

No time to drop signal

FINALLY, someone has stood up for the plight of the consumer, in this case the 40 million cellphone users in this country. Yesterday, Paris Mashile lashed out at the three cellphone service providers, telling them to build capacity or face the prospect of at best hefty fines, at worst having their licences revoked.

It's no idle threat, and it shouldn't be, for, as Mashile rightly points out, we have just emerged from a period of extremely dodgy service; dropped calls and delayed SMSes.

If anyone ever needed reminding of how dangerous that can be, they need only ask pay channel M-Net, which was forced into the humiliating situation of having to undo a reality TV programme and create two winners because SMS votes didn't get through in time.

We need no reminding either just how deep cellphone penetration has gone in our society. The cellphone companies themselves reckon there are so many users, it would appear that not only does just about every single South African from teenager up have a cellphone, but many have two handsets or even more.

Add to that the proliferation of 3G telephony for computers, and the success of this incredible phenomenon comes into even sharper relief.

It has been only 15 years since cellphones first became available in this country, but now everyone, from gogos to children, and from chief executives to manual labourers, has one – and many of us depend on our cellphone to get through our day: to keep in touch with our loved ones, to earn our living, to feel safe, to feel connected.

In the process, we have made cellphone telephony an incredibly profitable business for the service providers, but as Mashile points out, they have to invest some of that money back into the business to ensure that the quality of the service is maintained.

Mashile is angry on two grounds. He believes we deserve the service we pay for, but one which we aren't getting. His second concern is as pressing: in less than a year's time, our networks are going to be under strain like never before when tens of thousands of people arrive for the Fifa World Cup. And then the networks will go into meltdown, and we'll not only be inconvenienced, we'll be embarrassed too.

Bravo, Paris Mashile, for speaking out. Well done for laying down the law. This way we all benefit.

Voice in the wilderness

GAUTENG'S new premier, Nomvula Mokonyane, did well to step in and decisively end the Joburg Metrobus drivers' strike, which had been bedevilling the city for a month. She did particularly well in the face of a planned sympathy strike by municipal workers in both the Joburg and Ekurhuleni metropolitan areas.

But, as University of Johannesburg transport expert Vaughan Mostert pointed out this week, the premier resolved only part of the problem.

His thesis, in brief, is that not enough people are using the buses – when they do run, that is.

Effectively, Mostert is warning that the Bus Rapid Transit system, which aims to revolutionise our transport, may fail before it even begins because of these and a host of other integral dysfunctions.

Someone needs to speak to him, quickly.



Why can't we all find this recipe for harmony on a troubled continent?

HER VOICE, as it soared, unaccompanied, up to the vaulted awning above, had the purity and power which sent chills down my spine and pricked the gooseflesh up on my arm.

And, even when the drummers erupted, unleashing their sound as if from a dam wall breaking, her tones remained clear and sweet, winding themselves about the percussion in a sinuous duet. Then came the other female and male voices, rising in celebration as only African voices can.

Around the central voice, the other singers twirled and swirled, approaching and withdrawing, all the while performing an elaborate vocal dance with the drummers. And, as they sang, the women and the men danced. Everywhere there was rhythm. Everywhere there was energy.

Everywhere there was a natural harmony and integration even though they only decided shortly before what they were going to do.

When I looked closely at their faces, I saw the real joy in expressing themselves that sometimes we more uptight "Europeans" have buried away inside ourselves.

The performance, at Cape Town's GOLD restaurant, reminded me of many I saw in the years I covered Africa. The tall puppets they performed with reminded me of Senegal and Cameroon; the hairy, buck-like creature costume I saw in the Ivory Coast. The vigorous drumming seemed to echo an age-old mantra



from Zambia and Zimbabwe.

But what really brought a lump to my throat was the fact that they were all in genuine, pan-African harmony. South Africans and "foreigners" alike. Many of the staff at GOLD are from outside our borders, yet they and the South Africans worked as a team.

Why, if that happens in the setting of a restaurant, can people be attacked and terrorised just 15km away in the grim townships of the Cape Flats?

During the outburst of xenophobia last year, the South African staff were horrified about how their countrymen were treating other Africans, because the atmosphere in GOLD is one of "we are all Africans together" as one staff member put it.

Restaurant owner Cindy Muller has already ruffled some feathers locally by her willingness not only to employ foreigners, but to help all of her staff in the same way. It angers her, she says, to see how foreigners are abused and battered by the system, sent from pillar to post by government officials (especially those in Home Affairs who only overcome their hatred when their palms are greased with money); sworn at

in the street by locals or ripped off by those who see them as an easy, defenceless target. All the non-South Africans working in the restaurant have tales to tell, stories which should make us ashamed as South Africans, as human beings...

GOLD'S cuisine, an intriguing amalgam of Cape Malay and African cooking, is as seamless as the relationships between the workers. Upstairs, in the Gold of Africa Museum, the beautiful artefacts of the continent were a reminder of a history ploughed under by colonists. It all made me wonder: what has happened to the glorious idea of pan-Africanism (with the small p)? The dream of a continent united by its African-ness, by a shared vision and a shared history?

I remember visiting the ANC's Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania in the early 1980s and being struck not only by the steely determination of the cadres there to liberate their own country from apartheid, but their goal of uniting an Africa free of all the shackles of colonialism. The ANC people viewed themselves then as Africans from the south of the continent and were actually aware of the sacrifices the host countries had made in taking in exiles from here.

As I sat, watched and ate, I could feel that night in GOLD that there was way, way more than just food going on there. It was an Africa that was. But also an Africa which can be again if people come to their senses.

The week IN QUOTES

My wife says I'm rugby-befok! – Robert Terblanche from Pretoria, who wasted no time in getting tickets to today's Super 14 final. He was waiting in line at the ticket office 20 minutes before the final whistle sounded at Loftus Versfeld during the semi-final.

Poverty sucks. Humanity and human settlements should rock. – Minister of Human Settlements Tokyo Sexwale, saying his mission over the next five years is to wage a war against poverty

No f...ing comment. – A pupil from Northview High School, having a smoke with his friends, when asked why he was not in class. He was with more than 100

Compiled by KASHIEFA AJAM

pupils from Waverly Girls' High, Northview High and Highlands North High on the corner of Louis Botha Avenue and Athol Road in Balfour Park this week.

Tomorrow we are coming to give her the attention she wants, but in a very different way. She will never want us at her office again. – The MK Military Veterans' Association's national organiser, Fatty Booi, before their march to Western Cape

Premier Helen Zille's office to demand that she apologise to President Jacob Zuma.

Company CEOs and government aristocrats continue to be criminal beneficiaries of financial obesity irrespective of the performance of the economy. – Benzi Ka-Soko, Popcru's national spokesman.

I'm very sorry. If you need me to show a sign of how sorry I am, I'm ready to show. – Swaziland MP Timothy Myeni apologising for his comment suggesting that HIV-positive people should be branded on the buttocks.

Mr 4x4, you really should park pretty



SOME say hell's hot, some say it's cold; I think it's an underground parking lot at a shopping mall where you have to drive around and around for eternity trying to find the exit.

And when I do, I always seem to come out on the opposite side of the building and I haven't a clue which way I'm going. I'm quite capable of heading off to Pretoria when I'm supposed to be going to the CBD.

But then, face it, I'm directionally challenged. Some people seem to carry a compass in their heads. They always turn automatically to the north.

I have to rely on Auntie. Auntie's great. "Please turn right in 200m..." She gets caught out by suburban booms and roadworks, but then so do we all.

I'm not sure who supplied the voice for our GPS, but she put a lot of emotion into it. She gets quite frantic when we disregard her instructions. "Make a U-turn now if possible... please make a U-turn NOW!"

Then you can almost hear the sigh as she recalculates and the little car on the screen settles down again.

"Please turn left in 700m... turn left now..." I must say it is very reassuring to have Auntie around when you're lost in the pitch dark and pouring rain and all the streets look exactly the same.

One thing Auntie can't do is park pretty. That's the latest slogan at school where the parking lot has recently been revamped.

It is amazing how many people can't park pretty. The other day I parked neatly at the mall, nicely between my lines, but when I got back a positively huge ocean liner of a 4x4 had parked next to me, both massive wheels over the line. Only a skeleton could have wriggled into my driver's seat.

So do I climb tortuously into my own car via the passenger seat, or do I mash her paintwork? I wasn't worried; a scratch or two on my elderly granny of a car only adds to the ambience.

She really should have parked pretty. I totally fail to understand the craze for 4x4s. Why on earth do people need these massive, over-powered vehicles in the city? In the country, yes. If you're chasing black mambas or loading up for camping trips in the bush, they are absolutely the right vehicles, but then you'd have a few strategic scratches or some designer mud splashes to show for it.

But I don't think most of the shiny, perfect, metallic shells I see around have ever been through more than a puddle and I shudder to think how many litres of petrol or diesel they guzzle when they sit in a traffic jam. And have you noticed that when a car slows down to almost a stop to cautiously go over a traffic hump it's nearly always a 4x4 with enough clearance to hurdle Table Mountain?

Sometimes I really think there should be another category in the driver's licence for 4x4 drivers, or a compulsory advanced driver's course. After all, it's practically a truck. Of course, Auntie can't handle pedestrians either: I think we should change the rules. Pedestrians can walk on the roads, cars can drive on the pavements. It's basically what's happening anyway.

The other day, a small boy dashed out from between two parked cars right in front of my tyres. He was the same height as the cars, so I had no warning at all. I slammed on brakes, skidded and missed him by inches. Fortunately it was a very busy intersection with lots of pedestrians criss-crossing, so I was going very slowly.

He didn't look, he didn't even seem to know I was there. He ran across the road, laughing. I shook like a leaf all the way home. What if I hadn't stopped in time? What if I hadn't managed to miss him? Now that is truly my idea of hell.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUNTER'S SCENARIOS WILL BENEFIT SA

THE HIGH road-low road scenario of Clem Sunter's book *The World and South Africa in the 1990s* highlighted the characteristics of a winning nation. Yes, we took the high road under Nelson Mandela. That is: the policies, strategies and macro-economic blueprint for South Africa was followed, and the country and its people benefited. The world sat up and took notice and we became a respected global player.

Unfortunately the Mbeki years undid a lot of the good because of his centrist, autocratic style.

Zuma and his cabinet are now in charge. Only the future will really tell how effective their strategies will be in the areas of politics, social and economic development.

Sunter's book lists the six factors that make for a winning nation. I assume it is a recipe that has been researched.

These qualities are: quality education, work ethic, mobilisation of capital, a dual logic economy, social harmony and being a global player. 1. Education: Yes, the Nationalist government deprived the majority of decent education. Outcomes-



AFRICA DAY: Asa from Nigeria performing in Joburg.

Meaning of Africa Day lost in languages of colonialism

REAL value gets lost in the process when those responsible have little knowledge of the subject.

Like many Africans I went to Newtown to observe the day which signifies the beginning of African liberation, Africa Day (May 25). I had hoped to be taught and reminded of the sacrifices that the predecessors of the African Union made towards the liberation of Africa.

Nothing was mentioned about the founders of the Organisation of African Unity, its objectives, missions and constitution. What about

African socialism, philosophies, cultures and development?

Not once did I hear anybody speaking about any African leader, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Haile Selassie I, or the need to decolonise Africa and create African unity through eradication of poverty, inequality, hunger, civil wars, human displacement and all the humanitarian crises Africa faces.

The only unity that was there was the common diversity Africans share. When one peruses the list of artists, one would be forgiven to think that some African artists

were actually borrowed from the US to perform.

What an embarrassment. Why celebrate achievements of colonisation, through conversing in "deep" colonial languages, when the founders of African Unity fought against it? It seems there are very many Africans who harbour the notion that colonisation was the best thing that ever happened to Africa. The prevalence of colonialism was celebrated.

Second, I do confess to be a hater of the so-called VIPs; when did Africans started discriminating

according to class?

There was a marquee to the left for these naive people who do not know that they inherited the colonial mentalities of class discrimination.

Kings walked among people and didn't need bodyguards. Why claim to serve and love people when you have isolated yourself from them?

I believe it is time for Africans to start learning more about themselves before they embrace wrong cultures and ideals.

Phillimon Mnisi
Johannesburg

based education has just made a bad situation worse.

2. Work ethic: Productivity in South Africa has never been good. Work ethic is a core value of the Japanese success story. Entitlement and corruption is a virulent disease that is pervading our business arena. I am also trying to figure out what the ANC means by "decent work".

3. Mobilisation of capital: Economists know how important this is.

It's a pity Zuma's constituency doesn't appreciate it (Cosatu and the Vodacom deal, for example).

4. Dual logic economy: This encourages entrepreneurs and was the economic driving force in Taiwan and Korea.

5. Social harmony: Obvious. Except in South Africa, where groups are bent on making places "ungovernable" for the pettiest of reasons. It's probably an offshoot of the revolutionary mindset.

6. Global player: World economics is not based on sentiment. It is competitive and to be in the league one has to meet market demands.

Hopefully, Trevor Manuel's department will get us back onto the "high road".

Andy Beytell
Klerksdorp

CLEAN UP HOME AFFAIRS

I'M MOST interested to hear that

government offices are going to come under scrutiny. Can they start with the Home Affairs office in Market Street, Joburg?

I went there in the first week of March to drop off a form for a vault copy of my birth certificate, waited over a month then went back to see how far they had got with it.

The first woman I spoke to said my request has not been captured because the system kept rejecting the information. She could not find

my application form. I completed another and wrote "original lost in the office".

The next week I went back, as I also had to collect my sister's copy. The system was still rejecting my information. I was given a Pretoria telephone number and told to call and ask why.

To cut a very long story short, I'm still waiting after a member of the Pretoria office staff said she would courier both copies to me. My sis-

ter's copy was posted on April 24 and has not yet been received at Market Street.

This week when I phoned Pretoria both staffers I had previously spoken to were off and someone else told me my copy had been posted to Market Street on May 15. I rushed down there but not even the one posted on April 24 had been received.

Do these people really not care that they give such a very bad, uninterested attitude to the public?

Bernice Robertson

SABC IS WASTING MONEY

I HAVE read with dismay about how our public broadcaster, the SABC, is battling to pay all its bills for local content like soaps and dramas.

But the SABC has a 24-hour news service running worldwide and unless you own a Vivid decoder you wouldn't know it existed. It has 20-odd news bureaus all over the world that feed this news service, and it seems quite obvious to me that it is over-extended in this area.

It's time the SABC got its priorities right and brought these people in these cushy jobs back home.

AJM