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PILLARS OF MISINFORMATION: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RET NETWORK



A network of social media accounts is abusing so-called radical economic transformation (RET) policy to peddle misinformation and create racial divisions on Twitter. The network includes 51 accounts that were created over 11 years between 2009 and last year.

MAGASHULE: NEC DECISION 'RIVALS WORST DICTATORSHIPS EVER'



Suspended ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule will not be apologising for suspending Cyril Ramaphosa as president of the party. Instead, he wants the court to affirm that his decision was "valid and effective until lawfully nullified".

MONDLI MAKHANYA | REMEMBERING IFF'S HAND IN A MASSACRE



Thirty years ago this week, about 1 000 Inkatha Freedom Party warriors swept through the Swanieville informal settlement in Kagiso on Gauteng's West Rand, killing, maiming and burning everything in their path.

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Apology to Khutso Ramafalo

City Press hereby apologises to Khutso Ramafalo following the publication of an article with the headline "Soveto residents go hungry: 'We are living from hand to mouth'" (City Press, May 12 2020).

Ramafalo complained to the office of the press ombud that the article did not fairly reflect her responses that there were only 25 households out of a block of about 2 000 to which she distributed food parcels. City Press also apologises to Ramafalo for linking her to a subheading that implied that she was one of the "opportunists looking to make a quick buck or to fend only for themselves and their network".

The rest of her complaint was dismissed. Visit www.presscouncil.org.za for the full finding

Press Council RULING

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Despite a significant rise in cases in the country and fears of a third wave, the state's mass vaccination programme is still far behind schedule

DAWIE BOONZAATER, JUNIOUR KHUMALO and LIEZEL DE LANGE
news@citypress.co.za

Government had to adjust its plans to begin the long-awaited mass vaccination programme last week after the registration process failed miserably. By Friday afternoon, just more than 1.1 million of the expected 5 million South Africans older than 60 had registered with the department of health's electronic vaccination data system (EVDS) to get vaccination appointments. Government wants to vaccinate this group by the end of next month.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize and Gauteng Premier David Makhura have said tighter restrictions are being considered to ward off a third wave of Covid-19 infections.

On Friday, 3 141 new cases of Covid-19 were reported - the highest daily increase since early February, which is when the curve started to flatten after the second wave of infections hit the country. A total of 7.5% of Covid-19 tests were positive last week, compared with 3.7% in April and 4.3% in March.

Mkhize told eNCA on Friday that no individuals registered on the EVDS system had yet received an SMS with an appointment for a vaccination.

"The figures [for vaccinations] will start slowly. People have to be patient," he said.

This is while the latest National Income Dynamics Study Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (Nids-Cram) shows that about 190 000 people need to be vaccinated daily to meet government's target of 40 million vaccinations by the end of February next year.

The start of government's mass vaccination programme has been repeatedly postponed due to challenges in obtaining appropriate vaccines.

Mkhize also made an urgent appeal to South Africans not to show up at vaccine centres without an appointment.

"We plead for patience and cooperation. We ask our fellow citizens to wait for their text messages," he stressed.

Rather than individuals being assisted at vaccination centres from Monday, Mkhize indicated that provincial authorities would vaccinate elderly people in nursing homes with the Pfizer vaccine.

Only 130 of the planned 3 357 vaccination centres will be open on Monday for the nearly 500 000 healthcare workers who have not received a vaccine through the Sisonke research programme. A total of 500 000 healthcare workers have already received Johnson & Johnson vaccines thanks to the academic programme.

Dr Anban Pillay, deputy director-general of health, said in a webinar from the Government Employees' Medical Scheme (Gems) that there would be almost 1 million doses of Pfizer vaccine in the country by this evening. The first two consignments of about 650 000 doses have already been released by the national laboratory and delivery to the provinces has begun.

The release of more than 1 million Johnson & Johnson vaccines has been delayed by international regulatory processes, but will be available soon.

The change in government's administration plans and exactly when the mass vaccination campaign will start for other people older than 60 had not been officially communicated by the time of going to press.

"Communication about Covid-19 was extremely poor from the beginning," said Professor Francois Venter, an expert in communicable diseases at Wits University. "It's only a matter of days before government's vaccine programme [is supposed] to kick off and there's still no clarity on exactly how it will work."

A virologist in Gauteng said he was not surprised that so few people had been registered: "How should elderly people in rural areas register on the EVDS system without assistance? Information campaigns on social media are worthless. We should have gone to [these elderly people] a long time ago."

This is as Mkhize and scientists advising the national coronavirus command council have warned that, although currently confined to certain provinces, a third wave of Covid-19 infections will steadily engulf the entire country.

The surge in infections has gripped the Free State, the



SUFFER THE CHILDREN
A man carries the body of a Palestinian child (left) during a funeral in northern Gaza yesterday. The child was killed amid a flare-up of Israeli-Palestinian violence (Above) A demonstrator holds a Palestinian flag during a protest as tension in Jerusalem and Israel-Gaza escalates near the Hawara checkpoint in the Israeli-occupied West Bank

PHOTOS: SUHAIB SALEM / RANEEN SAWAFTA / REUTERS

Scramble to get vaccinations right



SMALL STING
A healthcare worker gets a Covid-19 vaccine during Gauteng Premier David Makhura's visit to the Netcare Milpark Hospital vaccination site in Johannesburg a few weeks ago

PHOTO: SHARON SERETLO / GALLO IMAGES

Northern Cape, Gauteng and North West, with a steady increase in infection rates also hitting the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

AN EXPERT OPINION

Professor Adriaan Puren, acting executive director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, maintains that South Africa has not yet met the threshold for a new wave.

Puren says that while the recent rapid increase in the percentage of people testing positive for Covid-19 and the seven-day moving average of confirmed cases across all provinces are cause for concern, the rising number of infections cannot yet be categorised as a third wave.

He explains that, according to a ministerial advisory committee technical working group, a resurgence can only be classified as a new wave "when the seven-day moving average incidence exceeds 30% of the previous wave's peak". Since, nationally, the seven-day moving average peaked at 18 800 cases during the last wave (on about January 11), the average ought to be at about 5 600 cases a day before the current increase in infections can be deemed a new wave. This is not yet the case, as the current national seven-day moving average incidence is about 1 950 cases.

ADVICE TO GOVERNMENT

With the national coronavirus command council expected to meet next week, a member of the council told City Press that it would probably consider tightening restrictions, particularly regarding gatherings.

"Restaurants, nightclubs and other similar forms of

entertainment have been identified by the ministerial advisory committee and provincial Covid-19 command councils," said the source.

Makhura said this week: "I can say now that this province [Gauteng] will be among those calling for stricter lockdown restrictions."

He reiterated that he was not advocating a total shutdown of the economy, but "there are measures we'd like to see being tightened".

"People are no longer observing the regulations. We see it at funerals and in the feedback we're getting from police and even people on the ground.

"Restaurants and entertainment places no longer adhere to measures that have been put in place to curb the spread of the pandemic," said Makhura.

Trade unions such as the Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA (Denosa) have bemoaned scenes that took place this week as the Johnson & Johnson Sisonke programme to vaccinate healthcare workers drew to an end. There was chaos and no social distancing as healthcare workers queued in vain for Covid-19 vaccines at some vaccination sites this week. Denosa acting general secretary Cassim Lekhoathi said such scenes were unfortunate and placed healthcare workers at great risk.

"What's particularly concerning is that this happened going into next week's phase two roll-out. It leaves a great deal to be desired because not only were our members placed at risk by being potentially exposed to the Covid-19 virus, but the very elderly who'll be attended to next week by those same healthcare workers will be placed at greater risk too," he said.

Magashule: I do not fear expulsion

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Magashule also claims that the ANC top six made a decision, in his presence, that the charges were frivolous and unsustainable. He asserts that his removal from office is intended to determine the outcome of the 2022 national conference.

ONLY 15 TURN UP FOR MAGASHULE SUPPORT VIGIL

Meanwhile, Junior Khumalo reports that a night vigil planned outside Luthuli House to support Magashule turned out to be a damp squib.

Posters, flyers and online notifications were extensively shared, urging ANC members to come out in their thousands to show support for Magashule, but only about 15 ANC Youth League members turned up.

The audacious plan was to mobilise as many branches as possible, congregate at the Johannesburg City Hall on Thursday at 5pm, then the envisaged horde of loyal supporters would roar along Helen Joseph Street to the nearby ANC headquarters at Luthuli House.

Once there, the multitudes that were expected to attend would then, through this show of force, demand that all NEC members resign.

However, 5pm came and went, and not a single green, black and gold-clad supporter was in sight.

Even the organisers - ANC Youth League members Prince Rulashe, Bhekhi Nkutha and another member only known as

“Our reason for coming here is to say that we want the NEC to step aside because they are preoccupied with infighting. These old people are tired now and they need to let younger people take over”

comrade Oliver - were nowhere to be seen.

An hour later and still no support had arrived, while a resilient Nkutha was still assuring journalists that he was on his way and that numerous others were also coming.

"Some members are held up at a memorial service, but as soon as it's done, they will make their way. Others are arriving from other provinces, so we have made provisions for that, hence we suggested 5pm to give us time to congregate and then make our way to Luthuli House," said the absent Nkutha when contacted by City Press.

It wasn't until about 6.30pm that the first two youth league members showed up. A few minutes later, Nkutha also appeared and a few more members trickled in.

Nkutha arrived with a number of 10kg pockets of oranges. That should have been an indicator that even the organisers were not really anticipating "thousands" of supporters.

By 8pm, there were still only about 15 supporters, milling around.

Speaking to City Press, Nkutha downplayed the Magashule support angle and instead said their protest was meant to defend the integrity of the ANC.

"When the current leadership inherited the ANC they got it intact, but now they are tearing it apart and they want to hand over a party that is torn apart by divisions.

"Our reason for coming here is to say that we want the NEC to step aside because they are preoccupied with infighting. These old people are tired now and they need to let younger people take over," said Nkutha.