

Road safety is our collective responsibility

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COMMENT



THE analysis piece ("KZN road carnage has trio of evil roots") penned by Radley Keys, which appeared on The Mercury last Tuesday bears reference.

Mr Keys, a former opposition party's Member of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Legislature and member of the Transport Portfolio Committee, which I chaired, liberally makes "fact" of misleading statements.

He misses the opportunity to make a progressive contribution to our call for collective leadership and action in the fight against road crashes and fatalities.

Firstly, Mr Keys writes that the provincial government is "culpable" in the "killing fields of our roads". That is not backed up by facts.

This last festive season, the provincial government deployed more than 24 000 personnel – from the KZN Department of Transport's Road Traffic Inspectorate, the metro and municipal traffic police, the South African Police Service, the SA National Defence Force, the KZN Department of Health's Emergency Medical Services, Customs (South African Revenue Service) and Cross-Border officials.

All these men and women were deployed across national, provincial, district, municipal, and local, residential and township roads.

Our campaign focused on 24/7 traffic police visibility in hot spot areas day and night, clamping down on speeding, unlicensed drivers and vehicles, and drinking and driving.

During these operations 49 drivers were caught for exceeding speed limit, the highest clocking 223 km/h. This particular driver was fined R40 000 by the Scottburgh Magistrate Court, and his licence suspended for 12 months.

Similarly, we are very concerned about drinking and driving especially among those between ages 18 and 40, who rank high as victims of crashes and fatalities, which has dire consequences for our society and economy.

By the end of the festive season, more than 126 000 vehicles had been stopped and checked for roadworthiness and driver fitness from close to 200 law enforcement road blocks.

During the operations, some of which I personally attended and monitored while interacting with motorists and passengers:

- 25 600 drivers were charged for various offences.

- 290 drivers were arrested for drinking and driving.

- 49 drivers were arrested for speeding.

- A total of 955 vehicles were suspended;

- Drivers of 1 966 unlicensed vehicles were charged.

- 1 964 drivers were charged for not wearing seat-belts.

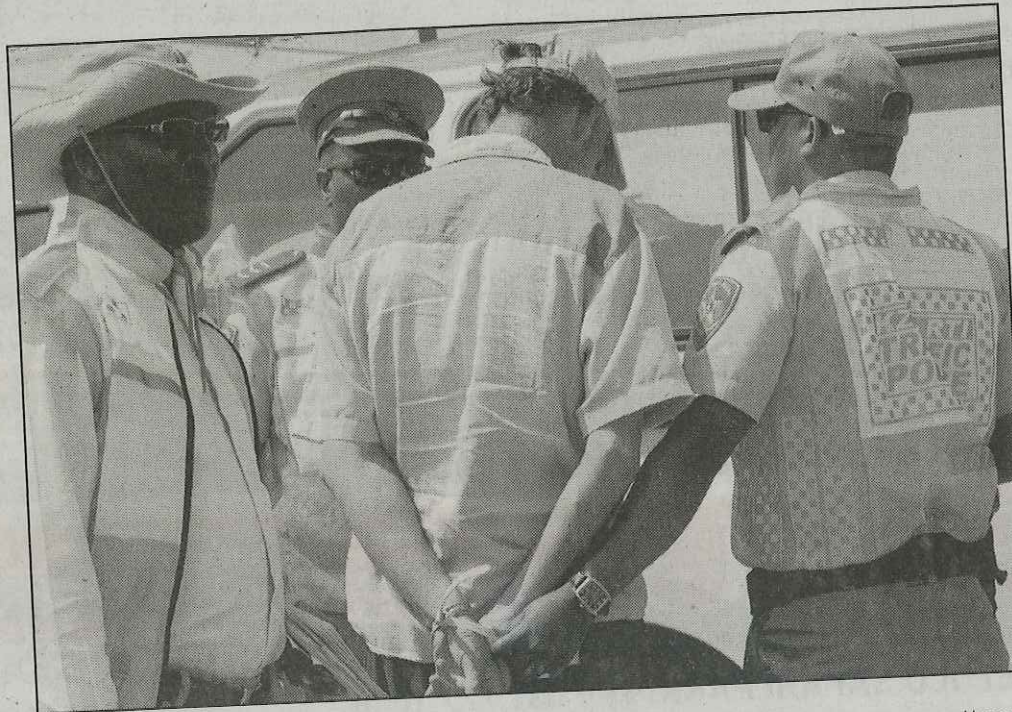
- 1 969 drivers were caught driving without licences.

- A total of 222 warrants were executed.

- And 147 vehicles were impounded.

I share these statistics to illustrate the point that during peak seasons, issues of overtime pay, which Mr Keys cites, are taken care of, within the well-known budgetary constraints.

Police visibility during the past festive season was probably at its highest in history. It has been a focal point for the KZN Department of



Transport for more than a decade already.

Statistics show that 90% of crashes are attributed to human factors such as drinking and driving, reckless driving and failure to obey road rules and signs, and less than 10% are due to vehicle defaults and road conditions.

Let me address another statement by Mr Keys. He claims that former MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, and now Premier, the Honourable Willies Mchunu, "closed down a programme that was specifically aimed at stopping the illegal registration of KZN vehicles in other provinces".

There was never such a programme.

Instead, for more than a decade, and continuing, the department has investigated issues of compliance in our 44 driving licence testing centres. This continues to yield results as 63 examiners have been charged

for fraudulent issuing of driving licences.

One of the latest cases was a Pongola driver's licence examiner and a runner who were prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to 10 years and 5 years in prison respectively, last November.

Vehicle and company operators have been brought to book, too.

Beyond this, everyone who owns a vehicle would know that registration of vehicles follows one's own or a company's residential address – hence the requirement for proof of residence. In fact, one of the ground-breaking programmes co-initiated by Premier Mchunu, working with amakhosi and other stakeholders while MEC, was the Inter-Provincial Technical Task Team structure.

This structure ensures that KZN interacts with other provinces such as Mpumalanga, the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Gauteng and Limpo-

po on matters relating to peace and stability in the taxi industry, faction fights, regulation in public transport and traffic management.

In terms of the latter, joint operations are held in areas such as Kokstad (Eastern Cape border); Charlestown (Mpumalanga border) and Van Reenen's Pass (Free State border), to curb cross-border crime.

The department has also migrated from a manual to a computerised learner licence testing system. This innovation has assisted a great deal in rooting out fraud and corruption in the issuing of learner, driver and vehicle licences. This is further boosted by installation of surveillance cameras in all vehicle-testing stations to monitor the process of testing drivers.

Moreover, working with the Driving School industry, the department has developed regulations which serve to institute a code of good practice for the previously un-

A motorist is taken into custody after violating the province's rules of the road. South Africa has unacceptably high road accident statistics.

regulated sector.

Perhaps one should highlight the point for the likes of Mr Keys that South Africa is a unitary, democratic state, and KZN is one of the provinces of South Africa.

Just like road safety, fighting fraud and corruption is every patriotic South African's responsibility.

To this end, I wish to implore Mr Keys to share with the police the details in his possession on criminal activity in driver licensing.

We need Mr Keys, as a good citizen, to join hands in our call for collective action to end the road carnage as well as fraud and corruption at testing stations.

What we do not need, though, is for Mr Keys to become, especially as a former representative of the people in the Provincial Legislature, a disgruntled couch analyst.

Turning the tide on road safety, maintaining peace and stability in communities and the taxi industry, as well as fighting fraud and corruption in all spheres of society, requires upright-standing and authentic leadership from all of us.

We are constantly engaging the Department of Justice and the National Prosecuting Authority to expedite the prosecution and conviction of road traffic offences, particularly drinking and driving.

Above all, we are seeking to create national consciousness on the fact that road safety – and safety in general is our collective responsibility – through ongoing road safety education and awareness campaigns.

All this is part of making citizens value their lives, and ensure that safety is uppermost in their minds wherever they are, and whatever they do.

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