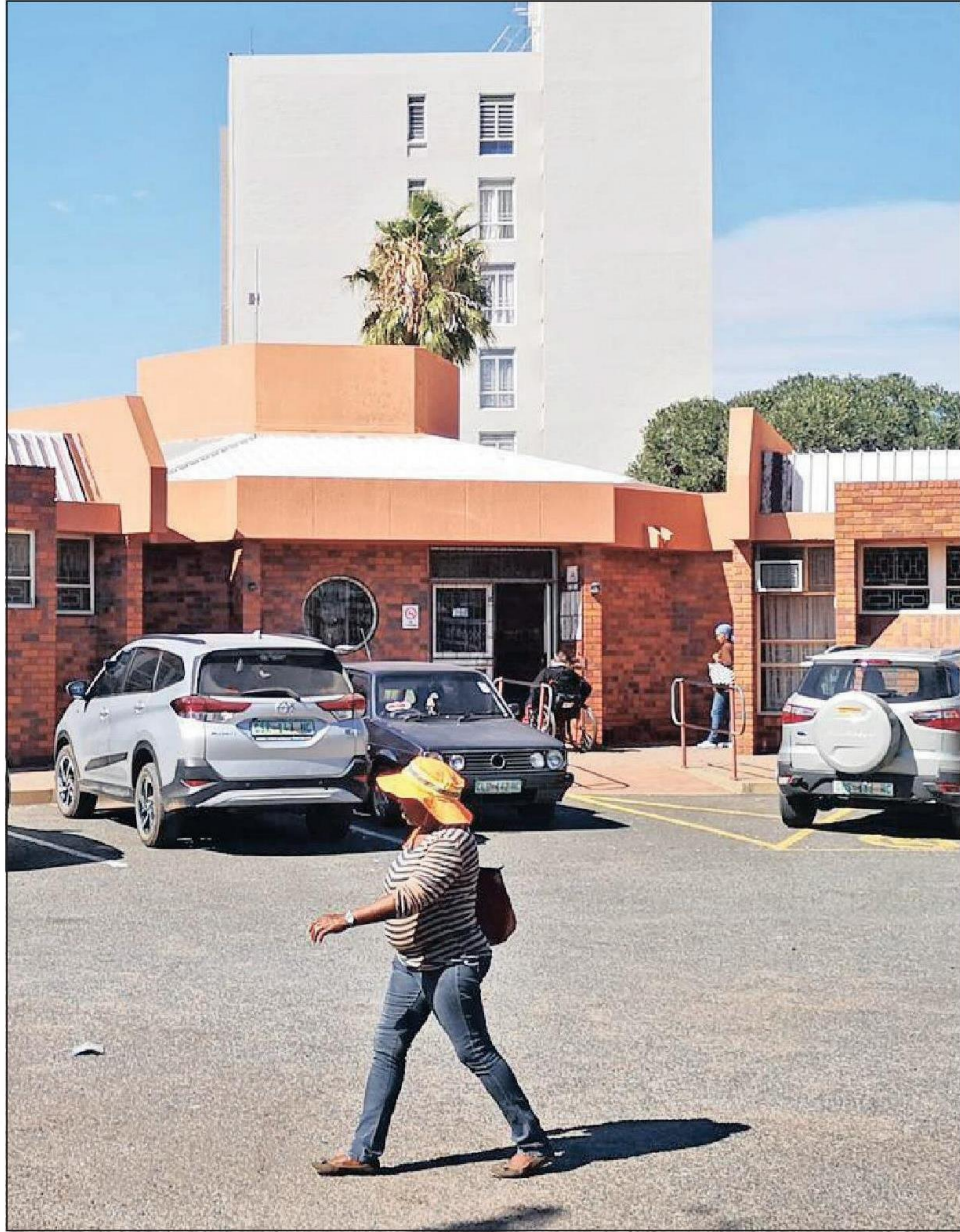


Health workers return to work



LEFT: The Kimberley City Clinic.

SANDI KWON HOO
CHIEF REPORTER

COMMUNITY health care workers returned to work yesterday after the Northern Cape Department of Health agreed to investigate deductions that have been made from their stipends, following protests that saw patients being turned away from health facilities this week.

The health care workers said that sometimes up to R1 200 was deducted from their monthly stipends of R3 500.

One worker, however, forgot that money was deducted from her earnings to pay for a life insurance policy.

South African Liberated Public Service Workers' Union (Salipswu) provincial organiser Thapelo Thole said that he was requested to intervene at Postmasburg Hospital and clinic yesterday, after Expanded Public Works Programme workers shut down operations.

"They also want to be absorbed permanently into the Department of Health," Thole said.

He said that the union had resolved to call off strike action for now, pending an investigation into apparent unlawful deductions.

"We do not know what the deductions are being made in respect of and we do not consider it to be a mistake. Different deductions are made from different workers, ranging from R1 000 to R1 200, and it is not in lieu of payments towards the unemployment insurance fund or medical aid. Our members are refusing to sign any contracts and they will only be on duty for five hours instead of six. Salipswu is now registered with the bargaining unit."

Spokesperson for the MEC for Health Lebogang Majaha said that MEC Fufe Makatong had met with Salipswu on Wednesday following health service delivery interruptions that led to the temporary closure of primary health care facilities, particularly in the Sol Plaatje municipal area.

"The union representatives appreciated the platform created by the MEC and further highlighted

their plight in relation to variations in salary deductions of community health workers. The union also cited this as part of their main reason for interrupting health services, in an attempt to demand the attention of the provincial department," Majaha said.

He added that in the interests of restoring calm and stability, the union had agreed to call off strike action to allow the MEC the opportunity to deal with their grievances.

"The MEC made a commitment to commission an investigation on the salary deductions of community health workers.

"Although Salipswu is not a recognised union at bargaining council and in the health sector, Makatong has always maintained an open door policy to engage with any stakeholder.

"She further reiterated her open door policy in ensuring continuous engagements with organised labour in the health sector to manage any workplace conflict in the future."