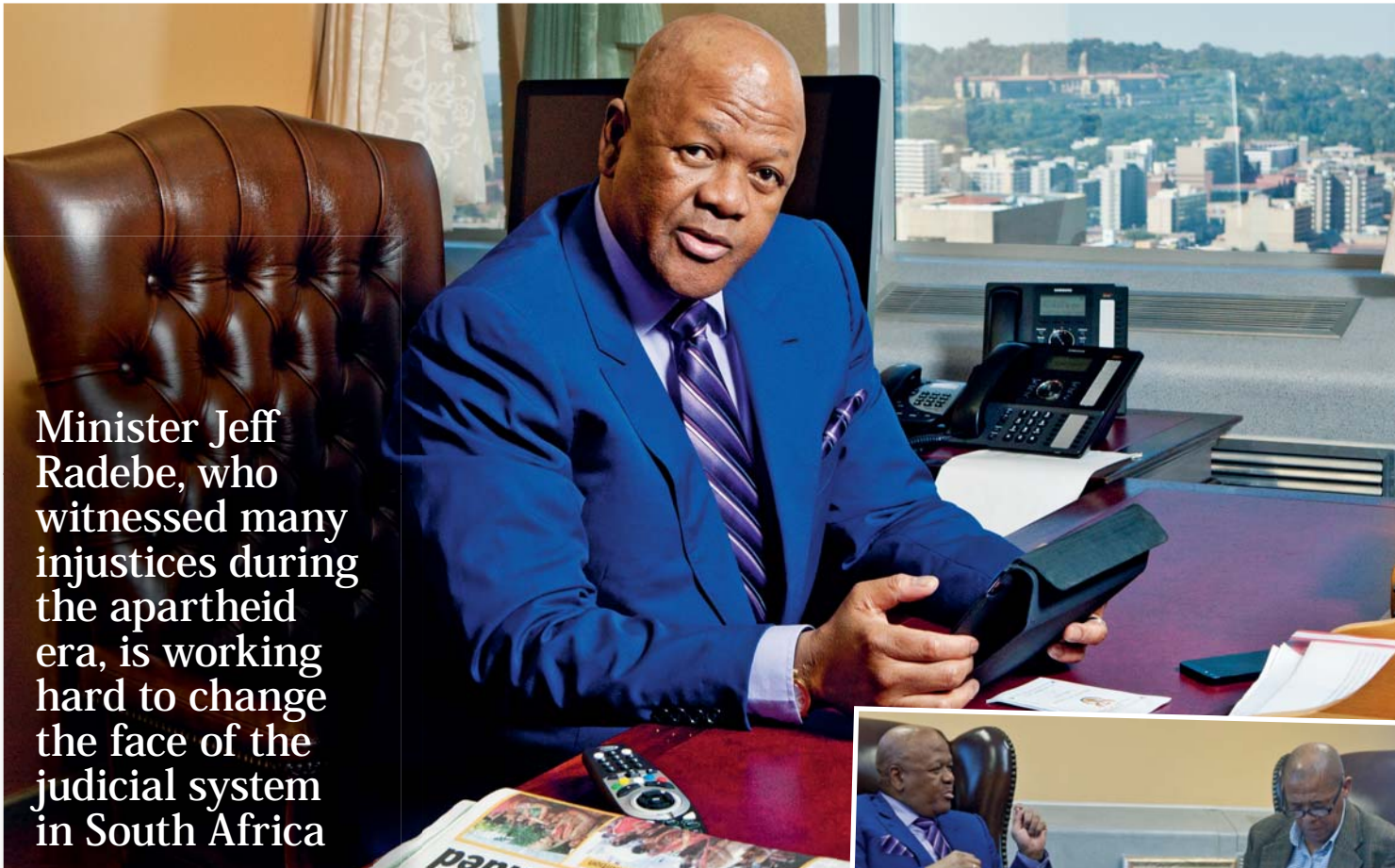


SEEKING JUSTICE FOR ALL



Minister Jeff Radebe, who witnessed many injustices during the apartheid era, is working hard to change the face of the judicial system in South Africa



ABOVE and INSET: Justice Minister Jeff Radebe talks to DRUM's Kaizer Ngwenya in his office in Pretoria.

THE first thing that greets us as we're ushered into the spacious office on the 28th floor of the Salu Building in Pretoria is the spectacular view. The Union Buildings are to the east, and to the south we can just make out the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Justice Minister Jeff Radebe rises from behind a big mahogany desk and takes long strides as he comes to the door to welcome us with a firm handshake and a friendly smile.

The minister, who's been in his position since 2009, is the picture of elegance in a blue suit, pale mauve shirt, purple, white and blue tie and black shoes. The office is also exquisitely furnished in Italian

leather sofas and wingback chairs.

He breaks the ice by telling us how he sold DRUM when he was a primary school learner way back in the early 1960s.

"I sold DRUM and another magazine called Zonk. Obviously, I read the magazines and that was one good thing about selling magazines," he says with a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

His office in Pretoria is a long way from the sprawling township of KwaMashu outside Durban, where he was born 60 years ago.

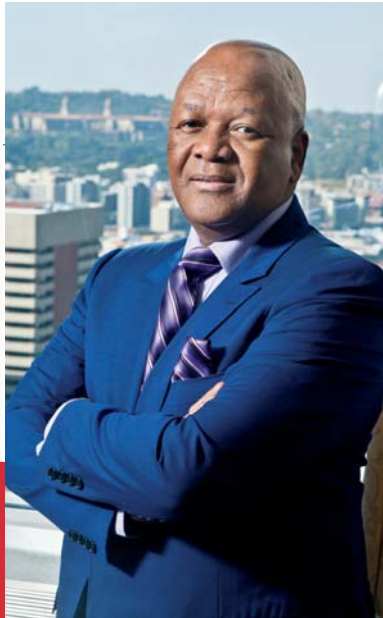
Radebe obtained his first law degree from the University of Zululand in 1976, and an LL.M. degree in international law

from Leipzig University in Germany in 1981. In 1985 he studied law at the Lenin International School in Moscow, Russia. When he was 16 years old he was part of a rotating library in KwaMashu. The purpose was to instill a culture of reading



GREATSTOCK

ABOVE: Like former president Nelson Mandela, Minister Jeff Radebe spent four-and-a-half years of his 10-year terrorism sentence in jail on Robben Island. RIGHT: The minister enjoys a spectacular view of Pretoria from his office.



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and stimulate debate about issues affecting communities. Among his peers were Mandla Langa, who is now a respected writer, and Themba Kubheka, the former SA ambassador to Angola.

At that time, Radebe was aware of the country’s repressive laws, including the ones that were the great edifice of apartheid – the pass laws and the Group Areas Act.

In fact, for many teenagers during the apartheid years, the harsh laws became a reality when they had to go to the pass office to get a “stinker”, as the identity document for blacks was called, and a “special”, a permit to be in the urban area or town as a sojourn labourer, even if you were born in that town or city.

RADEBE wanted to become a medical doctor. When he was in matric his maths teacher fell pregnant. Fortunately Aubrey Mokoape, an Africanist and member of the Pan Africanist Congress, and Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, who were medical students at the University of Natal, came to the school to teach the learners maths in their spare time.

“They taught us maths and introduced us to politics,” he says in his rich voice with perfect diction.

Radebe was soon under Mokoape and Biko’s spell and decided to study law. He joined the underground structures of the ANC during the student uprising in 1976, the year he served legal articles under Phyllis Naidoo, who defended activists in political trials.

Radebe met many people who came in from Robben Island and wanted Naidoo to defend them. At one stage, Naidoo had five ex-Robben Island prisoners as messengers at the law firm. Among these was SA’s future president, Jacob Zuma.

It was the injustices that Radebe saw when he was an article clerk that inspired him to work hard to introduce laws such as the recently introduced Protection from Harassment Act (see box for more information).

“I believe that there are challenges in every sector and access to justice is just one of them,” he says. “We’re building courts even in the remotest areas of our country to ensure people can seek justice wherever they live . . . ”

“We also want to transform the judiciary. It must represent the demographic of the rainbow nation. When the ANC government came into power there were only three black judges in the country.”

THE task of transforming the judiciary into one that is legitimate is shared by many, including the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), the legal profession and judges.

“We’re not only going to be dictated to by lobbyists who want certain people appointed to the bench. What we need is a judiciary that reflects broadly the racial and gender composition of our country,” says the minister, whose department is well on its way to fast-tracking the appointment of black and female judges.

If he hadn’t gone into politics, spent years on Robben Island and time in exile, he could have been a professional footballer – a goalkeeper, in fact.

“I grew up with Bongani Bophela, who later played professional football for African Wanderers. He was a striker and I was a goalkeeper,” he says.

He was a goalkeeper for Rovers, the University of Zululand football team. On Robben Island he was a goalkeeper in the Makana football team. “I served four-and-a-half years of a 10-year sentence on the island,” says Radebe, who was convicted under the Terrorism Act.

Radebe, who is still a soccer fan, was a member of the Local Organising Committee for the 2010 Fifa World Cup. The minister, who is married to mining boss Bridgette Motsepe-Radebe (Patrice Motsepe’s sister), never misses a major soccer derby. “I also love watching the Formula 1 Grand Prix and enjoy all types of music, from maskadi to kwaito.”

He has two daughters – Mandisa (20) and Malaika (6) – and a 39-year-old son, Vukani. And the minister likes nothing more than spending time with his family.

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THE PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT ACT

The Protection from Harassment Act includes both direct and indirect conduct that either causes harm or inspires the person to complain of harassment. Such conduct includes following, watching, pursuing, spying, bullying or accosting the complainant or someone in a close relationship with the complainant, such as a spouse or family member. This includes letters, SMSes, e-mail messages and Facebook posts or any social media posts which constitute harassment.

If you’re unable to apply for a protection order, someone else can do so on your behalf. The Act came into effect on 27 April, coinciding with SA’s Freedom Day holiday.

WHERE DO I GET A PROTECTION ORDER?

A complainant may apply to any magistrate’s court in the area where they live or work, or any magistrate’s court where the person who is causing the harassment lives or works, or in the place where the harassment took place.