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# Govt pulls out of bus, taxi operators' peace talks

By **Mandla Khoza**

Taximen demand bus company scale down its service

The Mpumalanga department of public works, roads and transport has pulled out of talks between the taxi industry and a major commuter bus company.

This could lead to more acts of violence and a possible total shutdown of the Mbombela CBD today.

For the past two weeks, the taxi fraternity had been disrupting Buscor services, demanding that the bus company limit operating hours, cut routes and stop cash payments from passengers.

Taxi operators also want the company to stop ferrying pupils to scholar transport

pick-up points and on trips.

MEC Mohita Latchminarain said the department cannot take sides. "Taxi operators are saying their demands are not negotiable. They also call for articulated buses to be suspended, want them to cut operating hours and suspend private hire or scholar transport and not collect cash.

"We understand the financial strain in the taxi industry and the entire country, hence we are calling for the taxi operators to work based on the permit they have.

"We can't force talks or hold hostage each stakeholder to

hold talks ... but they must on their own enter into working relations. So the government will not enter into negotiations between them as they both have operating licences, that will be a breach of one's contract if we compel one of the operators to get into talks," said Latchminarain.

The African National Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the fight between taxi and bus operators is slowing down the economic recovery of the province after the pandemic.

"There's a serious collapse of our economy post Covid-19

while these taxis and buses [operators] fight and shut down towns; that means businesses are going to collapse because stores can't open as workers stay outside towns ... which also means no-one will come and buy now because people can't get to town.

"We are calling for consensus to be reached," said the organisation's president Mandla Mashego.

During the rioting, a bus and truck were torched while a policeman was injured on the R40 between Mbombela and White River.

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