

Unions discuss govt's salary increase offer

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The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) is consulting its members following the government's latest 5,5% salary increase offer to civil servants. Nehawu and other unions, such as the Public Servants Association (PSA), have in recent weeks been locked in wage negotiations with the government.

Zola Saphetha, Nehawu's general secretary, confirmed that the union was currently in consultation with its members around the government's latest offer. "The union must embark on an intensified mandate-seeking process through the convening of membership meetings from January 20 to February 7 to source a mandate from members on the offer.

"Regional and provincial Bargaining forums of the public ser-

vice must be convened between February 10 to 14 and thereafter the national bargaining forum will be reconvened to consolidate mandates from membership unions, regional and provincial bargaining forums," he said.

At the beginning of the negotiations, the unions had demanded a 12% salary increase for civil servants, while the government offered a 4,7% salary hike. PSA spokesperson Claude Naicker, whose union represents close to 250 000 civil servants, described the latest government offer as "progressive".

The wage negotiations have been taking place amidst mounting concerns around the state's ballooning wage bill, which currently sits at R721 billion per year.

As part of measures to reduce its salary bill, the government has been providing financial incentives to those who retire before their re-

tirement age. Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana, recently revealed that R11 billion has been set aside to incentivise about 30 000 civil servants who were willing to exit the public services before retirement age. "Cabinet has approved an early-retirement programme to reduce government-employment costs while retaining critical skills and promoting the entry of younger talent into the public service," Godongwana said.

A report recently published by the Centre for Risk Analysis ranks South Africa third among 20 major global economies with high wage bills. "Although South Africa has a much smaller economy, its wage bill as a share of GDP towers over economic powerhouses such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Japan," the Centre for Risk Analysis said.

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