

COVID-19

More changes expected in ministerial advisory body

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THE Ministerial Advisory Committee on Covid-19 will soon be reconfigured in the wake of the resignation of its co-chairperson, Professor Salim Abdool Karim.

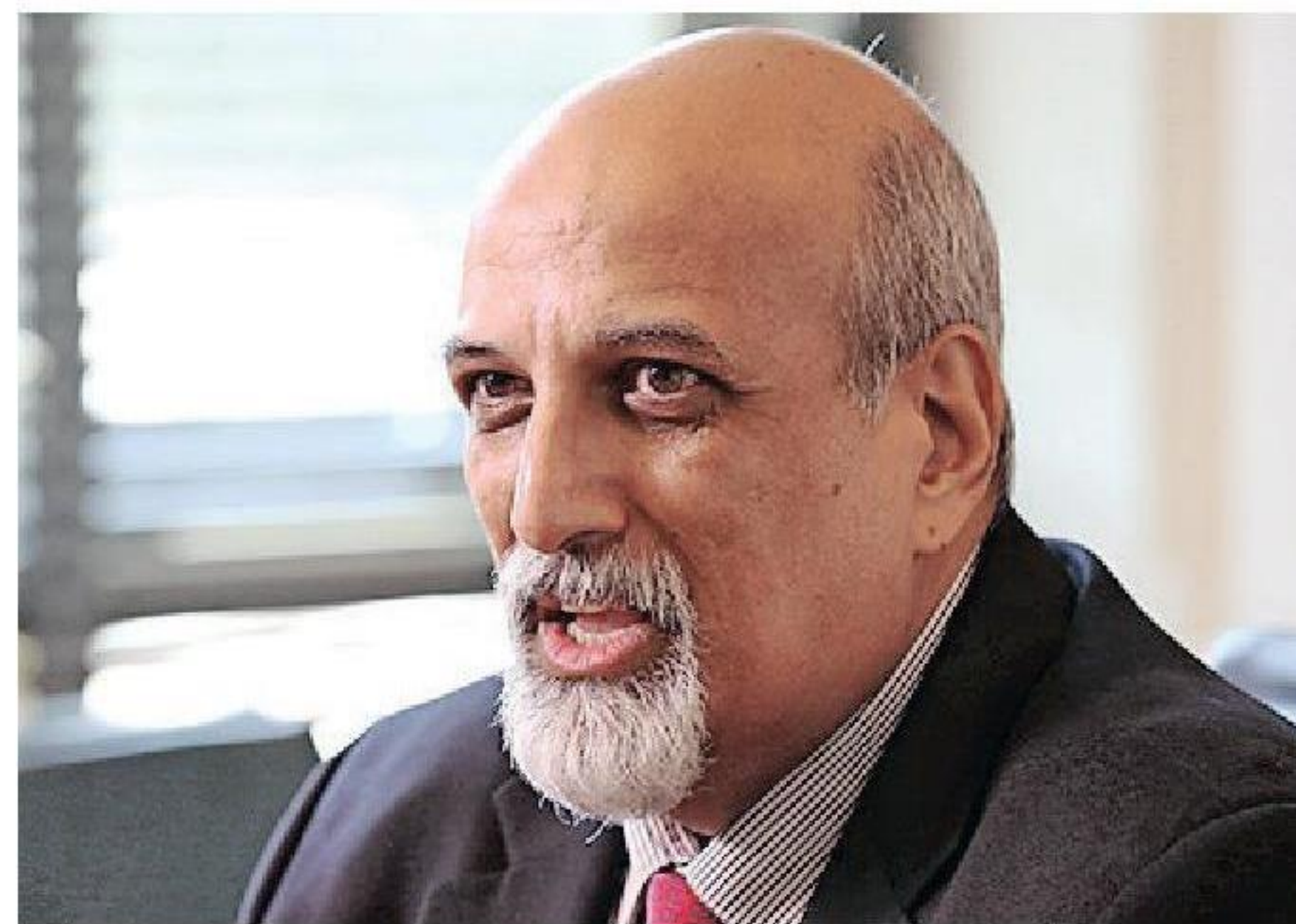
The incumbent MAC co-chairperson, Professor Marion Jacobs, yesterday indicated “a recomposition of the MAC will be necessary to respond to the current evolutions in virology and epidemiology related to Covid-19. The recomposition will see a strengthening of the MAC in the fields of virology, bioinformatics and phylogenetics, mathematical modelling, pharmacy and social behavioural change”.

Professor Karim, who held his

position for a year, said his agreement with Health Minister Zweli Mkhize was always on the basis that he would do it for a year. “The thing about this position is that you cannot do it part-time; you need to be focused 24/7 on the MAC, and really devoted to dealing with Covid. My HIV and academic research were all put on hold this year, and after receiving some new results in mid-February, I knew I needed to go back to my HIV work, because I cannot afford to let it sit idle for another whole year,” Karim said.

A year later, Karim said he felt the MAC was strong and that it was a good time to leave the team in good hands.

Karim’s role will be taken over by Professor Koleka Mlisana, who also



Professor Salim Abdool Karim

recently chaired the pathology/laboratory subcommittee of the first established MAC for Covid-19. Since July 2018 she has been the executive man-

ager for academic affairs, research and quality assurance at the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS).

Mlisana, whom Karim said was an “outstanding scientist”, said her first order of business would be to identify where the health minister needed advice.

“Right now the main priority is making sure we use our collective wisdom to see how we continue to build and move on to the next level. Our focus right now globally is on the vaccines and making sure we do not get into a third wave. It’s still too early to tell what I will and will not change,” said Mlisana.

She said the MAC was at an advantage because it had had 12 months with the pandemic and “we have a bank of

knowledge”.

Dr Angelique Coetzee, South African Medical Association chairperson, said Karim’s resignation was a huge loss to the MAC. “As Sama, we are sad because Professor Karim is a great public speaker who has an ability to step up when it’s hectic and when a strong personality is required. He has a phenomenal brain. Nothing he has advised us on so far was proven wrong, so we are sad to be losing him.”

Reacting to Karim’s resignation, chief executive of Discovery Health Dr Ryan Noach said: “All of us at Discovery extend huge thanks to Professor Karim for his amazing, intuitive, smart and thoughtful leadership of the MAC.

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