



Scraping through the citrus season but bumper crops ahead

Transnet's infrastructure "under-investment" a euphemism for theft

The state of South Africa's ports has become staple fare in mainstream media, as South Africans learn much more about the functioning (or lack of it, as the case may be) than they ever perhaps wanted to know.



Cape Town Container Terminal (photo: Druid007 | Dreamstime.com)

Two days ago, the Transnet Board chairperson said port congestion in South Africa was the result of what he euphemistically called "under-investment in equipment and its maintenance" .

Transnet recently shared the result of a special fraud investigation into breathalyser straw procurement during 2020 that ended up costing them R33.8 million (1.6 million euros). Two executive managers came up with the plan to increase the price of each straw from 29c to R29.99 and the supplier readily agreed.

This is but one of the many reasons why, for instance, half of Durban's straddle carriers are not working.

"Transnet, for most of the time in question under the stewardship of former CEO Brian Molefe, was responsible for a monstrous 81.59% of payments relating to State Capture: R40,084,201,927.00 [1.9 billion euros]," Daily Maverick wrote (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-24-the-totalish-cost-of-the-guptas-state-capture-r49157323233-68/>), in its reporting of the Zondo Commission that investigated the robbing of the state coffers during the reign of former president Jacob Zuma.

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"We scraped through during the citrus season but it's only because our volumes were down," said an industry source who asks not to be named.

In fact, the source added, there are Transnet port staff who do their utmost under impossible conditions and it was difficult not to tank their morale while voicing legitimate concerns.

"Transnet is lurching from one crisis to the next. There are no shortage of plans - we've heard about lots of plans, but it's all a Band-Aid. There's no time to think of plan B."

"The best we can hope for," the source in Cape Town adds, "is a December without wind to relieve the pain. If the port were mediocre, it could probably chug along but it's not. It's worse than mediocre."

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