

Cost of Nkandla upgrade revised upwards to R208m

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THE COST of the controversial upgrading of President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla homestead has been revised upwards, from R206 million to R208m.

This was revealed by Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi when he and his deputy, Jeremy Cronin, along with the department's top managers, appeared before Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts this week.

DA MP Dion George asked how much was spent in the 2011/2012 financial year on Nkandla.

Nxesi admitted the total spending had increased by R2m to R208m, but said he did not have a breakdown for the financial years. However, he said this could be obtained.

The department asserted that there had been "serious inflation of the construction work" at Nkandla.

Cronin said: "There could well be problems of inflation of scope in the name of security."

The department has insisted that the work done at the president's private home was limited to security upgrades, although there have been reports of a tuck shop, lift and other upgrades to the property.

Cronin said that the department wanted to "get to the bottom of this issue", but could not release information in a public meeting, as the detail involved presidential security.

"We know how much we spent, and what for. But we all read newspapers, and some of it does seem strange. We want Parliament to interrogate this, but it is hard to complete the discovery in public."

"Are security concerns being used to cover up and blur things? It is a distinct possibility," Cronin said.

Nxesi said all projects in the department, including the presidential upgrade, had been affected by over-inflation, corruption and collusion.

"There is a trend that we're seeing in Nkandla, that we see with all our projects, of collusion. It's common knowledge that the competition commission is looking into collusion around the construction of the World Cup stadia. This is a trend we're seeing in construction worldwide."

He said that the Nkandla issue had been politicised.

"Once the tone becomes political, it's not on issues of compliance any more. Unfortunately, we can't play politics when it comes to the security of the head of state," he said.

Zuma answered questions about Nkandla in the National Assembly on Wednesday, when DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko accused him of "tap dancing" around the issue, and produced a copy of a letter about the upgrading of Nkandla purportedly addressed to him by the former minister of public works, Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde.

The letter lists various "activities" – including a cattle culvert, tuck shop, excavation for a clinic, tunnel and safe haven – but does not include the costs for any of these.

Zuma told Mazibuko: "No letter has ever been received by me."

He refused to discuss further details, as Parliament was still deciding on how to deal with a report on a Public Works internal investigation into the matter.