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## Thousands flock for help over rising debt

Festive season spending takes its toll . . . and it will get even worse

Tabelo Tsimbe  
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**THOUSANDS** of Nelson Mandela Bay consumers are streaming in for debt counselling in a desperate bid to hold on to their possessions as they face the dire consequences of festive season spending.



RIANA FERREIRA

**This number keeps rising every hour. Tomorrow, it would have risen dramatically**

This comes after a counselling company said the number of South Africans under debt review was likely to increase fivefold over the next six months, with as many as 150 000 people in the debt recovery programme by June.

Luke Hirst, managing director of debt management experts debtbusters.co.za, said if the past month was anything to go by, these early estimates "may even be conservative".

"We received a mass of applications from indebted South Africans over the festive season and particularly since January 1," he said.

"We don't expect the numbers to subside any time soon. We've been handling debt review cases for more than a year now and the first week of this year has been our busiest period ever."

Monica Cakhwe, manager of Port Elizabeth-based CP Debt Counsellors, has more than 3 000 people on her database. The firm's daily counselling average was slowly increasing from six to 15 people a day, she added.

"We are so busy right now. People are streaming in because they don't

want lose their possessions. Our main job is to help the consumer manage their debts."

Riana Ferreira, co-owner of Able Tracers and Debt Collectors in Port Elizabeth, said her company was expecting people to be more in debt after the festive season. Many had medical expenses as their medical aid cover reached its annual limit.

The economic conditions and over-spending over the festive season were other contributing factors. Some people were also lying to get credit due to tight finance restrictions by the banks.

"What is a concern is that we have received inquiries even after (business) hours from creditors who want to recover their money from people who are not paying rent. This is a clear indication that people are struggling to pay their debts."

Hirst added: "Once the bills for Christmas gifts and festive season spending arrive in the post boxes, I would expect a further increase in applications."

"Holiday time can be costly and South Africans are well and truly struggling under the current economic climate."

"Though the debt review process has been going for just over a year, indebted South Africans are finally seeing that delaying the process of tackling

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### HOTLINE FAREWELL



GREAT RIDE . . . Chuma Myoli and André Kohler of Holiday Hotline say goodbye to the sponsored VW Caddy Life Maxi which got them to their Hotline activities safely and in style. See Page 3. Picture: JUDY DE VEGA

## Rain relief . . . but last year was Bay's driest on record for 40 years

Dineo Matomela  
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WHILE rain over the first few days of the new year may have brought the promise of relief from the scorching heat, last year was the "driest period" recorded in Port Elizabeth in 40 years.

SA Weather spokesman Garth Sampson said yesterday the cyclical nature of weather was behind 2008's dry spell.

"We have wet and dry years in

Port Elizabeth. We either have too much or too little rain. Never have we experienced normal rainfall," he said.

"The whole of last year was generally dry. No particular month stood out."

Sampson said the total average rainfall recorded for 2008 was 403mm compared with the 1969 figure of 406mm.

"This is a big drop from the norm of 623mm (1960 to 2008)."

"The highest figure, incidentally, was 1968 (a year before the

previous record) when 1 068mm was measured, he said.

The Weather SA website has forecast near normal rainfall for the next month whereas the longer-term forecast (for next three months) shows above-normal rainfall over the region.

Municipal spokesman Kupido Baron said although the city's dam levels had so far been sufficient, he advised people to conserve water. "Make sure there is enough for everyone."

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## Fruit toot! Motorcycle riders lose their heads over new law

Herald Correspondent  
in LAGOS

POLICE in Nigeria have arrested scores of motorcycle taxi riders with dried fruit shells, watermelons, paint pots or pieces of rubber tyre tied to their heads with string to avoid a new law forcing them to wear hel-

metts. The regulations have caused chaos around Africa's most populous nation, with motorcyclists complaining that helmets are too expensive and some passengers refusing to wear them, fearing they will catch skin disease or be put under a black magic spell. The law, which came into

**They use pots, plates, calabashes and plastic as helmets**

force on January 1, pits two factions equally feared by the common motorist against one another: erratic

motorcycle taxis known as "okadas", whose owners are notorious for road-rage, and the bribe-hungry traffic police. Some bikers have used calabashes or pots and pans tied to their heads with string to try to dodge the rules. Construction workers have set up a lucrative trade renting out their safety hel-

metts for around 500 naira (R35) a day.

Newspapers quoted passengers as saying they feared the helmets could be laced with magic spells so as to knock the wearer unconscious and make them easier to rob, while others feared they would pick up an infection. — Reuters

## ANC fires first salvo in polls battle on home turf of 'enemy'

Campaign kicks off in East London with Zuma launching party's new manifesto

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JEFF RADEBE

THE ANC will fire the first shots in the 2009 election campaign in East London tomorrow with the unveiling of its election manifesto by ANC president Jacob Zuma.

With the Eastern Cape the focus of the electoral battle between the ANC and Congress of the People (Cope), the party has deliberately elected to launch its campaign in the province and city that is home to one of its rival's founding leaders Mluleki George.

While most members of the national executive committee (NEC) are expected to attend an event that it has been suggested will attract tens of thousands, it is understood that former president Thabo Mbeki will not be present, and there is still uncertainty as to whether Nelson Mandela will be sending a recorded message or not.

An ANC spokesman said yesterday the party respected the fact that Mandela was now 90 and did not want to be

involved at the hustings — "but we are expecting that he will send a message of support".

For the first time, the manifesto that will be presented just two days after the ANC has celebrated its 97th birthday is the result of responses from the public with regard to what people

want included in the document.

That response, the ANC said, had been overwhelming "... and reconfirmed the views of ANC delegates at Polokwane that the most urgent priorities in our country are job creation, fighting crime, improvement of healthcare services, education, the development of rural infrastructure and agricultural reform".

ANC policy head Jeff Radebe said after the last NEC meeting at which the manifesto was discussed it would have five essential thrusts, including:

Expanding the social security plan by extending eligibility for the child support grant to the parents of youths of 18;

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