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Light is being shone in dark, festering places all over the country

There hasn't been a cataclysm by any means, but the overall achievement of Cyril Ramaphosa's first 100 days as president is greater than the sum of its parts. He has sidelined or fired tainted ministers and replaced them with cleaner pairs of hands; seen the back of the top officials at SARS, Tom Moyane and Jonas Makwakwa; shepherded North West premier Supra Mahumapelo into early retirement and put the province under administration; appointed a commission of inquiry into state capture; redeployed the head of the State Security Agency, Arthur Fraser; and done enough to persuade ratings agencies that economic prospects are brighter under his stewardship.

Crucially, he has unleashed corruption-buster-in-chief Pravin Gordhan, who has been making rapid progress through his own to-do list as minister of public enterprises. Eskom, Denel, Transnet and SA Express have new boards and, in some cases, executives; forensic auditors are investigating state-owned diamond company Alexkor; and there's much more to come as Sanral, Acsa and others fall under Gordhan's gimlet-like gaze.

"Virtually every entity that we are supervising, or are responsible for, is going to have changes as far as the board is concerned," Gordhan said in March, outlining the shape of things to come. "If you take out some of the negativity and some of the negative people, immediately your operations at that entity change. Your revenue changes, therefore your financial situation begins to actually improve. And then your financial credibility changes as well, so your ability to borrow changes."

There are other signs that the new broom is reaching into long-forgotten corners clogged with mould and filth. The NPA has reinstated charges against Zuma; the Hawks have a new head; SARS is taking steps to undo the damage done by Moyane; and the Reserve Bank has placed VBS Mutual Bank under curatorship and ordered a forensic investigation into whether it aimed to defraud depositors, including municipalities in which managers were allegedly given kickbacks, as we report today.

After 100 days in charge, Ramaphosa is under no illusions about the scale of the task he has taken on. "It will take some time to recalibrate and realign everything so that we can return to building good governance processes," he told editors in Cape Town on Thursday.

A day earlier, auditor-general Kimi Makwetu revealed findings that must have made for sobering reading in the Presidency. Only 33 out of 257 municipalities received clean audits for 2016-17. Irregular expenditure at local government level, the coalface of service delivery, amounted to R28.37-billion. Put another way – and this calculation could hardly be more apt in light of a 26.7% unemployment rate – 1.3 million people could have had full-time expanded public works programme jobs for the entire year if that money had been used properly. If each of them had supported another three people with their earnings, nearly a 10LLth of the country's population would be better off today.

Many other comparisons can be drawn, each of which illustrates one of the challenges Ramaphosa faces. Toilets could have been installed to replace the 3 500 pit latrines still in use at schools; homes could have been built for the 14% of people who still live in shacks; VAT could have been reduced in the budget, rather than increased.

The new South Africa, now a month into its 25th year, needs a "new dawn" only because the lights have been off – metaphorically and sometimes literally – for so long. Ramaphosa has always played the long game, so he will not be fazed either by the magnitude of the task or the sniping of critics within the ANC and on opposition benches.

His achievements in 100 days have already begun to overwrite memories of his predecessor's calamitous 3 145-day administration.

He has done enough to give a beleaguered, cynical and jaded electorate a glimpse of light at the end of a horribly long tunnel.

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DA needs to save itself from its own mess

We have previously challenged Mmusi Maimane and the DA to produce proof that Cape Town mayor Patricia de Lille was so corrupt that she needed to be pushed out of office. Instead of producing the proof, the DA opted for what it thought was a short cut to solving its problem, revoking De Lille's membership based on an interview she gave to 702.

In that interview, De Lille revealed her intention to walk away from the DA as soon as she had cleared her name. The DA's decision has come back to haunt the party. The High Court in Cape Town ruled that De Lille could continue occupying the mayor's office while the court dealt with the merits of her removal. With egg on his face, Maimane is now said to have realised that the short cut was the wrong move. The court decision to temporarily reinstate De Lille has embarrassed the official opposition. De Lille has won public sympathy, exposing Maimane and his cohorts as political vigilantes who would throw any mud at De Lille in the hope that it would stick.

It has emerged that Maimane's supporters are sharpening their daggers in preparation for the party's federal council meeting, where federal council chairman James Selfe will likely be presented as the sacrificial lamb. According to deep throats in the party, the plan is to push Selfe to fall on his sword and have him replaced. This will be a huge gamble for Maimane, should he allow it to happen. Such a move has the potential to destabilise a DA that is preparing to go head-to-head with a re-energised ANC under the leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa.

According to a survey published in this newspaper, Ramaphosa's approval rating has shot up since he took over from Jacob Zuma 100 days ago. Selfe's backers are likely to push back and launch a counter-campaign against Maimane. This is likely to cripple the party's election machinery and demoralise its ground troops. The fight may also discourage some voters who may see DA leaders as being no different from their ever-bickering ANC counterparts. A leadership squabble will only reverse the gains the party has made over the years. A political solution should be sought to resolve the De Lille mess if the DA is serious about running the country in the future.