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Zuma's lovechild sparks debate on polygamy in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: News that President Jacob Zuma, 67, has fathered his 20th child out of wedlock with the daughter of a World Cup organiser has sparked furious debate about the place of polygamy in modern South Africa.

"I couldn't believe it when I heard it," said Rose Masetla, 37, a domestic worker in Johannesburg's upmarket Rosebank neighbourhood. "I am disappointed and hurt, I mean he is the President."

Zuma said he had taken responsibility for his actions, formally acknowledging his paternity of the child born in October to the 39-year-old daughter of his long-time friend Irvin Khoza, one of the top organisers of the World Cup.

Zuma last month married his third current wife under customary law, which allows men to have more than one spouse, and has defended his polygamy as part of his Zulu culture.

He insisted his newest daughter was also a private issue that would be settled in line with Zulu culture, and accused the media of seeking to make money by printing stories about his child.

"The matter is now between the two of us, and culturally, between the

Zuma and Khoza families," he said.

"The media is making money out of the matter," he said. "The media is also in essence questioning the right of the child to exist and fundamentally, her right to life."

But Zuma's defence has sparked a debate over what exactly "culture" means, and how to judge what behaviour is acceptable in a nation with a dozen distinct ethnic groups.

Polygamy remains popular in rural KwaZulu-Natal province, Zuma's birthplace.

But experts say that traditional polygamy doesn't allow for extra-marital affairs, while many younger, urban South Africans—especially women—say having multiple spouses is no longer acceptable.

Nokuzola Mndende, director of Icamagu Institute which promotes African culture, said polygamy does not allow for sex outside of marriage.

"Polygamous marriage is like any other marriage, it doesn't allow extra marital affairs. If a man wants to take another wife he has to follow certain procedures," Mndende told AFP.

"An extra-marital affair is beyond race, religion or culture. It's a weakness of men," she added.

While South Africans widely accepted Zuma's latest

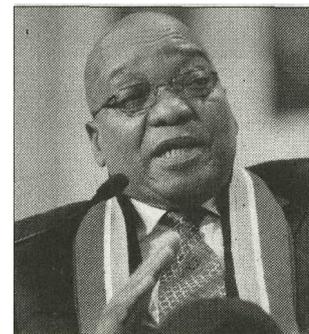
marriage, the report of his lovechild has sparked a public uproar.

Thato Radebe, a 20-year-old unemployed man, said Zuma should be recalled from office for "embarrassing us".

"It will do the country a lot of good if he is fired. Tourists must be laughing at us now. How is America going to take him seriously and give him money if he is a womaniser? No one is going to trust him," he said.

A survey last month by the TNS market research firm questioned 2,000 people in South African cities and found that 74 percent feel that it is a problem for a man to have more than one wife at a time.

Opposition parties have accused Zuma of compromising South Africa's AIDS prevention efforts, which promote condom use and faithfulness to a single sexual partner. — AFP



President Zuma