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Author: Sizwe Sama
Yende

MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENTS LOST R500M IN PPE CORRUPTION – SIU

SIZWE SAMA YENDE

sizwe.yende@citypress.co.za

Mpumalanga government departments and municipalities have lost R520 million in Covid-19-related malfeasance, according to the Special Investigating Unit (SIU).

The recent arrest of six public works, roads and transport officials and suppliers for personal protective equipment (PPE) fraud, corruption and money laundering charges involving R1.3 million is just the tip of the iceberg.

SIU spokesperson Kaizer Kganyago said the corruption-busting unit had referred nine matters to the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority to charge and prosecute those implicated in plundering provincial government coffers through PPE procurement during the pandemic.

The R500 million was siphoned from the departments of health, cooperative governance and traditional affairs, education, culture, sports and recreation, community safety, security and liaison, and the Govan Mbeki Local Municipality in Secunda.

The nature of the malfeasance committed by heads of department, officials and suppliers, Kganyago said, included irregular payments, fraud, corruption, money laundering, the contravention of the Municipal Finance Management Act, Prevention and Combatting of Corrupt Activities Act and the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA).

Last week, the Hawks arrested the provincial public works, roads and transport official Bandile Jacob Ngcobo, a state accountant, Siphon Monareng (the acting chief director: immovable assets management) and Macdonald Buko Sigudla (deputy director: facilities).

The officials were arrested alongside Tshidi Susan Sedibe, the sole director of Superia Services Trading, whose company had been contracted to render fumigation-related services; Anthony Mashego, the sole director of Maganeleni Trading and Projects; and Whisky Khumalo, the sole director of Makhula Span Trading. Maganeleni and Makhula were contracted to render PPE-related services at the department.

"As the SIU sifted through bank records, the probe found that Maganeleni had made numerous potentially corrupt payments to Monareng, and Superia had also made numerous potentially corrupt payments to Sigudla," Kganyago said.

He added that the bank records also indicated that Superia had made numerous potentially corrupt payments to Ngcobo.



LOOTERS

The Mpumalanga provincial government lost millions of rands meant for personal protective equipment, but now the alleged looters are facing the music in court

PHOTO: DARREN STEWART / GALLO IMAGES

The SIU's investigation found that there was fraudulent invoicing for services that were not rendered and the price was inflated.

"In an instance where service providers were contracted to do fumigations, there was fraudulent inflation of square metres claimed for, which resulted in the department paying more than what it should have," Kganyago said.

The Nelspruit Magistrates' Court released the six on R10 000 bail each on October 5. They will return to court on November 2.

In June this year, the Hawks arrested Samukelo Ngubane (50), the head of the Mpumalanga cooperative governance and traditional affairs department. This was after he had handed himself in after being charged for flouting the law in the awarding of an R5.9 million contract to supply PPEs.

Ngubane's arrest came six days after that of the department's deputy director, Raymond Manzini; his brother Chris Manzini; and the director of Gatjeni Trading, Moses Ndlovu, for the same tender.

The SIU said its investigation had revealed that Gatjeni Trading was the only company asked for a quote to supply and deliver PPE in March 2020.

Raymond Manzini allegedly financed the purchase,

in contravention of the provisions of the Prevention and Combatting of Corrupt Activities Act. Ngubane was released on R10 000 bail while the Manzini brothers and Ndlovu were bailed out for R15 000.

On February 25, the Hawks arrested Jabulani Rolland Nkosi (58), the chief director in the provincial health department, for contravention of the PFMA for allegedly flouting the procurement procedures in acquiring PPEs valued at R22 million. Nkosi procured the PPEs in May 2020, on behalf of the education department where he was the acting head.

He was granted R10 000 bail when he appeared in the Nelspruit Magistrates' Court.

This week, the Special Tribunal sat in the Mbombela High Court to hear testimony pertaining to the alleged overcharging for PPE items by Zeelwa Trading to the provincial department of social development.

The SIU alleges that it seeks to recover a total of R798 243 from Zeelwa and seeks an order that the company's invoice be declared invalid, reviewed and set aside.

The tribunal's spokesperson, Selby Makgotho, said that judgment would be issued tomorrow.