story.

Bra Joe traversed the country with a cameraman sworn to secrecy, collated the evidence and testimony from witnesses, and produced a compelling documentary detailing the story.

But we took a unanimous decision not to screen it.

The reasons were many, but I will break this down into two broad categories.

Firstly, it was clear that the parties feeding us the information had a political agenda seeking to prevent the National Prosecuting Authority bringing possible corruption charges against then ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma.

Secondly (and to our minds, more importantly), the story failed to satisfy the basics of journalism. There was a single source, no hard evidence, and the strong possibility that we would be tarring Mr Ngcuka with false accusations.

It turned out that others in our profession did not share e.tv's commitment to journalistic ethics. On 7 September 2003, the story broke in City Press under the heading "Was Ngcuka a spy?"

Within 2 weeks, President Thabo

KANTHAN PILLAY



Mbeki appointed a judicial commission of inquiry into the allegations under retired judge Joos Hefer.

What emerged from the Hefer Commission report were the following:

- ◆ That the story had also been presented to the Sunday Times and had been rejected by then editor Mathatha Tsedu for reasons similar to ours at e.tv.

- ◆ That the Sunday Times journalist investigating the story disagreed with her editor's decision to not publish the story and so leaked the story to the rival City Press
- ◆ That the City Press editor did not share the ethical viewpoint of Tsedu and e.tv and went ahead with the publication.

- ◆ The end result of the process was that the Commission found no substance to the allegations against Mr Ngcuka. Judge Hefer also commented on the testimony of the editor of City Press that "I am satisfied that he has discredited himself to such a degree in the newspaper community, that he will not find it easy to procure employment in that field again."

Many of us have forgotten about the Hefer Commission by now but it's a useful example of why the basics of

journalism matter. Over the past year, there has been a lot of discussion about the media and the role of journalists in pushing particular agendas.

We have seen the unqualified apology from the current editor of the Sunday Times regarding publication of fake stories.

We have seen the words of News 24 editor Adriaan Basson that "We wanted someone to embarrass Zuma for everything he's done, and Malema comfortably played the role of public accuser number one. ... Because we agreed with the EFF that Zuma was bad for the country. He had to go. ... We willingly and knowingly parked Malema's own sins in the past."

So there has been loss of credibility for major media outlets and the role of journalists has come under increased scrutiny.

Instead of our focus being on whether journalists are reporting truthfully and factually, we instead now question their motivation in reporting on particular stories.

I've been a journalist for 38 years and have trained 100s, starting with the Cape Times in 1997-1999 with the then Argus Cadet School.

I set up the eNews Journalism Training Programme at e.tv, and then YFM's Y Academy where I trained 252 recruits over 10 years. And the core lesson I try to teach is that the best defence of good journalism is good journalism.

It's not a popular idea. If a story has a racial bias, surely that means the writer is a racist?

If a story has a gender bias, surely that means the writer is sexist? If the story supports a particular narrative,

surely that means that the writer is biased?

My view is that if we stick to the basics of journalism, one can never be racist, sexist, or biased no matter whether we hold those views in our personal capacities. Let me share some of these.

*Journalism is about accuracy, objectivity, fairness.*

Accuracy means getting the facts right. Objectivity means don't take sides. Fairness means that one should not bring information into the story not related to the story to try and sway the opinion of the audience.

*Journalism is about facts, not speculation.*

Look for Kipling's servants: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. If any of those are missing, read no further.

*Toss out the adjectives.*

Journalism is about fact, but adjectives are about opinion. For example, when you see the word "controversial", it's the journalist's opinion that it is controversial.

*What people say is not news; what people do is news.*

If a politician says he is going to sue someone, it's not news until he actually files papers in court. Reporting a threat is just free publicity.

*When you see the word "if", be careful. Speculation is not journalism.*

For example, a Sunday newspaper report said: "If the arms deal investigation is reopened, South Africa could find out how much and whether senior ANC leaders received payments related to the arms deal."

At best, the sentence should read "If this happens, South Africa could

find out whether senior ANC leaders received payments related to the arms deal, and if they did, how much." By saying "how much" first, it implies that there is corruption.

*Beware of experts.*

The fact that an opinion comes from an expert still makes it an opinion. Getting a law professor to express an opinion on a case is less useful than the view of an advocate who has successfully fought such a case in court.

*Be careful of stories from a single source, especially if anonymous.*

There are good reasons to carry stories from anonymous sources if they are highlighting facts that can be confirmed. Example: if an insider at a bank says money is being embezzled, and there is a bank statement to prove it.

But be wary of reports like this one from CNN: "President Donald Trump has expressed concern that he could be impeached when Democrats take over the House, a source close to the President told CNN Monday."

There is no way of verifying whether Trump actually said this or whether it is someone with an axe to grind or whether the reporter made it up. That's why courts don't accept hearsay evidence.

Now if you use these guidelines to assess news reports, you will find that many news outlets fail these basic tests. Don't let that stop you reading.

No matter how flawed, a robust media environment is the best defender of democracy.

That's my opinion, but you may take that as fact.

*Kathan Pillay, a former journalist, is now a tech entrepreneur.*

## YOUR VIEWS

Email letters@iol.co.za (no attachments please). All letters must contain the writer's full name, physical address and telephone number. No pen names please.

### My son was also killed by falling goalposts

LAST week, goalposts fell onto a boy in Durban and killed him. Last year, goalposts fell onto my son. He, too, did not survive.

Kiyan Singh was an 8-year-old boy from Durban. My son, Hugo Paluch from Johannesburg, was 14. Both boys should be alive today.

I heard about the Durban accident and I was angry because this boy had been playing the game he loved and was taken from his family in an unnecessary way.

I was angry because no parent should have to bury a child. But mostly I was angry because after Hugo was taken from us, I naively thought it could not happen again.

Kiyan was playing soccer for his club, Hugo was playing soccer during break at school. While we were blessed to have 11 days with Hugo in hospital before he passed away, Kiyan never made it off the field.

In the space of just 18 months, two children have died in South Africa from goalpost incidents.

How is this possible? Were these "freak" accidents? At the same time, there was a huge outpouring of love and support from the community, there was inadequate response from administrators around meaningful efforts towards safety.

The vital question is, are our schools and clubs negligent in the way they care for our children and is there a general lack of concern for safety in this country?

When Hugo died, I searched for information on safety in South Africa. Not much came up specific to schools and clubs. When researching safety in other countries, there are manuals on securing soccer goals alone. We are so far behind in terms of child safety regulations?

Our response to tragedy is also lacking. South Africans have "bigger" concerns like crime and corruption. Coupled with the attitude of "it won't happen to my child" – people are quick to forget about "freak" accidents and nothing gets done.

In Canada, a 15-year-old boy suffered the same fate as Hugo and Kiyan, authorities were quick to discuss legislative changes and

regulations to ensure this never happened again.

Even without legislation there are common sense steps that should be taken. As reported in the press, Kiyan's grandfather stated that the "supervision of the children on the field was totally inadequate".

Our schools and sporting clubs need to take more responsibility and accountability when looking after our children. Does someone need to go to jail for this in order for other schools and clubs to stand up and take notice?

After it happened to us, it should never have happened again.

Sufficient supervision and regular checks on equipment should be standard at all schools and clubs.

If our schools, sporting clubs and government continue to remain silent, then it is up to us as parents to demand action. The next time you are at a soccer match watching your son or daughter play, ask the administrators if the goals are secured. Demand that all equipment is checked. Demand to see the roster for supervision of all children at all break times. Demand to see the emergency safety protocols that every school should have in place.

These are two incidents in 18 months. The next one might be a faulty jungle gym, or netball post, or even just a stack of chairs or desks not properly secured.

Hugo's death was followed by inaction and now a second child has died. Schools, sporting clubs and parents can no longer remain silent on the issue of the safety of our children.

DOV PALUCH (HUGO'S FATHER)  
Johannesburg

### Malema must think before he speaks

EFF leader Julius Malema has already attacked white and Indian communities, and now he has attacked Johann Rupert by saying he is "arrogant and racist". If anyone is arrogant and racist it is Malema himself. He is not a fit and able person to become president. He has a very filthy mouth that simply utters unsavoury remarks – he lacks

diplomacy. Call Rupert a racist, white capitalist, but, he and other white monopoly industrialists and businessmen provide jobs for thousands. If, Rupert and other businessmen leave tomorrow and relocate, imagine how many millions will go unemployed and hungry.

Does Malema ever think before he speaks? I am surprised that not a single leader stood up to Malema. Why, are they afraid of him? So, it seems. Their silence also means that they support Malema's utterances.

Malema must stop his ranting about whites and Indians. I wonder how the ANC will work with the EFF, if they are not victorious in next year's election. The EFF is a problem child born accidentally during the former president Jacob Zuma's reign. We can expect the child to remain delinquent.

ISMAIL M MOOLLA  
Umzinto

### Dhlomo responsible for state of morgues

I NEED to point out that it was not necessary for Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo to perform post-mortems at state mortuaries ("MEC does post-mortems to spare grieving Durban family," Sunday Tribune, December 9).

Doctors are the only people who may perform post-mortems and they are not on strike – it is the workers who are. Nor should the MEC, a political office-bearer, be performing autopsies at state facilities.

The jobs done by these workers include cleaning the premises, ensuring specimens taken during the procedure are properly stored, taking notes dictated by doctors and reconstructing bodies after the process.

Most of the workers should not be involved in reconstruction work since it involves handling human tissue and they lack the qualifications needed to register with the HPCSA (the Health Professions Council), a prerequisite for that job.

It is Dhlomo who is responsible for the dysfunctional state of forensic mortuaries. The transfer from the police to the Department

of Health was going well until his appointment. It was around that time that workers started refusing to under-go training, behaving in an un-disciplined manner, and going on illegal strikes (they are emergency workers) which, on occasion, included muddling bodies, switching off fridges, and hiding dissection tools.

The then Professor of Forensic Medicine, internationally respected Dr Steve Naidoo, spent years trying to get the department to take remedial action, but to no avail.

The impact on the criminal justice system of this gross mismanagement of mortuary services has been devastating for, given the absence of experienced pathologists, crucial forensic evidence is often lacking – or even incorrect – in cases in which it is of crucial importance.

MARY DE HAAS  
Durban

### It pays to examine your hospital bills

PERHAPS the most disconcerting aspect of private health care is the cost factor. Compounding this is the fact that most patients are lay people. The patient subjects himself to the "expertise" of the physician or specialist, and quite often returns home none the better or wiser.

But beware your rights as a patient to be informed every step of the way as to what you are being treated for, why and how, whether you are a cash-paying patient or are covered by medical insurance.

Questioning a doctor can be a dicey situation. Many patients are intimidated by the qualification of the person attending to them – and are in awe. Do not be.

Patients on medical aid do not really question their bills, and assume claims submitted are proper, valid and was specifically designed for treatments in the interests of the patient and that the medical aid will pay as claimed. You will be surprised.

More especially in private hospitals, while an admitting doctor may be the initial practitioner attending to the patient, you will, on closer inspection, find other

specialists of other disciplines being roped in as a "team", when it may not be necessary. Without painting all doctors with the same brush, if you are not alert or do not have the courage to question, you will yield to the world of the unknown controlled by the apparently knowledgeable who may not necessarily only have your health care in their hands, but also one eye on the cash register and a holiday on the French Riviera.

Examine your medical claims; confirm treatments done; verify procedures; ask "silly" questions. Examine the hospital's detailed billing. Should a roll of bandage be charged for, yet only a few centimetres used, ask for the rest.

Many private specialists charge consultations of more than 600% requiring the patient to pay cash – question this.

If you are uncertain about any aspect or procedure, enquire, or procure another opinion – your doctor might squirm, but his obligation to your health and your right to know is paramount.

NARENDH GANESH  
Durban North

### Court deals Zuma a blow, that's karma

FORMER President Jacob Zuma was hoping the court ruling on his legal fees would be in his favour. The omens were good.

The forefathers were appeased, the bones cast and the sangoma was confident the enemy would be defeated.

The knives were sharpened, the cattle ready for slaughter and Nkandla would see the biggest Christmas party ever.

But alas, the Pretoria High Court struck Zuma a severe blow. It ruled he must pay for his legal fees.

No bumper Christmas gift. He cannot go to the Gupta compound at Saxonwold.

His friends have flown, leaving him to face the music.

But it's music to our ears. You do the crime, you pay. It's an Indian thing called karma.

THYAGARAJ MARKANDAN  
Silvergleng