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Prosecutor Says Zuma Charges Near

By [MICHAEL WINES](#) and [GRAHAM BOWLEY](#)

JOHANNESBURG — [South Africa](#)'s chief prosecutor indicated Thursday that his agency would soon bring criminal corruption charges against the Zulu politician [Jacob G. Zuma](#), two days after Mr. Zuma's election as leader of the [African National Congress](#) put him in line to be the nation's next president.

The acting chief of the National Prosecuting Authority, Mokotedi Mpshe, said in a radio interview that a lengthy investigation of Mr. Zuma was complete and that "the evidence we have now points to a case that can be taken to court."

Asked whether that meant that prosecution of Mr. Zuma was imminent, Mr. Mpshe replied, "I should say so."

Mr. Mpshe's remarks, broadcast on the Johannesburg station Talk Radio 702, signaled the advent of what is likely to be a long stretch of political turmoil until allegations of corruption against Mr. Zuma are resolved.

A criminal conviction would end Mr. Zuma's political career, for South Africa's Constitution bars felons from becoming president of the country. Mr. Zuma has repeatedly suggested through his lawyer that the corruption inquiry is an attempt by enemies to destroy him politically, a charge many say is directed at South Africa's president, [Thabo Mbeki](#).

Mr. Zuma's lawyer, Michael Hulley, told Reuters on Thursday, "I can only speculate that the actions of the national director are fueling and lending credence to the idea that state resources are being used against my client."

Mr. Zuma soundly defeated Mr. Mbeki this week in the race for the leadership of the A.N.C. As the nation's president, Mr. Mbeki oversees the agency that both investigated the corruption allegations against Mr. Zuma and is now preparing to bring charges. The A.N.C. adopted a policy statement this week urging that that agency's investigative unit, known as the Scorpions, be disbanded.

Both Mr. Mbeki and Mr. Zuma have vigorously denied any political enmity, and they took pains after this week's leadership vote to make a show of unity and friendship, but political analysts generally agree that their rivalry runs deep.

Adam Habib, a leading analyst who is deputy vice chancellor at the University of Johannesburg, said it was unlikely that Mr. Mbeki was behind Mr. Mpshe's announcement of an impending prosecution of Mr. Zuma.

Rather, he said, Mr. Mpshe probably intended to remove any doubt that Mr. Zuma's new status as a political leader would deter his prosecution, which Mr. Habib said could begin early next year.

"They want to signal that it's going to happen," he said, "and I think they've made a strategic decision that they're going to do so in a kind of off-the-cuff remark, to prepare the groundwork."

Kgalema Motlanthe, who is the A.N.C.'s new deputy president, indicated at the party's national conference in Polokwane this week that Mr. Zuma would probably remain the party's president throughout any criminal proceedings, saying it would be "very hard to act against somebody on the basis of allegations."

Mr. Zuma was fired as South Africa's deputy president in 2005 after investigators tied him to a bribery scandal involving a multibillion-dollar military contract for a French

manufacturer. Mr. Zuma fended off a related corruption charge on procedural grounds this year, but the accusations against him have never really gone away.

On Tuesday, the A.N.C.'s 3,900 delegates voted to oust Mr. Mbeki as leader of the party and give the job to Mr. Zuma, making him the favorite to succeed Mr. Mbeki as South Africa's president when Mr. Mbeki's second term ends in early 2009.

Michael Wines reported from Johannesburg and Graham Bowley from New York.

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