

Parties still not convinced Nkandla was 'above board'

Opposition vows to question spending on president's homestead in Parliament

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IF PUBLIC Works Minister Thulas Nxesi thought that he had slammed the lid on the controversy over the R206 million spending on President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla homestead by announcing that a probe had found "no evidence" that public money had been used for the private residence, he was mistaken.

Opposition parties promised this week not only to ask questions in Parliament about the spending - R71.2m on security arrangements and R135.2m on what were called "operational needs for state departments" - but also to push for the tabling of the Public Works task team report before the national legislature - and, ultimately, for another debate on it.

And trade union federation Cosatu called for the naming and shaming of those consultants, service providers and others who contravened tender processes.

"For the government to spend such a grotesque amount of public money on any one person is shocking and grossly insensitive to the workers, the poor and the homeless," Cosatu said, adding that it was not questioning the state's need to adequately protect the president.

Fifteen service providers, including consultants, were involved in work at Nkandla and, according to Nxesi "it is very clear that there were a number of irregularities with regards to appointment of service providers and procurement of goods and services".

However, he stopped short of naming them. Instead, he said that the report had been referred to the police, auditor-general and the Special Investigating Unit (SIU).

However, the referral to the SIU again raises more questions than answers: its investigations can only commence

after the president signs a proclamation to this effect.

"No formal request has been made to the SIU. The unit will only be able to comment on this matter when it has been formally referred to it," the unit said this week.

Further questions remain over the role of the auditor-general. While it was reported in November that Nxesi had told the National Council of Provinces that the spend on Nkandla would go to the auditor-general because prices may have been inflated owing to



THULAS NXESI

lack of controls within his department, the auditor-general's office this week said that there was no investigation.

The response to requests for comment on whether the office had received the Public Works task team report and for an update on its own probe was: "The auditor-general of South Africa has not conducted an investi-

gation into the matter you are enquiring about. We believe it would be in order for you to contact the Department of Public Works, as they have made a pronouncement on this matter."

The police did not respond to requests for comment.

Meanwhile, Public Protector Thuli Madonsela has been investigating the spending debacle since December last year. The public protector is on record saying that the probe would be completed at the end of March, and interviews with people connected to the matter were under way.

Nkandla, built on Nxamalala traditional authority land, was declared a national key point by Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa in April 2010. This, Public Works argued late last year, meant that everything related to Nkandla was classified.

"You will never know how much was spent for all the presidents because it is classified," said acting public works director-general Mandisa Fatyela-Lindie.