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The big departments reshuffle

by **KGOTATHSO MADISA**

● The National Treasury has drafted a raft of proposals to drastically reduce the number of government departments and entities to cut spending.

The aim is the closure or merging of departments and entities that serve a similar mandate or are unlikely to fulfil their mandates.

The Sunday Times understands that the proposals were prepared for a secret meeting at Spier Wine Farm in Stellenbosch. President Cyril Ramaphosa met finance minister Enoch Godongwana, Treasury officials and top officials from the Reserve Bank amid the government's scrambles to curb its spending as national debt hits R4.7 trillion.

The proposals, if accepted, could save the country about R17bn in the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF). This would inevitably lead to retrenchments.

There is likely to be a pushback as the proposals are said to be unpopular with the government and the governing ANC.

The head of the ANC subcommittee on economic transformation and minister of human settlements Mmamoloko Kubayi said she could not comment as she was not part of the discussions. The Treasury also declined to comment.

The reconfiguration of the state was mooted by Ramaphosa in his "Thuma Mina" maiden state of the nation address in February 2018, when he said: "We will therefore initiate a process to review the configuration, number and size of national government departments" to ensure that "the structure and size of the state is optimally suited to meet the needs of the people and ensure the most efficient allocation of public resources".

The Sunday Times can reveal that the Treasury has been working on proposals for a reconfiguration – a move with far-reaching implications if adopted. Among them is the proposal to close the department of sports, arts & culture and incorporate it in the department of basic education at national and provincial level. This is envisioned to save

Mergers, redundancies on cards after meeting on state spending cuts



Finance minister Enoch Godongwana.

the state more than R700m in the MTEF.

There is also a proposal to close the department of public works & infrastructure, leaving departments to manage their own buildings and asset registries.

The suggested merging of the department of tourism with trade, industry & competition, as they serve similar mandates, would bring an envisioned saving of about R1bn. The department of women, youth & persons with disabilities is proposed to be turned into divisions in the Presidency or department of social development (DSD) as there is no justification for it to be a full department.

The same is proposed for the department of planning, monitoring & evaluation, which is said to be without a clear mandate and could be merged with either the Presidency or the department of public service & administration (DPSA).

It is understood Government Communications & Information Services (GCIS) would become a division in the Presidency.

At least R1.4bn would be saved by the closure and merger of the three departments to the Presidency, DSD and DPSA.

According to insiders, there was also a view that the department of public enterprises (DPE), which manages most of the country's SOEs, has led to misalignment between policy and governance and that it should be closed. The SOEs under it would be moved to relevant policy departments. A successful decision could see a R1bn saving, the Sunday Times understands.

The department of small business development should become a division in the DTIC, which could fully implement its mandate, a suggested saving of R150m.

Entities that could be merged or closed include the Road Traffic Management Corporation, which would go to the department of transport, saving about R700m.

The government is also understood to be proposing merging Brand SA, South African Tourism, Trade Investment SA, Export Marketing and Investment Assistance and the department of international relations & co-operation's foreign marketing programme to establish a new entity. This would mean a possible saving of about R3bn.

At least R700m could be saved by establishing a single human rights body that could house the South African Human Rights Commission, the commissions for gender equality and for the promotion and protection of the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities as well as the Pan South African Language Board, Denel and the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Ammcor) could be merged to establish a new entity, with an envisioned R2bn saving.

DA MP Dion George said his party has always maintained the cabinet is bloated.

"We support the rationalisation but the key thing here is which department should you shut down and which one should you keep. I think it's possible that the government is sitting up and taking the situation seriously. I think the government is now in panic mode because this has been brewing for a very long time and the minister has been sending the signal, but I don't think his cabinet colleagues have been listening." – Additional reporting by Amanda Khoza



Search and rescue teams continue to look for survivors after a 6.8 magnitude earthquake that killed more than 1,000 people in Marrakesh, Morocco, yesterday. Picture: Abu Adem Muhammed/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

● Rescuers dug through rubble for survivors in collapsed houses in remote mountain villages of Morocco yesterday in the wake of the country's deadliest earthquake for more than six decades, which killed more than 1,000 people.

Rescuers dig for survivors after Morocco quake

The quake, which struck in Morocco's