

# Transnet shuts down rail lines

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Transnet, the transport utility, said on Wednesday, 12 May 2010, it had temporarily shut down rail lines in the damaged areas just outside Durban after one of its trains derailed in the morning. It called the incident "a callous act of sabotage".

But the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu) said it was "premature" to make speculative assumptions about the derailment.

## Wage dispute

This derailment comes as Transnet and two unions - Satawu, and the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (Utatu) - have reached a deadlock in wage negotiations.

Some 50 000 workers, 84% of Transnet's workforce, have embarked on a countrywide strike over wage hikes. The industrial action looks set to enter the fourth day on Thursday. Unions are demanding 15%, while Transnet is offering 11%.

John Dlodlu, spokesman for Transnet, said on Wednesday a train transporting fuel from Durban to the inland market derailed on Wednesday morning.

Dlodlu said the circumstances of this incident indicated a callous act of sabotage that required specialist rail knowledge and equipment.

The company had closed the implicated rail lines until midnight on Wednesday, he said.

"Our teams have been deployed to assess the environmental impact and inspect the rest of the line."

## Security plans

Dlodlu said the group had stepped up security plans at its operations, warning it "will spare no effort in ensuring the safety and security of our colleagues, assets and customers' cargo".

The utility said about 100 metres of rail track was sabotaged, causing the derailment of three locomotives and six wagons, suggesting very strongly that the perpetrators had intimate knowledge of the infrastructure.

The incident, one of several that have occurred since the strike began on Monday, occurred at Burlington Shallcross,

outside Durban in KwaZulu Natal.

Dludlu said Durban has been the scene of the worst acts of mayhem by protesters linked to Satawu.

About 13 protesters were arrested in Durban on Monday and they faced charges of public violence, assault and intimidation.

On Tuesday, the Labour Court ordered the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), to stop the use of violence.

Transnet had sought relief from the court on Monday after several incidents of violence intended to intimidate non-striking employees by members of Satawu.

Jane Barret, policy research officer at Satawu, said the union would be surprised if the derailment had anything to do with the ongoing strike.

Barret said the cause of the derailment would not be known until the Railway Safety Regulator had finished its investigation.

## **Not budging**

Transnet and the unions have both dug their heels and maintained their positions in stalled wage talks.

Jane Barret, policy research officer at the Satawu, told I-Net Bridge on Wednesday that there was no scheduled meeting between unions and Transnet.

Barret said there was no indication when the next meeting might take place.

In an open letter to Satawu and Utatu, Transnet group human resources executive Pradeep Maharaj said on Wednesday the parastatal's 11% offer was made in a "genuine attempt to resolve the wage deadlock and prevent a strike".

Maharaj warned that the 15% unions were demanding would not only fuel wage inflation, it will drive up the company's operating costs and force Transnet to either raise the prices it charges its customers and or cut jobs.

"As a responsible publicly owned company, we are reluctant to go down this path. It is not in the interest of our employees, customers or the country," he said.

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