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were being investigated.

SYNDICATES

Minister Zikalala talks tough on construction

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MINISTER of Public Works and Infrastructure Sihle Zikalala says it is not true that the government has no political will to fight construction mafias and corruption in the public sector, which continue unabated in most of the country's infrastructure projects.

He was speaking during an editor's engagement with his department, held at the Southern Sun Hotel in Rosebank, yesterday.

Last week, the minister said there had been more than 200 arrests in connection with construction mafia syndicates countrywide.

Media reports indicate that some government projects in KZN and other provinces have been disrupted, with others halted after a group of armed men, known as Amadela Ngokubona, reportedly hijacked the operations.

Usually, these groups demand a



PUBLIC Works and Infrastructure Minister Sihle Zikalala. | AYANDA NDAMANE African News Agency (ANA)

stake in the construction tenders, with various incidents of intimidation having been reported in parts of KwaZulu-Natal.

Zikalala said the government was addressing the problem, and results were showing.

"I would not want to speculate, but it is not true that there is no political will in arresting construction mafia. The Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, has committed himself to helping fight this scourge. We are fighting construction mafias and illegal occupation of government buildings and sites, as well as inflation of prices by service providers. We are all trying to deal with all these issues," he said.

After the arrests, Zikalala said the government had made progress in curbing the trend of construction hijackers.

"More than 200 individuals have been arrested throughout the country for disrupting construction sites."

Zikalala said the department had gazetted more than 88 infrastructure projects across the country. He added that the department had spent R57.7 billion of its budget on various projects across the country.

"Our priority is to improve capacity

and create jobs through the release of land for socio-economic development and the building of government precincts to ensure an integrated approach to the work being done by various government departments. One of these integrated projects is the Salvador Precinct, currently under construction in Pretoria. We want to make sure that various departments that do the same work are put together to ensure the integrated provision of services," he said.

Zikalala decried a lack of public-private partnerships to speed up the delivery of services across the country. He said there needed to be buy-in from private businesses for the country's infrastructure development to take shape and serve more South Africans.

"We need to do business differently, and partner with stakeholders that are committed to transformation, growth, and the inclusive development of the construction industry," he said.