

No 90-second showers for luxury-loving Bongo

'The joke is he didn't want to take a bucket bath in Cape Town'

By THABO MOKONE

State Security Minister Bongani Bongo is living it up at Cape Town's five-star Taj hotel because he is unhappy with strict water restrictions at his official house in the city.

Bongo apparently insisted on checking into the Cape Town branch of the international hotel brand three weeks ago, justifying his move by complaining about the tight water restrictions at his official residence, which include a 90-second time limit when taking showers.

Government officials said Bongo used the Taj hotel as his base in Cape Town. A standard luxury suite with views of Table Mountain or the sea costs at least R4 000 a night and a presidential suite costs around R60 000 a night.

It is not clear whether Bongo is occupying a standard room or a suite, but his stay at the hotel is a snub to the government's belt-tightening measures, let alone the Western Cape's water crisis.

Bongo yesterday admitted to staying at the Taj at a cost of R7 000 a night and claimed he would be paying from his own pocket.

His bill should be about R147 000, excluding extras.

"There is a joke that he didn't want to take a short bucket bath when he was in Cape Town – like everyone else," said one of the officials.

Guests at the hotel are requested to take 90-second showers, but are not penalised if they don't adhere to this rule.

The government officials also claimed that



The Taj hotel lobby in Cape Town, where State Security Minister Bongani Bongo, left, has been staying. Picture: Getty Images

Bongo's bodyguards were spending time at the upmarket hotel as he preferred to have his security detail with him around the clock.

Other officials said he has been holding meetings with ANC MPs and deputy ministers at the glitzy hotel.

Hours before the state of the nation address, the Sunday Times team spotted Bongo mingling at the Taj lobby, wearing shorts and flip-flops while carrying his signature Louis Vuitton handbag.

An MP serving on parliament's joint standing committee on intelligence, who asked not to be named because members of the committee are sworn to secrecy, said Bongo's conduct was "ridiculous".

official house in Cape Town to him, even though he was appointed five months ago.

He claimed that he had been using his old house in Pelican Park, the parliamentary village, for the past few months but this week decided to check into the Taj at R7 000 a night.

The houses in Pelican Park, which are meant to be used by MPs, are not as cushy as those allocated to ministers – and backbenchers are often quick to move out of the MPs' villages when promoted to the cabinet.

"During this period I used my old accommodation in Pelican Park house No.38. This past week I stayed for three days at the Taj, the cost of which is around R7 000 per night before discounts owing to club membership."

Several officials, however, said Bongo has been staying at the hotel for three weeks.

He claimed he would foot the bill.

Bongo has been making headlines since his appointment to the cabinet by former president Jacob Zuma.

Shortly after his appointment in October, it emerged that Bongo had attempted to offer a bribe to Advocate Ntshuzelo Vanana, the evidence leader of the public enterprises committee's inquiry into the capture of state-owned entities, including Eskom.

The bribery allegation is now the subject of an investigation by parliament's joint ethics committee, which monitors the ethical conduct of MPs and ministers.

It also came to light last year that Bongo had allegedly taken kickbacks from government service providers during his tenure as an official in Mpsamalanga.

In an SMS sent yesterday afternoon, Bongo said he would be moving to the Table Bay hotel at the V&A Waterfront. "Further note that the minister advises that next week he will be sleeping at Table Bay Waterfront and will again pay from his own pocket as government has not provided him with the house."

A sea-facing suite there starts at R7 000 a night while one that features views of Table Mountain goes for at least R21 000 a night.

The MP said he would insist that Bongo be liable for the hotel bill as it amounted to wasteful expenditure, since the minister has been allocated an official residence in Cape Town.

Bongo said the MP could not be allowed to doubt government austerity measures and he was not above water restrictions.

"He must pay it out of his own pocket... He must be called to book. It's ridiculous since when is he above other citizens in this city?"

"It's absolute nonsense, in light of the utterances of the new president, that he wants to run a clean administration. It's clear to me that this guy is not fit to be a minister."

Bongo yesterday claimed that the Department of Public Works was yet to allocate an