

Blitz on hitchhiking, taxi licensing

Authorities fine several drivers during a clampdown on illegal hitchhiking spots and unlicensed taxis in Vryburg



ELFAS TORERAI

TRAFFIC authorities in North West impounded one vehicle and fined several motorists during a clampdown operation on illegal hitchhiking spots and unlicensed taxis in Vryburg.

The operation was said to be a continuation of a campaign that started last year in Mahikeng.

Community safety and transport management MEC Dr Mpho Motlhabane was part of the blitz.

He said the objective was to put an end to hitchhiking spots and encourage commuters to use official taxi ranks and operators who have operating permits.

"These illegal operators do not only rob the state of collecting maximum revenues but are a road menace and account for a spike in taxi conflicts."

One car was impounded, three motorists fined for transporting pupils without permits, one taxi operator was fined and his operating permit suspended for worn-out tyres while another motorist was fined for driving without a licence.

"Hitchhiking spots are a concern in the province and we as the public need to work together with taxi operators to save lives. Communities must stop using illegal taxi operators and avoid hitchhiking spots at all costs.

members from each of the eight taxi associations operating in Huhudi and the regional taxi structure, officials from the district office of the premier, police officials and the Dr Ruth Mompoti district municipality.

It was agreed that a moratorium on issuing new permits and operating licences would continue while submitted applications were processed.

The associations made an undertaking to desist from making threats of violence and institute dialogue instead, while the MEC committed to elevate the matter of the transport appeals tribunal rulings and arbitration awards.

The MEC said inspectorate functions would be reinforced and all taxi operations in the region would be monitored closely.

"Please start considering diversifying your business and venture into value chain business in the sector like supplying tyres, opening petrol stations, selling spare parts and opening vehicle service workshops," Motlhabane said.

"We also need to convene a district and provincial taxi summit to deal with this industry holistically. I am committing my department to undertake that exercise programmatically."

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CLOSE EYE: Community safety and transport management MEC Mpho Motlhabane, right, and a traffic official, inspecting vehicles during the blitz in Vryburg.

"From here we are going to other associations operating in and around places in the province such as Wolmaransstad, Klerksdorp and Rustenburg with the same vigour to clamp down on hitchhiking spots," he said.

While in Vryburg, the MEC met with the executive leadership of all the taxi associations operating in and around Huhudi. They complained about illegal public transport operations, illegal hitchhiking spots and non-association members getting permits.

The memorandum, taxi operators in the memorandum, taxi operators cited a number of issues that concerned them. The meeting drew five committee

Bank officials bust in heist

ELFAS TORERAI

TWO bank officials are among the seven people arrested in connection with the R3m cash heist that hit a Nedbank branch in Klerksdorp.

Charges against the third official were dropped after the person could not be linked to the crime.

The Hawks have managed to recover R280 000 and two vehicles since the arrests started and investigations continue.

The heist happened on April 11 after two men posed as SBV security officers on a routine pickup, produced fake documents and were handed money by the bank staff.

Hawks provincial leader, Maji-Cen Linda Mhama said the heist was the third bank robbery in North West in the past 12 months.

During the same period, 31 cash-in-transit robberies had also been reported.

"We cannot disclose the total amount of money involved but we have managed to recover more than R5m," Mhama said.

She said North West is the fifth worst hit province when it comes to bank and cash-in-transit robberies.

"However, we are doing our best to arrest the perpetrators. We are investigating other cases but this Nedbank one has shown tendencies of an inside job," she said.

A breakthrough in the case came when the Hawks' Priority Violent Crimes Unit unit arrested two men in Johannesburg in connection with the heist.

At the weekend, five other people were rounded up in Klerksdorp and Upington.

The five, including two bank officials, are aged between 24 and 46.

Mhama said they were conducting financial and asset forfeiture investigations.

"It's a matter of time before everyone else involved in this crime gets rounded up but we are certainly going to arrest more people," she said.

The five's case was rolled over for appearance in the Klerksdorp Magistrates' Court today where they face charges of theft.



CRIME SCENE: The Hawks have managed to recover R290 000 and two vehicles since the arrest of suspects in connection with the R3m cash heist at a Nedbank branch in Klerksdorp. PHOTO: SPS

Meanwhile, key players in the private security industry have welcomed news of a special meeting on cash-in-transit heists set for June 13.

The meeting was called by the National Assembly portfolio committee on police.

Allegations are that cash-in-transit crimes are on the rise because some in the law enforcement are involved, from

police, lawyers, magistrates, prosecutors and metro cops.

Fidelity Security Group CEO, Wahl Barmann said the situation is completely out of control and had become unsustainable.

"In spite of the efforts to work more diligently with the authorities and other stakeholders, the number of attacks continues to rise across the industry

with a record high of 135 incidents being reported this year.

Last month alone Fidelity spent in excess of R4.5m in back up and support to secure resources and assets and most importantly, to protect staff," Barmann said.

It is estimated that about 200 robbers specialising in cash-in-transit heists are out there, waiting to pounce and police

are caught unawares.

The South African Banking Risk Information Centre (Sabric) has also expressed its grave concern noting that although Sabrice is actively engaged in collaborative threat surveillance, risk detection and tactical support with relevant authorities, more needs to be done to stop heists.

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Bank robbery: 8 held

Pretoria news p2 23/5/18

54RS NW (POS) HAWKS

THREE employees are among the eight people arrested in connection with a robbery at a bank where more than R3 million was stolen in Klerksdorp, the Hawks said.

The Priority Violent Crimes Unit arrested people in Klerksdorp and Upington after a bank robbery that took place in April, Captain Tlangelani Rikhotso said.

"The suspects allegedly colluded and stole more than R3m at the local Nedbank branch.

"Two suspects allegedly posed as SBV security officers to do a routine pick-up. They produced fake documents and were handed money by the bank staff," she said. - African News Agency / ANA