

The Weekly

MANTASHE CONDEMNS NGWATHE SHENANIGANS

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A high-level ANC delegation, which included ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe, and the Provincial Working Committee (PWC), descended on the Fezile Dabi region this week with a strong anti-corruption message following the arrest of senior officials from the Ngwathe Local Municipality and a supplier in Parys last Friday.

Former municipal manager Norman Selai, acting municipal manager Samuel Moroe, supply chain manager Mokalo Mohale, and supplier Mlungisi Somhlolo of Victor Rompies Enterprise were arrested for alleged irregularities linked to the purchase of diaries that were supplied to the municipality at an inflated price of R185 000. It was reported that a single diary cost the municipality R200 while a local supplier said the diary cost R50.

They appeared in court on Friday and were granted bail of R10 000 each. The case was postponed to 15 February 2012. A spokesperson for the police in the Free State, Annelie Wrench, said "the four have been charged with fraud. After the warrant of arrest was issued, the suspects handed themselves over to the police".

Ngwathe Municipal spokesperson Steve Naale confirmed the arrests. "The matter is in the hands of the police and the municipality is allowing the law to take its course." Both Moroe and Somhlolo have been placed on special leave "to allow proper investigation processes to take place". "Ngwathe Municipality is currently functioning properly and our communities are receiving uninterrupted basic services as normal. Mayor Mochela is appealing to the community to allow the municipality to turn around the situation for the better," added Naale.

Mantashe was in Deanesville to preach the message of discipline and unity in the ANC ahead of the ruling party's centenary celebrations next year. He was attending the Fezile Dabi Regional General Council meeting. The municipality has since appointed Edwin Martins, the current Director of Corporate Services, as the acting municipal manager.

The municipality which includes Parys, Heilbron, Koppies, Vredefort, and Edenville has recently experienced a series of service delivery, leadership, and administrative challenges. Top managers have resigned, others were suspended, some workers have engaged in a wild cat strikes over unpaid salaries and promotions, and millions of rand have allegedly been misused, according to the Auditor General report.

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The provincial government has since appointed two task teams of local government specialists to help improve service delivery and stabilise the administration in the municipality after Salga national chairperson, Thabo Manyoni, intervened along with the head of cooperative governance, Kopung Ralikontsane.

According to Ralikontsane, the first task team is to probe the promotions and salary increases effected in the municipality from 1 July 2011. The team has the power to summons senior management, Samwu officials, and other stakeholders in the municipality who can assist the investigations to give evidence. The task team is headed by Solly Motingoe, Cogta district head, and two other officials from the department. The other members of the team are representatives from SALGA, Fezile Dabi, and the Provincial Treasury. The Open Water Risk Management company is providing technical support. The team is due to report their findings to council next week Tuesday.

The second team is an intervention team headed by Jan Botes from the Free State Premier's office. It is tasked with the mandate to ensure that the municipality continues to provide basic services, and has representatives from the Development Bank of Southern Africa and Rand Water.

ANC Provincial Secretary Sibongile Besani confirmed the PWC's visit to Fezile Dabi in Sasolburg early this week. According to Besani, all mayors, speakers, and chief whips of municipalities attended the meeting. The purpose of the engagement process was "to inform local government deployees on the need to stay in touch with the people and deliver the services and re-affirm our stance against corruption."

He said the recent arrests in Ngwathe were, however, "unfortunate" as the ANC in the province has dealt effectively with the political challenges in the municipality. To this end, Joey Mochela and Philemon Ndayi were recently appointed the new mayor and the speaker. With the appointment of the task team in Ngwathe, Besani said he was confident that the provincial government was on top of the situation.

Mantashe is said to have spoken strongly against corruption in municipalities. He came out very strongly on certain members who were running municipalities like their 'little fiefdoms' whilst in the process compromising pressing service delivery needs of communities.

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