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SAFE-HANDS BOUGHER IS SIMPLY THE BEST - PAGE 16

Plan to put end to squatting

Eradication of informal settlements by 2014 - State

GRAEME HOSKEN
and XOLANI MBANJWA

A group of squatters has made a home on the doorstep of the Union seat of government, the Union Buildings, but the government has pledged that this scenario will be a thing of the past by 2014.

The provincial government is promising an ambitious R8 billion plan to eradicate all informal settlements.

According to this plan, houses will be allocated to those priced out of the housing market. A housing subsidy to be made available to anyone regardless of race, will ensure that people who earn between R3 500 and R10 000 a month are able to apply for government-subsidised homes.

However, this will not mean more RDP-type housing.

This announcement was made at a National Press Club briefing yesterday by Gauteng housing MEC Nomvula Mokonyane, who said the department had realised that the "sea" of RDP housing was not the solution to the province's housing crisis.

But, in the meantime, about 30 squatters wake up at the crack of dawn at the foot of the majestic Union Buildings and go in search of casual jobs in Pretoria.

"They bathe, cook, do their laundry and sometimes smoke their dagga with prostitutes on the sprawling lawns of the city landmark.

They hang their washing in the bushes or on top of their tents, leaning on the Union Buildings fence.

Edward Ntongwa (21) said he had been living there since he moved from Johannesburg three months ago.

Asked where other squatters were, he said they were out looking for "small jobs".

The Pretoria News found Ntongwa -

originally from Cape Town - sitting on a broken chair surrounded by broken glass, beer bottles and a pile of rubbish.

Asked where he slept, Ntongwa pointed to a patch of grass, saying: "I don't have a tent. When it's cold we light a fire and people help each other."

Some of the squatters - who refused to give their names - said they would appreciate "a government house closer to where we can find jobs and where we usually find casual jobs".

"They said they knew of many people who had been on the waiting list for houses for many years and did not believe they would ever get a low-cost RDP house.

"There's no chance of us getting houses. We are not from around here, so we will never get government housing," said one squatter.

They said they had been harassed by police on several occasions, who had threatened to throw them off the land.

But they always returned to sleep there at night. "It's safe here and we know one another. We don't want to live this life, but there is nowhere else to go," said a young woman.

But according to Mokonyane, RDP houses are not the solution and are not sustainable.

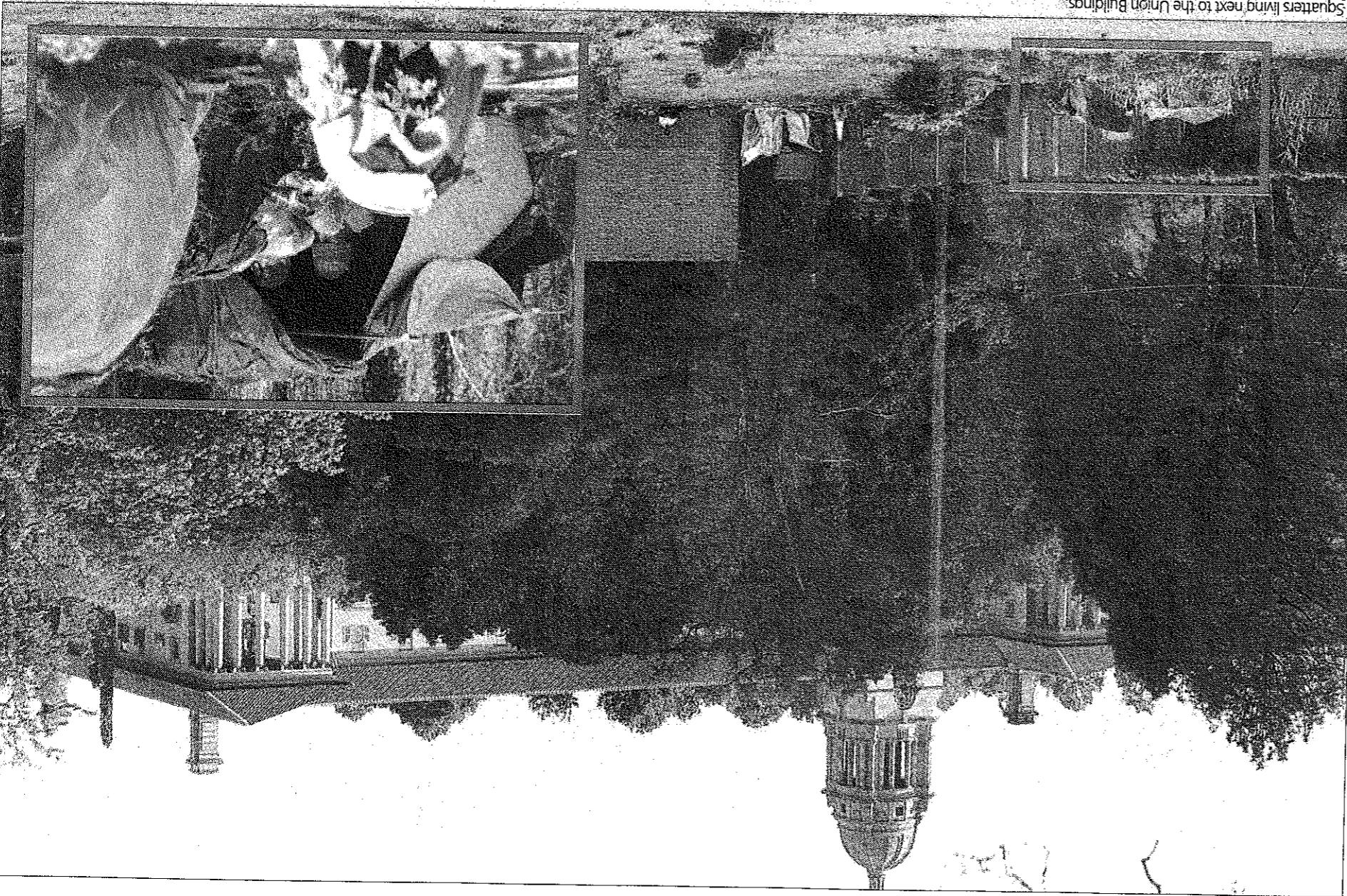
"A sea of these houses will not work, as these houses will continue the vicious cycle of poverty leading to the creation of more poor areas," she said.

"There will be mixed-housing areas where everyone regardless of their race or financial status have access to the same amenities and essential services," she said.

Currently only those who earn less than R3 500 a month qualify for RDP homes.

The department has prioritised 20 townships, including Mamelodi, Atteridgeville and Soshanguve, for rehabilitation and is conducting maintenance programmes that include, among other projects, the retarring of roads.

Mokonyane said that by the end of the 2007/08 financial year, 10 informal settlements in Gauteng would be eradicated. "We will speed up housing delivery and deal with the housing backlog 'time-bomb' by reducing the time it takes to acquire land to six months so that in a financial year land can be obtained and houses built. "We will allocate houses to township residents 'block by block' instead of using the notorious waiting list, which is open to corruption. This will allow for quicker distribution of houses," she said.



PICTURE: PHILL MAGAKOE

Mokonyane said Gauteng had many

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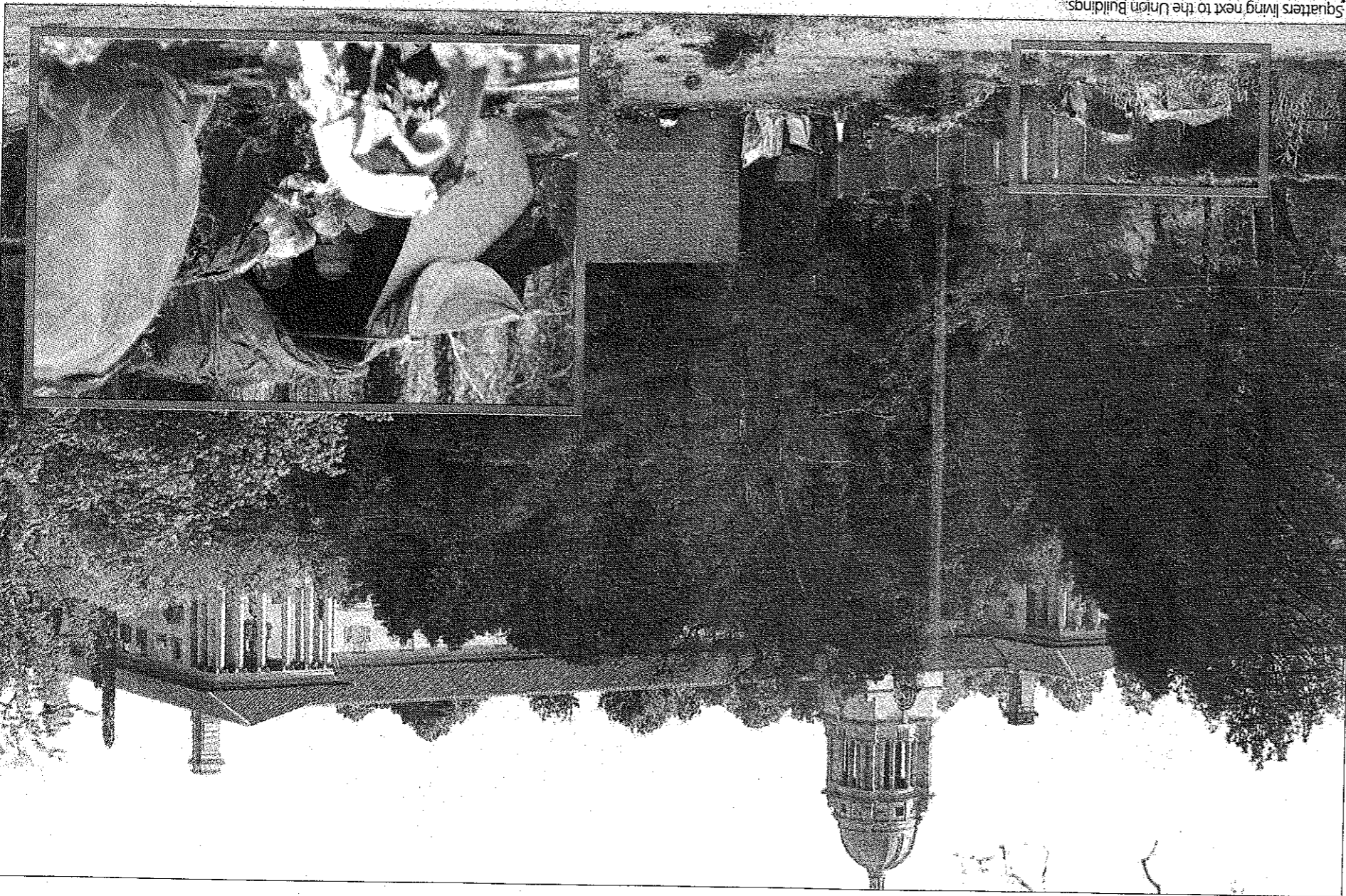
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Mokonyane said Gauteng had many housing challenges. "We are assessing 17 alternative-material homes being built at Pretoria, some of which can be constructed within 48 hours."



PICTURE: PHILL MAGAKOE

Squatters living next to the Union Buildings