



## Dr Vijay Ramlakan

Against great odds of family poverty, Durban doctor, Vijay Ramlakan, qualified as a medical practitioner.

But his medical training gave him a new view of South Africa and the effects of apartheid.

Eventually this — and the things he saw in medical practice — drew him into the ANC and a week ago he was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for his part in a number of bombings in and around Durban.

Originally Ramlakan was charged with 11 others, but three were acquitted, and at the end of the trial the remaining eight were given a total of 84 years' imprisonment.

The case drew interest because two of the accused were doctors - Ramlakan and Sibogiseni Dhlomo.

During his evidence in mitigation Ramlakan said he believed every doctor had a duty to become involved in the struggle against apartheid. No health worker could ignore the fact that apartheid caused disease, he said.

Explaining to the court what had led him to becoming politically involved and ultimately to join the ANC, Ramlakan said because of apartheid there were two types of disease in South Africa: whites suffered from diseases of excess, from a well-fed, inactive life style, while black people suffered from diseases caused by poverty, lack of sanitation, housing and food.

Apartheid created the kind of conditions where of 1 000 African children, 282 die before their first birthday — compared with six white children in every thousand which die in the first year, none of them of malnutrition.

For most of Ramlakan's working life, he was based at Durban's giant King Edward VIII Hospital, although he had some other experience including two terms at two rural hospitals.

He said King Edward Hospital was the second largest in the Southern

**Dr Vijay Ramlakan was recently sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. He goes to prison along with Sibusiso Ndlanzi, Sibongiseni Dhlomo, Vusumuzi Mahlobe, Ordway Msomi, Mapiki Dhlomo, Bafo Nguqu, Malusi Majola and Jude Franas, sentenced to a total of 72 years. Congress Resister reproduces the touching story of Dr Vijay Ramlam from The Weekly Mail (8-14/5/87)**

hemisphere, but it was a "constant nightmare" for the staff and over half a million patients seen in the hospital every year who have to queue up to 14 hours to be seen.

The hospital had been prevented from expanding as it needed to do, because it was in the middle of a "white" area.

There were often three patients to a bed and seriously ill patients had to sleep between or under the beds.

He said because of a shortage of both staff and facilities he found himself having to watch the death of patients who could have been saved if they had "proper" treatment. He sometimes had to choose which patients he would have to allow to die.

These conditions existed not 10km away from Durban's Addington Hospital where several wards have been closed because there are not enough white patients to fill the beds.

Ramlakan's life was changed irreversibly, he said, when he was faced with this situation.

He said that as a doctor his first consideration and duty was to his patients. He would not permit considerations of religion, race, politics or social standing to interfere with this.

This meant also that he could not allow apartheid to interfere in his relationship with patients.

He felt he had a moral duty to destroy apartheid and if he failed to try to do this he would not be true to his calling.

Ramlakan, who was also a lecturer in anatomy at Natal University's Medical School, came from a very poor family of eight children who lived in a single room with their parents in Cato Manor.

When the area was declared white during the 1950's, the family was forcibly moved.

An uncle noticed his academic talents and tried to help him through high school. Whenever he visited his home

he saw how his parents and siblings were affected by the poverty of their circumstances and how they could not afford for his brothers and sisters to continue their education.

While he was a student he worked in organisations which tried different kinds of non-violent protest but eventually he turned to the ANC in 1984 and accepted the need for "selective violence" to "overcome the forces of apartheid as there was no other option."

However, he told the court he believed the worst kind of violence was that "enshrined in the legislation of this country".

"I am greatly saddened that I belong to a community that is forced to engage in violence in order to get the basic right it deserves," he said.

Ramlakan, convicted of ordering House of Delegates leader Amichand Rajbansi's home to be bombed, said he wanted to show Rajbansi that he represented no one but himself and that the "oppressed people will not forgive him".

Ramlakan was described as an "angry young man" by Judge Thirion, who said he took into consideration that Ramlakan had warned his trainees to be careful not to injure anyone.

Ramlakan and his wife Sandy Africa, have a daughter 21 months, Rosa Raksha.

Africa said this week that she was greatly encouraged by the support given by her family and members of the community.

She was also coming to terms with the fact that Rosa would be over 12 before she saw her father again.

"But I'm proud of Vijay and believe he was playing his part in the liberation of black people," she added.

Africa said she hoped the families of the other eight sentenced in the trial would find similar support in the community.

### ● PRETORIA —

A former member of the Indian Congress, Ismail Ebrahim, faces charges of treason in Pretoria. Ismail was jailed for 12 years on Robben Island and left the country after his release. He was allegedly kidnapped from Swaziland and handed over to the SAP.

### ● DELMAS —

Terror Lekota (Publicity Secretary of the UDF and Popo Molefe (General Secretary of the UDF) with 16 other activists, many from the Vaal, are facing trial on charges of Treason. The trial has dragged on for many months, with the defense presently leading evidence.

### ● CISKEI —

The General Secretary of the Border region of the UDF, Rev. Arnold Stofile, and others were convicted of terrorism in the Ciskei Supreme Court. Rev. Stofile is to serve 11 years' imprisonment.