

**President's
Corner**



I'll remember the month of March 2020 for two events that happened in tandem – the first one was my birthday on the 26th when I turned 50 years (half-century) old. Turning 50 years is significant in anyone's life and mine was no different. However, I did not expect it to be as dramatic as it turned out to be, which leads to the second event, the beginning of the country's 21-day lockdown from midnight on 26 March to midnight on 16 April.

At the time of writing this letter, we were on the third day of the lockdown where, other than persons involved in essential services, we are all in quarantine within our homes or isolated if we have been infected by the coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19. Most industries remain closed during this three-week period – the South Africa's mining industry production levels are down to about 30% and globally, we are headed for a recession, the Global Covid-19 Recession (GCR). The impact of the pandemic is unprecedented in the modern world and its effects will be long-lasting in several ways; including, to name a few, how we work (and play), the nature of economic activity, and specifically for the SAIMM, how we pursue our primary objective of providing continuing education and skills for our members.

A fundamental and immediate change that has happened in how we work is the huge exodus to (home fitness and) digital platforms to continue with 'office work' (work from home – WFH). Work at the coal face (no pun intended) continues with minimal people resources to ensure the continued supply of coal for our electricity generation (imagine the double whammy of being isolated at home with intermittent electricity availability) – to prevent infections and transmission of the disease remains the primary objective. For those operations that are already digitalized, this period of lockdown, such as is prevalent in most countries where infections have been recorded, the transition to digital is vindicated. This is the beginning of the future of our lives and we need to adapt promptly or suffer the consequences.

The SAIMM, as with other organizations that convene conferences and meetings for learning, has postponed and will likely cancel some conferences during this year as a result of the lockdown and possible continuing consequences of the COVID-19 disease. Alternative and innovative avenues to continue to deliver our services, such as webcasts at scale' (*i.e.* for a large number of people), are being explored. This is the upside of the pandemic and we will take advantage of the opportunities presented to us to thrive in this new way of thinking and acting.

There's no telling whether the three weeks will be sufficient to arrest the spread of the disease in South Africa. It's the minimum and scientifically proven method of preventing further infections and we must adhere to this advice with military discipline for the sustainability of the nation. We are all under varying degrees of emotional and mental strain, the domestic economy is under recession, and as at Friday 27 March, Moody's Investor Service finally downgraded South Africa's sovereign credit rating to junk status with a negative outlook. Livelihoods are at stake - I dare say that we have reached the bottom in our social and economic development. It is now the time for leadership, not only as I have discussed in earlier letters, to rise up to this occasion – 'the greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things'¹. Wishing you all safety, health and resolve. Please do take care.

¹Ronald Reagan

M.I. Mthenjane
President, SAIMM