

Guards manhandle students as cops watch

Police were locked out of the UJ campus during the clashes

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POLICE officers watched helplessly as private security guards assaulted and pepper-sprayed protesting University of Johannesburg students and workers yesterday.

The officers were locked outside the gates of the institution's Kingsway campus during the protests against outsourcing of mainly cleaners, gardeners and security guards yesterday.

Earlier in the morning, private security guards hired by the university ordered gathered students and workers to stop blocking the gates. When they didn't, they were slapped and manhandled, and pepper spray was used on them.

UJ Soweto student representative council chairman Siyabonga Hlabathi walked onto campus to try to calm the protesters, but the guards escorted him off the premises.

Other leaders, including outgoing SRC president Khutso Rammutla, couldn't

enter the campus as they had been served with a letter of suspension. A defiant Rammutla said he refused to accept the suspension letter.

"They were happy when the SRC was silent about outsourcing. Now that we are talking, they suspend us. I don't owe the university any money. They can suspend me as a student but not as a leader," he said.

Four other students, including SRC secretary Mangaliso Mkhonto, have also been suspended.

Thirty workers were removed from campus because they posed a serious danger to the lives of students, according to vice-chancellor Ihron Rensburg.

He said the university was negotiating with workers through their union and other informal representatives.

A task team to deal with outsourcing was expected to sit for their first meeting today to develop an insourcing plan.

"Their brief must develop an insourcing plan as quickly as possible. It must come into effect early next year," Rensburg added.



CASUALTIES: Paramedics attend to two women who were pepper-sprayed during a confrontation between University of Johannesburg security personnel and workers and students on the campus yesterday.

PICTURE: BOXER NGWENYA

The university had to put its foot down

In the altercation between the protesters and the security guards, at least eight people were taken to hospital. One student struggled to breathe after being pepper-sprayed,

and cleaner Nthabiseng Moloi, who suffers from epilepsy, was injured.

Student Xhama Songwevu was taken to Helen Joseph Hospital after he was hit with a baton on the head and was bleeding profusely. After receiving medical attention, he returned to the protest.

He said: "The guards had been wanting to assault me for days, and the workers knew. When the guards approached, the workers formed a human shield around me. As they

couldn't get to me, they hit me on the head with a baton."

Songwevu vowed to continue protesting until UJ stopped outsourcing workers.

Frustrated by not being able to enter the campus, protesters burnt tyres at the entrance. But police officers extinguished the fires and warned them against a violent strike. The protesters then tried to force open the gate, and police threw stun grenades at them.

Rensburg defended the

move to bring private security guards onto campus, but denied there were any assaults on students and workers.

"The university had to put its foot down," he said the university would look at CCTV footage to see if anyone was assaulted.

Though students were hit by stun grenades, at a media conference Rensburg claimed all four campuses were calm.

In addition to stopping outsourcing, Rammutla said students wanted Rensburg to

rethink financial exclusion and cancel the registration fee for returning students.

Despite the protests, Rensburg was adamant that exams would continue as planned today. He said about 2 000 students were due to write their final year-end exams.

Rensburg said the university had two court interdicts prohibiting students from disrupting the institution.

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Three-way funding for universities

CARLO PETERSEN

THE DEPARTMENT of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the National Treasury will contribute R1.935 billion to the R2.330bn deficit incurred by not increasing fees next year.

Universities will then provide R394.7 million to make up the total, the portfolio committee on higher education and training (PCHET) said yesterday.

This follows more than a week of meetings with the Presidency and National Treasury to resolve matters related to President Jacob Zuma's announcement that tertiary fees will not increase next year.

Zuma's announcement had been prompted by the #Fees-MustFall campaign, which effectively shut down all universities in South Africa for a week.

Speaking after a presentation by the DHET in Parliament on Wednesday, PCHET chairwoman Yvonne Phosa said that in addition to the R2.330bn for universities, it was unanimously agreed that funding for the post-school education sector must be increased.

"The 0.62 percent of the gross domestic product apportioned to higher education is clearly insufficient. More funds have to be found for the DHET to be able to deliver on its mandate," said Phosa.

DHET Minister Blade Nzimande was questioned about a 2012 task team he had commissioned to investigate the possibility of fee-free university education.

Nzimande said the report concluded that free university education for the poor in South Africa was feasible. The report was made public this week.

"The implementation of fee-free university education is dependent on significant funding being made available, but the quantum of funding required varies depending on the range of parameters and policy decisions," Nzimande said.

University Council Chairs Forum chairperson Mbulelo Bikwani said: "This is a noble fight for the poor; but I don't think there is any university that is happy. There is an issue of underfunding while there is a call to open the doors of education widely."

SIYABONGA MKHWANAZI

DEPUTY President Cyril Ramaphosa and Minister for Planning Jeff Radebe have insisted that the government would find the money for higher education for next year and in future funding.

Ramaphosa and Radebe said yesterday that means would be found to fully fund deserving students in universities.

However, Ramaphosa said the focus must not be only on universities but also on technical and vocational colleges.

SA moving towards free education, says Cyril

The current estimate from the Department of Higher Education was that R51 billion was needed for both universities and technical and vocational colleges in the next three years.

Ramaphosa told Parliament, during question time, that resources would be mobilised to fund higher education.

On the other hand, Radebe told journalists during a post-cabinet briefing that President

Jacob Zuma's commission of inquiry into higher education would shed light on funding.

Radebe said the cabinet backed Zuma's decision to cap fees at zero percent for next year.

"This decision brings much-needed monetary relief, especially to the poor, working-class and lower middle-class families with university students," he said.

Asked where the money would come from, he said money

would be found.

Ramaphosa said student protests had raised the issue of funding to the highest level of government.

He denied a suggestion by IFP MP Mkhuleko Hlengwa that the government's response to the student protests was a knee-jerk reaction.

He said the government had been discussing the issue of funding for higher education for

some time.

He also dismissed DA leader Mmusi Maimane's proposal that the government cut R700 million from the Department of International Relations and more millions in ministerial benefits to cover the R2.33bn shortfall.

Ramaphosa described the proposal as a cheap shot.

He accused Maimane of trying to have a monopoly of ideas on how to raise billions for higher

education.

When the students embarked on the protest, this was already on the government's agenda.

He said the commission of inquiry would look at the medium-term and long-term solutions to funding for higher education.

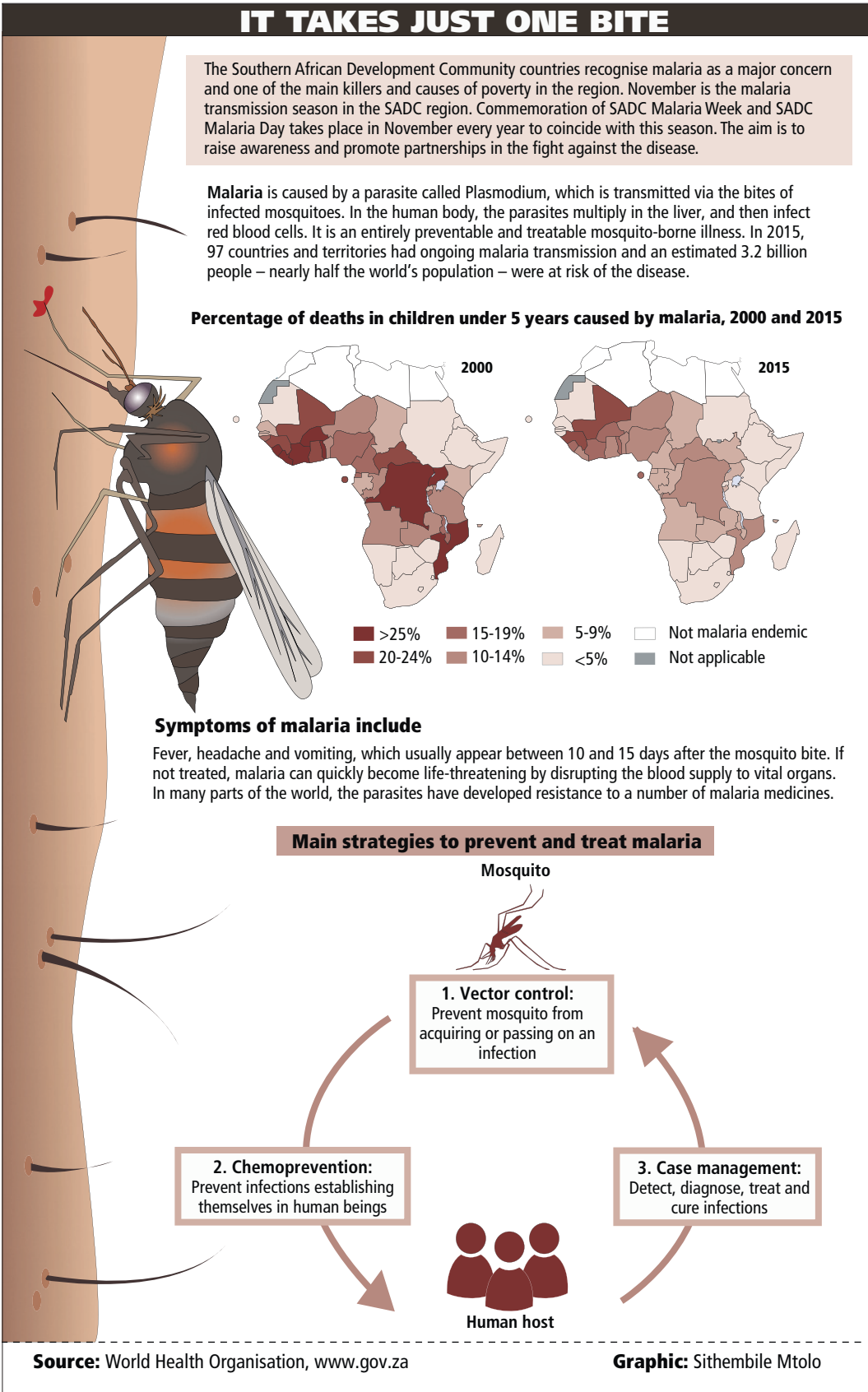
Parliament, through the standing committee on appropriations, was aware of the R2.33bn shortfall, he added.

The committee will also look at the question of free education for the poor.

The student protests had galvanised all sectors of society to work together in finding a solution to the funding of university education.

"This is a great opportunity that all of us can play a role in without grandstanding,"

Ramaphosa said South Africa was moving towards free education and it would be fully funded. This was a commitment the government had made, and it would stick to it.



Polar bears provide early warning on global warming

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AS COLD winds left summer-lovers across South Africa grumbling in the past few days about climate change, Polar Bear Week is here to remind us we're not the only ones affected by global warming.

Started five years ago by explore.org, Polar Bears International (PBI) and Frontiers North Adventures, Polar Bear Week comes at the height of the bears' annual migration along the Hudson Bay in Manitoba, Canada.

The organisations have set up live-streaming cameras so that people all over the world can watch the bears as they migrate.

"Polar bears provide us with an early warning of the global warming's risks," explained Steven Amstrup, a scientist at PBI.

His colleague Katharine Hayhoe, an atmospheric scientist, added: "Climate change is also exacerbating other issues across Africa and around the world: access to clean water, the risk of infectious disease, even the stability of nations such as Syria that teeter on the edge."

According to PBI, global warming delays the formation of sea ice that the bears walk on to hunt seals.

When there is no sea ice, the bears live off the extra fat their bodies have stored. The delays in ice formation mean bears migrate into the bay later in the year and out of the bay earlier,

so they live off their fat reserves longer.

Polar bears hunt seals because their fat has a high calorie content, according to PBI, which the bears need in the frigid Arctic temperatures.

Explore.org said polar bears can eat up to 45kg of blubber in one meal lasting 20 minutes.

Amstrup said the population of polar bears in the Hudson Bay area has dropped 22 percent in the last 30 years.

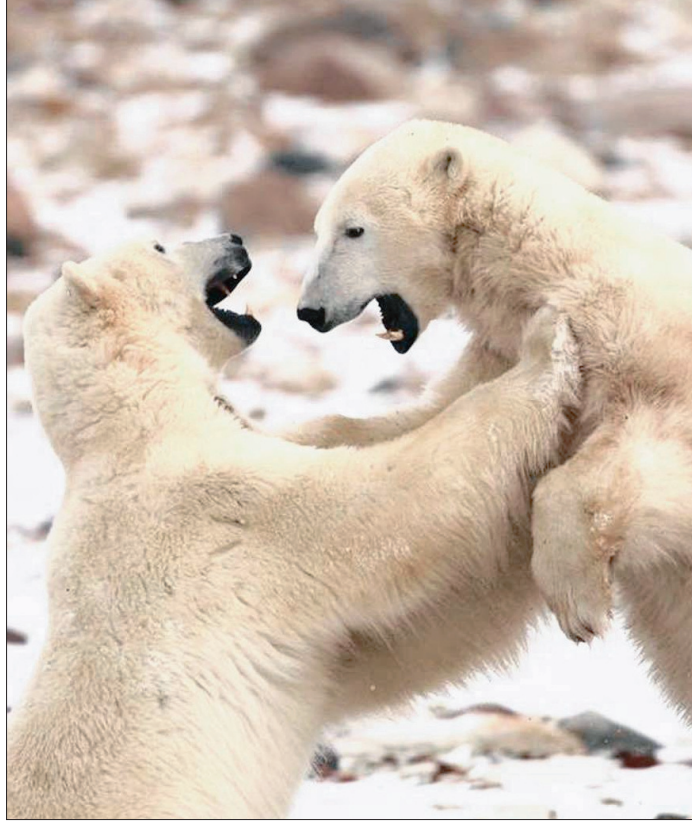
The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has classified the polar bear as a vulnerable species. According to PBI, scientists estimate between 20 000 and 25 000 polar bears are left in the world.

The last polar bear in all of Africa, Wang, died last year at the Johannesburg Zoo. Spokeswoman Jenny Moodley said the zoo does not plan to replace the bear. The zoo wants to upgrade the polar bear enclosure for a penguin exhibit but is waiting for funding.

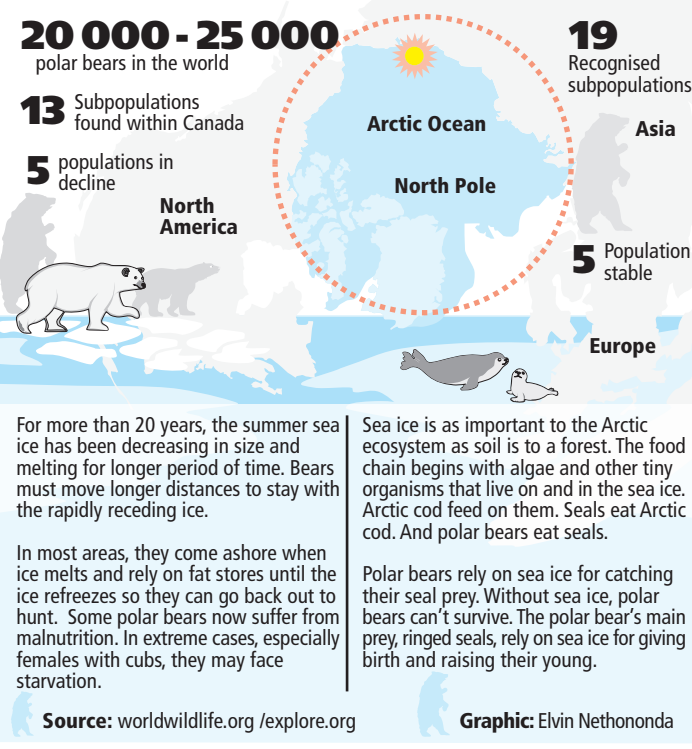
Amstrup said if we act soon, there is still time to reduce our greenhouse emissions enough to save the polar bears still living in the wild. PBI has called for initiatives similar to Joburg's Ecomobility Month.

The UN will hold a conference on climate change at the end of this month. PBI has a petition available to sign online to encourage the UN conference to consider the plight of the polar bears.

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IN DANGER: Polar bears play as they make their way along the Hudson Bay for their annual migration in Canada. PICTURE: EXPLORE.ORG



City Power staffer in court over cable theft

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"THIS is a serious matter, not just an ordinary fight. The theft of cables can lead to the death of innocents and the disruption of infrastructure," the State said yesterday.

The prosecution was warning two suspects, including a senior staffer at City Power, accused of stealing four drum rolls of cables estimated at R1.4 million.

The senior staff member at City Power, Isaac Dube, appeared in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court along with Zimbabwean Ntokozo Chitungu for a bail application.

Dube, the security manager for risk and compliance at City Power, and Chitungu, who is an electrician, both pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The State opposed bail because the men have families outside the country and could be a flight risk.

But the defence argued that the accused were not a flight risk because their passports had been confiscated and Dube had handed in his ID.

The defence added that if they were a flight risk, they would not have handed themselves over to police.

The State said the charges were a schedule five offence.

City Power's Hloni Motloung said Dube had been suspended. "The suspension will remain in force until the court proceedings are finalised," he said.

The case was postponed to Tuesday for a judgment on bail.