

"An individual cannot save SA" - Moeletsi Mbeki

You know a country is in deep trouble when you think an individual can save it. This is the view of Moeletsi Mbeki, political analyst, author and entrepreneur, speaking at the latest Think Big webinar, hosted by PSG.

He cautioned strongly against the tendency of South Africans to think there is a saviour who could sweep in and fix our problems. We saw this happening with Ramaphoria in 2018 and it quickly turned into Rama-reality.

"The strength of South Africa lies in our institutions. The problem with looking to an individual hero is that today it may be Cyril Ramaphosa, but tomorrow it could be Julius Malema or worse, he said.

Mbeki argued that although many institutions had been hollowed out during the Zuma years, there are still fundamental institutions in place protecting our democracy, as evidenced by the roles of the public protector, the Zondo commission, and the judiciary.

"For years, individuals have run roughshod over our institutions without any fear of consequences, but this is catching up to them," said Mbeki.

"Our institutions will always be attacked by opportunists who want to make a quick buck, and we have to rehabilitate those institutions that have been weakened. Those that are no longer functional need to be replaced."

He argued that we are more than capable of achieving this as we still have very strong academic institutions such as Wits and UCT, producing world class intellectual capital. In addition, we have the strongest private sector on the continent. Mbeki believes it is time for this sector to get more involved.

He said that it would be more beneficial for the private sector to direct efforts towards the rehabilitation of our institutions, however, than backing individual political campaigns.

Could Covid-19 be a catalyst for change?

Mbeki believes that if you are change-oriented, Covid-19 could be a catalyst for positive change. But if the status quo is serving you well, as it is for the ruling ANC, then Covid-19 is the perfect opportunity to entrench that.

“Covid-19 has given government the opportunity to escalate social grants, and this is a key election strategy,” said Mbeki.

Employed urban voters have recognised the ANC’s failure to deliver on housing, education, and employment and their support base there is slipping. As a result, the ANC is now putting all their efforts into the rural population, which is almost entirely dependent on social welfare grants.

“Covid-19 has also highlighted massive poverty amongst the urban unemployed, and the government is using social grants to placate this voter base and stop them from wanting change,” said Mbeki.

As concerned citizens, we can look at this strategy and recognise how short sighted it is. We know South Africa’s precarious financial position cannot sustain this level of social welfare. But the reality is that politicians aren’t concerned with the long term, said Mbeki.

“For politicians, the long term is five years. They only care about the next election cycle.”

Again, Mbeki argued that we need to be putting our efforts into institutional rehabilitation, because to bring about real change you need a longer-term strategy.

Views on the Senekal standoff

The stand-off between farmers and the EFF in Senekal was sparked by a tragic loss of human life, but Mbeki believes it has delivered an important message to South Africans.

“The EFF threatened to bring down the heavens with violence, but they ultimately failed in their attempts. They were not able to disrupt the police from doing their jobs in Senekal, nor were they able to disrupt or influence the normal functioning of the court proceedings,” said Mbeki.

“This is a good message for all South Africans, because it shows us that although many of our institutions have been hollowed out, the police and the courts are still protecting our democracy.”

Predictions for South Africa in 2030

“One of the most positive developments of 2020 was the recent ruling by the Constitutional Court that independent candidates are allowed to stand for provincial and national parliament,” said Mbeki.

We can all agree that holding politicians accountable for their actions is in South Africa’s best interests, and this ruling will enable that.

Mbeki said it is set to change the political landscape in South Africa for the better.

“I believe the era of single party dominance in South Africa is really and truly coming to an end,” said Mbeki. “If political change happens quickly, then the economy can start to move forward.”

By 2030 the political landscape in South Africa will have shifted and the ANC will have lost its stronghold. He is optimistic that this will pave the way for growth and lasting positive change.

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