

EDITOR'S VIEW

Tone set by Ramaphosa bodes well for the future

"AS A LEADER you set the tone for your entire team." They are the words of Colin Powell in his autobiography *My American Journey*. Before becoming an author, Powell was a decorated soldier. He served for 35 years in the American army. In his last assignment he was appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military position in the American Department of Defence.

However, he is probably best known in his capacity as Secretary of State. It was a position he held between 2001 and 2005 – a time when George W Bush was the American president.

Powell addressed the plenary session of the United Nations Security Council in February 2003 where he claimed "there can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to rapidly produce more, many more".

He subsequently acknowledged that the sources who supplied him with the information were wrong which said a lot about him as a leader.

One of South Africa's greatest sons, Thabo Mbeki, also set the tone for his presidency. Principled and hardworking, the South African economy boomed under his leadership.

Mbeki was a great thinker and his weekly online column (in his capacity as leader of the ANC) became popular.

It was one of the first things Jacob Zuma ditched when he took over the leadership of the ruling party from Mbeki.

At the time we were told that the letter from the president would only be published on special occasions and it would only deal with themes and events.

But, as Zuma consolidated his power, he isolated himself and we heard less and less from him.

Thankfully, Cyril Ramaphosa has adopted a more open approach.

He started a weekly column in his capacity as president of the Republic. It's not as long or philosophical as Mbeki's writing, but it does set the tone.

This week our president spoke about transformation and non-racialism.

He re-affirmed the ANC's commitment to non-racialism and called it "a fundamental pillar of the society we are trying to build".

"It is a principle we will not abandon," Ramaphosa said.

He acknowledged that too many South Africans had not embraced non-racialism.

"Whether it is reflected in the internal dynamics of political parties, in the workplace, or outwardly expressed on the letter pages of newspapers, one finds a reluctance on the part of some to accept that Africans, whites, Indians and coloureds all have an equal right to a seat at the table of our society."

Ramaphosa's words won't change things overnight. But, as our president, he has set the tone for the future.

Given the times we live in, it was an important message and one we welcome.

The Quote

You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.

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FOUNDED 1955

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Advertising 031 308 2004
Subscriptions 0800 204 711
Deliveries 031 308 2022

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Cover price: R9.50 (includes VAT at 15%)

Unions declare victory, but it's one not for the workers

SAA strike has cost the country dearly

JUGGERNAUT



KANTHAN PILLAY

SO THIS guy was taking a smoke break with his non-smoking colleague who asks: "How long have you been smoking?"

"Oh, about 30 years," the smoker replies. "Thirty years! Wow! You smoke a pack a day. You're spending R16 425 per year. Now if you invested that money at 8% return for the last 30 years, you'd have about R2 million in the bank today. You could pick up a Ferrari in good nick for that price."

The smoker frowned. "But you don't smoke," he said to his colleague.

"True," his colleague replied. "So where's your Ferrari?"

I mention this story because it's difficult to start talking about numbers without putting many people to sleep. But since we've started talking about percentages, let me tell you another story.

At the beginning of this month of November, pilots flying for SAA received a pay increase of 5.9%.

At the same time, SAA announced its intention to shed 944 jobs to cut costs.

Now SAA pays its employees extremely well compared to public sector schoolteachers or doctors. Flight attendants earn up to R332 000 per year. A customer service agent earns up to R256 000. An aircraft mechanic or service technician earns between R130 000 to R436 000.

Pilots in South Africa have a median salary of R480 000 peaking at R719 000 for those with 20+ years of experience.

But unlike other SAA employees, commercial pilots are highly sought-after around the world.

An SAA commercial pilot could easily find employment in Singapore or Hong Kong, and earn four times as much as they do here.

So the 5.9% increase to pilots still leaves them poorly paid by global standards. Nevertheless, trade unions working with SAA were incensed. How dare SAA give the pilots an increase but not the rest of the workers?

There followed some hasty back-peddalling on the part of SAA management. Workers



MEMBERS of the South African Cabin Crew Association and the National Union of Metalworkers recently picketed at the SAA Airways Park in Kempton Park. The writer says union leaders drummed up a great deal of manufactured outrage portraying the SAA employees as exploited victims. | THEMBA HADEBE AP

would get the same 5.9% increase, they said, but only in April next year because there was no money available right now.

Not good enough, said the unions. They demanded an 8% increase.

When this was not forthcoming, they went on strike.

Eight days later, the strike came to an end. The parties agreed to an increase of 5.9% on total cost of employment retrospective to April 1, 2019, which will be paid in the February 2020 payroll, subject to availability of funding.

SAA was quoted as saying the strike cost R50 million a day in lost revenue. The unions have declared victory.

Was it a victory for the workers?

So for the sake of our discussion today, let's look at our flight attendant earning R332 000 a year and see how she fares before and after the strike.

SAA had offered her a pay increase of 5.9% for the year. That's R19 588. The unions wanted 8%. That's R26 560 for the year, R6 972 more than SAA offered.

The unions went on strike for eight days. When one goes on strike, no work no pay applies.

At a rate of R332 000 per 365 days, this works out to R909.58 per day or R7 276 in lost income for the eight days our flight attendant did not work.

If you're confused, please bear with me. I'll break it down:

If our flight attendant had accepted the 5.9% increase, she would have earned R351 588 for the year.

If our flight attendant had won the 8% increase, she would have earned R358 560 for the year, minus the eight days' pay lost, to her bring a total of R351 284 for the year.

As things stand, our flight attendant ended up with R351 588 minus the eight days pay lost to her for a total of R344 312.

I can understand how the workers did not see how stupid this is. The union leaders drummed up a great deal of manufactured outrage portraying the SAA employees as exploited victims.

In a way, this is now true. The workers have ended up with less money than they would have had, had they accepted the SAA offer in the first place.

Variations on this drama have played themselves out in almost every strike in our country's recent history, with striking

workers ending up with less money than if they had not gone on strike.

The cost of such strikes to the economy has gone largely unnoticed. But now we have a figure to focus on: R50m a day in lost revenue to SAA translates to R400m down the drain.

The workers ended up with an effective 3.7% increase. And we taxpayers will have to fund a R2 billion guarantee to make this happen.

The time has come for workers to shift their focus to union leaders who themselves were unaffected.

They continued to draw their salaries uninterrupted through the process.

Perhaps if the no-work-no-pay rule were extended to union leaders too, they might hesitate to take the country down the path of destruction.

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

Sometimes, you must just switch off and let it be



YOGIN DEVAN

THE salt-and-pepper hair is fast disappearing. Kiran, my old school barber, gives me a six-weekly progress – or should I rather say regression – report.

He remembers when there were so few strands of grey hair, you had to look hard to spot them. Now, he says, the black hair is elusive, steadily overpowered by grey hair. How I wish there was affirmative action for black hair.

Of course, the natural process of ageing is to blame for my grey hair.

The vagaries of life – unpredicted happenings within the family and in the workplace – have also played a part.

I realise there is one more thing that must be making my hair lose its melanin so fast. It is getting angry too often at too small things.

On January 1, 2020, I will resolve to suck down my rage. I will work harder at not releasing the internal pressure cooker for every small thing that seems to anger me.

"So what? Let it be" will be my new mantra.

I don't have to explode each time I notice that the serrations down the middle of a pair of cream crackers do not line up and instead run horizontally. The biscuits are going to be crushed in any case.

I have decided that to help me come to terms with happenings that raise my hackles, I should write them down.

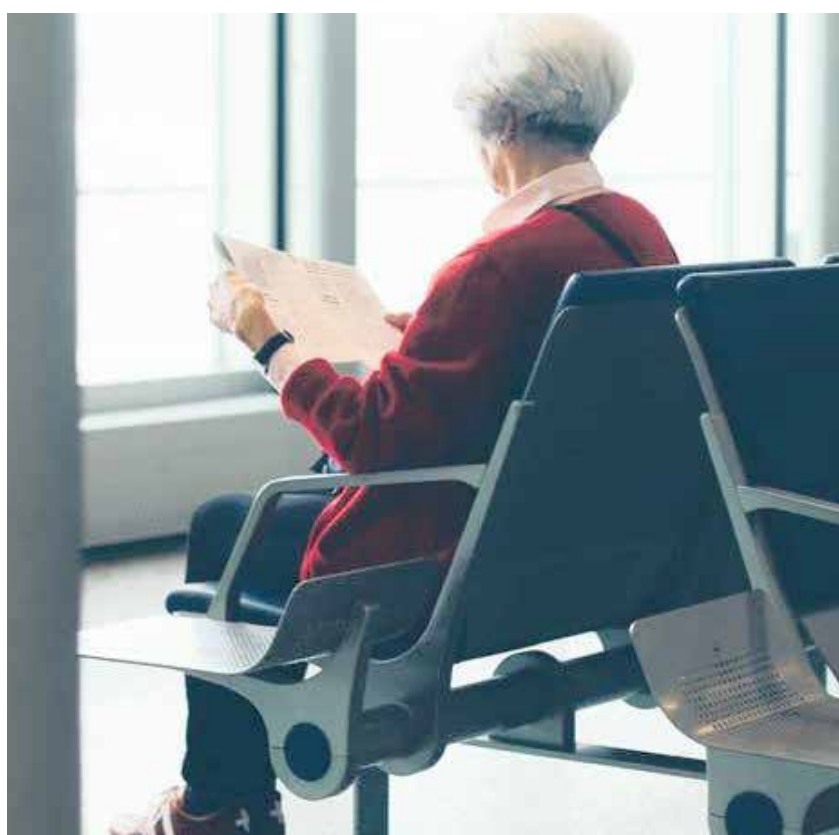
I am sharing some of the things that irritate me – lest we have common pet hates and can start working on disregarding them together.

It irritates me that Gandhi – as in the Mahatma – is spelt Ghandi, especially by non-Indians. Yes, there is racism in spelling. Why then do so many whites spell my name as Jurgen?

I am annoyed when people in cars – especially those teeny-weeny ones – don't say thank you when you let them get in front of you in a traffic jam.

The following also gets me fuming – and gets my hair turning grey.

When I go to the supermarket to buy shoe polish but return with everything that was



THE reader refers to an airport annoyance when people leave bags on empty seats next to them. | Pexels. Com

middle of the road to phone for directions. I must get more grey hairs when I am in a hurry in the supermarket queue and people with wallets bulging with banknotes pay with loose change – and take ages to pick out the coins with butterfingers.

I want to scream when even two-ply tissues disintegrate into pieces when you ask as try to blow your nose gently.

The journalist in my DNA thrives on stories. Little wonder then that I get peeved when I am having a good gossip session and the juicy story comes to an abrupt end because the other party's phone battery dies.

I am infuriated when, soon after washing my car, the guy in front decides to use his windscreen washer and wets my car.

My pet peeve is these chaps who will buy an expensive German sedan, say a BMW 750 which has a bold badge on the declaring BMW 750.

Centimetres away, the personalised registration plate will state BMW750-ZN. Eish?

Are people just being slow or dumb, not sure which, when it comes to filling out the customs cards at the airport or having their passports ready?

I mean how many times do they need to announce this on the plane only to have people jam up the line while they fill them out?

Even worse is when they have no pen and want to borrow mine. Am I going to spend my holiday waiting until they fill out their form with my pen?

Another airport annoyance is when people leave their bags on the empty seats next to them. Who cares if it is a Chanel, Louis Vuitton or Gucci? My bum needs that seat more than the bag.

If an irritation can get my ticker to go into overdrive, it is the driver in the parking lot of a mall who will pack goods in the boot, nod when you ask if he/she will be leaving, and then make you wait while the hair is adjusted in the rear view mirror.

Some exhaust smoke indicates the car has been started. But there is more waiting while the phone messages are scanned. Then the reverse light comes on. Still no movement. Where is the parking ticket? Finally, the car backs out. Will there be anything left in the Black Friday sale?

Life is too short to let the little things drive you crazy. Don't sweat over the small things.

Devan is a media consultant and social commentator. Share your comments with him on: yogind@meropa.co.za