

# Divided Cabinet grills Gordhan over budget

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**T**he Cabinet is said to be deeply divided, with some ministers accusing Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan of skimping on their budget allocations and others defending him.

Gordhan will deliver his budget speech on Wednesday amid growing pressure from some of his comrades to prioritise projects that would contribute towards "radical economic transformation", as highlighted in President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address last Thursday.

But political observers believe Gordhan is being targeted by those who want him fired from the key position of finance minister to make way for a Zuma loyalist.

Since his appointment, Gordhan has refused to approve a number of projects supported by Zuma, including the nuclear programme. A number of ministers seen as close Zuma allies have accused Gordhan of deliberately withholding money for certain projects in their respective departments to frustrate economic transformation.

Government insiders told the *Mail & Guardian* there was a war of words between known Zuma ally Water Affairs Minister Nomvula Mokonyane and Gordhan in a recent Cabinet meeting, with Mokonyane accusing Gordhan of stifling transformation by refusing to approve budgets for certain projects in her department.

But Gordhan hit back, asking how he was expected to allocate funds to Mokonyane's department if she could not account for some of the money allocated to her department.

"Pravin was furious. He defended himself against those who were attacking him," said

a government insider, who asked not to be named.

The source said Gordhan was angered by the treatment he was getting from the Zuma supporters. "He asked why he was redeployed from the co-operative governance and traditional affairs department to come and look after taxpayers' money if people did not believe in him."

"He told them part of his job is to tell them when there is money available and when there is no money."

Gordhan was supported by Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu, Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi and other ministers, according to government insiders.

It is understood Mokonyane was criticised by a number of Cabinet ministers in the meeting for attacking Gordhan in an interview with the *Sunday Times*. Zuma also apparently condemned Mokonyane's action.

Criticism of the treasury, for its apparent failure to provide money for projects to certain ministries, has gained momentum after comments reportedly made at the ANC's lekgotla earlier this month.

The *Business Day* reported that

Zuma criticised the treasury for not approving funds and said ministers had complained about inadequate resources to drive "radical economic transformation". The ANC denied Zuma made the remarks.

Mokonyane then took a direct swipe in the *Sunday Times* interview. The newspaper said Mokonyane was unhappy about the approval required from the treasury for certain projects.

"It can't be correct that treasury [tells us] what can happen and what cannot happen. That's what Cabinet is trying to reassert and say things must be brought to Cabinet and ... discussed within Cabinet," Mokonyane told the newspaper.

Small Business Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu has previously also raised concerns over her department being underresourced.

Free State Premier Ace Magashule, on a separate occasion last week, expressed his frustration with government bureaucracy but said treasury was not solely to blame.

"Even the implementers, at times they interpret the law as if the law doesn't want us to do some of the things. The types of people at times you have are not real agents of change, they are the ones who delay things. I'm speaking generally, I can't blame treasury for all of the things," he told the *M&G*.

Mokonyane's gripe with the treasury emanates from Gordhan's refusal to approve the R14-billion Mzimvu water project in the Eastern Cape. The Chinese government has offered to fund the project, provided construction was conducted by a Chinese company. In response the treasury advised that the department should put the contract on tender for competitive bidding, angering Mokonyane.

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**Under attack: Minister of Finance Pravin Gordhan faces scrutiny from Cabinet.** Photo: Nasief Manie/Beeld/ Gallo Images

