


Unions warn government against using Covid-19 to avoid increasing employees' salaries By Loyiso Sidimba 6m ago Share this article: ShareTweetShareShareShareEmailShare THE government has been warned against using the Covid-19 pandemic to avoid paying the R37.8 billion needed to increase its 1.3 million employees' salaries. Unions representing public servants on Wednesday squared off with the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and the National Treasury over the government's failure to increase their members' salaries by between 4.4% and 5.4% in April. The Labour Appeal Court heard that the government should not have waited until this year to challenge the validity of the three-year agreement signed in 2018. Advocate Ngwako Maenetje SC, on behalf of Cosatu affiliates, the SA Democratic Teachers' Union, the Democratic Nursing Organisation of SA and the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union, argued that the state should have approached a court of law to declare the agreement invalid and set it aside. According to Maenetje, the government could not simply ignore a collective agreement as it has precisely done. He said the decision not to effect the salary increases was taken before the Covid-19-enforced national lockdown in March. Maenetje told the court the committee of ministers, which includes the ministers of finance, public service and administration, police, basic education and justice and correctional services, knew that the compensation envelope was going to be exceeded by billions of rands in 2018 but proceeded to present the government's offer to Cabinet. The court also heard that the government had budgeted R110 billion for salary increases and knew that what they were proposing and was approved by Cabinet, would exceed that amount. Maenetje said the calculation of the costs of the agreement is done at the onset. "What we have here is a government that wants to walk away from the entire agreement," he said. Maenetje said the government signed the agreement to avoid negative public perception and possible industrial action but now wanted to walk away scot-free without even engaging the unions. He said the Public Servants Association, which approached the court with other affiliates of the Federation of Unions of SA, representing state employees to enforce the agreement, had indicated that some of its members offered to take early retirement and the government refused. "What the government is really doing here is being opportunistic," Maenetje said. Judgment was reserved. Political Bureau \_\_ Picture: Pixabay

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