FRIDAY, 4 JULY 2025

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PROCEEDINGS OF MINIPLENARY – GOOD HOPE CHAMBER

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Members of the mini plenary session met at the Good Hope Chamber at 13:00.

The Deputy Speaker took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 4 - Government Communication & Information System:

The MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY (Ms K P S Ntshavheni): Deputy Speaker, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies, hon Khusela Sangoni, Deputy Minister in The Presidency, hon Kenny Morolong, members of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies, representatives of the board of the Media

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Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, Brand SA, team GCIS, and hon members, good morning. Allow me to start by joining the President of the Republic and other South Africans in extending our condolences to the family, friends, and comrades of the late Eighth Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr D D Mabuza ...

IsiZulu:

Makalale ngobuhle.

English:

Deputy Speaker, when the Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, was established 27 years ago, on 18 May 1998, it said it will focus on six broad priorities: firstly, establishing a coherent government communication system; secondly, building a development information network to service grass roots needs; thirdly, developing an information strategy for multipurpose communication centres; fourthly, building relations with the media as communication partners; fifthly, encouraging media diversity; and lastly, improving the competencies of government communicators.

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On encouraging media diversity, the GCIS of 1998 grew up alongside the emergence at the time of Google as a dominant search engine, and Hotmail as the key email platform. We had four terrestrial television channels, three of them operated by the SABC and one private channel eTV. M-Net was the only satellite offering in South Africa. South Africa had only 1,2 million mobile users, and none of these phones could take photos, and WhatsApp only came along 11 years later.

We can all appreciate from this how much has changed in communications in 27 years, and there is a need for all of us to keep up with the rate of change. To make the point clearer, globally, the print media, which flourished in the pre-digital era, is facing survival challenges in the era of instant access to news using smartphones and online news aggregators. Allow me to illustrate this point. In 2004, there were more than 600 print media titles compared to a handful that exist today, and many of these are struggling to survive, and community media operating in a constrained regulatory environment are not immune to this. Recently, we have witnessed the closure of more than 50 independent newspapers. The once mighty *City Press* now only exists on a digital platform.

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This reality has impacted the ability of the MDDA to raise revenue from the commercial print media and thus its ability to support community newspapers. To mitigate this, I established a Print and Digital Media Transformation and Revitalisation Steering Committee of chief executive officers, CEOs, of the mainstream commercial media, community media, academia, and Over-the-Top, OTT, platform to recommend how to revitalise community and commercial print media in a multichannel and digital economy. The final report with recommendations from this committee is expected soon. From the final report of this committee, we will review both the strategic plan and the annual performance plan, APP, of the MDDA to ensure full implementation of the recommendations thereof.

In the Sixth Administration, we indicated the need for legislative amendments to the Electronic Communications Act, or the ECA, to bring the legislative framework up to date to support community media. The GCIS has commenced their work to review chapter 3 on Licensing Framework, and chapter 9, the Broadcasting Services of the ECA in earnest, and should be to complete consultations with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, the Independent Communications

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Authority of South Africa, Icasa, and other relevant stakeholders by the end of the current financial year.

On the G20, as South Africa continues its historic role as the G20 president in 2025, the GCIS, Brand SA, and the Department of International Relations and Co-operation, Dirco, have intensified efforts to protect and promote the country's image in a world marked by rising geopolitical tensions and misinformation. Growing alternative narratives continue to compete with facts. In this context, GCIS and Brand SA's priorities are focused on one targeted global campaigns that showcase South Africa's leadership in key sectors; robust stakeholder engagement to deepen collaboration across public, private, and regional actors; strengthening social cohesion through the Play Your Part programme, which inspires active citizenship and community pride; co-ordinated messaging by team South Africa at global forums to ensure one clear credible voice is heard; and proactive media engagement to ensure South Africa's story is told truthfully and responsibly in ways that inspire confidence, both domestically and internationally.

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Deputy Minister Morolong yesterday led Brand SA and Dirco in the launch of the G20 advert to announce South Africa's G20 Presidency and welcome global delegates. The advert profiles the attractiveness of the nation brand whilst reaffirming its position of being a stable and diversified economy. The advert uses powerful virtual storytelling to deepen engagement, shift perception, and reaffirm our voice on the global stage, anchored in the theme: Shared and Unified Prosperity Through Sustainable Partnerships. The advert captures the spirit, pride, and purpose behind our leadership role.

On re-establishing a coherent government communication system, as the Seventh Administration began its work and focused on its priorities of economic growth, reducing poverty, and building an ethical and capable state, the GCIS began its development of the Seventh Administration's National Communication Strategic Framework. This Cabinet's approved framework creates a clear structure and outlook for effective and co-ordinated communication by government communicators over the next five years. The GCIS will work to support the priorities of government through the implementation of this framework that seeks to bring government closer to its citizens and stakeholders and envisions an increase in the

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levels of trust between government and citizens based on improved information sharing about government services, performance, and interventions. To this end, 11 post-Cabinet media briefings reported on Cabinet’s deliberations and decisions, and 78 departmental media briefings were facilitated by the GCIS at either its Pretoria or Cape Town media centres. This translates to two media briefings per week, thus repositioning GCIS as the co-ordinator of government communications, and these media briefings, including the post-Cabinet briefings, are supported by livestreaming, which extends our reach internationally and into rural communities through community radios. During the 2025-26 financial year, GCIS has commenced in earnest with co-ordinating the pre- or post-Budget Votes media briefings of departments, and the same will be done when departments table their annual performance reports in October.

In addition, as part of the GCIS’s focus on monitoring the implementation of departmental and provincial communication plans, we will table to Cabinet, Quarterly Communication Plans Implementation Progress Report with the aim of identifying areas for improvement and support requirements for departmental and provincial implementation. The first report

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will be tabled in the next Cabinet meeting. We intend to share these quarterly reports with the portfolio committee as part of enhancing its oversight on the implementation of the National Communication Strategic Framework. In addition, the GCIS provincial offices will commence co-ordinating the development of District and Metro Municipalities Communication Plan in consultation with the offices of premiers and the SA Local Government Association, Salga, during the 2025-26 financial year.

At a policy level, we are at the final consultation stages in the review of the Government Communication Policy of 2018, the draft reviewed policy proposes: firstly, norms and standards to professionalise communication and ensure coherence and a well-functioning system across all spheres of government, including entities; secondly, prescribing that 1 to 5% of departmental operational budgets be allocated to communication, thus making compulsory allocation of budgets for communication so that communication is proactive and intentional; thirdly, 30% of departmental advertising budgets be set aside for spending on community media clarifying roles and responsibilities of various key government communicators, communication messengers such as executive authority,

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accounting officers, subject experts, and the rest to close the communication back that emerges from time to time due to personalities; fourthly, making compulsory the media training of MLO executive authorities and newly appointed head of communications; fifthly, providing clear guidelines for government's social media communication; and lastly, corporate identity application.

On building relations with the media as communication partners, the GCIS operates in a global environment where traditional news on TV, radio, and online is supplemented, but at times, also undermined by institutional or individual content creators who seek to cause mischief or drive divisions and cynicism in society. In a world where anyone can see anything happening everywhere in the world at any time, content development at the GCIS must be globally competitive, compelling, and credible. These are the demands placed on the GCIS at head office and in remote areas of our country, where government communicators are reaching out to communities, as well as visitors and investors with an interest, or economic interests in such areas. Under these circumstances, the GCIS continues to place a premium on engaging with trusted news channels across all media types, given their credibility and

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expansive reach. In this regard, during the 2024-25 financial year, there were 61 engagements undertaken between government officials and senior journalists on the government's key programmes.

The GCIS continues to monitor national and international print, broadcast, and online media, which ensures that the government is kept abreast of issues and dynamics in public discourse about our government and South Africa in general. Over the period, social media plays a key role in addressing disinformation and misinformation, and government social media platforms are growing in importance and usability as instant trusted sources of government information and news. The GCIS has also actively utilised digital media to reach citizens, thus harnessing the power and reach of social media in government communications. In October 2024, we reached one million followers on the government Facebook page, having started at just over 200 000 in March 2023, and to date, the government page following has reached 1,1 million.

Recently introduced government WhatsApp channels have reached 1,4 million followers. We boast a combined following of almost 3,5 million unique users across platforms. This is made

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possible because we are consistent in using government-owned platforms for up-to-date announcements on government initiatives, important news, and opportunities. Improvements are still required to improve the performance of other government departments, provincial governments, and local government social media platforms to be instantaneous information sources specific to their departments, provinces, and municipalities.

Furthermore, the South African Government News Agency, SAnews.gov.za, has become a valuable source of current news and information dedicated to government priorities, programmes, and interventions for the country. In the last financial year, 3 617 stories on key government programmes and activities were published on SAnews, focusing on government interventions in key priority areas such as anti-corruption, the fight against gender-based violence, implementation of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, combating crime, and the outlook of the country in general. SAnews articles were republished in mainstream media, both internationally and in the domestic media, which gave added traction to government messages and supplemented reporting by media on the

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government's extensive programme of activities and opportunities for citizens.

The GCIS continues to prioritise radio as a pervasive communication channel to reach South Africans in languages of their preference and to ensure that communities receive and engage with government information and services. In the last financial year, we used 1 086 radio products to inform citizens through differentiated platforms.

Before I turn to the budget allocation for the GCIS, allow me to list other initiatives in our pipeline that the Deputy Minister and I have not detailed in this budget debate due to time constraints. This include the assessment of the contribution of Brand SA and the MDDA to the national policy; revision of the statutory form of Brand SA; development and approval of the Digital Transformation Strategy; publishing of Annual Transformation Report to assess the state of transformation in the media, advertising, and communication sector; and development and implementation of the integrated platform strategy to improve relevance in a multichannel environment and increased reach. I believe these initiatives

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are crucial in rearing the GCIS and its entities for the communication landscape of the future.

The total budget allocation to the GCIS over the 2025 MTEF period amounts to R2,468 billion, which is spread as follows: 2025-26, R820,2 million; 2026-27, R805,7 million; and 2027-28, R842,1 million. The department's current budget of R820,2 million for the 2025-26 financial year is shared across operational costs, capital costs, and transfers and subsidies. The operating budget is R544,4 million, and this constitutes 46% of the budget allocation. The operating budget caters for the compensation of employees to the value of R311 million, with the establishment of 500 permanent positions. It must be noted that the GCIS's establishment is not fully funded, as the cost of employee allocation is insufficient. The transfers and subsidies amount to R270 million, and the transfer to the MDDA is R40 million and to Brand SA is R229 million.

In an era of ever-diminishing budgets and many pressing interests, we understand funding is a challenge for all departments. However, the present GCIS budget allocation does not adequately cover the cost of communicating per capita. I wish to table this budget for your support, and undertake that

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we will work diligently with this budget to save the nation, no matter how constrained it is. Thank you.

Ms K L N SANGONI: Madam Deputy Speaker, Minister, Deputy Minister, hon members, the leadership of the Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, and Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, and fellow South Africans, it was Nobel Prize-winning playwright George Bernard Shaw that once said the single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. That is the paradox that we confront today: a government communication system that, despite its effort, commitment, and intention too often speaks but is not heard, informs but does not connect, and broadcasts but does not engage.

The world is living in tumultuous times. The global political arena is unpredictable and information disorders, whether they be misinformation or disinformation, abound. There is increasing media fragmentation, increasing fragmentation of audiences, and the proliferation of digital technologies, which have since become the primary source of news for many people. Extreme and often very divisive views have emerged in political discourse, adding complexity to government’s efforts

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to address the national faultlines of racism, sexism, ethnic mobilisation, unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

In the midst of all of this local and global instability and rising uncertainty, our people live with a quiet but determined hope, a hope for jobs, a hope for security, and a hope for dignity, but hope needs to be fed with facts, with clarity, and with the truth. Without effective, co-ordinated communication from government, hope turns into frustration and frustration into alienation.

Perhaps let me paint the picture more clearly. In Mthatha, where I come from, a young entrepreneur wanted to open a small recycling business during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was inspired by government's promises of support for green enterprises, yet months went by, and no local or national information ever reached him on how to access the available funding for mentorship programmes or funding in general. His application was incomplete due to lack of guidance and was declined. Today his shopfront is closed, his dream deferred. In Limpopo, there is a mother who is eligible for the child support grant, but she spends R60 on taxi fare to visit the local SA Social Security Agency office every month because she

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has no idea that she can update her details online. No one told her. No campaign reached her, no poster, no local radio announcement, just silence — a silence that cost the poorest amongst us. Lastly, in Diepsloot, during the water outage last year, residents waited for days for an explanation. Confusion spread as different departments released contradictory statements. Was it maintenance, was it sabotage, or was it infrastructure failure? No one knew. In the absence of clear communication, rumours filled the vacuum, and tempers flared. The result was protests, violence, and a further erosion of trust.

Hon members, these are not isolated stories. They are the human cost of a fragmented, underresourced, and outdated government communication system. Section 195(1) of our Constitution compels public administration to be transparent, responsive, and accountable. The GCIS is meant to be at the heartbeat of that promise, ensuring that every citizen, whether in an urban township or rural village, has access to timely, accurate, and empowering information. To deliver this, GCIS must evolve. It must be digitally agile, strategically aligned, and adequately resourced.

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That is why the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies, having thoroughly considered the strategic plan 2025-2030 and the annual performance plan, has resolved to place conditions on the department for its recommendations of the approval of Budget Vote No 4 to the National Assembly. We have invoked section 10(5) of the Money Bills Amendment Procedure and Related Matters Act, which empowers Parliament not only to approve or reject budgets but to amend them with purpose.

We are not content to merely rubber-stamp this budget. Our support comes with clear, enforceable conditions designed to transform the GCIS from a passive broadcaster into an active enabler of democracy. For us to ensure that the GCIS is an effective instrument that can meet its constitutional mandate, there are structural issues that we believe the strategic plan and budget, in accordance with successive resolutions and national conferences and lekgotla of the ANC that leads the Government of National Unity, GNU, we called for, can resolve.

We are calling for a communications performance management framework for executive and senior officials, which ensures that government is accessible, and there is communication

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accountability in order to restore trust. Ministers and directors-general must be held accountable for clear, co-ordinated messages. The public must not only see them but hear them and understand them. This is about accessibility, accountability, and building trust.

We have called for legislative and policy reform. The GCIS can no longer depend on what they call collegiality and the goodwill of Cabinet colleagues. We require coherent legislation and policy instruments to govern communication across all spheres — national, provincial, and local — with a singular purpose to serve the people and not the collegiality between colleagues. We are also calling for a monitoring, evaluation, and results framework. This demands that communications must be research driven, evidence based, and people centred. We must stop measuring communication in output, by the number of press releases issued or tweets posted. We must start measuring outcomes by impact. Did the people understand? Were they reached on the appropriate platforms? Was there behavioural change as a result of that communication?

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We also want to see reforms to Brand South Africa and the MDDA. These institutions must be sharpened. Brand South Africa must boldly tell our story on the global stage, whilst the MDDA must truly empower community media, the only voice in places where mainstream media sometimes rarely ventures. Finally, we need enforcement of the 30% community spend. We believe that, for years, we have pledged support by words, and it is time that we had the legislative instruments that speak to this.

The department’s projected expenditure growth of 3,4% per annum is welcomed, but it is not sufficient. We welcome initiatives to ring-fence between 1% and 2% of department budgets to communications. The GCIS needs greater investment, yes, but it also needs a sharper focus, digital transformation, and, most critically, political will. It is political will that will also ensure that the vacancy of the director-general at this vital institution is finally filled. This moment demands a break from “business unusual”. We cannot afford another year of spray-and-pray communication.

So, let me end where I began. Communication is not a box to tick. It is the bridge between the state and the people, and,

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when it fails, trust fails. When it succeeds, democracy deepens. So, let's fix the illusion and make communication real. We support this budget with conditions. Thank you.

IsiZulu:

Mnu C V SHONGWE: Sihlalo, sithanda ukubingelela futhi sidlulise amazwi athi duduzekani emndenini kamhlonishwa uBaba u-Mabuza owayenguSekela Mongameli, kanye nomndeni womphathi nelungu lekhwaya yomculo owaziwa nge-Clap and Tap, i-Mighty Messengers u-Isaac Setati.

English:

Chairperson, the MKP rises to reject the Budget Vote for the GCIS as an entity. We reject this Vote not just in protest but in defence of our people's right to information, dignity, and agency. What we see here is not a communications budget but a propaganda package padded with empty phrases, decorated with vanity targets, and designed to manufacture concepts rather than deliver the truth.

Let us be clear: The GCIS has become the centralised spin machine that serves the political elite, not the people, with a budget of R2,5 billion projected over the medium term and

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more than 39% of that going to staff salaries, not public empowerment. A total of R148 million is dedicated to actual platforms that reach the people. The rest is bureaucracy, travel, consultations, and, most likely, cronies.

Chairperson, we are being asked to approve a budget that talks about empowered citizens, yet the same department has killed print *Vuk'uzenzele*, the only government newspaper accessible to the rural poor and the elderly.

IsiZulu:
Sihlalo ohloniphekile, ukuvalwa kwephephandaba *iVuk'uzenzele* kusho ukuthi abahlala emakhaya, ikakhulukazi abadala, basalelwe izimemo zokuvota kuphela, hhayi ulwazi olubalulekile ngoHulumeni. Lesi akusona isinqumo esihlakaniphile. Isinqumo esinobandlulo.

English:
They talk about transformation, yet annual performance plans have no measurable targets for youth, women, or people with disabilities. They claim to support community media, yet thousands of community outlets are going dark because of poor funding models and delayed disbursements.

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Let us talk about Inkonjane Community Radio station, the real people's station in the Eastern Cape. It operates under immense strain, gets no structured support, yet continues to speak the truth to power. However, we find an ANC Member of Parliament sitting on the board. That's not oversight. That is the real state capture at the community level. It is a direct violation of media independence and a clear conflict of interest. This government is not empowering media; it is infiltrating and co-opting the microphone to silence the message.

The MDDA claims to be the future forward. Let's interrogate that. It has no measurable digital transformation. It continues to fund the same number of outlets year after year, with no data on the impact, listenership, or survival rate. Its budget drops by over R16 million over the next three years. How does a shrinking budget build a resilient sector? The truth is the GNU-led government has failed to build a communication system that empowers the nation. Instead, it builds a network of loyalty, not information, and campaigns that flood the media with presidential content, whilst real civic education is nowhere to be found. Especially during the

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local government election of 2026, let us not be fooled by the branding of media-buying policies and the GoZA TV.

Where is the return on investment? Where is the reach? Where is the audience measurement strategy? This is not transformation; it is tender fiction. Even the community itself acknowledges that the targets are not measurable. There is no clear return on investment on budget disbursement. Community media funding remains inadequate. Parliament is sidelined during planning. That is a polite way of saying this department has no direction.

So, let me be clear: The MKP does not endorse captured communication. We will not fund a department that delivers documents instead of impact. We will not accept speeches about transformation without data to back it up. We will not support a system that silences grassroots voices like Inkonjane Radio station, while pouring millions into events like the G20 Summit that benefit the elite. What we demand is a complete overhaul. We have organisations like Zion gospel organisation Insindiso Yobukrestu Mass Choirs that need funding. For that to happen, they need radio stations like Inkonjane to operate freely without capture by ...

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IsiZulu:

... amalungu ajengeLungu lePhalamende ngoba umthetho ungavumi ukuthi bathole uxhaso lwezimali.

English:

Remember, when a member of government is part of the board, no funding can be given to that radio station. Again, until then, we stand opposed to this Budget Vote. We vote with the people, not with those who want to keep them in the dark.

IsiZulu:

Ngiyabonga, Sihlalo.

Mr S G VILAKAZI: Hon House Chair and fellow citizens, the reality is this a government that cannot communicate cannot government. In an age of disinformation, public mistrust and deepening inequality, effective and inclusive communication is not a luxury, but a constitutional duty.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Budget Vote of the Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, and its entity, the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA. The Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, is

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the state's communication nerve centre, but too many South Africans, especially in rural and marginalised communities, remain disconnected from credible, accessible public information. We acknowledge GCIS's efforts, including the GCIS for You campaign and steps to improve digital responsiveness.

We also note alignment with the national priorities such as the Medium-Term Strategic Framework, MTSF, and the state of the nation address. However, communication must go beyond co-ordination. It must deliver results. On this note, we raised three concerns

Firstly, GCIS's outcome indicators through which it directs and measures its performance are weak, as stated by the chair already. Many are activity based lacking clarity or rigour. The committee has submitted a refined results framework to the department offering more robust and measurable indicators. This is a contribution, my friends, and not a critique aimed at improving public accountability.

Secondly, and I repeat, Deputy Minister, the decision to discontinue the print edition of *Vukuzenzele* risks excluding vulnerable groups who depended on it, especially the elderly

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and the underserved. The department cites cost an audience preference but has presented no data to justify the decision. The Government Communication and Information System, GCIS, must assess and report the true impact of this move and outline mitigation steps.

Thirdly, GCIS has failed to ensure that government departments allocate a meaningful proportion of their advertising budgets to community media as required by its co-ordination mandate. This failure directly undermines the viability of small outlets and contradicts government's own commitment to inclusive and diversified media support.

On the financial front, GCIS must do more to demonstrate value for money. There is a noticeable gap between the scale of its budget and the clarity of its performance reporting. Several major expenditure items are backed by vague indicators of soft targets which weakens oversight and accountability.

Turning to the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, we recognise the agency's mandate to promote media diversity and support community and small commercial media, outlets that are often the only reliable source of local content in

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underserved areas. But this mandate is consistently undermined by underfunding, as the hon Minister has herself stated. The Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, is expected to transform and sustain an entire sector on limited resources. This is not sustainable. A new long-term funding model drawing from both public and private sources must be developed and implemented without delay.

We also raised concerns about transparency in the grant making process. Stakeholders in the sector whom we come across during our oversight visits, continue to question how projects are selected with limited visibility into the adjudication process. The agency must publish clearer criteria and consider introducing a third-party oversight or a rotating grant adjudication panel.

Finally, the MDDA's results frameworks need refinement. There's too much repetition across goals and insufficient focus on digital transformation, audience development and the long-term viability of funded entities. It is also evident that both GCIS and MDDA requires stronger technical capacity in their monitoring, evaluation and reporting units. Without

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this, meaningful organisational goals cannot be effectively set, monitored and achieved.

These are not superficial issues they go to the heart of institutional effectiveness. But we also acknowledge the co-operative posture of both the GCIS and MDDA. Their willingness to receive feedback and improve is commendable. And so, just like my chair did, I return to where I began. A government that cannot communicate cannot govern. If we are serious about rebuilding trust, empowering communities and strengthening democracy, communication must be clear, credible and, most importantly, inclusive, especially to those who have too often been left behind. I thank you.

Ms S GCILISHE: As the EFF we express our deepest condolences on the passing of a long-serving servant of our people, the former Deputy President of our country, David Mabuza. Deputy Speaker, members of the House and the people of South Africa, allow me to open this important debate by extending a revolutionary invitation to all people of South Africa to join us in celebrating the 12th anniversary of the EFF on 26 July 2025, at Khayelitsha Rugby Stadium in Cape Town.

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I rise on behalf of the EFF to categorically and unapologetically reject the Budget Vote of the GCIS. This Vote in its current form represents a betrayal of our economic sovereignty and giving in to imperialists' interests disguised as a technological progress. At the centre of our rejection is Elon Musk, a billionaire attempting to force his Starlink satellite system into South Africa, not through the front door of legal compliance, but through the back door of political cowardice and capitalist collusion. Let us be unequivocal, Starlink must be banned from operating in South Africa until it complies with our broad-based black economic empowerment, B-BBEE, laws, which requires 30% of black ownership of telecoms licences.

Rather than to respect our sovereignty, Elon Musk has insulted our people by calling our transformation policies racist simply because they challenge white monopoly capital and global elitism. This is not about internet access, it is about ownership, sovereignty and whether South Africa is ruled by the Constitution and the will of our people or billionaires from Silicon Valley.

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The EFF has long warned that this government, especially under the stewardship of the neoliberal collaborators like Minister Solly Malatsi and Minister Ntshavheni, has no genuine interest in economic transformation. The Ministers have now been exposed as gatekeepers of foreign capital trying to smuggle Starlink in the country under the guise of equity equivalent investment programme. This so-called equity equivalent investment programme, EEIP, is a scam mechanism — a mechanism that allows foreign capital to bypass meaningful transformation and avoid black ownership. This is a deliberate undermining of our laws to satisfy the whims of a tech billionaire who believes his wealth can override the democratic will of our people. So, we ask a simple question: Who benefits from this Budget Vote because it is not the millions of young people in rural areas who still lack access to education and opportunities? It is not the small, medium, and micro enterprises, SMMEs, that are starved of both bandwidth and capital. It is not the black majority of our people who remain landless, assetless and voiceless under the ANC-DA access compromise. Instead, we are told Starlink will connect the unconnected. But at what cost? At the cost of our self-determination, at the expense of our transformative laws

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and the vision of the Freedom Charter, which declares that the people shall share in the country's wealth.

Let us be clear, the EFF is not opposed to any technological progress. We are exposed to neocolonial capitalism disguised as innovation. There is nothing progressive about allowing Elon Musk to build a digital empire on African soil while giving nothing to our people. We note the suspicious timing of this policy shift coming after the diplomatic engagements with the United States allegedly lobbied by Johan Rupert, one of the architects of white monopoly capital. This is not a policy it is a sell-out to American tech imperialism.

We reject this Budget Vote because it undermines our laws behind closed doors. It allows capitalist cartels to dictate our developmental path. It disregards the historical and present pain to black people. It betrays the blood of our forbearers who fought self-governance.

The EFF demands a people-owned and publicly controlled digital future, one built on state-owned broadband infrastructure, community internet co-operatives and strict enforcement of transformation laws. We reject this budget with revolutionary

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clarity. We reject the commodification of sovereignty. we reject the cowardice of the Ministers, and we declare that South Africa is not for sale. Our dignity is not negotiable, and our laws are not optional. We let this Parliament know that the EFF will not consign to any kind of betrayal. Thank you very much.

Mr N M HADEBE: Hon Deputy Speaker, to the family of the former Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa and the ANC, I offer you Psalm 34:18: The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The IFP rises in this House to affirm that effective communication is not a luxury in government; it is a constitutional necessity. Therefore, we want to reaffirm our commitment to transparent governance, media diversity and informed citizenry.

At the heart of any democracy lies an informed citizenry, one that has access to timely, relevant and reliable information. It is through effective, professional and inclusive government communication that the state is made accessible to its people. It is through the media that democracy breathes. Therefore, the IFP welcomes the strategic focus of the GCIS on promoting

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transparent governance, empowering communities and improving communication channels between government and citizens.

The 2025-26 financial year is a critical moment, marking the first step of the Seventh Administration. We therefore commend GCIS for aligning its work with the Medium-Term Development Plan priorities and for placing clear emphasis on researched informed communication. For the development of the National Strategic Communication Framework and enhancing multilingual access to state messaging through platforms such as Vuk'uzenzele and community media, the allocated budget of R842,2 million by 2027-28, growing at a modest annual average rate of 3,4 % must be used efficiently.

The IFP supports the use of platform unification strategies and calls for stronger partnerships with local and community media houses, especially those in rural and historically underresourced areas. The Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, must play a more active role in broadening media ownership, empowering women- and youth-owned media enterprises and ensuring language and cultural inclusivity.

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The department’s strategic decision to improve digital communication platforms and expand Go Digital ZA, GoZA, TV is a welcomed step towards making government more visible and accountable. However, the IFP cautions that these platforms must not be mere publicity tools; they must deliver substantive service-oriented content that directly improves the lives of ordinary South Africans. Visibility must translate into impact.

We also welcome the focus on professionalising government communicators and the training planned in collaboration with the National School of Government. To ensure the credibility of state communication, we must guard against partisan use of communication tools. Government communication is not party political; it is public good. This distinction must be protected at all times.

Oversight must be meaningful. The IFP will continue to monitor the implementation of this Budget Vote, to ensure that the targets set from civic education to digital access are met in both word and deed.

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In conclusion, the IFP supports the Budget Vote with the expectation that communication will not only be a one-way transmission from the government, but a two-way engagement with the people. We must build an informed citizenry, not only to enhance public trust, but to strengthen the very fabric of our democracy. Thank you.

Mr A SAULS: Hon Chair, on behalf of the PA, our President, Gayton McKenzie and our Deputy President, Kenny Kunene, we wish to extend our condolences to the ANC and the family of our former Deputy President, D D Mabuza. Greetings in the wonderful name of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ.

Khoisan:

!Honkia u huniki. [Good day, all]

English:

GCIS expenditure is set to increase at an average annual rate of 3,4% from R760,8 million in 2024-25 to 2027-28. Such expenditure increase over the medium term must include intentionalism around a strong digital presence and footprint on social media. Hon Minister, well done on over a million followers on Facebook and WhatsApp. However, when comparing

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that to the data on Portal.com, statistics on local connectivity, which holds that South Africa's Internet penetration rate stood at 74,7%, which is 45,3% million users at the start of 2024, it means that our Facebook following is a fraction of that total.

The impact of this is shown by how a false broader social media narrative that there is a white genocide in South Africa was the sole basis of an executive decision by a sovereign government and at the centre of discussion in a formal meeting between His Excellency President Ramaphosa and President Donald Trump. The true narrative by GCIS on the issue dwarfed in reach and impact.

With the department's budget over the medium term of R2,5 billion, of which 32,6% is earmarked for transfer to its entities, my interest is in the support of the MDDA. It excites me that the agency will continue providing financial and non-financial support to community- and small commercial media. But it is the fact that they will be emphasising the promotion of indigenous languages.

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I stand here on behalf of the PA to support this budget, especially because of the role the MDDA must play in restoring the almost extinct heritage of language of the Khoi and San people. I am the third born son of a third generation, Jan Scholtz. I was born in Kliptown, raised in Klipspruit in Eldorado Park. To know that I am who the apartheid regime said I am - a coloured, speaking English and Afrikaans person.

Two years ago, I found out that I am a Boesman from the Westelike Khomani San tribe, N‖n‡e tribe, speaking the new language. I underwent the traditional ceremony, and I was named Khoi ‡e, the first. My seven-year-old son is here with me today. He is named after me. I support the role of the MDDA because when he is my age, I want him to know that he is not just Ashley Sauls; I want him to know that he is Ashley Khoi ‡e the second Sauls. And through supporting community radio stations such as Eldos FM, Kofifi FM in his hometown, he must be helped to speak his true mother tongue – the Boesman tongue, the new language. I thank you.

Ms M P KOBE: Hon House Chair, as Action SA, we stand in support of Budget Vote 4. We support this budget because we believe in an informed and empowered society. We believe that

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access to credible localised information is a right and not a privilege. Our communities from Moleji, Alexandra, Lusikisiki, cannot participate in a democracy, if they are left in the dark about what government is doing. We welcome the commitment to community dialogues, the expansion of Vuk'uzenzele into all official languages and the investment in GoZA TV. These efforts show an understanding that communication must meet people where they are, in their languages, in their communities and on platforms that they actually use.

We are also pleased with the MDDA's focus on building resilient community media, especially in rural and marginalised areas like the Limpopo area where I come from. The support for digital transformation training and new studio roll-out is a step in the right direction. But let us be clear, support does not mean silence.

Action SA is concerned that many of the targets are vague, unmeasurable and disconnected from impact. If we are truly building a capable department, then every rand must be matched with results. We are disappointed that there is no clear communication plan for the 2026 local government elections. This is a missed opportunity. Local government is where

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service delivery happens. Without proper public engagement, we risk voter apathy and a weakened democracy.

We call on the hon Minister to finalise the media buying policy, accelerate transformation in the advertising and communication sector and set clear measurable targets for youth, women and people with disabilities in the sector. We insist that the MDDA establishes a proper sustainability model for community media. Handouts are not enough. We need self-sufficient, future-ready media platforms that uplift and hold power to account.

Before I leave, I want to commend the portfolio chairperson, hon Khusela Sangoni, who in her remarks was clear that the work of the department will be subject to stringent monitoring by the committee, placing their support on clear conditions, showing that the work will be centred on people and not collegiality between colleagues, that it will measure the department’s performance on impact, as opposed to just outcomes, and that it will enforce the 30% community spend that prioritises local communities.

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We support this Vote, because, as Action SA, we believe that information is power, and Action SA will not allow our people to be left out of the national conversation. Thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY (Mr I K Morolong): Deputy Speaker, the chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies, hon Khusela Sangoni-Diko, Minister in the Presidency, hon Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, members of the portfolio committee, chairpersons of boards of MDDA and Brand SA, management of GCIS, MDDA and Brand SA. Two weeks ago, we met with the portfolio committee to, inter alia, deliver the APP and the strategic plan. We were told by the portfolio committee that an engagement will ensue with the Ministry in the form of a letter, which will indicate the discontent of the portfolio committee on the budgets, including some of the issues raised in this platform. Two weeks later, we are still waiting for the correspondence.

Chair, I want to also indicate that if there was any suggestion that this report is rejected purely on the basis of Starlink or the intention by anybody to bring Starlink to South Africa, that argument is misplaced because GCIS is not a regulator. Secondly, let me address the Vukuzenzele matter,

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which has been raised in this very House, and I have had to respond to it more than once.

Members of the portfolio committee indicated that one of their discontents with this report is that we have decided to phase off the printed version of Vukuzenzele. We have elucidated to the committee that the reasons thereof is that Vukuzenzele has got a reach of 60 000 South Africans in rural areas, which is not impactful. So, if we are rejecting this budget purely on the basis that is not impactful, yet, our issue is that Vukuzenzele is removed as a platform to serve our people, which does not necessarily impact, is also worrisome.

President Ramaphosa profoundly described former Deputy President Mabuza as a leader who was grounded in activism at a very early stage of his political career. We joined many South Africans in conveying our heartfelt condolences to his esteemed son of the liberation struggle. Government Communication has a vital role to play in uniting South Africans by promoting transparency, fostering national pride and encouraging active citizenship.

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The GCIS developed the government segmentation model which classifies citizens according to their information needs, which is used as a basis in the Biannual Research Report to better understand the unique information needs of citizens. These evidence-based approaches is further bolstered by the Government Communication excellence tool, which continues to use performance criteria to provide insights on the performance of strategies and implementation plans. The GCIS Biannual Reports have demonstrated significant and sustained progress against a 50% target of compliance to the Government Communication Policy.

House Chairperson, through a diversified range of six indicators that determine the existence of communication enablers within 30 participating national departments, the highest reported percentage of compliance to the communication policy was 82%. This success is attributed to the participation of 97% of national departments that submitted their reports as requested.

Enabled to our budget allocation of 2025-26, the GCIS will strengthen its communication arsenal by upskilling employees in digital communication skills, to ensure a skilled and

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capable workforce in an ever-evolving landscape. GCIS must stay ahead of the curve if it is to lead in both citizen engagement and hands-on communication. Therefore, GCIS is exploring ICT solutions which can assist in improving communication, responsiveness and interaction.

Chairperson, during this current financial year, we are finalising a standalone media buying policy. This policy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval, and it will enable a minimum of 30% of the overall government advertising expenditure to be set aside for community media. The media buying policy will also enable over 700 entities, 230 municipalities, 30 national government depart and over 70 provincial departments and nine provincial legislatures, to comply with setting aside 30% of advertising budget for community media.

The GCIS continues its vital outreach to work with communities, including supporting the Presidential District Developed Model and the Imbizo programme of government. In further taking communication directly to communities, the GCIS has, in this period, ensured the implementation of 1 741 developed communication projects. These were done through

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stakeholder engagements, community radio stations, print media outreach, dialogues, seminars, mall and taxi activations, and others. The GCIS continues to prioritise dissemination of good news stories from communities through the weekly, *My District Today* electronic newspapers.

Hon members, two years ago the board and management of Radio Zibonele, a community radio station, placed their hopes on the MDDA by applying for its grant funding. Radio Zibonele is one of the oldest community radio stations and the first ever community radio stations to receive community broadcast licence. This morning, I had the honour of visiting this community radio station, based in Khayelitsha, and to bear witness to the state-of-the-art studios provided by MDDA as part of its grant funding. These state-of-the-art studios elevates the quality of community broadcasting and reflect our commitment to diversifying the media landscape. Since its establishment in 2003, the MDDA has made great strides in funding initiatives that uplift marginalised voices.

Chairperson, we are entering a new and ambitious chapter of Brand SA, whose work remains critical to strengthening nation pride and building a nation brand that is inclusive, credible

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and competitive on the global stage. In this period, the organisation is guided by its annual performance plan, which is a first step in the implementation of its five-year 2025-30 strategic plan.

The organisation, through its flagship Play Your Part programme, will continue to work together with business, civil society and government to transform our society into one founded on justice, human dignity, equality and the rule of law. One of the most significant milestones has been the successful development and institutionalisation of the global reputation study. These annual research initiatives provide government, business and civil society with critical data driven insight into how South Africa is perceived globally.

House Chair, through these plans that we have outlined today, our ability to communicate more effectively with South Africans will be strengthened. These plans are not just about information dissemination, but about ensuring that every citizen - whether they are located in Schweizer Reneke in the district of Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati in the North West, or Sibasa village, where the Minister comes from in Vhembe in Limpopo, or where the chairperson of the portfolio committee

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come from in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape -our people must have access to the knowledge that they need to participate meaningfully in our democracy.

As we prepare to celebrate the birthday of our beloved former President Nelson Mandela on 18 July, we are reminded of the power each of us holds to make a difference. As we reflect on the legacy of Madiba, let us all be reminded that communication is more than just a tool. It is a bridge: A bridge between government and citizens; between hope and progress; and between aspiration and achievement. Let us use this bridge to unite our people; to tell the stories of transformation; to provide clarity in times of uncertainty; and to ignite the spirit of participation that the father of our nation so passionately believed in. I thank you.

Mr W M THRING: Hon Deputy Speaker, the ACDP posits that today, we are not merely debating a budget, but affirming the constitutional imperative of a transparent, inclusive and accountable communication system between the government and the people that it serves. The Government Communication and Information System has a critical mandate, to ensure that

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every South African, regardless of geography of circumstances, has access to timely, accurate and empowering information.

In an era marked by disinformation, misinformation, digital disruption and growing public scepticism, this mandate has never been more urgent. The ACDP recognises that the GCIS was allocated some R798,2 million for the 2025-26 financial year. This includes funding for media engagement, communication campaigns and the digital migration of platforms, like Vukuzenzele. Concerns remain, however, about whether this budget adequately supports inclusive multilingual outreach and if it counters rising misinformation.

We welcome the adoption of the National Communication Strategy Framework approved by Cabinet in February 2025. This framework is a step forward in professionalising communication across all spheres of government. However, frameworks alone are insufficient and will require close monitoring by all Members of Parliament and stakeholders. The ACDP further notes the constructive engagement between GCIS and the SA National Editors Forum in April, this year -a long overdue dialogue that acknowledged past shortcomings, including the exclusion of journalists during key events.

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We commend the commitment to more inclusive, transparent and regular media engagement, and the ACDP positions that this must become the norm and not the exception. We remain concerned, however, about the slow pace of digital transformation, while the shift to digital-only additions for the Vukuzenzele is fiscally prudent, it risks excluding those without reliable internet access. The ACDP urges the GCIS to accelerate its investment in community media and multilingual platforms, extending accurate information to those often overlooked.

In an era where misinformation spreads faster than facts, the GCIS must not merely react; it should lead. We must fund the communication system that is not only efficient, but one that is ethical, inclusive and resilient. For the ACDP, as kingdom builders in a society where 80% of South Africans profess to be Christians, truth is not a privilege; it is a public expectation. I thank you.

Mr S S ZIBI: Hon Chair, hon members, good afternoon. Good afternoon to you, chair of the Portfolio Committee. Chair, I want to talk about two issues that are adjacent to the work of Government Communications and Information System, GCIS, but

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are nonetheless critical to its work. The information ecosystem has changed because of the rapid expansion of digital communication channels. Previously, the government and citizens could rely on reasonably resourced media organisations to cover Parliament and national news events that informs South Africans. Despite what many may feel about the news media, the reality is that the SABC stamp on a circulating video is a form of authentication that the information is accurate, that it is official, that it has been vetted for accuracy. This is no longer the case. Local and regional news organisations are dying at a fast rate, with national news agencies at a close second.

Journalists get retrenched in big numbers, with the Parliament press gallery being a pale shadow of what it was just five years ago in terms of numbers. This problem is, particularly, bad at a time when people need more, not less accurate information that is useful from the government delivered on time. The budget impasse demonstrated this, revealing that most South Africans do not know how this Parliament works, let alone the budget process, and how it directly affects their lives. For those of us who are engaged in efforts to educate the public on this, it was clear from the feedback that

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there's an enormous gap that must be filled as soon as possible. This takes me to the problem of skillful and deliberate misinformation, which is the global phenomenon, but it's particularly bad here in South Africa. It is harmful.

There are serious public safety concerns when people prefer to believe a popular podcaster with a big social media following over a qualified, experienced medical expert. In this environment, people need to know where they can go for fact checking, for accurate public interest information, so they are not misled and endangered. GCIS, therefore, needs to treat these platforms more seriously than being understood, in the manner that most of us are at social media platforms. They own their attention economy and are literally where people live 24 hours a day. I also want to suggest, hon Chair, that we consider legislation and national policy where the large tech companies like Google and Meta pays a levy based on the revenues they generate in South Africa, that would be above any income taxes that they are paying. This can go towards building platforms that fight disinformation and improve access to civic education, fact checking services, using AI tools and media diversity development. Rise Mzantsi will support this budget. I thank you.

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Mr O M MATHAFA: House Chair, as we debate the Budget Vote today, I stand to amplify transformative pillars that will be important in shaping South African's broader communication landscape. This aspects revolve around empowering marginalised voices through media diversity and bridging the digital divide that continues to exclude many of our South Africans from participating meaningfully in the digital economy and information and communications technology, ICT, space. The commitment to transformation finds expression in the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA's, R172 million allocation through the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF, which will seek to empower 66 communities with broadcast projects and 18 small commercial media initiatives. These initiatives represent our people and must be well resourced to be effective. Our support for these initiatives directly addresses the historic injustice of the past, which were the exclusion of women, youth and persons with disability from media ownership and content creation.

The revised Marketing, Advertising and Communications, MAC, Sector Code, gives an element of practicality to this transformation by setting measurable targets for representation and procurement. The digital era has brought

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both opportunities and unprecedented threats to our democracy. While Government Communications and Information System, GCIS, actively engages in curbing the use of misinformation and disinformation, we agree with hon Billy that more work is required in this regard. The efforts to cap this rise of misinformation will gain agency as we approach the 2026 local government election, where foreign actors and local bad faith elements will undoubtedly weaponise misinformation. Programmes from GCIS to speak to this element must take center stage with the cycle. In order to wage an effective battle against misinformation and disinformation, GCIS must institutionalise regular structured ministerial briefings to ensure the public remains continuously informed, not just during crisis or disasters.

While emergency communications are critical, a truly transparent government engages citizens consistently, providing updates and national development initiatives. On Programme 2, the content production is central to the initiatives of Programme 2. GCIS produces and disseminates content across its various platforms and products to keep South Africans informed and empowered. Essential work is funded through the products and platforms subprogramme, under

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the content processing and dissemination programme which has allocated a budget of R143,5 million over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF, period. Infrastructure development project remains one of the key hindrance factors when it comes to bridging the digital divide. However, there are other factors that play a role, such as accessibility. The GCIS digital transformation strategy with its 300 hours of annual streaming content on GoZA TV and other platforms, ensures that South Africans can access crucial information, hon Shongwe.

The MDDA's parallel investment in digital screens training for 60 community project creates continuous programmes for those who are key drivers and enablers of change. Fiscal responsibility remains paramount as previously noted in the analysis of the R2,8 billion medium-term budget. The approach to MDDA's funding reduction demonstrates this principle by focusing on sustainability training and shared resources. We also believe in the construction in community media that can thrive beyond government subsidy. The R196,5 million from the Universal Service Fund Levy and R126,5 million departmental transfers are developed to maximise impact. This is an austerity measure. It is, however, a wise investment in self-

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reliant community institutions. As we move forward with implementing these programmes, we continue to be guided by our vision for communication as a means of liberation and empowerment. Our dedication to this initiative, which aligns with empowerment and national transformation goal, is one we aim to uphold throughout the Seventh administration, and it is taking shape in the department's Annual Performance Plans, APPs, and those entities across the board.

The budget demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that South Africa's media landscape fully reflects the diversity of its people. The threats that are facing the smaller players remain significant, ranging from the 100 million community medium debt to Sentech, to the sophisticated disinformation networks. The solutions that we are envisioning through this budget are equal to the task of addressing these particular shortfalls. May the spirit of Comrade D D Mabuza rest in peace. I thank you, House Chair. The ANC supports the budget.

Setswana:

Moh T K BODLANI: Modulasetilo ...

English:

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The formation of the Government of National Unity, GNU, gave GCIS a unique opportunity to move forward from the perceived stigma of being a government mouthpiece and truly becoming Government Communications Information Services, GCIS. However, under this new dispensation, GCIS has failed to adequately capture the work of new Ministers and does very little to communicate on their behalf. The DA notes with great concern the slow progress of the completion of the policy document to guide government communication, the manifestation of which is the failing results of various empowerment programmes offered by GCIS. As a government lead communicator, GCIS continues to fail in being a strong institution for government outreach. This, in the era of disinformation and misinformation, Minister, the GCIS as is well placed to serve the nation, and they should.

The establishment of GoZA TV by GCIS when the state broadcaster, the SA Broadcasting Corporation, SABC, exists, speaks to the insistence of government entities who work in silos. Why has GCIS reinvented the will when they could have collaborated with SABC? The question we have as the DA is, who stands to benefit from this GoZA TV? Somebody high up, must be making money from this ill-thought project. Following the 2024

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national and provincial elections, GCIS spent unbudgeted millions, I beg your pardon, on the inauguration of President Ramaphosa, as if the event caught them by surprise. A kind reminder through GCIS is that the country will be having local government election next year, and we trust that they will budget accordingly and make meaningful strides on voter education and government messaging.

In the same breath, it would make the work of GCIS more meaningful if they profiled and work with local municipalities. This is a sure way of extending their reach and improving on their low profile, especially in rural areas. Hon Minister, no organisation can perform optimally when fully funded posts remain unfilled, especially at an executive level. This is mitigated by having different acting heads every few months, which is an unsatisfactory management process. The DA calls on you, Minister, to ensure that a permanent director-general is appointed for GCIS. The long delays have caused a leadership vacuum. Turning to the MDDA, House Chairperson, the DA appreciates the mandate of the MDDA as articulated in the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, Act. The need for community-based media cannot be ignored. However, the number of community radio stations and

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newspapers that continue to close, Deputy Minister, are concerning.

We have stations that operate while owing Sentech transmission fees, compromising both their existence as well as that of Sentech. Establishing community radio stations and then closing them, does more harm. In the first instance, the MDDA must make an informed decision before setting up and funding new stations. Deputy Minister, Morolong, a better measure of the output of the MDDA should be the quality of radio stations and their ability to self-sustain. The MDDA should use more evidence based research before finding more stations. In a world where newspapers have gone to digital, local newspapers also need incredible support. As the MDDA has failed to understand the impact local newspapers can have on improving literacy rates, imagine if the MDDA had collaborated with schools, and children could read local news in their own languages. A huge, missed opportunity. Overspending by about 400 000 on litigation and legal matters is a cause for concern. These are funds that could have been used to empower MDDA beneficiaries. The DA stands to welcome the portfolio committee and the recommendations that have been made.

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Hon House Chairperson, the face of Parliament has changed in the Seventh administration. We have done this by not having members in the portfolio committee who just stand there, and rubber stamp the decisions as business as usual. As the DA, we stand to say we support the integration of the committee recommendations as stated by the committee chairperson. These recommendations are our one chance for the future of GCIS to truly become Government Communications and Information System, GCIS. Chairperson, as I conclude, to hon Gcilishe, where I come from, when you speak about a person who is not in the room, like you did about Minister Solly Malatsi, ...

IsiXhosa:

... sithi uyahleba. [Kwahlekwa.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): Hon Subrathie, can you go back and sit where you were. The next speaker will be hon Subrathie.

Mr S I SUBRATHIE: Chairperson, let me follow on the protocol of the hon members who have come before me and greet everybody in the House, and fellow South Africans. Let me also greet my wife, Fatima and Asma, who have joined me here today to be

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part of the Parliament for the People. Let me also note my reflection on the absence of hon Sithole of the IFP, who would have been debating with us today. Let me recognise his absence.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, a pivotal milestone which, as we reflect, we cannot help but marvel at the progress that we as a country have attained. The vision articulated in Kliptown in 1955 must find expression in the very work of the entities before this august House today. Driving transformation requires active redress of historical injustices. Let me directly address the misinformation and the selective outrage that have characterised some opposition statements in this debate. The stance of the opposition has always centred around this budget being wasteful expenditure and, as hon Shongwe calls it, a propaganda budget. From the outset, this has revealed their shocking ignorance or deliberate distortion of how a developmental budget, hon Shongwe, and not how a propaganda budget works. At the heart of our conversation is the central role of the Government Communications and Information System, GCIS. To those who criticise the GCIS's co-ordinating mandate, answer the straightforward, simple question. Why should taxpayers

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continue to fund separate departmental communication units with duplicate budgets, with duplicate staff and contracts?

The National Communication Strategic Framework is about more than just centralisation of control and about departmental autonomy. At its core, it aims to eliminate wasteful expenditure that the opposition claims to oppose. Our commitment to strengthening government communication remains firmly focused on ensuring that our people have ongoing access to credible and centralised information. Ultimately, all departments need to rally behind the GCIS to be fully effective and lead the industry in providing information. We must effectively utilise GCIS platforms for announcements and convey critical information to achieve this. We also need to address the role of the Ministerial Liaison Officers, MLOs and enhance the department's communication framework. The priority is to align these two areas with the overall goal of building a capable departmental communication framework. The next step is to establish a clear communication point and guidelines. This brings me to accountability, where criticism of internal department regulation on MLOs has been expressed, and insights have been given on using the Universal Service and Access Fund levy. However, when addressing this criticism, we must

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remember that it pertains to an implementation shortfall, not a policy failure. Implementation is enabled by both budget availability and budget allocation.

The National Dialogue presents a strategic opportunity for all South Africans to reshape the nation's future collectively. It presents a platform to address pressing challenges ranging from inequality to social cohesion and to forge a shared vision for progress. As the custodian of government communication, hon Minister, GCIS must ensure that every citizen understands the dialogue's purpose, the dialogue's process and participatory opportunities. As the ANC, we see the National Dialogue as the modern embodiment of what the Freedom Charter envisioned when it declared that the people shall govern. Moving forward towards creating an ongoing participatory democracy, the National Dialogue will continue, despite other parties pulling away from it, as it does not represent the views of the individual party. DA, no, it is a gathering for the people and by the people. The National Dialogue will not be held to ransom or used as a bargaining chip. It will never. We maintain that the G20's values lie not in its global stature, but in its ability to foster domestic ... [Interjections.] ...

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The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): Hon Subrathie, can you take a seat? Hon Gama, what are you rising on?

Mr S I GAMA: Chair, on a point of order: We are encouraged, Chair. He must always bring his wife. He is very energised.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): Hon Gama, that's not a point of order, you know that. Hon members, I can't control a person's passion on the subject. It is not my job. What is that hand for?

Mr C V SHONGWE: Chairperson, on a point of order: I rise on Rule 12. Please protect our eardrums.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): No, that's a frivolous point of order. Hon Subrathie, can you proceed?

Mr S I SUBRATHIE: ... unity and national pride when effectively communicated. The ANC expects, Hon Minister, that the GCIS will leverage its provincial networks and partnerships to make the G20 resonate as a people's project, not as a gathering of select individuals. The G20 presidency must instil a sense of pride in our people, and they should be

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able to resonate with its proceedings. As the ANC, we stand firm in supporting the Budget Vote.

Still, our backing reflects clear and actionable recommendations to ensure that the entities deliver maximum impact for the people of South Africa. The committee's recommendations serve as a roadmap for accountability and measurable outcomes that will determine the success of the entities over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework. I think I've adequately responded to hon Shongwe that I've educated the House that this is not a propaganda budget. This is a developmental budget. Hon Vilakazi, you speak about a government that cannot communicate and cannot govern.

Perhaps I will respond by saying that a party that does not and cannot participate in the National Dialogue should also not be governing. So maybe you will announce whether you will be contesting the local government election 202. Finally, Hon Gcilishe, I saw you leaving the House. I thought perhaps you went to bring the correct speech for this year, because the Starlink regulation sits in the next debate of the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, not in this debate.

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The ANC is aligned that anybody who wants to enter the telecom sector must comply and come through the front door, not through the back door, and the ANC supports this, Vote.

IsiZulu:

Ngiyabonga.

English:

Ms N M MHLONGO: Chair, on a point of order: We want to take this opportunity to commend you for choosing to ignore and not calling out the parties that we have noticed have nothing to contribute towards this process of Budget Votes. Thank you for not wasting South Africans' time by just blue-ticking those parties.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): Hon Mhlongo, thank you. Hon Shongwe, on which point are you rising on? Because Rule 12 does not speak about what you spoke about.

Mr C V SHONGWE: Chair, on a point of order: Chair, be patient with me I'm new in the Parliament. I just want to know, Chair, is it parliamentary that the Government of National Unity,

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GNU, on this side claps hands and the other GNU doesn't clap hands, is parliamentary?

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Mahlaule): The next and last speaker is the hon Minister.

The MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY (Ms K P S Ntshavheni): Hon Chair, listening to the conditions that were being tabled here by the chairperson of the portfolio committee, I'm certain and confident that we'll find each other when the letter reaches us because the issues you were raising are already covered in our annual performance plan, APP, and Strategic Plan, maybe it's just to package them in a different way.

You raised the issue of poor communication by the government departments, entities or municipalities, including the example of COVID-19, when you were part of the management team of the GCIS. We have gone back and brushed up on that communication plan that you did, and looked at the weaknesses and part of the work has been improving on those. That is why we've developed the National Communication Strategic Framework, and we did it early in the year.

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We got all departments to input and provinces to input, developing their own communications plans. We have gone further, and that's what we're saying in the next Cabinet meeting, we're tabling the First Quarter performance of departments in terms of implementing that, so that we can then bring coherence in the messaging and adequacy in the communication with our people. And it's for that reason we have also said, part of the work that's going to be done by the provincial offices of the GCIS, working with the Offices of the Premier in provinces and the SA Local Government Association, Salga, is to then develop the district and metro municipalities communication plan.

The ultimate goal is that by end of this financial year, even if we may not cover all the local municipalities, we must have covered a sufficient reach of local municipalities. As we aggregate towards a local government strategy for municipalities but also integrate government communication throughout the whole system. And that's the work that we're doing. And that's why we're confident that when that letter reaches us, we're going to be able to respond and say this is how we're dealing with it. Because those targets have to be measurable. I've committed that we'll table the quarterly

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reports that will serve in Cabinet as an extra to our quarterly reports as we table them to the portfolio committee. The second issue you raised is the issue of holding the Ministers, directors-general and Deputy Ministers accountable. Part of the government communication policy review is to address this very gap and are indicated on the six proposals that we are making. To say we want to clearly define the roles of Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and directors-general. And as you were in the GCIS and government communications before, you're fully aware that sometimes Ministers do not allow Deputy Ministers to communicate or do not allow directors-general to communicate. So, we want to clarify those roles and then hold the people who are blocking government communication accountable.

And it's for that reason we're starting to number how many press briefings have departments held. And we can even account now for the Budget Vote debates that how many were hosted and how many were not possible and what's the follow up. And that's why we've committed that in the next draft when we table the annual reports, we're also going to do those briefings. To enhance what hon Zibi has spoken about, that when we do this in supporting the parliamentary communication,

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we also enhance the ability of South Africans to know what's happening in their government across the board. And by the way, just so that it's not a myth, GoZA TV is not a tender, it's a collaboration between GCIS and the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa, Nemisa. There's nobody benefiting there unless we do not know what Nemisa is about. And hon Sauls, you get the first. Yes, we appreciate the commitment on pushing us to reach further on social media. But we need to measure. In English they say success is not the measure of the height you have achieved but the depth from where you have come. When we joined or when I rejoined GCIS in March 2023, the Facebook following was just over 200 000. But from March 2023 to October 2024, we got it to a million. Between that period and now we are over 1,1 million, which shows that we're active. And we're not only just measuring the following, but we’re also measuring the interactions and the responses on those platforms so that we can further reach.

I have articulated that print media is dead. We have to, and they're moving digital. So, we can be more in the depth of the print media. That's why we've put a team of CEOs of print media and also OTT platform, everybody, so that how do we save this important mouthpiece, which is important to give proper

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news and factually check news during the period that we are in, so that we can then deal with disinformation and misinformation. And the report, as it comes through, we said it will then amend the strategic plan and framework and APP of the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA. But the major challenge with the MDDA and support to community media is not the MDDA, it is the legislation that is outdated. That's why we're proposing that you will need your support as we propose amendments to chapter 3 and chapter 9 of the Electronic Communications Act because it is that Act that gives the power of how community media must function. Imagine how community newspapers will function when big newspapers are collapsing like the *City Press*. And therefore, we need to make an intervention and that's where the legislative change must come through. And we have said to the MDDA and GCIS, we will not wait for the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, we will initiate, consult with them and come to the portfolio committee. At least it's the same portfolio committee that we reported to. And hon Gcilishe, you were mourning at the wrong funeral. Thank you.

Debate concluded.

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The mini plenary session rose at 14:34.

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