Eight nabbed for Cape train vandalism

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By Murray Williams

Cape Town - Police have successfully hunted down eight suspects who a fortnight ago crippled key Cape Town railway services and left thousands of commuters stranded.

The arrested suspects, aged from 19 to 30, are from Zwelitsha and Enkanini in Khayelitsha and were nabbed thanks to CCTV footage.

The arrests come after the exasperated head of the country’s railway service warned last week that Cape Town’s central train lines could be closed if rampant vandalism continued - four carriages and a motor coach were destroyed by fire and overhead electrical equipment as well as mast poles suffered damage on August 14.

A conservative costing of the damage was R8 million, excluding the damage to the station and the overhead electrical equipment.

Police spokesman FC van Wyk said the arson attack came after “protesters allegedly wanted to build shacks in vacant land in Mew Way Road in Zwelitsha, Khayelitsha”.

“After their shacks were removed by law enforcement agencies they vented their anger by barricading the public roads, burning tyres, blocking the roads with huge lamp poles and other objects.

“They allegedly went as far as burning a train and vandalising the train station at Chris Hani train station in Enkanini, Khayelitsha,” Van Wyk said.

Passenger Rail Agency of SA (Prasa) chief executive Mosenngwa Mofi arrived in Cape Town to personally assess the damage and said the latest incident brought the total number of carriages lost/damaged by fire/arson during 2013/14 to 31 in the Western Cape alone.

He warned: “The continued lawlessness may force our hand to close the central lines in the Western Cape until protesters desist from destroying state assets and communities expose these criminals. How can we risk bringing new trains and infrastructure when the current service is not safe?”

Police detectives based at Harare station on Monday made the breakthrough when they arrested the eight suspects.

“Police worked around the clock in making sure that the perpetrators were brought to book,” Van Wyk said. “During the investigation CCTV footage showed what transpired… and police managed to track down the suspects.

“They are facing charges of public violence and malicious damage to property and are expected to appear in Khayelitsha Magistrate’s Court as soon as they are charged.”

Van Wyk said the Harare police members had been up in arms with the protesters who showed no remorse by demolishing anything in their sight.
“Several vehicles including police vehicles have been damaged during the protest actions in Harare policing precinct. This arrest is a major breakthrough for Harare SAPS as we want to show that anyone who commits crime will be brought to book in order to face the consequences,” Van Wyk said.

Metrorail said last week: “Shortly afterwards attempts were made to torch Kuyasa Station a few kilometres away.”

Spokeswoman Riana Scott said: “Richard Walker, regional manager, thanked customers for their patience and praised his teams who worked tirelessly under very trying circumstances to restore operations to normality as soon as possible. He appealed to communities to protect state assets and expose the guilty parties.”

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