

■ PUBLIC WORKS

Nxesi threatens Scopa with legal action

Appointment of senior official at centre of row; Godi hints minister's warning a bid to cover up malfeasance

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PUBLIC Works Minister Thulas Nxesi and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts are involved in a public spat, with the minister threatening to take the committee to court.

But Scopa has dared Nxesi to take legal action and insisted yesterday it was doing its work.

At the centre of the fight is the appointment of a senior official, Cox Mokgoro, to the department.

Scopa had asked the Public Service Commission (PSC) to investigate the matter.

But yesterday things blew up in the open with Nxesi threatening Scopa with legal action over unfair treatment in the matter.

This was after House chairperson Cedric Frolick had declared Scopa's decision to investigate the Mokgoro matter legally flawed and saying it should be dropped.

"Scopa was informed yesterday evening by the chairperson of committees in the National Assembly that the process followed in requesting the PSC report on Mr Mokgoro was flawed, illegal and against parliamentary procedures and should be stopped immediately," said Scopa chairperson Themba Godi.

"The only time that Scopa can request the PSC to investigate any matter is after it has been granted permission through a resolution of the National Assembly," he said.

Godi added that they will meet the Speaker's office soon to get clarity and how to resolve the issue.

Godi said Scopa will not be threatened by Public Works on Mokgoro as they have work to do.

"It is unprecedented that a member of the executive 'places on record' a threat to take Parliament to court for doing its work. This unprecedented threat can only be an attempt to cover up for malfeasance committed," said Godi.

But Nxesi was not holding back, saying the cancellation of the meeting yesterday had deprived him of an opportunity to respond to the allegations in the PSC report.

"While I respect the integrity of parliamentary and government institutions and their role in holding the executive and officials to account, I am concerned at the real and unfounded reputational damage to the department, myself as minister and Mr Mokgoro; a committed professional credited with the improvement of the audit outcomes of Public Works in recent years. The situation is highly unsatisfactory with allegations placed in the public space with no opportu-

nity for those accused to be heard.

"In light of this we are taking legal advice with a view to taking the process that has unfolded on judicial review," said Nxesi.

The minister added that there was no evidence in the PSC report.

He said there was a push back in the department since he announced two investigations after his re-appointment in February.

This related to the investigation by the Special Investigating Unit into maintenance contracts, which were a fertile ground for corruption.

Nxesi said he had also launched an investigation into the employment of 683 people in four months.