

# NXESI REINS IN SPENDING



HOME WITH A VIEW: President Zuma's controversial homestead in Nkandla which was upgraded at great cost

PHOTO: THEMINKOSI DWAYISA

## Caiphus Kgosana

**PUBLIC Works is working on a policy outlining "standards" for the renovations of the homes of the country's president, deputy president, ministers and MPs in a bid to halt expensive makeovers that have seen some homes fitted with jacuzzis, spas and other vanity items — at a cost of millions to the taxpayers.**

The government has come under fire over the millions of rand spent on expensive renovations to, among others, the private home of President Jacob Zuma in Nkandla and ministerial homes in both Pretoria and Cape Town.

Minister of Public Works Thulas Nxesi said the department was now tightening up the management of the prestige unit and introducing standards and norms for the renovations of ministerial homes.

"Policy proposals on norms and standards will be presented to the executive for a decision by June 30," he said.

The renovations to the homes of ministers and MPs will also come under the spotlight when the auditor-general joins the probe into "gross overspending" and possible collusion between contractors and the prestige unit, charged with managing the renovations of ministerial homes.

Nxesi told MPs, when presenting his budget vote in Parliament yesterday, that the auditor-general would also conduct his own probe into the renovations.

"All prestige [unit] projects are now undergoing investigation. The process is complete in regard to Pretoria," he said.

"We have now extended the investigation to Cape Town where R100-million was spent on renovating 11 ministerial homes."

It was reported in January that

these renovation bills included:

- R15-million spent on a Cape Town house allocated to Rural Development Minister Gugile Nkwinti;
- An overhaul to a house costing R10.67-million, which was earmarked for use by Deputy Transport Minister Lydia Chikunga; and
- Just under R5-million on upgrades to a home allocated to Agriculture Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson.

A multi-agency probe is also under way into the R200-million spent on renovating President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla homestead.

The Nkandla upgrade included a bunker with a lift, astro-turf fields, a tuck shop, a clinic and additional homes for security personnel.

Nxesi said the decision to centralise the prestige unit, creating a direct report line to the director-general, had already resulted in the

## Public Works to get tough on luxury deals for elite

cancellation of a number of high-priced projects.

He said they were now investigating under-performance by service providers, the pricing of renovations and other irregularities — and would hold all culprits to account. "I can assure honourable members no stone will be left unturned ... we will act against any official where evidence of wrongdoing exists," he said.

A full-time team tasked with implementing the department's turnaround strategy is also in place and has been placed under direct supervision of the director-general.

As part of the turnaround, Nxesi said, the department was conducting an exhaustive register of all the state's immovable assets and a comprehensive audit of all leases entered into by the government.