Pageant celebrates 'right of all to be beautiful'

Contestants absent as they weren't allowed to leave their country

KANINA FOSS

OS SOPHEAP needed help making it down the catwalk. Not because she is a landmine amputee with only one leg, but because her government barred her from attending the beauty pageant in which she was a

In the end, it was a fellow Cambodian girl living in Norway who carried Sopheap's poster-size photograph down the catwalk and smiled for the cameras, helping 18-year-old Sopheap scoop first place in Miss Landmine Cambodia 2009 - probably the first beauty pageant held in exile.

The story of how a Cambodian beauty queen came to be crowned in absentia in Norway at the weekend begins with a group of Cambodian refugees boarding a plane to the other end of the world in 1979, and ends with an e-mail sent the following century to one of the eldest members of a now 400strong Cambodian community in Kristiansand, a small town in the south of Norway.

In between, there are 30 years of ongoing government dictatorship, a population of women subjected to the subterranean weapons of civil war, and a Norwegian artist with the belief that everyone has the right to be beautiful.

Virak Yenn, 68, was a member of the third group to arrive in Norway in 1983. He says comparing Norway and Cambodia is like trying to compare the sky and the earth. Ir Channa, who arrived in the middle of winter, 2006, says that when he looked out the aircraft window and saw only snow - no people, no animals he felt sure he was going to die.

Both men fled Cambodia to save their lives. Yenn escaped the Pol Pot regime to Vietnam in 1976. Three years later, when he was arrested for refusing to enlist in an army to fight the Khmer Rouge, he had to flee again, this time to Thailand.

Channa, former vice-secretary of the Cambodian Students' Movement for Democracy, escaped to Thailand on the day he found out that a warrant had been issued for his arrest. His best friend, a trade union leader, had been assassinated two years before while reading a newspaper in a shop.

When Norwegian artist Morten Traavik contacted them about a beauty pageant for Cambodian landmine victims which had been banned by the Cambodian government, the Kristiansand community thought it was a good idea to



POSTER GIRL: A picture of Dos Sopheap is carried down the catwalk after she was forbidden by her government from entering the Miss Landmine Cambodia 2009 contest in Norway. Sopheap was crowned the winner in absentia. PICTURE: EUP IMAGES

hold the event in Norway. The pageant's first prize is

a custom-made prosthetic leg, which Traavik will deliver to The inaugural Miss Land-

mine took place in Angola in 2008. The project was criticised by some for being a shameless exploitation of Third World women, but the Angolans themselves, including the country's first lady, who presented the winners with their prizes, embraced it as a way to give a voice to the voiceless, using a medium much loved by the country – beauty pageants.

When Traavik tried to take

the project to Cambodia, the government thought differently. It said beauty pageants were foreign to Cambodian culture (Prime Minister Hun Sen banned beauty pageants in the 1990s), and forbade the Miss Landmine contestants from leaving their hometowns to take part, saying the event would undermine their dignity.

But Channa thinks the decision had more to do with the government's refusal to give rights to minority groups. "It's the nature of a dictator. The dictator does not want people to understand their rights. But people are born with rights.

He says the government is embarrassed by disabled people, and that showing them to the world will be perceived as a sign of the ruling party's incompetence.

The Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, which is widely considered a token organisation tolerated by the government, published a letter in one of the only newspapers still brave enough to criticise the ruling party, saying the ban was further evidence that the government had little or no regard for freedom of expression in Cambodia.

They said Miss Landmine

was the kind of awareness-raising much needed in a country with 25 000 amputees among 63 000 landmine victims.

Traavik, who says foreign NGOs dominate the provision of basic social services in Cambodia, wrote to the NGOs, telling them they had an obligation to respond to the decision. He didn't receive a single reply.

The Cambodians living in Norway say the situation back home is deteriorating rapidly. So Saturday's beauty pageant in exile, held in an art museum in Kristiansand, was a bittersweet occasion. The 20 candidates were represented by local

"I think I should have gone

As an attorney specialising

in medical negligence claims,

Eichstädt has seen worse

could be set " she said

Cambodian girls, wearing the flower-shaped hair clips, chiffon ruffles and multicoloured rhinestones of their homeland

Traavik said that even though the event had lacked the main protagonists – the candi dates themselves - it had expressed "all the hope at the end of hopelessness"

Yenn says he will die in Norway. He tried to go back to Cambodia four years ago, but his body wouldn't accept the change in climate. "I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep.'

Channa is still hoping to go back. But he knows he will be risking his life.

Row erupts following Caster article

GILL GIFFORD

AN ARTICLE on Caster Semenya published in The Guardian on Saturday and punted as "an exclusive interview" is alleged to have been obtained under false pretences.

A statement issued at the weekend by Greg Nott, managing partner at the law firm Dewey & LeBoeuf, said the world 800 metres champion was considering taking legal action against the British

The article, more than 5000 words long and published on page one of the news and features section, quotes Semenya as saying: "People want to stare at me, to touch me. I don't think I like being famous so much."

Her lawyers are now claiming that Semenya never agreed to an interview and that the quotes had been obtained under false pretences. Since the recent sex-testing debacle, Semenya has refused requests for interviews or comments.

A statement by Dewey & LeBoeuf claimed: "Our client has instructed us to convey that she continues to refuse to grant any interviews to any person. The reasons for our client's position are obvious.

"We are instructed by our client that any quotes or infor-

'Our client is considering her legal options'

mation in Mr (Donald) McRae's article which are alleged to have been obtained from or attributed to our client have been obtained under false pretences and in a wrongful and unlawful manner. This is regrettable. This has been con-

had been invited to speak to her

städt has successfully secured compensation for three of her clients.

"It is the feeling of knowing that you will never be the same or how you wanted to look. If you take these doctors on they will know there is someone looking and they will take responsibility for that," she said, explaining how she became involved in medical malpractice cases

after an operation that went It was Eichstädt and her

her to have a second operation, as she did not have money. Several other cases she has

handled involved a model botched operations than hers. A client contemplated suicide who ended up without nipples after a breast reduction, and a woman who was left with a long vertical scar on her abdomen after a tummy tuck.

She also has long scars on her thighs where fat was removed.

In the past few years, Eich-

She is now busy with five cases involving general practitioners performing plastic surgery

veyed to The Guardian. Our client is considering the legal The Associated Press has reported that The Guardian has denied Semenya was tricked into an interview and that the reporter who wrote the article

Semenya's coach, Michael Seme, who was quoted far more often than Semenya in the article, could not be reached for

comment yesterday. Athletics South Africa coach Wilfred Daniels, who resigned when the sex-testing controversy first broke, said

that while he was aware of The Guardian article, he had no knowledge of how it had been attained. Earlier this year, The Guardian had to pay "substantial damages" to President

Jacob Zuma for publishing an article by Simon Jenkins, entitled "Get used to a corrupt and chaotic South Africa. But don't write it off", on March 6.

The paper publicly apologised to Zuma. The amount of the damages was not revealed.

Woman's dream wedding turns to horror after plastic surgery

BOTHO MOLOSANKWE

ILZÈ Eichstädt had a breast- rest of their lives. improve her performance in sport - but instead started a long, painful battle to correct the botched procedure.

Eichstädt last had feeling in her nipples when the surgeon drew lines and circles on her breasts just before the surgery nine years ago.

When she removed the bandages 10 days later, the doctor "uttered an unpleasant word" when he examined her scarred breasts and chest. The 35-year-old mother-of-two then knew that the surgery was a failure and that her life would never be the same again.

She and a friend who had undergone surgery on the same day burst into tears.

"It was horrific; my friend almost passed out. It looked as though someone took a braai fork and tried to lift my breast with it," she said.

Eichstädt, who had the surgery as a 26-year-old student, is one of many South Africans whose cosmetic surgery went

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awry and now have to live with with good results, recom- took place four months later, opinion and went for a second Eichstädt now regrets. their doctors' mistakes for the mended her doctor.

undergone the same procedure,

SOME facts on breast

(APRSSA) executive

committee member and

clinical head of plastic

Gordon Medical Centre.

practice in South Africa.

surgery at the Wits Donald

• There is generally a high

standard of plastic surgical

It is an important part of the

plastic surgery consultation

to find the appropriate size

provided by Dr Richard

implants and plastic surgery

Halley-Stott, Association of

Plastic and Reconstructive

Surgeons of Southern Africa

go the operation in 2000 after her 38 DD breasts were making it difficult for her to play sport. A friend who had previously

Both women went for the surgery on the same day and

the results were equally horrific. Her friend, who was already married at the time, had to take antidepressants.

of implant, and "sizer"

prostheses and other aids are

available in this regard. In the

responsible plastic surgery

practice, an attempt should

always be made to find a

halance between what the

patient desires and what is

aesthetically appropriate,

patient's weight and frame

Given time, most larger-

breasted women may wish

to have breast-lift surgery

size (chest measurement) and

taking into account the

other parameters.

(ptosis correction).

was strained.

"My husband could not look me it was nasty We went through a difficult time," she said.

She later had two children. but could not breastfeed. She Eichstädt's wedding, which and her friend sought a second

Both augmentation and

realised, however, that breast

lifting are very safe

or misplaced.

procedures. It must be

augmentation involves

implantation of a foreign

body which, like any other

foreign body, could get infected

● In Halley-Stott's experience,

South African patients usually

do not request a "Posh Spice"-

obviously fake breast look),

instead choosing natural-

looking breasts. Hopefully

there will soon be even less

type enlargement (an

operation two years later. Even though the results to a trial so that a precedent

were better this time they were told that they would never be 100 percent again.

They sued the doctor, who settled out of court two weeks before the trial – something

demand for the fake breast

look, which is usually created

by placing implants directly

cheaper and usually done by

doctors who are not plastic

A well-placed sub-muscular,

silicone implant could last for

manufacturer) and should feel

life (most implant walls are

guaranteed for life by the

almost as soft as a natural

general practitioners or

smooth-walled, modern

surgeons.

under the breast tissue, as

opposed to under the

Tips to consider before going under knife

however, and the outcome can never be completely predicted pectoralis muscle. It is quicker, or guaranteed. Properly performed breast augmentation, in a good clinic with take-home medicines

breast. There is a dynamic

balance between foreign

material and the body,

and follow-up consultations. will cost about R35 000. • It should be done only by properly trained surgeons (a good guideline is to choose one belonging to the APRSSA) to avoid far more costly repair or

repeat surgery.

FIVE-DAY FORECAST FOR JOHANNESBURG Wed 18th 10 Thurs 19th Tues 17th₁₀ Fri 20th 10 18 16 **TOMORROW'S WEATHER GAUTENG** MAIN CITIES Minimum Maximum °C Cloudy with **14** Nelspruit 17 Bloemfontein 13 East London UVB (sunburn risk) MON 16 DANGEROUS Today's Temps Min Max oC Johannesburg 12 23 Cloudy/S/TS 25 Klerksdorp 10 31 . . **13 24** Cloudy/TS Kimberley 12 13 SUNRISE: 05.11 16 26 **SUNSET:** 18.33 MOONRISE: 03:11 WORLD TEMPERATURES Minimum Maximum °C 11 23 P/Cloudy Amsterdam 8 13 Rair . 9 14 Cairo P/Cloudy . 10 19 P/Cloudy Chicago P/Cloudy Perth 10 25 .10 15 P/Cloudy .10 19 Auckland . **12 20** Geneva . Rome P/Cloudv Barcelona 14 22 Rain Sydney 18 23 P/Cloudy Clea Lisbon .16 18

Manuel finally gets alliance support

SIBUSISO NGALWA

THE ANC has won the battle over the National Planning Commission, convincing its stubborn alliance partners to accept Trevor Manuel as its head.

ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe told reporters yesterday – after the three-day alliance summit in Kempton Park – that the summit had also agreed on Manuel's suggested composition for the commission.

This means that external experts drawn from various backgrounds will make up the commission, which will co-ordinate the government's broader planning.

"In particular we agreed that there is a need for the National Planning Commission located in the Presidency, which will be chaired by (Manuel), and whose main responsibility will be to ensure an integrated strategic planning across government," said Mantashe.

16 21

P/Cloudy

. 12 21

This is a U-turn by the described as "long and diffi-

alliance, after the ANC's economic transformation committee had initially rejected Manuel's model – instead suggesting that cabinet ministers, led by President Jacob Zuma, make up the commission.

However, it is understood that, to appease the restless Cosatu, civil society will also be represented in the commission

But Mantashe said they had merely agreed on the model, while work around finalising the structure was still in progress Cosatu was most vocifer-

ous in its opposition to Manuel heading the commission, warning that this would lead to the former finance minister being a de facto "imperialist" prime minister.

But the ANC was not willing to compromise on Manuel, and its national executive committee (NEC) made this clear after its last meeting.

After a three-day summit,

cult", even Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini was no longer on the offensive.

Asked about Cosatu's views on Manuel heading the commission, Dlamini was cautious in his response, saving they supported the "chairman" of the commission.

TREVOR MANUEL

The matter had been settled, he added.

Meanwhile Mantashe said the summit was opposed to Eskom's proposed 45 percent electricity hike

"We are totally uncomfortable with the 45 percent increase. The summit also successive tariff increase requests through the multiyear price determination by Eskom will negatively impact on society, the economy and jobs. "The summit therefore

supported efforts to have the tariff increases minimised," he said The alliance will draw up

its own proposal on the pricing issue – to be ready by the end of this month. On jobs, the summit sup-

ported the government's infrastructure investment programme as a key component of the country's response to the global economic crisis.

The summit, said Mantashe, also agreed that an alliance task team on macroeconomic policy remains seized with reviewing and broadening the mandate of the Reserve Bank"

But he would not go into specifics.

Opposition want Doidge probed for 'interference'

SIYABONGA MKHWANAZI

noted with concern that the PUBLIC WORKS Minister Geoff Doidge says his department has agreed to an independent forensic audit of its activities.

> But a statement issued vesterday by his spokesman, Koketso Sachane, was silent on why Doidge was so determined that the R45 million contract for the audit should go to Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr without going to tender and on his having fired two directors-general and pressuring a third because they refused to appoint the company after he

Opposition parties called yesterday for Doidge to be investigated for interfering in departmental matters.

had instructed them to do so.

But Doidge said: "I am determined to root out any corruption in the department (and) deal with offenders. I expect to announce further steps in the coming week."

Doidge fired two previous directors-general and is engaged in a battle with act-

ing director-general Sam Vukela over the minister's insistence that Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr be appointed to do the forensic investigation. Opposition parties said

the three officials were correct in refusing to appoint the minister's preferred law firm and that Doidge was flouting the law. Doidge has said that the

fallout over the law firm was a "smokescreen" and there was resistance to the forensic probe in the department. "There have for some time

been allegations of corruption in procurement processes, including the awarding of tenders and contracts for rentals," Doidge said.

"Following the auditorgeneral's report earlier this year, which gave the department a qualified audit, we agreed on the need for an independent investigation through a forensic audit of departmental activities."

The DA, ID and Cope said Doidge should be probed for his "interference"