

Cele's peremptory promotion

Police Minister Bheki Cele missed President Cyril Ramaphosa's first phone call to inform him of his new appointment because he was flying from Durban to Cape Town. Later, "the president got on the phone. 'It's me here and the SG [ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule]. We've decided to make sure you take care of the police of the country. Thank you.' And he put the phone down"



Shooting from the hip

By THABO MOKONE

 Bheki Cele stands behind his desk, wearing a black suit and his famous fedora. We're in his ninth-floor parliamentary office and he's glued to the TV watching his predecessor, Fikile Mbalula, addressing a press conference at Luthuli House.

"I would love to continue listening, but let's start, guys, it's going to take long. Mbaks is full of energy. I am meeting him next week to complete the handover," says the man known as "The Hat" in ANC circles, and as Ndosi, his Zulu clan name.

Cele can't remember where his love of hats started but admits to owning 43. He would like more but says he already has all the colours.

"I remember when I had two and somebody said: 'Hey, it suits you, Ndosi, you look good.' And I said I'm not going to abandon something that makes me look good," he said.

One of the more colourful personalities in South African politics, he promoted himself to general as police commissioner. He also urged police officers to be "stomach in, chest out" types.

He was also linked to a "shoot to kill" order to police, but denies he ever said this, although he says the law does allow police to use deadly force if necessary.

"I will never call [on] the police to die with their guns in their hands. By the way, the law allows them...go and read section 49 of the Criminal Procedure Act. There they use the phrase 'deadly force' that must be used by the officers.

"So this has been my call all the time. I've not moved away from that call, so shoot to kill maybe comes from that."

Cele returned to political prominence this week when President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed him police minister.

Until axed as a police commissioner in 2012, Cele was a supporter of former president Jacob Zuma. He was fired after a judicial inquiry found him to have been dishonest about his relationship with businessman Roux Shabangu, who had

leased a building to the police for R1-billion. The inquiry was triggered by news reports in the Sunday Times and former public protector Thuli Madonsela's finding that the lease was unlawful. The probe by Mandonsela and the inquiry came after the Sunday Times exposé of the flawed lease

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dealing between the SAPS, Shabangu and the Department of Public Works.

Cele was found to have failed to declare

his relationship with Shabangu. Cele is still upset about the findings and insists that he had no role in the matter, and didn't even know Shabangu. He says he's now ready to take both findings on judicial review in an attempt to clear his name.

"I have my issues, big issues with both processes, but the place to clear it out is the court. The Thuli one was not enough to dismiss me from work, that's why the board of inquiry had to be established. Thuli never came close to the word corruption, or fraud and abuse of government money.

"My job was to identify the building, and [the Department of Public Works] signs. I did not know Roux before the processes. I did not know him, I did not meet with him. I've had no relationship with him, none

whatsoever," says Cele as he shakes his head.

Cele believes that when he wanted to clear his name in court, he was let down by the police minister and Zuma, who gave him insufficient backing. This is rumoured to have triggered the falling out between him and Zuma, something he denies.

"I would believe [the] president did his job to his best capacity. Is that a fallout? I would say no, but . . . I would have loved if all Thuli's recommendations were pursued with the same vigour, sometimes including the recommendations against the president of the country. I'm worried about the *Animal* Farm approach, where some animals are more equal than others."

Cele supported Ramaphosa at the ANC's elective conference in December. He also ensured that Ramaphosa got support from ANC branches in KwaZulu-Natal, the ANC's second-biggest voting bloc.

Cele refuses to talk about his current, if any, political relationship with Zuma. He says only that it remains cordial, then reminisces about the good old days when he used to drive to Nkandla for breakfast with Zuma, then still president.

"I can say maybe I did have a special relationship with JZ. I would take the car, drive to Nkandla, eat breakfast there, go to the king's house to talk. We would do those kind of things.

"And with President Ramaphosa, it would be presumptuous of me because I

campaigned for him . . . I expect more than anybody else. That would be wrong. The relationship is cordial, there's mutual respect and it must be kept that way, especially if we're to work together."

Turning to police matters, he says his priority is to boost staff morale. "That morale has to be there. If it's low, let's lift it up . . . let's work on the working

conditions of the police themselves. "Somebody phoned me this morning to say he's been on one rank — I think he's a warrant officer – for 20 years. You see we're not producing human beings for stagnation. You can't just do one thing for 20 years and nobody looks at you to say: 'Please progress

to the next level.' " Cele says he also wants to see the police taking advantage of the improved technology in the fight against crime and restore public confidence in the men and

women in blue. "We need to harp on that and work hard on it. The community must feel that these are our husbands, our sons. We did cover some ground on that when I was police commissioner; I find it a bit lost now. Once you do that, the police are better protected." Cele said intelligence gathering on crime would also receive his special attention.

"The blame for [the] Ngcobo [killings of police officers] lies with crime intelligence. If crime intelligence was functioning properly, that thing would have been avoided. The other one is the unit that deals



I don't know whether I'm now getting old, but I feel like crying when I hear the national anthem

with children and women -you know the scourge of abuse, rape and murder. We need to broaden the police's understanding of those issues. Sometimes police don't handle those matters very well.

"I remember one police station in KwaZulu-Natal, when I was a commissioner, when this young woman went to report that she's been chased away by the husband. This policeman said: 'Give me what you didn't give your husband.' Anybody who makes that kind of statement, must immediately lose their job. It's like when you go to report a rape and the police say: 'Why are you wearing such a short dress?' I used to tell them: 'You're not fashion advisers, your job is to go and arrest that person.'

Cele was born on April 22 1952 in Umzumbe in southern KwaZulu-Natal.

"My mother got married at 18, gave birth to me at 19 and died at 20. I grew up under my stepmother . . . she was a good stepmother. If somebody had not told me that my mother had died, I would not have known that she was not my biological mother."

A teacher by profession, Cele says he is well equipped to lead the police because of his military training with Umkhonto weSizwe as a soldier.

"I heard people complaining when I was a commissioner to say I'm a civilian. I'm not a civilian, I'm a military man. I can assure you my training in the bush was better than the training of the SAPS in the country. No doubt about that."

Behind his tough-guy image lies a softie. He says his wife, Thembeka, can attest to

"One person that has discovered that I'm not as macho, that when you come closer, I am a softie, is my wife. She's really discovered that I'm not what I show out

old, but sometimes I feel like crying when I hear something like the national anthem. It makes me so emotional. "My heart is really on the softer side and in

"I don't know whether I'm now getting

the defence of the weak. I hate to see weak and vulnerable people being harassed."

Stomach in, chest out. Will Bheki Cele have his critics eating their hats?



Police officers have the right to use deadly force, says Bheki Cele. But he never gave any order to shoot to kill when he was police commissioner.

From the Cele files

- Age: 65, born on April 22 1952
- Married to Thembeka Ngcobo
- Served as KwaZulu-Natal MEC for transport and safety
- Deputy minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries from 2014 to 2018
- Member of the national executive committee of the ANC