

■ PARLIAMENT

Year of watershed moments and heated public grillings

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PARLIAMENT has ended a year of watershed moments when ground-breaking decisions were taken that will impact on many people.

The year began with MPs voting for President Cyril Ramaphosa to lead the country after the ANC recalled former president Jacob Zuma. In an unprecedented move, the ANC had even lined up its MPs to vote in a motion of no confidence against Zuma if he had failed to heed the party's decision to step down. The election of Ramaphosa saw several changes in the cabinet and boards of state-owned entities.

But the biggest decision of Parliament was the finalisation of the inquiry into Eskom in April.

The report, which was adopted just last month, has implicated former cabinet ministers Malusi Gigaba and Lynne Brown, as well as ex-executives of Eskom Matshela Koko, Brian Molefe and Anoj Singh. Parliament has not minced its words in its report, saying the Hawks, the National Prosecuting



Authority (NPA) and the Special Investigating Unit must take action against all those implicated in the looting of Eskom.

It seems new NPA boss Shamila Batohi has her hands full already and will need all hands on deck to prosecute these and other similar cases of state capture and go for politicians and top officials implicated.

Batohi will assume her duties officially only in February next year. The EFF fought with DA MPs in the chamber and racial insults were hurled when

Ramaphosa answered oral questions.

But the most groundbreaking decision of Parliament was the move to amend the constitution to expropriate land without compensation. The ad hoc committee, to be chaired by senior ANC MP and former minister of land affairs and later public works Thoko Didiza will early next year begin the process of crafting a bill to amend section 25 of the constitution. The ANC has conceded it may not finalise the process before the elections because of the intricacies involved in

the process.

However, the opposition has promised a fight to the end, with the process to be challenged in the Constitutional Court. Almost all the parties seem to agree that this process will drag on for some time, with legal battles to intensify in the next few months.

Parliament has also passed a law that will give Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu powers to clamp down on corruption in the public sector. This has been prompted by the fact that irregular expenditure has increased over the last few years with no action.

In his latest report, the auditor-general found that irregular expenditure in the national and provincial departments increased from R46.3 billion to R51bn.

The National Assembly was also dealing with the matter of SAA and MPs continued to complain that the government was pumping money into a black hole. The airline needs more than R21.7bn to stay afloat and it has received R19bn in bailouts in the past few years. MPs were to approve the Special Appropriations Bill to give SAA

another bailout of R5bn. Ramaphosa was also in the firing line in Parliament after he changed his replies on the R500000 paid into his son Andile's account by Bosasa. The opposition has proposed there should be an inquiry into Bosasa.

This year also, Parliament passed another important law on party funding. The bill would ensure transparency on the funding of parties in Parliament.

Another milestone for Parliament was the adoption of the National Minimum Wage Bill, which will set the minimum wage for workers at R3 500 a month. Ramaphosa has said the minimum wage will come into effect on January 1.

The Eskom inquiry was not the end of Gigaba's woes, as the home affairs portfolio committee grilled him on the naturalisation of the Guptas and the granting of a private terminal for Fireblade at O R Tambo International Airport.

The committee may call Gigaba again next year if they want to clarify other issues.