

Opposition 'abandoning its voters'

Zuma accuses parties engaged in no-confidence motion of sacrificing voters' interests

Andisiwe Makinana

President Jacob Zuma deviated from his prepared speech in Parliament on Thursday to criticise co-operation between opposition political parties.

While responding to a two-day debate of his State of the Nation address, Zuma, for the first time, responded to the proposed motion of no confidence in him brought by eight of the opposition parties in Parliament last November.

He suggested that voters were being abandoned by parties who pursued other parties' interests after being elected to Parliament.

"I have no difficulty if the opposition join hands," he said. "It defines a particular political landscape in one sense if we all understand what democracy is because people have free choice to choose partners and those they can work with."

"The reality is that it's always good in democracy when there is a view you can identify with. Once it is blurred, it's a problem."

Zuma said individual parties were brought to Parliament by those who voted for their programmes, but once they got to Parliament, they abandoned those programmes and pushed other people's positions.

"It paints a particular picture of the political landscape in the Parliament of South Africa," he said.

Zuma also took a swipe at Inkatha

Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who joined the opposition parties in tabling the motion of no confidence against him and later wrote to Zuma to explain why he was part of the motion.

On Tuesday, Buthelezi complained while delivering his speech that Zuma no longer responded to his letters.

Meanwhile, Zuma revealed that the sexual offences courts that were closed down a few years ago would be re-established to complement the work of the sexual offences units in the South African Police Services.

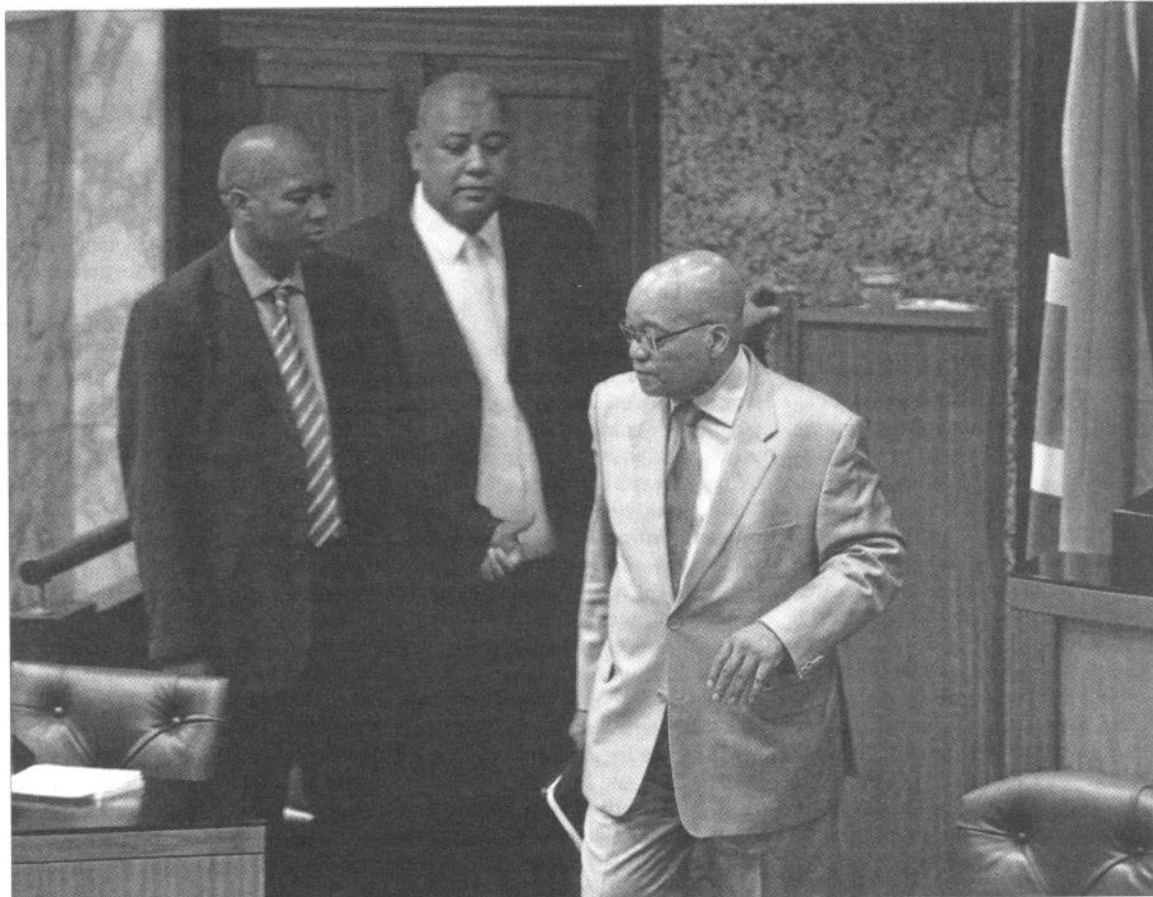
Opposition parties and non-governmental organisations have called for the reinstatement of the courts to accelerate cases against rape suspects.

Opposition parties criticised Zuma's address for lacking detail, saying that the president was out of touch and had failed to address key and relevant issues.

In defending Zuma, Public Enterprises Minister Malusi Gigaba said the president's address was about reporting on the progress made since the 2012 address and also discussing a programme of action for 2013.

Gigaba said it would have been folly to present a new vision in 2013 on top of the vision Zuma presented in 2012, which had only just begun to be implemented.

"But, of course, the opposition wants us to be stuck on endless



President Jacob Zuma diverted from the debate on his State of the Nation address in the National Assembly to criticise opposition parties for blurring issues for the sake of co-operation. Photo: David Harrison

visions so that they turn around and ask: 'Where is implementation? When you implement the vision, they turn around again and ask: 'Why is there no new vision?'"

In a surprising move, Deputy Public Works Minister Jeremy Cronin became the first senior member of the government to criticise publicly the National Key Points Act, which the government has relied on in its refusal to reveal detailed information about the security upgrades at Zuma's private home in Nkandla.

In a prepared speech, a version of which Cronin delivered in Parliament on Wednesday afternoon in response to Zuma's State of the Nation Address, he described the Act as anachronistic and problematic.

"This Parliament does need to look at this anachronistic and problematic piece of legislation, it may well be unconstitutional," he said.

Cronin excluded his views about the Act from his delivered speech.

The full speech was sent to the media by the ANC and the government communication and information system.

Cronin also described the spending at Nkandla as "probably excessive and undoubtedly extremely costly security operational requirements".

The public works department has repeatedly cited the National Key Points Act when refusing to provide details about the R206-million Nkandla upgrades.

Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi has on several occasions intimated that Nkandla is a national key point and so requires special security arrangements that cannot be made public because of the laws prohibiting it.

The government has attracted fierce criticism from political and social commentators and the opposition for its reliance on an apartheid-era law in refusing to reveal details about the Nkandla upgrades.

In his speech, Cronin took a swipe

at Congress of the People leader and former defence minister Mosiuoa Lekota, saying that he "forgets that he has got his fingerprints all over it". He agreed with Lekota's characterisation of the Act as "dastardly apartheid legislation", but said Lekota had an opportunity to amend it while he was defence minister. "Did he use the opportunity to transform this piece of legislation dealing with security around sensitive localities to be in line with our new democracy? In line with our Constitution? No. He simply changed the definition of the responsible minister from defence to police, passing the buck," said Cronin.

Asked to respond to Cronin's speech, a livid Lekota asked why Cronin did not raise the matter in his speech in the legislature.

Although he admitted to "doing something" to the Act while he was still minister, he insisted: "I would never approve an Act that says a private home is a national key point."