

The ANC needs to wake up to the reality of an electorate prioritising service delivery over loyalty to struggle credentials.

So says Webster Mfebe, CEO of the SA Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, a 78-year-old organisation which represents civil engineers with expertise in constructing roads, bridges, dams and buildings.

Last month, Mfebe raised eyebrows at a construction expo at Gallagher Estate in Midrand when he described the country as a "kakistocracy" - meaning that the government was being run by the nation's worst or least-qualified citizens.

This week, Mfebe reiterated his views during an interview with City Press at the organisation's head office in Bedfordview, on Johannesburg's East Rand.

"We must avoid South Africa sliding into a kakistocracy because when you begin to have part of the leadership saying, 'if the rand falls, you simply pick it up' - referring to the reaction by Water and Sanitation Minister Nomvula Mokonyane in April to the country's credit rating having been downgraded to sub-investment grade - that cannot be a principled stance," Mfebe said.

Asked how close he thought South Africa was to becoming a kakistocracy, without hesitation the former ANC MP said: "I think we are five minutes away from becoming a kakistocracy. Some would argue that we are already in a kakistocracy".

Appearing to take a swipe at the governing party, Mfebe said it did not bode well for politicians to be so reckless.

"Perceptions are more effective than facts," he said, pointing out that the ANC Youth League was not helping when it came to potential investors' perceptions of government.

"When you reward them, you reward them as a collective. Likewise, when you punish them, you punish as a collective," he said, adding that it was wrong for people to blame the state of the economy on President Jacob Zuma.

Mfebe is passionate about the quality of leadership and walks his talk, having received a prestigious Kaelo Award

The road to kakistocracy

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Pg 5

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CEO says SA is five minutes from **disaster** and leadership must wake up



PASSIONATE
Webster
Mfebe

in 2014, which honours successful black entrepreneurs and senior executives, for his business leadership. He is currently a finalist for the Global CEO Award Africa. The winner will be announced later this year.

Mfebe, known for not mincing his words, expressed satisfaction with the transformation taking place within the multibillion-rand construction industry.

He said listed companies were mainly transformed and it was only at CEO level where black faces were rare.

Among the major local listed construction companies, only Group Five has a black CEO in Themba Mosai.

"You cannot say these are white-owned companies," added Mfebe.

"There are many investors, some of them institutional. Yes, the management and control may be white - that is where you have to change."

He said the organisation he leads, which has 406 members, was transformed.

He wasted no time in making changes to the company's constitution when he took office in 2013. The required transformation included gender equity.

"I was charged with turning around this organisation when I was appointed in 2013. We have to be circumspect and not play the colour card. Let us rather play the card of excellence in the form of the ability to execute the programme," he said, adding that he saw a brighter future ahead, especially for industry professionals.

Mfebe said the R1.5 billion development fund - set up as a contribution by the construction companies which had been implicated in colluding to secure contracts for the 2010 Fifa World Cup Stadium Projects, in addition to penalties imposed on them - was enough to set the industry on a fast-paced transformation drive. A significant part of the money had been set aside to empower black contractors.

"Collusion amounts to about 1% of the total projects that happened at the time, so it was not a widespread problem. However, it was a prohibited, illegal activity," Msebe said, pointing out that cover-pricing was an illicit practice that seemed to have been overlooked.

Cover-pricing is when companies collude on pricing to predetermine which of them gets the contract by overpricing their bids - in so doing, forcing the client to go for the lowest bidder of the group of bidders.