

Pahad cut attacks on Oppenheimers

Criticism of SA's richest family in book on Mbeki angered minister in the Presidency

MEGAN POWER

ESSOP Pahad censored scathing attacks on South Africa's richest family that were included in a biography on President Thabo Mbeki.

Although controversial author Ronald Suresh Roberts's *Pit to Govern: The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki* remains critical of the Oppenheimers and their gold and diamond dynasty, a leaked e-mail this week suggests that

several negative references were cut or toned down — at the eleventh hour — at the request of the minister in the Presidency. The texts existed from Roberts's biography include:

● "(Harry) Oppenheimer rejected apartheid racial policies not because of moral outrage at racial injustices, but rather because he felt that such race laws messed with his profits and his substantive domination of South African politics, economics and law."

● "What primarily concerned Oppenheimer was access to black labour, not black people's access to human rights."

● "Yet Jonathan Oppenheimer, the latest adult beneficiary of the De Beers slave labour history, spoke like a private school prefect when explaining the modern aspirations of the family company in an interview: 'We have to live up to diamonds.' How does one 'live up' to fascism?"

Details of Pahad's intervention were exposed this week by anti-retroviral activist and author Advocate Anthony Brink, who has accused Roberts of plagiarising his work, and falsifying the history of Mbeki's

A few days before the book by Ronald Suresh Roberts went to print, Pahad ordered 11 edits to be made

political engagement with AIDS.

The e-mail is included in an expanded version of *Lying and Thieving: The Fraudulent Scholarship of Ronald Suresh Roberts*, Brink's detailed critique of Roberts's book, released online this week.

Brink says Roberts "rounded" on the Oppenheimers throughout his draft manuscript and that Pahad didn't like this attack on "his Oppenheimers". In the e-mail sent by Pahad aide Louis du Plooy to Roberts's publisher Reedwain Vally, a few days before the book went to print, 11 edits were ordered.

The e-mail read: "The following are Minister Pahad's comments on the most recent version of the book. He has repeated some of the comments and would now like to urge, in the strongest terms, that the following be addressed immediately..."

Pahad, through spokesman Mukoni Ratshtanga, said yesterday: "I am not commenting. This is a matter between the author and the publisher."

Roberts denied yesterday that Pahad had "censored" his work.

He said the e-mail, which he had seen for the first time this week, reflected changes he had already agreed to with Pahad, but which were not yet reflected in the page proofs.

"The changes were acceptable because they accurately reflected the dif-



CADDY SHOCK: Members of the England and Wales golf team pass a baboon during the Women's World Cup Golf tournament in Sun City. See Sport Picture: AP


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ference between my strong views on the role of liberal capital and the President's almost-as-strong views," said Roberts. He said his publisher had disclosed on Friday that they had "flagged Oppenheimer and took it to Essop" because they feared he (Roberts) would not have agreed to the changes. The publisher had been nervous about "attacking this powerful family", Roberts said, and that, if anything, was "the real censorship".

Vally, head of STE Publishers, said that Pahad's edits were a confirmation of changes he (Vally) had already decided on. He said Pahad was "in agreement" with the edits, aimed at better readability, less repetition and fixing problematic texts.

"There was no editorial interference on the part of the presidency in terms of the author's writing," said Vally.

Brink said he found "most improbable" Vally's assertion that Pahad had merely agreed with edits which he (Vally) had already suggested. "The tone of Pahad's instructions doesn't jibe with this version. If Vally was so concerned with problematic material, why did he not attempt to edit out Roberts's lying defamation of me in his book? And why the fixation on protecting the Oppenheimers?"

Group managing director of E Oppenheimer & Sons, James Teeger, said they were "never consulted" by Roberts, Pahad or the President "about anything in the book".

Gandhi rift to be healed

WHEN Mahatma Gandhi was cremated, legend has it that his estranged eldest son, Harilal, a Muslim convert, alcoholic and vagrant, either boycotted the ceremony or arrived too late to perform his filial duties.

Sixty years after Gandhi's murder, Harilal's granddaughter is to scatter some of his recently discovered ashes in the Arabian Sea in a ritual designed to lay the Mahatma to rest — and heal the rift with his long-dead son.

Gandhi's descendants have agreed to perform the ceremony

off the coast of Mumbai on January 30, the 60th anniversary of his assassination.

"What should have been done then will be done now," Tushar Gandhi, one of the Mahatma's great-grandsons, said.

Hindu custom dictates that the oldest son should scatter his father's ashes into a river or the sea within 19 days. But relations between Gandhi and Harilal were so bad that they had not spoken in years and no one in the family even knew where the son was. — *The Times, London.*