

■ JUDGES

SIU in bid to recover lost public works cash

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THE KwaZulu-Natal government has lost over R200 million to building owners by paying inflated rents, and for non-existent space and parking bays.

The Special Investigation Unit (SIU) Special Tribunal has been brought in to investigate and assist in recovering the money lost by the Department of Public Works.

It is not clear when the money was lost.

The tribunal, which was announced by Justice and Correctional Services Minister Ronald Lamola last week, started work on Monday.

Chaired by Judge Gidfonia Mlin-delwa Makhanya, the tribunal has a statutory mandate to recover public funds siphoned from the fiscus through corruption, fraud and illicit money flows.

The monetary value of cases ready for adjudication and recovery stands at R14.7 billion, according to the department.

Tribunal spokesperson Dr Jerome Wells said the cases were currently in high courts around the country.

“The SIU will seek to transfer some of these cases for adjudication to the Special Tribunal,” he said.

The tribunal seeks to recover over R220 million from the Public Works Department for rentals that were not market-related, among other issues.

The department’s media and stakeholder relations director, Thamsanqa Mchunu, said the SIU had identified overpayments in respect of where the department had paid for more space than was available in buildings, for non-existent parking bays and VAT payments made to landlords not entitled to such payments.

“The processes to recover these amounts is ongoing and the department at this stage cannot divulge the names of the people concerned.

“The disclosure will prejudice the investigations and the legal recovery under way,” Mchunu said.

In February, President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed Makhanya as president of the tribunal for three years in terms of Sections 7 (2) and (5) of the Special Tribunals Act, 1996.

He appointed Judges Icantharuby Pillay, Johannes Eksteen, Selewe Peter Mothle, Lebogang Modiba, Thina Siwendu, David van Zyl and Sirajudien Desai as additional members.

The department said the tribunal adopted a “more flexible” and expeditious approach to legal actions, and that its proceedings were inquisitorial in nature and characterised by extensive pre-trial investigations.

It would not divulge details pertaining to the collection of the lost money.