

NC LIBRARY IN THE DARK

STAFF REPORTER

WHILE Freedom Day celebrations in the Northern Cape will kick off tomorrow in Warrenton with the official opening of a new library, residents in Ritchie have been left in the dark after the library in the town has been without electricity since the beginning of the year.

The library in Warrenton will be officially opened tomorrow by the MEC for Sport, Arts and Culture, Bongive Mbinqo-Gigaba.

The H.O Kgadiete Community Library in Warrenton will be handed over to the community together with a new multi-purpose sports facility.

The events form part of the Province's 2019 Freedom Day build-up programme, with the celebrations continuing on Saturday at the Ikhutseng Stadium in Warrenton from 10am with an address by Premier Sylvia Lucas under the theme "Celebrating 25 Years of Democracy".

Yesterday, the provincial government called on all residents to join in the celebrations commemorating democracy and freedom.

"This year's Freedom Month comes shortly before the upcoming national and provincial elections on May 8, in which all South Africans will be exercising their democratic right to vote," the spokesperson for the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, Conrad Fortune, stated.

As part of its Freedom Month programme, the department has also handed over a multi-purpose sports facility to the community of Carolusburg in the Namakwa district as well as officially opened the new M.S Kitchin Study Library in Kuruman.

Residents in Ritchie, however, yesterday pointed out that amidst the opening of new libraries, the department was doing little to ensure the continued functionality of existing libraries.

The library in Ritchie has, according to residents, been without electricity since the beginning of



LIGHTS OUT: The library in Ritchie which has been without electricity since the beginning of the year.

Picture: Danie van der Liff

this year.

The disgruntled residents stated yesterday that the lack of electricity was due to a faulty cable. "The department keeps promising that the cable will be replaced. Initially the department stated that it was getting quotes for the installation of a new cable but now everything is quiet and we are unsure about what is happening," one resident said.

"In the meantime, our children, especially the matrices, cannot access the computers to do research for their projects. It is putting them at a disadvantage because they have to travel to Kimberley, which is expensive, to do research. You can only go to the Ritchie library to get books, but it is very dark in there.

"The department is not taking this community seriously as it has been three months already that there has been no electricity at the library."

Fortune said yesterday that the department was aware of the challenges around the supply of electricity at the Ritchie Library and had requested the Department of

Roads and Public Works to do an inspection of the electricity supply.

"They have done the inspection. According to their findings all electrical cabling connections and supply to the facility are sufficient to carry the electrical load of the facility, which has a three-phase electrical connection. The cabling in and to the distribution board is as required and no faults were found with the cables or connections."

Fortune added, however, that the earth leakage seemed to have a fault on it. "We could also not check the supply cable from Eskom to the building."

According to Fortune, the department was in the process of appointing an electrical company to fix the problems as identified by the Department of Roads and Public Works.

"We are also currently in contact with Eskom for them to inspect their supply cable to the building."

He added that currently the library was still open, despite certain sections not having electricity.

"Community members and pupils in Ritchie can still access the

library," he stated.

The library was opened in June last year and during the opening the premier pointed out that libraries unlocked the power of information and opportunity. "Libraries are the nucleus of communities, where community members, parents and children gain access to government information, gain access to newspapers wherein jobs are advertised and where pupils and students can gain access to information on the internet," Lucas stated at the opening.

"Libraries are also places that must be open to everybody, irrespective of race, colour or creed. It is a place where social cohesion and nation building can be enhanced and promoted," she stated, adding that the provincial government had taken a decision to build all new libraries in close proximity to schools to alleviate the pressing need for information by pupils, especially disadvantaged communities.

"The pupils from the surrounding schools will therefore benefit from these facilities. It is a common

fact that our poor communities do not have the financial resources to buy computers and other information material, but they have a pressing need to have access to information. It is access to the information that remains key to personal development and improvement of social, economic, technical and scientific skills that are needed in the labour market.

"For many communities in South Africa, it is only public libraries which provide free access to computers and the internet. The library we are opening here will open the doors to free internet connectivity and technology resources to and for the less privileged communities."

A reply to a parliamentary question earlier, revealed that the Northern Cape had 10 dysfunctional libraries.

The DA pointed out at the time, that these libraries had suffered vandalism, staff shortages, arson during protests and building upgrades that were yet to be completed.

Fortune said in his response at the time that the department was committed to promoting a culture of reading.

"However, from time to time the department is faced with various challenges with regard to the optimal functioning of our libraries in our Province. The department is aware of several libraries that have had to be closed due to a number of reasons, including the resignation of staff, the destruction of some libraries, especially container libraries in some areas due to community unrest, and occupational health and safety concerns," he said.