

Gang guilty verdicts at 3%

Stats reveal increase in killings; concern at low conviction rates

Siyabonga Sesant

AT LEAST 1886 people have died in gang-related murders in Cape Town in the past five years, but there have only been 61 convictions, which is a conviction rate of 3%.

Gang-related murders have increased dramatically over the last five years, from 83 during 2011/12 to 408 last year.

This is according to statistics received from the national police in response to a parliamentary question by the DA.

According to the statistics provided, the most gang-related killings were recorded during the 2013/14 financial year, when 529 incidents were reported.

DA community safety spokesperson, Mireille Wenger, who had submitted the parliamentary questions relating to community safety, said the conviction rate for gang-related murders last year stood at 1%.

"My questions have gone to the MEC of community safety, Dan Plato, who has an oversight function over SAPS, so the police would provide him with the statistics and he would then hand those to us. So the replies that we have, can be taken as accurate," Wenger said yesterday.

Dr Simon Howell, from UCT's centre of criminology, said the conviction rates did not seem "immediately incorrect or inaccurate".

"In relation to drug-related incarceration statistics, the figure is in the same ballpark," Howell said. "It should be remembered that gangsterism is, in terms of criminal law, not that easy to define and so how one criminally defines a gang or gangster will play a role in defining the parameters of the statistics generated."

"In the same way, determining the contextual factors implicit in the definition of 'gang-related murders' can be difficult, so influencing any statistics generated from

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the definition... Without seeing how the statistics were calculated, I can't comment on their precise accuracy, but in comparing them with statistics from other crimes frequently associated with gangsterism, the figures do not seem immediately incorrect or inaccurate," he said.

During 2015/16, more than 50% of murders which took place in Steenberg, Belhar and Elsies River were reported as gang-related.

Chairperson of the Belhar community policing forum (CPF), Kenneth Visser, said: "These stats are shocking, but police can't fight crime alone. It's very important that all stakeholders come on board to help police in combating crime; community members who have information have to come forward, the justice department must do their bit and so on."

Lenteur CPF chairperson Mark Brookes added: "In our area we've seen a lot of cases thrown out of court on technicalities. The community is also worried that bail is granted too easily to suspects because there's no proper communication between prosecutors and detectives."

Wenger said she would write to the Minister of Police Nkosinathi Nhleko to consider the reintroduction of the specialised policing units.

"The establishment of effective crime-fighting teams is now urgent, given the spread of gang violence to rural areas such as Worcester and the spread of gang-associated crimes such as poaching and drug sales," she said.

Attempts to get comment from the police or the department of Justice were unsuccessful.

— siyabonga.sesant@inl.co.za



SUBJECT TO ABUSE: At Newlands Brewery Spring, people line up to collect drinking water. Here Zuleiga Dollie from Wynberg collects litres of free water. Earlier, people had complained when someone held up the line by tapping out 2 000 litres of water.

PICTURE: TRACEY ADAMS

SAB's surplus water welcomed

THERE was a long queue at the South African Breweries fountain where people can collect free water every day.

The Breweries uses the water from the Table Mountain Aquifer for their beer making, but the surplus is given to residents of Cape Town for free.

With Cape Town experiencing its worst water crisis, the municipality has been giving residents hefty fines for not adhering to the strict water restrictions in place.

Marvin Charles

And with free water from the fountain in Newlands in abundance, there has been a steady queue for months, with around 20 people gathered there yesterday to fill up bottles and canisters.

Many of these people have been using the water as either drinking or cooking water. Waheed Dollie said he and his family have been coming to fill up for a very long time. However, the only

problem was that building construction companies arrive to fill up tanks full of water which they use for building materials, Dollie said.

The maximum amount allowed per user is 15 litres. Upon the Cape Argus's arrival yesterday we responded to a complaint of someone filling a tank with over 2 000 litres of water. Members of the public who witnessed the incident were outraged and reported the matter to a security guard.

Uncle Kathy's health deteriorates

STRUGGLE stalwart Ahmed Kathrada's condition has deteriorated following surgery related to clotting on his brain, the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation said in a statement.

A veteran of the anti-apartheid struggle, Kathrada is one of just three surviving Rivonia Trial accused.

The 87-year-old was hospitalised in Joburg earlier this month for the surgery. However, the foundation said yesterday Uncle Kathy had "experienced several post-operation complications,

rendering his condition serious".

The foundation's director, Neeshan Balton, said: "Kathrada has contracted pneumonia, which has affected both his lungs. Despite appropriate medical care, his condition is deteriorating. He is currently comfortable."

"The Kathrada Foundation will keep the public informed on a regular basis about his condition. Follow our Twitter handle @KathradaFound for updates," Balton said.

"We continue asking for your prayers

during this period, both for Kathrada and his family and friends."

He said members of the public were welcome to post their messages of support on the foundation's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Kathrada-Foundation/>) or by emailing info@kathrada-foundation.org.

Cards or flowers can be dropped off at the foundation's offices (Signet Terrace Office Park, Block B, Suite 2, 19 Guinea Fowl Street, Ext 1, Lenasia). — Staff Reporter

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LIFE



What does
child-friendly
really mean?

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MYANMAR has the most Buddhist temples of any Southeast Asian country. There are said to be a million pagodas and stupas. In the rural village of Bagan, there are more than 3 000 structures on a plain of 42km², the site of the first Burmese kingdom between the 11th and 13th centuries. In each city, town and remote villages, there are pagodas to be found.

Fascinatingly, although hundreds are in ruins – vegetation valiantly growing on the walls or through floors – countless are places of active worship and the centre of community life.

In addition, hundreds of Buddhist temples are being built. I saw new construction – with bamboo scaffolding – as well as restoration, in each place I visited. Donating money to build a pagoda on temple grounds, or to support a monastery, is one of the most popular ways to earn merit (*kutha*), believed to allay illness and misfortune and secure a better rebirth in the next life.

The wide practice of Theravada Buddhism permeates the daily life of the people, ranking them as the world's most generous country, along with the US. I experienced the renowned hospitality when I was invited off the street into a private home in Bagan, to enjoy a magnificent meal with an extended family.

Exploring some of the major temples and their nearby monasteries, observing the vibrant and bustling activity in these often exquisitely beautiful places, is a major attraction and it provides an opportunity to chat with the warm locals. When you enter a temple – whether it is famous like Shwedagon Paya in Yangon, Mahamuni in Mandalay or if it is an obscure small complex that you discover near your hotel at Inle Lake – you will be required to take off your shoes. Make sure you take slippers to facilitate this process. Women and children will approach you selling bunches of fresh cut flowers like lotus, anthurium and orchid, as well as fruit and incense, which are placed at the shrines as an offering.

Once you have run the gauntlet of the sales people and are inside the temple, expect numerous images of Buddha. Sometimes a huge statue dominates in each of the four compass points. Aspects of the life of Buddha are shown in various ways using sculpture, bass relief or paintings. Some temples sell gold leaf, which is pressed onto certain statues, as an act of worship. In some places the gold is so thick, that the Buddha effigy becomes an amorphous mass. In Mandalay, in Maha Myat Muni Pagoda, women are not permitted to apply gold leaf. The Buddha-graven images frequently have brightly coloured and flashing lights above them. Sometimes pillars are also entwined with these pulsating lights.

The devotion and sincerity of the worshippers is touching. As you are not allowed to point your foot at a Buddha image, people tend to either sit on their knees or cross-legged as they meditate or pray. In one temple I saw a toddler copying her mother, who was bowing down.

Outside the temple there is a sizeable bell, which you can ring using a thick wooden stick. This is a symbol of Buddha's voice, calling for the protection of deities and sustaining the order of things in the universe. Children love to sound the bells and gongs. Stray dogs and cats wander in and out of the temples, seeking food and shade, but are mostly ignored or given the occasional pat on the head.

Faith and superstition go hand in hand in Myanmar. I saw vans selling lotto tickets outside the temples, with individuals carefully considering which ticket to choose. People consult astrologers to find a marriage partner or an auspicious date for a major life event. In private homes I visited, personal shrines to Buddha included spirit houses for "nat", or spirit beings. Tree spirit shrines can be seen on venerated Banyan trees, which symbolise Buddha's enlightenment.



ABUNDANCE: The gilded turrets of Schwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.

PICTURES: GILLIAN McLAREN

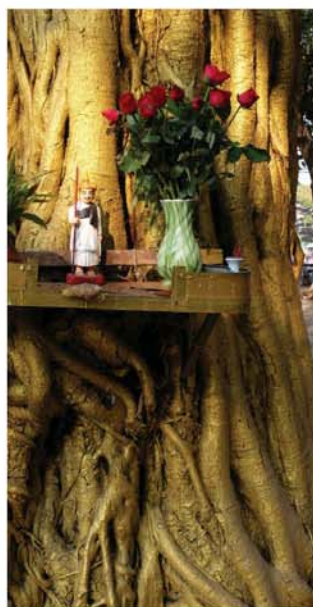
Mystical Myanmar

Gilded temples, sounding gongs tinkling bells and chanting monks are part of everyday life, writes Gillian McLaren

Myanmar people of all ages can spend an unspecified time as a monk or nun. In the early mornings, members of the Sangha walk in the streets with their bowl (formerly known as a begging bowl, but now as an offering bowl) wearing their robes. Men are clad in saffron and women in pink. Restaurant owners, or any lay people come out onto the streets with pots of rice – or if the Sanga is lucky maybe some curry – which they ladle into the bowls. Giving food to the monks and nuns is done willingly as an offering, as unto Buddha and is considered a righteous act that creates positive karma.

Feeding birds is another way of making an offering, so birdseed is sold and thrown to the pigeons. Outside the temples worshippers pay to set a bird free, which has been caught and placed in a cage. Sadly, they are often caught repeatedly.

Now is the time to visit this fascinating country, which was one of the most isolated countries in the world, but opened to the West – and to the thought of democracy – in 2011. Be surprised and delighted by tradition where all the men wear sarong-like longhis, women and children paint their faces with thanaka made from bark, old men and woman savour cheeroots or chew on bright red betel nut and tea-houses are almost as abundant as temples.



DEVOTION: A Spirit House on a painted Banyan tree in Yangon.

Great places to stay

The Strand Yangon – set in the vibrant old city, surrounded by grand colonial period buildings – is steeped in tradition from the colonial era, with delicious high teas and fine dining, whirring ceiling fans, a smoking bar and butler to unpack your clothes. www.hotelthestrang.com.

Blue Bird Hotel Bagan – in a verdant garden, with swimming pool and al fresco restaurant – is an oasis, on a dust road in a village within walking distance of some of the extraordinary temples of Bagan. Local people are employed and sound eco-friendly principles are practised here. www.bluebirdhotelbagan.com.

Hotel by the Red Canal, Mandalay is a boutique hotel in a welcoming space enclosing a lush garden with water features. It has a striking pagoda-style roof, red teak furniture, floors and staircases and provides lavish amenities. www.hotelredcanal.com.

The Strand Cruise is the perfect way to get from Bagan to Mandalay – in pure luxury, enjoying excellent food and exploring fabulous temples and local life along the Ayeyarwady River, with musical and puppet shows by artists, plus demonstrations on how to wear a longhi and facial thanaka paste. www.thestrandcruise.com.

Sanctum Inle Resort is tranquil and elegant, with high ceilings and selected teak furniture, set in a large garden including Tamarind trees, with views over an infinity swimming pool to paddy fields and Inle Lake, with the Shan mountains. Well sited for day boat trips to water villages. www.sanctum-inle-resort.com.

How to get to Myanmar

Cathay Pacific, measured as the world's safest airline for the last three years, has a business-class cabin that is spacious, open and decorated in soothing tones. Having an ergonomically designed flat bed, the longest and widest of any commercial airline. I slept soundly. Generous storage space, intuitive seat and entertainment system controls, fabulous food and wine served by efficient staff made this an exceptionally comfortable and enjoyable long-haul option.

Well worth the extra cost, Cathay Pacific premium economy seats – in a quiet, roomy separate cabin – are bigger, wider and have a pitch of 15cm more than economy class. I appreciated the large meal table, cocktail table, 27cm personal television and added space to stow my cameras. The welcome champagne did not go amiss, nor did the personal water bottle and extra snacks. The 5kg extra luggage and priority check-in and boarding are a boon. I highly recommend this choice.

Parenting tough even for royals

Rebecca English

SHE has all the privileges most parents can only dream of. But the Duchess of Cambridge admitted that even for her, motherhood had its difficulties.

Kate said that despite the help of a full-time nanny and a team of household staff, she still found coping with Prince George, 3, and 22-month-old Princess Charlotte an occasional struggle.

In her most personal speech yet, at an event to highlight the issue of maternal mental health, she said some of her experiences as a mother had led her to feel "unconfident and ignorant".

She said: "Becoming a mother has

been such a rewarding and wonderful experience. However, at times it has also been a huge challenge – even for me who has support at home that most mothers do not. Nothing can really prepare you for the sheer overwhelming experience. Your fundamental identity changes overnight.

"And yet there is no rule book, no right or wrong – you just have to make it up and do the very best you can."

Kate, 34, who wore a striking 1960s-style dress by Eponine, warned that for the two in ten women who suffered mental health issues during and after pregnancy, the pressure could be even greater. Post-natal depression could

"cloud their moments of joy with a real sense of darkness and isolation" but leave them unwilling to seek help for fear of not being seen as coping.

"Some of this fear is about the pressure to be a perfect parent, pretending we're all coping perfectly and loving every minute of it," she said. "It's okay not to find it easy. Asking for help should not be seen as a sign of weakness."

The event, organised by the Best Beginnings charity, was the first time she had spoken in such depth about her experiences. It is known that George did not sleep well as a baby and that she and Prince William found parenthood tough at first. – Daily Mail



FAMILY TIME: Kate said that despite the help of a full-time nanny and a team of household staff, she still finds coping with Prince George, three, and 22-month-old Princess Charlotte an occasional struggle. PICTURE: AP