

SIPHO MASONDO

sipho.masondo@citypress.co.za

EThekwini Mayor Zandile Gumede and senior ANC councillor in the metro Mondli Mthembu face the possibility of arrest by the Hawks after the completion of a lengthy investigation into allegations of money laundering, fraud and corruption against them.

Following the arrest of three municipal officials on charges of fraud and theft early this week, City Press can today reveal that the Hawks have shifted their focus to Gumede and Mthembu and are ready to pounce on the two.

This week, two high-ranking police officials close to the investigation told City Press that Gumede and Mthembu's arrest "is not a matter of if, but a matter of when".

A senior Hawks official directly involved with the investigation said "the docket has been opened and I have seen it. The investigation has been completed and we are tying a few loose ends before they get arrested. Following the investigation, the team has compiled a report. The report is accompanied by piles and piles of annexures which are contained in many boxes."

Another police officer, a high-ranking Crime Intelligence operative who knows about the case, said: "The investigation has been completed. Arrests are imminent. I think they are now trying to figure out how to go about the logistics. Remember, this is a very sensitive case involving quite serious crimes."

HOW IT ALL STARTED

In May, City Press revealed that the Hawks had launched an investigation into allegations of money laundering, fraud and corruption against Gumede and Mthembu. The investigation followed on another investigation by Integrity Forensic Solutions into the awarding of a contract to hire and clean chemical toilets.

Integrity Forensic Solutions was appointed by and conducted the investigation on behalf of eThekwini's city integrity and investigations unit.

The forensic company found that Gumede, Mthembu and three officials had orchestrated a scam which saw eThekwini pay R25 million to hire and clean chemical toilets for six months. The same council had previously paid R3 million to hire the same toilets for three years.

The city integrity and investigations unit has produced a series of reports with damning findings about corruption in the city. The unit has also enlisted the services of a number of firms to help it investigate graft in the city.

In February, City Press reported how eThekwini had paid companies some R36 million to build more than 2 000 toilets, but the toilets were never built. During the same month, The Mercury in Durban reported that an investigation by NMK Forensics found that a R90 million tender to supply eThekwini with recycling waste refuse bags was riddled with irregularities. In September, President Cyril Ramaphosa issued a proclamation authorising the Special Investigating Unit to probe possible corruption in this tender.

The three municipal officials, who appeared in court this week, were exposed in a report by the

HAWKS *circle* ETHEKWINI MAYOR

It's only a matter of time before the investigation unit descends to clean up the metro, which is pervaded by **fraud, money laundering and corruption**



TICK TOCK Mayor Zandile Gumede faces the possibility of arrest by the Hawks after the completion of a lengthy investigation

PHOTO: JABULANI LANGA

city integrity and investigations unit for recruiting unemployed people, promising them jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme.

The report found that the municipality deposited substantial amounts of money into the accounts of the recruits, however, the money went to the officials. The Hawks investigation at eThekwini is

based on all the reports produced by the city integrity and investigations unit and other service providers such as Integrity Forensic Solutions and NMK Forensics.

A Hawks official said Gumede is implicated in a number of the reports, including an investigation into a R200 million rand waste removal and illegal

dumping tender.

Hawks spokesperson Hangwani Mulaudzi did not comment about Gumede, but said the Hawks had dispatched the National Clean Audit Task Team to KwaZulu-Natal to investigate rampant corruption in the eThekwini council.

"We arrested three people this week and many more arrests are coming. We are going to arrest all corrupt officials, whether they are senior or junior, whether the crime committed is worth R10 or R100 million."

He said the audit task team was also operating in the Free State, North West and Limpopo, which were struggling with corruption.

THE THREATS

During the early hours of Sunday morning, Mbuso Ngcobo, head of the city integrity and investigations unit, was attacked in his home in Hillcrest, Durban. Three men allegedly gained access to Ngcobo's property, handcuffed a guard and entered the house.

A police officer with knowledge of the investigation into the security breach at Ngcobo's house said another security officer who was in the property, but not with his colleague when the criminals entered the yard, fired warning shots in the air, causing the intruders to flee.

KwaZulu-Natal police spokesperson Captain Nqobile Gwala said the police were investigating a case of robbery.

However, the police officer with knowledge of the case said Gwala was downplaying the matter. "The police are investigating a case of attempted murder. It is such a serious case that Police Minister Bheki Cele has dispatched a team of top detectives from other provinces. It was not a robbery, it was an attempt on Ngcobo's life. And we think it is directly linked to the corruption that Ngcobo and his team are investigating at the municipality. Ngcobo refused to comment.

eThekwini spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said "All what we are saying is that the city denounces what happened at the home of our employee and we urge our law enforcement agencies to leave no stone unturned to arrest the culprits. And we are appealing for the police to be given space to do their work."

Mayisela did not respond to detailed questions about the Hawks' investigation into corruption at eThekwini, in particular the focus on Gumede and Mthembu.

Ngcobo is not the only eThekwini employee to have experienced a threatening incident. Philane Shange, a senior procurement officer employed in the municipality's electricity division has been off work since November 22.

Another official in the same department told City Press that Shange was accosted by a colleague who was accompanied by three armed men and threatened with death.

"Philane handles high-value tenders and it is understandable why people would threaten him with death. The colleague and his three friends found him working out in the field and started asking him a lot of questions about tenders.

"The guns were visible and they were meant to intimidate him. He has since been booked off sick with stress."

Shange refused to comment.