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Nkandla guilty plea: others may follow

Parties concerned that remaining 11 officials could try same tactic

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PUBLIC Works Department officials might plead guilty to flouting procurement procedures on the security upgrades at President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla residence.

This comes after the Pretoria-based director of projects, Itumeleng Molosi, pleaded guilty to irregularly appointing contractors and flouting procurement procedures.

City Press newspaper reported that Molosi was given a slap on the wrist in the form of a two-month suspension without pay and a final written warning.

Sources said Molosi's plea could pave the way for the other 11 officials to sign similar deals and avoid lengthy hearings.

According to the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) report, Molosi, Rakesh Dhaniram, Bheki Dlamini and Thuli Ngubane approved the appointment of E Magubane CC through a negotiated strategy in June 2011.

The contractor was to be paid R9.6 million, but received R10.8m for installing electronic security systems at the president's home.

The disciplinary hearings of the 12 officials began in Durban in September, and Molosi's case is the first to be concluded. If Molosi had been found guilty rather than signing a plea deal, he would've forfeited his pension.

Roshan Lil-Ruthan, labour officer for the Public Service Association (PSA), believed the sanction was harsh because "none of the employees benefited financially from the project and they told the SIU that they were pressured by their supervisors to fast-track the project".

In September, Lil-Ruthan said all the officials intended pleading not guilty, and the disciplinary hearings were merely the department looking for scapegoats to shoulder the blame for Nkandla. However, yesterday he expressed his uncertainty about the possibility of others following Molosi's suit.

'The suspension of an official, or officials, is what we called for'

"I'm not sure whether some of them will choose to plead guilty because I haven't met with them since we (PSA) closed for (the) holidays," he said.

Lil-Ruthan said Molosi's plea was a "brave step" and he was certain his co-accused might consider the same route to fast-track their cases.

"They obviously want the whole thing to be over, but it is also important to consider the implications of either pleading guilty or being found guilty," he said.

The PSA plans to analyse transcripts of Molosi's case to see if its members were not implicated in his plea, in case they need to rework their defence.

ANC spokesman Zizi Kodwa said Molosi's suspension was welcomed as it dealt with what the ruling party viewed as the unlawful escalation of prices.

"The suspension of an official, or officials, is what we called for. That someone must be responsible for the unexpected escalation," Kodwa said.

The EFF's Mbuyiseni Ndlozi said it was a travesty that Zuma was being protected through the charges brought against the officials. He urged the remaining 11 officials not to plead guilty.

"The issue is being buried by destroying people's careers. We reaffirm our position that the officials must not stand down, and instead stand their ground. The opposition parties are willing to stand by them. They must stand up for the truth."

The IFP's Naren Singh said the guilty plea did not exonerate Zuma from paying for what the IFP considered as non-security upgrades.

"The president must do the right thing and acknowledge that he unduly benefited from the project and pay back some of the taxpayers' money," he said.

The DA's James Masango said the party also wanted the recommendations in the report by the Public Protector Thuli Madonsela to be adhered to.

"We want Zuma to take responsibility for the money that was spent on things like the swimming pool, kraal and chicken run which had nothing to do with security," he said.

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