

PREMIER BIDS TO CONTROL ANC

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Mpumalanga premier Refilwe Mtsweni has won the first battle in the divided ANC province to be premier without too much sweat - but a tougher one to lead the organisation awaits.

With the general elections having come and gone, ANC factions are regrouping to take control of the party, which has known no other chairperson than Deputy President David Mabuza since 2008.

Since Mabuza's departure to Luthuli House, the ANC in the province has been in the hands of secretary Mandla Ndlovu who has been acting as chairperson.

Mpumalanga will now be gearing up for an elective conference, which promises to be a bruising affair.

Being premier, Mtsweni seems to have the upper hand. And most in the provincial executive committee (PEC) favour her - a fact which manifested when her name was submitted as number one among the three premier candidates despite her not being a PEC or regional executive member.

Working in her favour is her close relationship with Mabuza whose influence in Mpumalanga has not waned.

A senior ANC leader said that members who were opposed to Mtsweni's

Refilwe Mtsweni

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premiership were worried because of her links to Mabuza.

"What most people don't know is that Mtsweni's father is a Mabuza from the Hazyview area. Although he may not be a close relative to the deputy president, comrades are worried about a Mabuza taking over again. Mtsweni is her mother's surname," the leader said.

City Press could not confirm independently that Mtsweni is a relative of Mabuza.

A lobbyist in Mtsweni's camp told City Press there was a rumour that her inauguration at Sy Mthimunye Stadium in Ackerville near eMalahleni would be disrupted. But this claim was denied by Mtsweni's spokesperson, Zibonele Mncwango, who said that the security cluster was involved and if there had been any threat, the venue would have been changed.

Mncwango said rumours that a plenary meeting for the event was disrupted were untrue.

"All stakeholders are on board to make this a memorable event," Mncwango said.

Ndlovu also downplayed the rumour.

"That's not true and it's not confirmed.

There's no reason for disruption and democracy must be respected."

Mtsweni's lobbyist said they had the upper hand in the battle to win the ANC.

"We've got everything under control," he said, "many regions are behind our campaign."

He said that the chairpersons of Gert Sibande (Muzi Chirwa who also executive mayor), Ehlanzeni (Ngrayi Ngwenya) and Bohlabela (Gillion Mashego who is public works MEC) as well as the ANC Youth League were rallying behind Mtsweni.

"The Nkangala region is divided, but we're working on it," he said.

He said that discussion on the composition of the top five positions was still ongoing but the camp had reached a consensus that the treasury position should be given to a comrade in Ehlanzeni and that the time had come for the Gert Sibande region to get a position in the secretariat or deputy chairpersonship.

"The treasurer position has been going to Gert Sibande for too long now. That's why there's a feeling that this region must get another position," he said.

On the other hand, Mpumalanga cooperative governance and traditional affairs head of department Peter Nyoni has not thrown in the towel in his campaign to be provincial chairperson, despite his group's high court application to dissolve the PEC being turned down recently.

Nyoni's camp believes that Mtsweni was not senior enough in the ANC to be provincial chairperson and also that it was an indictment on the PEC not to have a premier coming from one of their own.

"This means the PEC or Mabuza has failed to groom a leader. She wants to be a chairperson but has never served in any structure," said a Nyoni sympathiser. "We're armed with nothing, but our determination will see us through in the battle."