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SOUTH AFRICA

HSRC bypasses university of KwaZulu-Natal

### Desai to head sports racism probe

January 3, 2006

By Zukile Majova

The Human Sciences Research Council has by-passed the University of KwaZulu-Natal in funding Durban academic Ashwin Desai to conduct research into traces of racism in South African sport.

Desai was initially excluded from a list of academics who had applied to undertake the research under a grant because, according to the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of UKZN, Malegapuru Makgoba, he was still banned in terms of UKZN records. The ban apparently stands because of a legal oversight by the then vice-chancellor of the University of Durban-Westville, Saths Cooper, who lifted Desai's ban in 2003. Desai was banned in 1997 for alleged insubordination at the then UDW.

However, in a show of support for Desai, who continues to challenge his exclusion as being institutional pressure brought to silence academics, the HSRC decided to withdraw its research grant from the university and, instead, to appoint Desai to co-ordinate the research project. Adam Habib, executive director of the Democracy and Governance Programme of the HSRC, said the council felt Desai's exclusion was unfair and the quality of the end-product could be compromised if he was excluded.

#### Reviews

On the research, Habib said: "First, the big question we are asking is what mechanism has been put in place by the sporting codes and government to fast-track transformation and whether these mechanisms were working.

"The sport research is one of four public studies that include reviews of the economy, the country's higher education system, the public service and administration and sport."

On hearing that efforts by the Centre for Civil Society to contract Desai had faltered, the HSRC had decided to terminate the contract with UKZN and to withdraw the money.

"We terminated the contract partly because we felt this (Desai's exclusion) was unfair and mainly because we felt strongly that Desai understands this environment.

"He has, for instance, written a book on racism in cricket.

"We have now subcontracted him directly into the project.

"We had, however, preferred that he should do the work within a university environment," said Habib. Desai said: "The research will be under severe scrutiny from the sporting boards, government and the public because sport in South Africa is an emotive issue.

"The concerns are that despite government intervention and the introduction of the quota system, there are a couple of failures. For instance, if Makhaya Ntini is injured before the Proteas go on tour, we have a team representing our country, yet not one player is black.

"African pupils from the townships who are very good in rugby and cricket continue to be poached by white private schools.



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"Another component of it is that the media has racialised the quota system by tagging players like (former Springbok wing) Chester Williams, Hanyani Shimange and Breyton Paule as development players when they grew up in the game long before the system was introduced."

On being directly contracted to do the research, Desai said: "Of course, prize one for me would be to conduct the research in a university environment where I would have access to resources and be around other academics."

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