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RESTORATION

# Fears over corruption in parliament repairs

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Public works & infrastructure minister Patricia de Lille and some ANC MPs are concerned that the restoration of the parliamentary buildings – estimated to cost R1.5bn – will be used as an opportunity for corruption.

They are proposing that real-time audits – used to monitor expenditure for flood disaster

relief in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape – be used to control expenditure on the restoration project. Concerns have also been expressed over cost overruns in the project.

The aim of real-time audits is to prevent and detect weaknesses in controls and report on findings within a short time.

The concerns were raised on Friday during a meeting of the joint standing committee on the

financial management of parliament, which was briefed by Coega Development Corporation (CDC) project manager Christo Beukes on the extensive damage caused by the January fire, the estimated cost of repair and the timelines for restoration.

The CDC was appointed by De Lille to assess the damage and prepare cost estimates.

Beukes said repairing the fire damage and upgrading the Old

Assembly and the building that links it to the New Assembly building would cost an estimated R528m and would take about 18 months, until possibly the second quarter of 2025.

Restoring the New Assembly building and installing compliant fire protection and ventilation systems would cost about R1bn and would take 42 months, with a possible completion date in the second quarter of 2027. The

R1.5bn does not include the cost of furniture, fittings and equipment such as laptops.

Parliament has been slow in dealing with the CDC report, submitted in May.

ANC MPs Mandla Rayi and Bhekri Radebe emphasised the need for real-time audits, a view shared by De Lille and National Council of Provinces chair Amos

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Masondo, who warned against the situation getting bogged down by corruption.

De Lille said: "We are all concerned about corruption. We need to see transparency. We can certainly design a process with parliament on how to open up the process," which she said could involve the meetings of bid evaluation committees being held in public.

Rayi said: "These are huge projects with a lot of money involved. In the past, there have always been challenges with regard to other projects that the department was involved with in terms of fraud and corrup-

tion." He noted that this had also appeared in the spending of flood relief money.

Assurances are needed that there would be no cost overruns. Radebe said he expects the medium-term budget policy statement that finance minister Enoch Godongwana will table on October 26 to make provision for the restoration.

De Lille said her department, the Treasury and parliament will have to thrash out the way forward. Godongwana has indicated that if there were any allocation to be made for the project, the announcement would be made in October.

Parliament's secretary, Xolile George, said he has met with Treasury acting director-general Ismail Momoniat about the funding for the restoration project and is to meet this week with the acting director-general of public works & infrastructure, Alec Moemi.

The committee was also briefed on the measures taken to enhance the security of the parliamentary precinct and on the court case involving the person accused of having started the fire, Zandile Mafe. His case is due to be heard in the high court in Cape Town on November 5.

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