

# Hawks probe 'prince' over R95-million

A KwaZulu-Natal municipality paid Ishwar Ramlutchman, but no boreholes were drilled

Paddy Harper

**W**hile the man called “Prince Ishwar Ramlutchman Mabheka Zulu” was unveiling a tribute to King Goodwill Zwelithini in Durban on Heritage Day, Hawks investigators were looking into allegations that he had made off with R95-million intended for boreholes for drought-stricken communities around Dundee.

Ishwar Ramlutchman (42), a convicted fraudster whom Zwelithini appointed as head of the iziNyosi regiment during Ramlutchman’s 40th birthday celebrations, recently

made headlines when he unveiled a series of Sivananda Peace Pillars in honour of Zwelithini and other historic public figures. Ramlutchman founded the Sivananda World Peace Foundation in 2012.

The controversial Richards Bay tenderpreneur calls himself Zwelithini’s “son” and is a regular at functions officiated over by the monarch. The two men are understood to have been friends for 20 years.

Criminal charges of corruption and fraud were laid with the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks) against Ramlutchman by the KwaZulu-Natal department of co-operative governance and traditional affairs. It did so after it com-



**Ceremonial son: King Goodwill Zwelithini (left) appointed Ishwar Ramlutchman (right) as head of the iziNyosi regiment two years ago**

missioned PwC to conduct a forensic audit into the Umzinyathi district municipality.

The audit report is understood to have been handed to the Hawks, when the department asked the unit to investigate charges of fraud, corruption and money-laundering.

An earlier charge is understood to have been laid at the Dundee police station last July by a whistle-blower, who had also approached the department for intervention.

The complaints relate to the failure of Ramlutchman’s company to carry out a R95-million borehole drilling contract for the municipality, for which it was paid, and the alleged diversion of the money to another company.

Ramlutchman this week denied any involvement in defrauding the Umzinyathi municipality, under which the Endumeni, Nquthu, Msinga and Umvoti municipalities fall, or of being approached by the Hawks.

“I know nothing about it,” he said.

**H**awks spokesperson Captain Simphiwe Mhlongo confirmed that an initial charge of corruption and fraud was laid at the Dundee police station last year and that the Hawks are now investigating the case.

“No arrest has been made at this stage,” he said.

In 2013, Stanger-born Ramlutchman was convicted on 21 counts of fraud and one of corruption. But he avoided jail for the scam — in which he and his accomplices defrauded the provincial department of public works using forged documents in a tender bidding process — and paid a R500 000 fine after pleading guilty. An attempt by the Asset Forfeiture Unit to seize his properties failed.

Co-operative governance spokesperson Lennox Mabaso was unwilling to comment. “We can neither confirm nor deny that there is an investigation taking place. If one were, it would be inappropriate for us to comment on an ongoing investigation by law enforcement agencies.”

He said a forensic report had been commissioned, but that he was unable to comment on its contents or its recommendations.

But a senior official in the co-operative governance department, who asked not to be named, said they had commissioned PwC to conduct the forensic audit after a whistle-blower had tipped off the department and the police about the alleged fraud.

“Ramlutchman was allegedly given the R95-million by Umzinyathi for boreholes in communities around Dundee, Glencoe and Dannhauser, which were battling with drought, but did not do the job. No boreholes were drilled at all. The money was moved to a third party and disappeared,” the official said.

“We were alerted about the fraud in the borehole project and the report was commissioned. It has been handed over to the Hawks and they are busy with the investigation now.

“There are similar investigations taking place in some of the other municipalities in the district and in other parts of the province regarding the defrauding of water provision projects. They are all being handed to the Hawks, so we anticipate that there will be more movement on this matter.”

Zwelithini’s spokesperson, Prince Thulani Zulu, had not responded to calls from the *Mail & Guardian* at the time of writing.

According to the Sivananda Peace Pillars website, Ramlutchman is committed to rural development and uplifting the poor through his company, AC Industrial.

“One of his priorities is to improve water and sanitation services to previously disadvantaged communities in consultation and collaboration with both the authorities and communities.

“He tries to focus more on rural areas to ensure that we do away with the situation where children and women, in particular, need to walk long distances to dams and rivers to fetch water for their households,” the website reads.