



President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla homestead.

Nkandla official's hearing on in Durban this week

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DURBAN'S director of key accounts management Rakesh Dhaniram is next to face the music in the disciplinary hearings of public works officials accused of a myriad irregularities in the controversial upgrades to President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla homestead.

The hearings began in 2014 but had to be temporarily suspended following a legal dispute over whether the media should have access.

They resumed in Durban this week after the court ruled in the media's favour.

The officials involved are being investigated as per the recommendations of the Special Investigation Unit's report.

Dhaniram's hearing is scheduled for Wednesday and will probably run over three days.

His co-accused are Durban-based senior project manager Jean Rindel; Thuli Ngubane, director: finance and supply chain manager; Nelisiwe Hlengwa, deputy director: disposals; Belinda Mlota, director of prestige projects in Cape Town; Itumeleng Molosi, director of projects in Pretoria; Irene Nel, deputy director: key accounts management; Trevor Watson, project manager; Bheki Dlamini, acting manager: supply chain management; Sibusiso Chonco, deputy director: utilisation and contracts; as well as Jayshree Pardesi, director of key accounts management from Pretoria.

Chonco appeared briefly on Wednesday but did not testify. He sent his lawyer to present a medical certificate to the panel on Tuesday.

According to the report, Dhaniram, Chonco and Ngubane flouted the open tender procedures in approving "a nominated procurement strategy for emergency building and civil works".

The alleged deviation from department procurement procedures reportedly cost the government millions of rands in irregular expenditure.

The report further states that of the 15 contractors and consultants appointed, only two were awarded

contracts after valid procurement processes and those were Mustapha and Cachalia Engineers and Ramcon CC, and they were paid R2.8 million and just over R5m respectively.

"Even when officials were aware of what their obligations were, on a number of occasions they simply failed to fulfil them because of, among other reasons, the absence of moral courage to do the right thing or simply failure to apply their minds to the matter," reads the report on what could have led to the alleged "deliberate ignorance" of the regulations.

Last year Zuma paid R7.8m following a Constitutional Court ruling that some of the upgrades to Nkandla were non-security features and therefore taxpayers' money should not have been utilised.

These included R2.3m renovations of the infamous "fire pool", the amphitheatre for R1m, almost R2m for the visitors' centre, a R1.2m cattle kraal and R250 000 for a chicken run.

However, this does not exonerate the public works officials currently under investigation.

While the other officials have reportedly indicated that they would not be pleading guilty, in 2014 Molosi pleaded guilty to irregularly appointing contractors and flouting procurement procedures. He was suspended for two months but it is not clear whether he has undergone retraining on the Public Finance Management Act, as per the unit's recommendation.

The DA has criticised the Department of Public Works for focusing their investigation only on officials while the contractors who benefited from the flouting of procurement procedures seem to be getting off scot-free. This comes as the department is reportedly making preparation to refurbish some of the houses that were built during the upgrades, which are now in a less desirable state as a result of poor workmanship by the contractors.

In 2014, parts of an R8.2m fence surrounding the homestead were already falling apart, just two years after it was erected.

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