

Bond between Rustenburg's Indians and Afrikaners is stronger than right-wing bombs

BY KURT SWART

This week's bombing of the Zinnia-ville mosque in Rustenburg has shaken the Muslim community of the town in the North West Province.

Afrikaner and Indian residents are shocked and scared. Strangers near the mosque are approached with caution. The caution is justified.

Two right-wingers, Christiaan Harmse and Pierre Jacobs, were arrested last Sunday after an alleged bombing spree at the mosque, a post office built on Muslim-owned land and a bottle store. One man was injured in the mosque.

Pieces of fuse were found in Harmse's car. At his home in Mooi-nooi steel tubes used to build pipe bombs were discovered along with commercial explosives and 14 fuses.

But the explosions have not broken the strong bond between the town's Indians and Afrikaners. The link dates back to the turn of the century when Paul Kruger ceded land in Rustenburg to Muslims for building mosques and schools.

Rustenburg's Indian residents form a friendly and keen-minded business community. They often talk of democracy and religious tolerance and are quick to distance themselves from rumours that Muslims plan violent retribution.

Yet how far can they be pushed? There are mutterings along the line: "We will not tolerate further attacks on our holy places. It's time we stood up for ourselves."

Mumtaz ul-Haq, a religious leader, said: "There is a feeling of total shock, anger and sadness. How could these people attack a mosque, a house of God? It hits us hard, emotionally and deep in the heart. No religion could advocate such barbarism. Islam is not anti-Christ. This goes against the atmosphere of reconciliation and goodwill since the start of our democracy."

Ul-Haq said his congregation was calm, but anger would increase if justice was not done.

"We have not received a formal offer from [the Western Cape anti-drug vigilante group] Pagad of help to protect our mosques, but we don't need it. We do not believe in violence, but there are some Muslim organisations prepared to take the law into their own hands."

The community has not lost its sense of humour. In the courtroom, where the suspected bombers appeared this week, an old man sat with a bandaged foot. As people filed by him, he said with mock seriousness while pointing at his foot: "Be careful of that. There's a bomb in it."

At a community forum held at the mosque on Wednesday, high-ranking police officers had to answer searching questions about the progress of their investigation into the attacks. The answers were not always convincing and the community was not entirely trusting. There is strong right-wing sentiment within elements of the Rustenburg police, but the attempts at the forum to reach out to one another seemed sincere.

"There is concern in the whole Rustenburg community. Afrikaners and Muslims have a history much older than any of us sitting here. The threat against Islam will form part of our investigations," said Jan Truter, the area's police commissioner.

The bombers made a mistake in their anti-Muslim raid - they destroyed a white-owned bottle store outside Rustenburg. A Muslim general store on the other side of the road was apparently the intended target.

"They thought it was my brother's shop," said an Indian woman. "We were lucky they chose the wrong target because we sleep in the building."

Bennie Bell, the owner of the liquor store, is facing financial ruin because of the attack. His insurance has refused to pay for the politically motivated damage.

"I wish I knew why I was attacked. This is a strong right-wing area, owing particularly to the miners who can't accept change. But 99 percent of whites here oppose what has been done to the Muslims," he said.

Other Afrikaners also expressed solidarity with the beleaguered Muslim community. A coffee-shop owner labelled the right wing as *dof* (stupid). An elderly customer added: "They should lock these people up and throw away the key."

Karlie Behrens, a white resident, said: "The bombing did not solve any problems, but Indians and Afrikaners will stick together."

Hussain Naidoo, an Indian businessman, agreed: "Our intercultural bonds go back many years. In times of trouble we assist each other."

Zippering around town in a high-powered BMW on highway patrol were constables Rodney van der Vlugt and Gert Janneke, who arrested the two suspects. Van der Vlugt, a national bodybuilding champion who does his socialising at techno clubs in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, said of the bombers: "They're dumb. They're not professionals. How can they use their own car to carry out the bombings?"

The police are patting themselves on the back for the swift arrests.

Thirty-nine policemen received commendations at a parade this week and were congratulated as "defenders of our new-found democracy and our constitution".

"The fact that the policemen and women are white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans clearly makes a loud statement," said a policeman.

Black, white and Indian families dine together at the town's Spur and Mike's Kitchen restaurants. Though Rustenburg lies in the stronghold of the far right, the new South Africa exists side by side with violent and nostalgic attempts to turn the clock back to times when the Boer was *baas*.

The black community watched the struggle between Boer and Muslim from the sidelines until the National Union of Mineworkers joined in with a passionate protest against right-wing terrorism outside the Rustenburg courtroom on Friday when Harmse and Jacobs applied for bail.

The postponement of the application until next week defused the tension in Rustenburg, but not the sense of unease and disquiet among the town's Muslim community.

170

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Gert Janneke and Rodney van der Vlugt, the highway patrolmen who arrested two suspected right-wing bombers minutes after the last blast

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