



Is Mkhize ready to defect?

PRESIDENCY BID: MEETING WITH COMRADES, HE SPOKE OF 'A PLOY' TO STOP HIM AND BLAMED CYRIL

➔ 'RET side can give sense of belonging if pressured or acted against by the ANC.'

Brian Sokutu

While embattled Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize is reportedly unhappy with the manner in which his comrades within the ANC have handled the Digital Vibes scandal, he is unlikely to the cross to the radical economic transformation (RET) faction of the party, political analysts said yesterday.

Mkhize has been implicated in the awarding of a dubious R150 million Covid-19 communications tender.

The *Sunday Times* reported Mkhize confirmed meeting ANC regional members at his Pietermaritzburg hometown last Friday where:

► The impact of the Digital Vibes scandal was discussed, with Mkhize expressing concern that the matter was a ploy to eliminate him from next year's ANC presidential race.

► Mkhize blamed President Cyril Ramaphosa for targeting potential candidates who could challenge him.

► He expressed unhappiness at being "betrayed" by health portfolio committee chair Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo for "calling him to a meeting in parliament to account for the scandal".

Ruling out the possibility of Mkhize crossing to the RET – with



CONCERNED. Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize has been implicated in the awarding of a dubious R150 million Covid-19 communications tender. Picture Neil McCartney

strong allegiance to suspended ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule and former president Jacob Zuma – independent political analyst Dr Ralph Mathekga said Mkhize had less to share with the RET faction.

Said Mathekga: "I don't think Mkhize will go to the RET because he hasn't come out as sharing much with them in recent years."

"President Cyril Ramaphosa is treading carefully on the Mkhize issue to avoid finding himself with blood in his hands. He wants to be the Great Pontius Pilate."

Ramaphosa has to act fairly to ensure he does not create a sense of fear.

Roland Henwood
Political lecturer
University of Pretoria

"Why push someone if the system is nicely working [rogue ANC elements] out?"

"At the end, Ramaphosa's crime will be that he could not save Mkhize – a forgivable offence –

[rather] than pushing him out."

Mkhize, whose 2017 ANC presidential election bid against Ramaphosa was unsuccessful, has not lost hope to assume the country's most powerful political position.

Said University of Pretoria political lecturer Roland Henwood: "Remember, Mkhize can [run] again."

"What we are not sure of is whether that will imply going to the RET side – though it may give some sense of belonging if pressured or acted against by the ANC leadership."

Referring to the Digital Vibes saga, Henwood said Ramaphosa could not "be seen to protect anyone close to him or allow persons associated with him to get away".

"At the same time, he has to act correctly and fairly to ensure he does not create a sense of fear and destabilise the party and his position as president."

Commenting on ANC KwaZulu-Natal regional leaders being unhappy with Ramaphosa, he said: "They are unhappy as KZN is not really in the leadership – after dominating for a long time."

"This is used effectively to agitate against President Ramaphosa – reason why he has to act carefully and correctly."

"What he does to replace Mkhize – if required – will be very important to satisfy to some extent these issues."

Commenting on last week's failure by Mkhize to appear before the health portfolio committee, Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution executive secretary Lawson Naidoo said: "Ministers have a constitutional responsibility to account to the National Assembly."

"In this instance, minister Mkhize seems to suggest legal advice prevented him from doing so. It is not a justifiable excuse."

"Ultimately the National Assembly can use its powers of subpoena to force people to appear..."

"This is a regrettable event, given the testimony we have heard at the [Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, chaired by Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo] where parliament was exposed to have clearly failed in its constitutional duty to hold the executive to account." – brians@citizen.co.za

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