

Maharaj joins the blame game

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JOURNALISTS were caught in the crossfire yesterday in the debate over apartheid's share of the blame for the state of the nation.

President Jacob Zuma's spokesman, Mac Maharaj, said "apartheid denialist reporting" had ignored 99 percent of the president's speech at a ceremony on Wednesday to mark the 20th anniversary of SACP leader Chris Hani's assassination.

Zuma said it was "a mistake to say the least" to suggest "we cannot blame apartheid for what is happening in our country now" – an apparent reference to Planning Minister Trevor Manuel's call a week earlier for the government to stop laying the blame for its failures at the door of apartheid.

Yesterday, Maharaj said Zuma had not been implying that public servants should use apartheid to excuse "laziness and incompetence". Zuma's point was that it was impossible to reverse the legacy of apartheid in

only 20 years, Maharaj said.

SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin, DA spokesman Mmusi Maimane and UDM leader Bantu Holomisa also weighed in on the debate. Writing in the SACP online newsletter, Cronin said Manuel had been set up by "shoddy journalism and crude ideologues".

He pointed out that Manuel had in fact said an effective and strong government was needed to "reverse the effects of apartheid".

Maimane said many South Africans still suffered from "the material legacy of apartheid". But the government had not delivered on its responsibility to "combat this legacy".

"The slow rate of delivery cannot be blamed on apartheid, but only on government itself," he said.

Holomisa said apartheid would remain "an important reminder of what not to do in building a nation".

"However, the time for the ANC-led government to blame its failures on apartheid is over," he said.