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SOUTH AFRICA: A Socio-Economic and Political Overview in the Post World Cup Period

The World Cup has come and gone and what a World Cup it was! Expectations reached fever pitch around the nation as the opening ceremony approached (June 11th) and the world and the country held its breath wondering if South Africa had the ability to deliver. The rest, as they say, is now history. The tournament could not have gone better. All matches started on time, transportation excelled and crime diminished. This was a moment of 'grace' for South Africa in particular and Africa in general. The psychic of the nation changed where the country developed a new found pride in being South African and delivering the goods.

As the games ended there was a collective national cry to somehow find a way to capture the electrifying atmosphere that prevailed throughout the World Cup and to retain and enhance the national spirit that emerged. And so was born the 'Lead South Africa Campaign'. This is a call to all South Africans to do something for their country. There is a kaleidoscope of possibilities from paying your taxes, to cleaning up the neighborhood, to donating blood, to painting the local police station, to volunteering in hospitals, in fact anything that enhances the country. And the campaign is catching on, pushed as it is by the mass media, government, churches, big business and a host of communities and individual initiatives.

But there is another side to the story. Almost as soon as the 'vuvuzelas' had stopped blasting and the dust had settled on the euphoria of the World Cup, real-politics hit the country with a vengeance. 1.3 million Public Servants went on strike, crippling as they did the educational, health and judicial system. Three weeks later the strike was suspended, though it has yet to be called off. The Unions were asking for an 8.5% rise and a housing allowance of close on \$150 while the State offer was 7.5% and about \$100 house allowance. And where was the President in all this? In China – a situation deeply resented by the strikers! In 36 days he visited 20 countries, a figure that has not gone unnoticed by an angry population.

Indeed, the President has come under unprecedented attack in recent weeks. In his rise to the presidency many believed that Jacob Zuma-with his emotional charisma and improvisatory charm-had a different script for a battled

underclass. He clearly positioned himself as 'the President of and for the Poor'. His party had indeed successfully peddled him as the leader of its new age revolutionary enlightenment after the darkness of Thabo Mbeki. Since the Zuma administration was sworn in last year, the Party (African National Congress) has worked hard to keep public sentiment on their side. But try as they may, in recent weeks they have not been able to bear the crumbling wall of their President's own power.

There is a perception that the party is rotting slowly from within, and there is a belief among some South Africans that while corruption and fraud charges against Zuma were dropped, he is himself symbolic of that. His own family's involvement in several apparently inappropriate mining deals recently, simply adds to the debate. So it seems for now that it is authentic political discontent which is likely to unseat Zuma, not just yet, as that would be a disaster, but inevitably. One must remember that he made it clear at the start of his tenure that he would not be seeking a second term and it seems many of his former friends believe he has let them down. The ANC Youth League the strongest supporter of Zuma in the past and the ones who projected him to the presidency are now openly defiant of his administration. As the President nears the half way stage of his presidency (April 2011), he is a lonelier and more isolated political figure. Has he the personality to rise above this in the years to come remains to be seen. If nothing else time at least is on his side.

The deteriorating position of the President underscores a deeper 'malaise' in South African society. To understand the nature of this 'malaise' one has to go back to the all party negotiation forum (1992-1993) that ushered in the dawn of a new democratic dispensation in 1994. The hotly contested issue in the negotiations was political power. Virtually little or nothing was said about economic power. Somewhere during the negotiation the then ruling party led by Frederick DeKlerk realized that it really did not matter who had the political power as long as the economic power stayed in the hands of 'the white community'. And by and large that is precisely what happened! Political power was handed to Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress, while the economic power remained in the hands of the previously advantaged community. And that remains the state of play today. 16 years later the old divide of a rich white minority and a poor black majority prevails. One example of this is the difference in salaries between the person at the top and the person at the bottom in major corporations. In one instance it was found to be 250 to 1.

Nowhere is this economic inequality more noticeable than the debate around 'nationalizing the mines'. South Africa has the biggest deposits of gold and platinum, to name but two minerals, in the world. Added to this is the fact that gold and platinum are priced today at new heights, with gold selling at \$1,310 a fine ounce and platinum at \$1,660. What a lot of people in South Africa seem not to know is that the mines are already nationalized. The Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2002 states: "South Africa's mineral and petroleum resources belong to the nation and that the State is the custodian thereof". The problem is that the State has leased for long periods the mineral wealth to multi-international corporations who are taxed. Only 9% of all mines are leased by South African black entrepreneurs. The mines produce 8% of South African GDP, a figure than many feel is too low. With a growing gap between rich and poor and more and more people hungry and unemployed the debate around the mines is sure to intensify.

While dissention marks the ruling party, the opposite is true in opposition politics. The scourge of the opposition is that it is far too fragmented to lead any worthwhile challenge to the government of the day. A small step forward took place recently when the minute Independent Party, with a very charismatic leader in Patricia Delille, joined the biggest of the opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance to team up with an equally dynamic leader in Helen Zille. Were this trend to continue over the coming years and the fragmented parties willing to work together as a single party, or in a loose coalition, then perhaps they could give the African National Congress a run for their money in 2013.

In 1996, a mere two years after taking power South Africa accepted a new Constitution that is the envy of the world. This 'national birth certificate' is a fitting tribute to the many thousands that gave their lives by spilling their blood in dusty streets all over South Africa for the cause of freedom and democracy. The Constitution has a superb Bill of Rights, but perhaps more importantly the custodians of the Constitution are a Constitutional Court and not Parliament or the President. One can say that the most powerful person in South Africa today is not the President of the country but the President of the Constitutional Court.

It is the very people who fought for and won the right for this new Constitution to see the light of day who are today trying to undermine the protections enshrined in the Constitutions. Corruption is widespread in the new dispensation, but it is corruption that is exposed time and again by a

courageous and for now free press. Newspapers are littered with story after story of corrupt politicians to the point they are collectively fighting back. Their arsenal is two new pieces of legislation coming before parliament: The Protection of Information Bill and The Media Appeals Board Bill. The first is an attempt to hid information from and the second an attempt to gage the press. As one can expect there is fierce opposition from civil society. Despite this opposition given the ruling party has a 68% majority in parliament these two odious pieces of legislation will probably become law but at a great cost to the credibility of the ANC. However, if passed they will be challenged in the Constitutional Court.

South Africa is not poor; it has resources and can do better. It is widely accepted that national government is doing fairly well, provincial government less well and local government dismal. The issue is the inability of the government to deliver basic commodities, such as, education, health, housing and infrastructure to an increasingly demanding poor population. Corruption and the lack of capacity to deliver are juxtaposed to good governance and capacity building. There is a way forward but there does not seem to be the political goodwill to take the road of recovery. Legitimate local anger will only increase. But as the same time South Africa has proven to itself and the world that it has the capacity to rise above seemingly insurmountable problems and deliver; the World Cup being the case in point. Can it do the same for national reconstruction is the question of the day!

Finally, many believe South Africa is still in a honeymoon period as long as Nelson Mandela lives. Though retired, even from retirement, he holds a tremendous moral grip on the physic of the nation. When he leaves us this grip will be gone and it is largely expected that new political, economic and social groupings will emerge vying for a say in the future of the country. Though the loss of Mandela will be a profound blow to the nation his leaving us may inspire new leadership to take the helm of the country.

And so, as World Cup memories fade in the minds of the people the challenge to bring the wonderful atmosphere of a caring nation captured during the World Cup period into the future, remains a daunting task for all people of goodwill.

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