

COMMENT



LINDSAY SLOGROVE

Sacrificing ego, partisan politics to save lives

IT'S THE economy, stupid.

Until it's not.

It's about not sacrificing people's

lives.

At this stage of South Africa's colourful (that pun just happened) history, we are blessed to have people of courage and smarts at the helm.

Our nation should thank its lucky stars that President Cyril Ramaphosa is in charge right now. He has taken flak from many corners for mistakes, missteps and dithering. But his actions in facing up to the coronavirus pandemic have been masterful.

His masterstroke while being the main man in charge has been to identify the man to lead the charge.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize has been the right man in the right place at this terrible time. Mkhize has been highly visible during the lockdown, ensuring South Africans get the facts.

This week Mkhize unleashed globally respected Professor Salim Abdool Karim, chairperson of the Covid-19 Ministerial Advisory Committee. With charts, graphs and a layman's delivery, he told the nation what it needed to know about the virus.

This Saffer felt proud of what we were doing.

The economic hardship are real, painful and terrifying. The brutality dealt out to some of our citizens, unforgivable. Flip-flopping, lurching out, incomprehensible Covid cadres are blemishes on the task team.

But consider this: imagine if we had the leader of the free world in the driving seat. The one who called African countries "shitholes". Who knew the threat of this pandemic but did nothing for a month because of the expected impact on the economy, and therefore his re-election prospects. Who also holds daily "briefings", in one emphatically stating one thing, and the very next day, pronouncing the exact opposite.

The one who attacks the press for asking what happened in the month between when he knew what was coming and when the death count started.

The one who was going to open his country by Easter.

The one who has refused to issue a country-wide lock down.

The one who has instructed his administration to stop funding the World Health Organization. He has delayed stimulus package payments to his citizens because he insists each cheque carries his signature.

Every day it's another outrage as his country's death toll is number one in the world's corona carnage.

He has alienated decades-long international allies and harmed, if not negated, his nation's standing as a global leader. So as we grumble and grouse and fear the future here, at least we can take comfort in the fact that our leader recognised the danger early. That he acted courageously and quickly even though he knew the economy was already in grave peril.

And that he was smart enough to hand leadership of the crisis and decision making that would make life-saving calls to men of science.

There are enormous and consequential choices to be made: when, and how, do we start to emerge from our homes to rebuild our country? Even when these doors open, the virus will not have been subdued, and, as experts including Abdool Karim warn, there will be no vaccine for at least a year.

Our curve-flattening actions seem to have had a promising outcome.

We must, at all costs, not act in any way to nullify the efforts of those actions when the door is set ajar.

Slogrove is the news editor of the Independent on Saturday.