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Title: Inspectors find no proof of foreigners illegally occupying Mahikeng Airport

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Inspectors find no proof of foreigners illegally

By **Setumo Stone**

The furore over foreign nationals illegally occupying aviation facilities at the Mahikeng George Dick Montshioa International Airport in North West has turned out to be a damp squib, potentially embarrassing to the

seemingly overzealous North West community safety and transport MEC Mosimanegape Morweng.

A video of Morweng on Tuesday conducting oversight at the airport was leaked on social media, containing claims that Nigerian nationals had unauthorised access to the aviation facilities, including conducting flights.

This sparked fears of a catastrophic national security failure by the provincial government and demands for accountability.

On Wednesday, a heavy police contingent, including immigration officers and state security agents, descended on the airport to conduct inspections, including the search of an alleged drug cargo. But the authorities were sent on a wild goose chase.

"The objectives of the operation were to enforce immigration laws and monitor illegal migration as well as the illegal employment of foreigners. Enforcing compliance with the conditions under which they were allowed into the country," read the internal memo.

The team had a mandate



The Mahikeng George Dick Montshioa International Airport, a strategic key point, was, according to the MK Party, allegedly operated by illegal Nigerian nationals

to "ensure compliance with regard to the Immigration Act, enhance visibility of immigration officers, arrest and detain possible illegal foreigners, conduct investigative interviews of suspected transgressors, charge those who are harbouring illegal foreigners and arrest and charge those who employ illegal foreigners".

According to a report from the exercise, the multi-agency team found two flight schools in operation, namely Paramount Aviation Academy and African Union Aviation Academy.

It turns out that the department officials did not complete the contracting of the pilot schools for this financial year.



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occupying Mahikeng Airport

"The department has lost potential revenue from the operation of the two schools as the lease agreement is held with a company whose contract with the department has ended," noted the report prepared by Oshebeng Koonyaditse, director of communications services.

Paramount held an expired lease (August 2023–July 2024) with Mahikeng Airport Management Company; hosted 11 students (eight Nigerians, three South Africans) and three tutors (two foreign nationals absent during inspection); and it was registered with the Central Supplier Database and accredited by the South African Civil Aviation Authority.

The African Union Aviation Academy was operational, however, it had no active students enrolled. It is similarly registered and accredited.

Immigration Services confirmed all foreign nationals possessed valid study permits, except one Ghanaian student whose visa required further verification. "All foreign nationals are in possession of study visas, and South African citizens have identity documents. The Ghanaian who was taken to the home affairs office is being issued with a notice to appear before immigration, as they have to verify with our head office the authenticity of his visa."

According to the lease agreement between Paramount and the department, signed on July 13, 2023, the school would commence operations from August 1, 2023, to July 31, 2024, paying a rental fee of R16 000 per month.

A department insider said, "People are tarnishing our names and abusing power. Whatever it is that they are alleging, hiding that the school is run by a black South African woman who's married to a Nigerian is a shame. The individual in question has not been in the country for the past two years. And then there are allegations of drugs with no police report."

"The only Nigerian is the husband, and he hasn't been in the country for the past two years."

The person continued, "We have made reports about the schools every quarter. About the status of the airport and the average in schools, and we thought those reports were sufficient. So, from where I'm standing, we were being violated. And someone needs to be held accountable for it."

The MK Party had accused authorities of "sleeping on duty", claiming Nigerian nationals allegedly lived and operated unchecked at the strategic airport since 2018, bypassing immigration controls, lease agreements, and utility payments while under 24-hour private security surveillance.

"The Mafikeng International Airport is one of the strategic key points in the country," said MKP provincial leader Alfred Motsi. "Therefore, the public works department, as the custodian of government property, as well as the police intelligence, should have been the first to have picked up the illegal existence of the long occupation of a national strategic key point by foreign nationals." The portfolio committee in the legislature had also called for a probe.