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News

Interministerial committee report boosts calls for Mahumapelo's removal

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Supra Mahumapelo is glo met die dood gedreig. Foto: Susan Cilliers

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A damning report by a team of ministers into issues of governance in the troubled North West province was expected to boost widespread calls for the removal of the embattled Premier Supra Mahumapelo.

A senior ANC member in the province said the report will “only run short of saying let [Mahumapelo] go because it was not those ministers' mandate. It will, however, reveal a spate of problems in governance and expose the rot under Mahumapelo's watch”.

“There was evidence presented to the ministers, and the most critical part of the evidence were payment reports showing how some companies were paid millions where value for money cannot be proved. The report will prove that we lack clean governance and leadership.”

While the report itself was not expected to say Mahumapelo should be recalled, the evidence and strong allegations of corruption, tender irregularities and maladministration were expected to do so silently.

This follows Monday’s meeting of the interministerial committee (IMC) led by Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, where different groups and individuals presented almost similar stories with their fingers pointing in one direction – towards Mahumapelo.

A member of the North West Business Forum who attended the meeting, Themba Gwabeni, said ministers – including Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi and State Security Minister Dipuo Letsatsi-Duba – were left jaws-dropped as they listened to presentations by public groups and individuals on Monday. They listened to presentations from businesspeople, including those from the taxi industry, private bus operators and professionals.

“Looking at their faces, it was like they were watching a horror movie. Shock was painted all over their faces and it was also seen in their gestures as they sat there listening and shaking their heads in disbelief,” Gwabeni said.

“For the first time, people poured their hearts out and they presented documents to back what they alleged. As much as we’ve been complaining about this rampant corruption, sitting in that meeting and listening to others, we were also left numb by revelations that came out there.”

A senior political ANC member in the province said the information presented to the ministers against Mahumapelo was so damning “it will be very difficult even for his political ally Dlamini-Zuma to save him”.

Meanwhile, Gwabeni said among those who presented was a group of professionals, which is made up of “former public servants who were purged from the public service and replaced with incompetent and incapable people by premier Mahumapelo”.

“There are also people who have been running scholar transport that was taken from the transport department to North West Transport Investments, where tenders were awarded to preferred companies and later taken back to the department when everything was done and sealed. People complained

about the state of local government and how only companies whose owners were loyal to [Mahumapelo] were awarded tenders.”

He said AgriDelight, a company which was allegedly used in several dubious transactions, was mentioned more than any other. The same company was recently implicated in a scandal when the North West government donated 25 cattle to former president Jacob Zuma. City Press understands that the AgriDelight owner has already made a deal with law enforcement agencies and was expected at some point to turn state witness.

Explaining where he thinks it all went wrong, Gwabeni said when he took over in 2014, Mahumapelo “dismantled government and built an empire of trustees... One thing he mastered was replacing people loyal to the state with those loyal to him”.

“It is for this reason that Dlamini-Zuma and the team were repeatedly and empathetically told of the need to reconfigure the provincial government. We did not say who should take over, but that an honest and capable person should be sought to take the province out of this situation,” he said.

A member of the Revolutionary Council, Lucky Kgabi, said it was reiterated by many to the IMC that Mahumapelo’s removal was the only solution.

“There here has been systematic corruption and all departments were affected... The damage done is too huge and it is our view that we have no government. The only justice for the people of the North West is for Mahumapelo to go. It is also our view that there should be a judicial commission of inquiry, which will lead to people being charged, prosecuted and public funds recovered,” he said.

Meanwhile, Mahumapelo, whose involvement in politics can be traced back to his days as a student and all the way up into provincial politics from where he shot up to ANC chairperson and later became one of the most influential and powerful politicians, is known to have amassed wealth during a short space of time.

Even after he was appointed premier he continued living in his own house – at Unit 14 in Mahikeng – surrounded among others by police officers, nurses, soldiers and teachers as neighbours. He drives through pothole-riddled streets in the area like everyone else.

His house, however, has over the years evolved from a modest property to a huge mansion which was expanded after he bought a neighbour's property. It has high walls with an electric fence and CCTV cameras almost everywhere.

Mahumapelo's wife, Kule Mahumapelo, went from being an employee of the North West provincial legislature to an owner of two McDonald's outlets in Mahikeng. Questions have been asked about how she managed to raise R7 million required for a franchisee to acquire one outlet.

Mahumapelo said that the McDonalds stores in Mafikeng belonged to his wife. "They make noise about McDonalds. It belongs to Mrs Mahumapelo, not me," he said.

He said the business was established before he became a premier. "It takes more than two years to get a McDonalds franchise. The poor woman started in 2011/2012."

Mahumapelo's family is also understood to be owning a Nando's chicken outlet, a car wash and auto-body centre, and other businesses in the province as well properties, including empty stands.

Mahumapelo's spokesperson, Brian Setswambung, would not comment on the premier's business interests. He also would not comment on allegations presented to the IMC.

"The office of the premier wishes to outrightly indicate that it has not seen the IMC report and that it would be inappropriate for us to respond to issues raised in a report it has not seen," he said.

On Mahumapelo bearing the blame for troubles in other departments, including tender scandals in health where services have almost collapsed, Setswambung said: "The premier is not running the day-to-day activities of any of the provincial departments. There are MECs deployed to those departments who are working with skilled accounting officers, chief financial officers and senior managers. It is therefore not only unfair, but unreasonable for anyone to expect the premier to be the one responding to administration issues performed in the provincial departments."

Another senior ANC member in the province said they were worried that Mahumapelo may survive the saga and allegations of corruption against him.

"He has mastered the skill of using people and makes sure that he doesn't leave his fingerprints anywhere. "We can expect many people to be thrown

under the bus ... those are people who took his orders, including MECs and head of departments, while he goes scot-free," he said.