

EDITOR'S VIEW

Light of non-racialism still flickers, despite differences

THESE days few remember the ANC is the political home of the Indian community in South Africa.

On August 22, 125 years ago, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) was founded by Mahatma Gandhi to fight against the discrimination of Indians in South Africa.

In the years that followed, the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the Cape Indian Congress were formed. Then, in 1919, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) was born.

In the 1940s, the leaders of the time realised the need for blacks (Africans, Indians and coloureds) to unite.

And so, over the years, the relationship between the different black communities grew closer. In the 1980s it led to the formation of the United Democratic Front under the slogan "UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides".

The 1990s heralded the start of a new era. The ANC was unbanned and absorbed both the NIC and TIC.

But, like the extended family system, there were too many people in the house and too many different ideas on how to run the household. As a result, over the years, many left, disgruntled. And, over a period, their children lost the emotional bond with the family home.

What's touching is that those who remain in the family home have not forgotten those who have left and, time and again, reached out to those who are gone.

Yes, there are deep rifts in our society. There are different sets of rules. There is reverse apartheid. But the light of non-racialism, a core principle of the ANC, still flickers.

We see it in our national Cabinet, where, since democracy, minority communities have always been represented. We see it in provincial executives, where spaces are found for representatives from minority communities despite the fact that these communities no longer vote ANC.

Most recently, it was visible in the appointment of deputy mayors in eThekweni and Umsunduzi.

If all goes according to plan, Mxolisi Kaunda will become the new mayor of eThekweni and Belinda Scott will be his deputy.

Scott proved her worth when she served as the MEC for finance in KZN. But there are others who could have done an equally good job.

The same holds true at Msunduzi, where Mzimkhulu Thobela is the mayor-elect and Manilal Inderjit likely to be his deputy.

It tells us one thing – despite our fears there remains life in the ideal of a non-racial South Africa. "A rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world," as described by Nelson Mandela.

Given Eskom's current form, let's switch to a solar/battery option

JUGGERNAUT



KANTHAN PILLAY

FIVE years ago, an internationally renowned electrical engineer of my acquaintance and I were discussing the Grand Inga Project – a plan to build a 40 000 megawatt hydroelectric plant on the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

To put this in perspective, the biggest hydroelectric plant in the world is China's Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River which generates 22 500MW.

Eskom's generating capacity includes 13 coal-fired plants, the Koeberg nuclear plant, two hydro plants on the Orange River, two pumped storage schemes, four gas-fired plants, and one wind farm. Together, these output 44 084MW.

In other words, the Grand Inga Project, if completed, could supply almost 100% of that amount.

South Africa had signed a treaty with the DRC related to the project in 2013 which indicated we, through Eskom, would buy 2 500MW of power from the plant to feed into our national grid. The treaty committed South Africa to an investment of \$2 billion for construction of phase 1 of the Grand Inga Project.

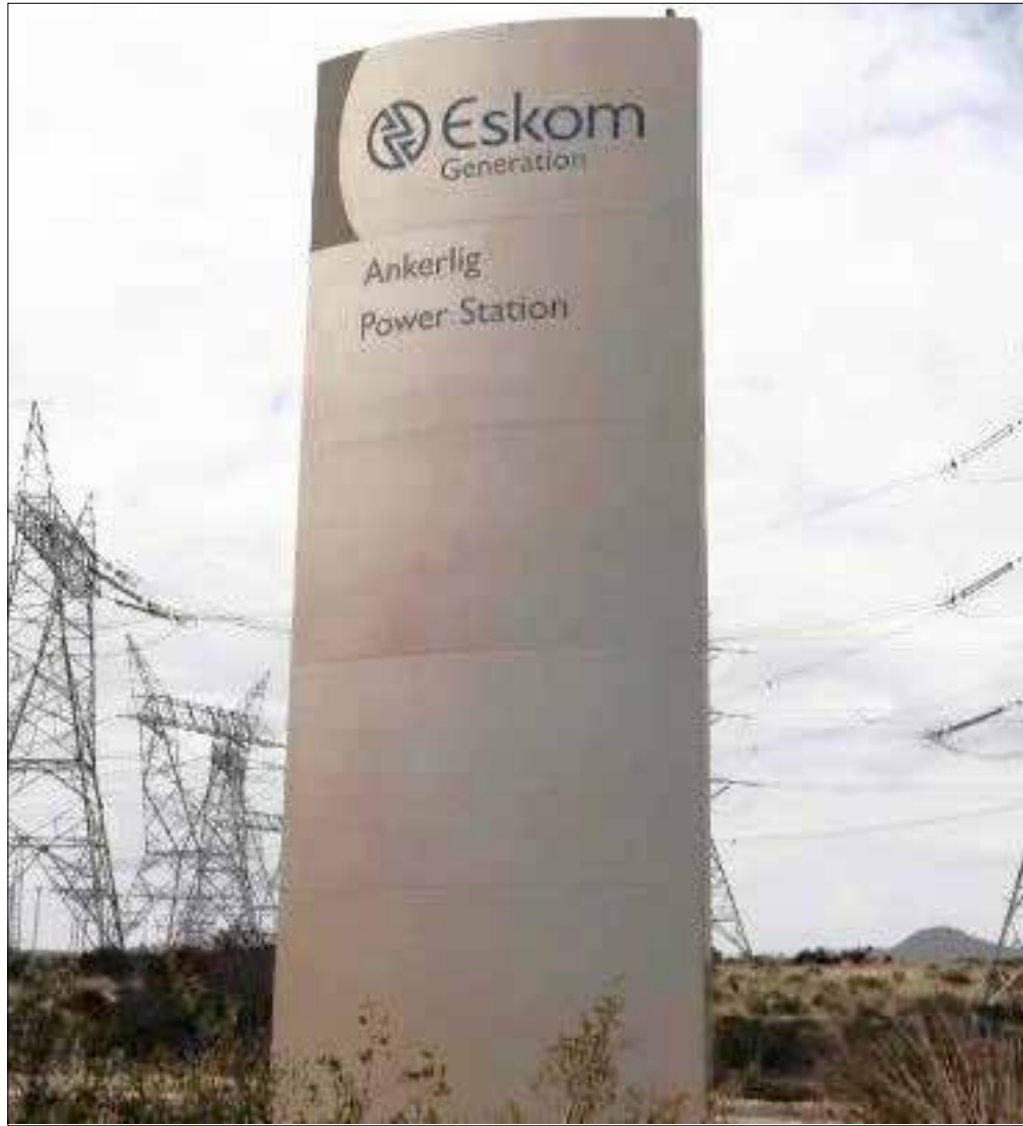
One small problem though: the Congo River is 3 500km away. Power lines from the DRC to South Africa would need to pass through Angola, Namibia, and Botswana before reaching Gauteng, and every 160km loses around 1% of power.

The engineer (whom I'll refer to as Tony) was intrigued at the challenge of moving electricity from the DRC to South Africa. He conceptualised a solution that would use high voltage direct current (DC) instead of alternating current (AC).

This would have two advantages. First, DC is more efficient than AC over long distances. Second, DC uses one cable for every two needed by AC.

Tony's interest in the project was driven by his desire to have South Africa be the first in the world to pull off a DC project of this scale.

My interest came from the sheer scale of the cost saving if Tony was right. A single cable stretching from DRC to South Africa would use 2 175kg of cable costing \$250 000 a kilometre, so each cable run would weigh 7 612 tons and cost \$870 million.



PYLONS carry electricity from a sub-station of state power utility Eskom outside Cape Town. The writer calls for drastic action on Eskom. | MIKE HUTCHINGS Reuters

I knew of one company that was part of a world-leading alliance in transmission and distribution of electricity – Edison Power, which was started with R500 and a borrowed bakkie more than 35 years ago.

I had not met chairperson Vivian Reddy previously, but he responded positively to my request for a meeting between his technical team and Tony.

The first meeting took place shortly afterwards. Vivian introduced his team and left. I stayed to listen out of curiosity and watched as equations and explanatory notes flew across the whiteboard.

I took two insights from that meeting. First, the science of managing power distribution at scale was new territory for me, and I thoroughly enjoyed that brief glimpse

into the field. Second, I was impressed by the competence and expertise on the part of Edison's in-house team.

I've no doubt that had the collective intellect in that room been given the green light at the time, we in South Africa might today have been receiving the first supply of electricity from the power of the mighty Congo River.

Instead, political instability in the DRC led to the World Bank withdrawing funding for the project in 2016. The European Investment Bank, which had initially considered an investment of almost \$1bn, has also backtracked.

The opportunity has been lost, perhaps forever. An investment of \$100bn five years ago would have made financial sense

“It's time for drastic action around Eskom – and that requires writing off its debt, which would allow Eskom to reset its tariff structure

at the time as cheap, clean electricity would be paying dividends in increased economic growth.

But technology does not stand still. Two years ago, Elon Musk's Tesla group delivered a 100MW Powerpack giant battery to Southern Australia at a cost of \$96m.

That Australian investment led to the ability to more effectively use both solar and wind electricity as well as stabilising the grid in peak times. In its first year of operation, the big battery generated revenue of almost \$20m.

Last month, Tesla announced that its replacement for the Powerpack has 60% greater capacity. Tesla says it can deploy a gigawatt-hour plant on 1.25 hectares of land in less than three months.

Let me make a controversial suggestion: it's time for drastic action around Eskom – and that requires writing off its debt.

Here's my logic. Eskom sells electricity at a loss. Constant bailouts will not fix the problem, but the loans taken out to pay for construction of Medupi and Khusile need to be paid off.

If we absorb that debt into the national budget, we, as taxpayers, will still need to cough up the money. But writing off the debt would allow Eskom to reset its tariff structure to a level that is less expensive, which in turn can spur economic growth.

Then starting immediately, Eskom will need to systematically introduce solar/battery replacements for the 13 coal-fired stations it operates.

It will pay for these in two ways: One, by saving money it used to spend money on coal; two, by avoiding paying carbon tax which comes into effect in 2023 at a cost of R11.5bn a year.

Also, we can remind Finance Minister Tito Mboweni that he has saved \$2bn that we promised to the DRC.

Srikanthan is one of the names of Vishnu. Another name for Vishnu is Jagannath, "the unstoppable force", which gives us the modern word Juggernaut. Kanchan Pillay writes about understanding the unstoppable forces which shape our lives in technology, commerce, science and society.

The Quote

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Indo-African bonds made the UDF a powerhouse



THABANI KHUMALO

AUGUST 20 marked the 36th anniversary of a formation credited with liberating the country. The United Democratic Front was formed in 1983 and united hundreds of progressive organisations.

The UDF co-ordinated protests against apartheid, including the 1983 apartheid constitution and the subsequent tri-cameral elections of 1984.

As a result of the Three Doctor's Pact, African and Indian leaders had been working together. The UDF brought them closer together and produced some of our greatest icons.

They include Cyril Ramaphosa, Pravin Gordhan, Frank Chikane, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Archie Gumede, Jay Naidoo, Valli Moosa, Ismail Meer and Ahmed Kathrada.

Through its motto, "UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides", the UDF rallied communities to unite and build a non-racial country.

The Defiance Campaign that began on June 26, 1952, was one of the most powerful actions undertaken by the country's oppressed masses and was led by Indo-African leaders.

The apartheid government saw the campaign as a huge threat and was concerned about the growing partnership between Africans and Indians.

As Nelson Mandela reflected in his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, "Apartheid was designed to divide racial groups, and we showed that different groups could work together".

When the ANC and other progressive organisations were banned, the UDF blossomed into a powerful organisation that united more than 600 anti-apartheid organisations with more than three million members.

The success of the UDF's programme of action was mainly due to the strength of the Indo-African relations.

The two races were subjected to similar hardships at their places of residence and work.

Together they shared oppression, exploitation and poverty. Areas such as Cato



THE United Democratic Front, formed in 1983, united hundreds of progressive organisations, says the writer. | African News Agency (ANA) Archives

Manor, Inanda, Isipingo, Stanger, Marianhill, Umzinto, Verulam and Breamer still reflect that.

That having been said, tension between Africans and Indians in South Africa are a long-standing reality.

Low points include the 1949 riots, the conflict in Inanda during 1985, and Mbongeni Ngema's *Amanliya* song which berated Indians for exploiting Africans as well as allegations that an Indian cabal manipulated the UDF and ANC.

But the tension was always managed by leaders of the UDF and the ANC.

Today, South Africa is experiencing a breakdown of trust and hope. Racism and tribalism are rearing their ugly heads once again. The answer to these problems lies in the lessons we can learn from the UDF.

First, the UDF put the masses ahead of the individual. Organisations that formed the UDF were based on grass roots structures. Decisions were taken through open discussions at community level.

Power within the UDF was decentralised to grass roots level.

Second, internal issues, like the tension between the African and Indian communities were managed.

"The remarkable manner in which the UDF managed the internal strains and stresses which often threaten to blow it apart is rare in front organisations," said UDF general secretary, Popo Molefe.

"That we managed to remain united after the bruising debate of December 1983 referendum suggests a high and almost incredible degree of mutual tolerance amongst UDF leaders and activists."

Third, the UDF valued diversity (cultural, racial, regional, gender, age, ideological and so on), human rights and non-racialism. The way the UDF co-ordinated hundreds of organisations that had different ideologies and had never worked together before was amazing.

Fourth, UDF leaders showed us that to be a revolutionary meant being a principled,

“SA parties need to foster a new kind of activism rooted in service and devotion to the people.

non-racist, disciplined, selfless and practical leader; a nation builder, peacemaker and an activist devoted to the most honourable cause of all – serving others – and providing ethical leadership outside their own constituencies.

Fifth, the UDF's success was due, in part, to the nurturing of successive tiers of leadership produced through strict adherence to internal democratic practices. They understood that investing in the next generation of leadership was the only way to develop responsible and reasoned future leaders.

The UDF leaders emphasised organisational development, resilience, discipline and dedication to the struggle in the face of extreme repression and brutality by the apartheid regime.

It is remarkable that, during a dangerous political atmosphere, the UDF managed to co-ordinate and lead a formidable, coherent and principled opposition movement inside the country.

Its strengths were top quality communications, accountability and respect for diversity which inspired confidence, passion and trust within its formations and the public at large. These are lessons the ANC should take to heart. The lessons should also hold true to opposition parties and civil society leaders who must set examples of ethical and value-based leadership in order to engender trust.

South Africa's parties need to foster a new kind of activism rooted in the UDF traditions throughout their ranks: service and devotion to the people.

When the country's political space is running out of principled leaders and inundated with nationalist and racist political tendencies, the UDF's commitment to democracy, diversity, dedication and discipline has lessons for the country's politics. Long live the UDF!

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