



*Read our CEO, Jonny Wilkinson's regular column in
The Northern Advocate
"A different Light"*

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Weed-eater malfunctions lose to ethnic cleansing on a 1-10 scale of global issues

The weed-eater smashed into bits after my father-in-law, a burly Liverpudlian, hurled it against the shed wall out of sheer frustration.

The new patented self-feeding line seemed to break off inside the highly complex mechanism, was near impossible to put back together and then lasted seconds before it broke again.

He was a jovial man, a talented musician, and with a very short fuse that the weed-eater obviously ignited. Na mate, hare, hare, hare.

That was in the late '80s. Fast forward 30 years and I found myself dancing around with similar rage and frustration with a newly purchased weed-eater. The line broke after seconds. I went to retrieve another one from the garage, which is absolutely crammed to the ceiling (thanks to our papa kainga dwelling).

The line was eight feet away, obstructed by piles of hoarded stuff. I leaned over with an outdoor umbrella pole and deftly flicked the line towards me. It promptly fell down a crack behind tons of crap.

Sharif, my son-in-law, came up with an ingenious idea of cable ties and attached them before heading out. They lasted 20 seconds.

Determined not to be defeated, I hacked off some clothes line from our washing line and after half an hour of fiddling around, started the weed-eater - and it lasted 15 seconds.

Defeated, I went inside to read the paper and quickly realised my torment was but a very small, first world problem.

The slanging match between President Trump and the leaders of North Korea are far more grave.

President Trump: "Rocket Man needs to be dealt with."

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho: "[Trump is] a mentally deranged person full of megalomania," adding a strike against the US mainland was "inevitable".

I had the disturbing image of Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump sitting like X Factor judges hovering over big red buttons.

The next reality check of a third world problem was the UN Chief describing the situation in Myanmar (Burma) as: "A textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Over the past month, a crackdown by the military has forced more than 400,000 Rohingya Muslims from the Burmese State of Rakhine to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Tensions between the Bengali-speaking Muslims and Buddhists in Rakhine state have existed for decades - some would say centuries - but a significant inflection point came in 1982 when Burma passed a law that identified 135 ethnicities entitled to citizenship.

The Rohingya were not among them, though they had enjoyed equal rights since Burma became independent from British rule in 1948. Almost overnight, they were stripped of their citizenship. The refugees' images and statements were disturbing at the least, and a reminder of the importance of respecting historical ethnic and indigenous rights.

After last week's election, which I found disappointing, I am appalled to see the historical right of Maori to be ensured representation in Government is up for debate. Such a notion, even to have a referendum on the subject, would be incredibly divisive and eat away at the unique biculturalism we enjoy in New Zealand.

Another disappointment was Green MP Mojo Mathers not being re-elected. Mojo was one of New Zealand's first MPS to identify themselves as disabled. In her exit speech, she reiterated the importance of having parliamentary representation for nearly one in four New Zealanders.

I would love to see a quota of disabled seats in parliament, or at least adequate resourcing to support disabled representation in the New Zealand Parliament as they do in Scotland and Kenya. To say I find New Zealand democracy frustrating is a gross understatement.

I'm going back to the garden for some comparatively therapeutic weed-eating.

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