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ALERT

MEC issues stern warning to construction mafia amid rising threats

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KWAZULU-NATAL Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer has issued a warning to criminals targeting government infrastructure projects, declaring that anyone attempting to halt the construction of Port Shepstone's new R240 million psychiatric facility will trade their civilian clothes for orange prison overalls.

Meyer was speaking at the official site handover to contractor GVK-Siya Zama.

The project will create over 200 local jobs and adhere to the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) mandate (60% women, 55% youth, and 3% people living with disabilities).

"We're giving our promise to the people of KwaZulu-Natal that this is going to be a quality project that everyone can be proud of," Meyer said.

"I'm very grateful to the Department of Health for building such a vital hospital here where the community really needs it.

"Mental healthcare is a huge challenge to our province, and this hospital will go a long way in fighting that."

Meyer said there will be over 260 EPWP jobs created.

He said this is their first major flagship project. He and the head of department, Dr Vish Govender, have given their undertaking, and he will get monthly reports on the project and visit regularly.

"I give you my word as the MEC of Public Works and Infrastructure. I will be on this project," Meyer said.

He said they will make sure they do everything in their power to make sure the project is done on time and on budget.

Reflecting on the department's history with the construction mafia, Meyer said: "We've been engaging with the local communities together with the help of the local and the district



THE new psychiatric health facility aims to alleviate the strain on existing mental healthcare services in Port Shepstone, with a focus on community needs. | SUPPLIED

municipality. We've said many times before that if you involve the community right from the start, then many of these problems get solved.

"We've also already assigned our EPWP department in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.

They have a section in there that is just there for community engagement, and they'll be walking this road together with the contractors day by day."

The MEC warned anyone who wanted to take chances by holding the department ransom.



MEC Martin Meyer led the site handover for the new psychiatric health facility in Port Shepstone, promising quality and community involvement. | SUPPLIED

"We are not held to ransom. We will not negotiate with criminals. If you want to talk to us about concerns, please contact my office. We will sit down with any forum that wants to talk to us peacefully. But we will not allow lawlessness and criminality on our building sites or to affect these municipalities.

"I can't say I have a red telephone line directly to the good general, but we work very closely with SAPS as well. So, no criminality will be tolerated at all. If people want to disrupt our sites, the only overalls they will wear are orange ones, and that's not EPWP orange; that is Westville orange," Meyer said.

Port Shepstone Regional Hospital chief executive officer Zak Mbethe said the hospital is inundated with mental healthcare users, mainly because of a change in disease burden.

"The hospital currently has only an eight-bedded ward designated for mental healthcare users. This eight-bedded ward is only a male ward. Then it means, therefore, we have to make shifts within the available infrastructure and modify the general wards to actually accommodate the mental healthcare users," Mbethe said.

GVK-Siya Zama director Barry Elsmore-Cary said: "We understand the magnitude and the significance of it and we take that into account. We fully appreciate it. And our full thanks for trusting us with it. At GVK, it's what we do. We're good at it."

"We're good at delivering projects, and that's exactly what we plan on doing in this project. Delivering it on time as best as we can within budget, within our control, and to the quality that's expected."