

Budget gap makes Parliament sweat

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Parliament is facing a "nightmare" cash crunch that could result in the institution freezing new hires and possibly retrenching some staff.



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National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete conceded this on Monday, 29 May 2017, when she said Parliament was under increasing financial strain.

This had been made worse by a R1bn shortfall in its allocations from the Treasury. Mbete was speaking ahead of Parliament's budget vote speech, which is scheduled for Tuesday. She touched on a number of issues, including that she was not opposed to a parliamentary commission of inquiry into state capture.

Mbete said that despite Parliament's money problems she did not foresee the institution freezing staff salaries.

The National Health, Education and Allied Workers Union, a Cosatu affiliate, would hold a picket outside Parliament on Tuesday, as its first "warning shot", should increases not be effected, it said on Monday.

When Mbete was holding her briefing, some staff held a small protest, decrying a deadlock over salary increases and the long-term suspensions of staff.

Parliament has a R2.2bn budget for 2017-18 but its wage bill is rising. The institution had asked for a R3.9bn allocation.

"The issues [are] being engaged upon with workers ... We are hopeful that we do not settle for a 0% increase," said Mbete.

Secretary of Parliament Gengezi Mgidlana said there were no imminent retrenchments on the cards.

Mbete said she would indicate to the Treasury that Parliament was not one of the ministries but "one of the three arms of the state". She said budget cuts had weakened it from meeting its objectives.

On state capture, Mbete said she would not be opposed to the DA's call for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue but had not received a formal request.

"I believe it is desirable to have a state capture inquiry broadly so that we can settle our minds and move on with life.

"For now, there is none but there will be. There will be a structure that will probe what you may understand to be state capture," she said.

Source: Business Day

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