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**SUPRA  
MAHUMAPELO**  
**Newsmaker**  
by  
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**KINGMAKER** Supra Mahumapelo talks to the media moments after President Cyril Ramaphosa called for calm in Mahikeng

PHOTO: FELIX DLANGAMANDLA

# His way or no way

**T**he last time Mahikeng saw protest and looting of this magnitude to oust its leader was in March 1994 when residents demanded that president of Bophuthatswana Lucas Mangope resign.

They wanted him to allow his Bantustan to be part of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa.

Twenty-four years later Mahikeng finds itself on the knife-edge again with residents demanding the removal of Supra Mahumapelo as premier of North West.

Scores of people died in 1994 as Mangope continued clinging to power by his fingernails. The man who had ruled Bophuthatswana with an iron fist for 16 years and never got used to being challenged in any way was suddenly under siege.

It was then that Roelf Meyer and Mac Maharaj landed in Mahikeng and woke Mangope from his sleep. Still clad in his pyjamas, Maharaj said to him: "You are now out of power." That was the end of Mangope and Bophuthatswana.

This week ordinary residents in Mahikeng once again took to the streets. Some described Mahumapelo as a powerful man, the kingmaker who "can destroy someone", referring to those who "lost businesses and lost their jobs because they failed to toe the line".

A majority did not want to be heard talking badly about him in public, saying they believed he has "eyes and ears everywhere".

Some gave him names such as "Setsokotsane" (Setswana for whirlwind, referring to his service-delivery programme), "Monna wa rona" (our man) and even "Boko Haram" in some political circles.

His power in politics also earned him the name "Black Jesus". Some placards in anti-Supra marches this week said: "Mahumapelo - the one who gets rich first."

Those wanting him gone - including former MECs and his own comrades in the ANC - described him as the most

feared premier and ANC chairperson the province had ever seen.

"With this man, it is his way or no way. You ask questions or challenge his decisions you will find yourself out there on the streets ... that's the reason people like MECs and HODs [heads of departments] find themselves in trouble today because they followed his orders and irregularly awarded contracts to his chosen people," said a former MEC and senior ANC member in the province.

"I can assure you that Mahumapelo knows very well that through all these investigations they will never find his fingerprints anywhere because all he did was give orders."

However, Mahumapelo has questioned why he should be blamed for the alleged corruption in the health department related, among others, to a dubiously awarded mobile clinic contract. This R180 million tender was awarded to Mediosa, a Gupta-linked company, which later received a R30 million advance payment months before it could do any work.

"Why are they not talking about the MEC for health? Why are they talking about the premier, because the premier doesn't run the department?" he asked in a television interview.

He remained undeterred even after the Hawks raided his office when it emerged that Nepo Data Dynamics had been paid more than R200 million in a dubiously awarded IT contract.

The premier said: "Why do you [the Hawks] say to South Africa you raided my office when you know you didn't raid my office but the office of the director general?"

Asked to comment on allegations of corruption, Mahumapelo said for "anybody to be declared corrupt in South Africa, it must be through due processes of the law".

The community calling for his removal as the premier was left disappointed when the ANC failed to decide on Mahumapelo's future on Friday, saying proper processes and consultation were necessary.

The call for the premier's removal first came from the public servants through the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) during their march to the provincial legislature last month, accusing Mahumapelo of corruption in his

administration. This followed allegations of corruption that were revealed in portfolio committee meetings in which ANC provincial legislators questioned the award of some tenders, particularly in the premier's office, health and public works.

With president Jacob Zuma gone, the caucus in North West has since shown the courage and determination to challenge Mahumapelo's dented leadership. Even some of the ANC legislators seemed ready to vote Mahumapelo out by supporting an Economic Freedom Fighters-sponsored motion of no confidence. But the ANC discouraged the plan.

The ANC's own alliance partners, the SA Communist Party (SACP) and the SA National Civic Association (Sanco), also raised their voice and reiterated calls for Mahumapelo's removal this week.

"The leader of the alliance under the Presidency of Cyril Ramaphosa must reprimand its Premier [Mahumapelo] and advise him to do the honourable thing and resign as he continues to embarrass the ANC and has failed to protect the public purse," said Sanco provincial secretary Packet Seaketso.

The SACP's provincial secretary Madoda Sambatha warned the ANC could be "giving away votes to other parties" if it delayed acting against Mahumapelo.

City Press understands that Mahumapelo met Ramaphosa at least once before he flew to London. Mahumapelo apparently refused to resign as premier. Ramaphosa believed Mahumapelo's resignation would save the ANC at next year's national elections.

The ANC Women's League in the province expressed its confidence in Mahumapelo's leadership and a bakkie full of his supporters arrived at Cookes Lake where Ramaphosa and the ANC's provincial and national executive committee leaders were meeting on Friday. They jumped off the bakkie and started insulting all those "who want Supra removed". One of the men slapped a provincial leader, accusing him of being one of the protest coordinators. They later left after police intervened.

Moments after Ramaphosa announced that the ANC would decide on Mahumapelo only after due process, the premier emerged from one of the rooms smiling and joking with the media.

The North West's powerful leader has survived - at least for now.