

Daily Dispatch

SABC up to its old tricks again

THE decision by the SABC to cancel public protector Thuli Madonsela's scheduled interview with SAfm, the broadcaster's leading talk radio station, has acting chief operations officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng's fingerprints all over it.

The public protector was scheduled to participate in a debate on the station's *Forum@Eight* yesterday morning. On arrival at the SABC's Auckland Park studios, she was told the interview had been canned.

The show was meant to deal with her report titled "When governance and ethics fail", which was released in Pretoria on Monday.

It followed her investigation into the appointment of Motsoeneng and his subsequent promotion to the position of acting COO.

Her investigation found that his appointment had been irregular and former Communications Minister Dina Pule had interfered unduly in the affairs of the public broadcaster during her tenure.

Madonsela also lashed out at the SABC board over Motsoeneng's irregular appointment and his salary progression at the public broadcaster. She also found that under Motsoeneng, the state broadcaster's salary bill had escalated to an unprecedented R29-million.

His own salary had been unlawfully hiked by 63% – from R122 961 to R211 000 in one year. This was in violation of the state broadcaster's personnel regulations.

She urged Communications Minister Yunus Carrim to fill the COO position with someone who was suitably qualified within 90 days. After canning the show, the broadcaster gave the reasons for the cancellation: it could not find other people in time to take part in the debate.

"Remember that the radio show is a debate consisting of a panel.

"The producers could not get other people for the debate together with the public protector. Her office was informed about this beforehand.

"It was probably a miscommunication between Madonsela and the station. The debate would not have been balanced without other participants," said SABC spokesman Kai-zer Kganyago.

But this defence is as old and tired as the hills. It has been used to death and is still just as moronic as when it was first used.

Motsoeneng has done it before. Two years ago he prevented top political journalists from taking part in a debate and the SABC defended his decision saying this was to ensure fairness and balance. He had earlier used the same argument as his defence after barring political analysts and commentators, who were believed to hold views critical of government, from appearing on SABC.

So we do not believe the real reason the Madonsela show was canned was because there were not enough people to debate with her.

This action worries us as it borders on censorship and could pose a threat to erode free speech. And we all know what censorship has done at the SABC.



Kidnap for ransom: to pay or not to pay?

IT IS one of the best-kept secrets in the world. As freed hostages step on to the tarmac after being released by terror groups in places like Mali, Nigeria or Yemen, no one dares to reveal whether a ransom has been paid to the kidnappers. Invariably, governments deny having handed over the huge sums requested by terrorists. Too much is at stake.

Lately, more and more governments are advocating a ban on such payments. Yet experts believe that, faced with a moral dilemma and pressure of public opinion, many governments still pay millions of dollars in ransom money to terror groups.

As South Africans continue to wait for news of schoolteacher Pierre Korkie, who was kidnapped with his wife in Yemen last year, analysts indicate that there is a worrying new trend of kidnappers increasingly targeting locals in the African countries where they operate.

In its latest risk report, consultancy Control Risk Management cites Mali, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan as having the highest risk for kidnapping worldwide.

In Africa, Nigeria, Mauritania, Niger, southern Algeria, Kenya and parts of Sudan are also on the list of high-risk places where terror groups engage in kidnapping. Other studies also indicate that Nigeria and Mexico top the list when it comes to the number of kidnappings for ransom that are carried out annually.

Institute for Security Studies (ISS) senior researcher Martin Ewi says kidnapping for ransom has become one of the most important sources of income for terror groups. "They use the money to buy sophisticated weapons and to expand their terrorist operations," he explains.

A declassified August 2013 report by the UK government states that at least US\$70-million (R770-million) was paid to terrorists in the previous three to four years, and that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which operates in the Sahel, has collected at least US\$45-million in ransom payments from various

LIESL LOUW-VAUDRAN

governments.

"It is the single largest source of income for a number of key groups, including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP] and AQIM," the report states. "Invariably, governments deny having handed over the huge sums requested by terrorists."

Ewi says the governments of the United Kingdom and Algeria have been particularly steadfast in their efforts to crack down on and prohibit the payment of ransoms to terror groups. Yet, this remains a very difficult moral choice, as governments could be accused of failing to assist citizens who become kidnab victims.

France, in particular, has been accused of dishing out millions of euros to secure the release of its many nationals held hostage over the last few years, mostly in Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria. If this is true, is France encouraging hostage taking?

Ewi says this moral dilemma, which is faced by governments all over the world, is one of the reasons why this is such a sensitive issue. "Even former hostages won't talk about it, because keeping this issue a secret is often part of the conditions of their release," he says.

The South African government seems to be taking a case-by-case approach on the issue – sometimes with a high-profile approach and at other times discreetly participating in negotiations. The government has consistently denied paying any ransom for its citizens. In June 2012, a South African couple held hostage by Somali pirates was released after intervention by the South African government. A ransom of US\$800 000 was demanded for their release, but the government never admitted to paying it.

Despite this denial, South African citizens are increasingly being targeted for ransom.

The Korkie case has created unprecedented media interest, particularly after the involvement of charity organisation, Gift of the Givers. A deadline to pay a ransom of over US\$3-million expired on February 8, but unconfirmed reports indicate that Korkie, who was reported gravely ill, is still alive.

His wife, Yolande, who was released by the kidnappers and returned to South Africa on January 17, made an emotional appeal, together with her two children, for his release.

South African Deputy Minister in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Ebrahim Ebrahim, also travelled to Yemen in January in an attempt to secure Korkie's release. In an open letter to the kidnappers he appealed to their sense of humanity and stated, "Islam enjoins us to show mercy".

While fewer foreigners might now be travelling to the dangerous zones in the Sahel, local workers of foreign companies and NGOs are still at risk, says Ewi.

Earlier this month, five Malians working for the Red Cross were kidnapped in Gao in northern Mali. The Islamist Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mujao) claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, which could be seen as an act of desperation by a group whose funds may be running out.

Ewi says the kidnapping of locals could also be used to put political pressure on African governments – who are not likely to pay for their citizens' release – to yield to certain terrorist demands such as the release of prisoners, or even to abandon certain policies.

"Depending on the response, this could become a trend," says Ewi.

In Nigeria, groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have notoriously used kidnapping not only for financial gain, but also to get their political message across. This has abated somewhat since the 2009

amnesty offered to MEND by the Nigerian government, but Ewi says the kidnapping of foreign and local oil workers in that country continues. The issue is just not receiving the same media attention it had in the past.

Lately, foreigners in northern Nigeria and parts of Cameroon have also become victims of kidnapping by Islamist organisation Boko Haram and its breakaway group, Ansaru. Two high-profile cases last year – one of a French family kidnapped in Cameroon and another of a French priest, who had managed to escape his attackers – have been linked to Boko Haram.

Ewi says while the organisation had initially distanced itself from kidnapping for ransom, considering it a "dirty business", it now engages in this practice because of the potential profits involved.

The group's biggest ransom so far is believed to be a payment of US\$3-million for the release of the French family kidnapped in February 2013. According to the UK government report, 19 people have thus far been kidnapped by Boko Haram and Ansaru.

Could tracking financial transactions be of some assistance in fighting this problem? The fight against piracy has been aided, for example, by tracking the financial transactions of Somali pirates in Kenyan real estate.

Ewi says this is unlikely to work. While pirates engage in kidnapping for personal gain, terror groups use proceeds to further their activities. Putting an end to political instability and zones of lawlessness remain some of the only ways to stop kidnapping for ransom in Africa and elsewhere. An agreement among states to universally prohibit the payment of ransoms, perhaps through an international treaty, will also certainly assist.

Liesl Louw-Vaudran is an ISS consultant. This is article is from issafrica.org

THE CHIEL

Farewell, fellow Chiel

STRANGE as it may seem, I never met fellow Chiel Gavin Stewart, who passed away in Cape Town earlier this week. I always believed our paths would one day cross but, sadly, it was not meant to be.

From everything I've heard about this sage man of words, it was my huge loss.

By all accounts, Gavin was a newspaperman's newspaperman (in a completely gender-encompassing manner of speaking).

As an editor, he was quicker with a compliment than a rebuke, according to colleagues who worked with him – a rare and motivational leadership skill.

As a mentor – he was head of the journalism department at Rhodes University – he couldn't be bettered: having started out studying typography and design, there was no part of the newspaper process he did not know intimately.

As one of his former students, respected magazine editor and journalist Peta Krost Mauder, posted on Facebook: "What a gem of a journalist and person! He was always so gentle and kind but had such integrity. Rest in Peace Prof!"

Added one of her friends who obviously knew him, too: "A great journalist, an inspiring Dean, and a real mensch, to boot."

Not only that, Gavin was insatiably curious.

Just as well, really. It's a prime requirement, I've discovered, for the special peculiarities of "being a Chiel".

His quirky eye and even quirkier "pen" knew no bounds as he spelt out the fun and foibles of daily life, whether he was writing about the Pope's motorbike (Pope Francis has apparently hung up his biker boots and, as befits the modest soul he claims to be, sold his top-of-the-range Harley), or the difficulties of opening a can without an opener (apparently you can, he concluded – all it takes is a handy slab of concrete and a suitably flimsy can or, in Gavin's own inimitable words: "not our robust blik").

He was resourceful and determined, too.

Throughout his hospitalisation, the former Daily Dispatch editor faithfully submitted his columns to the newspaper he still loved, managing to put a funny spin even on that.

"Don't go to hospital," he exhorted, "not unless you have a work opportunity there (as jobs are now officially called) or you have suffered a setback so crushing that you have absolutely no choice. Nobody ever went to hospital by accident, except by accident ... Certain things about hospitals are universal: 'Have you been to pre-admissions?' That stops you in your tracks. 'I have medical aid!' you try. 'You need authorisation from your medical aid.' You phone them About this time the thought will come creeping over you that this place looks a little like a modern bank and that it generates paper by the ton

"Assuming you are able to muster medical, identity and approval numbers and sundry other referrals and documentation, you are in. You will eventually be taken to a ward. This you will come to regret. The ward is the hospital's version of limbo

Chronicling even the rotten procedures he had to endure with the stoicism for which he was well-known, Gavin managed to remain upbeat to the end – a rare quality, indeed.

Today's Chiel is Stevie Godson. E-mail her at stevieg@wordnerds.co.za

FROM OUR FILES

FEBRUARY 20, 1964: Thousands of people fled from the Azores as continuing earthquakes caused by an underwater volcano shook the archipelago. A 5-nation fleet evacuated more than 1 000 from Sao Jorge to Angra, after most buildings were destroyed and citizens had lost their belongings.

FEBRUARY 20, 1984: There was havoc in the wake of cyclone Imboia after it tore away from the Natal Coast. Hardest hit was Westville, Pinetown and Hillcrest. The storm reached peak winds of 95 km/h (60 mph) on February 13 while passing near Europa Island. After executing a small loop, Imboia turned toward the south-eastern African coastline as a weakened system. A ridge caused the storm to turn to the east and northeast, dissipating on February 19 in its duration. Imboia produced winds of 111 km/h (69 mph)



MUCH LOVED, HIGHLY RESPECTED: Gavin Stewart

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stewart takes special pedestal in journalistic history

AHH, Beningfield! down from darkest Queenstown again are you?" This was the way Gavin Stewart, former editor of the Daily Dispatch who died this week, always greeted me together with a handshake and a large grin creasing his bearded countenance when I came down from the hinterland for a meeting at headquarters.

I always regarded it as a piece of singular good fortune on the part of the Daily Dispatch that it came under Stewart's editorship during the difficult initial years of democracy.

He followed such predecessors as the charismatic Donald Woods, war hero George Farr and Welsh wizard Glyn Williams, all of whom brought to the task of piloting this 142-year-old newspaper with tact, wisdom, a fine sense of balance and a pursuance for all that is just and noble in society.

All had a literary style it was always a pleasure to follow. And long may it continue.

We were saddened when Stewart retired some years ago and we lost his valued editorial opinions to which we had become accustomed and now we are to be deprived of his quaint sense of humour we have come to expect in the

Chiel's column every week. It is therefore with deep respect that I, on behalf of those who have found pleasure in Stewart's wonderful command of the English language, commit him to a special pedestal in South African journalistic history.

Begone now dear friend, the rest of eternity is yours to spend as you please. — Charles Beningfield, a former colleague

Vote out looters

WHEN I read about the waste of taxpayers money – yet again – for items such as Premier Nxolo Kiviet's State of the Province address, our Executive Mayor's travel bill of R800 000, Buffalo City Metro's R10-million Mandela funeral taxi debacle, BCM being willing to pay R16.5-million for land valued at R290 000, etc. etc – it really makes my blood boil.

For how much longer must we as hardworking, honest residents of the Eastern Cape and BCM have to put up with this on-going plunder of the public purse?

These "leaders" who were appointed to their positions – remember we as

residents did not have a say in their appointments – are failing the residents in every way. The state of BCM, as well as the province, attests to this in no uncertain terms.

I implore all residents to remember these shenanigans when deciding on where to place their "X" in the next election. While I am not advocating for any political party, remember – you get what you vote for. You vote for corruption and wastefulness, then you suffer the consequences! — Judy Sanan, Beacon Bay

ANC has delivered

THE 91st dialogue hosted by the Daily Dispatch and the University of Fort Hare at the Guild Theatre on Tuesday night was a turning point for the people of the Eastern Cape.

The authors of the book *The Fall of the ANC* by Dr Mzukisi Qobo and Prince Mashale made astounding remarks, referring to the death of hope in our country and claimed the ANC had not been ready to govern.

They also criticised the leadership of President Jacob Zuma, saying he had lurched from scandal to scandal and

escaped the courts through political manoeuvring.

The audience complained that the ANC has done nothing in the rural areas. But I advise them to go to Xhorha village. There has been massive development of infrastructure, RDP houses and dams have been built and the majority of households now have electricity.

ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe said the ANC, from its inception, had fought the limited rights of the elites and was a people's organisation.

I believe the ANC is still in the hearts of the black majority and will win the next general election.

However, I urge the Zuma collective leadership to open space for ANC intellectuals like Joel Netshitenze, Pallo Jordan and Phila Nkayi to play advisory roles within the movement. — Thabang Maseko, Mdantsane

□ **TUESDAY'S** dialogue hit a new high. It was a full house and (Gwede) Mantashe was completely outclassed.

And no patronising comments from the audience – the very same members of the ANC are becoming more and more disillusioned.

The event was awesome. Nothing like

it anywhere in the country. This is revolutionising the media. — TL, via e-mail

Poor show SABC

YES, "Hlaudi Motsoeneng admitted to falsifying a matric certificate in order to get appointed by the SABC". But, what does that tell us about the SABC board, which advertised the post, and interviewed applicants?

Is a Grade 12 certificate all that is required to be the Chief Operating Officer of the SABC? Is no tertiary qualification required? — Sastri Mda, Mthatha

NOTE TO WRITERS

Write to the Editor at 35 Caxton Street, East London 5201. Fax: (043) 743 5155. Email: letters@dispatch.co.za. Please include your name, telephone number and address. Letters should not exceed 200 words. The Editor reserves the right to edit or reject letters. Preference will be go to readers writing under their own full name.