

Minister speaks out on Madagascar

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INTERNATIONAL Relations and Co-operation Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane yesterday questioned the judicial process that sentenced Madagascar's former president, Marc Ravalomanana, to life imprisonment last week.

This statement is the clearest indication yet that SA does not recognise Madagascar's government led by Andry Rajoelina.

"The outcome of the case should not be isolated from the political" developments in Madagascar, Ms Nkoana-Mashabane said. "I don't think that judgments that are passed

in absentia will help in resolving problems in Madagascar," she said.

Foreign policy analysts seem to concur with the minister's statements. Siphamandla Zondi, director of the Institute for Global Dialogue, told Business Day yesterday that "it is very obvious that this court case is tainted by the political situation" in Madagascar. "The judgment may not be political but the very idea of using a court to settle a political case is very problematic," Mr Zondi said.

Tom Wheeler, a foreign policy expert at the South African Institute of International Affairs, said he was "not surprised" by the minister's comments. "It's just a way of neutralising the man (Mr Ravalomanana) by giving him a life sentence," Mr Wheeler said.

He said SA and former Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano "have put in a lot of effort to resolve the political situation there", but to no avail.

Mr Chissano was appointed by the Southern African Development Community to resolve Madagascar's political stalemate between factions supporting Mr Ravalomanana and incumbent Mr Rajoelina.

Mr Ravalomanana was sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly instructing soldiers to viciously suppress a protest march in Madagascar last year when he was still president. About 30 people died and several



Maite Nkoana-Mashabane

were wounded in the capital Antananarivo, official reports indicated.

This incident culminated in a coup, which forced Mr Ravaloma-

nana to flee to Swaziland and settle in SA last year. This coup was met with an angry response from the of the African Union (AU) member states.

The AU summarily suspended Madagascar's membership.

An official at Madagascar's embassy in Pretoria yesterday declined to comment on whether an official request will be made to the South African government to return Mr Ravalomanana to his country.

Madagascar does not have an extradition agreement with SA, according to information from the Department of Justice's web portal. Mr Ravalomanana is the second head of state to be granted asylum in SA. langeni@bdtm.co.za

De Lille dossier shows MPs gained thousands more for road travel

BEKEZELA PHAKATHI

Contributing Writer

CAPE TOWN — Independent Democrats (ID) leader Patricia de Lille yesterday released a dossier showing some MPs were paid more than R200 000 for road travel to and from Parliament and their homes between April last year and March 31 this year.

Ms de Lille said yesterday that some MPs were opting to drive "just so that they can claim more money than if they were to fly".

MPs' LUCRATIVE TRAVEL



Changes to 'secrecy bill' not ruled out

WYNDHAM HARTLEY

CAPE TOWN — The government is prepared to entertain changes to the controversial Protection of Information Bill but has warned that this can be done only as far as "is practicable and reasonable".

Objections to the so-called secrecy bill have continued to rage and a broad selection of civil society groups have formed an alliance to oppose the bill, which is presently before Parliament.

Minister Siyabonga Cwele is focusing on areas of the bill that have been described as too broad or vague and which have the potential to infringe on constitutionally enshrined rights.

"Following this involved and detailed process, the minister will table a comprehensive response to Parliament, on the bill sits for its next meeting," Mr Maseko said.

However, in response to questions, Mr Maseko said there were no

IN BRIEF Tax bill harmful

TAX | The Constitutional Court's decision that the Tax Administration Act is unconstitutional could have serious implications for the country's tax system. The court's ruling that the bill would strip rights and obligations from the Revenue Service also reduces the burden on SA taxpayers as it sets out the tax laws in place. The burden on SA taxpayers is unnecessary as it has been simplified.

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