Withholding Nkandla report a political ploy – ANC

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The African National Congress (ANC) has drawn a line in the sand before Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, urging her to release the full report into upgrades to President Jacob Zuma’s Nkandla residence with “extreme urgency” or risk aspirations that she is playing a “political game”.

As next year’s elections loom, the ANC wants the full report released as any further postponement allowed the matter to “fester” in the public mind, making the report a “factor” in the elections.

DAMNING DETAILS OF THE PUBLIC PROTECTOR’S PROVISIONAL REPORT were published in the Mail and Guardian last week. This has put the ANC on the defensive after a public outcry over the latest revelations. By yesterday afternoon a petition with about 15,000 signatures supporting Mr Zuma’s impeachment had circulated widely on social networks, as opposition parties bayed for blood.

ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe has also called for the full report of the interministerial task team – of which only the findings were released by the government – to be made available too.

“As the ANC we reiterate our demand that the final report, not leaked snippets, is released to the public with immediate effect by the office of the public protector,” said Mr Mantashe, speaking at an “urgent” press briefing at Luthuli House yesterday.

The briefing came after a two-day meeting of ANC officials, which included President Jacob Zuma.

“Any further postponement of the report’s release allows this matter to fester in the public domain. As we approach the elections, this can only be construed as playing tactics and a political ploy to create negativity around the image and integrity of the ANC president and the ANC itself,” Mr Mantashe said.

Should the report be released in March, just before the elections, it would become a “factor” in the polls.

“It is (then) no longer a technical investigation by the public protector, it is a political game,” he said.

Institutions of state such as the public protector, the police or intelligence must “never play the game” of “throwing weight on the political balance of power”.

Responding to questions on the effect of the Nkandla saga on the ANC, Mr Mantashe said talk about Nkandla and the way it was being reported and projected in the public domain amounted to an investigation into Mr Zuma.

“Mr Zuma is the president of the ANC. Our understanding is that there is no investigation on Jacob Zuma… there is an investigation into the security features in Nkandla, therefore it affects the sitting president whose residence is being investigated. It affects the president of the ANC, it affects the ANC image, we can’t run away from that.”

ANC deputy secretary-general Jesse Duarte accused the public protector’s office of leaking the report. She said a number of reports had leaked from that office recently. “We cannot say for sure because we don’t have access to who leaks to the Mail and Guardian… but what was peculiar… when something of that nature is leaked, normally you go ballistic, you make a huge noise… not a polite statement as was issued.”

“We could also say that (Madonsela) seemed a bit comfortable about the fact that that report was leaked,” Ms Duarte said.

In a statement on Monday, Ms Madonsela expressed concern over the leaking of her provisional reports, saying she has now put in place measures to prevent this from happening. She also assured the public that the leaks were not coming from her office.

Mr Mantashe said the release in full of both Nkandla reports would ensure that there was “informed debate” about the matter in the public domain.

“We want to compare notes,” he said. “We have an interest in knowing how did they come to two different conclusions as two institutions of the state.”

The ANC wanted “clarity” from the public protector on a number of issues, he said. This included whether Mr Zuma himself had requested any of the security upgrades to his home and whether he had spent more than R200m in taxpayers money on it.

The party also wanted to know if Mr Zuma had asked for a swimming pool until kraal and whether he had asked that his wife’s tuck shop be moved from its original position.

The ANC also wanted to know if he had requested bulletproof windows and a waiting room, how much was spent on the security upgrade and what was built on state land.

Ms Madonsela is set to release two reports tomorrow, but the Nkandla report is not among them.

According to a media invite to the briefing tomorrow, Ms Madonsela will release her report on the investigation into an allegation of maladministration by Mpumalanga’s department of public works, roads and transport in the awarding of tenders for shop leases at Pilgrim Rest and a report on the probe into allegations of maladministration, corruption and a potential conflict of interest against former minister of communications Dina Pule over the appointment of service providers for the Ict Indaba last year.

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