

**G**overnment officials insist that President Jacob Zuma will not effect a Cabinet reshuffle this week. This despite strong indications that conditions are favourable for such after the swearing in of former Eskom chief executive officer Brian Molefe as an MP on Wednesday.

This week, City Press learnt that if a reshuffle were to be effected, it could be followed by an en masse resignation from Cabinet.

Panic over a looming reshuffle rose again this week after Molefe was hurriedly sworn in, intensifying speculation that he was being positioned to take over from Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan.

Speculation was rife yesterday that the reshuffle could happen as soon as today.

Insiders said this week the prospects of a split in the governing party were becoming real and the person who would lead the disaffected group would be deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa.

Sources close to the anti-Zuma lobby said ministers would resign in big numbers and in key portfolios, particularly in the event of any drastic changes at National Treasury. Those aggrieved would, however, keep their parliamentary seats.

Following the resignations, some ANC MPs would themselves initiate a motion of no confidence in Zuma.

Apart from a July decision on whether to contest elections on its own ticket, the central committee of the SA Communist Party (SACP) - the highest decision-making body in between congresses - was this week already having intense discussions about possibly forcing its leaders who hold prominent government positions to resign.

But a senior government official said Zuma had a hectic schedule ahead of him this week and would not have time to reshuffle, as that would require extensive consultation.

The official said Zuma would travel to Indonesia the following week, return for a Southern African Development Community meeting in Swaziland and then host an Iranian government delegation.

The official said there had been talk that Zuma would reshuffle after the January event; then after his state of the nation address; and then after the budget speech.

"People are anxious, so they just keep on looking at these different milestones to speculate.

"A reshuffle is an involved process. You don't just wake up and reshuffle," said the official.

The official further said talk that former AU Commission chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma would be appointed to Cabinet was ill-informed because she was still serving her handover period until April.

The SACP said it was not consulted on crucial decisions such as these, despite the fact that it campaigns side by side with the ANC at election time.

It was expected that Zuma would appoint Molefe in a calculated move to use him to promote the Gupta family's interests.

On Friday, the SACP's second deputy secretary Jeremy Cronin did not hold back as he pointed out that the party would have to weigh two options: Stay and be complicit, or pack up and go.

"Nothing is off the table when we are looking at what might transpire. All of this is guesswork and supposition, but nothing is off the table in discussion about how to go forward, with many eventualities being quite uncertain and quite worrying," he said.

One of those eventualities is the prospect of Gordhan being removed.

The finance minister endured a torrid week after he got into an ugly spat with Mzwanele Manyi of the Progressive Professionals Forum on Friday.

For the first time, he experienced the hostility of fellow Cabinet ministers who refused to give him a standing ovation when everyone else was doing so after he delivered his budget speech on Wednesday.

He was also attacked in statements by the ANC women's and youth leagues.

The SACP's senior leadership members who sit in the central committee and are part of Zuma's executive include its general secretary and Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande, Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi and his deputy, Jeremy Cronin, Agriculture Minister Senzeni Zokwana, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davis, minister in the presidency Jeff Radebe, deputy minister of mineral resources Godfrey Oliphant, and Economic Development Minister Ebrahim Patel.

Cronin said the SACP would need to consider all its options as it fights against looting and against those who try to suborn forces in Treasury - that is still holding the line against corruption.

It would not be the first time that the party withdrew a deployed official. Last year, a frustrated Joyce Moloi-Moropa slapped ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe with a letter of resignation from her position as chairperson of the portfolio committee on communications.

At this point, if the option is to go, the concern is that it would leave a vacuum that would enable blatant

looting. But this will also depend on who gets elected as Zuma's successor in December when the ANC goes to its elective conference.

Cronin said this week's developments raised many questions, not just on whether they would stay or go, but about whether they could in fact rescue the ANC.

"We don't think we can rescue the ANC on our own, but we are extremely concerned about the state of affairs in the ANC, as are many other ANC members. We are certainly interacting actively with many ANC members who are deeply distressed about this wonderful movement and its legacy of which we are all proud, but that is in danger of being sold down the tubes."

Zuma yesterday addressed some of his closest allies, including former SABC chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng and Manyi, at a closed-door function at the Oyster Box Hotel in Umhlanga near Durban.

The media was not allowed to attend the function, hosted by Zuko Communications, for which silver, gold and platinum packages at R250 000, R500 000 and R750 000 respectively were on sale earlier in the week.

Meanwhile, two North West ANC MP candidates turned down the opportunity to earn the lucrative R1 million annual salary and perks that come with

being a member of the National Assembly in favour of Molefe.

Former ANC Youth League deputy secretary Kenetswe Mosenogi and speaker of the Matlosana local municipality, Washington Ntozini, had been next in line in the event of a vacancy on North West's national election list.

The province's list has changed at least twice since the 2014 general elections, the last time being on February 14 when Molefe's name was gazetted.

Others who were removed from the original 2014 list include former MP Windvoel Mahlangu and member of the party's provincial executive committee, Morwesi Segale-Diswai - who are both said to be currently out of work, according to an insider.

This week, Segale-Diswai declined to comment, saying that she was on her way to a church conference.

North West ANC secretary Dakota Lègoete said the candidates who resigned from their positions on the election list to make room for Molefe "did so voluntarily and without prejudice".

Lègoete said Molefe's nomination also had the blessing of ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe, who a month ago said it was unlikely that Molefe would be sworn in as an MP any time soon.

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**JEREMY CRONIN**