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DA eThekweni leadership in turmoil

Plan to elect new leaders challenged

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THE DA in eThekweni is embroiled in a leadership dispute after the move to elect a new caucus was challenged by individuals within the party who are calling for the elections to be stopped.

Mzamo Billy, one of the caucus leaders ousted recently through a motion of no confidence, has written to federal leader Helen Zille, calling for the election to be stopped.

In his letter that *The Mercury* has seen, he highlighted discrepancies about how the motion of no confidence, which saw him and the rest of his caucus leadership removed, had been carried out. *The Mercury* reached out to Billy, but he declined to confirm or deny the complaint.

Outgoing caucus leader Thabani Mthethwa, deputy leader Billy, chief whip Vincent Mkhize and whip Zoe Solomon were recently ousted through a motion of no confidence. Among the reasons given was that the caucus had failed to hold the ANC to account in eThekweni. However, party insiders have described the recent upheaval within the DA in eThekweni as a battle for the control of the party's eThekweni caucus.

"These leaders in the caucus did not support some of the leaders in the province during the recent provincial congress, for instance Mthethwa openly supported Dianne Kohler Barnard for the position of provincial chairperson over incumbent Dean Macpherson, supported Bongumusa Nhlabathi for provincial leader position over Francois Rodgers and supported Billy for deputy leader over Sthembis Ngema," said a source who did not want to be named for fear of reprisal. The source added that the provincial leaders knew they did not have control of the eThekweni caucus which is the biggest caucus in KZN.

"As such to get it under their control, they are doing this to ensure that they have their people in that caucus." *The Mercury* understands that despite the uncertainty, Mthethwa and Billy will contest the race should the elections go ahead. Billy's letter lodges a dispute regarding the process followed in the build-up to the tabling of the motion of no confidence which happened at a caucus meeting on June 13, with the outcome of the ballot on the same day.

It raised concerns about the procedure that was followed as the motion of no confidence was directed at the

caucus leader, Mthethwa and the entire caucus executive, calling for the removal of all members of the caucus executive from their positions. The letter said this was in violation of the caucus rules which allow for individual leaders to be presented with motions, but not to be grouped together under one motion of no confidence.

The letter alleged that the mishandling of this motion has had consequences for the DA, pointing out that as a result of the leaders being ousted, there was currently no leadership in place. Relief sought in the letter includes:

- ◆ That the motion of no confidence be declared invalid.
- ◆ Halting of caucus elections called by the provincial office for June 30.
- ◆ Resolution of the dispute by the national leadership.

Other party insiders also challenged the claim that the caucus was failing to hold the ANC to account. They said the party's internal media monitoring data shows that they are among the top performing caucuses in terms of driving issues that affect voters.

However, political analyst Thabani Khumalo said the failure to hold the municipal leaders to account was a valid complaint. "Durban is dying if it's not dead already, yet this caucus has not been vocal about this, they should have been taking the platform to highlight the problems in Durban in the run-up to the elections next year, but they are quiet, the last real person to challenge the ANC failures is (now ActionSA leader Zwakele) Mncwango," he said.

The DA national office directed all communication to the provincial chairperson Dean Macpherson. He said: "I am unaware that any dispute has been lodged. A majority of caucus members signed and supported a motion of no confidence in the leadership because they believed the leadership had not achieved the objectives of the caucus."

He said the objectives included ensuring DA councillors are supplied with necessary information so that they can promote discussions on current issues that affect the municipality, identify contraventions of legislation and hold the governing party accountable for such contraventions among many.

"That decision and the reasons stated in writing are respected by the DA, as you can see the reasons (are) not what is claimed," he said.

City forges ahead with problem buildings project

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THE CHINA Emporium building in the Durban central business district, which caught fire in January last year, will be demolished soon.

This was confirmed by eThekweni Municipality yesterday following enquiries from *The Mercury* on the future of the condemned building.

The demolition of the structure, which has become an eyesore over the past months, is part of the city's efforts to deal with urban decay and target problem buildings that are occupied by vagrants and used for a range of illegal activities, including drug trafficking and prostitution.

Head of communications for eThekweni Municipality, Lindiwe Khuzwayo, said the demolition would be carried out in phases, adding that all the necessary steps have been followed including the owners submitting and subsequently receiving approval for demolition works from the City (demolition permit) and submission of all the required documentation, including demolition methodology and safety plans.

"Council is now set to receive the commencement notice from the owner prior to demolition such that all the necessary checks are concluded by ourselves as the City and the final go-ahead is granted," said Khuzwayo, adding that the City has set aside R8 million in the 2023/24 financial year for the problem buildings project that was started in 2019.

The spokesperson said that the city has identified eight buildings for renovations, four for demolition and four for sale in execution.

In the 2022/23 financial year the City managed to get 15 buildings renovated, with five demolished and at 25 properties the property owners committed to getting the structures in good condition.

According to the City, there are 88 problem buildings on the database, "but the number is not static as buildings are inspected continuously and subse-



THE China Emporium building in the Durban CBD, seen in a picture last year, is set to be demolished after it was severely damaged in a fire in January last year. | TUMI PAKKIES African News Agency (ANA)

quently removed once success has been declared".

Khuzwayo cited difficulty in accessing funds for rehabilitation purposes by property owners, and multiple ownership of some of the buildings as among the challenges hampering the municipality's programme, which is aimed at giving the city a much-needed facelift and ensuring that it appeals to both tourists and potential investors.

The project is spearheaded by the municipality, with the co-operation of property owners.

She said that implementing a comprehensive and effective problem buildings programme can be complex, due to challenges including deceased estates, difficulty to serve notices on owners or obtain necessary permissions for interventions, and untraceable owners,

which created difficulties for initiating any renovations, evictions, or legal proceedings. She pointed out that the municipality was working at ensuring that the policy made it easier for City authorities to enforce the law.

"Currently, the review of the problem building by-law is under way to broaden functions (scope) of the by-law, including giving the powers to the municipality to execute renovations and recover costs from owners," said Khuzwayo.

The City has also had engagements with property owners in a bid to deal with problem buildings and ensure that owners become more responsible for their properties.

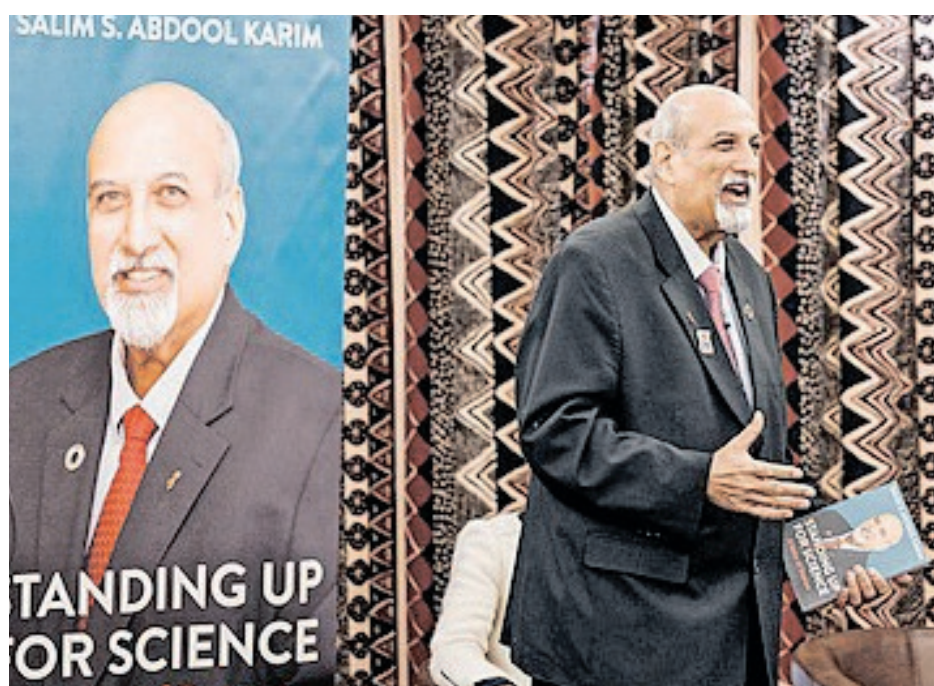
"A carrot-and-stick approach is used by the municipality to encourage owners of problem buildings to turn around

their buildings. However, if owners refuse to do so, enforcement will take place," said Khuzwayo.

She pointed out that part of the enforcement would include serving notices and taking legal action, which may include property acquisition or sale in execution.

Khuzwayo conceded that addressing the challenge of problem buildings requires an integrated approach involving a range of stakeholders, including different municipal departments, provincial and national government departments, the judiciary, local communities, and non-governmental organisations.

"Despite these challenges, the eThekweni Municipality remains committed to pursuing its Bad Buildings Programme in the best interest of its residents and the broader community," she said.



INFECTIOUS diseases epidemiologist Professor Salim Abdool Karim launched his book, *Standing Up For Science: A Voice of Reason*, at the Durban ICC yesterday. | Supplied by Caprisa

Abdool Karim launches book on Covid-19 pandemic

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ONE OF South Africa's chief Covid-19 advisers, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, launched a book yesterday titled *Standing Up For Science: A Voice of Reason*, which documents the first three years of the pandemic in a bid to help future generations tackle the next pandemic.

The infectious diseases epidemiologist is the director of the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa) and serves as a special adviser on pandemics to the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Abdool Karim stepped down as co-chair of the Covid-19 ministerial advisory committee in 2021 after being part of 119 advisories on the pandemic.

Speaking at the launch, held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Con-

vention Centre in Durban yesterday, Abdool Karim said the book, which he started writing in 2020, was "a journey of love".

"It's been a challenge to write this book and to capture the facts as best I could and to document this history for all of our benefit and for generations to come," he said.

The book, which Abdool Karim has dedicated to health-care workers, scientists and essential workers for their personal sacrifice and commitment during the Covid-19 pandemic, is a personal behind-the-scenes account of the first three years of the pandemic.

"I learnt that the science that we did have available was critical in the discourse, and making decisions that were fundamentally impacting people's rights, people's movement and livelihoods, science needed to feature in that discourse," he said.

Abdool Karim said the book captured this in four segments that included the first 100 days of the pandemic, the journey involved in getting to a point where scientific advice could be given, the challenges at the advice-to-policy interface and the lessons for the future.

The panel of speakers at the launch included Professor Peter Piot, special adviser on Covid-19 to the president of the European Commission, Professor Jeremy Farrar, chief scientist of the WHO and ambassador John Nkengasong, who is the US global Aids co-ordinator and special representative for health diplomacy.

Piot said it was important to tell the story while it was still on our minds, and not forgotten.

"As societies and individuals we all hope to, as soon as possible, forget bad experiences and that's why we are already in that phase worldwide (of feel-

ing) that Covid is over and that we can go back to normal. I would say there is no going back to normal, there is going forward to a new normal," he said.

Farrar said the book was a remarkable story that was important to write.

"The critical things of why it's important to write a book is because history will be rewritten. I suspect probably nobody in this room will be here in 100 years' time, but this pandemic will still be debated 100 years from now and all the controversies will still be debated."

Nkengasong said there were five Ps to consider in a pandemic, which included knowing the pathogen, population, policies, politics and the partnerships.

"When I was reading this book ... I wanted to see how the book fits into those five Ps, and I think it very clearly does that," he said.

See Opinion page



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