

Making headlines

Service delivery protests in Frankfort

Residents of Frankfort, a Free State town, marched on 14 August in a protest against slack provision of municipal services. Protesters, furious over nepotism and delays in the provision of housing in the local council, blocked roads in Mamahadi township with burning tyres and other objects and damaged shops and other properties. Various schools were also disrupted. Police had to call for reinforcements from Gauteng and North West in order to contain the situation. The protesters refused to talk to municipal officials and demanded to have more influence in the nomination of councillors for the forthcoming local government elections. At least 68 people appeared in the Frankfort's magistrate's court on charges of public violence.

Boom gates approved

The city of Johannesburg approved more than 80 boom gates in and around the city in August 2005. This followed an application by residents after the Johannesburg Roads Agency gave a three-month deadline in 2003 to legalise their road closures. The South African Human Rights Commission chairperson, Jody Kollapen, expressed concern about the number of permanent boom gates approved by the metro council. Kollapen said gated communities led to dysfunctional cities and were in general "something we would not support". He said that the gates interfere with people's right to move about freely. Assertions are also often made that boom gates are a racist practice. Residents, however, claim that they put up boom gates in an effort to curb high levels of crime in their residential areas.

Corruption in municipal offices

The mayor of Mangaung, his wife and senior municipal officials appeared in court on charges of

theft, corruption and fraud. The Scorpions arrested Mayor John Pappie Mokoena, his wife, the city manager, the Chief operating officer and the Speaker, as well as the mayor's political advisor. The arrests follow a raid at the offices of the municipality in June 2005.

Municipal skills import?

On 24 July 2005, President Mbeki announced that government is considering bringing in skilled foreigners to help address the capacity problems facing a number of municipalities in the country. Mbeki said South Africa would have to import skilled people to implement government's development plans at municipal level. The Opposition, however, criticised government's plan to import managers, instead blaming affirmative action policies for the lack of skills at local government level. They claim that there are many suitably skilled and qualified people available locally.

Municipal workers strike

Cities across the country were witness to a three-day strike by municipal workers for better wages that started on 12 July 2004. Johannesburg was particularly hard hit with some protesters running riot in the city streets during a march. Some 70 people were arrested in Johannesburg in relation to the protest. Cape Town and Durban also saw striking workers marching for better wages. The unions demanded a wage increase of the greater of 9% or R400 and a new monthly minimum wage of R3 000. SALGA offered 6% and later improved its offer to an across-the-board increase of 6% plus a 1.5% adjustment effective from 1 February next year, for workers earning below R4 792 per month. The South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) later suspended its strike without accepting SALGA's offer.