

Anger erupts at Wits

Witsies object to tuition cost hike

KATE MORISSEY,
TEBOGO MONAMA AND
BOTHO MOLOSANKWE

ENRAGED Wits University students blocked off entrances to the institution this morning in protest against planned fee increases.

Fees are expected to go up by 10.5 percent from next year due to declining government subsidies, but the students will have none of it, saying the "exorbitant" increase excludes working-class students from the chance of getting a higher education.

They blocked cars trying to enter the university from 6am, disrupted classes, opened lecture hall doors and chanted struggle songs.

"In barring the cars from coming in, we're showing how many students won't be able to come back next year. #WitsFeesMustFall," tweeted Fizzy Schwarzenegger (@Fizzy_Mabz).

The confrontation got physical shortly before 9am when a student on a motorcycle tried to force his way through and was pushed back out by the crowd.

Security had to intervene and stop protesting students from fighting with those trying to enter the campus.

"There are people who are writing tests. I'm upset because I drove here from far away and classes are cancelled," said Shahil Singh.

However there were many who supported the action. "When I started at Wits in 2007, the registration fee was about R5 000. It's now almost R10 000. #WitsFeesMustFall," wrote @ThatDasia.

Others, like @valavooosh, said to cut costs the university should stop outsourcing services. "Universities are meant to be centres of learning but they are looking more and more like businesses #WitsFeesMustFall."

Wits chief financial officer Linda Jarvis said since Wits announced the fee increases, she has been inundated with students asking her why it was necessary.

She said the increases were necessary because:

- The rand-dollar exchange rate had fallen by 22 percent, which meant the university had to spend more to buy library books, journals and other items overseas.
- Salary increases for academic staff were set at 7 percent on a



BLOCKING THE WAY: Wits students closed the university entrances during their protest against a proposed increase in fees.

PICTURE: BHEKIHAYA MABASO

Phoneless jail officials sound alarm 'to stop fight'

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SANDTON residents were gripped by fear last night as sirens from a nearby jail echoed through the area in the north of Joburg.

After being woken by the sound of the alarm at Leeuwkop Prison, residents rushed outside their houses to see what the commotion was about.

They were further unsettled when they spotted police helicop-

ters hovering over their suburb. "Leeuwkop prison sounding, prison break maybe?" asked @FrankHeitmuller on Twitter shortly after 10pm.

"Okay if the Leeuwkop prison bells ring at this hour what does this possibly mean? An inmate has escaped?" asked @Mam_Duma.

@NiccJoyCox from Rivonia said the sirens were "unnerving" as she had recently experienced a robbery.

But this morning, Correctional

Services spokesman Ofentse Morwane quelled fears of marauding criminals being on the loose in Sandton.

"There was no prison break but I can confirm that there was a fight inside the prison," he said.

Morwane was unable to give details, such as the number of prisoners involved.

But a prison official, who did not want to be named, said prisoners had got into an altercation and that officials raised the alarm

in a bid to stop it.

"The inmates were stabbing each other and the members couldn't call anyone because our telephones are not working for ages now, so they had to push the alarm," said the official.

Although inmates had access to both pay phones and cellphones in prison, officials were without phones and had used the siren as a last resort to stop the fight from escalating.

@Karishma_Dipa

three-year cycle.

- Inflation was hovering at 6 percent while rates for utilities were increasing at a rate higher than that.

Jarvis said they expected a subsidy increase of 5 percent from the government and this wouldn't be enough to cover their expenses.

She said Wits had reduced the fee increases from 11 percent to 10.5 percent and the registration fee from 10 to 6 percent.

"We are mindful of the current economic climate and financial strain on students and families. About 20 000 of our students are on bursaries, scholarships and finan-

cial aid, but we are cognisant of the pressure this increase places on parents and caregivers of those who pay their own way," Jarvis said.

Higher education spokesman Khaye Nkwanyana agreed with the students that the increase was too high.

"These institutions always raise

their fees in double digits and the decision excludes many students who can't afford it."

Nkwanyana said the minister, Blade Nzimande, was investigating the cost drivers.

Wits spokeswoman Shirona Patel said that by 10am, lectures were continuing as normal.

MOGOMOTSI MAGOME

COMMUNICATIONS Minister Faith Muthambi has come under heavy fire from the ruling party over her "unmandated" comments on criticism by the ANC's national general council (NGC) of her handling of the digital migration project and instability at the SABC.

The party has slammed Muthambi for effectively calling ANC communications subcommittee chairman Jackson Mthembu a liar.

In a statement issued yesterday, Muthambi disputed Mthembu's comments that the ANC was unhappy about the country missing the digital migration deadline, the encryption component of the process and instability at the public broadcaster, claiming these were

never discussed at the NGC.

But the ANC has hit back hard at Muthambi in a stinging and rare public rebuttal of a cabinet minister.

It said her comments had inaccuracies, and that she was not mandated to communicate decisions and discussions of its mid-term assessment meeting.

"It is unfortunate that in her statement there are a number of inaccuracies relating to matters discussed by the communications commission and subsequently adopted by the NGC.

"We want to place on record that the issues of digital migration and the SABC were discussed



HAULED OVER THE COALS: Communications Minister Faith Muthambi

extensively by the commission, which resulted in the decisions that were taken," ANC spokesman Zizi Kodwa said in a statement last night.

Kodwa said the party, having noted the "unfortunate failure by South Africa to migrate from analogue to digital broadcasting

and the terrible instability at the SABC", would schedule an urgent meeting between the ministers of post and telecommunications and communication, and the national executive committee (NEC) subcommittee for communication.

"We want to assert that the responsibility to communicate the ANC NEC conference, the NGC and other decisions reside with the secretary-general of the ANC, spokesperson of the ANC and chairpersons of ANC NEC subcommittees.

"It is unfortunate that Minister Muthambi, despite this reality, she opted again to speak on ANC decisions unmandated and

in the process she unfortunately accused the chairperson of the subcommittee of being a liar."

Independent Media reported at the weekend how the ANC was losing patience with Muthambi over what Mthembu called "the flip-flopping" on digital migration and the controversial deal between the SABC and MultiChoice, which is seen as giving MultiChoice a monopoly in the pay-TV space.

The deal, which has seen the SABC make all its archives exclusively available to MultiChoice, has been referred to the Competition Commission by the media group Caxton.

Mthembu said there had been no transparency around the deal, and the ANC would demand that Muthambi's department account to the ruling party.

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