

# DATE WITH DESTINY

By SHAUNA WESTCOTT

**S**OUTH Africans are days away from the most significant event in centuries of our history. We have snatched from the ashes of apartheid a chance that was unimaginable only five years ago. We must not lose sight of this fact, whatever the difficulties that lie ahead.

This means that everybody must make an effort to vote on 27 April – or exercise their right not to vote, peacefully. But it means more than that. It means taking a stand against intolerance wherever we may find it. It means refusing to participate in panic. Every person who stays calm, every person who is non-violent, every person who refuses to be stampeded into doomsday stockpiling of groceries, will make a contribution to ensuring a free and fair election.

Idasa Training Centre for Democracy Director Paul Graham put it like this: "This election will work only if everyone realises that they must play a part. We must all cooperate. We must look after one another, deal fairly with one another. We all need to understand that this a great moment in our history and it is one that we might not have again."

Ultimate responsibility for managing this "great moment in our history" rests with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). It is a responsibility no one can envy – the scale alone has been daunting. Arrangements had to be made for about 25 million voters to cast their votes in about 80 000 voting booths in almost 10 000 polling stations spread across a vast territory.

Nearly a quarter of a million people will staff polling stations on election day, in addition to more than 10 000 monitors. Not only did this vast army of workers have to be employed, trained and deployed, it all had to happen in less than two months.

Western Cape Chief Electoral Officer Mary Burton, for instance, attended her first IEC meeting on 23 February. Yet she is upbeat and imperturbable. "The timeframe looks



PRAYER FOR THE FUTURE: Prominent South Africans bow their heads at an Easter service in Moria, Northern Transvaal. SATV

## Idasa encounters 'Q'

By BEA ROBERTS

**W**E LIVE on the edge at Idasa, but we did not know how close to the edge until "Q" – who subsequently became the Goldstone Commission's "Deep Throat" – approached staff running a community policing project with allegations that plunged us into a shadowy and chilling world of covert operations, gun-running, enormous financial pay-outs, shady deals and murder.

Most people learned about the allegations of "Q" on 18 March, when Justice Richard Goldstone released his by now well-known report. The broad thrust of those

allegations is that senior police generals were among those involved in an orchestrated effort to sow violence and mayhem in the country, with the East Rand and KwaZulu/Natal particularly targeted.

Activities alleged to be part of this conspiracy include the manufacture and purchase of weapons; the delivery of weapons to the Inkatha Freedom Party; orchestrated attacks on trains; and other terrorist attacks – in short, the "third force" operation whose

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### New SA, new director

Wilmot James explains how he plans to lead Idasa into the future — See Page 16

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## Idasa encounters 'Q'

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existence has been the subject of speculation for some years.

The primary source behind the current spate of allegations is "Q", a lieutenant from the C-10 unit based at Vlakplaas. As long ago as 1989, former SAP captain Dirk Coetzee and his erstwhile colleague Butana Almond Nofumela were alleging that Vlakplaas was a base for hit squad operatives. Nofumela took the desperate step of making a sworn affidavit about hit squad activities, including the murder of Durban lawyer Griffiths Mxenge, the day before he was scheduled to hang.

Still languishing on death row in Pretoria Central, Nofumela told *The Weekly Mail* this month that there are others from his old unit who "know a lot, but don't have the courage to come forward". Other witnesses have unburdened themselves, however, and at least three, including "Q", have been moved outside South Africa in terms of the Goldstone Commission's witness protection programme.

The three SAP generals alleged to be involved in a third force conspiracy - Basie Smit, "Krappies" Engelbrecht and Johan le Roux - went on "voluntary" leave after the release of the Goldstone report. Police Commissioner Johan van der Merwe truculently defended the generals, vowing to "go on pension" if any firm evidence against them was forthcoming.

That there might be altogether too much confidence about a lack of evidence may be a factor behind the Goldstone Commission's refusal to hand over to the police any evidence relating to the "Q" allegations. Evidence of crucial importance to other investigations - the probe into Civil Co-operation Bureau (CCB) activities and the Goniwe inquest, to name only two on a shockingly long list - has all too often "disappeared", as in the case of police tape recordings relating to the police role in the Boipatong massacre.

Justice Goldstone seems determined that this will not happen in this instance and that the law will take its course.

Justice Goldstone emphasised in his report that the allegations against the generals were allegations. This is obviously an important principle. People are innocent until proved guilty.

However, such is the seriousness of the allegations, so long-standing and persistent

have similar allegations been, that it is imperative that the entire third force issue receives urgent, focused attention from neutral persons whose integrity is unlikely to be impugned.

Van der Merwe would appear to have disqualified himself from such a role by virtue of public utterances entirely inappropriate to such serious allegations. His attitude has been inappropriate, also, in the light of the fact that these serious allegations were brought to the attention of the authorities by no less a person than the judge appointed to investigate the causes of the violence that is posing such a threat to the country.

The sinister spectre of a third force stirring up hatred and chaos cannot be allowed to hang over South Africa indefinitely. It must be laid to rest or given a concrete shape and prosecuted - as the Goldstone Commission intends to do.

In the meanwhile, much that is important for future reconstruction is compromised. For example, the third force spectre makes Idasa's work on the interface between the



Judge Richard Goldstone and Idasa's Bea Roberts

police and communities more difficult. More importantly, it undermines all those police officers working hard in conditions of great danger and inadequate pay to fulfill their task of protecting citizens.

Most worrying of all, it confirms the majority of the people in an attitude of mistrust that is currently contributing enormously to the crisis of the entire legal system.

So severe is community lack of trust in the police, an attitude established by decades of apartheid brutality, that even the most concerted efforts at establishing good community-police relations are fraught with difficulty.

Nevertheless, Idasa's experience in workshops set up to explore the development of good relations between police and community has been extremely encouraging. It

appears that there is a willingness from all parties to put the past aside, and work to develop positive relations, channels of communication and a spirit of co-operation.

Both police and community clearly recognise that this will take some time; nevertheless the shifts in attitude have been nothing short of remarkable. The police officers who have attended these workshops have generally been able to recognise that communities have experienced damage at the hands of the police. They have also generally managed to move beyond defensive positions to a remarkable, constructive engagement with members of these very communities.

However, if the top ranks of the police force have in fact been involved in a third force conspiracy, this entire process - if not the whole approach to community policing itself - may have to be rethought.

It is critically important for the country to have a confident, fully operational and well-supported police service - and for this reason it may be necessary to embark on a cleansing process.

Two issues need urgent attention. The first question is what to do with a police force that could face the loss of its leadership - a frightening prospect. The possibility of chaos and disorder exists and will have to be dealt with. Middle- and lower-ranking police officers may be confused, angry or scared at the prospect of not only a new political order, but also a fundamental change in leadership.

The second issue is a related one. If indeed there has been a third force conspiracy on the scale alleged, then clearly it could not have been the work of a mere handful of generals and their supporters.

It therefore follows that, in the event that those already implicated are proved guilty, a ripple effect will be felt across the entire police force. Already a number of "Qs" - driven to talk through fear, revenge or conscience - have been given protection by the Goldstone Commission with the backing of the State President.

While the process takes its course there is another important task: the transformation and support of a new South African police service. In the course of our community policing work - and in the course of the Goldstone investigation - it has been proved that there are honest, committed police who want to see justice done, and want to perform their daily task of ensuring law and order to the benefit of all people. These men and women deserve our support and encouragement.