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# Bizarre KZN reshuffle hints at former allies' rift

MEC Ntuthuko Mahlaba, recently transferred from human settlements & public works to sports, arts & culture, says it was a strategic reshuffle. Picture: Sandle Ndlovu

By ZIMASA MATIWANE

● Former KwaZulu-Natal MEC of public works Dr Ntuthuko Mahlaba was demoted to the department of sports, arts & culture on the day he was to unveil 50 posters bearing his face across the province.

Strangely, Mahlaba's reshuffle and the appointment of his successor Siphoniso Nkosi was announced by acting premier and health MEC Nomagugu Simelane-Zulu.

Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube's office said the head of the executive was in Kenya on Tuesday when Simelane-Zulu announced the changes. She returned a day later. Her office did not respond when asked why the announcement could not wait another day.

Mahlaba's redeployment is widely seen as a demotion because the sports department has a much smaller budget and does not give the principal as much exposure as the public works & human settlements portfolio.

ANC insiders say the reshuffle was on instruction from provincial leaders after an alleged fallout between Mahlaba and his former allies provincial secretary Bheki Mtolo and chair Siboniso Duma. ANC leaders say Dube-Ncube's absence on the day was deliberate as she did not want to be caught in the power struggle.

Dube-Ncube's office denied this. KZN party leaders the Sunday Times



A billboard that was going to be unveiled bearing the image of Ntuthuko Mahlaba, who was human settlements and public works MEC. Picture: Supplied

spoke to said Mahlaba's detractors accuse him of having lobbied Luthuli House to disband the ANC provincial executive committee (PEC) ahead of a visit by the national working committee (NWC).

Mahlaba's removal has been traced back to cracks in KZN's ANC leadership that recently culminated in a strong push for disbandment of the PEC.

Mahlaba was conspicuous by his absence at the announcement of the provincial cabinet changes on Tuesday.

He told the Sunday Times he was on duty when the announcement was made.

"I was on my way to meet amakhosi in Ulundi on the day of the cabinet changes. When I got back the judge had left – I was 10 minutes away."

He refused to comment on how much the posters cost and what would happen to them.

Several PEC members who spoke to the Sunday Times said the initial decision was to remove Mahlaba from cabinet.

"That was reversed because he has the ear of the national leadership and removing him without reason is dangerous. After these NWC visits, the national leadership will make a decision.

"Getting rid of him before without reason, when there's an outstanding decision from national about what to do about KZN, only reinforces rumours that Mtolo is a bully mistreating others," an insider said.

Mahlaba is said to have formed alliances with members who are dissatisfied with Mtolo's leadership style.

Mtolo is said to be a "bully", "harsh" and "difficult to deal with" by some who believe he is taking the ANC on a destructive path.

Speaking to the Sunday Times this week,

Mtolo said there was no truth to such allegations. He denied there was ever a decision to remove Mahlaba, adding it was untrue that Mahlaba was leading a disbandment campaign against the PEC.

He attributed such a narrative to a "few individuals who are bitter about the outcomes of the provincial conference, who have not recovered from that democratic process of our movement and are doing everything in their power to discredit our leadership, but they will fail".

Mahlaba said he was not campaigning against the Mtolo-led PEC. Neither was he unhappy about his move to arts and culture.

"People must not think there is a fight in the ANC – arts and culture is a strategic department and my deployment there is to elevate it.

"I have never spoken to anyone at national against the leadership I'm part of. Speaking to national is the responsibility of the provincial secretary and we are satisfied with his representation," he said.

Mahlaba also denied falling out with Mtolo. "Anyone will tell you I was chairing the caucus that led to the election of Duma and Mtolo: we are still together, we are fine. We are united towards winning the elections. People are trying to create a narrative that is outside the ANC, but we are working well together, we are united," he said.