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FREE STATE PREMIER IN 'HOT WATER'

Free State Premier Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae and her husband have been accused of **tender corruption and bribery**

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The recent allegations of corruption against Free State Premier Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae and her husband, speaker of the Mangaung Council Lawrence Mathae, have landed them in hot water with the ANC.

City Press can reveal that the ANC is contemplating disciplinary action against the couple after the integrity committee informed the office of the secretary-general of its intention to summon the premier to account.

Insiders say the committee has been hard at work collecting data about the incident and believes that Letsoha-Mathae has violated the party's regulations.

"Remember that the integrity committee doesn't only wait for complaints, but can also collect its own data and summon people to appear before the party.

"This committee is the custodian of the party's integrity. Any time it feels that the party's being compromised by the actions or behaviour of party members, it can step in through the secretary-general's office," said a source, adding that the allegations against Letsoha-Mathae and her husband were considered to be very serious and warranted action.

City Press reported last week that the termination of a multimillion-rand road tender in Tseapit, Free State, had laid bare claims of corruption implicating the couple.

City Press has learnt that the allegations have also caught the attention of the Hawks, which have been trying to interview Letsoha-Mathae and her husband.

This came after WhatsApp messages alleging that the couple had accepted a bribe in the form of a Mercedes-Benz V300d and a BMW 7 Series were circulated after the department of community safety, roads and transport terminated a road contract won by local businessperson Patrick Phuti's New Beginning company.

The proof of payment circulating in various political groups indicates that Phuti paid for not only the two cars, but also the transportation of Letsoha-Mathae's supporters to attend the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) national conference, which was held at Nasrec in July 2023.

The invoices also indicate that Phuti paid R400 000 for another event during the 2023 project launch for the department of public works, roads and transport, where Letsoha-Mathae was the MEC.

In addition, City Press understands that another company known as Tau Pele paid Phuti more than R2 million to deliver to the premier, which would facilitate taking over of the construction of the Excelsior road in Tseapit.

Phuti also paid taxis to transport Letsoha-Mathae's staff from Welkom to Johannesburg for the ANCWL conference.

Moreover, in WhatsApp chats, Phuti claimed to have spent more than R4.5 million on various projects on the instructions of Letsoha-Mathae. However, he became angry when his contract was

terminated and asked the premier and her husband what he had done to deserve such treatment.

In what is purported to be Letsoha-Mathae's response to his WhatsApp query, the premier said that they had never agreed that the money would be a loan.

"Afternoon Patrick, apologies for the delay in response to the message. I don't agree with your statement about the day that we met for our discussion regarding the subcontract work and the request to assist with the ANCWL. After our meeting on Monday, 10 July, you sent a WhatsApp that you were at the ANCWL to submit the necessary documents," read her message.

She wrote that they had never discussed "this as a loan and that this was part of the relationship with the subcontract work".

The messages indicate that the two discussed the status and feedback on the draft subcontract agreement.

"Only to realise and read on Friday morning that you have already appointed a project manager (Cornelius Adriaan le Roux).

"The project cash flow indicated that there was a profit margin of R54 million for the project and you signed an agreement with SP Lenong, who will hire and pay for equipment and all machinery to execute the project. The plant hire [costs] R15 million to execute the work and this was already sent on Tuesday, 15 August from CP Advisers," read Letsoha-Mathae's message to Phuti.

However, City Press could not independently verify the authenticity of the messages, as the premier failed to respond to our inquiry.

Both Letsoha-Mathae and Lawrence have since released an individual statement denying the allegations last week.

"The premier wishes to categorically distance herself from these malicious and unfounded allegations levelled against her and implores the individual or individuals from the said establishment to approach law enforcement agencies to lay charges in support of his/her allegations.

"Furthermore, the premier wishes to refrain from making any comments regarding this matter, as advised by her legal representatives," read Letsoha-Mathae's statement.

She said she was committed to clean governance and reiterated that service providers that failed to complete projects for which they had been appointed would have no space in this administration.

"The allegations imply that I have engaged in corrupt practices in exchange for government contracts.

"I want to emphasise that I have never participated in any illicit activity with Phuti or any other individual or entity," stated

Lawrence. He added that he was committed to ethical governance and public service.

ANC spokesperson Mahlengi Bhengu-Motsiri confirmed that the ANC was taking the matter of the allegations against the premier very seriously. She said that whenever allegations of this nature were made against any of the party's members, it followed the procedures to hold them to account.



ACCUSED
Lawrence Mathae
PHOTO: FACEBOOK



IMPLICATED
Free State premier
Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae