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Zuma's firing puts graft in SA on the world stage

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Chief Reporter

THE removal of Jacob Zuma from the deputy presidency was one of the biggest corruption scandals in the world last year, with "far-reaching" consequences for SA's parliamentary oversight bodies, according to global watchdog Transparency International.

Transparency's 2006 global corruption report, released yesterday, includes an extensive discussion of the Zuma scandal, Parliament's Travelgate scandal and weaknesses in protecting whistle-blowers.

The report serves as a warning to SA. The Berlin-based body's annual corruption report, along with its corruption perceptions index released in October, are followed by the investment community, and can influence decisions.

Cobus de Swardt, Transparency's head of global programmes, said yesterday the Zuma issue had brought about a greater awareness globally of the corruption issues facing SA.

"But most of the response from (international) businessmen has been encouraging (with people perceiving) that for a president to sack his deputy is a bold move," he said.

Transparency's report said the conviction of Zuma's financial adviser, Durban businessman Shabir Shaik, had "highlighted weaknesses or abuse in oversight mechanisms in Parliament, the director of public prosecutions, the public protector and the auditor-general".

It said this was because the investigation team that looked into the arms deal in 2001 found that there were no corruption issues significantly affecting the contracts awarded.

"Since the (joint team) included investigators from all the above oversight bodies, the court verdict calls into question the rigour of their inquiries," Transparency said.



The removal of Jacob Zuma from the deputy presidency was one of the biggest corruption scandals in the world last year, with "far-reaching" consequences for SA's parliamentary oversight bodies, according to global watchdog Transparency International. Picture: Sydney Seshibedi/ST

The corruption report said the Shaik trial also focused attention on the “supply side” of bribery, where multinational companies paid over thinly disguised bribes such as “facilitation fees”.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is encouraging countries to outlaw such payments.

“The OECD’s 1999 Anti-Bribery Convention could mean increased scrutiny for Thales and other firms implicated in the arms deal,” Transparency said.

The report also scrutinised the Travelgate saga, concluding that the judiciary had been able to carry out its duties in prosecuting offenders without interference, even when it involved the African National Congress.

But it raised concerns over the commission led by Judge Sisi Khampepe charged with looking into the future of the Scorpions investigating unit.

Transparency was wary of what it saw as “moves to muzzle the Scorpions” by incorporating the unit into the police force from the justice department’s National Prosecuting Authority.

The commission is expected to make its recommendations to President Thabo Mbeki on the future of the Scorpions this year.

Transparency warned that the commission’s recommendations would indicate the strength of government’s commitment to fighting graft at a high level.

Late last year, Transparency released its corruption perceptions index, which showed that SA had slipped two notches to 46th out of 156 countries.

But this was slammed by Public Service Commission chairman and Anti-Corruption Forum member Prof Stan Sangweni, who said the index measured perception rather than progress.

Sangweni’s office said he was too busy to comment yesterday.

De Swardt said that there were signs that SA was moving in the right direction when it came to tackling corruption.

“But this started from a very low base a decade ago because not only was apartheid a corrupt political system ... the access-to-information laws at the time were not helpful,” he said.

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