

News

Palace politics

Zulu king's 'Nkandla' in ruins as costs soar

MPs are angry and report recommends criminal charges

By JEFF WICKS

● Chickens, goats and cattle now have the run of Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini's R129-million palace in Nongoma.

The Enyokeni palace complex was built at taxpayers' expense in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Two years ago construction was halted. The grandiose amphitheatre is without a roof, a 2.5 million-litre reservoir leaks and the concrete columns in the arrival court lie in ruins.

Officials say the place will cost another R1-billion to complete.

The initial cost, in 2014, was R225-million, and a budget of R129-million was approved by the national Department of Arts and Culture following a request from the king.

It is intended as accommodation for thousands of women who attend the annual reed dance.

Last week's reed dance had to be held at a stadium near the palace.

A delegation of members of parliament's arts and culture portfolio committee were outraged when they visited the site on Thursday.

They found that the reservoir cost R17-million after R12.8-million had been budgeted. It still did not work properly.

Officials of the Independent Development Trust, which manages the project, could not say why the reservoir was needed when there was one close by.

The MPs were told that construction on the R37-million amphitheatre had begun without plans and budgets for a roof.

"We are not seeing value for money," said committee chairwoman Xoliswa Tom.

Tom said the fact that no one had been criminally charged was "vexing and she would take the investigation to parliament.



A goat is the only beneficiary from the Zulu king's reservoir.

R730 000

A BILL

for carpentry and joinery, which is essentially wooden gum poles slatted between concrete columns

R17m

THE COST

of a 2.5 million litre water tank, which was initially set to cost R12.8-million

R19m

Overheads and contractual matters for the VIP area and royal square



Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini.

"There are names that have been submitted to the police for investigation, but this just drags on," she said.

"We have decided to go to parliament and liaise directly with my counterpart on the police portfolio committee and find out exactly what is going on," Tom said.

King Zwelithini said that even if the cost was 10 times the initial amount, it must be completed.

He welcomed an investigation into the costs and said the centre would bring dignity to the maidens.

Project manager Owen Nxumalo said the design of the amphitheatre, which is unusable because it is incomplete, had evolved after building began.

"The roof covering and the ablutions still need to be built so this area can be functional, and R28-million more is still needed to build the roof. It will resemble the soccer stadium in Durban, according to the design we received," he said.

Nxumalo said construction of the roof and the ablution facilities had been abandoned when a forensic investigation began.

The upgrade of the traditional arena and the construction of a royal court came at a cost of over R28-million.

Included was a R730 000 bill for carpentry and joinery for wooden poles used between the concrete columns.

MP Jabu Mahlangu was incensed at the costs.

"These are just treated gum poles. That is all that they are. How is it possible that gum poles cost more than R700 000?" he said.

A forensic investigation pointed to grossly inflated construction and consultation costs. The investigators have recommended that senior Department of Arts and Culture officials face criminal charges.

A report by Gobodo Forensic Investigative Accounting revealed that prices had been inflated and consultants charged as much as 200% more than the usual industry rates.

The report recommended that criminal charges be laid against former arts and culture director-general Sibusiso Xaba and other senior managers. Xaba was suspended when the investigation was initiated in 2014. He left the position in 2015.