

Former Deputy President causing headache

A snapshot of international media's coverage of South Africa

Bad news are good news' is a familiar explanation as to why some countries or regions rarely receive positive coverage in international news. Often, historical or racial issues are cited, references made to 'former aggressors' or simply blame laid on existing stereotypes such related to the 'dark continent'. South Africa's former Deputy President Jacob Zuma not only caused severe political dilemmas within the ruling party African National Congress (ANC), but has tainted the overall image of South Africa to a large extent during the course of the last few months in international media.

Considering budgets and limited resources, it is not surprising that countries such as South Africa have limited options to lift themselves from below the awareness threshold in international media, but this was never more needed than now. With the Soccer World Cup having started in Germany and 2010 hosted by South Africa, drawing close; the attention of several media are focusing on South Africa's ability to host this event – and serious doubts are raised. British media in particular (**Sunday Times**, 16 April 2006), and some of the criticism crossing the Atlantic with the **Los Angeles Times** asking the question 'What if South Africa stumbles in its efforts to stage the 2010 World Cup?'

Adding to all these doubts, numerous reports about crime in South Africa and – with considerable impact – coverage on the Zuma trial, surfaced. Accused of raping an HIV positive activist - and defending himself successfully in a court of law, the court proceedings not only took centerpiece in South African media but were given considerable attention in internationally.

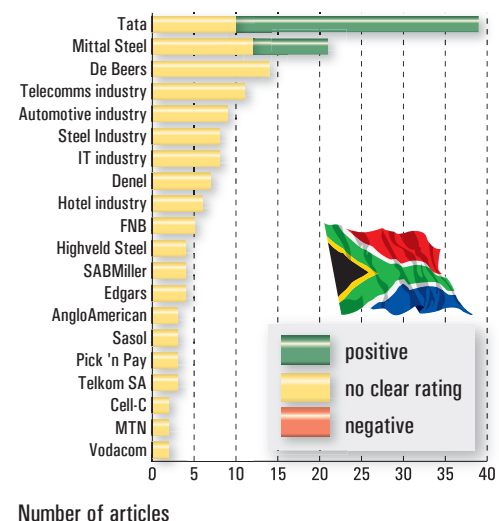
Zuma was eventually acquitted on 8 May with the meaning of 'innocent until proven guilty' changing to a 'guilty even after declared innocent'. Although the majority of media seemed to agree that the case was not strong from the beginning, the amount of coverage was certainly unprecedented. In South African leading media in May, the court case took up close to 6% of the total coverage in the media, and this included business and economy reports. No other individual issue since Media Tenor South Africa started analyzing media in 2000 has captured more dedicated coverage than this particular 'event'. During this time, it pushed aside virtually all other issues, particularly those that are traditionally under the radar

(education, environment and others). But sadly, even though the debate around the rape could have lead to a constructive debate around the role of women and gender politics, cultural attitudes towards HIV Aids or the issue of 'leading by example' by politicians; this did not take place. Instead, even traditionally more 'serious' publications such as **Business Day** or **The Sunday Independent** turned to a detailed description of the 'events' rather than the issue at stake choosing to sensationalize the issue.

Internationally, the Zuma rape case took up center stage in the attention South Africa received during this time – overshadowing the very little coverage on the country by far. In the UK, of the 52 articles in 11 leading newspapers, 19% focused on the trial proceedings, in the United States (32 articles in 20 media) this share was at 28%, equal to Germany, where 9 articles were dedicated to the court proceedings. Indian and Chinese media on the other hand almost did not cover the event (2% and 3% respectively). Even on the African continent, where South Africa traditionally has a status of both 'admired role model for Africa' as well as 'new African colonizer' criticism has been visible. The **East African**, one of Kenya's largest publications, wrote on 18 April ('Once Again, It is a Good Season to Be a Strongman in Africa') that 'If you didn't know better, you would be excused for thinking the stories of the rape trial in Johannesburg involving Jacob Zuma have been conjured up by someone with the most twisted stereotype of Africans. But no, it is reality. In fact, readers outside South Africa are getting a very tame version of what is going on in court.'

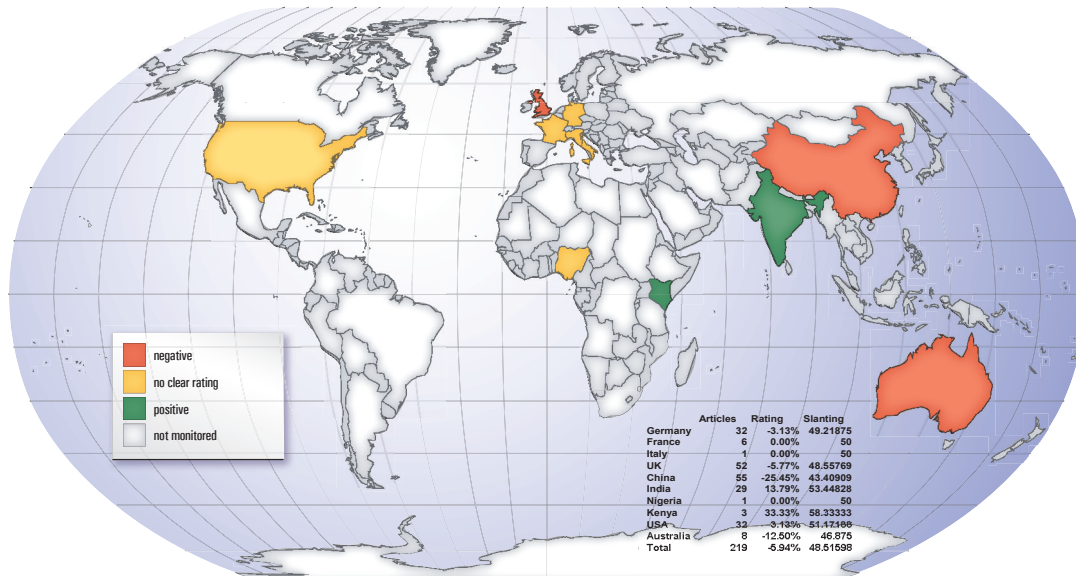
Business that seems to have to 'save the day' for South Africa

Coverage on business in South Africa: April, 2006



Source: Media Tenor 04/01 – 04/30/2006
Basis: 170 articles on business

Coverage on South Africa, April, 2006: Only Kenya, India with more friendly coverage



It is not just the Soccer World Cup ahead in just four years time. South Africa's role as model for Africa is under increased scrutiny.

However the large focus of coverage on the Zuma trial did not take away the 'usual' coverage that South Africa receives. Chinese media (and here particularly the agency **Xinhua**) devoted 27% of all coverage to crime committed in South Africa – even when not linked to Chinese nationals. Every larger car accident, gruesome murder, kidnapping and other 'events' featured prominently in the media, seemingly in disagreement with a decision undertaken recently by a joint initiative from the South African and Chinese governments, to 'tune down' the type of coverage on the respective national news agencies.

Again, it is business that seems to have to 'save the day' for South Africa. Business coverage on South Africa was the key focus of British as well as Indian media, with very positive reporting, even though linked to own interests. In Indian media, steel giant Mittal as well as Holding company Tata's activities in South Africa received considerable reporting, followed by mining giant De Beers. In Britain, the take-over of private hospital company General Healthcare Group by South Africa's Ncare was largely welcomed and equally favourable were coverage on mining and financial organizations. In Germany, business coverage focused on South African airways joining the Star Alliance airline network (with Lufthansa a key founding member).

But criticism of business has also been visible: 'Open to abuse? Why cronyism threatens to sour the South African dream BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: The murder of a mining magnate has shed light on the connections between government and business in a country struggling to address the imbalances of apartheid,' was a headline by John Reed in the **Financial Times** of 18 April, raising con-

cerns around corporate governance issues in South Africa, where influential members of government 'suddenly' become influential business people 'overnight'. Reed ends by saying: 'One danger is that the next generation of South Africans may come to see politics or government service as a path to riches. This may already be happening.'

It is not just the Soccer World Cup ahead in just four years time. South Africa's role as model for Africa is under increased scrutiny. This is good as it shows that the considerable success achieved since the end of Apartheid has made an impact in the international community's view of the country, and therefore possibly on Africa as a whole. South Africa as an 'ambassador' of Africa should not be surprised if it is also judged by successes and failures and benchmarked accordingly – it is not above this. While many South Africans, including the media are brushing off these judgments and might be claiming 'racism' and 'colonial oppression', it still means that South Africa has not yet managed to set a strong foot in international media to be able to set the agenda – rather than receiving it. Yes, bad news do sell, particularly well if the general volume of coverage is low. Increasing own and more positive coverage ahead of an event that will place increased spotlight on South Africa will most likely be one of the biggest challenges yet for the country and its media. ws

Basis:

Media: 96 international media in 12 countries: United States, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, China, India, Australia, Japan, Nigeria, Kenya

Time: 04/01 – 04/30/2006

Analysis: 219 articles/reports about South Africa in 96 media in 12 countries