

Case load in Lenasia courts crippling justice

SANDF ammunition theft trial postponed after magistrate laments huge court roll and dire lack of resources

SHAIN GERMANER
shain.germaner@inl.co.za

THE LENASIA Magistrate's Court has been paralysed by a massive roll and minimal resources, meaning important trials are unable to go ahead at the court.

Last week, the trial of five men believed to have stolen 200 000 rounds of ammunition from the SANDF had to be postponed yet again because the Lenasia court couldn't cope with its case load.

Gareth de Nysschen, Efthi-

mios Demis Karamitsos, a director and manager at Dave Sheer Guns, and soldiers Teboho Peter Motaung, Diphang John Motloung and his son Thabang have all been charged with the theft of the SANDF ammunition. But as their case was called before magistrate Maggie van der Merwe, the presiding officer was forced to apologise to everyone in attendance.

Describing the situation as "intolerable", Van der Merwe said the recent demarcation of the court's jurisdiction had more than doubled over the past year.

Since Justice Minister Michael Masutha altered the jurisdiction of the courts and the areas they serve in November last year, criminal cases from other areas outside of Lenasia, among them Sebokeng, now have to be heard in the Lenasia court.

The Star noted that more than 200 cases were on the roll at the Lenasia court last Wednesday, and during her tirade, magistrate Van der Merwe said this was the norm.

While 200 cases a day might be manageable at a larger court, the Lenasia Regional Court has

just four courtrooms on the premises.

Van der Merwe told all of the accused that the huge number of first appearances and bail applications took precedence over trials, as dictated by the law, and this meant that many major trials had stalled in the court.

Despite all her efforts to contact other nearby court houses to try to help alleviate the burden at the court, Van der Merwe said she was simply labelled a "troublemaker" for trying to get them to take on some of the excessive number of cases

assigned to her courthouse.

Van der Merwe said the Department of Justice had pledged it would help alleviate the problem at the beginning of next year, but she believed it would take at least a full year to recover from the demarcation "chaos".

The Dave Sheer Guns case ultimately resulted in a head of the firearms registry in Pretoria, Brigadier Mathapelo Miriam Mangwani, being fired for her corruption in fast-tracking licences for the gun store.

Van der Merwe told the court

she acknowledged what an important case it was, but that the bottleneck at the court had become too severe to continue the trial. The court was told that the case would be transferred to the Kagiso Regional Court this week, but that the trial might only continue late next year.

Despite numerous attempts to contact the Department of Justice since Wednesday, its spokesman Mthunzi Mhaga did not respond to e-mail queries, text messages or telephone calls to enquire about the court and its massive backlog.

Acid victim is bracing for sentencing of her ex-lover

ANNA COX
anna.cox@

THIS MORNING, acid attack victim Ines Antonio was due to know her fate.

Although it was her former boyfriend Jan Pieterse, 45, who was to be sentenced, it is she who will be affected.

She will know whether she will have to relocate, leave the country or live incognito – and in fear – for the rest of her life.

Pieterse was convicted in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court of attempt to do grievous bodily harm last month, arising from the attack against her.

Antonio says she was failed by both the justice system and the police.

She had a protection order against Pieterse, as he had been stalking her for months before the attack. But he ignored it and every time she reported this to the Norwood police station, they did nothing. She laid six complaints, none of which were investigated.

"I had a protection order because he had attacked me and my daughter several times in the past. Every time the police came, they would just tell us to calm down. He would

cry and say he was disabled (his one leg is slightly shorter than the other) and that it was my fault, and that I had attacked him. They believed him every time," she said.

He got so confident that he told her no one would do anything to him and he would get away with it, like Oscar Pistorius, she said.

Antonio was attacked by Pieterse in November last year when he threw a tin of acid over her, badly burning her face, chest and arms.

The couple had split up a year before the attack, because of his constant abuse.

And after the attack, Antonio was let down by the police.

They claimed to have looked for him and said they could not find him. During this time, he bombarded her with abusive text messages, threatening to "finish off the job" and telling her how useless she was.

Some three weeks later, when The Star was informed that he was still on the run and his photo was printed on the front page, someone recognised

him and informed a private investigator who offered to help free of charge. It was only then that he was arrested.

Although he was not supporting her, Pieterse maliciously stopped the R440 a month child grant that was in his name when they broke up, just to spite her.

Antonio not only lost her looks, endured great pain and faces many years of surgery, she was forced out of her home and into shelters.

She has also temporarily lost her daughter who is staying with a friend, as she is unable to look after her because of all the surgery.

Antonio was starting to take control of her life after years of abuse at Pieterse's hands. She had started working in a beauty salon as a hairstylist and studying to complete her matric, which she gave up when she fell pregnant.

"I feel let down by the police, had they arrested him in the first place, this might never have happened," she said.



AWAITING HIS FATE: Ines Antonio looks at her former boyfriend Jan Pieterse who was convicted of assault for throwing acid at her.

PICTURE: CHRIS COLLINGRIDGE

Missing initiates reunited with their parents

KGOPI MABOTJA
kgopi.mabotja@inl.co.za

EIGHTEEN boys allegedly kidnapped and taken to illegal initiation schools around Gauteng last month, have been reunited with their parents.

The boys, aged between 13 and 17, were found in places such as

Poortjie near Orange Farm, Boksburg and Tembisa in Ekurhuleni and Dobsonville in Soweto. Police were initially not sure if the boys had been abducted or went willingly.

"The 18 were not officially reported missing, but the police reunited them with their families," police spokesman Captain Johannes

Motsiri said yesterday.

He said that most of the boys, among them a 13-year-old from Orange Farm, who was reported missing last week, were found with injuries. The Star reported on Thursday seven boys were recovered from initiation schools.

No arrests have been made.

14 fahfee players lose out in court

KATE MORRISSEY
kathleen.morrissey@inl.co.za

FOURTEEN Chinese fahfee players, who pleaded guilty last week to illegal gambling in Bramley, Joburg, were sentenced to six months in jail.

Their sentences were suspended provided they don't commit a similar offence in the next five years.

Three of them, including the one woman arrested, have previous gambling or lottery-related convictions.

According to the accused's statements, at about 4am on November 27, they were playing fahfee in a house on Beryl Avenue in Bramley Park when they heard a knock at the door. They were so engrossed in

their game that they yelled to the visitors that the door was unlocked.

They did not realise the callers were police.

“It's one of the biggest illegal lotteries in SA”

Odaho Sengani of the National Lotteries Commission said fahfee, also known as "mochaina", is "one of the biggest illegal lotteries in the country".

In their admission of guilt

statements, the accused said the R60 000 police confiscated was part of their game.

Sengani said police also seized 11 armoured vehicles during the arrest, but the SAPS communications officer for Bramley was unable to say what had happened to the vehicles.

All but one of the players are Chinese according to court documents. The other is a South African citizen with Chinese ancestry. Their ages range from 22 to 43.

According to Sengani, police were investigating the illegal rhino horn trade when they discovered the fahfee game. She also said that the alleged leader managed to flee while the 14 players were arrested.

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Calling all Matrics

As the matrics have started writing their final exams, *The Star* would like to celebrate this special time by publishing articles of their success. If you know of matric pupils you believe will do particularly well this year, or who have overcome any type of hardship to get their matric certificate, let us know. We're looking for names of children and their schools, the reasons why you believe they will do well, contact details and photos.

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