

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024039513407 BY GEOFF NYAROTA || SPECTACULARLY prosperous Minister of Home Affairs and Culture, Dr Obert Moses Mpofu, owns a vast array of upmarket tourism-related assets in the tourist resort town of Victoria Falls, despite his spirited denials, as recently published in the press. The assets of Khanondo Safaris and Tours, a company to which he is linked, include luxury guest houses, as well as residential and industrial properties and stands. Movable assets include two cruise boats and a wide range of vehicles for hire. They include luxury cars, game-viewing vehicles and airport transport buses, servicing both Victoria Falls Airport and Livingstone Airport across the Zambezi River in Zambia. Mpofu served as Minister of Mines and Mining Development between 2009 and 2013. It is during that period that Mpofu is widely alleged to have corruptly enriched himself. Mpofu's ownership of such vast assets of dubious origin must be a cause of concern for President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, who has pegged the future of his presidency on a bid to eradicate corruption, among other goals. Half-hearted efforts by the Parliament of Zimbabwe to enforce accountability on Mpofu have, however, failed to bring the aggressive minister to book. The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Mines and Energy, under the chairmanship of mercurial Norton legislator, Themba Mliswa, is fighting against heavy odds to establish the whereabouts of billions of dollars in diamond revenue alleged to have gone missing over the years. Also on the agenda of the committee is an investigation into the source of Mpofu's vast wealth. In March 2018, businessman Lovemore Kurotwi the director of Core Mining and Mineral Resources, told Mliswa's committee that Mpofu had demanded a \$10 million bribe from him in return for a mining concession at Chiadzwa in 2009. In January NewsDay carried a report to the effect that Kurotwi had filed a report with the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission on 22 January 2018. Kurotwi alleged that Mpofu had seized from his company 1, 34 million carats of diamonds, which were in the custody of the Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe and converted them to his own personal benefit. "We write to request that you investigate the current minister of Home Affairs, Obert Mpofu, over known corruption which he has committed but which now seems to be swept under the carpet either for reasons of ignorance of the said corruption by the relevant authorities or reasons of impunity or both," Kurotwi wrote. Kurotwi claimed that he had been arrested for fraud after he reported Mpofu to former President Mugabe. He said he was acquitted by the High Court because the charges had been concocted by the Minister. He reported to ZACC that he had also brought to the attention of Mugabe the matter of the \$10 million allegedly demanded by Mpofu in return for mining concessions at Chiadzwa. Kurotwi said he had also reported Mpofu to President Emmerson Mnangagwa over the same issue two weeks before approaching ZACC. "During the time, my so-called fraud case was still sub judice, Mpofu further took advantage (of) the sub judice position and confiscated 1, 4 million carats of our diamonds which were in our vaults in Mutare and \$10.6 million which was in the custody of the Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe," Kurotwi stated. He said efforts to recover both the money and the diamonds had been in vain, with officials in the ministry either professing total ignorance of the matter or pointing in the direction of Mpofu. There was drama when Mpofu himself appeared before the same Parliamentary Committee. He angrily refused to testify, citing personal differences with Mliswa. The committee's examination of Mpofu virtually ground to a halt on that controversial note, when he refused to cooperate if Mliswa was chairman. There was a public outcry when Mpofu was allowed to get away with what amounted to an arrogant display of impunity. Observers expressed surprise that, in the circumstances, Mliswa did not recuse himself from chairing the committee, instead of sacrificing its work over what appeared to be personal differences with Mpofu. Meanwhile, Mpofu granted an interview published in The Daily News on 23 March 2018. He opened up on what he claimed to be the source of his enormous wealth, claiming he had earned all of it from his own hard work and sweat. The minister also proclaimed that anyone who alleges that he owns any large assortment of assets in Victoria Falls has to be "an idiot peddling nonsense". But it now turns out that, notwithstanding his vehement denials, Mpofu does own an extensive range of both movable and immovable assets in the popular tourist resort town. During the interview with The Daily News, Mpofu also rubbished any suggestion that he dominates the real estate sector in Victoria Falls. He stated categorically that he owns no property in the resort town and challenged anyone with documentary proof of such ownership of the alleged properties to produce such evidence. Several newspaper stories over the years have directly linked Mpofu to Khanondo Safari and Tours. He did not protest when these various newspapers referred to

him as the owner of Khanondo, despite the negative implications, especially with regard to tax obligations. On Thursday and Friday, 19 and 20 April, 2018, I made several attempts to reach Mpofu by telephone but in vain, in a bid to obtain comment from him. I then visited his office at Mukwati Buildings on the Friday morning. He was said to be out of the office, attending a meeting. I gave my number to his secretary and implored her to call me at the earliest opportunity. I impressed upon her the importance and urgency of the matter, which was in his own interest. By the end of that day I had not heard from the minister. Neither had I heard from his office by Monday, 30 April. On 20 September 2016, NewsDay published an article about the well-heeled minister under the headline, "Mpofu's business empire crumbles". Mpofu was reported to be faced with potential loss of 50 properties which he had reportedly tendered as surety to secure a \$2 million loan from CBZ Bank. The bank had taken the case to the High Court after he defaulted on repayments. "The Zanu-PF secretary for finance – who owns companies such as Trebo and Khays, Maminza Transport, and Khanondo Safaris and Tours – could be sitting on a crumbling business empire after some of his movable properties reportedly went under the hammer over an outstanding debt last year," Newsday reported. "Macro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion Minister Obert Mpofu's business empire has reportedly hit the rocks, with most of his business units facing litigation over non-payment of services rendered," the article continued. It proceeded to list Khanondo Safaris and Tours among the companies affected. NewsDay editor Wisdom Mudzungairi says Mpofu never challenged his newspaper to produce documentary evidence that he was the owner of this or many other companies listed by the newspaper as being owned by him. Six months later, Bulawayo24, an online publication, reported on 15 March 2017, that Mpofu was set to lose 50 properties over a \$2 million debt. On 12 December 2017, the Bulawayo-based government-controlled daily newspaper, The Chronicle, carried yet another story about Mpofu's business empire. It was published under the headline, "Minister's company sues over debt." According to this article, "Mpofu's company, Khanondo Safaris and Tours, has taken a Victoria Falls construction firm to court over a debt of more than \$15 000." Apparently the defaulting contractor had bought building materials on credit from none other than Khanondo Hardware, a Khanondo subsidiary. Unchallenged references There exists in the public domain a litany of unchallenged references to Mpofu as the owner of, not only Khanondo Safaris and Tours, but also of other companies as well. None of the publications that have repeatedly published such information has, either voluntarily or at the behest of the minister, produced any documentary evidence that he is the owner of the companies. It is these uncontested news reports that have instilled in the public mind the perception that Mpofu does own much of Victoria Falls as well as a plethora of other immovable assets in Bulawayo and elsewhere, as alleged. But it was the Daily News article which prompted a vigorous challenge of Mpofu's position vis a vis ownership of properties in Victoria Falls and elsewhere. Some months before publication of the article, Khanondo Safaris and Tours engaged a consultant to perform certain services for the company in Victoria Falls. During this assignment, the consultant became familiar with the full range of the organization's operations in the town that is apart from gaining knowledge of the special position occupied by Mpofu in the thriving company. The consultant says he thought he had done a good job. Khanondo then committed a critical error. They failed to pay him his dues. After months of frustration, the consultant duly approached me with details of his woeful story. "They failed to pay me for my services," he protested, "yet they are making so much money. Now Minister Mpofu denies in The Daily News that he owns anything in Victoria Falls. Well, I know he does." Back in 2010, during his tenure as chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Mines and Energy, the late Edward Chindori-Chininga, who was a former Minister of Mines, reportedly declared Mpofu to be "a crook and a thief". He then told Charles Ray, then United States Ambassador to Zimbabwe, on 21 January 2010, that Mpofu had entered into unauthorized partnerships with Mbada and Canadile, both of them mining companies, to exploit diamond deposits in Marange. Chindori-Chininga released a damning report in June 2013, about the alleged involvement of Zanu PF officials and their allies in the diamond industry. The report revealed that millions of dollars in royalties, paid by various diamond companies, had literally disappeared. The report also divulged crucial information pertaining to how Mpofu, as Minister of Mines, had allegedly "stacked the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation with his cronies, sister-in-law, personal assistant and people with zero mining experience." Unfortunately, Chindori-Chininga died in a car crash just one week after his report was published. The

incriminating report appears to have died a natural death of its own. Googling of Khanondo Safaris and Tours reveals the vast array of assets owned by Mpofu through Khanondo Safaris and Tours. The company is described on its website as “a quality-oriented and reputable leisure and hospitality operator based in Victoria Falls. Khanondo Safaris offers tours in Victoria Falls and around Zimbabwe, Tour of the Falls, Zambezi Cruises, Rafting, Game Drives, Car Hire, Airport Transfers, VIP Transfers and many other travel services.” “I am aware of the nonsense that has been peddled by political and social opponents who feel challenged by my success,” Mpofu fumed in The Daily News of 23 March 2018. “I am proud of what I have and no one will take what I have sweated for because I have worked for everything that I have. “The most expensive asset I have is the famous seven-storey York House Building, which the family bought from Old Mutual in 1998. The Victoria Falls nonsense that I own all or most of it is as stupid as the idiots who are peddling it. Can they list those assets so that I can take ownership of them if they ever exist?” Reward for Willowgate Mpofu shocked newspaper readers when he claimed, while testifying as a witness in the then ongoing High Court fraud trial of Core Mining and Mineral Resources director, Lovemore Kurotwi, that among the sources of his immense wealth was a reward that he received from the government of former President Robert Mugabe for his role as whistleblower in the Willowgate Scandal which I investigated and published. in 1988 when I was editor of The Chronicle. Mpofu claimed that a part of this alleged bonus had gone towards the purchase of York House in Bulawayo. I immediately challenged Mpofu in an article published in Newsday on 8 October 2014. I questioned that the minister should have received what appeared to be very significant compensation for being my whistleblower yet I was fired from my position as editor for investigating and exposing the Willowgate Scandal on the basis of a misdirected cheque from Willowvale Mazda Motors that was received and put at my disposal by the same Mpofu. Mpofu never responded. Neither did anyone else offer any explanation in the Mugabe government, which was notorious for being lax in matters of corruption. Given the new circumstances of Zimbabwe politically and in the interests of transparency and accountability, Mpofu must feel obliged to produce proof or evidence of the Willowgate gratuity that enabled him to invest in York House. It remains my resolute conviction, however, that Mpofu was being economic with the truth and he did this while he was testifying in court under oath, which amounts to perjury. There has been public agitation, especially on social media, that Mpofu be held accountable following his boast and his challenge as published in The Daily New, in particular, and in the context of President Mnangagwa’s much-acclaimed onslaught on corruption, in general. The minister recently announced his decision to stand down as a candidate for Umguza Constituency in the forthcoming harmonized elections. Mpofu’s predecessor as Home Affairs Minister, Ignatius Chombo, was dramatically arrested as November 2017’s Operation Restore Legacy got underway in Harare, signaling the downfall of former President Robert Mugabe. Subsequently appearing at Rotten Row Magistrates’ Courts in leg irons, he was put on trial for alleged corruption and abuse of office. The vast extent of Chombo’s wealth had earlier been revealed during court proceedings when he and his wife, Marion Chombo, divorced. Judging by appearances, it is arguable that Mpofu is the wealthier of the two successive Home Affairs Ministers. That there is no documentary proof of Mpofu’s name being directly connected to Khanondo Safaris and Tours is understandable. It is common practice in Zimbabwe for government officials or other entrepreneurs to exploit the age-old strategy, whereby they will register a company or companies in the names of proxies, usually relatives, friends or business associates. While documentary proof directly linking him to ownership of the said properties may not be readily available, other proof exists that the vehicle of Mpofu’s ownership of the assets in Victoria Falls is his company, Khanondo Safaris and Tours. According to a report following an investigation by the Political Action Committee (PAC), which was published in November 2012, Mpofu also owns the following companies: Trebo and Khays, through which he acquired the now defunct Allied Bank, originally the Zimbabwe Allied Banking Group (ZABG), Maminza Properties, Maminza Transport, Khanondo Car Hire, Horseshow Estate, KoMpofu La Sports Bar, Luna Rainbow Tours, Paradise Guest Lodge, Good Memories Lodge, Mswelangubo Farm, New Miners Restaurant (Hwange), Accut and Crews Village, Moya Security and Matetsi Meat Butchery. 4 000-strong herd of cattle Mpofu’s Winter Block ranch is reported to hold stock of a 4 000-strong herd of cattle. Mpofu’s herd of cattle is said to be “clearly a big source of personal pride and legitimate revenue”, the PAC report says. It says he owns a herd of about 3 000 breeding cattle, and uses a feedlot in Umguza to

fatten another herd of about a 1 000 at a time. It quotes Mpofu's farm manager, one Dumisani Moyo, as claiming that they "sell about 50 cattle every week and the profits are good". A herd of such magnitude must have cost Mpofu a substantial amount of money to build. In 2012, Mpofu who trained as a journalist in India, launched a short-lived newspaper, The Zimbabwe Mail, which is now defunct. The PAC report also highlighted that since he became Minister of Mines, one of Mpofu's companies, Maminza Transport, acquired eight Volvo FH12 haulage trucks and some drilling equipment. The trucks were, at the time the report was released in 2012, parked at the depot of the former Clan Transport along Plumtree Road in Bulawayo. Both trucks and drilling equipment were subsequently spotted at Hwange Colliery, a state-owned coal mine whose operations came under the ambit of Mpofu's portfolio as Minister of Mines. The report says, "The trucks, which retail at over \$100,000 apiece, are decalised with 'Maminza Transport' signs on the doors and 'OMM'- (for Obert Moses Mpofu)-and a sequential number stenciled above the windscreen." Accompanying this article is a large number of images of assets that belong to Khanondo Safaris and Tours in Victoria Falls. The company's website carries hundreds of other images depicting guest houses and their luxurious interiors, two cruise boats, upmarket sedans and SUV's, including the iconic Hummer, for hire, game viewing vehicles, as well as two transfer buses. The website also boasts of more than 30 images of Mpofu himself in various poses, as if to dispel any lingering doubt in the public mind as to who is boss at Khanondo Safaris and Tours. Mpofu embarked on a spree of acquisition and massive construction or development of some of his properties during a period of national economic hardship, when most other businesses in the premier resort town and elsewhere in Zimbabwe, were just managing to remain open, were scaling down their operations or closing down altogether. The amazingly high standards set all round as well as the magnitude of the conglomerate could only have been achieved by an entrepreneur with easy access to loads of capital. The Minister of Information Communication Technology and Cyber Security, Supa Mandiwanzira spoke on ZiFM radio station recently. He lamented the fact that he earns a salary of what he called a paltry \$4 000 a month. Mpofu built a business empire on the same "paltry" remuneration as government minister and earlier as provincial governor. This definitely defies logic, especially given that between 2010 and 2012 his net salary was less than \$2 000 a month. For several years Mpofu treated the ownership of his vast business empire as a closely guarded secret. However, in December 2011, a bout of big-headedness got the better of the minister. He unwittingly booked a 16-page advertising supplement in The Chronicle to sing praises of his own business acumen and achievements. This was a gross error of judgement. Zimbabweans were thus offered a rare opportunity to peep into his business conglomerate, whose details were indelibly printed on the pages of the newspaper. Minister with a diamond touch The supplement was supported by his many companies with advertising. It celebrated Mpofu's 60 th birthday, as well as his then recently acquired Doctorate in Policy Studies from the distance-based Zimbabwe Open University. Among the articles published in the supplement were some in which relatives extolled Mpofu's virtues as "the minister with (a) diamond touch", "a leader of quality and stead" and "a true people's servant". The irony of referring to the Minister of Mines as the minister "with a diamond touch" at a time when diamonds worth millions of dollars were suffering a mysterious disappearance from the Chiyadzwa Diamond Fields, could not have been lost on perceptive Chronicle readers, given the allegation that Mpofu was enriching himself on Chiyadzwa diamonds. Mpofu's salvation was that during the Mugabe era citizens were not given to the voicing of such serious concerns as publicly as they do now under the New Dispensation of President Mnangagwa. Among the companies which advertised in the Chronicle supplement were Trebo and Khays, Maminza Properties, Maminza Transport, Khanondo Safaris and Tours, Khanondo Car Hire, Horseshow Estate, KoMpofu La Sports Bar, Luna Rainbow Tours, Guest Paradise Lodge, Good Memories Lodge, Mswelangubo Farm, New Miners Restaurant (Hwange), Accut and Crews Village, Moya Security and Matetsi Meat Butchery. According to PAC, a most detailed, but unconfirmed report, "listed cash-purchases of a supermarket in Victoria Falls' Chinotimba high density suburb, three houses in a medium-density area, two cruise boats on the Zambezi, five houses in Mkhosana high-density suburb, three houses in Chinotimba, two industrial stands, one large stand in Chisuma, one big industrial stand next to Chinotimba Stadium, four industrial stands on the Airport Road, and four medium-density plots." The PAC report listed the following as being among Mpofu's landholdings: 10 006ha, North Part, Umguza Block. This is property formerly owned by the Cold Storage Commission

(CSC) and is known specifically as Blocks 39, 40 and 41. 1 027ha, Auchenburg Farm, Nyamandlovu. Green Haven Farm. Located close to the Umguza River just outside Bulawayo on the Victoria Falls road. This is a farm Mpofu has reportedly owned for some time and where he keeps most of his herd. 3 700ha, Umguza CSC Block. 2 300ha, Young Farm, Nyamandlovu. 8 000ha, Horseshoe Ranch, Matetsi. It is believed Mpofu bought this property from Bill Bedford in 2008 for an undisclosed sum. At the time of publication of the report in 2012, hunting and safari operations were run by one Shaun Kearney, a South African. 100ha, in Epping Forest B Section, a part of Accut and Crew, formerly a white-owned farm bought by government for resettlement in 1996. Now referred to as Mswelangubo Farm, it serves as Mpofu's main residence. The property underwent extensive upgrades, including approximately \$150 000 spent on fencing and paving ahead of the lavish December 2011 birthday bash. The cost of this party was estimated at another \$250,000. In March 2012 a 10-kilometre stretch of road to this house was resurfaced, rather fittingly, by a brand new Caterpillar excavator. The report says the Umguza Rural Council would not, in any way, have afforded to undertake such project. Several other commercial ventures, including a horticultural business, an abattoir and a chicken factory, were reportedly established on the property. In addition to the above listings of approximately 25 000ha, PAC discovered that Mpofu also controls Winter Block, a 40 000ha section of land next to Umguza Block. A source with inside knowledge of the Cold Storage Commission land holdings confirmed this to be an entirely separate parcel of land. It was reported that after the land invasions of 2000, Winter Block had been largely divided between former Vice-President Joseph Msika and Bulawayo High Court Judge Maphios Cheda. "Msika died in 2009 and Cheda has maintained only a minimal interest in the area after being awarded another farm in 2008," says the report. "Since then Mpofu has primarily used Winter Block to graze his cattle, which he has boasted is the biggest herd in Zimbabwe. With total farm holdings of at least 65 000ha, this would also place Mpofu amongst the country's biggest landowners." Zimbabwean legislation does not permit an individual to own more than one farm. A more comprehensive list of Mpofu's properties in Bulawayo has been reserved for a follow-up article. The list has been in the public domain for the past six years. Obert Mpofu was born on 12 October 1951 into an average rural family in Jambezi Village in the district of Hwange, in Matabeleland North. From such humble beginnings he has risen over recent years to the pinnacle of opulence in Victoria Falls and Bulawayo and political influence in Harare in which he now finds himself happily ensconced conveniently as powerful Minister of Home affairs. During the Rhodesian war of liberation the Mpofu family, like the majority of other families in Matabeleland, supported Dr Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), which operated from Zambia, while President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was based in Mozambique. It is reported that in his late teens Mpofu was recruited for training under renowned ZIPRA commander, Nikita Mangena; but was dismissed not long afterwards, after he was allegedly deemed to be both "untrainable and divisive within the camp". Mpofu later left for India, like a number of other black Rhodesian youths. While there, he studied journalism at the University of New Delhi. On return he worked briefly as a reporter in Lusaka, but does not appear to have pursued a career as a journalist in Zimbabwe. Instead, he became a line manager at Zimbabwe Newspapers in Harare. Mpofu also had a stint with Customs and Excise, also in Harare. He left amid allegations of corruption. It was at about this time that Mpofu allegedly changed his political allegiance from PF-ZAPU to Zanu-PF under the tutelage of the late Enos Mzombi Nkala, the fiery Zanu-PF politician from Matabeleland and a fierce adversary of the late Dr Joshua Nkomo. The hostility between these two politicians had earlier indirectly led to the outbreak of the Gukurahundi atrocities, during which thousands of innocent civilians were massacred by the Zimbabwe National Army's Five Brigade. Since his political conversion Mpofu has never looked back. He was appointed general manager of the Zimbabwe Grain Bag Company, a new enterprise established by Zanu-PF in the city of Bulawayo. It was during this period that he received the cheque from Willowvale Mazda Motor Industries that he brought to me at The Chronicle, thus triggering the investigation that resulted in the Willowgate Scandal in a bid to fight incipient corruption within the ranks of the Mugabe government. Now Mpofu claims that for the simple act of showing me a misdirected cheque he was paid enough money for him to invest in a seven-storey building in Bulawayo. Meanwhile I was fired from The Chronicle and proceeded to endure periods of suffering and starvation, while being severely victimised. Mpofu's shrewd political transformation opened doors and launched his career as a

Zanu-PF politician, being appointed Governor of Matabeleland in 2000 and as Minister of Industry and International Trade in 2005. In 2009 he literally hit the jackpot on appointment as Minister of Mines. As he rose through the ranks of government Mpofu tried his hand at business and succeeded. He built the empire which encompasses his flagship companies – Trebo and Khays, Maminza Transport and Khanondo Safaris and Tours. The much talked about magnitude and questionable origin of Mpofu's business empire and enormous wealth have potential to impact negatively on President Mnangagwa and Zanu-PF's fortunes in the pending harmonized elections.