

TIA News 11/02/13

Presidency mum on Pule 'facing axe'

Embattled minister wants envoy post

BABALO NDENZE
POLITICAL BUREAU

PRESIDENCY spokesman Mac Maharaj has declined to comment on reports that Communications Minister Dina Pule faces the axe.

Maharaj was responding to weekend reports that the beleaguered Pule was on her way out of President Jacob Zuma's cabinet and had asked in a pre-emptive move to be redeployed as an ambassador.

The ANC's communications head, Lindiwe Zulu, is rumoured to be her possible replacement if Zuma reshuffles his cabinet.

The Sunday Independent reported that Pule, who failed to make it back on to the party's national executive committee in December, had asked to be redeployed as an ambassador. It is understood that Pule met Zuma recently.

Pule would become the second communications minister to be given the boot by Zuma, after Siphwe Nyanda, who was dogged by controversy.

The late Roy Padayachie also held the position briefly, before being moved to the public service and administration portfolio.

Problems with meeting the 2015 global deadline for switching to a digital television signal and lingering financial and governance woes at the SABC are among the issues yet to be settled by the Department of Communications.

"The Presidency is not going to comment on rumours and get them recognition. The Presidency doesn't comment on that. The rumours are unsubstantiated and pure speculation," Maharaj said yesterday.

Pule is also being investigated in connection with allegations that her boyfriend withdrew substantial sums of money from funds provided by sponsors for the inaugural ICT Indaba in Cape Town last year. He was reportedly paid R6 million to manage the event.

The Department of Communica-



Communications Minister Dina Pule.

tions is alleged to have pressured indaba organisers to hire Phosane Mngqibisa's company to assist with the event. Mngqibisa is also reported to have splurged on designer shoes worth R20 000 for Pule, using ICT funds, during one of his overseas trips.

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela and Parliament's ethics committee are investigating the alleged conflict of interest.

Pule's spokesman, Siya Qoza, would not confirm whether the minister had met Zuma regarding her possible redeployment.

"We are not commenting on this speculation. If you read the constitution, you will see that deployment of ministers is done by the president, so we can't comment," he said.

Madonsela's investigation is expected to be completed by the end of next month, while the ethics committee has said it intends to finalise its probe soon.

Other ministers said in weekend reports to be facing the chop include Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale, who supported the unsuccessful bid to unseat Zuma as ANC president; Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi, forced to defend the R206m security upgrade at Zuma's Nkandla residence; and Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities Lulu Xingwana.