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SIPHO Ronny Monareng is demanding R5 million from Police Minister Bheki Cele.

Public Works official sues Cele for R5m over photo

TSHWARELO HUNTER MOGAKANE

MPUMALANGA Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport deputy director Siphonhony Monareng is demanding R5 million from Police Minister Bheki Cele for public humiliation over his photo allegedly being "unlawfully" circulated on social media.

Monareng, 50, is one of the government officials who have become part of arrests in a recent sweeping anti-corruption campaign involving the SAPS and the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation (Hawks) unit in Mpumalanga.

He was arrested on September 28 alongside colleagues Macdonald Boto Sigudla, 43, Bandle Jacob Ngebo, 41, and suppliers Maganleng Anthony Mashego, 43, Whiskey Delisa Khumalo, 45, and Tshidi Suzen Sedibe, 43.

They appeared before the Nelspruit Magistrate's Court on the day of their arrest, facing charges of corruption, fraud and money laundering relating to Covid-19 tenders.

"It is alleged that during the Covid-19 pandemic, Monareng colluded with company directors who made misrepresentation and submitted claims to the Department of Public Works for services which were never rendered, thus prejudiced the department an amount of R1.38 million.

"The scope of corruption expanded to other officials and company directors who also benefited," said provincial Hawks spokesperson Captain Dineo Sekgotodi.

Following his arrest, Monareng instructed his lawyers, Simelane-Mthembu HJG Attorneys, to institute legal action against Cele and four others, in which he alleged he was photographed under suspicious circumstances with the intention of distributing his image to the media.

"On or about the 28th of September 2022 our client was invited by Hawks officials who informed him that they needed to interview him.

"On arrival, he was told ... that he was now under arrest. Our client was directed to lean in front of a special wall wherein a photo of him was taken. When our client enquired about the taking of the photos, he was told that it was part of processing measures and for official records," a letter says.

The attorneys alleged that Sekgotodi shared the picture on a Hawks media WhatsApp group along with a press release. "The mainstream print and electronic media have used and continue to use the official photos captured by the Hawks official in his official duties ... and thereon the property of the state (the photos) has been distributed to the media to be used for news headlines," the attorneys say.

The attorneys told Cele and the four others that they were instructed to demand a formal apology from the Hawks, which should be tendered within 60 days. "Such apology (must) be issued in the same media and platform that was used to humiliate and degrade the dignity of our client. The Hawks (must) pay an amount of R5 000 000 in compensation for damages as a result of the breach of the fundamental rights of our clients."

Cele's spokesperson Lirandzu Themba said they were yet to receive the letter of demand. Monareng's attorneys insisted that the letter of demand had been received by the offices of all involved in the legal matter.

Sekgotodi declined to comment on the matter.