

Private investigators, Hawks called in to probe North West graft

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The North West province government has hired private investigators to look into allegations that its health department awarded R180 million in illegal tenders to the Gupta-linked company, [Mediosa](#), provincial spokesperson Brian Setswambung said this week.



Photo: Oupa Nkosi

The firm [Open Water](#) is investigating claims linked to contracts awarded to Mediosa for two mobile clinics.

Meanwhile, the Hawks have also opened an investigation into alleged fraud and corruption within the province's health department, Hawks regional spokesperson Captain Tlangelani Rikhotso confirmed.

North West health department head Thabo Lekalakala admitted that he had paid Mediosa R30 million upfront when he appeared before the provincial legislature in February, News24 [reported](#).

A month later, the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism [revealed](#) links between the Guptas, Mediosa and its directors dating back to 2015.

Lekalakala also confessed that Mediosa had financed a trip to India for himself and other health department officials after the R30 million payment was made. Setswambung confirmed on Thursday that Lekalakala has been suspended. Premier Supra Mahumapelo had made a decision based on the preliminary results of Open Water's forensic investigation.

The company is continuing to look into procurement irregularities in the department as reported by trade unions, the legislature and the media, Setswambung said. But Open Water's investigation, which was to be finalised by the end of March, has also been stalled by ongoing protests by government workers affiliated with the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu).

"Documents central to the investigation cannot be reached because of the go-slow in the department," Setswambung said.

Nehawu government workers, including those at its medicine depot, have been on a go-slow for more than a month. Union members are refusing to work until the government meets a list of demands, including Lekalakala's axing as well as changes in procurement processes that, the union claims, led to improperly awarded contracts, Nehawu provincial secretary Patrick Makhafane told Bhekisisa [last week](#).

Meanwhile, the protest action has led to widespread medicine shortages in the North West. Almost 400 clinics in the province are reporting stock-outs of essential medicines, said public interest law organisation Section27 in a statement. On Saturday, the South African Health Military Services were activated to deploy to provincial hospitals to help deal with the escalating crisis in health facilities.

Bhekisisa reported last week that North West hospitals and clinics had just days to avoid a province-wide medicine shortage. "Patients are still going to clinics and are coming back empty-handed," according to Glenda Muzenda.

She manages the civil society coalition [Stop Stock-outs Project](#), which monitors the availability of medicine in the public sector. Most of the current investigations conducted by the Hawks involve provincial health departments, according to a March presentation to Parliament.

The Hawks are [currently investigating](#) seven provincial health departments: those of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, the Free State, the Northern Cape, the Western Cape and the North West Province.

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