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# KZN Public Works MEC vows to ensure timely payments for contractors

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THE KWAZULU-Natal Public Works and Infrastructure MEC, Martin Meyer, has vowed to fight hard to ensure contractors doing work for the provincial government are paid within 30 days.

The MEC was responding to a barrage of criticism leveled at his department and other departments by construction contractors at an imbizo in Durban yesterday.

Many contractors cited the late payments by the government as the main hindrance in the development of contractors in the construction indus-

try, saying many contractors have been forced out of business because of the problem.

Contractors said the late payments caused them to be blacklisted by their debtors, and banks were no longer giving them loans because of their poor financial standing.

"We are struggling, and many contractors have been forced out of business because of the government's failure to pay within the 30-day period. We can't service our debts because of this and we call on you, MEC, to ensure this does not happen.

"We can't grow and banks can't give us letters of good standing. SARS

is also on us," one of the contractors complained.

As part of addressing this problem, Meyer said he had managed to negotiate with provincial Treasury to ringfence the infrastructure budgets of all departments so that when the contractors have finished with the work, Treasury will just transfer funds straight to the department so that the contractors are paid.

He said he fully understood the frustrations of the contractors, and they were right in addressing their concerns with him because it was his department that issued tenders.

However, he explained that the rea-

son for non-payment or late payment was because of the client departments who redirected their infrastructure budget to other needs, and this became a problem when his department needed to pay contractors.

"We are happy that they raised these issues.

"It is exactly the reason why we organised this imbizo, as we wanted to hear their problems," said Meyer.

He also promised to help tackle other red tape that still exists in government, which is a hindrance to the development of contractors.

Meyer also announced the digitalisation of the tendering system, where

contractors will no longer be required to drive long distances to collect bid documents and fill them out.

He said this will not only save the contractors time but also prevent corruption where rogue officials remove pages from the bid document in order to disqualify a winning contractor in order to make way for their contractors of choice.

"By the end of the year, the bidding for contracts will be online. There will be no long distances (to travel) to collect bid tender documents and submit them back to our offices.

"This will also ensure that there is maximum transparency," said Meyer.