

‘This court is unhygienic’

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BIRD lice, cat faeces, dead pigeons caught in nets and dysfunctional toilets and air conditioning.

That’s what staff and members of the public experience at the Durban High Court complex, where much-needed renovations have again been delayed, leaving those who frequent it fuming.

“This place is not befitting a place of justice. The court is so unhygienic,” a prosecutor told **POST**, calling the delay in the building revamp a “total abortion”.

Renovations to the century-old building were set to commence this month but a notification by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Public Works advised that “challenges” had been experienced in the issuing of the tender and the process would now be delayed by more than four months.

The prosecutor, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the court was in a poor condition and the revamp should have been prioritised.

There were times when the air conditioners had to be switched off during proceedings because of the noise they made,

the prosecutor said.

“In summer, to have the air cons switched off is unbearable, especially when we have to wear court garb and suits underneath. Added to this, the toilets are sometimes unusable. There was a time when the female toilets were out of order for weeks and the women had to use the gents’ facilities.”

In a letter sent to affected parties, Durban High Court manager Karlien Marais said arrangements were made to move the criminal courts to the 12th floor of the Durban Magistrate’s Court building to make room for renovations – and they planned to start sitting there with effect from Monday. The delay, he said, had now put the office in a major predicament.

She said the tender for renovations and additional accommodation was meant to be advertised during the first week of this month and the move of the criminal courts had to be scheduled before the awarding of the tender.

“The move was scheduled during the recess as this would have caused the least disruption to services and would allow for Courts A, B and L and the grill area to be immediately available



Renovations to the Durban High Court building have been delayed because of ‘challenges’ in the tender process.

PICTURE: FILE PHOTOGRAPH

once the contract was awarded. However, a telephonic enquiry by the provincial head of the Office of the Chief Justice revealed that the process would be delayed.”

Marais said confirmation was received in writing that the tender advert date would be moved to “probably” the end of next

month. “This by implication then means that the tender might only be awarded in December 2018 or January 2019.”

A high court prosecutor said court rolls prepared by the director of public prosecutions for the move, as well as witnesses and the accused who were sub-

poenaed to the magistrate’s court building, would be affected.

“First we are told that we are moving, then we are not. All cases will have to be redirected back to the high court. We have to redo subpoenas and redirect the accused who have been warned for Durban Magistrate’s Court.”

Another prosecutor said the high court is housed in a “beautiful building” and the intended renovations would make it a highlight in Durban.

“I personally don’t mind having to wait, in the long term it would be beneficial to everyone. Everybody wants it to be done quickly but that is how the construction industry works. I’m sure the end result will be worth the wait.”

Marais said the move to the magistrate’s court would not only cause an inconvenience to the regional and district court magistrates, but would impact on the sitting of courts and court hours.

She said that moving with full knowledge of the incurred delay would be a waste of resources, knowing that the high court would “stand empty”.

She said prosecutors, administrative staff and magistrates would be inconvenienced for a further six months as magistrates would have to vacate their chambers and courts and make provision to hear matters in chambers because of the lack of courtrooms.

Marais apologised for the postponement but stressed it was in the best interests of all involved.