

Zuma and energy minister at odds over nuclear adviser; Zuma refutes claims

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The *Sunday Times* has learnt that Senti Thobejane, a special adviser to both Zuma and Energy Minister Tina Joemat-Peterssen, is one of three candidates for the director-general post in the Department of Energy.



Zuma has his choice, it's reported... (Image: GQIS)

Thobejane is said to be Zuma's preferred candidate, while Joemat-Peterssen is opposed to him.

Other candidates are acting director-general Wolsey Barnard and deputy director-general Tseliso Maqubela.

Joemat-Peterssen inherited Thobejane when she succeeded Ben Martins as energy minister earlier this year.

Thobejane played a key role in the nuclear agreements South Africa signed with Russia, France, China, Japan, South Korea and the US.

He was in Russia with Zuma in August. This week, he denied that he was lobbying for the Russians, saying he had developed similar "relationships" with companies from other countries.

"The relationship that I have with any company is the relationship that the South African government has with that company," Thobejane said. "Whether it is the Russians or Chinese companies, we engage with them exactly the same way."

He said there was a perception that South Africa was favouring Russia and China, but this had arisen because of "discomfort" among countries that had previously dominated the industry.

He predicted that more than one service provider would be awarded a contract to expand South Africa's nuclear power capacity.

Thobejane, whose CV includes an MSc degree from Georgetown University in the US, said he had been approached to advise Zuma on nuclear matters in 2011. He was appointed adviser to the then energy minister, Dipuo Peters, the following year.

"I was appointed by the Ministry of Energy, but one of my functions is to provide advisory services to the president," Thobejane said.

It appears that his dual role has caused confusion and tension between himself and Joemat-Peterssen.

Sources in the Department of Energy say Thobejane has been on trips without Joemat-Peterssen's approval, and has defied instructions from her.

He described his relationship with the minister as "cordial, professional and effective", while acknowledging that it was not

"lovey-dovey".

"This minister drives her people, whether it is Thobejane or the acting director-general," he said.

"Naturally people don't like to be driven. But if you are driven and you understand the reason and the purpose, then there is no reason to harbour tensions."

Thobejane is said to have refused to be vetted after Joemat-Peterssen was appointed.

"The minister asked him about five times," said one senior official.

Thobejane said he was aware of the requests for staff to undergo vetting, but this did not apply to him because Zuma had used his prerogative to give him a security clearance when the president appointed him as his adviser.

"The president has defined me in his appointment of me. [He said] 'You are defined in this dispensation.' Who am I now, or who is anybody out there, to want to define me otherwise?"

Thobejane - who speaks nine languages, including Swahili and Spanish - has years of experience in government and in state-owned companies. He has worked for the department of health in Limpopo, Eskom and the Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa.

He left Necsa under a cloud after he was accused of negotiating himself a 25% increase, an allegation he denied this week.

Source: Sunday Times, Via I-Net Bridge



...And the minister has hers, it's reported... (Image: GCIS)



A typical nuclear power station. (Image: Public Domain)

Meanwhile...

Presidency rejects Sunday Times advisor report

The Presidency has issued a statement in which it says it "is surprised that the *Sunday Times* newspaper has totally disregarded its responses to questions that the paper had posed about a Department of Energy official, Senti Thobejane, who the paper has incorrectly identified as an advisor to President Jacob Zuma in its report today, 21 December 2014.

"On 18 December, the *Sunday Times* sent questions asking if the official was a technical advisor and what position he held in the Presidency. A response was sent back promptly on the same day, indicating that Thobejane was not in the employ of the Presidency and held no position in the institution. The side of the Presidency has been completely omitted in the story. This behaviour flies in the face of all journalistic norms and ethics and is completely unacceptable.

"Officials of government departments are asked from time to time to provide information to the Presidency. Thobejane, like other officials in the Department of Energy, is requested at times to provide information on areas that he has expertise in. Such officials do not automatically become advisors to the Presidency or the President. They remain officials of the Departments where they are employed."