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TENESHIA NAIDOO

THE best compliment a student can pay law professor Karthy Govender is to say he inspires them.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal law expert from Westville, Durban, who will be acting judge for one month in the Durban High Court in November, is determined to produce law students who are passionate about their careers.

"They are probably not going to remember the law I teach but if they remember the inspiration and the enthusiasm and take that into their practice, they will succeed."

While Govender, 51, is not anti-marriage — he is married to actress and drama professor Suria Govender — he advocates that his students "experience life" instead of getting married at a young age and being stuck with a bond.

"I encourage them that there is life outside of this. They are young. I encourage them to travel and I tell students to apply for scholarships and apply to work for NGOs and human rights commissions around the world so they can experience something else."

One of the top legal minds in the country, Govender has worked for the Human Rights Commission (HRC) for 14 years as a part-time commissioner.

Appointed by former president Nelson Mandela, Govender was tasked with addressing parliamentarians in Ethiopia in 1998 and travelled to Bangkok the following year to make a presentation to a committee on the requirements of a human rights commission act. In 2007, the Indian government invited him to make presentations on aspects of the South African constitution to parties negotiating a new Nepalese constitution.

"Ultimately, it has been about setting up an institution, working with phenomenal people and trying to create a culture of responsibility for human rights."

Govender, who is also an arbitrator for the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, said he loved his job as a teacher. He added that students were "respectful".

"We have a strong ethic about respect here. Being at the university, I can do a variety of things. They have allowed me to write and be part of the HRC because they have seen that it is beneficial to students."

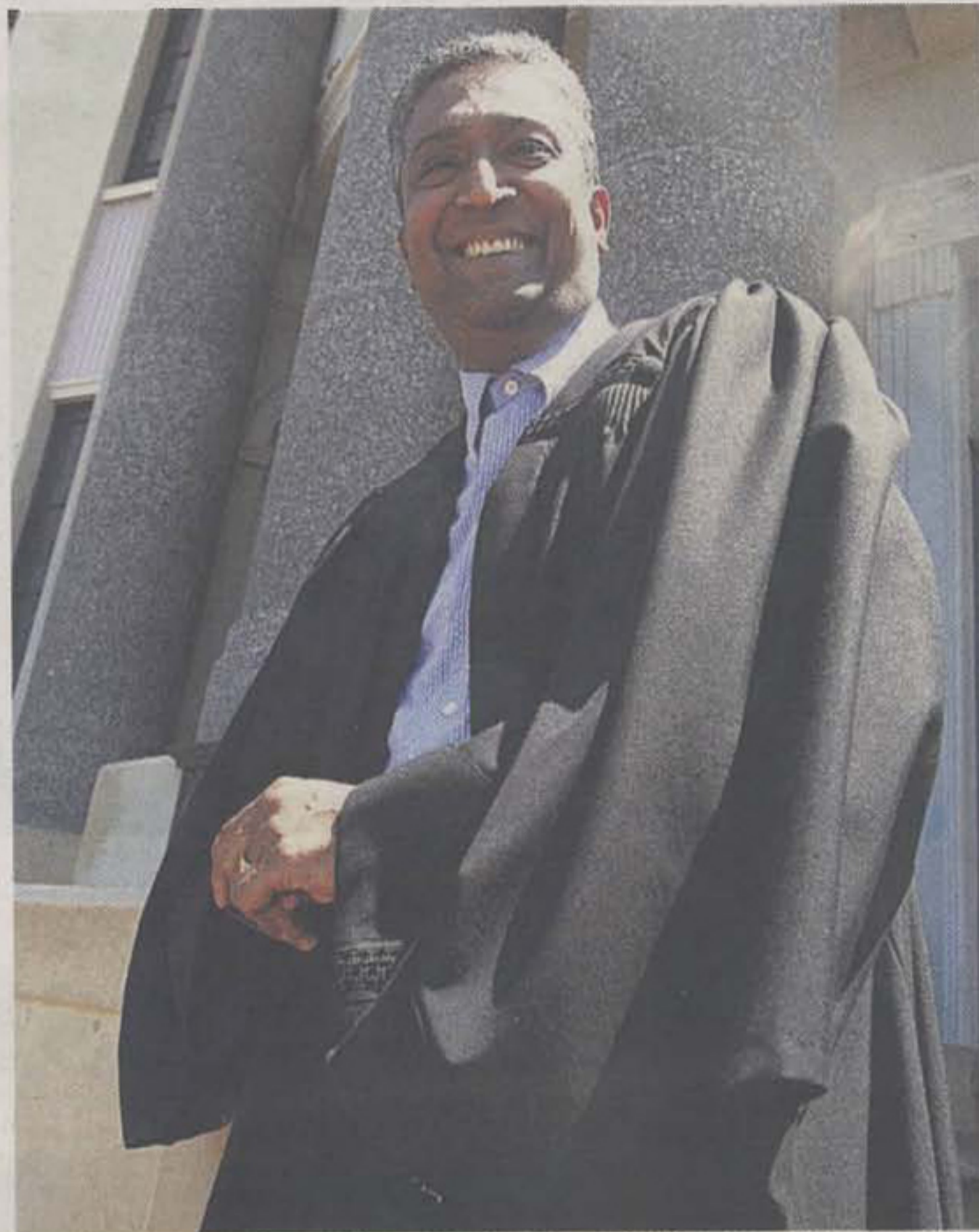
At the age of 16, Govender left home to study at Bancroft's School in Essex, UK. He then went on to study law at the University of London, where he qualified as a barrister.

Govender said his father, Balan Gounder, made a lot of "sacrifices" to send him to a private school. He added that the "hard" work his parents put in at their family grocery store had made it possible.

"It gave me confidence, going to another school to study at such a young age. My father was a bus conductor in the 1950s in London. He picked up this

'Passion is vital — in law and life'

UKZN professor inspires his students



YOUR HONOUR: Law professor Karthy Govender is to be acting judge in the Durban High Court
Picture: THULI DLAMIN

romantic idea about English private schools."

Govender said it was difficult initially, but he eventually adapted.

"Initially the children used to call me 'Paki'. Then I became part of the group and after the first few months I started enjoying it," he said.

After completing his degree, Govender looked for a job in Zimbabwe but finding that that country, along with South Africa, did not recognise his UK qualifications, he decided to study law at UKZN.

He received a Fulbright scholarship to study at the University of Michigan in the US in 1987.

After getting a job at the university, Govender was awarded the Colenso Fellowship and in 2002 became a fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, in the UK.