

Strike Season Hits SA

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
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No trains and buses, minimal municipal services and understaffed pharmacies.

This is what South Africans face next week, if strike threats by no fewer than six trade unions materialise.

"There is not any possible indication that the strike on Monday can be averted," South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) general secretary Mthandeki Nhlapho told Sapa.

At least 150,000 municipal workers are stopping work from Monday in an attempt to get better pay.

Samwu and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (Imatu) have both rejected an 11.5 percent wage increase offer.

The union's Durban office said essential services may be affected by the strike.

The city of Johannesburg was putting contingency plans in place and appealed to unions to ensure their members did not break the law during the strike.

The city of Tshwane warned commuters the strike meant buses would not be running.

"Bus commuters should therefore make use of alternative modes of transport if the services are interrupted by the strike," councillor Gabriel Twala said in a statement.

"However, essential services, such as waste management and emergency services, should not be affected by the strike."

Metrobus in Johannesburg issued a similar warning.

"In view of the national work stoppage... Metrobus would like to inform all its commuters that the bus service may not be operating.

We therefore urge our commuters and contract clients to make alternative transport arrangements," it said in a statement.

The city of Cape Town warned that refuse collection in informal settlements, street sweeping, the emptying of litter bins and the removal of illegally-dumped material may be affected by the municipal strike.

Meanwhile, the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (Satawu) said it would make a "last ditch effort" on Friday to prevent a national strike of Metrorail workers.

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Satawu and the United Transport and Allied Trade Union (Utatu) have rejected a seven percent wage increase.

The unions, representing 10,000 workers, plan to down tools on Monday. This could leave 1.5 million commuters stranded.

"Utatu and Satawu... have already given Metrorail the opportunity to settle wage demands of workers," Utatu said in a statement.

"If not done so, the unions have already served Metrorail with a 48-hour notice of strike action as determined by the Labour Relations Act."

Satawu said in a statement on Friday afternoon that it had not decided whether to issue a strike notice.

Wage talks between employers and trade unions were set to continue through the weekend.

Elsewhere, the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) decided on Friday afternoon that picketing and demonstrations would take place next week against Telkom and the SABC.

CWU general secretary Gallant Roberts said the action could culminate in work stoppages in August.

The union is unhappy over wages, the threat of possible job losses and poor administration.

Makro, Game and Dion workers staged marches in several cities on Friday to protest against working conditions. A memorandum was handed to the company detailing workers' demands.

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union's list of demands included a R460 per month or 8.5 percent salary increase (whichever is the highest) for Makro workers, overtime payment on Sundays and an end to a seven day rolling working week.

Members of the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (Ceppwawu) have yet to decide if their strike will continue into next week.

The union is in the process of briefing its pharmaceutical workers on a new offer by employers. Talks in the chemicals sector were continuing on Friday afternoon.

Ceppwawu said all its members in the pulp and paper sector supported the strike, and pharmacists would also continue staying away from work until a settlement was announced.

Workers in this sector were offered a nine percent pay rise on Friday, which it would take to its members for endorsement.

The union would have a clearer idea of its position by Monday, it said, adding that a march on Monday would go ahead despite the new pay offer.

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The union said members from the petroleum industry would join the strike next week.

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