

Sizwe

-South African News-

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Cricket

Let's talk about the important stuff first. I hope you've all been following the very close series between Australia and South Africa: a tie in the five day tests, but SA is outdoing Aus in the one day matches. Needless to say, there is some difference of opinion between the two of us as to who's the best team!

We went to Durban for one day of the third test, and enjoyed the view from a club at which Rosalee's parents are members.

Jonty is Rosalee's absolute hero, and our 2 year old niece asks you to come "bat" with her in the garden, and pretend you are Hansie Cronje!

More than anything, this tour has given many South Africans a sense of excitement and pride. It is great to get our minds off the uncertainty, the violence and the horror stories that make up our daily news. On Saturday night, can you believe that *all 3 TV channels* were broadcasting cricket!!! If you don't like cricket, than toughies! The adage "adapt or die" has come to be meaningful in SA in more ways than one.

Elections

I'm sure the Australian media has alerted you to the coming South African elections. This will be the first election in which black people can vote, and so it is being promoted as the first truly democratic election. But democracy requires more than the legal right to vote, and it remains to be seen how democratic the new South Africa will actually become, especially given our history of intolerance and politicised ethnicity.

As a result of multi-party negotiations we now have an Interim Constitution with some remarkable features. It describes a federal structure (broadly similar to Australia) and includes a Bill of Rights which should

ensure equality across races. There will be nine provinces which each have a Provincial Assembly, and a two-house national parliament. Whereas the parliament has been the final authority in the past, the Constitution will now be pre-eminent, and there is to be a new Constitutional Court capable of over-riding parliamentary decisions.

The most interesting feature of the new structure is the organisation of the National Assembly. This body will have 400 seats: 200 dependant on the national vote count and 200 dependant on regional vote counts.

When voting, people will receive two ballot papers: one for the National Assembly and one for the Provincial Assembly. Given the high illiteracy rate and low level of education, this is bound to be very confusing for many voters. Both papers list parties rather than people, and you vote by choosing just one party. On the national ballot there will be 29 parties, and any party polling more than 0.5% of the national vote is guaranteed a seat in the National Assembly.

Now for the most amazing part! The National Assembly will be run not by the majority party, but by a cabinet of about 30 people with representation from all parties in the National Assembly. This cabinet, which is being called the "Government of National Unity", is to make decisions following the same style as the negotiations over the past two years -- the principle of "sufficient consensus". A criticism of this is that there will be no significant party outside the cabinet to play a watchdog role.

Nevertheless, this is a remarkable and most admirable arrangement. It emphasises co-operation and shared responsibility. But will it work?

The new government's number one task will be to agree to a new, permanent Constitution within three years and then to organise the next election in 1999.

Voting will take place over three days -- April 26, 27 and 28. The first day is set aside for people who do not have access to a voting booth (either because of ill-health or lack of transport). Such people can make application to be personally visited by a polling official.

Anyone over 18 who has an official Identity Document can vote, including foreign citizens who have Permanent Residence status in SA (like Matthew!). At least, that's the official rule - unofficially there will be a lot of intimidation among some communities and we have already heard people say they will not be voting because they would be killed if seen near a polling station. This is especially applicable in the Natal area where Inkatha has decided not to participate in the elections.

Many people are panicking about the days during the election anticipating that all services will come to a stand still. Our landlord has just stocked up his pantry with tin food, and filled up all his gas bottles in fear of electricity cuts. You should come over, and we can go camping!!

Violence

There really is a big chance of violence before, during and after the election. A peace-keeping force has been trained and will soon be deployed, but they will be too few to do much. There will be large numbers of normal SA Defence Force, police, official election monitors as well as innumerable observers from other countries, and it seems that the polling stations themselves will be well protected. However, there are groups who are opposing the election -- notably the white right wing and Inkatha (the IFP) -- and who threaten violence.

The right wing may well cause problems in some parts of the country, but in Natal, where we live, it is the IFP which will be

the main threat to free and fair elections. They have the military and political power to completely disrupt the election process in rural areas and within black "townships". It would be very surprising if any major violence moves into the cities or traditionally white areas, but you will probably hear about conflict in Natal and around Pietermaritzburg.

Some of the violence you may have heard about recently can actually be viewed quite positively. The apartheid policies of the past 40 years have established a number of black "homelands" with semi-autonomous government. The new South Africa will have none of these, but decommissioning past political and beauraucratic structures is not always smooth. In particular the leaders of Bophuthatswana and the Ciskei have tried to hold on to their power, but mass action (and unfortunately some deaths) have lead to the necessary collapse of these two homelands.

The KwaZulu area, governed by Buthelezi, is in a similar position. KwaZulu is embedded within Natal and totally dependant on Natal and the national government economically. However, the economy there is much more stable and the KwaZulu government much stronger than the other homelands, so it is extremely unlikely that similar mass-action would have any positive results.

It seems too late now to hope that the IFP will join in the elections, but please pray that the IFP leaders would not try to forcefully prevent people from voting.

Pray also for Christians in South Africa, and especially the 'haves', primarily whites. We have the most to lose in the new SA, and you can imagine the numbers who are leaving the country. This of course just fuels the fears, and more people are leaving all the time. It is very depressing for those who are still here watching their friends and families uproot and leave. Besides the sadness of losing friends, this mass exodus has grave effects on the economy of the country, as skilled labour and capital leave also. Rosalee feels very strongly about this issue, although can understand the fear and wrenching pain my white community is going through. Pray that white Christians see that they have so much to give, and to think of how they can best use their resources for the good of their society.

Personal

From the address at the top of this newsletter, you will see that we have moved. Hilton is a small English-like village about 10km out of Pietermaritzburg. Rosalee and I found the inner-city life of Pietermaritzburg far too stressful for our

young marriage and so we are soaking up the country air and birdsong.

As we've written before, we plan to visit Oz later this year. We'll reach Sydney in late July and stay until the following July. We don't know where we'll live or what we'll do, but hope to find enough work to finance us as we travel around all our friends and family.

If any of you have suggestions about either work or accommodation, please drop us a line. We also hope that we can spend some time talking about the South African situation, and maybe leading some workshops on racism, the role of Christianity in conflict, and the role of the church in social development.

Please pray for us and for South Africa. Maybe you could join with many South Africans in praying the Prayer for Africa -

God Bless Africa.
Guard her children,
Guide her leaders,
And bring her peace.

May the Lord spread his protection over you, so that all those who love his name may rejoice in him.