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# Workers block Department of Transport operations over unpaid salaries

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WORKERS of Northwest Transport Investment on Wednesday shut operations and entrances and exits to the Department of Transport building in Pretoria as they demanded intervention after their employer had failed to pay salaries for three months.

The crowd of bus drivers and administration workers travelled from Mabopane and arrived in Pretoria to block access between Struben and Bosman streets before shutting entrances.

They wanted the intervention of Minister of Transport Fikile Mbalula in dealing with the government-subsidised company, which they said has failed to pay workers to a point that they were unable to provide for themselves and their families.

They said shutting down operations at the national government department was a desperate plea to be taken seriously because their previous attempts to get the attention and intervention of Mbalula's office fell on deaf ears.

Traffic ground to a halt as their demonstration took place at the same time as members of the Police and Prisons Civil Right Union were marching to the Union Buildings from Kgosi Mampuru and Madiba streets.

Regional chairperson of the National Economic Development Forum, Zephanius Melani, said the failure to get paid affected workers negatively, as some already had their cars repossessed, while others have been served with eviction notices by landlords and the banks.

"This has also resulted in commuters not getting transport to go to work because the buses are not ferrying

them. We have been communicating with the North West government through its premier and MEC in charge of transport for the past five years, and they still have not assisted in solving this company's problems and failure to pay salaries adequately.

"As workers, we want our commuters to have transport. That is why we need the intervention of Mbalula's office.

"We have submitted a report about corruption involving members of the executive, management and politicians who have been looting in the company.

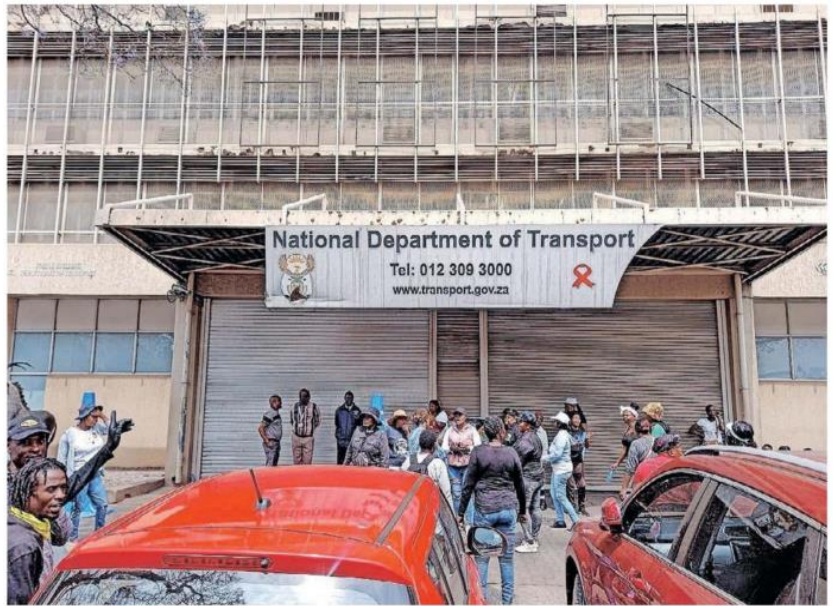
"We have even opened a case at the office of the public protector, and it is being investigated. We also opened cases at other institutions of government, but there is no action taken, and that is why we are here."

While the company did not respond to the allegations, the DA in the North West condemned the failure by the North West government to change the status of the embattled company, saying lives of staff and commuters were affected badly.

Freddy Sonakile, DA North West spokesperson for Public Works and Roads, Community Safety and Transport Management, said the company is faced with a myriad issues, which include the failure to pay staff salaries.

The entity also does not have governance structures and has mounting debt. Some of the debt, he said, included R44.9 million in licensing permits to operate legally on public roads, with penalties of R3m accrued monthly; a R23.8m a month contract for 350 buses rented at R68 000 per bus from Transnet; and R44-million towards Workman's Compensation.

The South African Transport and



THE Department of Transport building in Pretoria was shut down by striking workers on Wednesday because of non-payment of salaries.

Allied Workers Union has also reacted to the development, stating it was disgusted by Northwest Transport Investment over its behaviour and non-compliance.

General secretary Jack Mazibuko said: "As much as the strike is affecting commuters and the economy, as the

union we are of the view that the employer must not be greedy and do the right thing. The employer must pay salaries of our members.

"We are calling on the Department of Transport, provincial MECs in the Northwest and in Gauteng to intervene. The company is subsidised by

the government.

"The employer's reasoning that they do not have money just does not make sense to us. We believe there is money to pay our members, its only that maladministration and corruption in the entity is playing a huge role that may end up collapsing the entity."