

Court agrees to hear Zuma's challenge to jail term

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A South African court on Saturday agreed to hear ex-president Jacob Zuma's challenge to a 15-month jail term for failing to attend a corruption hearing, as hundreds of his supporters gathered outside his home in a show of force.



Former South African President Jacob Zuma sits in the dock after recess in his corruption trial in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 26 May, 2021.
Phill Magakoe/Pool via Reuters/File Photo

The Constitutional Court had on Tuesday given Zuma 15 months in jail for absconding in February from the inquiry led by Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. Zuma had until the end of Sunday to hand himself in, but on Saturday the court agreed to hear his application, suspending the order.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) reported that the court will hear his application on 12 July.

The jail sentence was seen as sign of just how far Zuma, once revered as a veteran of the struggle against white minority rule, has fallen since embarking on a presidency beset by multiple sleaze and graft scandals between 2009 and 2018.

His travails have divided the ruling African National Congress, which cancelled an executive committee meeting over the weekend in order to focus on the ensuing crisis.

The ex-leader has applied to the court for the sentence to be annulled on the grounds that it is excessive and could expose

him to Covid-19.

"When somebody is saying please hear me out ... and then we have court that says 'OK, we are willing to listen to you', that's the kind of justice system people died for in this country," the Jacob Zuma Foundation said in a statement.

At his hometown of Nkandla, Zuma, who did not speak to his supporters, wore a black and gold tropical shirt as he walked through the crowd, but no mask. He was guarded by men dressed as traditional warriors from his Zulu nation, wearing leopard skins and holding spears with oval ox-hide shields.

"They can give Zuma 15 months... Or 100 months. He's not going to serve even one day or one minute of that," his son Edward Zuma told Reuters at the gathering. "They would have to kill me before they put their hands on him."

Application

In an application to annul the decision submitted on Friday, Zuma said going to jail "would put him at the highest risk of death" from the pandemic because he was nearly 80 and has a medical condition.

Zuma also called the sentence a "political statement of exemplary punishment". He has maintained he is the victim of a political witch hunt and that Zondo is biased against him.

He gave in to pressure to quit and yield to his successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, in 2018, and since then has faced several attempts to bring him to book for alleged corruption during and before his time as president.

The Zondo Commission is examining allegations that he allowed three Indian-born businessmen, the brothers Atul, Ajay and Rajesh Gupta, to plunder state resources and influence policy. He and the brothers, who fled to Dubai after Zuma's ouster, deny wrongdoing.

Zuma also faces a separate court case relating to a \$2bn arms deal in 1999 when he was deputy president.

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