

Botswana probes huge SA train deal

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Botswana authorities are investigating a R250-million contract involving Transnet amid claims that South Africa sold that country old trains that it presented as new.



Image source: [SA Construction News](#)

Botswana's equivalent of the Hawks, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, confirmed this week that it was investigating alleged corruption in the deal and revealed that it had interviewed Transnet executives.

In July last year, Transnet Engineering was awarded the contract to deliver 37 state-of-the-art coaches to Botswana Railways by March this year. Transnet Engineering delivered 22 passenger coaches in March - and there were allegations that some of these were not new.

Botswana authorities became suspicious of the state of the trains at the launch of the luxury passenger service, dubbed the BR Express, on March 22 - which was attended by President Ian Khama - when one experienced technical problems. Passengers boarded the train, which then broke down in Francistown.

Directorate spokesman Phakamile Kraai said allegations of corruption during the tender had sparked the probe, which broadened to include "allegations that the coaches were not new".

Transnet maintains coaches manufactured to exact specifications

But Transnet spokesman Mboniso Sigonyela denied that the parastatal was involved in any corrupt dealings and that the coaches were not new. "Transnet won the R250-million contract following a competitive bidding process with established manufacturers in which it excelled on technological innovation, delivery schedule, and pricing.

"The coaches were engineered and manufactured to exact specifications at Transnet's state-of-the-art facilities in Koedoespoort, east of Pretoria, and Salt River, Cape Town.

"The components used to manufacture the coaches were sourced new from various suppliers following Transnet's procurement processes, policies and procedures," he said.

Bogies not new

However, Sigonyela admitted that the bogies - part of the carriages' suspension system - that had been fitted on the trains were not new. "Botswana Railways wanted the coaches ready for use before the end of March 2016. This gave Transnet Engineering only five months to manufacture.

"The parties agreed that Transnet should lease refurbished bogies at no cost to the customer while the company manufactured new ones. This is a temporary measure. It takes 12 months to manufacture the bogies and we will deliver before the end of this year." But a source in Botswana said it was never revealed to that country's authorities that Botswana Rail had acquired trains with refurbished bogies.

Technical problems due to contamination during refuelling

Sigonyela said it was not true that the trains experienced technical problems because they were old. "The reported technical challenges were as a result of contamination during refuelling. Diesel was inadvertently mixed with water, resulting in technical failures in the power car, which is the coach that provides power to the state-of-the-art train to ensure that all the electronic passenger amenities are operational," said Sigonyela.

The new train's features include plasma-screen TVs across all coaches, a bar, sleeper coaches, Wi-Fi, high-standard public address audio systems, ablution facilities and air conditioning.

"The problem is that when you get a new train like that you must also test on your side," said a source at Transnet. "These were tested here in South Africa but Botswana Rail didn't test on their side. Instead, they just packed the train with people when they launched."

Opportunities in the rest of Africa

Transnet Engineering CEO Thamsanqa Jiyane is reported to have said that the company is looking at opportunities in the rest of Africa. "We are launching our African locomotives. We are going to be doing various tests and we are going to be putting it up on the line after the launch. It is our first African-designed and manufactured locomotive, it is our own technology, it is our own intellectual property," said Jiyane.

Botswana Railways did not respond to questions sent to it.

Source: Sunday Times