

More arrests likely in probe into false medical claims

President extends mandate to widen the investigation

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More arrests can be expected in a year-long investigation into a number of lawyers suspected of unscrupulously milking the provincial state's health system, the Special Investigating Unit said on Wednesday.

SIU spokesperson Nazreen Pandor said the presidential proclamation mandating them to investigate had been amended to extend the scope and ambit of investigation and included "new, extended terms of reference".

Pandor said: "The SIU has worked together with other law enforcement agencies including the SAPS who have

since effected at least two arrests in the Eastern Cape in relation to this investigation.

"More arrests by the SAPS are expected."

The original proclamation was issued on July 13 2018 and instructed the SIU to investigate allegations relating to the affairs of the office of the state attorney, which included an investigation into a "so-called unscrupulous lawyer who represented claimants in lodging medico-legal claims against the health department".

Pandor said: "However, in the course of investigations, a need arose for the extension of the original proclamation, in order to empower the SIU to investigate further allegations."

On Tuesday President Cyril Ramaphosa also signed several proclamations for SIU investigations into fleet, fuel and asset mismanagement at Sassa.

Under the new proclamations, the SIU will investigate suspected fraud at the SA Heritage Resources Agency around improvements to Steve Biko and Robert Sobukwe's graves, and at the provincial departments of public works and health around procurement of prefabricated classrooms.

Premier Oscar Mabuyane's spokesperson Mvusiwekhaya Sicwetsha said: "The premier deems this decision a good step that will ensure proper investigation of allegations so that those found to be in the wrong will be held accountable.

"This is part of the renewal work to ensure that the public purse is protected from wrongdoing.

"Premier Mabuyane encourages all those with information about the alleged incidents to co-operate with the SIU investigation."