

Minister Nxesi acts

Minister Thulas Nxesi yesterday announced that he requested a lifestyle audit, starting with himself and all management of the department, after internal investigations revealed 16 000 suspicious transactions to the value of R2 billion.

Nxesi said after announcing investigations in Public Works, allegations were made that he was siphoning off millions of rands.

He said these were just dirty tricks by criminal syndicates in the department.

"The only way to respond is to intensify the struggle against corruption in state capture," he said.

SIU head Andy Mthibhile released findings into investigations of procurement processes of leases by the department.

The findings revealed that landlords leasing buildings to the department have been over-charging and over-stating rented space.

He said an acknowledgment of debt found was over R500 000 that landlords must pay back.

A further 81 matters have been referred back to the department amounting to over R230 million owed to the department for over-payments. He said they were in a process of recovering the money.

They also found procurement irregularities in terms of the leases. He said many landlords submitted false clearance certificates in order to procure leases or continue leases.

Mthibhile said in another investigation it was found that 2 469 employees at public works were found to be in conflict of interest as they were doing business with government.

He added that the SIU also found that some of the buildings leased to the department did not comply with the occupational health and safety standards.

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WHALE OF THE SKIES?

An Airbus Beluga XL transport aircraft is put through its paces on its maiden flight in Colomiers, near Toulouse, France, yesterday. Picture: Reuters

2 500 officials implicated

SIU CHIEF: RESIGNATIONS WOULD NOT SAVE THEM FROM PROSECUTION

→ **Minister says a syndicate of officials is behind corruption in the country.**

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At least 2 500 officials in the Department of Public Works have been found to be in conflict of interest when it comes to irregular procurement, with several quickly quitting their jobs when they were probed for alleged fraud and corruption.

This was revealed yesterday by the Special Investigative Unit (SIU) along with the department when they briefed the media on outcomes of some of the efforts made to curb corruption in the department.

SIU head, Advocate Andy Mthibhile, said their investigations looked at irregularities of expenditure, corruption and collusion around leases. He said investigations found that a number of public officials had been guilty of conflict of interest when it came to procurement.

"This means you either have a company you have registered that is doing business with the state, or any other manner that creates conflict. As of this year, 2 469 employees have been found to be in conflict of interest. In some cases, those who have found to be under investigation have resigned from the department."

But resignations would not deter the investigating unit from prosecuting any guilty party, Mthibhile explained.

"In instances where officials

resign, they have just terminated their relationship with the employer but they cannot escape criminality. We will follow up if we find criminality and will make sure there is criminal prosecution."

The department's anti-corruption unit, which falls under the governance, risk and compliance branch, has in the last four years, investigated 252 allegations of fraud and corruption within the department.

Two hundred and twenty-three of those have been completed, said Imtiaz Pazel, director-general of the governance, risk and compliance branch.

Seventeen of the cases are at various stages while 12 will be referred to other law enforcement agencies such as the SIU, he explained.

We will make sure there is criminal prosecution.

"As a result of investigations, 255 disciplinary proceedings were initiated against departmental officials, of which 193 have been finalised. Of these finalised proceedings, some officials have been dismissed, received final written warnings, unpaid suspension and verbal warnings. But there is a tendency to see resignation by staff members who are under investigation before the disciplinary proceedings are finalised."

Minister Thulas Nxesi said his department would heed the call by President Cyril Ramaphosa to turn the tide of state capture in the country as it was clear a syndicate of officials was behind corruption.

"It's not just individuals involved but a syndicate of officials working with syndicates in the private sector in order to continue with this corruption. That is why we are relying on the SIU."

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