

## LOOTING

# Fixing the damage comes with a 'R8bn–R20bn' price tag

LESEGO MAKGATHO

THE effects of the week-long unrest in parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng are set to be felt across the country for some time to come. And the cost of getting the economy back on track will run into billions of rand.

The damage of the protests and subsequent looting and destruction of property purportedly driven by the demand to release former president Jacob Zuma is estimated to be around R8 billion, with the estimated rebuilding time frame expected to be 18 to 24 months. This is according to preliminary calculations by the SA Special Risk Insurance Association (Sasria).

Sasria is the only insurance company that covers damage caused by risks such as politically motivated malicious acts, riots, strike action, terrorism and public disorder. The insurer had R8.4 billion in assets under management by March 30, 2020.

Meanwhile, the SA Property Owners Association (Sapoa), which represents over 800 organisations in the commercial property sector, with 90% of the nation's commercial real estate owned by its members, estimates the damage at more than R20 billion.

Sapoa says it has collated figures showing that some 800 stores have been looted and/or severely damaged while 100 shopping centres have either been burned down or suffered significant fire damage. Several distribution centres in Durban have also been looted, with serious structural damage.

Business Unity South Africa (Busa) is computing the damage, and it believes the events that took place last week have weakened investor confidence in the country.

"It has eroded investor confidence and created a fissure in our society. The impact on jobs, economic growth and societal cohesion will still be felt in the medium-term," said Busa CEO Cas Coovadia.

In Gauteng, Hlahatsi had the only Shoprite shopping complex that unscathed in the Kathorus (Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus) region.

Residents of Katlehong, who were fed-up with the looting spree, took turns guarding it overnight. Community members said many of the township's residents are employed at the centre, which helps families keep hunger at bay.

"We've been here for days now. Some guard the centre overnight while

we guard it during the day. There are three entrances to the small shopping centre, so we've barricaded the roads from a distance so that we can see who is approaching. We are getting help from law enforcement agencies such as SAPS and EMPD," said Katlego Puso.

Lesego Kekana, who is a community leader in Hlahatsi, said they faced intimidation from groups that wanted to loot the complex, mostly in the evenings when they are guarding the shopping complex.

"We've been intimidated quite a few times over the last few days by hooligans who've tried to loot, but thankfully, we are working with SAPS and EMPD to manage the situation. We don't want destruction in our neighbourhood. Most of us have not slept much, and we are willing to keep our community as safe as possible," said Kekana.

Godfrey Radebe said it was important for SAPS to work hand in hand with the community.

"What we have done as the community of Ward 49 was to show other communities the importance of standing together. It is up to us to defend our own infrastructure. At the end of the day, it is beneficial to us, the people who live here.

"It is good that we have established a good relationship with the community because the police cannot do it alone. They cannot function without the help of the community. And the

community itself cannot function without the police," said Radebe.

On the other side of town, Protea Point Shopping Complex and Protea Gardens Mall in Protea North, Soweto, were ransacked.

Looters at Protea Gardens Mall said they ransacked the shops because they "were hungry".

"We are from Protea South, the informal settlement nearby. What else can we do? We really don't care much about the arrest of former president Zuma," said Mpho Maletja.

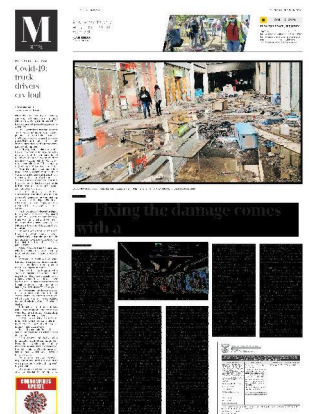
Maponya Mall, which was officially opened by the late former president Nelson Mandela almost 14 years ago, remained the only unscathed major shopping centre in Soweto after others, including Jabulani Mall, Dobsonville Mall and Protea Gardens, were cleaned out. The spate of the looting raised questions about where people would shop in future. Locals from Jabulani, Soweto, said it was going to be diffi-

cult for them to get groceries going forward.

Selinah Mekgwe, who lives in Jabulani, stood a few metres away from the ravaged mall, looking at the carnage left behind.

She said the mall was convenient for her as it was close by and had everything she needed. Getting supplies would be a challenge for her following the looting.

"I don't know where to go. Now that we don't have a mall, this means I would have to go to Maponya Mall to get groceries. I would have to take



a taxi to Bara and get off at Maponya Mall," said Mekgwe.

Skhosana Ntshanga, a 19-year-old Jabulani resident who had taken part in the looting spree, said he hoped that the incident would get government to hear their cries.

"We are tired of inequality in this country. We are unemployed and hungry. Maybe government will hear us when we loot. All we want is equality," said Ntshanga.

A trade union said it feared that thousands of jobs would be lost permanently as a result of the factories that were burnt down.

"We are deeply disturbed at the looting and burning of factories and other workplaces," SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union general-secretary André Kriel said.

"In Isithebe (KZN), a brand new clothing factory, which was set up only in September last year, has been completely destroyed."

He said machinery and raw materials had been looted, and nothing remained. In the process, 600 much-needed jobs supporting 3 000 family members in the poorest part of the country were lost in that instance alone.

Several other small businesses were broken into, cleaned out and vandalised by looters in the province.

Farouk Ramera, who owns a furni-

ture shop in Freedom Square, said the looters kicked him out of his shop at about 3pm on Monday, vandalised it and stole furniture worth more than R400 000.

"I begged for the police to help me, but they said there is nothing they can do for me. I ran for cover, and they threw stones at my car. My younger brother was hit in the head," he said.

"I am out of options now. I don't know what I am going to do. But I know that I won't manage to open the shop again. I will also go look for a job, and so will the five peo-

ple I was employing in the shop. We are finished now, and we don't have insurance."

Ramera said he had been running the shop for 10 years, and he never imagined that this was how it would all come to an end.

Noluntu Mthiya, who had a food stall just outside Protea Gardens Mall, said the looters stole the food she had prepared to sell and her cooking equipment.

Affected communities in Gauteng took it upon themselves to clean up the mess to restore some normality.



THE damage is expected to take up to two years to fix. | African News Agency (ANA)