

Vengeance feared as migran

IN OCTOBER monitors for the Durban and coastal areas recorded at least 65 deaths caused by ongoing violence.

This figure is down on the previous month and lower still compared to August figures - a statistical dip that has been enough to persuade people that the violence is ending in Natal. This perception persists despite the fact that the monthly average is higher than it was last year when everyone was beginning to see Natal as worse than Beirut.

So the violence continues. The view that it is subsiding is a dangerous one that can only serve the interests of those parties or individuals not interested in peace.

When some of the worst violence the country has seen occurred within two weeks of the launch of the Inkatha Freedom Party on the Rand, the media justifiably focused attention on what was happening in the townships around Johannesburg, even if they confusingly insisted it was a "Zulu versus the rest" war.

This intense media coverage forced South Africans who were still suffering a hangover after the 2 February party to sober up very quickly. Unfortunately this process was bedevilled by confused and often contradictory statements from leadership on all sides.

An example was that while it was a relief to see the police eventually respond to calls to act forcibly, most of us cringed when the operation was called "Iron Fist".

The point is, however, that what initially forced the rest of South Africa to confront the issue of violence has allowed them to forget

The perception that the violence in Natal is subsiding is mistaken and serves the interests of those disinterested in peace, says STEVE COLLINS of Idasa's Community Conflict Monitoring Service.

staffers from both weekly and daily papers. Daily reporting for some reason has not been able to offer the same insight.

Before it was possible to follow up on this excellent start, however, papers became Natal rugby fanzines as the Natal team's victory over Northern Transvaal displaced "a new Natal" in capturing the imagination of a tired and depressed press and public.

But there are other reasons, besides the shift of media attention to violence in the Transvaal and glory on the rugby field, for the growing misperception that the violence has ended. The most obvious was the decision to lift the state of emergency.

Most outsiders interpreted the imposition of the emergency as necessary to stop the violence. Its lifting was therefore a signal that the violence had ended.

In Natal when the announcement was made you could sense the collective sigh of relief. It was difficult to find anybody voicing concern about the fact that the violence was far from over. One more Harare Declaration pre-condition for negotiations had been met, and the

expectation was that the behaviour of the police and SADF would change.

In reality, however, the situation has not changed. There is no detectable distinction between security force action now and before the emergency was lifted. On the one hand

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'As long as it appears that the state can use its firepower to help stop the war, as long as monitors are called upon to request assistance from all branches of the forces except the KwaZulu Police, it is difficult to campaign for a removal of forces from the townships.'