

Ghost of Nkandla comes back to spook the president

IF PRESIDENT Jacob Zuma thought that his R7.8-million payment for security and infrastructure upgrades at his Nkandla home would draw a line under this scandal, he was mistaken — the ghost of Nkandla, it seems, refuses to be laid to rest.

The Sunday Times stirred it back to life at the weekend with a report that millions more are due to be spent on fixing security and other issues at the notorious homestead which has already slurped up R246-million in public funds.

While the Presidency vehemently denies the Sunday Times' claims, they were backed by on-the-record confirmations by senior Public Works officials and Police Minister Fikile Mbalula, pretty much guaranteeing a new controversy.

As any follower of the Nkandla story will know, there are still enormous holes in the narrative despite a plethora of inquiries and the public protector's Secure in Comfort report.

There has been little political accountability outside of two cabinet ministers and one former cabinet minister being given written reprimands after the Constitutional Court ruled against Zuma.

But what has been lost in the wash is Zuma's personal involvement in the Nkandla saga. It was spelt out in some detail in the public protector's report, to little effect.

But that could soon change as 10 public works officials begin their disciplinary hearings in Durban this week.

Since the media — including this newspaper — have succeeded in legal argument to gain access to proceedings, this is the first real opportunity for the public to hear the Nkandla story raw and from the frontline.

With careers on the line and a widely held view that the officials are being hung out to dry to save their political masters, these hearings may be more illuminating than anything that has come before.

For Zuma the ghost of Nkandla couldn't have returned at a worse time.

Public will hear the story raw for the first time