

Cosatu slams cash splurge on Nkandla

Grotesque, says alliance partner

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GOVERNMENT attempts to draw a line under the "Nkandlagate" affair have been dealt another blow, with the ANC's alliance partner Cosatu slamming the "grotesque amount" spent on "one person" and calling for those responsible, "including political office-bearers" who approved the spending, to be held to account.

The DA, meanwhile, said it would apply under the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) for access to the report quoted on Sunday by Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi when he announced the findings of a task team investigation into the matter.

Nxesi cited "security issues" as the reason for withholding the full report on the R206-million government-funded security upgrade at President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla home.

He said the report would be handed to law enforcement agencies for further investigation and possible criminal charges against officials who had flouted procedures.

But Cosatu indicated yesterday that it would not be satisfied with a sacrifice of junior officials.

Saying the R206m that Nxesi confirmed had been spent on the security upgrade was "shocking and grossly insensitive to the workers, the poor and the homeless", it said this vindicated its decision to ask the public protector and auditor-general to investigate whether the spending could be "morally justified".

"In particular we want to be assured no government official, including (the) political leadership, is conflicted and/or has benefited from what appears to be massive inflation of prices," Cosatu spokesman Patrick Craven said.

He said the union federation appreciated the assurance that no

public money had been spent on work to Zuma's private home and did not question the need for "adequate measures" to protect him.

But Cosatu noted "with great concern" the evidence of irregularities and welcomed the decision to refer these to the Special Investigating Unit, the auditor-general and the police.

"We call for the publication of all the names of all the service providers, including the names of their directors and shareholders," Craven said.

He also repeated Cosatu's call for government officials involved in procurement to be subjected to lifestyle audits.

"The federation calls on the Ministry of Public Works and the public protector to focus on the role of the contracted companies and investigate whether there was any corrupt collusion with public officials, or officials using their own companies, in the inflation of prices for the work."

Referring to the R1-billion Nkandla-Mlalazi Smart Growth Centre planned for the area, Craven said rural development should be implemented "regardless of who will benefit" and Nkandla "should not be prioritised".

DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko said Zuma should intervene and have the task team report tabled in Parliament for "proper scrutiny and debate".

"If he fails to do so, having gained access to the document through a PAIA application, I will table the report myself as I am empowered to do as a member of the National Assembly," Mazibuko said.

"It is a slap in the face of accountability and transparency."

"This casts yet another shadow over this shameful saga and makes it clear that he (Nxesi) is engaged in a concerted campaign to protect President Zuma from accountability at all costs."