

Is this goodbye for De Lille?

Speculation is rife that Patricia de Lille – whose future in Cabinet is uncertain – has **had enough of politics** and aims to retire at the end of the year

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Patricia de Lille, the minister of public works and infrastructure and leader of the Good Party, is apparently considering bowing out of political life after this year's municipal elections.

Sources close to her claim that she mentioned in casual conversation that she wanted to retire by the end of the year.

When City Press asked the 70-year-old about this, De Lille expressed annoyance at the rumours and at those presuming to be privy to her intentions.

However, she did not outright deny them.

"I'll announce my plans to retire myself, if and when that time comes, and directly to the people of the country. I'm not going to rely on faceless, nameless so-called 'sources' to make it [the announcement]."

Officials in De Lille's department are being probed by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) to determine whether they were involved in the awarding of a tender of R37 million for the erection of a flimsy fence at the Beitbridge border post.



Patricia de Lille

According to an order made by the special tribunal in October last year, the contractors must repay the money they received for the construction of the 40km fence between South Africa and Zimbabwe because it does not meet the required standards.

The SIU, which found that there were several irregularities in the awarding of the contract, is investigating whether senior officials in the department followed the prescribed procedures for doing so.

De Lille's future in Cabinet is apparently also in jeopardy.

ANC sources claim that she will not survive a Cabinet reshuffle, which many expect will be made by President Cyril Ramaphosa soon after he receives the SIU report on Health Minister Zweli Mkhize's involvement in the awarding of a R150 million contract to Digital

Vibes, an obscure communications company that has ties to Mkhize and his family.

Mkhize has been on special leave since last month. The expectation is that he will receive his marching orders if the SIU implicates him directly in the Digital Vibes saga.

Small Business Development Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni has also been acting as minister in the

presidency since January, after Jackson Mthembu passed away due to Covid-19.

ANC sources say De Lille may make way for an ANC official from KwaZulu-Natal, where Ramaphosa has to consolidate his support after the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma on Wednesday night. Riots have been raging in the province ever since.

De Lille's Good Party last week started interviewing candidates for the October 27 local government elections.

Interviews for candidates for councillors and mayors in the Saldanha Bay Municipality in the Western Cape took place on Friday.

De Lille's former party, the Independent Democrats, enjoyed strong support in the mid-2000s on the west coast.

Reliable sources in Saldanha said that if De Lille retired, it would come as a big shock, since she was the face of the party. Her resignation could lead the party's first election conference early next year into faction fighting.

According to De Lille, plans to hold an election conference this year were thwarted by Disaster Management Act regulations enacted in response to Covid-19, which delayed the establishment of branches.

"The branch structures are needed to nominate candidates for this conference," she said.

The Good Party, which was established in December 2018 after De Lille resigned as the DA mayor of Cape Town, participated in its first election in May 2019.

The party won a total of 70 408 votes in the general election, which were enough to gain it two seats in Parliament.

The party won one seat in the Western Cape legislature.