

Perspectives on KwaZulu-Natal

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The State of KwaZulu-Natal

Political scientist Professor Adam Habib talks to **Cheryl Goodenough** about the state of politics in KwaZulu-Natal.

What have been some of the recent successes of the provincial government?

The provincial government has had two significant positive outcomes. It has been very successful in bringing peace to the province and it has brought the finances of the province back in line.

What is your assessment of Premier Lionel Mtshali's term of office to date?

I must say that Premier Mtshali has presided over one of the most peaceful periods in KwaZulu-Natal's history. He should be applauded for that. He was open enough to enter into the agreements with the ANC that brought about peace.

But he has some serious weaknesses. First, his insistence, which is like the IFP's insistence, that the capital of KwaZulu-Natal should be Ulundi. That could have a serious impact in terms of a loss of skills within the premier's department. Already we have heard reports of five or six senior people leaving. I would like to know on what terms they are going. One can say that moving the capital to Ulundi would be beneficial in terms of the development that it would bring to the hinterland, but there are other strategies that could be used to achieve that development. It seems that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, but Mtshali has a fixation with moving the capital to Ulundi.

My second concern is that he doesn't come off as a people's man. His personality and his image do not inculcate loyalty and confidence.

Thirdly, a concern that is also relevant to other senior politicians: He hasn't given serious consideration to delivering to all marginalised communities. These are people who are really struggling to find jobs, to survive, to clothe their families.

Fourthly, I do not see that there is a coherent strategy to transcend the limitations of poverty that history has bequeathed us. KwaZulu-Natal is the second poorest province in the country.

Finally, like the ANC, the premier doesn't act against the people who he should be acting

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against. There has been the Minister of Welfare who spent R500 000 on staying at the Royal Hotel. Politicians should lead by example and Mtshali hasn't reined in ministers who have been out of line.

How do you rate the provincial ministers?

S'bu Ndebele has been regarded as one of the better transport ministers in the country. He has had some success in traffic campaigns. But there are two blots with the first being his failure to address the violence in the taxi industry. I don't believe that one can bring peace to a public transport industry in the context of a free market. The only way is to provide subsidised public transport. In that way you take the profit part out of it. But Ndebele and other people are unwilling to accept this because of black empowerment. But the right to life should be the greatest principle and without removing the profit aspect there will always be a threat to life.

Ndebele also has a habit of making major gaffes. The statement that has become the most famous was the one he made after the local government election in December last year when he said that services would be provided only to people who voted for the ANC. There are others too.

My other concern is his willingness to resort to playing the race card whenever he is criticised. It is not peculiar to Ndebele and that is something we should be concerned about. We've also had statements from Dumisani Makhaye and Zweli Mkhize from the ANC, as well as Premier Mtshali and Faith Gasa from the IFP. It's not something that happens only in this province.

One can praise finance minister Peter Miller for bringing the provincial finances back in order.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize hasn't addressed the Aids crisis. There are, however, far more clinics in the province now than we have ever had. But Mkhize has had a lack of resources and compared to the challenges that confront the health department, the progress that has been made is miniscule.

The education system is in a complete crisis. However, if provincial minister Faith Gasa is moved out of the position it will not be because she has not done a good job. It is because there are intra-party politics that influenced state politics. Frankly it happens on a local government level as well.

Welfare is a complete disaster.

There are other questions relating to the provincial legislature. There's the issue of Dumisani Makhaye waving his hand in front of his nose in the legislature (at the presence of white DP members). That is unacceptable behaviour for a senior leader. As we mentioned earlier there's the minister who spent R500 000 staying in the Royal Hotel. That is unacceptable behaviour for a senior leader. For Ndebele to make the comments that he did, that is unacceptable behaviour for a senior leader.

Leaders in society should treat all members equally. They should respect all sectors of

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society across party lines.

What is your view of the IFP in KwaZulu-Natal?

The IFP president Mangosuthu Buthelezi still largely controls the party. The other leadership is particularly unstimulating and consideration should be given to a successor to Buthelezi. The IFP has not challenged the ANC to deliver on its macro-economic policy and party members are also guilty of playing the race card.

The IFP also suffers from dogmindedness with regard to having Ulundi as the capital. Its position on traditional leaders has the effect of undermining the culture of democracy. I am sceptical about the institution of traditional leadership because I believe that it has been undermined through its close association with the National Party government. However, it is a force that needs to be recognised in rural areas.

On the issue of traditional leaders, do you think that the conflict is going to be resolved?

It is going to remain a source of tension if it is not resolved. The ANC has not dealt decisively with this issue. But on this I sympathise with them.

What is your view of the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal?

The ANC has a particularly weak leadership in the province. Members tend to play the race card and gaffes are a serious problem. They have not done what they should have done. They should have challenged the economic strategy Gear because it is completely inappropriate for South Africa at the moment.

What do you think the impact will be of the reported division between the provincial leader of the ANC S'bu Ndebele and his deputy Zweli Mkhize?

It is debatable whether either Ndebele or Mkhize are capable of uniting the province. There has been talk about the possibility of the ANC on a national level bringing a third leader to the province in an attempt to marry the factions.

But a democratic contest is good and I hope that the various factions are mature enough to unite under a single leader. I doubt that will happen though, but it would be good for the province. The divide could create tensions in the run up to the elections, but that depends on how the two leaders handle the situation. I hope that it is in a mature fashion.

I hope that the contest will remain within the democratic discourse. I am more concerned about the weaknesses of both Ndebele and Mkhize in terms of delivery, playing the race card and governance.

What role has the Democratic Party/National Party alliance played in KwaZulu-Natal?

The opposition, along with the other parties, are all fighting to service the advantaged. The Democratic Alliance is not prioritising the interests of the poor; not the poor in Mpumalanga, not the poor in Chatsworth. The DA was as complicit as the ANC in the

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local city council in getting people evicted from Chatsworth or getting the water supply to people in Mpumalanga cut off. There is an alliance of parties against the poor.

The DA is still very much a rich man's party. They have deliberately pandered to minority concerns in all the elections and this fundamentally aggravates racial tensions.

If the concerns of the marginalised are not addressed they will come back to haunt us. In terms of the poor and the disadvantaged the DA is not and will not be a serious electoral option.

However, the DA has been at the forefront of exposing corruption and challenging the government. That is the positive role of the opposition.

What about the Minority Front?

I think that the Minority Front is a racist party that panders to ethnic concerns. It organises on the most vulnerable of human emotions and on the most vulnerable of fears. I think that the leader of the party Amichand Rajbansi is a complete charlatan. He's opportunistic.

The Minority Front's relationship with the ANC is opportunistic on the part of Rajbansi and it is opportunistic on the part of the ANC. The ANC is so quickly prepared to sacrifice its principles for pragmatism. It is prepared to sacrifice its honour for short-term political gain.

Does the provincial government have a significant role to play in terms of governing structures?

I question whether the provincial government is a necessary layer of government. It costs too much money and for the amount of delivery I wonder whether it is worthwhile. Perhaps there should be stronger local government structures and the money saved from the provincial structures could be put into delivery.

What do you think is the future of the ANC/IFP coalition?

The benefit of the coalition has been that it has brought peace. The disadvantage is that there is too cozy a relationship between the ANC and IFP and that undermines the purpose of opposition parties.

The future depends on how things are played out at a national level: If the IFP remains in the Cabinet then the coalition will remain at the provincial level. There are serious tensions within the coalition in the province and the coalition is sustained at a national rather than provincial level. However, the relations are tenuous and too dependent on a single individual in the form of Buthelezi.

Has the peace process really filtered down to local communities?

I believe that the violence was not completely spontaneous. It was an organised

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violence. That is testified to in the sense that the coalition has been sustained at a national level and KwaZulu-Natal is far more peaceful now than it has ever been. That has to be a positive feature of the coalition.

Cheryl Goodenough heads Profile KwaZulu-Natal cc.

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