

'Must I go to jail to satisfy critics?'

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S'bu and Shauwn Mpisane say they're victims of construction industry rivals

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S'BU and Shauwn Mpisane, the self-styled "first citizens" of La Lucia, Durban, believe they are victims of a smear campaign involving powerful construction industry rivals and "anti-transportation agents" abusing their political and judicial power.

So fed-up are they, that Shauwn says she would rather spend time in jail if it satisfied her detractors and got them off her back.

Speaking from their plush sea-facing home yesterday, after a week of high drama in which millions worth of assets - including 62 cars - were attached by the Asset Forfeiture Unit as part of a Durban High Court preservation order, the Mpisanes decried being projected as criminals. They maintained they had not been found guilty on any of the charges Shauwn faces.

Among the fleet of exotic cars taken from them are at least two that bear the "NUR 1" and "NUR 2" registration plates, cementing the Mpisane's place as the exclusive suburb's first citizens.

But even now that their garage is almost empty holding just one Maserati, a brand new Range Rover and a BMW sedan, the couple maintain they are not down and out.

Their sizeable lounge with marble floors sports a big TV set, a surround sound system with huge speakers and a leather lounge suite.

"People say our things have been taken and we are sitting on benches, but that is not the case," Shauwn conceded for the first time that putting on a brave face for the cameras at her numerous court appearances was a façade to hide her pain.

"I'm a jolly, humble person but people see me laughing and they think everything is fine when I'm actually hurting inside. It's not good. It's not good for S'bu either. He's always been a nice, cheerful person, but all these things are slowly changing him."

Referring to her court battles, she said, "There is a drive by some people to see me in jail. Maybe I need to be put in a cell, maybe they'll leave me alone. Maybe they'll stop doing all these things."

The case against them was affecting their 12-year-old son.

"It's impacting badly on the kid. Every time he has to go to school, he sees all these guys from Sars and the Asset Forfeiture Unit at his home. These memories stay with you even

was taking its toll on the family and pleaded for more decisive action.

"We are pleading with state organs to come at one go and deal with us, so we can know if we sink or carry on with our lives," he said.

The couple said they couldn't understand why they were subjected to different standards. Said Sbu: "I know of people who had problems with Construction Industry Board certificates who were fined R20 000 then allowed to continue trading. Have you ever heard of a situation where you get charged for omitting one digit from your ID number, but instead of someone calling you and drawing your attention to the error, you get charged? That is wrong."

He added, "There are a lot of people who can afford what we have, but instead they hide their money in trust funds and overseas accounts. So when they see us driving Rolls

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OTHERS HIDE THEIR MONEY IN TRUST FUNDS AND OVERSEAS ACCOUNTS

Royces they wish they could too, but they are too afraid to buy them because they'll have questions to answer. But we have nothing to hide. Everything is traceable."

Shauwn added: "Maybe the problem is that we are living a life that some people only get to live when they are too old. But we are young and this is how we enjoy ourselves. We have a passion for cars."

Shauwn contends that her only conviction, for VAT fraud in 2005, arose out of an informal plea bargain with the state after she had failed to register as a taxpayer. Even then, she said, she had voluntarily gone to Sars to seek advice on tax-related matters after her business' meteoric rise.

Shauwn was granted R100 000 bail in the Durban Commercial Crimes Court on Friday. Magistrate Gerrie Maree also ordered that she could not change her residential address, leave the country or have



IN THE LAP OF LEATHER: S'bu Mpisane and his wife Shauwn discuss their situation.

PICTURE: DOCTOR NGCOBO

Scant sympathy shown from neighbours

IT'S A BIG white monument to bling, S'bu and Shauwn Mpisane's mansion in Addison Drive, but for the neighbours, it has certainly lost its lustre.

The Mpisane pad atop a hill in La Lucia commands splendid views of the sea. It might be a bit garish for your taste if you're not a tenderpreneur, but with a few "bars" in the bank you might come to appreciate the statement of imposing white walls, stainless steel balustrades and floor-to-ceiling glass.

It just doesn't look too homely. That might be a bit subjective if you only experienced it from the verge outside, where journalists were encamped on Wednesday morning in the blazing sun, along with cops, curious housewives and other nosy neighbours.

ture Unit and the curator arrived at the Mpisanes' house on Wednesday morning with a court order preserving assets to the value of R140 million, the guards got grouchy and tried to assert themselves.

When the first journalist arrived on Wednesday to watch the celebrity couple's cars being seized, they told him to put his camera away and take a hike.

By midday the motley press crew had grown and photographers were merrily aiming their lenses through the gates to get a shot of S'bu saying goodbye to his Porsche.

The head honcho growled at his underlings and ordered one guard to get rid of them. He ordered the reporters off the verge, but he was roundly cursed by hot hacks losing

cap. They're a spectacle of their own making, the Mpisanes.

Perhaps they rue the day they transformed one floor of their mansion into a car showroom and invited Kenny Kunene and others among the rich and famous to ogle the Porsches, Ferraris, Rolls-Royces, Lamborghinis and the other symbols of their success. If they hadn't drawn attention to themselves and their state contracts, who knows, they might have flown comfortably below the radar.

It's the classic folly of the nouveau riche: flashing their cash at any given opportunity to show they've arrived.

People despise it. Call it jealousy or Schadenfreude. Or it could be the fact that the Mpisane fortune is derived from state contracts, but there wasn't a kind word uttered on the Addison

score government contracts."

The Mercury reported that Shauwn Mpisane appeared in the Commercial Crimes Court in Durban on Thursday on 53 counts of fraud and forgery relating to her alleged submission of false documentation to the Construction Industry Development Board, boosting gradings granted to her company, Zikhulise Cleaning, Maintenance and Transport cc and resulting in her being granted five contracts, involving more than R140m, from the Department of Public Works between 2005 and 2012.

She has two other pending cases relating to tax fraud and defeating the ends of justice. This week Mpisane successfully argued for bail, saying that putting