

KwaZulu-Natal premier's residence a R32m 'second Nkandla'

Thami Ngubane

AS The Department of Public Works announced that it had stopped the controversial renovations to the KwaZulu-Natal premier's official residence in Pietermaritzburg, government officials made shocking findings during their site visit yesterday.

Among the revelations is that the swimming pool area, that will cost around R1 million to upgrade, has not been used in the last 20 years.

The DA had asked to inspect the residence following media reports that R32m was to be spent on renovating the residence over the next few years.

The premier's office has denied that R32m has been "splurged" on the property, and stated only about R821 000 had been spent so far. The rest was an estimate of how much the renovations would cost.

Members of the media were restricted during the site visit. One official tried to claim that the site was a national key point, but was forced to withdraw the statement after members of the media challenged him.

"This swimming pool, we estimate, has not been used in the last 20 years," said Mkuseli

Madubela, a project manager of Public Works in the Southern Region, when pressed by the leader of the DA, Zwakele Mncwango, about the frequency of the use of the pool.

The pool appeared to be in a dilapidated state. It had no water and the infrastructure around it was crumbling.

The officials disputed reports that R1m would be forked out for the pool.

"The money will be spent on the entire entertainment area, that is the pool, the braai and bar area and to fix the lighting problems.

"The fence around the pool will be removed and the wall built around it. So the purpose of the renovations of the entertainment area is to beautify it as it is directly on the entrance to the residence," said Madubela.

The perimeter wall around the residence will also be upgraded, the tennis court will be resurfaced and the road networks inside the residence will be upgraded.

Plans are also under way to build parking bays next to the conference centre to accommodate government officials holding conferences.

Work has already been done in the bathrooms and kitchen.

Mncwango described the renovations as "vanity projects".

"This is a second Nkandla – the renovations at Nkandla were all about the swimming pool and the entertainment area, which is also the case here."

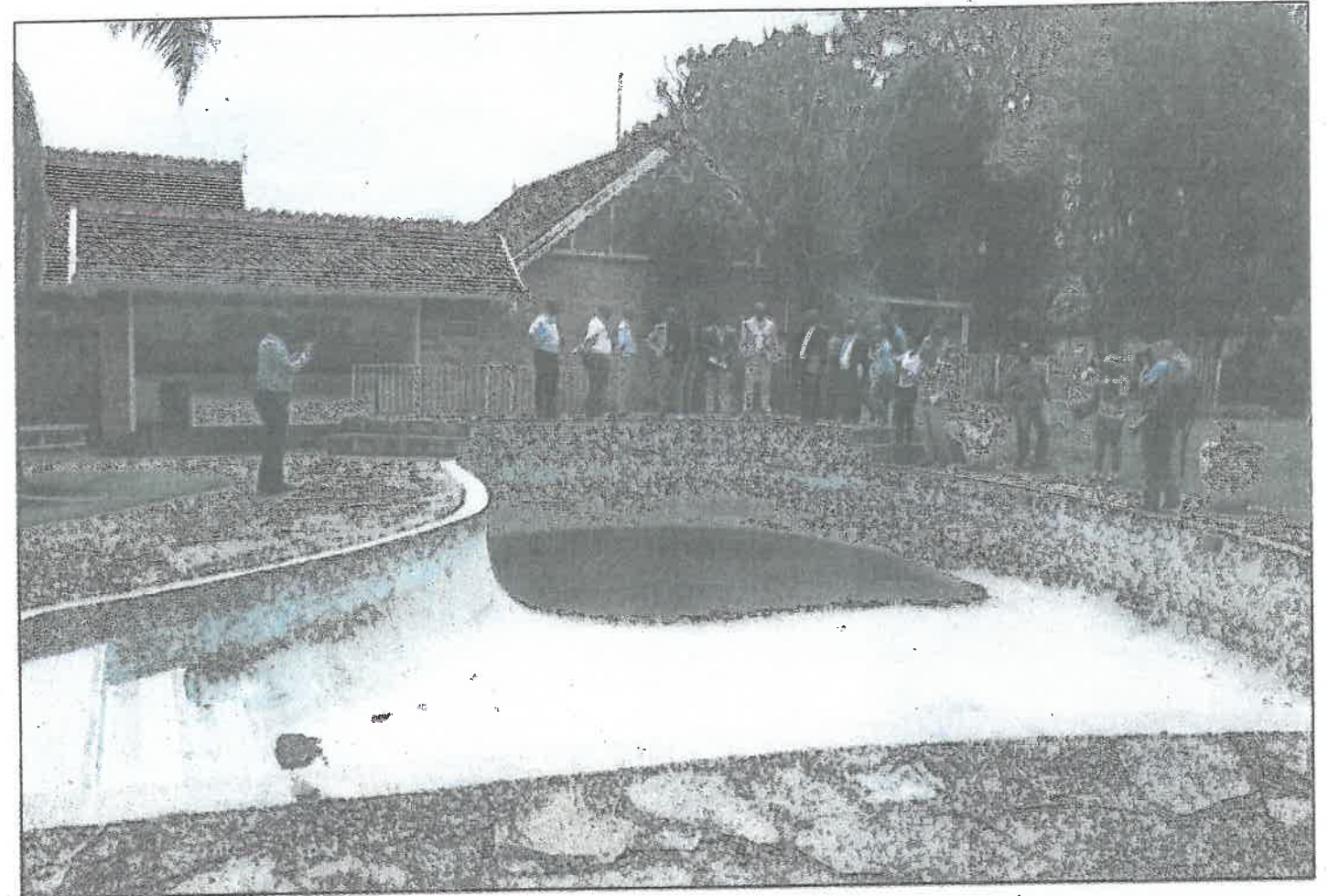
He said it was concerning that an estimated R32m would be spent on renovating a house that was a white elephant.

"This money could be used to build houses for the poor.

"The amount that will be spent on the bathrooms is estimated to be around R500 000. We went into one of these bathrooms and the work that has been done here cannot cost more than R100 000. This seems to be another case of rampant looting," he said.

Director-general at the Premier's Office, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize, said that Premier Willies Mchunu had undertaken to stop all the renovations and conduct an independent assessment of the upgrades.

"The investigation will determine whether the work done was necessary and whether the proper tender processes were followed in the awarding of the contracts. In the meantime, no further work will proceed," said Mkhize.



The DA delegation inspects the pool at the KwaZulu-Natal premier's house in Parkside, Pietermaritzburg.

PICTURE BONGANI MBATHA

THE MERCURY 25 OCTOBER 2017
PAGE 1