

Professor Koleka Mlisana to replace Karim

Minister Mkhize hails Salim

By **Yasantha Naidoo**

Health minister Zweli Mkhize yesterday confirmed that eminent scientist and academic Professor Koleka Mlisana will succeed Prof Salim Abdool Karim as the head of the ministerial advisory committee (MAC) on Covid-19.

Karim stepped down from his position to devote his attention to science and research.

Karim, an internationally respected scientist who heads Centre for Aids Programme of Research in SA at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and holds positions at the universities of Columbia, Cornell and Harvard, was appointed as chair on March 23 last year.

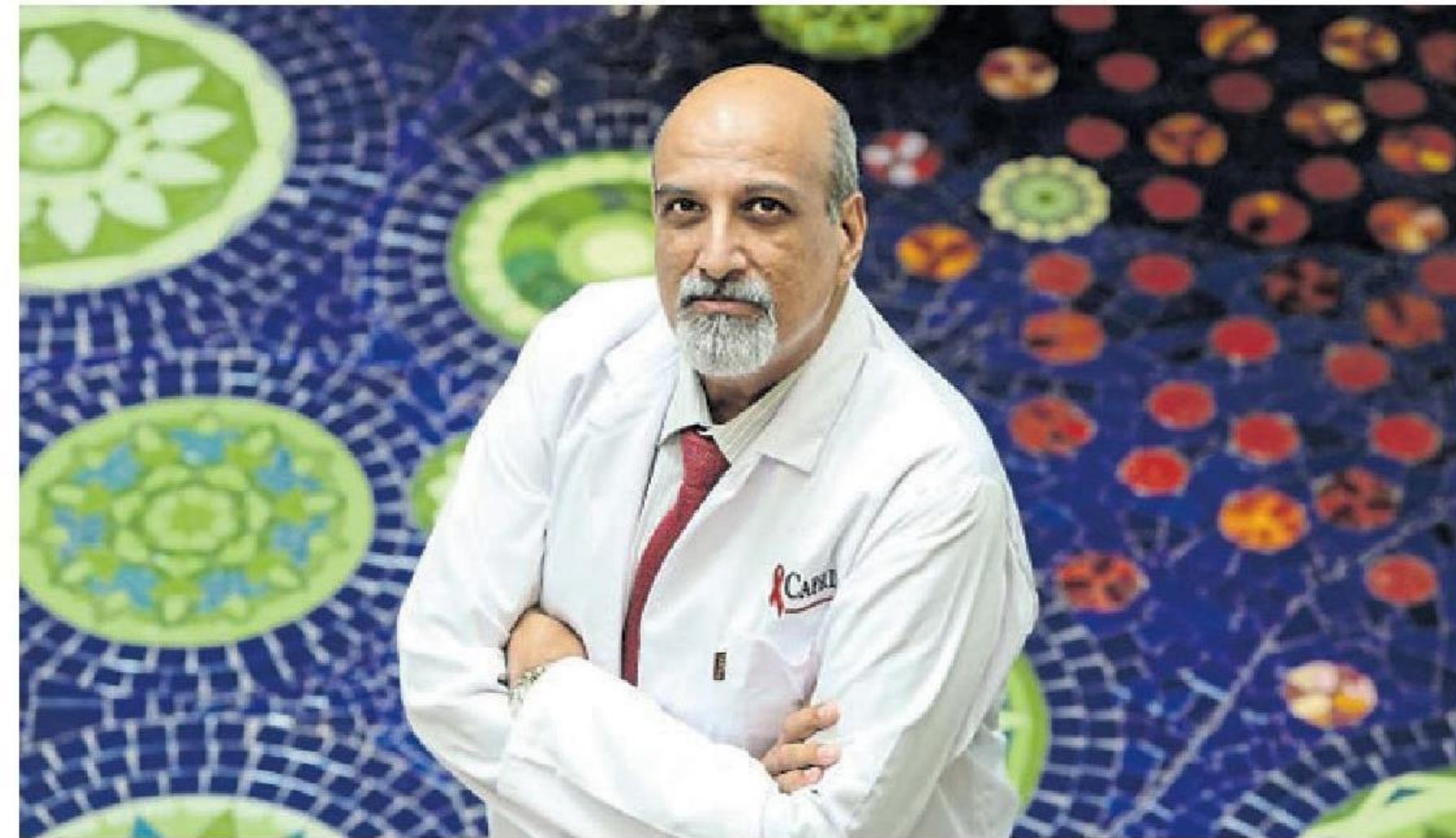
The epidemiologist advised health minister Zweli Mkhize in a letter dated February 24

that his term of office would end in March. "It has been my singular honour and privilege to serve as the chair initially and subsequently as the co-chair of the ministerial advisory committee on Covid-19 during an unprecedented time in our country's history," he said.

"When I accepted the appointment on March 23 2020, little did I realise how important science would be in helping our country navigate the complexities of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It has been most rewarding to work alongside many of our country's leading scientists from a range of disciplines... SA is indeed very fortunate to have so many accomplished scientists in the MAC."

Karim said he felt it was time to return to his HIV research and academic commitments. "I wish to pay tribute to my colleagues who served and who continue to serve on the MAC – it is a labour of love,



Former head of MAC on Covid-19, Salim Abdool Karim, wants to devote his time to HIV research. /JACKIE CLAUSEN

grappling with an avalanche of new information daily – sifting through fact, fiction, conspiracy theories, assumptions and projections to provide science-based advice in the midst of substantial uncertainty."

In a statement yesterday, Mkhize announced that Karim would be succeeded by Prof Mlisana as co-chair.

Mkhize said Karim has presided over a committee that has positioned South Africa as one of the "leading nations" in the emergency response to the pandemic.

"He has become a trusted figure for so many South Africans who have grown accustomed to his singular ability of explaining complex

scientific concepts in simple terms that all of us can understand.

"Throughout, he has remained focused, level-headed, calm and compassionate. Even under enormous pressure, Prof Abdool Karim always received everyone with his warm smile and reassuring presence."

He said MAC co-chair Prof Marian Jacobs will hold the fort for a few more months until she is joined by Mlisana, the MAC chair of the pathology/laboratory subcommittee.

Mlisana also serves as a member of the MAC on antimicrobial resistance. She has held the position of executive manager of academic affairs, research and quality assurance at the National Health Laboratory Service since 2018.

Mkhize said Jacobs indicated that a re-composition of the MAC was necessary to respond to the evolutions related to the virus.