

IN BRIEF

Short tempers at Zondo commission

Accusations, heated cross-examinations and excuses not to testify were some of the highlights this week at the Zondo state capture commission. The focus was on the South African Revenue Service (Sars) but the spotlight was stolen by some individuals. Athol Williams, a former employee at Bain & Company, testified about how the company and former president Jacob Zuma allegedly worked together on a restructuring plan for the revenue service. Then it was advocate Dali Mpofu, former Sars commissioner Tom Moyane's legal counsel, whose demeanour ran away with him — a characteristic when you don't know what you are talking about. Accusations of racism and jealousy were thrown at Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan who was cross-examined by Mpofu. On Thursday it was a no-show for Moyane, as he is suffering from a serious illness and unable to testify at the Zondo commission. May he get well soon, in time to appear at the inquiry.

The pot is overcooking

It was another turbulent week for the ANC as the division within the ruling party is more evident than ever. On Tuesday, national executive committee (NEC) member Joel Neshitenzhe wrote in the Daily Maverick that the radical economic transformation (RET) faction stems from the secretary general Ace Magashule's office — and how RET undermines the ruling party. The ANC in the Eastern Cape also spoke out against the RET faction and didn't hold back when they claimed the organisation is run by Magashule's office at Luthuli House. On Wednesday another NEC member, Enoch Godongwana, voiced his concern over radio waves on Radio 702. He said if the ANC could not correct its ways, South Africans must look for an alternative.

Covid-19 globally in a nutshell

It was a good week for South Africa as it was announced the single-dose J&J/Janssen Covid-19 vaccine — manufactured by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, which is owned by Johnson & Johnson — is 85% effective against the emerging global Covid-19 variants. South Africa might soon get some of these vaccines to speed up its Covid-19 vaccine roll-out. There are global concerns about the nearing Easter weekend, which could cause Covid-19 infections to rise again significantly. France has implemented new nightly curfews for four weeks stretching across Easter. Germany also announced a special Easter lockdown, but no sooner were the restrictions announced as withdrawn again after heavy criticism from citizens. In Brazil, another grim milestone was reached when the country's daily death toll reached a new record of more than 3000 Covid-19 deaths. President Jair Bolsonaro failed miserably when he assured citizens that they will “very soon return to normal life.”

Our fave Covid expert steps down

Salim Abdool Karim, the top coronavirus adviser to Health Minister Zweli Mkhize and co-chair of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19, will step down as his one year on the committee ended. He served on the committee since its inception in March 2020. “Even under enormous pressure, Professor Abdool

Karim always received everyone with his warm smile and reassuring presence,” Mkhize said. Abdool Karim told Twitter followers he would continue with his HIV research and other academic commitments. Professor Koleka Mlisana takes his post and will co-chair the committee together with Professor Marian Jacobs.

Nasa's Ingenuity

When Nasa's Perseverance rover landed on Mars last month, the world was in awe. Now space fanatics can once again watch in astonishment as Nasa will launch its Mars Ingenuity helicopter in early April. Like most space equipment, the helicopter will take some days to separate from the rover. Six days to be exact. Then Ingenuity will have 31 days to roam the Red Planet. Carrying no scientific instruments, the helicopter will primarily focus on sending videos to Earth.



Ongoing talks for peace

“Afghans are not just ready for peace: they are demanding it,” said UN special repre-

sentative Deborah Lyons when she briefed the UN Security Council about the situation in Afghanistan — a country torn by ongoing war with the Taliban. Peace talks, which are not new, are however showing some progress. During a meeting in Moscow a week ago, the Taliban agreed to accelerate peace talks. Russia, the US, China and Pakistan were present at the talks and called on both Afghan and Taliban representatives to end the violence in the Afghan regions. In less than six weeks US troops are set to withdraw from Afghanistan. According to the UN the next meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government to work towards peace is set for April in Turkey.

More pain for Rohingya refugees

Fifteen people are reportedly dead, 400 missing and thousands displaced. A devastating fire ripped through a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazaar in south-eastern Bangladesh, that shelters about a million people. The fire destroyed thousands of huts in the densely populated area, injuring more than 500 people in the Balukhali camp. Aid workers and families are still searching for missing victims while

the cause of the fire is investigated. Many people, including children, could not flee the fire because barbed wire encircles the camp. The majority of refugees in the camp fled Myanmar in 2017 after similar events to what is happening now — a military crackdown — played out.

Fat-shaming is so last Olympics

The already-delayed Tokyo Olympics have now had yet another high flyer quit over “inappropriate” remarks. Earlier this year former prime minister Yoshiro Mori resigned as chief of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee after sexist comments. The latest resignation is of the chief executive creative director, Hiroshi Sasaki. He was responsible for all the opening and closing ceremonies, always one of the highlights of any prestigious event. But Sasaki made a really bad suggestion when he suggested a play on words referring to the last three letters of Olympics sounding like “pigs”. On the receiving end was female comedian Naomi Watanabe, who he suggested could dress up as an “Olympig” during the ceremonies, in an apparent fat-shaming comment aimed at the comedian's body shape. Any bets on the likelihood he would have made such a comment to a male comedian? Ai.



A new dawn for gun control in US?

How many more mass shootings must there be before the US amends its ultra-permissive gun control legislation? The debate on amending the law on gun control is not new in the US and while Democrats and Republicans are politicising the phenomenon, people keep on being killed in mass shootings. In a matter of one week 18 people were gunned down in two separate mass shooting incidents, prompting President Joe Biden to opine that the Senate should pass two critical House Bills and ban assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines. Yes, military-style rifles in America are available — if you have the cash, you can have the gun, legally. But the two Bills might at least lead to improved background checks before purchase. Why is it so hard to implement such rational policies? Because, well, politics.

Iceland's sleepless problem solved

Iceland's some 50000 earthquakes were robbing residents in the fishing town of Grindavik of sleep. Well, the problem is solved after the much-anticipated volcano finally erupted to break its 800 years of inactivity. The volcano is not said to pose any threat to people and has in fact led to large crowds gathering nearby to witness the significant lava-spewing mountain — named Fagradalsfjall. As the last volcano to attain international fame in 2010 volcano was a real tongue twister — Eyjafjallajökull — media houses and spell checkers are rejoicing too. Back to the recent volcano. Live footage of the volcano is available on YouTube, while photographer Bjorn Steinbekk managed to film incredible close drone footage of the erupting volcano. — *Compiled by Eunice Stoltz*

Apology to Themba Mfeka

The *Mail & Guardian* apologises for stating as fact that Themba Mfeka, the principal officer of the Municipal Workers Retirement Fund (MWRF), was under investigation by the Financial Sector Conduct Authority — unnecessarily tarnishing his reputation and dignity.

This claim was made in a part of an article that noted he had been called to the regulator to explain the fund's actions since it had learned about financial losses and breaches of its mandate.

In March 2020, the *M&G* ran an investigation into the MWRF (“Municipal Workers Retirement Fund comes under scrutiny”). This looked at the R60-million that the fund had lost and the likely impact on people's ability to retire.

Mfeka lodged a complaint with the press council. Ten of his grounds for complaint were dismissed.

Visit presscouncil.org.za for the full finding



Devastation: A massive fire at the Kutupalong camp in Bangladesh is estimated to have affected 87 000 Rohingya refugees who previously fled oppression in Myanmar