

Masualle faced tough choice – fire four MECs or be recalled

Zine George

PREMIER Phumulo Masualle faced being recalled by the ANC caucus at the Bhisho legislature had he refused to fire four key MECs by the end of this week.

It was revealed yesterday that a plan crafted by all ANC whips at the legislature on Monday would have seen the 45-member ANC caucus convening a special meeting tomorrow where the plan to oust Masualle would have been effected.

But a senior ANC member of the legislature confirmed yesterday the plan had to be shelved following Monday's developments which saw the ANC top six officials, including President Cyril Ramaphosa, instructing Masualle to implement the decision of the ANC provincial executive committee (PEC) to fire agrarian reform and rural development MEC Mlibo Qoboshiyane, finance MEC Sakhumzi Somyo, public works MEC Thandiswa Marawu and social development MEC Nancy Sihlwayi by Friday.

While Masualle faced a barrage of questions from senior party leaders, including Deputy President David Mabuza, who led the charge on why he continued to defy the PEC led by Oscar Mabuyane, it was learnt that ANC whips in Bhisho had also plotted Masualle's downfall.

Their plan was for the ANC caucus to vote Masualle out as premier at a caucus meeting scheduled for tomorrow. But that meeting was shelved, a senior party leader said.

ANC provincial secretary Lulama Ngcukayitobi confirmed yesterday that Masualle had undertaken to change his executive this week.

Masualle's detractors accuse him of playing "hide and seek", using international trips and government events as delaying tactics.

It is understood that Masualle again asked for more time to assess his cabinet and table a report on the performance of each MEC. But Mabuza is said to have not been convinced by Masualle's reasoning.

"DD [Mabuza] told him that is not his responsibility but that of the PEC.

"DD was on fire at that meeting, saying Masualle has no right to challenge PEC decisions, because he is an ANC deployee, so when the PEC wants to recall MECs, that has to be effected," said the source.

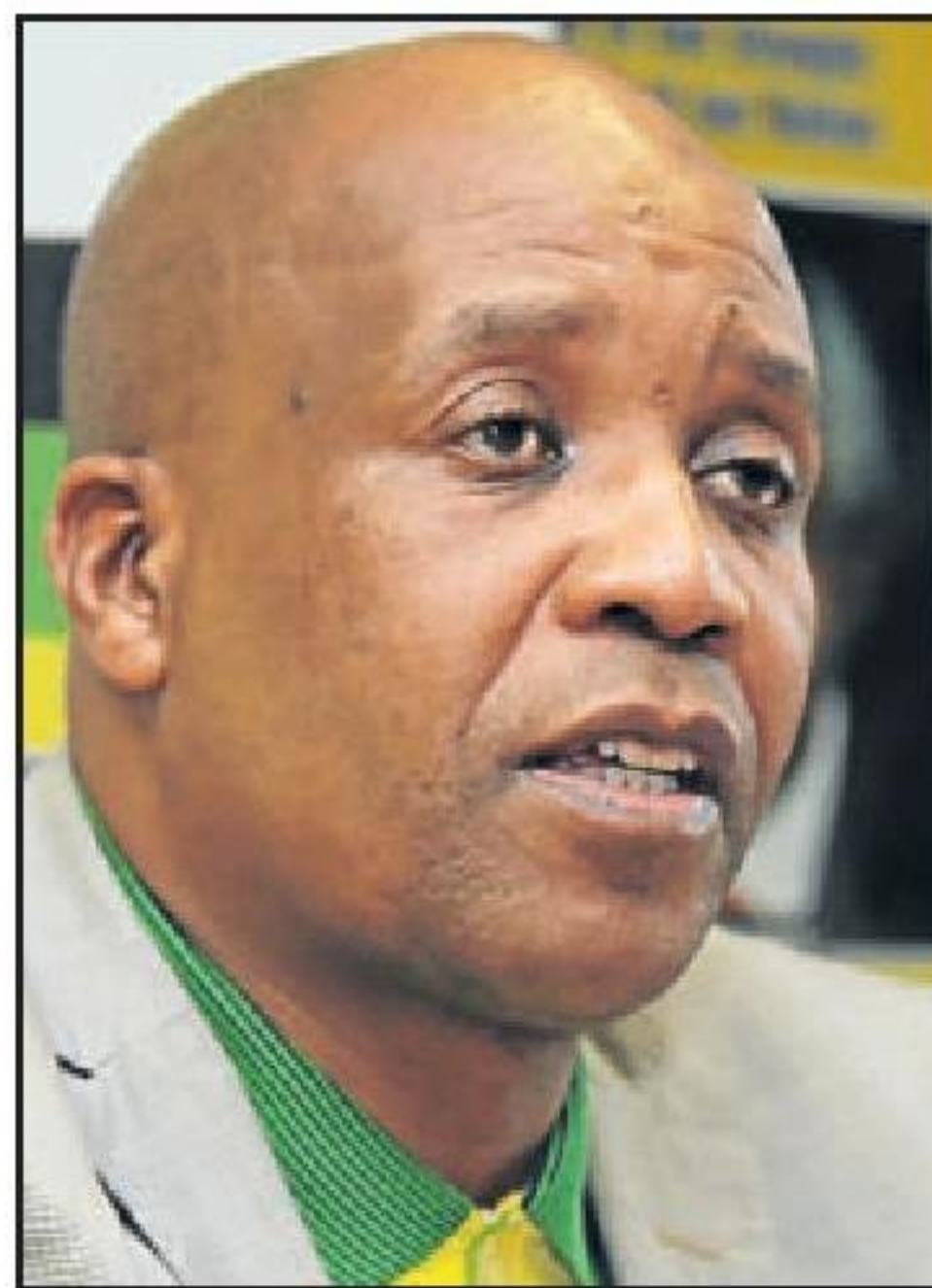
Insiders said ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule, who along with Masualle campaigned against Ramaphosa's presidency at Nasrec in December, tried but failed to defend Masualle.

The ANC NEC resolved last month to retain Masualle as premier but allowed the PEC to go ahead and reshuffle the provincial cabinet, while the Mabuyane-led PEC was declared legitimate.

The officials are expected to be back in Eastern Cape soon to try to find common ground between rival ANC factions.

"We are glad that this is almost over. He has no choice but to act," the source said.

Masualle could not be reached for comment yesterday.



**PHUMULO
MASUALLE**