

The Herald

Editorial Comment

Our leaders must set an example and cough up on rental debts

It is simply shameful that serving and former ministers and members of parliament have failed to settle their rental bills with the state. In a reply to a question to public works minister Patricia de Lille by IFP Mthokozisi Nxumalo, it was revealed that R3bn was owed to the department by various entities including government departments, state-owned companies, municipalities and big companies.

This staggering amount includes R8m which is money owed by current and former MPs.

The Herald's sister publication Sunday Times reported that these debtors include some of the big names in SA politics including Nomvula Mokonyane, Fikile Mbalula, Bathabile Dlamini, Malusi Gigaba, Buti Manamela and Kebby Maphatsoe.

De Lille has fired off several letters of demand, pleading with them to pay what is due to the state, but many of the errant debtors have failed to do so.

There appear to be two problems: One is that the public works department's processes of ensuring members of government pay what they ought to are flawed. The second is a culture of wanting everything free by virtue of their standing in government.

Granted, some may genuinely not have known they owed money to the state, though it is hard to believe that one would not keep abreast with one's own financial matters.

The government's systems and policies are far from perfect and this is proof that they must be bolstered to ensure that those employed by the government especially be made to pay what they owe in good time — be it through payment arrangements, salary deductions or taking from their pensions if they have left the employ of the state.

It is simply inconceivable that an employee of government is able to owe the very state that pays his or her salary every month.

If leaders in society fail to cough up, how can we expect the rest to follow suit?

Failure to deal with this matter quickly further encourages a culture of impunity which, we know, is already deeply entrenched in the state.