

# ZUMA TO FIRE PULE

■ Lindiwe Zulu could replace minister

■ Lulu also faces chop

KARIMA BROWN

**E**MBATTLED Communications Minister Dina Pule looks set to be booted from cabinet soon, in a move to stabilise the department following an embarrassing scandal in which she is accused of routing large sums of money to her alleged lover.

The Sunday Independent understands that Pule, whose political fortunes in the ANC have already nosedived after she failed to make it back onto the party's national executive committee in December, has reportedly asked to be redeployed as an ambassador, after it became clear that she is about to be fired.

It is understood Pule recently met with President Jacob Zuma.

The spokesman for the Department of Communications Siya Qoza said he could not comment on "deployment".

"That is the prerogative of the presidency and the ANC."

Pule attended the recent World Economic Forum in Davos as part of Zuma's coterie of ministers where key discussions took place with international players in the ITC sector.

Communications is a key portfolio, but Pule's preoccupation with dousing fires and suspected conflicts of interests, as well as her inability to drive the policy process suggests that she is too great a liability for Zuma.

Given that elections are a mere 16 months away, Pule could well be the first casualty as the ANC and Zuma decide to clean house as a way of demonstrating to voters that they are prepared to act tough to restore the trust of South Africans.

Pule's public troubles come after Werksmans Attorneys, on behalf of MTN, revealed that her alleged lover, Phosane Mngqibisa, benefited improperly from the ICT Indaba held in Cape Town last year to the tune of R6 million.

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela expects her investigation into Pule's alleged conflict of interest to be completed by the end of March. Parliament's ethics committee has also started an investigation into the matter.

In the event of Pule's dismissal, whoever replaces her will be the fourth face at the communications

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**BIRTHDAY BOY:** Vivian Reddy started celebrating early in anticipation of his 60th birthday party.

PICTURE: LAUREN RAWLINS

ministry in four years under Zuma's administration which came to power in 2009.

Pule's departure will see her join Siphile Nyanda, appointed as communications minister in 2009 and fired in 2010, when Zuma wielded the axe following reports that linked Nyanda to tender irregularities involving Transnet.

The department is already in crisis following Pule's decision to place her director-general Rosey Sekese on "special leave".

The Communications ministry has been the scene of on-going paralysis as minister after minister fall prey to the murk of tender irregularities, while key strategic policy issues are left unattended, often with massive consequences for the economy and education.

There are already fears that South Africa will miss the 2015 deadline to convert its analogue broadcasting signal to digital. The delay will mean that analogue television will use up bandwidth which is necessary for faster internet.

Pule also stands accused by opposition parties and industry players of dithering when she had to implement the government's plan for Telkom, and she has been taken to court by e.tv over the migration of digital terrestrial television, which has caused further delays.

Some of the pressing challenges

facing the department include the allocation of spectrum, the unbundling of the local loop to allow operators access to the part of Telkom's copper network that delivers services to homes and businesses, addressing low broadband penetration and the switch-over to digital terrestrial television.

According to the 2011 census, 64.8 percent of South Africans had no access to the internet. But six months into the year in 2012, the Department of Communications had not met its target of a 7 percent increase in broadband penetration for the financial year.

Opposition parties have criticised Pule and called for her to be sacked, saying she failed to make progress on key projects.

Compounding matters are the massive staff shortages, managing trouble-infested institutions such as the SABC and Sentech as well as an under-resourced regulator.

It is understood that Lindiwe Zulu, Zuma's adviser on international relations, will possibly take over from Pule. Zulu has just been elected by the ANC's national executive committee to head up its subcommittee on communications.

Other possible candidates include Pule's deputy Stella Ndabeni. However some ANC leaders believe Ndabeni is far too inexperienced to manage what is clearly



**DINNER OUT:** Communications Minister Dina Pule.

a very difficult portfolio, which has already seen the back of several leading lights in the ANC.

Deputy Minister in the Presidency Obed Bapela, who was the late Roy Padayachee's deputy when the latter served his stint as Communications minister, is another option that is reportedly being considered to replace Pule.

Public Service and Administration Minister Lindiwe Sisulu is also apparently being considered.

If Pule departs from the cabinet, it affords Zuma the opportunity to make more changes to the executive despite his reluctance to reshuffle before 2014 and after he resisted speculations to get rid of his political rivals.

It is understood that the ruling party and its government is mulling more changes that could see a rearrangement of the executive deck even prior to the elections. The mooted changes have little to do with party politics and factions. It is driven by the need to jack up government's performance on critical areas prior to the 2014 elections.

Ministers that could be affected include Lulu Xingwana, who heads the Department of Women, Youth Children and People with Disabilities. Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga could also be moved as Zuma considers how best to ramp up governments' efforts on education, which the ANC is considering to make an essential service. There has been talk that Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi, a former general secretary of teachers' union Sadtu, could well be considered to replace Motshekga. Such an eventuality would be a dicey one for Nxesi as it would pit him against his constituency in the labour movement.

## R330m hospital equipment gathers dust in warehouse

DIANNE HAWKER AND CANDICE BAILEY

R330 million worth of medical equipment gathered dust in a warehouse in Midrand for two years before it was installed.

units, life support systems and operating tables. At the time of the contract, the two hospitals were yet to be built - raising questions why the tender was fast-tracked.

At least four senior managers could face disciplinary action as the

and MR Property Developers won the tender. According to the contract, the companies would have to supply all medical equipment to the hospitals. The department started probing the matter more than a year ago and asked forensic auditors to investigate.

developer Peolwane Properties after it signed a R650m lease for a head office building, but refused to occupy the controversial complex.

The department is also probing the supply of coal to hospitals in one of its regions, where it allegedly paid millions extra for sub-standard

authorities in Limpopo wasting medication estimated at R14m - mostly antiretroviral drugs for HIV patients that had been left to expire in a depot. The stock was part of the multimillion-rand pharmaceutical contracts awarded irregularly in 2011. In Gauteng, the health depart-