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# Meth slams construction mafia

**Let there be no disruptions, MEC says during Ngcobo hospital project handover**

**SIKHO NTSHOBANE**

Tough-talking Eastern Cape health MEC Nomakhosazana Meth has warned the construction mafia to steer clear of provincial government projects.

She was speaking at the official handover of a contractor appointed to carry out major renovations at All Saints Hospital in Ngcobo on Friday.

Meth slammed the growing trend of organised crime groups demanding protection fees from contractors appointed to

carry out projects.

"We condemn this in the strongest possible terms. It is breaking the law. We don't want to hear reports that there are people who threaten or intimidate others because of business," Meth said.

Zabest Properties has been appointed to carry out R43m-worth of renovations at All Saints.

The project includes upgrades to staff accommodation and the Gateway clinic and is expected to be completed in 18 months.

Meth said the project should have already been completed but the department had been let down by the previous contractor, forcing it to start the

process from scratch.

She said R12.9m of the total R43m budget, equating to 30% of the money allocated, would go to local SMMEs.

Meth said the project should not be viewed in isolation from the ANC government's infrastructure development in preparation for the implementation of the National Health Insurance scheme.

"To this end, a lot of work has been done and continues to be done. Just last week, we were in rural Ntabankulu, where we officially opened the state-of-the-art Sipetu Hospital. Our government invested R680.5m."

Before that, the health department had introduced a



**NOMAKHOSAZANA METH**

contractor to build an oncology unit at a cost of R412m at Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital in Mthatha.

In June, the appointment was announced of a contractor to carry out renovations totalling R103m at Nessie Knight Hospital in Qumbu.

In addition, the new R510m Khutsong Hospital for TB patients in Matatiele is due to be opened this month.

The department has also spent R81.1m on staff accommodation at Frontier Hospital in Komani and R92m for the same purpose at Mjanyana Hospital in Ngcobo while R109m was used to build proper staff accommodation at Nessie Knight.

"We urge businesspeople to work with us to ensure that this project [All Saints] become a success.

"We are pleading with you, let there be no disruptions and if there are any disagreements, let us sit down and find solutions," she said on Friday.

Public works minister Sihle Zikalala was quoted recently as saying government had established a national forum to coordinate cases relating to extortion syndicates in the construction sector.

"The construction mafias have been a terrible nightmare for construction companies that want to finish their projects, hence the government is trying to address the issue

by drafting policies and legislation to tackle it," he was quoted as saying.

The Dispatch reported last year that road construction and upgrade projects worth at least R4bn had come to a standstill in the Eastern Cape because of threats, intimidation and demands for contracts.

At the time, the SA National Roads Agency regional chair in the Eastern Cape, Mbulelo Peterson, said the projects included the R500m upgrade of a road in Qqince and the R34bn Mntentu bridge.

"Threats have varied from strike action by villagers to threatening messages sent to staff of some of the companies working on projects."

Ngcobo Business Forum secretary Zolani Falemi expressed delight on Friday at the 30% allocation towards local SMMEs on the All Saints Hospital project.

"Since our main objective is development, this project will not only bring about positive change into the lives of ordinary citizens but to the business fraternity as well," he said.

"It means small businesses will grow."

Owethu Mzuku, a young business owner in Ngcobo, said he was particularly excited because SMMEs would also receive training and be able to improve on their grading to get bigger contracts in future.