

SA province retracts ban on recruiting foreign doctors

The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Health Department published a circular at the height of the xenophobic violence SA last week banning the recruitment of foreign doctors. Its aim was to make space for newly-qualified locals who are returning from training in Cuba. **Business Day** says the department retracted the circular yesterday for reasons it has yet to explain, according to the National Health Department and SA's biggest doctors' union, the SA Medical Association (Sama). **Business Day** says it has seen a copy of the circular, dated 4 September, in which KZN's acting head of health, Musa Gumede, said the recruitment and employment of foreign health professionals has been suspended. **The department has recruited 'a huge number' of SA citizens to be trained as doctors in Cuba, and will have insufficient posts and funds to absorb them unless the recruitment and employment of foreign doctors is halted,** he said. The KZN Health Department employs 336 foreign doctors from 57 countries, according to a statement issued by the Inkatha Freedom Party. Sama vice-chair Mvuyisi Mzukwa said the timing of the circular was ill-considered, given the recent attacks on immigrants. Moreover, the directive itself was puzzling, as government policy prioritises hiring SA doctors over foreign nationals, he said. The report notes that medical students returning from Cuba require three more years of training and community service to qualify. SA has been sending medical students to train in Cuba since 1997 under a deal in terms of which Cuba has also been sending health-care professionals to work in SA's rural areas. No comment has been forthcoming from KZN Health.