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Title: Standoff in Parly over dome costs

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Standoff in Parly over dome costs

By **THABO MOKONE**

● Parliament and the department of public works are in a standoff over the cost of installing fittings in the newly erected R30m dome meant to serve as the interim home of the national legislature for the next two years.

As a result, it's "highly unlikely" the installation of the dome will be completed in time for debate on the state of the nation (Sona) address – and President Cyril Ramaphosa's reply to it – scheduled for February 11 and 12.

This is according to a memo sent to chief whips on January 17 by National Assembly speaker Thoko Didiza, in which she says she is disappointed by the department of public works' decision to renege on an agreement to carry the full costs of installing the dome – last used for Nelson Mandela's funeral in 2013.

The memo was tabled at a closed meeting of the chief whips' forum on Wednesday, which was held to discuss logistical arrangements for the Sona, set for Thursday.

Public works minister Dean Macpherson's department has declined to pay for the cost of installing a backup generator, air-conditioning, carpets, furniture, toilets and flooring, among other things.

"I should at this point state that the extent of parliament's obligations, as indicated by the minister ... is different from what was presented and agreed to between parliament and the department at the point decisions were made on this matter," says Didiza in her memo.

"I find this development rather unfortunate, and I have indicated as much to the minister. Members are therefore advised that given the extensive work to be carried out in respect of the internal/tenant fittings of the dome, it is highly unlikely that the Sona debate and the president's reply to the debate will be held in the dome."

This will see parliament continuing to hire

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The dome will be parliament's interim home for the next two years.

Parly dome may not be ready for Sona debate

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the Cape Town City Hall. The venue, including technical equipment, can cost up to R8m a day; the dome was intended to help eliminate such spending.

The department of public works started installing the dome in the first week of January, after it was shipped to Cape Town from Pretoria in late November. Structural engineers and technicians worked seven days a week to complete the job before the Sona debate.

Didiza's spokesperson, Reggie Ngcobo, yesterday declined to comment on the matter, saying all enquiries about the dome should be directed to public works.

Lennox Mahaso, head of communications at public works, insisted that his department and parliament had agreed to share the costs of installing the dome.

"Before the start of the project, it was agreed with parliament that the costs related to transporting the dome from Pretoria to Cape Town, as well as its installation and construction, would be covered by the department ... The internal furnishing would be executed and funded by parliament. The department is adhering to this agreement," he said.

The chief whips' forum meeting also heard there were two MPs who were refusing to vacate their state-allocated houses at parliamentary villages in Cape Town, seven months after losing their seats in last year's general elections.

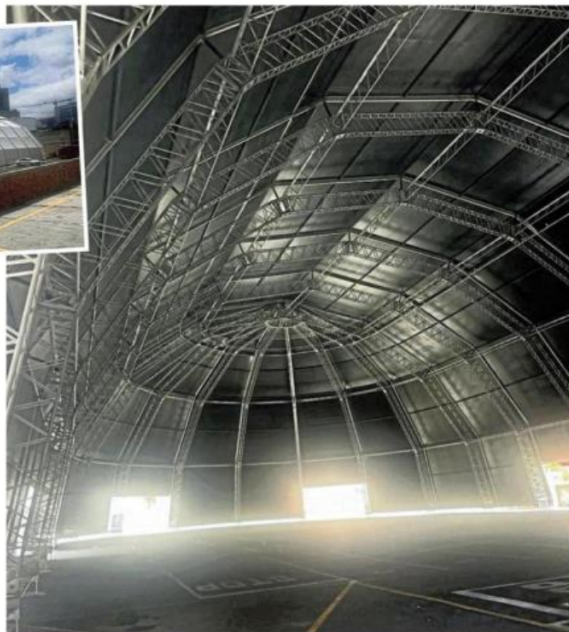
Mahaso said they were now facing legal eviction, but declined to name the defiant MPs.

"Yes, two former MPs have not yet vacated their allocated residences. The department has now instituted legal eviction proceedings to remove them from the properties," he said.

Another presentation made at the chief whips' meeting by senior parliamentary officials showed that at least three former presidents have confirmed their attendance at this year's Sona along with other important guests.

The three are Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe and Jacob Zuma, who is also the leader of the MK Party, the official opposition party in parliament.

Other confirmed VIPs include former national assembly speakers Thandi Modise and Baleka Mbete.



Structural technicians have been working seven days a week to erect the dome in Cape Town. The structure was last used for the funeral of Nelson Mandela in 2013. Pictures: Thabo Mokone

Cost of Parliament Dome

According to the presentation seen by this paper, the R31m is due to be spent on, among others:

...used to be spent on other building contracts.

Artist's impression of dome, which will be used as temporary accommodation for Parliament.

Electrical installations (generators and fire detectors).

R6.4m

Dry walling

R1.5m

Painting

R116,768

Conference chairs and foldable conference tables.

R1.7m

R1m

Six shipping containers to be converted into "VIP toilets".

Raised speaker stage including stairs and podium.

R408,280

Suspended timber flooring

R2.2m

R2.6m

Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system.

Parliamentary branding

R180,000

Fence and gates

R88,500

Belgotex "diagonal carpet tiles"

R939,900

Balustrades

R261,898

R1.1m

Aluminium doors

R1.6m

Earmarked towards the cost of "servicing, repairs and replacement" of other components of the dome.

Graphic: Noko Moma/Sunday Times Pictures: Public Works

Sunday Times

Former speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula – who is facing corruption charges – was invited, but is among those who have declined.
Former deputy presidents David Mabuza

and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka have also turned down invitations to attend the 2025 Sona, where Ramaphosa is expected to lay out the priorities of the government of national unity for the first time.