

Zuma seeks to replace prosecutor in arms trial

A South African court on Tuesday resumed a trial that has dragged out for years over a \$2bn arms deal involving ex-president Jacob Zuma, whose legal team sought to remove a prosecutor they accused of bias.



Former South African President Jacob Zuma speaks to supporters after appearing at the High Court in Pietermaritzburg on 17 May 2021.
Reuters/Rogan Ward/File Photo

The trial over the 1990s deal was meant to start in May, after being stalled by legal arguments, but was delayed again by Zuma's request to replace lead prosecutor Billy Downer, who Zuma's lawyers said was not impartial. The case was adjourned until 11am on Wednesday.

On 7 July, Zuma was jailed for failing to cooperate with a separate corruption probe, precipitating some of the worst riots and looting the country has witnessed since the end of white minority rule in 1994. More than 300 people were killed and thousands of businesses were pillaged and burned.

His jailing was nonetheless seen as a victory for South Africa's ability to enforce the rule of law, even against powerful politicians. The top court on Friday dismissed a bid by Zuma to overturn that 15-month jail sentence.

Zuma, 79, has been convalescing after an undisclosed illness and has been allowed to see out the rest of his sentence at

home on health grounds. He regards the criminal trial against him as a political witch hunt.

"I wear the badge of being a political prisoner ... (of) the struggle for the freedom of the African," Zuma said in a statement late on Monday. "Injustice will be defeated."

Zuma, who was absent from proceedings at the Pietermaritzburg High Court on Tuesday, has pleaded not guilty to corruption, money laundering and racketeering related to the acquisition of military equipment. French arms group Thales has also denied wrongdoing.

Zuma is accused of accepting a R500,000 annual bribe from Thales from 1999 in exchange for protecting the company from investigation.

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