

It goes to show: the cops have got their eye on ... the cops

MOIRA LEVY'S NOTES FROM THE HOUSE

G. MICHALAKIS (DA) asked the Minister of State Security whether her department has instituted any forensic and/or other investigations into the breaches of financial and other controls regarding the Principal Agent Network (Pan) project and Special Operations.

He also wanted to know if this had resulted in any prosecutions. The minister assured Michalakis that the State Security Agency (SSA) is onto it and has been since June 2018. However, regrettably, SSA's chances of success are hampered by corrupt networks operational within the SSA.

These have been in operation for "a period of years", causing "serious economic losses to the state through illegal financial flows, which severely affected the operational capability of the organisation to discharge its constitutional mandate".

That is not encouraging, but the minister has some good news. A multi-disciplinary team has been established to tackle these crime networks operating within the SSA "and both administrative and criminal actions are underway.

"An inquiry has been registered with the South African Police Services' Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations on both the Pan and the activities of the Chief Directorate Special Operations. Approximately 30 individuals, in-

cluding current and former SSA members, as well as non-SSA members who were complicit in some activities, have been directly and indirectly implicated." A total of eight of these SSA criminals have been suspended. Disciplinary procedures are underway.

DEPT OWED ALMOST R80 MLN

State-owned land and property falls under the Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure, which recently confirmed that R76 854 966,40 is outstanding in unpaid rent for properties under the department's custodianship. Asked what the department is going to do about this, the minister announced that an acquisition and disposal framework has been developed according to Section 217 of the Constitution. She did not elaborate further, so it is not known if she, or anyone else, understands what that is.

In addition, national Treasury has appointed new officials in the office of the chief procurement officer and "consequently there will have to be further engagements before finalisation". And the department's real-estate management branch regularly convenes engagements with provinces to discuss matters in the leasing and letting environment, she said.

It may be of interest to learn that worst defaulter when it comes to paying rent for leasing state property through the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is Telkom SA, which

owes the department more than R8 million. Since the 2017/18 final year, the department has incurred just under R50 000 in legal fees for collecting debt from outstanding rent, with R22 500 incurred since April.

ESKOM PLAGUED BY CABLE THEFT

According to information received from Eskom, by the end of the latest financial year it was owed R19,9 billion by municipalities. By August this had increased to R23,5 billion.

So what can be done to tackle Eskom's mounting debt, the minister was asked in a parliamentary question from the EFF? It was suggested that a good place to start is cable theft. Apparently that has seen a rapid increase in recent years.

In the 2018/19 financial year there were 5 150 incidents of cable theft and 119 arrests. Why so few arrests? It is not cost effective for Eskom to protect its network in isolated parts of the country, the minister replied. Security is deployed only in high-risk areas where teams work with SAPS and other intelligence departments.

Eskom cable has also been clearly marked so that it is easily identifiable at scrap dealers and during police raids. Legislation has been changed so that cable theft is now recognised as a serious economic offence, with minimum sentences. Yet in the 2018/19 financial year, losses of conductor theft, cabling and related equipment is said to have

totalled R105 million.

We can only hope that Eskom does not seriously believe that bringing a halt to cable theft will make a dent in its debt. Before targeting thieves on the street, find and bring to book the criminals within Eskom.

PURSUING ZAMA ZAMAS

Raids conducted on illegal miners or "Zama Zamas" are led by specialised police units because there are many dangers involved in trying to police illegal and illicit mining and the heavily armed groups who oversee them.

Who are these "specialised police units", and what do they cost the state? Is this effort really worth it if you consider that between April 1, 2018, and August 31, 2019, a total of 1 275 illegal miners were successfully prosecuted.

About half (935) were deported, which can take up to 30 days and cost a lot in flights. For example, a total of R33 070 629,90 was spent during the 2018/19 financial year and another R8 956 713,41 was incurred between April 1, 2019, and August 31, 2019, to pay for chartered flights or air tickets to return undocumented migrants. This is not only the Zama Zamas. At least some people benefit from this extensive undertaking: Air Angola; Ethiopian Airways; Kenyan Airways; LAN Airline, which returns illegals from Peru; Lantam, for those from Guyana; Linhas Airways, for illegal Bolivians; and Rwanda Airlines and Turkish Airlines.

South African Airways gets a small cut of the business. It returns illegals from Columbia and Australia.

KEEPING AN EYE ON WATER

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) has carried out an in-depth analysis of the country's water resource availability to establish the areas that are already experiencing water stress; those that are likely to be under water stress; and those that can expect to be under water stress in five to 10 years.

The DWS has also carried out analyses to determine the status of water resources and water services infrastructure to ensure that communities are provided with water services as and when they need it ("taking into consideration the limited resources available").

All three tiers of government — national, provincial and local — are involved, as well as other water sector entities such as water boards and water service providers, "to ensure sustainable water services to all stressed areas".

It sounds good, but clearly it is not working. At the level of municipalities, the annual Municipal Strategic Self-Assessment (MuSSA) conducted at all water services authorities (WSAs) indicated that just under half (44%) of the WSAs had an immediate water shortage where demand exceeds the supply by 20%.

At provincial level, research in KZN indicated that almost 80% of all the

WSAs has a water shortage where the demand exceeds the supply by 10% of their needs, and this is likely to increase to just over 90% in the next 10 years if nothing is done.

TAKING LOCAL CRIME SERIOUSLY

A question put to the Minister of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs asked what steps her department is taking to "fight the scourge of maladministration such as mismanagement of municipal finances, fraud and corruption, in view of the urgent need to rethink innovative ways of curbing corruption and other administrative malpractices within municipalities?"

Here is proof that if you ask a silly question you are bound to get a silly answer. First, a "background" to this problem is provided. It makes no mention of corruption, state capture, misappropriation of funds. What we are told is: "In terms of Section 62 of the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, the accounting officer must ensure that disciplinary or, when appropriate, criminal proceedings are instituted against any official of the municipality who has allegedly committed an act of financial misconduct." Well, now that's clear.

To reinforce its efforts in the fight against corruption, we are told the department is rolling out a training programme for municipalities on the Local Government Anti-Corruption Strategy as well as the Municipal Integrity

Framework. The former "sets out the strategic objectives to be pursued by municipalities in terms of preventing and combating corruption", while the latter focuses on, well, "integrity".

Moreover, the department recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) "with a view to combat (sic) moral decay at municipalities in order to promote the development of a caring society".

Why then, as of July, are the Hawks investigating 250 cases of the misuse of funds in municipalities? Maybe it has something to do with "the implementation of recommendations emanating from forensic reports". We are told: "Most of the forensic reports made recommendations that certain remedial or other corrective measures should be taken. However, some municipalities have failed to implement resolutions emanating from these reports."

There is more.

We are reminded that there are municipalities that invested funds with a mutual bank, which is contrary to the Municipal Finance Management Act and Municipal Investment Regulations. Some of the officials implicated are on precautionary suspension, while others have resigned from their positions.

Regarding the VBS Bank saga, the Hawks have registered a total of five cases of impropriety and are investigating two inquiries. They assure us "investigations are at an advanced stage".