

■ POLITICS

Cele – I was removed in a purge

Police Minister says dismissal over building lease deal was a smokescreen for political interference

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POLICE Minister Bheki Cele says his 2012 dismissal as national police commissioner over a building lease deal was part of a wider purge at state institutions.

“I was the first victim,” he told the Daily News in a wide-ranging interview in Durban yesterday.

“What is clear in my mind is that the lease agreement as a method to get rid of me was a fallacy. Someone else can provide the real reasons behind them wanting me out.”

Cele said he had been vindicated after the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, last week dismissed the reasons used by former president Jacob Zuma to fire him as the national police commissioner in 2012.

The inquiry was initiated by Zuma after the public protector found in 2011 that Cele’s involvement in deals to acquire police office space in the run-up to the 2010 Soccer World

Cup was “improper, unlawful, and amounted to maladministration”.

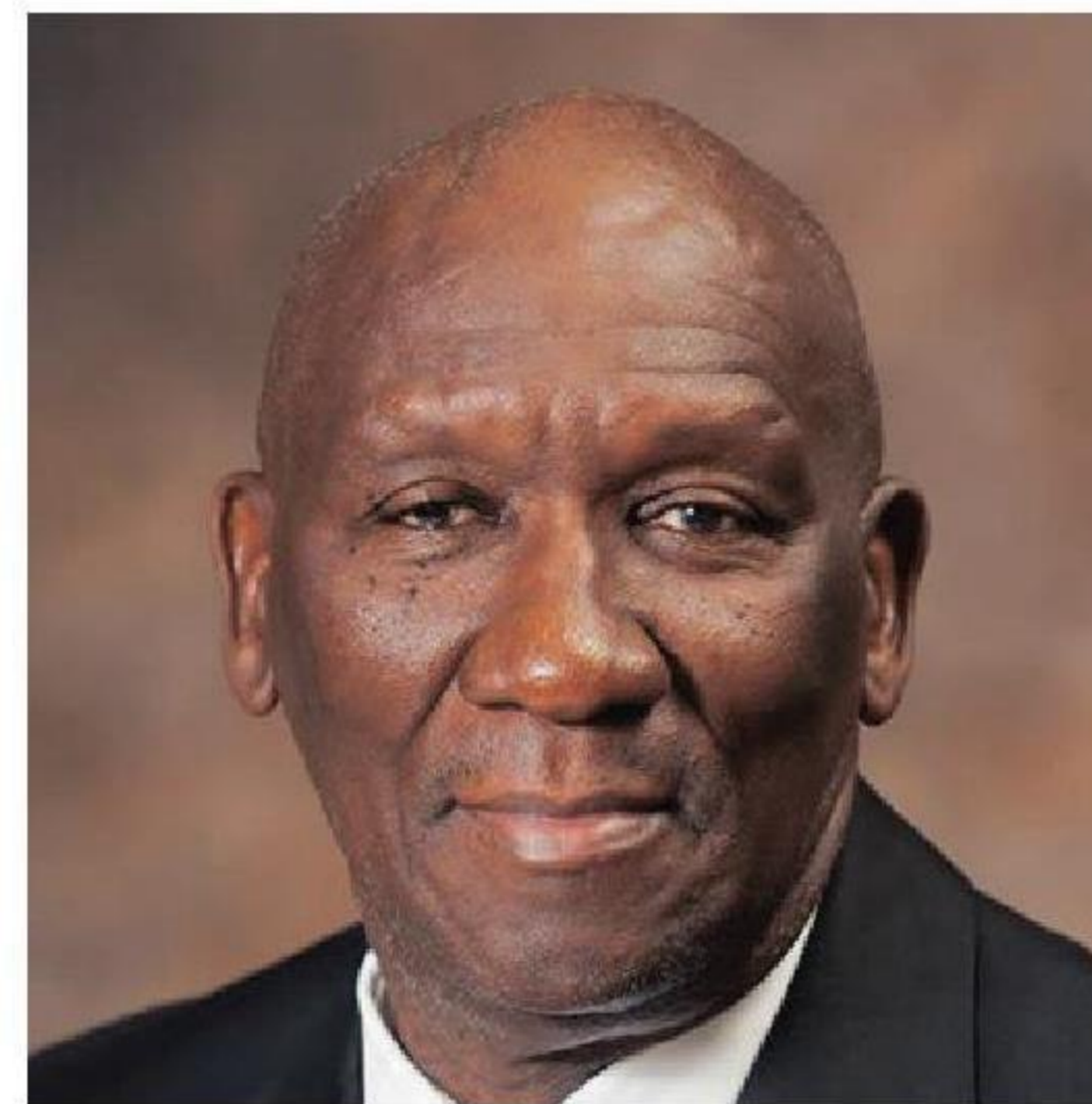
Then public protector Thuli Madonsela tabled two reports concerning two lease agreements in Pretoria and Durban worth more than R1.7 billion that the SAPS wanted to sign with businessman Roux Shabangu between March and July 2010.

Judge Jake Moloi concluded in 2012 that the evidence produced before him “proved abundantly that there was a questionable relationship between the national commissioner and Shabangu on the one hand, and between Shabangu and Public Works officials who facilitated the lease agreements on the other”.

According to last week’s court order, the inquiry report had since been “reviewed and set aside”.

Cele said others who he worked closely with had been removed.

“People like Anwar Dramat (former Hawks boss) were removed. The other person who I was instructed to remove was the late Sean Tshabalala,



Bheki Cele

the (then) divisional commissioner of the Protection and Security Services.

“I refused to remove Sean and I shifted him. I know today that was one of the reasons I was fired because I did not implement that decision.

“Sean was my comrade, he was doing a good job and I could not remove him.”

Cele said he was part of the “mass removal” of key people at the police

service and the State Security Agency.

“I was the first victim to fall, and then many of the people followed, but I stand here and I stand firm to say that the lease agreement was a fallacy.”

Cele said he had noted with concern reports of political interference by him regarding decisions being made.

He said his decision not to renew Robert McBride’s contract for the position of head of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate was not about settling of scores.

“With McBride the contract expired and the final arbitrator was the portfolio committee, which did not favour the renewal of the contract. Their report was taken to the National Assembly and they adopted the non-renewal. If anyone has a question about that then they can put it to Parliament.”

Cele said he and McBride had a good relationship.

“McBride is my comrade, he is a Durban boy and we both come from the south of Durban. He comes from

Wentworth and I come from Lamontville. When he had problems with the previous minister of police, Nathi Nhleko, we spent a lot of time talking, we have that kind of relationship. There is no personal conflict between the two of us.”

He said he had an equally good relationship with national police commissioner Khehla Sitole.

“Somebody daydreamed this issue of conflict between myself and the commissioner. The media wrote complete nonsense which said there was conflict. I have no problem working with him, but we are not sweethearts. It is a working relationship.”

Cele said he and Sitole had one-on-one meetings which they were trying to make bi-weekly.

“If there was a problem we would not be meeting so often. We do a lot of outreach programmes together. General Sitole is running the organisation with the full understanding of the minister.”