



Publication: Mercury, The - Main
Title: Restoration of damaged Parliament buildings to begin
Publish date: 16 May 2023
Page: 4

Reach: 10990
AVE:R: 16742.88
Author: Staff Reporter

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Restoration of damaged Parliament buildings to begin

WORK is set to get under way to restore the Parliament buildings that were damaged in a fire last year.

The national legislature was allocated R2 billion for the restoration programme of the Old and New Assembly buildings by the Finance Minister in his medium-term budget policy statement.

A total of R118 million was also allocated for unforeseen and unavoidable expenditure.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa has since been appointed as an implementing agent for the restoration work.

National Assembly Speaker, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and officials

recently briefed the MPs on the restoration and precinct design project.

Special project manager Simon Mashigo said Parliament engaged the Development Bank of Southern Africa as an implementing agent and a handover report from the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure took place on March 6.

"The handover was based on a condition assessment report for restoration of the Old Assembly and the New Wing. The programme was broken down into work packages for early, medium and long-term deliverables."

Mashigo said safe access routes were created to determine access to the buildings and verify the assets,

scan the buildings and prepare for removal of rubble.

"As part of the repairs, there is a request for upgrading the buildings so they meet the national building regulations. The Old Assembly's corridors are too narrow, dark and without sufficient ventilation."

Mashigo said certain work was delayed due to the need to determine safe access routes and verify the assets.

"Work has continued in terms of planning and construction is to commence on May 18."

He said some heritage assets were retrieved and cleaned.

"Some are infested with mould and bacteria. Some are in bad condition."

There were 2 800 assets that burned down in the National Assembly's asset register.

"We have completed the process. We will submit a report so the CFO can prepare the annual financial statements," he said, adding that the report would be submitted on May 16.

Mashigo also said work has been done in terms of planning for the removal of rubble and debris in the affected buildings.

"Work will start on June 9 and be completed on June 31."

Last Friday, a contractor was to be appointed to reconfigure two floors in 90 Plein Street for the offices of MPs.

Work will start on May 18 and be

completed on June 13.

"It will be a fast-tracked project. The construction company is required to run on three shifts a day," he said.

Mashigo noted they were behind schedule for the 155 MPs' offices.

Mapisa-Nqakula said a lot of progress has been made towards the planning for actual restoration and interim arrangements to bring MPs and employees back in order to normalise operations of Parliament.

"It has not been an easy road but we are getting somewhere," Mapisa-Nqakula said. She said the restoration was about reaffirming the centrality and functioning of South Africa's democracy. | Mercury Correspondent