



Publication: Cape Times - Main
Title: PARLY BLAZE: REAL-TIME AUDITS CALL
Publish date: 26 Sep 2022
Page: 2

Reach: 29673
AVE:R 32356.17
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INVESTIGATION

Parly blaze: Real-time audits call

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MPs want real-time audits on the more than R1.5 billion in funding that will be spent to restore the buildings damaged by the fire in Parliament earlier this year.

This emerged when the joint parliamentary standing committee on financial management was briefed on Friday on matters related to the investigation of the fire and progress in the renovation efforts.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure commissioned the Coega Development Corporation to conduct a detailed assessment of the damage and looked at structural issues in the damaged buildings.

The old and New Assembly buildings were gutted by the fire on January 2 and Zandile Mafe, initially charged with arson and housebreaking, will now face terrorism charges in the Western Cape High Court next month.

The report provided four restoration options, including complete demolishing and rebuilding the old and new Assembly to their pre-fire condition.

Coega programme manager Chris-

tos Beukes said they recommended the restoration of the Old Assembly, which will include replacing the roof structure, timber floor, electrical, electronic and water services to the tune of R528m.

"We recommend the upgrading due to the fact that you have got this opportunity and that work can overlap with restoration work of fire-damaged scope.

"That will ensure that your building is now fully compliant and there is no possibility of maintenance issues and breakdown of equipment," Beukes said.

He said they were recommending the restoration of the existing building housing the New Assembly by retaining the floor layout and upgrading the equipment to the tune of R1 billion.

Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia De Lille said her department was in consultation with National Assembly Speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula on interim measures that can be put in place so that Parliament can proceed as normal as soon as possible.

Secretary to Parliament, Xolile George said he would soon be holding a meeting with acting directors-

general for the National Treasury and Department of Public Works.

"We agree that I need to convene a meeting to thrash out the implementation scope," he said.

George said he had already met the head of National Treasury to discuss their request for funding.

"Our engagement with the National Treasury has at least gone to a stage where we are now ready for subsequent engagements with executive authority of Parliament, with the executive authority of National Treasury, which is scheduled to take place fairly soon," he said.

ANC MP Mandla Rayi asked that they received a report from parliament with regards to the implementation plan and the restoration option they have chosen.

"We should consider a real-time audit rather than wait for the normal auditing to take place," Rayi said.

He also said there should be no overruns when the restoration work was done.

"When we get the report we should be assured that there should be no overruns," he said.

ANC MP Bheki Radebe noted that Finance Minister Enoch Gogongwana

table the medium-term budget policy statement in October.

"One would expect the issue of Parliament must be there with costing. The National Treasury must come on board," Radebe said.

"The sooner Parliament returns to its optimal operation, the better for the Republic of South Africa. The issue of rebuilding, starting as soon as possible, is very critical," he said, adding there should be real-time audits of the allocated funds for restoration.

De Lille said Godongwana had indicated that if there was to be any allocation, an announcement would be made in October.

She said they were concerned about corruption and needed to see transparency.

"I agree with real-time auditing and no overruns," she said.

National Council of Provinces chairperson Amos Masondo said the concerns about corruption and the need for real-time audits were very genuine and were noted.

"I agree with the minister on real-time audits. Everything possible should be done to avoid a situation where we end up bogged down by corruption," Masondo.