

South Africa: Maersk shuts key operations, port operator declares force majeure

Shipping line Maersk has reportedly shut down key operations in South Africa as violence and looting in the country continued, amid plans by the government to deploy thousands of soldiers.

Local website [Times Live](#) said quoted a company spokesperson as saying on Wednesday that it was shutting all its depots, warehouses and cold stores in South Africa's Durban and Johannesburg,

"The port of Durban has had many of the terminals shut over the past 24 hours. However at this stage we have not triggered any contingencies that will cause ships not to call at Durban," said Kerry Rosser, the company's Africa spokesperson.

South Africa's Durban port has suffered major disruption after days of unrest, and operations have also been badly affected at the Richards Bay port and on a national freight rail line, logistics and freight companies said on Wednesday.

The violence erupted last week in KwaZulu-Natal province, where Durban is located, after the jailing of former President Jacob Zuma but it has rapidly escalated in widespread looting and destruction in several other provinces.

Durban has one of the busiest shipping terminals on the African continent, and is a hub for exports including agricultural commodities and imports like crude oil and petroleum products. Richards Bay is home to a major coal export terminal.

The crisis has severely [disrupted the country's citrus exports](#) which are now in peak season. Citrus Growers Association Chief Executive Justin Chadwick said trucks carrying citrus have been unable to use the main arterial roads to the Durban port, where more than half of the citrus is exported.

He also said that harvesting and packing could not be stopped since producers would then face losing their crops. Instead, fruit was being palletised and kept in cold storage on farms until the roads were safe again.

"Most cold storage facilities in the [Port of Durban] have closed down, as have the fresh produce facilities. People can't get to work so there is no one there to operate the ports," he was quoted as saying.

State logistics group Transnet said in a statement that service levels at Durban and Richards Bay were impacted "as the entire supply chain is closed," including roads into and out of the ports.

The South African Association of Freight Forwarders told Reuters that port health services at Durban had been closed, effectively preventing vessels from berthing because COVID-19 testing could not be carried out.

"This situation is exacerbated by launch crews also not being available," it said.

South Africa said it plans to deploy up to 25,000 soldiers in two provinces where security forces are struggling to quell days of looting, arson and violence, its defence minister told a parliamentary committee on Wednesday, according to local news channel eNCA.

A military surge of that size would increase tenfold the number of soldiers deployed in the hot spots of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces, where the police and army have been battling unrest for days.