

Flak from Cosatu over ministry's report on Nkandla

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GOVERNMENT attempts to draw a line under the Nkandla affair were dealt another blow yesterday when the ANC's alliance partner Cosatu slammed the "grotesque amount" spent on "one person" and called 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 an investigation.

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 it would be handed to law enforcement agencies for further investigation and possible criminal charges against errant officials.

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

Saying the R206m Nxesi confirmed had been spent on the security upgrade was "shocking and grossly insensitive to the workers, the poor and the homeless", it added that this vindicated its decision to ask the Public Protector and the Auditor-General to investigate whether the spending could be "morally justified".

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

Cosatu noted "with great concern" the evidence of irregularities and welcomed the decision to refer them 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 done."

Referring to reports on the R1bn Nkandla-Mlalazi Smart Growth Centre being developed in 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 yesterday Zuma should intervene and

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have the task team report tabled in Parliament.

"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 for the report, which makes a number of unsubstantiated assertions, to remain secret. This casts yet another shadow over this shameful saga and makes it clear that the Minister of Public Works, Thulas Nxesi, is engaged in a concerted campaign to protect President Zuma from accountability at all costs."

But the ANC in Parliament indicated yesterday it would fight any attempts to have the report made public.