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# Millions blown on death-trap road

Eight people die on road contractor was paid R20m to fix but ditched the job, citing threats to his safety

By ISAAC MAHLANGU

● A botched project to patch a busy 21km stretch of road has left at least eight people dead after the contractor who was paid at least R20m walked off the job, citing threats to life and property.

In one of the horror crashes, a woman was killed instantly at an unmarked intersection when a truck ploughed into her vehicle. The crash happened four weeks ago northwest of Pretoria near Mmakau village on the R566, between Brits and the industrial hub of Rosslyn. There are no stop signs at the intersection.

The Sunday Times has established via Mmakau police station records that there were at least seven crashes on the stretch of the road since the project stopped, with eight fatalities recorded.

The R566 does not have road signs or markings, a speed hump has been left partially removed from the surface of the road and heaps of concrete rubble were strewn on the roadside.

Charity Moyo, who sells cooked food near the junction, said crashes were narrowly avoided there almost daily: "Just wait here for 10 minutes ... an accident is always waiting to happen here," she said before another near-accident was witnessed by the Sunday Times team.

Moyo and two other people witnessed last month's deadly crash.

Lebo Tebo Trading & Projects, the contractor, was paid more than R20m by the North West government before the company pulled the plug on the project in September.

Company director Lebo Mabe undertook to respond to questions after being contacted by the Sunday Times by phone, e-mail and WhatsApp but failed to do so by the time of publication.

Mabe was waiting for final payment from the provincial public works & roads department that granted him a project termination letter because of safety concerns.

The department awarded the company

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## A GENIUS AT PLAY

Internationally acclaimed pianist Abdullah Ibrahim returned to the Cape Town City Hall, a venue he first played at aged 16. The tour titled 'The Water from an Ancient Well' will conclude tonight at SunBet Arena in Tshwane, the last he will ever play in SA.  
Picture: Ruvan Boshoff



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# Millions blown on death-trap road



**Steve Motsepe, a former safety officer on the road project and also a Mmakau community policing forum member.**

**The 21km stretch of road that has been left in a deadly state of disrepair in Pretoria North near Mmakau village, on the R566 between Brits and the industrial hub of Rosslyn.**

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an eight-month pothole patching and resealing job worth R56.8m.

Lerato Gambu, spokesperson for public works & roads MEC Saliva Molapisi, said the site had not been "abandoned", but the contractor had opted to "terminate the contract due to expected risks".

"These [risks] are in the main riots, work stoppages, extortion [and] threats to life and property," said Gambu.

The department accepted the reasons for the contractor pulling out and would rethink how to complete the upgrade.

She confirmed the company had been paid R20m to date, and that a final payment would be concluded to "avoid litigation". In addition, the contractor would not be blacklisted.

However, the department would not pay for stretches of the route where there was shoddy workmanship.

Steve Motsepe, a former safety officer on the project, was among the workers paid outstanding wages in December after the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation & Arbitration (CCMA) intervened.

Motsepe, who also serves on the Mmakau community policing forum, said: "I am one of those who gets called every time there's a car accident on this road because people associate this unfinished project with some of us."

"There was an incident where two men came while we were working and spoke to us aggressively, saying they were looking for Lebo [Mabel]. I told everyone not to continue working because I was worried they would come back and attack us."

However, Motsepe queried why there did not appear to have been any complaints about threats or alleged extortion opened at the local police station.

Public works was not aware of any cases opened



**Equipment, road signs, poles and guard rails on a property rented as an office by contractor Lebo Tebo Trading & Projects. Pictures: Thapelo Morebudi**

by Mabe, but "relied on site reports submitted by the contractor and supported by the engineer" regarding the threats.

Gambu said part of the project was upgraded under police observation. "At the intersection to Lethabile, where the road surface was badly potholed, the repairs done at that intersection were done under police patrol due to threats on site. This was in fact the last work done on site."

Motsepe said he was struggling to access his Unemployment Insurance Fund benefits because he was told by the department of employment & labour the company had made incomplete contributions.

He was among about 10 general workers who had obtained a CCMA award for unfair dismissal, and were to be paid outstanding wages.

The landlord of a property the contractor had rented to accommodate site offices and equipment said he was owed more than R300,000 by the company. Concrete, equipment, road signs, poles and guard rails were still piled up on the property and might need to be sold to cover the debt.

Public protector spokesperson Ndill Msoki confirmed a complaint had been received relating to the project, but said it was still in the early stages of assessment.

Gambu said the department was aware of the "misunderstandings and disputes, which were exacerbated by the termination of contract" that led to workers approaching the CCMA.

Trucks and other commercial vehicles use the road, which runs parallel to the N4 freeway.