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R50k bribe 'ends' the good times for businessman

By KGOMOTSO MEDUPE

A MPUMALANGA businessman will face the full might of law after he attempted to bribe a Special Investigating Unit (SIU) official to make a Covid-19 investigation disappear.

Sentencing for Sipho Mapalala began on Thursday, 23 March in the Mbombela Magistrates Court following his guilty plea in January.

According to National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) spokeswoman Monica Nyuswa, they secured a guilty plea from Mapalala on charges of corruption and bribery of a SIU investigator to make a Covid-19 procurement investigation against Gugu Bulunga go away.

She said Mapalala was arrested in August 2021 during a joint oper-

ation with the Hawks when he was delivering a bribe of R50 000 to the investigator.

"The attempted bribe follows an SIU investigation in the affairs of the Mpumalanga Department of Public Works, Roads, and Transport, under Proclamation R23 of 2020, which uncovered procurement irregularities.

"The SIU investigations revealed that the department contracted a service provider in the 2017/18 financial year for pest control services. However, when a National State of Disaster was declared, the department varied the contract to include disinfection services in the Ehlanzeni District," she said.

Nyuswa said the disinfection services were for buildings owned and managed by the

Mpumalanga provincial government in the said district and after the disinfection, the service provider received multiple payments amounting to R4,8 million.

She said the first payment was R1,3 million in July 2020 and was followed by several payments amounting to R3,5 million.

"On 5 August 2021, the SIU interviewed Bulunga, a director of Mbombela Integrated and Thandolwani Transport and Properties. Bulunga was questioned about payments made to government officials and properties bought for government officials. Bulunga denied the allegations.

Hours after the interview, Mapalala called an SIU investigator to declare that he is prepared to do anything to make the matter against Bulunga go away," said

Nyuswa.

She said that in his guilty plea statement, Mapalala admitted that his actions were against the law and he knew it was wrong to provide money or payment to the investigator, as she was an official of the SIU.

He said he gave this money to the investigator to compensate her and the other people the investigator referred to, to compensate them to crush the involvement of Gugu Bulunga.

"I wanted to help Gugu get out of the mess which caused her severe anxiety and the threat to her life.

"I therefore admit that I corrupted SIU investigator and that my actions were unlawful and punishable," he wrote in his plea statement.