

SYLVIA DROPS A BOMBHELL

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PREMIER Sylvia Lucas dropped a bombshell when she announced a surprise provincial cabinet reshuffle yesterday afternoon, as MECs were making their way to the ANC provincial elective conference in Colesberg, which starts today.

After calling the media to an urgent press conference at 3 pm yesterday, Lucas read out the names of her new cabinet, without allowing any follow-up questions to be asked.

MECs were apparently called in individually to her office from 11 am yesterday morning.

Lucas did not provide any reasons for her decision, other than to indicate that she had started a consultative process last week, which was concluded yesterday.

Both the Office of the Premier and the ANC have previously denied that there was any possibility of a cabinet shake-up.

MEC for Finance, Economic Development, and Tourism Mac Jack and the MEC for Transport, Safety and Liaison, Pauline Williams, were axed from Lucas' cabinet.

Jack has been instrumental in promoting fiscal discipline in the Province under difficult economic circumstances.

Williams was appointed as MEC for Transport, Safety and Liaison last year, following a long sabbatical from government life.

ANC Women's League deputy secretary Gail Parker will replace Jack, while ANC MPL Alexandra Beukes will take over from Williams.

The new MEC for Roads and Public Works is Bongwiwe Mbinjo-Gigaba while the new MEC for Sports, Arts

and Culture is Mxolisi Sokatsha.

The rest of the cabinet, namely MEC for Nature Conservation and Environmental Affairs Tiny Chotelo, MEC for Education Martha Bartlett, MEC for Co-operative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs Alvin Botes, MEC for Social Development Father Gift van Staden and MEC for Health Lebogang Motlaping, will remain in their positions.

The spokeswoman for the Office of the Premier, Bronwyn Thomas-Abrahams, explained that the premier's decision was taken after "applying her mind and consultation with her individual MECs".

An ANC insider believed that Lucas must have had the backing of President Jacob Zuma, or was heavily pressured into removing Jack from the provincial cabinet.

"War has been declared and this move was not expected and could not have been executed of her own accord. Jack occupies a powerful position, second in command to ANC provincial secretary Zamani Saul."

He indicated that while Lucas' detractors had been purged, he believed that the last-minute reshuffling ahead of the conference would serve to alienate many of

the delegates.

"Whether the bombshell announcement will give her the upper hand at the conference, remains to be seen. Many members who are supporting the 'Premier League' are boycotting the conference or have been denied access to the venue in Colesberg. This will serve to dilute the Zuma support base in the upcoming ANC national conference. Everyone is waiting with bated breath to see the outcome of the provincial elective conference, as it will serve as a test run for the national elective conference."

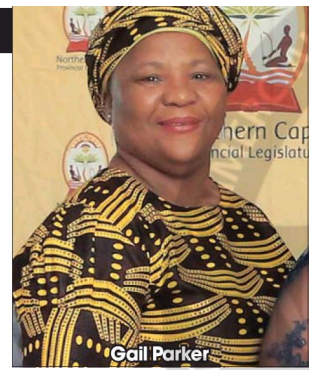
Meanwhile, the DA in the Province cautiously welcomed the reshuffle but pointed out that there were other MECs who were not performing up to standard and should also have faced the chop.

DA provincial leader Andrew Louw pointed out that the Department of Health was in dire straits.

"We are disappointed that the MEC for Health, Lebogang Motlaping, was not removed as the political head of this critical department. Things have gone from bad to worse in the Health Department and if not addressed soon, will result in a total collapse of this department," said Louw.

He pointed out that both Parker and Beukes had proved themselves to be earnest in their oversight tasks as Members of the Provincial Legislature.

"They have not been afraid to raise sensitive matters with departments. They have also displayed a willingness to listen to the opposition. We sincerely hope that their apparent determination to resolve problems within departments will not wane once they cross the threshold from MPLs to MECs."



Gail Parker

REACTION

THE ANC in the Northern Cape yesterday noted with "absolute disgust" the cabinet reshuffle done by the premier yesterday.

ANC provincial secretary Zamani Saul placed it on record that the ANC was not consulted before the decision was taken.

"We don't know anything about this reshuffling. This was done in total disregard of the ANC internal processes, which require thorough consultation with both the ANC and the alliance partners. We therefore don't take kindly to this conduct by the premier. There will definitely be consequences," said Saul.

He pointed out that the timing of the reshuffle, which took place a day before the 8th provincial elective conference was about to start, was "very suspect".

"We also want to put it on record that the reshuffling has got nothing to do with improving service delivery but has everything to do with influencing the outcome of the conference. This is grossly irresponsible, reckless and self-serving. This tact is fallacious and deeply entangles the provincial government in the organisational politics of the ANC."

Meanwhile, Cosatu Provincial Secretary Anele Gxoyiya has condemned the Provincial cabinet reshuffle as "childish and factional behaviour" and has called for Lucas, to step down with immediate effect.

"The reshuffling was not based on strengthening cabinet or due to the incompetence of the MECs. Instead it was motivated by selecting cabinet members who are perceived to be loyal to her. The decision was not sanctioned by the alliance partners."

He believed that processes were not followed.

"The decision was taken without consultation and the relevant MECs were not informed. They were called to a meeting last week where a lot of fighting took place."