



Paying price for SA culture of lawlessness

THE killing of 21 tavern patrons in Soweto, Katlehong and Pietermaritzburg over the past weekend is deeply worrying, especially because it comes so soon after the Enyobeni, Eastern Cape tragedy a fortnight ago.

The common thread in all in these killings is that alcohol and guns were involved – bar the Enyobeni deaths.

In terms of alcohol abuse, it is a well-known fact that social events among black people are not complete without alcohol. Thus, even young people have easy access to alcohol.

In addition, the prevalence of guns, especially unlicensed or stolen ones, is a major problem. The prevalence of alcohol and the easy access to guns is a deadly combination.

Some people are beginning to ask whether South Africa is entering the era of mass shootings like in the US.

Just over a week ago, a Chicago shooter killed seven people at a July 4 event. Last month, another shooter killed 19 learners and two teachers in Uvelda, Texas. In fact, almost weekly there are mass shootings in the US.

In our case, the issue of guns and alcohol is compounded by our complete disregard for human life.

Over and over again, South Africans continue to demonstrate how little they value and cherish life, whether it be their own or that of others.

One only has to drive on our freeways to see how reckless some drivers operate – far exceeding speed limits, driving under the influence of alcohol, disobeying traffic rules, road rage, etc.

All this underpins the argument that ours is not a problem of law enforcement, guns or alcohol. These are just symptoms, the arguments goes.

The problem is that we have a culture of lawlessness. Respect for others – including their lives – is non-existent, manifesting in corruption, violence and misbehaviour of learners at school.

To arrest this issue, we need several interventions. In the short term, law enforcement agencies must rigorously deal with those breaking laws.

In the medium term, our legislators need to review existing laws to see if they need to be amended.

In the long term, South Africans need to have a national, all-inclusive conversation about what country we want to live in and what it will take to get there. This is such a crucial conversation that it cannot be left to politicians alone as it affects all of us.

CONTEMPLATING A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Thoughts on the 'new normal'

LATE in December 2019, I was embarking on a new challenge after deciding to leave my comfort zone. I was aware that it would have a significant influence on my personal and professional life.

However, before I dived into the challenge fully, I decided to take a short break and rejuvenate. Little did I know that during my summer sojourn something monstrous was lurking without our knowledge.

Something which would affect society significantly in the immediate future and change many of us forever. The Covid-19 pandemic was real, scary and evil! It just crashed into our lives all of a sudden and out of nowhere. It was both mystifying and blinding.

Unlike many other epidemics that have engulfed us in the past, it came to stay, and compel us to live in eternal fear and uncertainty.

Hardly anyone could have escaped from its impact and the misery that has been brought along with it. Certainly, it has changed my thinking process, my philosophy, my urbanity, and above, all my life, forever.

It has left me pondering and searching for answers to the path my personal and professional life will turn into.

However, when I reflect, it is with an eerie feeling. I am not sure what is ahead of me and ahead of society as a whole, but we are eagerly awaiting the so-called post-pandemic era. So, I think it would not be unwise to share my reflections and thoughts.

One word that defined my life during this difficult time is "loss". It started with a weird feeling during the lockdown, transforming into apprehension, and continued as profound loss and agony.

Many of us must have gone through this process. I still remember the first days of lockdown, when I could stand at the bay window of my flat, looking down the empty roads, valleys and hills, full of presumably



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lifeless buildings accommodating full of lives.

I could remember my childhood and adolescence in the 1970s and 1980s, when I stood for hours on the road that passed through my village, to watch the occasional vehicle that whistled past me.

A calm, serene and pollution-free environment, where one can hear the cacophony of the birds and see the stars on a dark night. It also gave ample time without the concerns of being late for an appointment or juggling various activities.

It gave me time and the opportunity to do things I had planned for but could not accomplish previously.

I learned many things, and I did many things which I wanted to do but would not have done otherwise.

However, these small unintended benefits fast gave away to apprehension, fear and loss.

Soon, there was mayhem everywhere. It was bad news galore, that came thick and fast from every corner. No one was safe. Nobody had the answer to stopping the lurking and advancing monster. We were helpless and there was no solution in sight.

I started living in perpetual fear and anxiety. I never knew what would happen to my loved ones, who were

far away from me.

I was also concerned about whether tomorrow would never come for me or any of my close mates. Eventually, my worst nightmare befell me.

Along with many of us, I continued to survive. But like many, I experienced profound losses, one after another. I stood in grief, helpless and empty. My world was changed forever. I entered a different world, bereft of joy and filled with agony.

This is not my story alone, but that of many of us. Amid the pain, I whispered to myself: "Welcome to the new world and to the new normal!"

My professional life was not so different. It started with uncertainty and I faced the dilemma of whether to follow a process that was appropriate for one and all. Working from home came with both unintended benefits and challenges.

Many of us must have gone through this process. I still remember the first days of lockdown, when I could stand at the bay window of my flat looking down the empty roads, valleys and hills, full of presumably lifeless buildings accommodating full of lives.

I accepted it with a bit of reluctance and also observed a strange reaction from many people.

Change in the work environment, working in isolation and adapting to a digital model of teaching, learning and assessment created some challenges as expected. However, the flexibility of

work hours and informal home atmosphere made it easy to adopt. The initial reluctance waned over time.

The new way of digitally-enabled teaching and learning became a day-to-day practice. We observed that the new normal with the aid of technology and online teaching and learning and assessment has brought numerous advantages: for example, video lectures assisted the students to revisit the lessons and learn at their own pace.

In the absence of in-person lectures, student assessments could be more rigorous and less time-consuming; the lecturers have the flexibility to prepare the lectures and deliver them without the worry that some students might not understand the lessons delivered, and so on.

However, on the other hand, I experienced that student engagement has become a black hole.

Although we, the lecturers, became more accessible through the use of technology, it was difficult to understand and measure the impact of student engagement and feedback on student performance.

In addition, student alibis because of the general technical issues and ethical challenges, specifically during online tests, were experienced.

The real challenge crept in among many of us when we found the students struggled for everything, from the availability of data to searching for stable internet connectivity, attending online classes, writing assessments and the assured and physical presence of the teachers to assist them to solve their problems at hand.

I could feel the pain and agony of the students when I receive a WhatsApp message or emails late in the night, asking for assistance to resolve their issues. I could feel their helplessness and resigned mood. I wondered if I could make them feel more assured by any means.

But I am not sure whether the new normal with non-personal digital

technology-enabled life could make it happen anymore.

Further, a major question is how we would transform teaching, learning, and assessment when we are back in classrooms.

I am still pondering how I would operate in the classroom as a teacher. Also, how would the student engagement process turn out?

However, beyond my professional and personal challenges, there is a much bigger concern. I still question, as an individual, society and the human race, if we could have handled the pandemic differently or better.

I am in no way competent to assess anybody's performance.

But surely everybody contributed to meet the challenges. Specifically, the front-line health-care workers, the angels who gave their best to save many of us by putting their lives at stake – and so do the researchers, scientists and scores of people engaged in developing remedial measures such as vaccines, medicines, etc, in such a short time.

Yet, something that comes to my mind persistently is whether we as the scientific fraternity could have visualised the challenge more holistically, and assisted in thinking about the processes and remedial interventions holistically. Also, could we have been a little bolder to enable more informed, timely, rational and humane decisions? I don't know.

Similarly, a question remains whether we have learned enough to at least remain prepared and equipped for any uncertainty that might be moving towards us, either to crash into us or tiptoe into our life in the future – or do we just keep accepting the new normals helplessly, and move on?

For me, there are more questions than answers. Even though I know change is inevitable and eternal, embracing a new normal as we have now is a much harder challenge than we presume.

IMAGE OF THE DAY



A GROUP of dancers wearing indigenous costume participate in the day of Prayer for Peace in the face of violence in Mexico, called by the Catholic Church throughout the country, during the annual visit of the Image of the Virgin of Zapopan in Chapala, state of Jalisco, Mexico. | AFP

QUICK READ

BULLET

A YEAR-OLD girl had to be hospitalised after being accidentally wounded when a stray bullet from a local graveyard struck her in the leg while playing at home.

Mpumalanga police spokesperson Colonel Donald Mdluli said the incident happened during a funeral in Pienaar outside Mbombela on Saturday.

The minor is said to have been playing outside the house. Gunshot sounds were reportedly heard coming from the nearby graveyard where there was a burial and moments later the child was heard screaming. | IOL

POWER

SEVERAL Durban industrial operators that consume large quantities of electricity have remained closed owing to the power supply not having been restored after the April floods wrecked infrastructure.

Therefore, eThekweni Municipality is adamant Eskom won't impose load shedding on the city just yet, according to head of electricity, Maxwell Mthembu.

This, after the council issued a joint statement with Eskom last week notifying residents that an agreement had been reached to implement load shedding sooner. | IOL

RESTORE PUBLIC, INVESTORS' CONFIDENCE

Transparency around Phala Phala is crucial

BLESSING MBALAKA

PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa was meant to be the salvation of the ANC. His history in business and billionaire status created a public perception that painted him as an individual who could potentially abstain from the dirty politics of the ANC.

However, the Phala Phala incident, arguably, has caused immense reputational damage to Cyril Ramaphosa. This reputational damage could contribute to major implications for the ANC. However, this reputational damage, arguably also has the potential to transcend borders by influencing investor confidence.

South Africa has been historically shaped by corruption throughout its history, and a few noted accounts include the state capture in Apartheid South Africa and the vehement expropriation of funds which transpired during the stewardship of Jacob Zuma.

When the country went in the direction of Ramaphosa, a lot of us pondered if his wealth could motivate him to abstain from the dirty politics of the ANC.

However, the illusion of the anti-corrupt Ramaphosa, as it stands, appears short-lived. The president's reputation of being the "clean" saviour of the ANC has come under severe scrutiny in recent years. This emanated from a corruption perception survey published by Afrobarometer.

This survey found 64% of South Africans perceived corruption to have increased under the stewardship of Cyril Ramaphosa. The Phala Phala farm incident arguably has exacerbated this already prevalent diminishing perception.

Ramaphosa and his alleged "conspirators" have denied the allegations, while a narrative of gangsterism and corruption has been narrated by Arthur Fraser, tabloids, and politicians such as DA president John Steenhuisen and EFF leader Julius Malema.

This split narrative makes the truth murky, therefore it would be incorrect to regard Ramaphosa as guilty until the justice system has had its verdict.

However, the suspicious allegations of cash being stored in sofas, and amounting to the alleged \$4 million (about R68m) has contributed to immense scepticism regarding the origin of these funds.

The uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the Phala Phala farm incident has been argued by Steenhuisen to warrant an investigation by the FBI into money laundering. Steenhuisen's scepticism is warranted and necessary, because it may help the truth surface.

The public needs to be made aware of the true origin of Ramaphosa's funds to ensure there are no concerns surrounding state capture and money laundering.

Aside from citizen concerns, international investment can be drastically

influenced by this perceived corruption.

The truth could contribute to disinvestment, while the ambiguous judicial process could contribute to the hesitancy of international investors.

In a recent ENCA interview, former president Thabo Mbeki noted that he had hopes that the judicial process will be promptly adhered to. Mbeki noted that the justice process would reveal many public questions.

Mbeki is correct, but if this legal process is not administered fairly, then Ramaphosa's dwindling reputation may be compounded by public distrust, especially, if the justice system appears "soft" on the president.

South Africa's constitutional sovereignty needs to be hailed as supreme. It is imperative that the public and the international community witness the president succumb to the rule of law.

This ideally implies that if Rama-

phosa is indeed guilty, he will have his days in orange overalls.

The international community is watching, and if there is any scepticism, it could have dire implications on the economy.

Ramaphosa's public perception is potentially in an irredeemable state, because Arthur Fraser's claims that Ramaphosa is a gangster, kidnapper and money launderer may contribute to public scepticism surrounding the fairness of the justice process.

This scepticism may define Ramaphosa's presidential tenure and may permanently end the Ramaphoria (euphoria around Ramaphosa).

Therefore, transparency during this process is crucial to ensure that the process is fair so the public and the international community begin to trust Ramaphosa again.

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