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The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has launched an investigation into stalled projects, saying it suspects corruption is behind the blockage of several key infrastructure developments.

A preliminary probe has revealed a pattern suggesting that financial collusion between contractors and department officials may be responsible for the delays.

"Interference in supply chain management processes and dereliction of duty were also cited as key factors undermining service delivery," department spokesperson Steve Bhengu said.

Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer, who said some projects have been delayed for more than a decade, has adopted a tough stance on corruption and maladministration.

"The deliberate stalling of projects has become a major burden on the province's fiscal budget, costing taxpayers large sums that could be channelled into critical infrastructure.

"We are aware that part of the reason for these delays is serious collusion between senior officials and prominent contractors. We will ensure that perpetrators are brought to book," Meyer said.

As part of its clean-up efforts, the department last week settled years of debt owed to contractors by paying more

than R1 billion in outstanding invoices within a year.

"This has made the department 100% compliant with the 30-day payment policy for service providers," Bhengu said.

The stalled projects are to be addressed by the department's Rapid Response Team (RRT), established to deal with persistent challenges.

"Part of the RRT's immediate mandate is to address material irregularities, poor financial management, procurement delays, fraud, corruption and non-compliance with regulatory requirements, particularly around supplier payments," Bhengu said.

He added that the department is also considering consequence management against officials found guilty of misconduct. "Where sufficient evidence exists, cases may be referred to law enforcement agencies for criminal prosecution.

"Oversight bodies, including the Auditor-General's office, will be engaged to strengthen accountability.

"Acting head of department Dr Vish Govender and MEC Meyer have jointly pledged that accountability and transparency will underpin every decision going forward. The department urges members of the public to report corruption or wrongdoing to help clean up the sector and ensure infrastructure delivery benefits communities across KwaZulu-Natal," Bhengu said.

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