

MILLIONS MORE TO FIX NKANDLA

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SHOWING
CRACKS:
President
Jacob Zuma's
private home
at Nkandla

Picture:
TEBOGO
LETSIE

Zuma denies it but official, minister say 'process has started'

**MATTHEW SAVIDES,
NATHI OLIFANT
and BONGANI MTHETHWA**

THE government is gearing up to lavish more taxpayer funds on President Jacob Zuma's controversial Nkandla homestead, which has already been upgraded at a cost to the country of R246-million.

The news comes just before 10 public works officials are to face disciplinary hearings this week, arising from reported irregularities when the homestead was first upgraded in a blaze of negative publicity more than two years ago.

Undeterred by the public outcry and a finding by the Constitutional Court that Zuma had failed to uphold the constitution when it came to the money spent on his private home, the Department of Public Works this week confirmed a new round of work was in the offing.

It said processes were under way to refurbish the property — in some cases significantly — to repair shoddy workmanship and, once again, to address security concerns.

While the assessment is not complete, the cost of additional upgrades and repairs could run into millions of rands and could even involve the rebuilding of some of the houses on the property.

News of the upgrades comes as Zuma faces a renewed push from opposition parties and civil society to step down.

Zuma, through his spokesman, said yesterday that he would not allow any renovations to his private residence. He also denied knowing about any planned upgrades.

"There are no renovations of the private houses at the president's residence at Nkandla currently and no department has mentioned anything regarding renovations. President Zuma will not allow any government department, including the Department of Public Works, to renovate any of his private houses," said Presidency spokesman Bongani Ngqulunga.

However, public works chief di-

rector for legal services Barnie Ntlou told the Sunday Times in writing this week that "the process has just started" to have parts of the homestead repaired, and that officials had already visited the homestead.

In a series of follow-up phone calls to confirm this, Ntlou reiterated the work would definitely go ahead.

"We are forced to do that. We can't allow a presidential residence to be dilapidated," he said.

The department is preparing to start formal disciplinary hearings against 10 of its staff accused of "having not followed procurement processes in the appointment of contractors in the upgrading of the president's Nkandla homestead", said Ntlou.

Asked via SMS whether he had

**It's quite obscene!
Zuma shouldn't
be rewarded
with more money**

received a briefing about future upgrades to the homestead, newly appointed Police Minister Fikile Mbalula replied: "Yes."

In response to a follow-up question about the nature of the work, Mbalula referred the Sunday Times to the presidency.

Although specific information has not been made available, Ntlou said public works officials had visited the homestead "several times" to do assessments. He said there had to be a quantification of what was needed before any work could start.

Former public protector Thuli Madonsela found in her report on the Nkandla scandal that the questionable publicly funded upgrades to the property included a guest-house and two private residences, a swimming pool, a visitors centre, a cattle kraal and chicken run, a helipad and secret tunnels and underground bunkers.

Although the shoddiness of some of the work done was spotted by MPs

during an oversight visit in 2015, and also highlighted in an August 2014 Special Investigating Unit report outlining concerns that the compound's security was not up to scratch, repairs were put on hold because of the Constitutional Court process following Madonsela's findings.

"Everything was put on hold. The department is looking into the structural damage now that investigations have been concluded," Ntlou said, adding that this included the "relocation [of] homes".

In March 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled that Zuma failed to uphold, defend and respect the con-

stitution after ignoring Madonsela's recommendations that he pay back some of the money spent on upgrading his home. The Treasury set the amount he was liable to pay back at R7.8-million — and the Presidency said Zuma took out a loan from VBS Mutual Bank to do so.

A family member said a government official — he could not remember from which department — visited the homestead following a fire at a rondavel belonging to one of Zuma's nieces in January.

"I heard there has been a concern that after one of the houses caught fire that, if it happened in winter

when it's windy, a fire might cross to the president's home," the relative said.

The relative confirmed that some of the houses had structural defects, and that these problems had never been addressed.

"There has not been any work started. One of the [other] family members told me there was damage that was visible and some houses have ... cracks on them."

DA chief whip John Steenhuisen, who was part of the oversight visit to Nkandla, said MPs had found a

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