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Group halts building of Limpopo theatre

Construction mafia wants sub-contracts and disrupts work

By **Moyahabo Mabeba**

Limpopo police are "monitoring" events around the halting of a R376-million theatre construction project by a business forum demanding a slice of the massive contract.

The construction of a multimillion-rand state-of-the-art theatre precinct near Polokwane was halted after a group calling itself the Community Business Engagement Forum ordered operations to be stopped this week.

The group stormed the construction site at the foot of the Bakone Malapa open-air museum along the R37 road outside Polokwane and ordered labourers to vacate the area.

The disruptions came at a time when construction is barely at 18% since its commencement in February.

The group, which picketed at the site, vowed to disrupt any construction work unless they are offered sub-contracts.

The stalemate could result in



A theatre construction project in Limpopo has ground to a halt because of threats by a construction mafia.
/Gallo Images

the theatre not being finished by the envisaged completion in February 2026.

The R376-million project has been marred by allegations of political meddling and power struggles.

The much-anticipated theatre, which is on 10 hectares of land, is envisaged to be a four-storey structure of 17 000m².

Floyd Tleane, deputy chairperson of the Community Business Engagement Forum, said their reasons for disrupting the project were justifiable.

Tleane has accused politicians of interfering in the ap-

pointment of contractors.

"We will continue to stop this project because there are people with hidden agendas who are denying us opportunities."

Tleane, who denied claims that they are part of the belligerent construction mafia, said while they are resolute in halting the project, they have no intentions of resorting to violence.

A report by the Inclusive Society Institute noted that "construction mafia, often labelled 'business forums', are networks that employ violence and other illegal means of controlling access to public sector procure-

ment opportunities."

The report titled Overview of the Construction Mafia Crisis in South Africa noted that in 2019, at least 183 infrastructure and construction projects worth more than R63-billion were affected by the construction mafia.

Spokesperson for Limpopo police Brigadier Hlulani Mashaba said they were informed of a group of people picketing at the construction site.

"Our officers from Polokwane and Westernburg were dispatched there. They managed to contain the sit-

uation and no one was arrested. However, we will be closely monitoring the situation henceforth," said Mashaba.

The project's social facilitator, Ishmael Hlomane, referred all queries to the Department of Public Works. "I am not going to comment on what happened at the construction site because it is not my mandate to do so."

Provincial Department of Public Works spokesperson, Emmanuel Mongwe said the project has up to date hired a total of four local small, medium and micro enterprises to provide various services.

"Any stakeholders who seek any opportunities on the project are referred to the PLC and the social facilitator, Mongwe said.

Mpho Mashabela, the chairperson of Limpopo Artists Movement said the stoppage will derail progress.

"The current situation at the theatre site is a question of jubilation turning into gloom. These unnecessary squabbles are going to take us backwards."

Another industry giant, Mashupye Phala, lambasted the disruptors as people with no interest in the opportunities to be presented by the theatre after completion.