

Minister wants cops to focus on crime fight

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POLICE Minister Nathi Mthethwa wants his men and women in blue manning the country's borders to be withdrawn so that they can focus on fighting crime in business and residential areas.

Mthethwa said the government might have to reverse an earlier decision to withdraw the army from patrolling the country's borders and hand over the function to the police.

In an interview with *The Star*, Mthethwa said rampant crime in South Africa could be dealt with only if more police officers were deployed in problem areas.

"The old cabinet said we have set a law that police should be at the border, and March was meant to be the last day for the army to withdraw," Mthethwa said. "We are going to be engaging our colleagues on that ... the challenge at home is the crime in business and residential areas.

"I would argue ... why would you want to have borders manned by the police? If you look at international trends, the job of securing the country is done by the army. You may want to release the police to concentrate where it matters most," he said.

Mthethwa also wants the army to escort cash-in-transit trucks to deter organised-crime syndicates.

"If you look at other countries, the issue of transporting money is a joint operation between security forces."

A large percentage of trained soldiers were part of the reserve force and could be brought in for this purpose. The police, said Mthethwa, needed to be visible in crime-ridden areas.