

## **Minister Gordhan's bid to reform SOEs will not be derailed by lies, distortions and forces of greed**

Ellis Mnyandu

The article of 28 November 2023 by Ms Adri Senekal, the executive editor of Business Report, owned by Independent Media, cannot go unchallenged. In the article *“Pravin Gordhan's deathly legacy: A threat to SA's economic future”*, she commits the cardinal sin in journalism and that is to stand in the way of the truth.

Her article has all the hallmarks of electioneering propaganda.

What the public should know is that the attack directed at the Minister of Public Enterprises in this article is part of a fight-back campaign by vested interests and other shadowy forces against the irreversible clean-up of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

This is also a declaration of war against the African National Congress (ANC) in the context of ongoing corruption and the forthcoming elections – but those – inside and outside the ANC – working for the masses of our country will be vindicated and will be victorious against these dark forces of greed.

Minister Gordhan has known since assuming his current portfolio that he will take no prisoners in his quest to root out corruption, stabilize SOE boards, and hold people accountable.

Yet Ms Senekal conveniently chooses not to mention any of the progress that is being made. Instead she peddles false narratives that rely on recycled distortions and falsities.

It is no secret that those opposed to the work of Department of Public Enterprises have chosen to use Minister Gordhan as a decoy in their quest to denigrate the administration of President Cyril Ramaphosa in the run-up to the 2024 elections.

Thus the attacks on Minister Gordhan form part of an elaborate ploy to peddle a contrived notion of state incapacity and supposed collapse of SOEs. Yet what the public is not told is that the push back by these shadowy forces is because they are intent on recapturing the country's economic apparatus for their own self-interest.

Ms Senekal really ought to know better. This administration will not relent from pursuing criminals who want the SOEs to continue to be their feeding troughs. Minister Gordhan received marching orders back in 2018, when the President gave his first State of the Nation address, in which he set out the need to clean up SOEs.

In that address, the President could not have been any clearer when he said: “Amasela eba imali ka Rhulumente mawabanjwe.” (Thieves who are stealing public funds should be arrested and prosecuted). So, no matter how much vilification is directed at Minister Gordhan, there is no reversing course from this objective.

However, what we cannot accept is for the public to be fed lies and distortions that seek to create a smokescreen about the true intent of those opposing the work to ensure that our SOEs can contribute to the development and the transformation of our economy.

There is zero truth to the claims that the government will wilfully subject SOEs to failure as a pretext for privatisation. All our SOEs will be recalibrated so that they can play their developmental role. Where there is a strategic rationale for leveraging private sector investment, for example in rail or power generation, the state will engage the private sector while retaining control of these critical assets.

Our work to transform SOEs requires ethical leadership and people who put the interest of South Africa first. Any deviation from this principle, means that those individuals who are unable to deliver the requisite outcomes must give way so that the interests of the country are not compromised.

Rather than be objective, Independent Media panders to the same elements that remain hell-bent on peddling distortions, lies and fabrications about the work of this administration.

Unsurprisingly, these fake and false narratives are pitched as expert commentary or pseudo analysis, when in fact the aim is to deceive and mislead. It is therefore no wonder that the level of public discourse has become so parlous.

Our country sorely lacks meaningful engagement on critical issues, yet platforms like Independent Media continue to beat the old drums of untruths and seek to create villains while absolving thieves and saboteurs.

And these are some of the untruths that Independent Media wants the public to swallow hook, line, and sinker:

- Minister Gordhan is waging a war against black talent. (It's a lie).
- Minister Gordhan is responsible for capital flight from South Africa. (Another contrived lie).
- Minister Gordhan is unaccountable and untouchable. (Another preposterous lie).
- Minister Gordhan is responsible for the rand's devaluation. (Another lie).
- Minister Gordhan is responsible for the Steinhoff corruption and implosion. (A total fabrication).
- Minister Gordhan is on a privatisation spree. (Another lie that is on constant replay to deceive the public).

Fortunately, the public can see through all these lies. To make such claims is even defamatory. Besides, the public knows that Independent Media could not possibly object to one of its newspapers being used as an election campaign pamphlet, where lies about Minister Gordhan and about government must be taken as gospel.

Ms Senekal's article needs to be seen in the light it deserves. It is a shoddy attempt at parroting what those opposed to the cleaning up of SOEs hope will become their election manifesto, with Minister Gordhan and the President as their bogeymen. There is nothing that will reverse the progress that is being made to root out corruption across all our SOEs. To do otherwise will be treasonous.

What the public needs to understand is that as government we are fully committed to capacitating our SOEs so that they can attract the requisite investments and the right skills, and thus be able to drive their mandate to full effect.

The SOEs are public assets that must deliver for the public good. No amount of political machinations are going to change this. And this is why as government, we are also determined to establish an overarching governance structure to marshal all SOEs and insulate them from political interference and from counter revolutionary forces.

"A luta continua; vitória é certa"!

***Ellis Mnyandu is the spokesperson for Minister Gordhan and the Department of Public Enterprises.***

ENDS/