

# Bell Equipment, a South African manufacturing icon

**The Department of Economic Development is looking for national icons and heavy equipment manufacturer, Bell Equipment ‘definitely qualifies as one of best success stories in manufacturing’, according to the National Minister of Economic Development, Mr Ebrahim Patel.**

Mr Patel visited Richards Bay at the beginning of March to discuss the Department’s New Growth Path (NGP) with region’s role players including major industry, business, labour, local and district government as well as the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone Company.

The NGP seeks to guide the Government’s work in achieving its goal of job creation through meaningful economic transformation and inclusive growth. All government departments as well as provincial and local government need to align their programmes with the need to create employment opportunities. The NGP also aims to look at every region in the country to see how government can improve conditions in the various regions.

Mr Patel’s itinerary concluded with a visit to Bell

Equipment’s headquarters and factory in Richards Bay to discuss synergies with government’s various economic development policies and programmes.

Here Bell Equipment Chief Executive Gary Bell gave a brief overview of the company, which has an extensive product range of infrastructure, construction, mining and agricultural equipment which it exports its products to 80 countries. Commenting on the company’s impact on the NGP objectives, Mr Bell said that the company had employed about 1 000 people in the past 18 months and about 90% of those who had been retrenched during the recession had been re-employed now that the company is almost back to its pre-2008 manufacturing levels.

Currently Bell employs 3 500 people and creates about 34 000 indirect jobs through its 440 South African suppliers. In addition the company believes in ‘growing its own timber’ and has one of the largest accelerated training programmes in its sector with 236 apprentices and 144 trainees.

Mr Patel urged Bell to publicise what they have achieved through their training efforts, saying that training is at the

centre of the NGP. He added that his department is looking at a new Black Economic Empowerment Model to promote black industrialists and was keen to involve Bell Equipment.

Mr Bell also pointed out that 75% of what the company sells in South Africa is manufactured in the country. Likewise the company designs many of its own products and has its own engineering team. The company is also focussed on increasing the local content of its products – its Articulated Dump Trucks currently has a local content of over 70% – and has invested substantially in a Global Logistics Centre in Johannesburg and as well as the “best network in South Africa” to ensure that the company is well positioned to support mining, construction and agricultural activity in South Africa.

While acknowledging that government’s programmes and policies have been well considered and well aligned with Bell Equipment’s strategies, he said it was important to ensure that government’s Preferential Procurement Framework Act is properly implemented on the ground and takes into consideration local content and local presence to create employment locally.

In response Mr Patel indicated that he would like to keep channels of communication open between the Department and the company. He also encouraged Bell to see their local municipality as a partner and meet with the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone Company to discuss the potential localisation of some of its component suppliers to create local employment opportunities.



*Above: Minister Ebrahim Patel experienced first-hand the design and technology innovation as well as build quality of Bell Equipment’s proudly South African D-series Articulated Dump Truck when he was given the opportunity of driving a truck on the company’s test track facility.*



*Bell Equipment Chief Executive Gary Bell and Managing Director of Bell Equipment, André McDuling led the walk through the Bell Equipment factory where some of the factory processes were explained to Minister Ebrahim Patel and his delegation, which included uMhlathuze Deputy Mayor Zethu Gumbi, Speaker Mvuseni Mnqayi and NUMSA President Cedric Gina.*



*Minister of Economic Development, Mr Ebrahim Patel visit to Bell Equipment included a walk through company’s Articulated Dump Truck production line. Here he is with factory employees and NUMSA President, Cedric Gina (left) and Bell Equipment Chief Executive Gary Bell (right).*