

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

Not out of woods yet

SOUTH Africans would have heaved a collective sigh of relief when Standard & Poor's announced it continued to view South Africa as a country worthy of investment.

The decision follows a similar conclusion from Moody's a few weeks ago.

In coming days, the third major international ratings agency, Fitch, will announce how it views South Africa. Given the view of the other two, it is more than likely Fitch will follow suit.

However, the relief may only be temporary. In October, Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan will present the medium-term budget policy statement in Parliament.

To keep our investment grading, we would need to show by then that we are meeting the targets we have set to collect taxes and curb government spending. We would also need to show that we have put measures in place to grow our economy.

It's no easy task given the global economy and the political instability we are currently experiencing.

One, we have no control over, but we do have control of our political environment. There the focus needs to change from fighting each other to growing our economy.

Pressing matters

IF YOU think Hlaudi Motsoeneng's decision to ban violence from our screens was bad, consider what's happening in other parts of the world.

In America, there have been ominous signs for media freedom since Donald Trump began his White House campaign. Trump has a reputation for treating the media badly. He has insulted journalists and prevented those he does not like from covering his events. This week was no different.

When the American media reported that Trump had not made good on certain donations he had pledged, he accused the media of being "the most dishonest people" he had ever met. He publicly referred to one journalist as "sleaze".

This week, the future president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, said journalists were legitimate targets for assassination if they engaged in corruption.

Meanwhile, a former Miss Turkey has received a suspended prison sentence because she insulted Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Merve Buyuksarac, 27, shared a satirical poem about Erdogan on Instagram in 2014.

The 2006 Miss Turkey is one of about 2000 people who face censor for insulting the president.

Our politicians are clearly very strong advocates of media freedom or they have very thick skins. Whatever the case, it is a positive for our country.

Ramadaan and socio-political change

TOMORROW or the day after, depending on the sighting of the moon, Muslims around the world will begin a month-long fast of Ramadaan – the month the Muslims' holy book, the Qur'an, was revealed.

During this month, all adult Muslims are required to fast from dawn until sunset. Essentially, the fast requires abstinence from food, drink and sexual intercourse.

However, it is more than just that – hence the great sense of religiosity among Muslims in this month.

"Fasting has been prescribed for you, as it has been prescribed to those before you, so that you may learn self-restraint," says the Qur'an.

That "self-restraint" plays itself out in various ways apart from the fast. Participants pay particular heed to not getting angry.

A particularly striking social aspect of the month is the personal commitment by all worshippers to increase their charity in this period.

In South Africa, millions have already been set aside by Muslim

businesses and individuals. These amounts will be distributed during Ramadaan – some to Muslim organisations and institutions, some to welfare organisations, and some to individuals deserving of charity.

The *zakah*, another of the five defining ritual duties of a Muslim, is a compulsory wealth tax of 2.5 percent that is usually distributed in this month.

Indeed, the social aspect of Ramadaan is regarded very seriously. Most Muslims even suggest that one of the significances of the fast is identification with those who are poverty-stricken, so that they may feel their pangs of hunger.

"Worldly pleasures" are also reduced during this month, and most Muslims pray more.

Special food is usually prepared in many households, and generally women bear the burden of much of the preparation.

Thus, apart from attempting to increase their worship and service to God and His creation, women also



MY View
Imraan Buccus

find themselves having to increase their service to their families as well – often in unnecessary ways.

Ramadaan is important in the religious imagination of Muslims in South Africa and around the world. It is being observed in a difficult socio-political context for Muslims globally.

Writing in *Al Qalam*, renowned academic Rashied Omar reminds us that this Ramadaan we will be commemorating 40 years since the June 16, 1976 uprisings. And a number of recent uprisings demand critical introspection by our leadership.

The mayhem caused by Islamic

State, especially in Syria and Iraq, is causing untold suffering and dehumanising swathes of those societies. This Ramadaan, Muslims will reflect on how IS has created an environment that violates the religious norms of preserving human life and honouring human dignity.

And in a post-9/11 context in which Muslims have come to be seen as extremists, some even have to downplay their "Muslim-ness" in case it is held against them.

There is also a current wave of a realignment to Islam. In some ways, it is a reaction to disillusionment with the imperial and colonising capitalist project of the West.

For example, a number of Muslim intellectuals who had decades ago strayed from Islam are relocating themselves within the religion and beginning to challenge empire in general through their new ideological location. They are also observing the rituals, which means those who may not have fasted before are starting to take Ramadaan seriously.

So the fast means God-consciousness, self-restraint, greater charity initiatives and awareness of the social realities of hunger and want. Hopefully, it also means greater support for South Africa and the world's poor and disadvantaged.

The current context raises the challenge of ensuring that this renewed energy in religion, particularly during the fast, is directed towards the objective of development, poverty alleviation and the global struggle against all forms of oppression.

The first day after Ramadaan is the festival of Eid al-Fitr – this year on July 6. Traditionally, the day cannot belong to those who do not cleanse their wealth with special charity.

Buccus is a senior research associate at the *Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute*, a research fellow at the *University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Social Sciences*, and the academic director of a university study-abroad programme on political transformation.



Vantage point affects view of party lists

FROM a general perspective, the compilation of candidates' lists by political parties is a test of the leadership prowess of those saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the process.

One area where their leadership dexterity will be tested is their interpretation of section 19(3)(b) of the constitution, which states that every adult citizen has the right "to stand for public office and, if elected, to hold office".

The second area is on the interpretation of section 9(3), which lists the grounds on which a person may not be discriminated against. These include, inter alia, race and gender.

While the constitutional imperatives outlined above apply to all political parties equally, as the ruling party, the ANC is expected to be at the vanguard of ensuring the process is not in contravention of these constitutional precepts.

If this is done properly, it will save the ANC from attacks by opposition political parties. More importantly, it will dissuade ANC members from revolting against their own party.

One has to ask to what extent the ANC has followed a transparent and democratic process in finalising its candidates list. There is no single answer to this question.

This is so because any answer provided would be informed by a confluence of factors, some of which are not easily discernible to the general public.

The ANC's political adversaries from outside the party and disgruntled members of the organisation could argue that there was no transparency.

They would say so simply because they hate the party, or failed to get the nomination they wanted, or failed to have their preferred candidates making it on to the list.

MyView

Bheki Mngomezulu

On the other hand, those who like the ANC to the extent that they deem it infallible would unabashedly argue that everything was democratic and transparent.

The same view would be held by those who either made it on to the party list or saw their preferred candidates sailing through. In that sense, it is not easy to get an objective answer to the question posed above.

However, without preferring one viewpoint over another, it is imperative that we subject the ANC's candidate selection process to close scrutiny.

Firstly, branches were afforded the opportunity to put forward the names of their preferred candidates.

Once voting was completed at this level, the names were forwarded to the relevant party structures for further processing. Assuming that the correct names were submitted, the process would be deemed fair, transparent and democratic.

If certain names were removed or added somewhere, then the process would be unfair and undemocratic – let alone transparent.

The ANC meeting held during the last weekend before the Independent Electoral Commission of SA deadline to submit candidate lists was attended by the national list committee chaired by ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe.

The same committee also has six senior ANC members, representatives from the tripartite alliance, as well as representatives from the ANC's other leagues. From that perspective, one could say it is

a representative and a democratic structure.

Speaking to the media, Mantashe gleefully informed journalists that, from what they had seen as a committee, there was adequate representation of women and the youth.

What also stood out in his address was that at all levels ANC members were required to ensure that the following requirements were adhered to: (i) no less than 50 percent of candidates had to be women, (ii) 20 percent of the candidates had to be from the youth, and (iii) no less than 2 percent of the candidates had to be people with disabilities.

Importantly, he insisted that at least 60 percent of incumbent councillors should be retained in order to ensure continuity.

Holes

Now, some might say this was indeed a cogently thought-through arrangement which is consistent with the constitution and therefore devoid of any undemocratic practice.

From the wide representation of the national list committee to the composition of the candidate list, the impression created is that this was a transparent process.

Even the proposal to retain about 60 percent of current councillors seems to have been well argued for.

However, looked at from another vantage point, one could start drilling holes, depending on one's interpretation.

Some might say that, instead of talking about a 50 percent minimum of female candidates, the percentage should have been at least 55 or 60 percent, given that statistically women outnumber men. For such people, this would be democratic and fair.

Similarly, the 20 percent allocated to the youth might sound okay

to some, but for those who have been calling for 40 percent youth representation at all government levels, this figure is only half of what they want.

On the 60 percent retention of current councillors, a counter-argument could be: "What if they have the experience, but have failed to deliver services to the people?"

This question is given credence by the increased number of service delivery protests witnessed recently. Not all the protests are politically motivated. Some are genuine, but have been carried out inappropriately.

Lastly, race remains a key factor in South African politics. At a glance, most political parties are established along racial lines. Now, is it necessary or realistic to have a racial balance in the party list? If not, where does that leave minority groups like Indians and coloureds?

For those who invest a lot in the racial profile of organisations, they could see the ANC list as being discriminatory.

However, those who base their assessment of the racial profile of the ANC as a party would argue that it would not make sense to have race as a factor to be considered in finalising the list.

Put succinctly, the ANC has taken precautionary measures to protect its image.

However, there is always the other side of the coin.

As such, the extent to which the nomination process has been fair, transparent and democratic depends on the vantage point from which one looks at the list and the process.

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TONGUE & CHEEK Dennis Pather

Sing your hearts out, Mzansi

SOUTH Africa is a singing nation, right? Okay, I admit we've had a few bloopers along the way, like when that tone deaf idiot embarrassed us with his off-key rendition of the national anthem at a rugby game that sounded more like a bagpipe suffering from tonsillitis. But let's dismiss that as an aberration.

The consensus is South Africans love to sing, and sing lustily too. We do it every day, when we're in the shower, or at concerts, when workers are digging trenches, or on strike, when we're protesting, when we're celebrating and even when we're mourning.

Singing is like breathing to us. It comes naturally, as if it's just part and parcel of our national DNA.

Why, even our president has shown he's a crooner of note, needing little urging to break away from formalities and belt out songs about the struggle and his beloved weapon of choice.

But hold on. If all that is true, how come we don't hear our nation in full voice when we're supporting Bafana Bafana, or our Premier Soccer League teams.

As far as I can recall, the closest we've come to it are occasional half-hearted renderings of *Shosholoza* by Bafana fans, and the singing of the Indian independence song *Vande Mataram* by Bluebells United supporters in the old Soccer Federation days.

I hate being shown up by the Brits, but I have to confess, they can teach us a thing or two about chanting on the terraces. Their football chants go back decades, dating back to their club's formation to adaptations of popular songs – and even spontaneous reactions to events on the pitch.

A game involving England is never complete without a stirring rendition of *God Save the Queen*.

Liverpool will "never walk alone". West Ham United are "forever blowing bubbles" while "the Saints go marchin' in" at Southampton at every game.

Some chants are based on evergreen spirituals or even popular songs like Depeche Mode's *Just Can't Get Enough* or Rod Stewart's *We are Sailing*.

Our country is blessed with some of the best singing talent in the world, across all genres, and cultures. Our singing talent is legendary, and boasts artists such as Miriam Makeba, Dorothy Masuka, Jonathan Butler, Judith Sephuma, Brenda Fassie and Natalie Rungu, to name a few.

In the UK, singing on the terraces is taken so seriously that a person has been chosen as England's first "chant laureate" and he's paid to tour Premier League stadiums and compose chants for the different clubs.

Let's throw our vuvuzelas into the sea, I say, and sing on the terraces like there was no tomorrow.

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