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SURVIVOR

NKANDLA

ANC and its leaders in government likely

to delay release of Nkandla report

through the courts, while elections team punts party's achievements

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City Press
01 DEC 13
P/1

Purported leaks of Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's provisional report into security upgrades at President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla home have taken the ANC by surprise, but the party is set to fight back.

A source close to government's security cluster said should Madonsela release her report now, government would contest

its contents, item by item, in court.

Government ministers asked for a meeting with Madonsela on Friday after the Mail & Guardian published the contents of a purported leaked report, said Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi.

Ministers were "very concerned about what was reported".

The outcomes of the final report could be more favourable to Zuma than the leaked one.

A source close to Madonsela said there was a possibility that comments on the provisional report could persuade her to

make changes, which means the final report could seem watered down. "In the public mind, this change of mind can be read as backtracking or watering down, which is very bad for the office," the source said.

Should the final report indicate that Zuma lied to Parliament about not having known about the details of the upgrades, opposition parties could also move to impeach and finally unseat him. But given the ANC's overwhelming majority, this is unlikely.

There are three ways this could play out:

SCENARIO 1

OBSTRUCT THE REPORT

The ANC and its leaders in government are likely to delay the release of Madonsela's final report - through the courts if necessary - while attempting to dilute its contents.

A source close to the security cluster said they would also contest every point in which Zuma is cast in a negative light in their responses to the preliminary report.

Meanwhile, elections teams will stay on message, punting the ANC's achievements.

The leaking of the report will be played up as a means of questioning its credibility and party seniors will build an argument that Madonsela has an agenda against Zuma. They will also downplay the costs by factoring in inflation and high building prices to comparisons with spending on, for example, former president Nelson Mandela's home security.

Members of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial election team said they were caught unprepared and would assess during this weekend's door-to-door work just how much damage the disclosures had done to Zuma and the ANC's image.

The ANC has indicated it would stick by Zuma while calling on South Africans to stop discussing the leaked reports. ANC spokesperson Jackson Mthembu said the Nkandla report was not on the agenda of the party's national executive committee meeting next weekend.

In a statement on Friday, he said: "As the ANC, we continue to have confidence in our president, and we believe and know that he is not responsible for any wrongdoing."

The SA Communist Party

SCENARIO 2

GO WITH MADONSELA'S FLOW

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's final report could differ dramatically from the provisional one after inputs by affected parties are made. This has happened before.

The report could appear watered down and Madonsela's reported statement - that some who wanted to see harsh action against Zuma might find the report disappointing - would come true.

This would vindicate the ANC, which is for now keeping mum on the leak report's contents.

"The opposition is making a meal of it for now. We expected this, but not right now," said a KwaZulu-Natal ANC elections team member.

"For now, we will stay on track with the campaign. This is a leaked report, so we'll only acknowledge its contents when the Public Protector releases it," he said.

"Most of our voters are asking why the president is being attacked. Most of the people we have interacted with while campaigning are saying the president should be left alone," he said.

The ANC is also likely to heavily spin the issue of cost escalations when dealing with ordinary voters.

"Why are we comparing the spending on president Mandela in 1996 of R48 million with Nkandla? What cost R48 million in 1996 would not cost R48 million today," he said.

SCENARIO 3

IMPEACH THE MAN

President Jacob Zuma could be ousted as president if it is found that he has lied to Parliament. Although unlikely, the ANC could call a special congress and oust him as party leader.

Opposition parties reacted with outrage to the leaked provisional report, with DA parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko calling it "one of the biggest corruption scandals in democratic South Africa".

Mazibuko, one of the complainants, said she would table a motion for Parliament to investigate Zuma in terms of section 89 of the Constitution, on the basis that he lied to Parliament.

Zuma said: "All the buildings and every room we use in that residence was built by ourselves as family and not government."

Zuma also said he was unaware of the upgrade details. "The nature and form of the improvements was decided upon by the relevant officials through their departments." Madonsela's provisional report, however, found otherwise.

If Zuma is ousted, ANC deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa would be next in line. The ANC could also decide to call a special congress to discuss Zuma's position if the majority of provinces ask for one. It is up to the national executive committee, currently pro-Zuma, to determine participation in the conference.

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OF THE THREE SCENARIOS ABOVE, WHICH WOULD