

Nkandla security upgrades 'hush and rush'

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"HUSH and rush." was how a member of the Special Investigating Unit yesterday described the process of awarding a multimillion-rand contract for security upgrades at President Jacob Zuma's Nkandla home, to construction company Money Mine 310 CC.

Christian Legwabe – the chief forensic investigator tasked with looking into the contract – was testifying at the second day of Public Works official Jayshree Pardesi's internal disciplinary hearing.

Pardesi is charged with misconduct, for signing off on the dodgy contract – for which Money Mine was the only bidder – when she was an assistant director at the Public Works Department's KZN offices in 2010.

Legwabe said normally there were several days between the sittings of the Bid Evaluation Committee (BEC) – which evaluates tenders

and makes recommendations – and the Regional Bid Adjudication Committee (RBAC) – which approves or rejects those recommendations.

But in the case of the Money Mine contract and according to the BEC's minutes, it sat at 1pm on June 15, 2010. The RBAC sat on the same day but its minutes are missing and so it is unclear at what time this was.

"Maybe after (the BEC) sat, they then went around 2pm or 3pm," Legwabe said yesterday, "It's abnormal. Me, I would call it 'hush and rush'."

Money Mine was awarded the contract for work on the fence, the main house and several rondavels at the president's private residence, through a "negotiated procurement strategy" where no one else bid.

A negotiated strategy is "the least desirable of all acquisition procedures" as it is not open and fair. It is only supposed to be used in very specific circumstances, such as in an emergency.

It has been suggested that Zuma personally requested Money Mine do the work on Nkandla, but Legwabe said the president denied this.

"We did interview the president – or sent him a list of questions – and he never gave anyone instructions to say, 'Hire Money Mine'," he said.

Moments earlier, however, Legwabe read from an internal memorandum issued before the contract was awarded.

"The owner of the property has appointed a contractor, Money Mine Investments, to construct new accommodation at the site. The current status is that the contractor is on site and construction is 15% completed," he read.

Legwabe explained that, before Zuma became president, he employed Money Mine to work on his home.

After he became president, security officials carried out a security assessment on his home, concluded he was "not safe" and said he needed

a security upgrade.

"According to (the project manager), the owner (Zuma) requested Money Mine to come back again and do the work because there was a relationship – a trust relationship or something like that," Legwabe said.

Apparently the project manager had said that if Money Mine were to stop work on Nkandla then – before it was complete – and have to wait for further instructions, this would result in "a great embarrassment to the department".

"(He) was trying to do a good name for himself and the department ... It was 'rush rush' because he was looking at not being embarrassed," Legwabe said.

Before Legwabe could be cross-examined yesterday, proceedings were adjourned for Pardesi's legal team to secure documents they needed in light of evidence the department's lawyer had led.

Proceedings will resume late next month.