

Dlamini feels grants crisis heat

Minister accuses opposition MPs of using grant beneficiaries as cannon fodder in their campaign to rubbish the ruling party

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PICTURE: ANN7



BEARING HER FANGS: Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini berated opposition MPs as naysayers in Parliament yesterday.

DESPITE growing concern from the opposition benches and civil society organisations about the SA Social Security Agency's (Sassa's) readiness to meet its grants payment deadline of April 1, Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini has denied her department was in crisis.

This was the message Dlamini relayed to MPs in Parliament yesterday as she accused the opposition benches of using the country's 17 million social grant beneficiaries as cannon fodder in their campaign to rubbish the ANC.

While she said "social grant beneficiaries were not for sale", Dlamini berated opposition MPs, accusing them of being scaremongers and doomsayers.

"The opposition's claim that there is a crisis at Sassa is therefore nothing more than self-serving propaganda and political grandstanding of the highest order. They must stop with their scare mongering which has caused public panic and anxiety.

"They are doing this to remove the authority of the ANC, the governing party."

Dlamini's comments come on the back of Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan telling Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa), that while the national Treasury agreed with the Constitutional Court's determination that Sassa's existing contract with Cash Paymaster Services (CPS) was illegal, the

Treasury would consider Sassa's request for a deviation from normal tender process in a bid to extend its contract with CPS.

Dlamini, making reference to interest from the SA Post Office (Sapo) to assist Sassa on the payment of social grants, said the state-owned enterprise could not achieve the task on its own, without the assistance of the current service provider.

"They will not be able to offer a convenient payment solution anytime soon without the assistance of the current service provider. More importantly, the post office does not have technological and operational solutions to deliver grants without limitation or convenience.

"Also more than a 100 offices have been closed. But also Sapo wants to use a voucher system that is not clear on how we are going to prevent the duplication of payment systems. The solution here again requires the assistance of the present company."

However, SA Post Office CEO Mark Barnes last month told The New Age the state-owned enterprise was wellcapacitated to relieve pressure on Sassa in the payment of social grants.

"I think we can be part of the solution. We can use our electronic data system which is already in operation with the department of public works in the Eastern Cape. Having got hold of Sassa's database, we could send electronic vouchers to people who can pitch up at a post office or post bank and get paid upon presenting their ID number,"

Barnes said that should Sapo be given the opportunity to assist Sassa, the decision would allow the state-owned enterprise fulfil its mandate of becoming a key service provider of government services to the people.