

Publication: Sowetan - Main

Title: CONSTRUCTION MAFIAS, BEWARE - RAMAPHOSA

Publish date: 14 Nov 2025

Page: 7

Reach: 25596

AVE: R 87283.32

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President Cyril Ramaphosa has vowed to crackdown on the 'construction mafia', saying he will not negotiate with criminal syndicates. /Supplied

CONSTRUCTION MAFIAS, BEWARE – RAMAPHOSA

● President vows to deal harshly with criminal syndicates

By **NOXOLO MAJAVU**

President Cyril Ramaphosa has issued a stern warning to criminal syndicates disrupting infrastructure projects, declaring that his government "will not negotiate with construction mafias".

This comes amid growing concerns over criminal groups that have infiltrated construction sites nationwide, demanding a share of contracts and halting work when their demands aren't met.

Their actions have disrupted more than 180 projects worth R63bn since 2019, leading to costly delays and budget overruns.

Speaking at the national construction summit at Birchwood Hotel in Boksburg yesterday, Ramaphosa said law enforcement agencies would act decisively against those who extorted contractors.

"We will not let anyone derail these efforts. We will not negotiate with construction mafias. We will not yield to cable thieves or those who vandalise infrastructure. The law enforcement agencies will deal with those who break the law," he said.

The president stressed that the government remained committed to spending R1-trillion on infrastructure over the medium term, describing it as a deliberate shift from consumption to investment. "As the minister of finance Enoch Godongwana indicated in the medium-term budget policy statement yesterday, we're shifting the composition of spending from consumption to investment," he said.

Ramaphosa pointed out that capital payments were now the fastest-growing item in the national budget, projected to rise by 7.5% over the medium term.

He cited the latest employment data from Stats SA, which showed the construction industry as the biggest contributor to job creation in the third

quarter of 2025. The sector added 130,000 new jobs, helping reduce the national unemployment rate from 33.2% to 31.9%.

"These statistics reflect an upswing in the industry," Ramaphosa said, noting that infrastructure investment remained one of the most effective levers for stimulating economic activity.

"Infrastructure is the backbone of development because, among many other reasons, it bolsters economic competitiveness and sustainability. Without infrastructure, economic growth slows down, inequality deepens and the quality of life declines," he said.

Ramaphosa also highlighted new efforts by the department of public works and infrastructure to strengthen accountability and improve delivery.

Through its recently announced SA construction action plan, the government aims to prevent underperforming contractors from securing new contracts, address cash-flow constraints, and use technology to track projects in real time.

"Every public works department will establish a procurement war room to identify blockages, speed up evaluations and ensure that projects move from bid to site without unnecessary delay," Ramaphosa said.

"The plan includes actions to strengthen audit and governance outcomes and professionalise the built environment in the public sector."

Ramaphosa said SA's infrastructure push aligned with global efforts to build resilience against climate shocks.

He noted that as the country prepared to host the first G20 Leaders' Summit on African soil next week, disaster risk reduction and sustainable infrastructure would take centre stage.

"We have placed infrastructure at the centre of economic progress and human development.

"We look forward to the outcomes of this summit, confident that it will turn plans into projects and accelerate progress towards a country that works for all," said Ramaphosa. – *Business Day*