



▲ Prime Minister Russell Dlamini speaking during the event. (Right) National Commissioner of Police Manoma Vusie Masango engaging motorists.



## PM calls for national unity in fight against crime

By Thokozani Mazibuko

PRIME Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini has made a call for unity and shared responsibility in the fight against crime and road accidents. Dlamini stated such as he was addressing hundreds of residents, community leaders and members of the security services during the the End of Year National Crime and Road Accident Campaign 2025, organised by the Royal Eswatini Police Service. The Prime Minister said the Government values such engagements because they help strengthen collaboration between the police and the public.

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Stories by Thokozani Mazibuko

# PM calls for national unity in fight against crime

**PRIME Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini has made a call for unity and shared responsibility in the fight against crime and road accidents.** Dlamini stated such as he was addressing hundreds of residents, community leaders and members of the security services during the the End of Year National Crime and Road Accident Campaign 2025, organised by the Royal Eswatini Police Service.

The Prime Minister said the Government values such engagements because they help strengthen collaboration between the police and the public. He said every liSwati has a role to play in creating a peaceful and safe country. He reminded the nation of the importance of collective responsibility, pointing to the national motto which encourages unity in upholding safety and security. He said there is no progress without peace and encouraged communities, businesses and organisations to work closely with the police throughout the year.

The Premier emphasised that cooperation becomes even more important during the festive period when road traffic increases and crime often rises. He appealed for a

different approach this year by urging the nation to reduce crime and prevent road accidents through vigilance, discipline and adherence to the law.

He told the gathering that the theme of the national campaign reflects the determination of the police to stand firm against criminal activities and road dangers. He said the police remain committed to protecting every liSwati but cannot succeed without public involvement. He encouraged citizens to eliminate all forms of lawlessness in their communities and to protect children who are often targeted by criminals.

The Prime Minister said Government strongly supports the Royal Eswatini Police Service in its battle against crime, particularly violent acts committed by gangs. He described these groups as a serious threat to national peace and urged the public to help law enforcement bring them to an end. He said no nation should allow its people to live in fear and encouraged communities to unite, think together and find lasting solutions for the safety of families.

Government will continue to take steps to strengthen national safety and will ensure that public offices receive training and resources to carry out their mandates effectively. The Prime Minister highlighted Government's recent provision of new vehicles to the police, saying these have already helped officers respond faster to emergencies and have contributed to the reduction of certain crimes.

However, he warned that crime remains a serious challenge. Murder, robbery, gender based violence, housebreaking and livestock theft continue to disrupt families and communities. The Prime Minister noted with concern the increase in attacks taking place in homes, often committed by people known to the victims. He urged citizens to prioritise the protection of their homes and to look out for their neighbours, especially the vulnerable.

The Prime Minister also raised alarm about the rise in scams committed through mobile phones and social media. He said these crimes have destroyed businesses and

livelihoods.

He urged the nation to be extremely cautious when responding to unknown messages or online prompts. He said people must ignore messages that promise winnings, profits or financial assistance as criminals continue to use such tactics to deceive citizens.

He thanked all individuals and organisations who contribute to national safety, including the police, community policing volunteers and local leadership structures. He expressed hope that once the Crime Prevention Bill becomes law it will greatly strengthen the national framework in dealing with emerging threats.

The Prime Minister appealed to the nation to approach the festive season with responsibility. He said safety, respect for the law and cooperation with the police should guide the conduct of citizens as they celebrate with their families. He reminded the nation that the police have already increased visibility in many parts of the country to ensure peaceful holidays.



▲ Prime Minister Russell Dlamini speaking during the End of Year National Crime and Road Accident Campaign 2025, organised by the Royal Eswatini Police Service.



▲ National Commissioner of Police Manoma Vusie Masango engaging motorists.

## NatCom reports drop in GBV cases

**THE Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS) has released new gender based violence (GBV) statistics showing a decline in GBV cases.**

The National Commissioner of Police Manoma Vusie Masango shared the report during the End of Year National Crime and Road Accident Prevention Campaign. He stated that rape and cyber related domestic abuse are still being monitored.

According to the report, Eswatini recorded six thousand one hundred and sixty gender based violence cases between January and October 2025. This represents a three percent decrease compared to the six thousand three hundred and fifty two cases reported during the same period in 2024. The National Commissioner said the slight decline demonstrates progress in crime prevention efforts but warned that the country cannot relax its vigilance.

He said the Police Service is intensifying investigations, strengthening the work of Family Protection Units and expanding

victim support services. He encouraged survivors to continue reporting cases without fear, adding that police officers have received training to handle sensitive cases with professionalism and care.

He said the Police Cybercrime Unit is expanding its capacity to trace digital footprints, collect electronic evidence and bring offenders to justice. He noted that most victims are young people, especially women, who are increasingly targeted through social media and mobile communication platforms. He urged the public to be cautious when sharing personal information online and to seek assistance immediately when threatened.

Masango further commended the work of community volunteers, traditional leaders and civil society partners who have helped victims seek help. He said these statistics prove that when communities and police work together, progress becomes possible.



▲ Commissioner Masango speaking during the event.



By Siphesihle Dlamini

DEPUTY Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla has called for strengthened efforts to advance disability inclusion, underscoring its vital role in driving Eswatini's socio-economic progress. The DPM said this during the 2025 International Day of Persons with Disabilities commemoration at the Mavuso Trade Centre.

The Deputy Prime Minister underscored that the government's commitment is not symbolic but concrete, aimed at opening doors, creating opportunities, and ensuring that every person with a disability can fully participate in mainstream development. She highlighted the strides Eswatini has made in mainstreaming disability and inclusion across all sectors, emphasising that these efforts are foundational to the nation's growth.

Quoting Neil Marcus, an actor and playwright influential in shaping disability culture, she reminded the audience that "Disability is not a brave struggle or 'courage in the face of adversity.' Disability is an art. It's an ingenious way to live." Dladla stressed that persons with disabilities are not a separate or marginalised group but are integral members of society, mothers, fathers, siblings, entrepreneurs, thinkers, students, employees, and community leaders.

She asserted that removing barriers and opening opportunities does more than uphold justice; it unlocks the talents and energies essential to driving national development. Reflecting on the government's progress, she pointed to the enactment of the National Disability Act and the development of the National Disability Plan of Action as critical milestones. However, she cautioned that laws and plans alone are insufficient without accompanying concrete steps, including adequate budgetary allocations, effective implementation, and accountability mechanisms.

To translate the theme of fostering disability inclusion into measurable socio-economic progress, Dladla outlined four interlinked

# DPM calls for enhanced disability inclusion



▲ Sabelo Matse making remarks during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities commemoration at the Mavuso Trade Centre.

priorities. First, she emphasised inclusive education and skills development as fundamental, describing education as "the great equaliser." She called for ensuring that every child with a disability learns in an accessible environment equipped with assistive devices, trained teachers, and early-intervention services, while also expanding vocational and digital skills programs for adolescents and adults to access decent employment in a rapidly evolving economy.

Second, she highlighted employment and economic empowerment as essential for dignity and independence, pledging to strengthen incentives for the private sector to hire persons with disabilities, promote social enterprises and entrepreneurship, and open public procurement opportunities for disability-led businesses. The government will collaborate with employers, unions, and training institutions to eliminate discriminatory hiring practices and provide reasonable accommodations on the job.

Dladla further addressed the critical need for accessible services, infrastructure, and information, noting that physical, communi-



▲ Deputy Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla interacting with attendees during the event.

cation, and digital barriers continue to prevent full participation.

She insisted that national infrastructure programs, from schools and clinics to transport and public buildings, must meet accessibility standards, and public services must be available in accessible formats supported by digital platforms. "Accessibility is not optional; it is essential infrastructure for inclusion," she affirmed.

Again, she spoke to social protection and targeted support, recognising the necessity to protect the most vulnerable while pursuing inclusion in education and employment. Disability-sensitive social protection schemes must provide adequate, dignified support and link recipients to pathways for education, rehabilitation, and employment. Caregivers and families should also be supported with respite, training, and financial assistance to help their loved ones thrive.

To achieve these priorities, the Deputy Prime Minister stressed the importance of mainstreaming disability across all national plans and budgets, ensuring that disability inclusion is visible in sector plans such as

health, education, transport, and employment, and reflected in the national budget. She emphasised that without budgetary allocations, progress cannot be sustained. Strengthening data and monitoring was another critical commitment, with the government pledging to invest heavily in disaggregated data collection, administrative systems, and community feedback mechanisms designed with the participation of persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, Dladla expressed that the principle of "Nothing for us without us," insisting that organisations of persons with disabilities must be partners in decision-making at every level, from national policy to local implementation, as their lived experience provides the best guidance on what works. Acknowledging the indispensable contributions of partners including UN agencies, civil society, faith-based organisations, families, and the private sector, Dladla assured that the government will be bold in policy, rigorous in implementation, and transparent in accountability.

## 'Africa Positions Digital Agriculture at the Centre of Its Development Agenda'

By Ncaba Ntshakala

AFRICA must not remain on the margins of global technological advancement, African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment Moses Vilakati declared as he opened the inaugural African Union Conference on Digital Agriculture in Addis Ababa.

Addressing delegates from across the continent, Vilakati said Africa's transformation depends on decisive, coordinated, and digitally informed policy action especially in agriculture, which remains the backbone of most economies. He highlighted the continent's bold ambition to ensure that 45% of global agrifood output comes from Africa by 2030, stressing that digital transformation must be a major driving force behind this target.

The three-day conference, hosted by the African Union Commission through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, was being held under the theme "Shaping Agricultural Policy for Africa's Future: Innovation, Climate-Smart Practices, and Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development."

Running from 1-3 December 2025 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, the platform brought together policymakers, technologists, researchers, private sector leaders, and development partners to chart a unified approach to modernizing the continent's agriculture sector.

The discussions cut across digital extension

services, agri-tech innovations, market access and value chains, climate-smart agriculture, data privacy, and the regulatory environment needed to manage digital technologies responsibly.

At the centre of the conference was a shared objective: accelerating the adoption and effective use of digital technologies to improve agricultural productivity, sustainability, and resilience.

Delegates are examining emerging solutions such as remote-sensing tools for climate-smart farming, mobile platforms that link farmers to markets, artificial intelligence systems that provide real-time agronomic advice, and blockchain technologies supporting transparent value chains. The AU used the platform to generate concrete recommendations that will guide national and continental policy reforms.

The conference also sought to promote knowledge sharing among stakeholders by showcasing successful digital agriculture initiatives from across Africa and other regions.

Participants were identifying strategies to scale proven innovations, strengthen partnerships between governments and the private sector, and expand access to digital tools and information for smallholder farmers. These outcomes, the AU believes, will help empower rural communities, boost food production, and reinforce Africa's capacity to withstand shocks linked to climate change and economic disruptions.



▲ African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment Moses Vilakati.



▲ Delegates following proceedings during the conference in Ethiopia.



# Eswatini emerges as leading hub for high-level continental meetings

By Noaba Ntshakala

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ESWATINI has firmly positioned itself as one of Africa's fastest-rising destinations for high-level symposiums, conferences and regional policy dialogues which is an achievement attributed to the foresight of His Majesty King Mswati III, the country's stable governance system and a consistently low crime rate that continues to inspire confidence among

... AU, SACU and SADC gatherings highlights national stability, strong governance and growing global confidence

international partners.

Over the past two weeks, the Kingdom hosted a series of major meetings, including the African Union (AU) Humanitarian Symposium, the SACU Heads of Institutions engagements, and the SADC Electoral Commissions Forum annual conference.

Two of these gatherings were officially commissioned by His Majesty through his representatives, further reinforcing Eswatini's growing diplomatic stature and capacity to convene important continental conversations. Government officials note

that this momentum highlights years of deliberate work by the King in strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties, improving national infrastructure and driving reforms that ensure Eswatini is well positioned to host events of international significance. Such activities significantly boost the Kingdom's economy as they spurring hotel occupancy, transport services, tourism, hospitality and the visibility of local businesses while also elevating Eswatini's profile in global governance and development spaces.

...A nation rising in diplomatic influence

ESWATINI'S ability to attract major continental gatherings is not accidental.

It is a strategic outcome of:

- ▶ Stable governance and strong leadership by His Majesty King Mswati III
- ▶ Low crime rates and efficient national security, which assure visitors of safety
- ▶ High-level policing and coordinated law-enforcement operations
- ▶ Long-term diplomatic engagements and international partnerships
- ▶ Improving infrastructure and accommodation facilities
- ▶ A hospitable environment and trusted administrative systems.

## 1. Eswatini Hosts First-Ever AU Humanitarian Symposium in Southern Africa

ESWATINI has hosted the first-ever African Union Humanitarian Symposium to be held in Southern Africa. Delegates from across the 52 AU member states convened at Esibayeni Lodge for the 13th edition of the symposium, which has been hailed as moment of continental recognition for the Kingdom's growing leadership in humanitarian engagement.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Senator Pholile Shakantu, formally opened the meeting and welcomed the delegate to the Kingdome on behalf of His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Queen Mother and the Nation. She expressed Eswatini's honour in hosting such a critical gathering, emphasising the country's commitment to strengthening Africa's humanitarian response systems.



▲ Eswatini Foreign Affairs Pholile Shakantu (c) posing with AU senior officials during the opening of the symposium.

The symposium was held under the theme "Spotlighting Crisis Hotspots and Forgotten Emergencies: Triple Nexus Solutions through Inclusion and Solidarity," which was said to highlight escalating

humanitarian needs and the collective responsibility of AU member states.

Minister Shakantu during the symposium also reflected on the AU's support to Eswatini during crises such as Cyclone

Eloise in 2023, which caused extensive damage nationwide.

The AU Humanitarian Relief Fund assisted in reconstructing bridges, schools and key infrastructure.

## 2. Eswatini Hosts 27th ECF-SADC General Conference

HIS Majesty King Mswati III, represented by His Royal Highness Prince Lonkhokhela Minister for Natural Resources and Energy opened the 27th Annual General Conference of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries at Happy Valley Hotel.

Addressing regional delegates, His Majesty commended SADC structures for their efforts to promote democratic governance and urged member states to increase support for electoral institutions. He affirmed Eswatini's commitment to SADC's vision of an industrialised, peaceful and inclusive region, noting that electoral

integrity is central to achieving long-term stability.

The King highlighted Eswatini's progress in sustaining peace, unity and a cultural-based governance system that prioritises respect and cohesion. Marking 57 years of independence, he emphasised that the country's monarchical democracy continues to anchor national development and social harmony.

His Majesty, reflecting on Eswatini's regional role, noted the country's leadership in election observation missions, including heading the SADC Election Observer Mission during Malawi's 2025 general elections. He stressed that elections must serve as tools for unity and nation-building.



▲ His Majesty King Mswati III, represented by Minister for Natural Resources and Energy, Prince Lonkhokhela, with delegates and dignitaries from SADC community at 27th annual general conference of the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries held at Happy Valley Hotel in Ezulwini.

## 3. 44th African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM)

HIS Majesty King Mswati III, represented by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Prince Simelane, officially opened the 44th AAPAM Roundtable Conference which is another major event confirming Eswatini's rising influence in African governance circles.

The King, when welcoming delegates from across the continent emphasized Eswatini's commitment to public service excellence and innovation. He said the conference theme—"Agile Public Administration: Partnership and Digital Transformation for Citizen-Centric Service Delivery" aligns with the country's long-term development programmes, including the National Development Plan, the Nkwe Programme

of Action and the Grand Plan for National Transformation.

His Majesty stressed that agility and digital transformation have become necessities, not options, for governments seeking to remain responsive and effective. Eswatini, he said, is embracing reforms aimed at modernising systems, strengthening institutions and expanding digital access to public services.

### Strength

He also highlighted the unique strength of Eswatini's governance model, the Tinkhundla system, which blends modern administration with cultural values of buntfu, unity and participation. Through the Sibaya People's Parliament, he noted, ordinary citizens play a direct role in shaping national policy.



▲ His Majesty's representative, Prince Simelane, who also serves as Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs joined Minister for Public Service Mabulala Maseko, senior officials, and delegates of the 44th Association of African Public Administration (AAPAM) Roundtable Conference for a group picture.



Stories By Delisa Magagula

# Eswatini launches 2026 SADC essay competitions

## ... E20K pumped in for 2025 winners

THE Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Training, Nanikie Mnisi, has officially launched the 2026 SADC Secondary Schools Essay Competition.

She also launched, Tertiary Institutions Essay Competition, describing them as vital platforms that nurture academic excellence and regional consciousness among young people.

Speaking at the launch, she emphasised that the annual contests continue to expose Eswatini's learners to regional development priorities while encouraging intellectual participation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) agenda.

The 2026 Secondary Schools theme challenges students to interrogate 'How can SADC achieve industrialization, transform agriculture, and energy transition for a Resilient Future'

The theme speaks to the region's long-term ambition of building stronger economies capable of absorbing shocks, reducing poverty, and competing globally.

Meanwhile, tertiary students are expected to respond to a reflective topic 'Compare and Contrast the challenges faced by the SADC founders in the 20th century against the current challenges. Which lesson(s) from the SADC Founders would you advise or adapt to address today's regional dilemma(s)'

Mnisi said both themes demand critical thinking, research, and an appreciation of the region's historical and socio-economic context.

She noted that the competitions do not only reward academic talent, but also encourage youth to contribute thought leadership on complex development questions.

The Principal Secretary commended teachers and school administrators who consistently support students throughout the process, saying the competition depends greatly on mentorship at school level.

She urged lecturers in tertiary institutions to take a more proactive role in promoting the competition, guiding students, and embedding academic writing skills in their programmes.

She further acknowledged the English Language Inspectorate for coordinating the national process, along with the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and other education stakeholders.

Worth noting, this year's national winners were honoured at the event, receiving monetary prizes disbursed directly by the SADC Secretariat.

The awards included approximately E10 000 for first place, E6 000 for second place, and E4 000 for third place.

### The recipients were:

1. Vuyiswa Nxumalo – St. Mark's High School
2. Khulani Dlamini– Evelyn Baring High School
3. Aliselihle Thwala– St. Mark's High School

Mnisi described the prize money as an important and meaningful incentive that recognises the effort students invest in preparing their essays.

She said such rewards often go towards



▲ Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Training Nanikie Mnisi has officially launched the 2026 SADC Secondary Schools Essay Competition and the Tertiary Institutions Essay Competition.

personal or academic growth, including purchasing learning materials, contributing to school needs, or supporting families. She added that although the cash prizes may be capped at certain levels, they remain a valuable acknowledgement of young people's academic contribution.

Beyond national recognition, some of Eswatini's entrants performed exceptionally at regional level.

Thwala achieved 6th place, while Dlamini

secured 10th position among hundreds of submissions from across Southern Africa. Both will receive official certificates from the Secretariat, along with other regional finalists who made it into the top ten.

"These achievements show that Eswatini's learners are not merely participating, but actively competing and excelling. The prize money and certificates are a show of confidence in our young scholars, and we are proud of their hard work," Mnisi said.



▲ The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, through Eswatini Legal Aid, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration Commission.



▲ Director of Eswatini Legal Aid Lungile Magagula during the signing of the MoU.



▲ CMAC Executive Director Lomkhosi Magagula, an HR practitioner and businesswoman, said the collaboration was designed to strengthen institutional capacity.

## Legal Aid, CMAC sign MoU to strengthen access to justice

THE Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, through Eswatini Legal Aid, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration Commission (CMAC) to improve access to legal services for workers and other vulnerable groups.

The agreement formalises cooperation between the two institutions to support individuals who cannot afford legal representation, particularly those involved in labour

disputes. The partnership aims to facilitate timely and fair resolutions by offering legal assistance and mediation options to parties who would otherwise struggle to navigate the justice system. The Ministry's PS Dorcas Dlamini said the MoU would address the high number of unresolved matters by ensuring that parties receive guidance throughout the dispute resolution process. "This MoU will help reduce unresolved dis-

putes by providing people with the support they need to pursue justice," she said. Meanwhile CMAC Executive Director Lomkhosi Magagula, an HR practitioner and businesswoman, said the collaboration was designed to strengthen institutional capacity and improve service delivery for workers and employers. She said it reflects a coordinated effort to make dispute resolution more efficient and accessible. The agreement sets out mechanisms for

case referrals, information sharing, and coordinated interventions to ensure that complainants receive legal assistance where required. It also seeks to enhance public awareness of available services and improve compliance with labour laws through early interventions. Both institutions said the partnership is intended to promote fair labour practices, reduce case backlogs, and support people who face barriers when asserting their rights.



# More pictures from Tusk Conservation Awards in London



▲ Minister for Home Affairs Her Royal Highness Princess Lindiwe with Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones. Princess Lindiwe, the Minister for Home Affairs for the Kingdom of Eswatini graced the Tusk Conservation Awards in London as a distinguished Guest of Honour. The annual event, held under the patronage of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, is dedicated to celebrating exceptional leaders whose efforts are pivotal in safeguarding Africa's wildlife and natural heritage.



▲ The Prince of Wales, Prince William awarding one of the recipients.



▲ Minister for Home Affairs Her Royal Highness Princess Lindiwe posing with renowned artist Chris Levine.



▲ His Royal Highness Prince William, the Prince of Wales making his remarks.



▲ Minister for Home Affairs Her Royal Highness Princess Lindiwe (c) with renowned international Lawyer Richard Griffiths (SpaceX and Global Engagement) and another guest.

## ICT Minister engages Editors, ESNAJ, calls for innovation in digital era

By **Noaba Ntshakala**  
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THE Minister of Information, Communication and Technology, Savannah Maziya, held a meet and greet engagement session with the Eswatini National Association of Journalists (ESNAJ) and senior representatives of the country's leading media houses, emphasising the need for ethical reporting, innovation and adaptability

in an increasingly digital global media environment.

The meet-and-greet created a platform for open dialogue, collaboration and shared vision between the Ministry and the media fraternity.

Addressing the rapidly evolving information landscape, the Minister encouraged journalists to explore new business models, embrace emerging technologies and position Eswatini's media on the global stage. She highlighted that digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges and urged

newsrooms to strengthen professionalism while tapping into creative and modern storytelling tools that resonate with today's audiences.

### Engagement

During the engagement, the Minister also clarified recent public disruptions to several government digital services, explaining that the instability stemmed from challenges within the Government Mainframe, which supports many of the GIYH App functions. She reassured the media that technical teams were working to stabilise the system to restore seamless service delivery.

Maziya commended journalists for their critical role in informing and empowering the nation, noting their contribution to promoting Eswatini's image and showcasing national achievements.

She urged media houses to continue upholding high ethical standards, fairness and accuracy in their reporting.

The Minister further affirmed that such engagements will continue, with the goal of strengthening media-government cooperation, enhancing skills development and supporting the transformation of Eswatini's media sector.



▲ Minister for Information Communication and Technology Savannah Maziya posing with members of the media.





### BRIEFS

**SA business confidence rebounds**

SOUTH African business confidence climbed 5 points in the fourth quarter after two consecutive declines, helped by broad-based improvements across five sectors, a survey showed on Wednesday.

Business confidence stood at 44 points in the quarter ending December, three points above its long-term average, according to a survey by the Rand Merchant Bank that was compiled by the Bureau of Economic Research.

**Nigeria tightens cash withdrawal limits**

NIGERIA'S central bank announced sweeping changes to its cash management policies on Tuesday, introducing stricter withdrawal limits and scrapping fees on excess deposits in a bid to curb cash dependency and tackle security and money-laundering risks.

Effective January 1, 2026, individuals will be limited to cumulative weekly withdrawals of 500,000 naira and corporates 5 million naira, the Central Bank of Nigeria said in a circular to banks and financial institutions.

**Developing world 'not out of danger'**

THE gap between developing nations' debt servicing costs and new financing hit a more than 50-year high of \$741 billion between 2022 and 2024, the World Bank said on Wednesday, urging countries to use the more relaxed global financing conditions to bring their houses in order. (Reuters)

### FX RATES

Notes/Cash	Buy	Sell
U.S. Dollar	16.8802	17.1437
G.B. Pound	22.0354	22.7141
EURO	19.3989	20.0064
Bank Rate (July 2023)		7.50%
Prime Rate (July 2023)		11%
Inflation (July 2023)		4.5%
Petrol	E21.60/Litre	
Diesel	E22.90/Litre	
Paraffin	E17.25/Litre	

# Retail fuel compliance improves, safety gaps remain a concern

Stories By Delisa Magagula

THE country recorded a modest improvement in the technical compliance of licensed fuel retailers and commercial consumers over the last financial year.

This is following intensified inspections and stricter enforcement by the regulator.

According the Eswatini Energy Regulatory Authority (ESERA) Annual Technical Compliance Report for the electricity supply industry data compiled from inspections show a gradual rise in adherence to regulatory, operational and safety standards, although authorities say persistent non-compliance at some sites continues to pose risks to public safety and the environment.

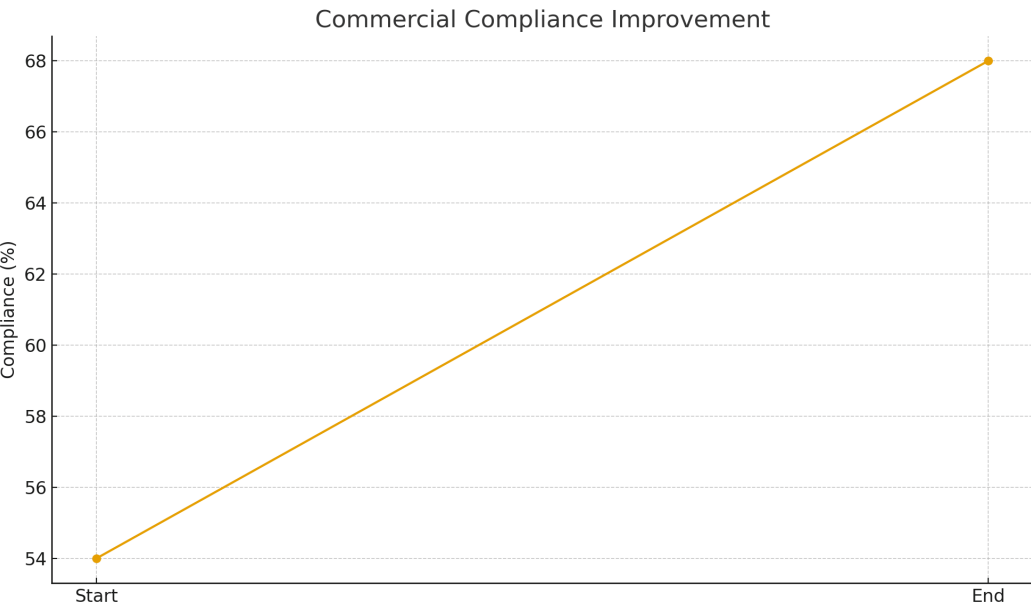
### Inspection

Worth noting, the regulator uses inspection checklists for each licence category, assessing sites on regulatory adherence, operational safety, maintenance of infrastructure and equipment, and emergency preparedness.

These checklists are aligned with existing regulations and industry standards. The report mentions, the assessments are not merely administrative but central to identifying safety hazards, improving operational standards, and reducing fuel-related accidents.

During the reporting period, the Authority monitored 115 licensed retail sites around the country. Of these, 21 were new operations still under construction and not yet open to the public. Inspectors recorded a three per cent improvement in compliance levels among operational retailers, reflecting a gradual but sustained shift towards safer business practices.

According to the authority, this progress is at-



tributed to intensified compliance enforcement introduced in the previous financial year.

“Under the new approach, non-compliant sites were closely monitored through frequent follow-up inspections. Inspectors targeted repeat offenders and locations with poor safety records, ensuring that operators were compelled to take corrective action,” reads the report in part.

The report, further mentions that in situations where conditions were found to present an immediate threat to life or the environment, retailers were ordered to implement urgent safety interventions.

In some cases, this resulted in the temporary closure of affected service stations until safety concerns were resolved.

Although the overall compliance level remains below the high standards expected of the

industry, the improvement is seen as a step in the right direction.

The report, mentions that, they will maintain pressure on operators who disregard safety rules, particularly those whose facilities lack adequate fire prevention mechanisms, spill containment measures or emergency response systems.

Worth noting, fuel handling is considered a high-risk undertaking, and inspectors found that many sites struggled to maintain equipment in optimal condition.

Ageing infrastructure, inadequate maintenance schedules and improper storage practices emerged as recurring problems at some outlets. However, newly established retailers generally performed better, largely because modern facilities often include built-in safety systems that reduce the probability of accidents.

## Commercial consumer sites show stronger progress

THE compliance performance of commercial consumer sites recorded a sharper improvement than retail sites.

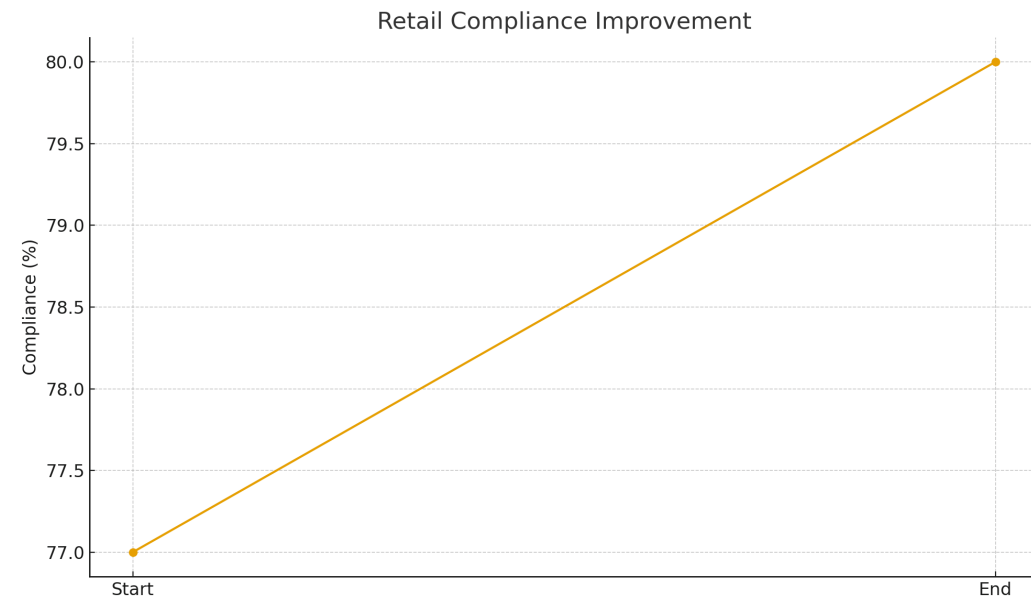
These operations purchase fuel in bulk from licensed wholesalers for private fleet or equipment use, often because their machinery operates in locations that are not easily serviced by nearby fuel service stations.

According to the ESERA report, there is an emphasise that these facilities must uphold strict safety and environmental standards due to the volatile nature of fuel.

“Inspectors conducted 167 compliance monitoring inspections at commercial consumer sites over the year. Of these, 79 were inspections for sites with valid operating licences, 63 were carried out for licence renewals, and 27 involved new applications. The regulator reported that the compliance rate for licensed sites rose by fourteen per cent, from an average of 54 per cent to 68 per cent by the end of March 2025,” read the report.

This was viewed as a notable achievement, given that commercial consumer sites have historically had lower compliance scores, particularly relating to storage conditions, record-keeping and emergency response preparedness.

Further, in the report it is mentioned that improved compliance is attributed to targeted education programmes, increased enforcement



and a gradual shift in industry attitudes towards risk management.

Despite this, ESERA acknowledged that many commercial operators continue to struggle with infrastructure upgrades, especially in rural or remote areas.

Inspectors frequently found inadequate bund walls, poor spill control measures and poorly maintained pumps. Operators also faced challenges in training personnel to handle

hazardous products safely and respond to emergencies.

The Authority says inspection teams will continue conducting both scheduled and unannounced inspections, particularly at high-risk sites.

The focus will remain on enforcing legislative requirements relating to safety, occupational health and environmental protection.



By Delisa Magagula

# Eswatini's textile sector eyes new global markets

## ... Trade landscape shifts

ESWATINI's textile and apparel industry is entering a pivotal phase as shifting global trade conditions demand urgent adaptation, according to a new report released by the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA).

The report, the second edition of the organisation's Market Insights series, outlines emerging export opportunities, investment prospects and structural vulnerabilities that could define the future competitiveness of one of the country's most significant manufacturing sectors.

The publication, titled 'Trade and Investment Opportunities for Eswatini's Textile and Apparel Industry' examines the implications of two major policy developments, the expiry of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in September 2025 and the intensification of South Africa's localisation agenda under the Retail, Clothing, Textile, Footwear and Leather (R-CTFL) Master Plan.

EIPA notes that the convergence of these changes heightens the urgency for Eswatini to diversify both markets and product offerings, as traditional export channels become less predictable.

"Eswatini's textile sector is among the country's top five export earners and currently employs approximately 20,000 workers. The industry is dominated by Cut, Make, Trim (CMT) and Free on Board (FOB) manufacturing models, which are tailored to serve large regional and international buyers," reads the report in part.

Despite challenging external conditions, the report states that the sector has demonstrated resilience, maintaining its contribution to exports, job creation and industrial development.

However, the structure of the industry leaves it exposed to external shocks. South Africa absorbs 89 per cent of Eswatini's textile exports while the United States accounts for 7 per cent with the remainder distributed across other international markets.

With AGOA benefits having underpinned Eswatini's access to the US market for over

two decades, the termination of the scheme has direct implications for manufacturers supplying American buyers. At the same time, tighter localisation ru

les in South Africa could shift procurement preferences in favour of domestic producers, potentially affecting Eswatini's dominant market share.

According to the report, these developments reinforce the need for Eswatini to seek new destinations for its products, expand into higher-value segments and invest in supporting industries that bolster competitiveness.

"The changing trade environment requires a strategic shift that prioritises diversification, innovation and greater integration into global value chains," the report notes, adding that dependence on a single market increases the sector's vulnerability to policy shifts and economic fluctuations.

Meanwhile, Eswatini's manufacturing base remains heavily reliant on imports. More than 50 per cent of textile input materials are sourced from foreign suppliers, driving up production costs and limiting the local value addition potential.

EIPA identifies this supply gap as a major opportunity for investors interested in upstream activities such as cotton cultivation, ginning, yarn spinning, dyeing and fabric production.

The report suggests that expanding local input production could improve cost competitiveness, support import substitution and create new industrial linkages with agriculture, logistics and manufacturing.

Additional opportunities exist for companies specialising in fabric enhancement processes, including printing, finishing, and technical textiles manufacturing. EIPA further identifies emerging market prospects for specialised apparel, including corporate uniforms, school wear, children's clothing and traditional attire.



▲ The Kingdom of Eswatini remains committed to enhancing bilateral relations with Japan. Through strategic forums and targeted sectoral engagements.



▲ A local textile firm.

## Eswatini advances sugar industry interests at ISO Annual Conference in London



▲ Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo with the Eswatini delegation.



▲ The Minister is exploring ways of stimulating growth within the Sugar sector.

By Noaba Ntshakala  
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ESWATINI strengthened its global trade footprint this week as the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo, led a high-level delegation to the International Sugar Organization (ISO) Annual Conference in London, United Kingdom.

Working alongside Eswatini Sugar Association CEO Banele Nyamane and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (UK) Thandazile Mbuyisa, the minister advanced the Kingdom's strategic interests through targeted engagements with influential stakeholders on the sidelines of the conference.

The discussions centred on deepening skills and technology transfer, unlocking new export markets, improving industry efficiencies and diversification, and

examining global factors affecting sugar prices. Opportunities for tertiary beneficiation of sugar products, particularly ethanol and energy production featured prominently, positioning Eswatini to explore value-addition pathways that could boost national revenue and industrial growth.

Climate resilience and sustainability were also key themes, with the delegation participating in extensive dialogue on how global producers are adapting to climate change while promoting greener and more efficient production models.

The minister further held private bilateral meetings with major industry players from Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, the UK and India, ensuring Eswatini remains visible and competitive in the global sugar arena. The delegation attended all scheduled seminars and council sessions, highlighting Eswatini's commitment to strengthening its sugar sector and expanding its international partnerships.





**Miccah Nkabinde**  
ENPF Conversion Specialist



# ENPF conversion sparks mixed but growing support

... As the nation deliberates its future social security landscape, the debate surrounding the proposed conversion of the Eswatini National Provident Fund (ENPF) into a national pension scheme has intensified, revealing strong mixed reactions and deep-seated concerns across society

**The conversation about the proposed conversion of the Eswatini National Provident Fund (ENPF) into a national pension scheme has captured the nation's full attention in recent weeks**

From the shop floors to the bus ranks, from WhatsApp groups to church gatherings, emaSwati are debating, sometimes gently, sometimes fiercely, what kind of future they want for their retirement.

And as the author of Likhweti, I must begin by expressing my gratitude to all who have engaged so frankly with the material. Your feedback has been a mixed bag, but it is the kind of mixed bag that strengthens national dialogue.

Many contributors wrote to affirm the clarity brought by Likhweti's explanations. As Mnelisi Mndzebele observed, the initiative could not have come at a better time.

"Thank you for the clarification as well as the Likhweti initiative. Many people are perplexed about the conversion, so this column will absolutely help the multitudes," he said.

His words reflect a widespread sentiment; many workers and employers admit that the concept of moving from a lump-sum model to a lifelong income model was initially daunting, but information and engagement are helping to reshape understanding. Among those who welcomed the shift was Samkelisiwe Shongwe, who wrote passionately about the dangers of lump-sum payouts. "Educate and mobilise until we are all on board," she urged. "Imagine being broke after three months and the lump sum was between E200, 000 and E500, 000." Her point is not hypothetical. Across Eswatini and in many neighbouring countries, studies have shown that most workers exhaust their retirement lump sums within three to eighteen months, often because of extended family obligations, medical emergencies, debt, or simply a lack of structured financial planning support.

## Scheme

Research conducted by the ENPF and the Eswatini Economic Policy Analysis and Research Centre (ESEPARC) has provided stark evidence used to justify the proposed conversion to a national pension scheme. These studies reveal a concerning trend that many retirees who receive a lump sum payment quickly exhaust their savings. According to the findings often cited in public discourse, most workers who receive a full lump sum are left with nothing within a short space of time, a situation that often leads to 'abject poverty'. This data underscores the argument that the current system fails to provide long-term financial security for the nation's elderly.

Supporting the same position is Theminkhosi Mabuza, who stressed the social and health advantages of lifelong income. "A steady pension contributes to a longer lifespan," he said, adding that while he supports a pension-based system, he remains unconvinced about any talk of merging the Fund with the other contributory pension schemes. His concerns reflect a separate debate, one that does not automatically follow from the conversion itself.

For clarity, the ENPF conversion Bill does not legally require a merger with the other contributory



▲ The Eswatini National Provident Fund recently handed over a newly constructed house and completed a long-delayed poultry shed for Stanley Lukhele, a local craftsman living with a disability.

pension schemes; that is a different policy conversation altogether. The Bill contains absolutely no provision or language mandating or even suggesting the merger of the ENPF with any occupational pension scheme including the PSPF. The Bill is designed to complement and coexist with, not absorb, established pension schemes.

Other voices, such as Zanele Hlophe, expressed concerns rooted in practical realities. She asked how much a retiree would earn if the pension system were implemented today and whether dependants would be looked after should a pensioner pass away shortly after retirement. These concerns strike at the heart of the most common misconceptions. Under a pension system, survivor benefits are not an afterthought, they are a core component. When a pensioner passes on, the spouse or dependants continue receiving a portion of the monthly income, ensuring continuity and protection for the family. That protection does not exist under the lump-sum model, where once the money is spent, nothing more follows. Another contributor, Sibusiso Methula, challenged the broader labour environment. He argued that no pension reform would be complete without addressing the instability faced by thousands of workers in short-term and seasonal employment. His appeal for improved job security and recognition of workers who contribute only sporadically. Sibusiso Methula's observation reveals a deeper social challenge, one that the conversion seeks to mitigate. By transforming the ENPF into a pension fund, even workers with fragmented employment histories will build a foundation for old age income that does not evaporate when their contracts end, as long as



the monthly contributions in aggregate would amount to a minimum of 180, despite their being non-consecutive.

While many of these views represent genuine concerns, there is also a sharp and compelling argument from experts who support the conversion. A social protection specialist offered one of the most striking endorsements yet. She stated that a country relying on lump sums retirement benefits, inevitably produces elderly poverty, while a nation investing in pensions produces dignity. "This conversion is not just a financial reform," she noted. "It is a public health intervention." Her perspective aligns with global best practice, where pension reforms are increasingly

recognised as tools for reducing old-age poverty, decreasing reliance on extended families, and improving mental and physical well-being among senior citizens.

Small business owner S'thembiso Dlamini also shared his practical concerns. He explained that many small businesspeople already support ageing parents whose lump sums ran out years ago.

"A proper pension system means fewer families collapsing under the weight of supporting retirees who ran out of their money," he said. In a society where informal support networks remain the primary safety net, the introduction of a structured, predictable pension system is more than administrative reform, it is a shift in how families survive. Yet perhaps the most powerful testimony came from former seasonal worker Nathi Vilakati, who said in such an environment you never save enough.

"A pension scheme is the only guarantee that someone like me will not die without income." His story resonates widely. Casual and temporary employees make up a significant portion of the country's workforce, and the current lump-sum model does not serve them well. It provides a once-off payout that often covers immediate needs but rarely supports long-term well-being.

Despite strong support for the conversion, a substantial number of emaSwati still say they prefer the lump sum. They argue that the large payout offers freedom of choice, freedom to build a house, freedom to pay debt, freedom to start a business.

## Aspirations

These are understandable aspirations. However, the national data shows that the 'freedom' offered by lump sums is often short-lived. Without recurring income, many retirees fall into vulnerability. Clinics report rising numbers of elderly patients who cannot afford medication. Families report strain under the weight of supporting parents who no longer receive regular income. The cycle of poverty intensifies. A pension, by contrast, introduces forced discipline and security no lump sum can match. It ensures that the worker who gave their prime years to the nation receives something back every month until the final day of their life. And crucially, it ensures that when death comes, the family is not abandoned. Survivor benefits offer a safety net that does not exist under the provident fund model. This is the heart of the pro-conversion argument: a pension uplifts not only the worker but the worker's family, and the nation at large.

As the national debate progresses, Likhweti remains committed to transparent engagement providing accurate and accessible information. The conversion is not merely a financial recalibration; it is a generational turning point toward a more secure, equitable, and dignified retirement for all emaSwati. Whether one supports or opposes it, the reform deserves the nation's full understanding. And as long as the questions keep coming, we will continue to answer them, with transparency, empathy, and depth.



▲ ENPF CEO Futhie Tembe.



# The AI frenzy is driving a memory chip supply crisis



▲ Magnifier screens show chips at a booth in a mall of Huaqiangbei electronics market in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, China.

most 40 people, including 17 executives at chipmakers and distributors. It shows industry efforts to meet voracious appetite for advanced chips — driven by Nvidia and tech giants like Google, Microsoft and Alibaba — created a dual bind: Chipmakers still can't produce enough high-end semiconductors for the AI race, yet their tilt away from traditional memory products is choking supply to smartphones, PCs and consumer electronics. Some are now hurrying to course-correct.

Details of the global scramble by tech firms and price increases described by elec-

tronics retailers and component suppliers in China and Japan are reported here for the first time.

Average inventory levels at suppliers of dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) — the main type used in computers and phones — fell to two to four weeks in October from three to eight weeks in July and 13 to 17 weeks in late 2024, according to TrendForce.

The crunch is unfolding as investors question whether the billions of dollars poured into AI infrastructure have inflated a bubble. Some analysts predict a shakeout, with only

the biggest and financially strongest companies able to stomach the price increases.

One memory-chip executive told Reuters the shortage would delay future data-center projects. New capacity takes at least two years to build but memory-chip makers are wary of overbuilding for fear it could end up idle should the demand surge pass, the person said.

SK Hynix has told analysts that the memory shortfall would last through late 2027, Citi said in November.

"These days, we're receiving requests for memory supplies from so many companies that we're worried about how we'll be able to handle all of them. If we fail to supply them, they could face a situation where they can't do business at all," Chey Tae-won, chairman of SK Hynix parent SK Group, said at an industry forum in Seoul last month.

OpenAI in October signed initial deals with Samsung and SK Hynix to supply chips for its Stargate project, which would require up to 900,000 wafers per month by 2029. That's about double current global monthly HBM production, Chey said.

Samsung told Reuters it is monitoring the market but wouldn't comment on pricing or customer relationships. SK Hynix said it is boosting production capacity to meet increased memory demand.

Microsoft declined to comment and ByteDance didn't address questions about the chip strain. Micron and Google didn't respond to comment requests.

(Reuters)

## YouTube says it will comply with Australia's teen social media ban

GOOGLE'S YouTube shared a "disappointing update" to millions of Australian users and content creators on Wednesday, saying it will comply with a world-first teen social media ban by locking out users aged under 16 from their accounts within days.

The decision ends a stand-off between the internet giant and the Australian government which initially exempted YouTube from the age restriction, citing its use for educational purposes.

Google had said it was getting legal advice about how to respond to being included.

"Viewers must now be 16 or older to sign into YouTube," the company said in a statement.

"This is a disappointing update to share. This law will not fulfill its promise to make

kids safer online and will, in fact, make Australian kids less safe on YouTube."

The Australian ban is being closely watched by other jurisdictions considering similar age-based measures, setting up a potential global precedent for how the mostly U.S. tech giants behind the biggest platforms balance child safety with access to digital services.

The Australian government says the measure responds to mounting evidence that platforms are failing to do enough to protect children from harmful content.

SIGNED OUT

YouTube said any user aged under 16 would be automatically signed out of their account from December 10, meaning they could no longer subscribe, like or comment on posts although they could still view content logged out.

(Reuters)



## Netflix, Warner Bros Discovery combo seen lowering costs for consumers

NETFLIX'S proposed acquisition of Warner Bros Discovery's studios and streaming unit is expected to reduce streaming costs for consumers by bundling Netflix and HBO Max, according to two people familiar with the proposal.

In recent talks with Warner Bros Discovery, Netflix said the potential combination of its streaming service with HBO Max would benefit consumers by lowering the cost of a bundled offering, the sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters. They requested anonymity to discuss confidential negotiations.

Netflix's argument seeks to address potential regulatory concerns that combining one of the nation's leading subscription video streaming services with a top rival would reduce consumer choice and raise

prices, the sources said. The services are not currently offered as a bundle by either company.

Warner Bros Discovery has been exploring a sale of all or part of its business, which includes film and television studios, cable networks such as HBO and CNN, and the HBO Max streaming service.

Reuters reported in October that Netflix was actively exploring a bid for Warner Bros Discovery's studio and streaming business, a tie-up that was seen as potentially reshaping the streaming landscape. Now, by framing the acquisition as pro-consumer, Netflix aims to build a case that the deal should withstand a potential regulatory challenge, according to the sources.

Reuters previously reported that Netflix had submitted a mostly cash offer for the studio and streaming unit. (Reuters)





## Kenyan lawmakers identify 'disturbing trend' of misconduct by British troops

A parliamentary inquiry in Kenya has accused British troops training there of a pattern of sexual misconduct and environmental harm that has led the forces from the former colonial power to be seen as an "occupying presence".

The findings of the investigation by a parliamentary committee focused on defence and foreign relations highlight rising frustrations in the East African country at the conduct of soldiers from the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), who have faced a raft of highly-publicised accusations in recent years.

A spokesperson for Britain's defence ministry said in a statement to Reuters that the ministry deeply regrets "the challenges that have arisen in relation to our defence presence in Kenya" and said it was prepared to investigate new allegations in the report once evidence is provided.

Thousands of British troops can pass through Kenya for training missions in any given year.

The most prominent allegation relates to the 2012 murder of 21-year-old Agnes Wanjiru near the British forces' training camp in the town of Nanyuki. The suspect, a British soldier named Robert Purkiss, was arrested in Britain last month after years of campaigning by Wanjiru's



▲ Soldiers are seen during a training session under the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), at a camp in Laikipia, Kenya.

family and Kenyan rights groups, who said her killers were being shielded by a defence cooperation agreement between the two countries.

Purkiss, who now faces extradition hearings, has denied any involvement in Wanjiru's death.

The committee's report, which was dated November 25 but published on parliament's website on Tuesday, said it had "uncovered a disturbing trend of sexual misconduct by BATUK personnel, marked by rape, assault, and abandonment of children fathered by soldiers".

It said public hearings in areas where BATUK trains had brought to

light evidence of numerous injuries and deaths to Kenyans employed by British forces to clear unexploded ordnance without protective equipment, as well as environmental damage caused by the illegal dumping of toxic materials.

"BATUK is increasingly seen as an occupying presence rather than a development partner," it said.

In a statement it provided to the parliamentary committee, BATUK said it has zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and takes any allegations very seriously. It added that environmental audits showed high levels of compliance with Kenyan regulations. (Reuters)

## Putin accepts US proposals, ready for further talks

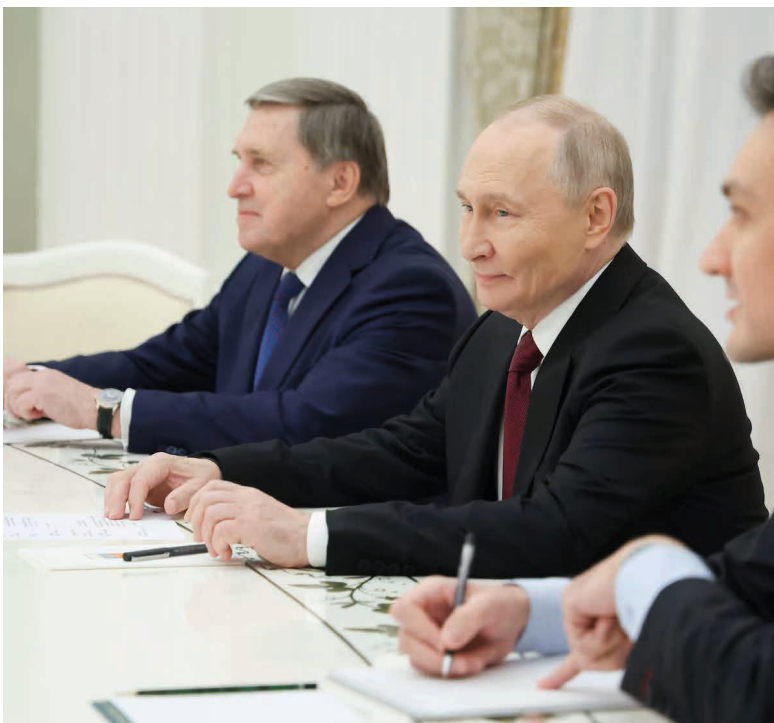
THE Kremlin said on Wednesday that President Vladimir Putin accepted some U.S. proposals aimed at ending the war in Ukraine and rejected others but that Russia was ready to meet U.S. negotiators as many times as it took to reach an agreement. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was speaking after talks in Moscow between Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner went into the early hours of Wednesday morning, with a Kremlin aide saying afterwards that "compromises have not yet been found."

Asked if it would be correct to say that Putin had rejected the U.S. proposals, Peskov said that it would not.

"A direct exchange of views took place yesterday for the first time," Peskov said. "Some things were accepted, some things were marked as unacceptable - this is a normal working process of finding a compromise."

Peskov said that Russia was grateful to Trump for his efforts but that the Kremlin would not be giving a running commentary on discussions with the United States as publicity was unlikely to be constructive.

"Work is currently being carried out at a working expert level," Peskov said. "It is at the expert level that certain results should be achieved that will then become the basis for contacts at the highest level."



▲ Members of the Russian delegation, led by President Vladimir Putin, attend a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia.

A leaked set of 28 U.S. draft peace proposals emerged in November, alarming Ukrainian and European officials who said they bowed to Moscow's main demands.

European powers then came up with a counter-proposal, and at talks in Geneva, the U.S. and Ukraine said they had created an "updated and refined peace framework" to end the war.

Putin on Tuesday said European

powers were trying to sink the peace talks by proposing ideas which were absolutely unacceptable to Russia.

Putin's foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, told reporters after the Witkoff talks that Moscow had previously received a 27-point set of proposals and then four additional documents which were discussed with Witkoff.

(Reuters)

## Hamas says it will hand over a Gaza hostage body, Israel to open Rafah crossing

HAMAS said it will hand over a body of a hostage on Wednesday, as Israel said it would allow Gaza's gateway to Egypt to open in the next few days so that Palestinians who need medical care could leave the war-ravaged territory.

The handover of the last two hostages' bodies in Gaza would complete a key condition of the initial part of U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to end the two-year Gaza war, which also entails the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt opening in both directions.

Israel has kept the crossing shut since the ceasefire came into effect in October, saying that Hamas must abide by the agreement to return all hostages still in Gaza, living and deceased.

Since the fragile truce started, Hamas has returned all 20 living hostages and 26 bodies in exchange for around 2,000 Palestinian detainees and convicted prisoners, but two more deceased captives - an Israeli police officer and a Thai agricultural worker - are still in Gaza.

### ISRAEL SAYS PREVIOUS 'FINDINGS' NOT LINKED TO HOSTAGES

The armed wing of the Hamas-allied Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, the Al Quds Brigades, said it had found a hostage body after conducting a search in northern Gaza, along with a team from the Red Cross.

Hamas said it would hand over the remains at 5 p.m. local time (1300 GMT) on Wednesday. The group did not say which of the two remaining deceased hostages it believed it to be.

The two are Israeli police officer Ran Gvili and Thai national Sudthisak Rinthalak, both kidnapped during Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that triggered two years of devastating war in Gaza.

Hamas had handed over remains on Tuesday to the Geneva-based Red Cross, which has acted as an intermediary between Gaza militant groups

and Israel throughout the war.

Israeli forces said they sent the remains, which they described as "findings" for forensic testing.

"The findings brought yesterday for examination from the Gaza Strip are not linked to any of the deceased hostages," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement on Wednesday.

### OPENING OF CROSSING COULD ALLOW OUT THOSE NEEDING TREATMENT

COGAT, the Israeli military arm that oversees humanitarian matters, said the opening of the Rafah crossing would be coordinated with Egypt, under the supervision of a European Union mission - a similar mechanism to that employed during a previous Gaza ceasefire agreed in January 2025.

There was currently no coordination between Egypt and Israel to reopen the Rafah crossing in the coming days, state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV cited Egypt's State Information Service as saying.

Before the war, the Rafah crossing was the only direct exit point for most Palestinians in Gaza to reach the outside world and was a key entry point for aid into the territory. It has been mostly closed throughout the conflict.

At least 16,500 patients in Gaza require medical care outside of the enclave, according to the United Nations. Some Gazans have managed to leave for medical treatment abroad through Israel.

### BLOODSHED CONTINUES

Violence has tailed off since the October 10 ceasefire but Israel has continued to strike Gaza and conduct demolitions against what it says is Hamas infrastructure. Hamas and Israel have traded blame for violating the U.S.-backed agreement.

Health officials at Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza said on Wednesday that two Palestinians were killed by Israeli gunfire in the Zeitoun suburb of Gaza City. The Israeli military said it was looking into the re-



▲ People hold images of dead hostages Ran Gvili and Sudthisak Rinthalak, whose bodies haven't been returned yet, as Israelis attend a rally calling for the immediate return of the remains of all hostages held in Gaza, more than two years after the deadly October 7, 2023, attack on Israel by Hamas, at the Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, Israel.



# Stixx to headline IF's Lounge Mbabane 1st Anniversary Bash

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini  
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SOUTH African DJ and producer Stixx is poised to take centre stage as the headline act for IF's Lounge Mbabane's highly anticipated 1st anniversary celebration.

Scheduled for December 27, 2025, this milestone event is set to be an unforgettable night of music and celebration in the heart of Mbabane. The anniversary party will be held at IF's Lounge Mbabane, a venue that has quickly become a cultural hot spot for music lovers in the region. Tickets for the event are available for pre-sale at E80, with prices increasing to E120 at the gate. Fans can purchase tickets directly at IF's Lounge locations in Mbabane and Manzini, as well as online through Mojaticket, ensuring easy access for attendees.

Stixx, whose real name is Samuel Seloane, hails from Kwa-Thema and Selcourt in the East Rand of South Africa. Born in 2003 into a family with deep musical roots, his connection to music began almost from infancy, as he first picked drumsticks at the tender age of two. His early musical explorations included deep house and gospel production starting in 2015. Over time, he expanded his repertoire to include Afrosoul, neo-soul, and R&B, before fully immersing himself in the Amapiano genre in late 2020, a genre that has since become a defining element of his artistic identity.

The year 2021 marked a significant step in Stixx's career with the independent release of his EP 'Ngeke Balunge.' This project showcased his distinctive creative vision and set the stage for further growth. Throughout 2022, Stixx dedicated himself



▲ South African DJ and Producer Stixx.

to refining his craft during rigorous studio camps, which opened doors to collaborations with established artists in the South African music scene.

### Breakthrough

His breakthrough came when DBN Gogo, a prominent figure in the Amapiano community, recognised his talent. She

invited him to use her studio facilities and eventually signed him to her label, Zikode Records. Under this banner, Stixx released his debut single "Buya" and contributed production work on tracks such as Venom & Shishiliza's "Love Is Pain," further cementing his reputation as a producer with a soulful and unique sound.

## Velemseni added to Poetry & Acoustics

AN extraordinary celebration of art, music, and poetry is set to unfold at Bahle Gallery 112 on December 4, 2025, as the venue hosts the highly anticipated event, 'Poetry & Acoustics.'

Headlined by the acclaimed Velemseni and Bholoja, this evening will be a vibrant showcase of Eswatini's flourishing creative scene, blending diverse artistic expressions into a cohesive and immersive experience. The event opens with a guided tour of Bahle Gallery's latest exhibition, offering guests an intimate encounter with a thoughtfully curated collection of visual art.

This introduction is designed to spark reflection and creativity, creating a contemplative atmosphere that will resonate throughout the night. The gallery's relaxed and inviting environment serves as the perfect setting, fostering a sense of connection between the audience and the art on display.

Following the tour, 'Poetry & Acoustics' shifts its focus to live performance, opening the stage to emerging talents through an open mic session. Poets, singers, and spoken word artists will have the opportunity to present their work, transforming the evening into a dynamic platform for community engagement and artistic exchange.

The event is organised by Umsamo we

Culture, a pivotal organisation dedicated to promoting Eswatini's creative economy. Umsamo we Culture's mission centres on creating vibrant spaces where artists and audiences can connect, celebrate local artistry, and contribute to the growth of the arts sector. Choosing Bahle Gallery 112 as the venue reflects a deliberate emphasis on intimacy and artistic synergy. Known for its welcoming atmosphere, the gallery provides an ideal backdrop for meaningful interactions between artists and attendees, enhancing the overall experience of the night. This setting not only elevates the performances but also encourages a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of different art forms.

Set for the event, Velemseni is a singer, songwriter, and guitarist from Eswatini who skillfully fuses jazz, rock, neo-soul, and African soul in her music. Her sound is frequently characterized by a cinematic feel and deeply embodies Swazi cultural influences. She debuted with her album 'We Are All People' in 2012 and has showcased her talent at prominent events like the Bushfire Festival.



◀ Velemseni.



▲ Ndumiso Manana.

## Manana release visualiser for 'Embrace Me'

GRAMMY Award-winning musician Ndumiso Manana has unveiled the visualiser for his latest track, 'Embrace Me,' featuring acclaimed South African artist Shekinah.

Since its release, the song has rapidly gained traction, amassing over 12,000 views. 'Embrace Me' is one of the standout visuals from Manana's newest album, 'Our Broken Hearts Mend,' a 16-track collection that invites listeners on an intimate and emotive musical journey. The collaboration with Shekinah adds a dynamic layer to the song, with her masterful verse complementing Manana's soulful delivery, creating a rich blend of sounds that resonates deeply with audiences.

Born in Eswatini, Ndumiso Manana has carved a unique niche in the music industry, demonstrating that artistic expression transcends borders. His versatility shines through as he effortlessly moves between instruments, from the drum kit to the piano, and vocals, delivering heartfelt performances that connect on a profound level. Rooted in a jazz background and as a member of the band Seba Kaapstad alongside Zoë Modiga, Manana's musical journey is marked by innovation and authenticity.

### Creative footprint

Beyond his musical achievements, Manana has expanded his creative footprint this year by securing an advertising deal with Amazon Storefront, where he promotes their latest skincare products. Reflecting on this partnership, Manana shared, "If you know me, you'll know that self-care is important to me. I like to say it's because I'm always performing and travelling, but honestly, I just like smelling and feeling good."

Another significant milestone for Manana in 2024 was his inclusion in the Spotify Radar program. Established nearly four years ago, Spotify Radar is dedicated to spotlighting rising talent worldwide, offering artists a platform to broaden their global reach and accelerate their careers. Manana's participation in this program not only elevates his profile but also serves as a beacon for other Eswatini artists aspiring to gain international recognition. Through Spotify Radar, local musicians are afforded unprecedented exposure, enabling their music to transcend geographic limitations and reach diverse audiences.



FOLLOWING MINNIE DLAMINI CONTROVERSY. . .

# MacG agrees to gender sensitisation training

JOHANNESBURG - Popular podcaster MacGyver “MacG” Mukwevho recently confirmed that he is willing to undergo gender sensitisation sessions.

His decision comes after presenter, TV producer and actress Minnie Dlamini filed a complaint at the Johannesburg Equality Court about hate speech and discrimination.

The case began after MacG made misogynistic remarks during an episode of “Podcast and Chill” in April.

MacG, along with his co-host Sol Phenduka, discussed Dlamini’s breakup with Dr Brian Monaisa. MacG made comments suggesting Dlamini was only interested in relationships for money, saying things like “she just wanted to secure the bag”.

He also commented that the split might be due to Dlamini’s hygiene, making a crude remark about her private parts.

Many viewers saw these remarks as slut-shaming. After the episode aired, the comments went viral and many people, including women’s rights groups and celebrities, spoke out against MacG, calling his statements “vile, degrading and utterly unacceptable.”

In a lengthy statement, Dlamini shared her intent to pursue legal recourse.

Dlamini explained how she had watched in disbelief and deep pain as her name, body and dignity had been dragged through the mud of public discourse, triggered by the “vile, humiliating and inexcusable” comments made by MacG. In August, Dlamini filed a complaint in the Equality Court, asking for a public apology from MacG and Phenduka, a R1.5 million donation to support GBV survivors and 50 hours of



▲ Podcast and Chill’s Macgyver ‘MacG’ Mukwevho.

gender sensitisation training for both hosts.

In his affidavit submitted in October 2025, MacG admitted that he sometimes makes mistakes on his podcast and expressed regret for his comments. He described his words as “speculations” rather than facts, and offered to improve his apology to Dlamini’s satisfaction.

### Rectify

“I am willing to rectify the apology and to mediate the current dispute,” MacG said.

Additionally, he has shown his willingness to take part in the gender sensitisation training if the court requires it.

However, he disagreed with the demand

for the R1.5 million donation, arguing that this matter should be taken to a civil court instead of the Equality Court. “I note the allegations made by Dlamini and submit that, should she be of the view that the episode is defamatory in nature, she can still approach the civil court for an appropriate remedy,” he added. The Equality Court, which deals with cases of unfair discrimination, is expected to make a ruling soon. If it rules in favour of Dlamini, it could lead to similar mandatory training for other media personalities who have faced complaints.

IOL

## Trace Africa rebrands to Trace Ngoma

JOHANNESBURG - Trace, with Canal+ and MultiChoice, has announced the rebrand of Trace Africa to Trace Ngoma.

Trace Ngoma is set to celebrate the rhythms, voices and stories that define the nation’s cultural identity by showcasing homegrown sounds, from amapiano and Afro-pop to maskandi, hip-hop, gqom, lemkompo and urban gospel. “Our customers want to see themselves reflected on screen ... their music, their languages, their culture. Trace Ngoma brings that to life in a powerful way. The rebrand aligns perfectly with our mission to deliver meaningful local entertainment that celebrates who we are as South Africans,” said Wellington Ngwepe, MultiChoice CEO.

The changes will take place on December 18 on DStv Channel 326.

“Trace Ngoma is where music meets identity. It amplifies the rhythms and stories that define South African culture and gives young people a space to connect and feel seen.”

TshisaLive

## All you need to know about Nkalakatha Fest ‘25

JOHANNESBURG - Mandoza’s family are set to honour the late kwaito star’s life this December with the Nkalakatha Festival, inspired by his iconic anthem Nkalakatha first released in 2000.

The festival is set to host giants of kwaito and a combination of other genres, including a dash of amapiano, to keep the crowds entertained. “Nkalakatha Fest isn’t just about entertainment; it’s about celebrating who we are as South Africans: resilient, powerful and united,” said the festival organisers.

The Nkalakatha Fest ’25 marks the beginning of an annual movement, one that merges music, culture and social impact under the spirit of unity. Here’s what you need to know:

### WHO IS HEADLINING THE SHOW?

► The line-up will feature Mdu Masilela, Chomee, Lady Du, Trompies, Boom Shaka, Mgarimbe, Mbali Ngidi, Arthur Mafokate, Professor, Sbu Malawyer, Pitch Black Afro, Bongo Maffin, Rethabile Khumalo, DJ Christos, Toss, Nkalakathaboyz, Skwatta Kamp, Mzambiya, Busiswa, Alaska, Nkiyase, Ralf Gum, Mafikizolo and Dashline.

Most of these artists worked with or alongside Mandoza before he died in 2016.

### WHEN AND WHERE



▲ The late kwaito star Mandoza.

► December 20 at the Nasreo Expo Centre in Johannesburg.

### HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

► Prices range from R350 to R1,860 and tickets are available at Webtickets, Ploek n Pay and Boxer.

### WHAT TIME?

► The event runs from 2pm to 2am. Gates open at 12 noon. The event is restricted to people aged 18 and older. **ThisaLive**



▲ R.Kelly.



▲ The Game.



▲ Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs.

## Get Diddy, R. Kelly out of jail ASAP – The Game

CARLIFONIA - The Game got on his soap box at his birthday party ... grabbing the mic and telling the world to free Diddy and R. Kelly ... and then he started talking baby oil and urination ... and it’s all on video.

TMZ obtained footage from The Game’s Friday night birthday bash in Hollywood, and you hear him voice support for a couple of infamous musicians ... Diddy and Kelly. The Game gets bolder and bolder as he spouts off into the mic ... making light of all the baby oil and urination aspects of the Diddy and Kelly trials ... as some R. Kelly

music starts to play.

He then adds ... “Free all the freaky homies!!!” Seems like The Game was having a helluva night ... other videos from the same club show him smoking and dancing with his friends.

### Pardon

Diddy may be free before long ... he’s confident he’s getting a presidential pardon from Donald Trump sooner than later ... though his release date is not far off on June, 2028. Kelly is likely looking at a longer time behind bars, despite what The Game is saying here ... it appears Kelly won’t be free until 2045 when he’s 79. **TMZ**





DO your shoulders instantly tense up at the thought of the hustle and bustle of the holiday season?

Does your heart skip a beat when you think about spending the entire day with your extended family during the most wonderful time of the year? Does the thought of holiday overspending keep you up at night? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you're not alone. Nearly 9 in 10 adults report experiencing stress during the holidays. Before the holiday stress sneaks up on you, read on to learn how to enjoy your most stress-free holiday season yet.

### 1. Identify your triggers

Holiday stress is manageable, but first, you need to understand your personal triggers. Do certain situations cause you to feel overwhelmed? When you feel stressed, stop and try to consider what may be causing your anxiety. Once you understand your triggers, the other times can help you limit holiday stressors.

### Top causes of holiday stress

According to a 2021 survey by the American Psychiatric Association, the top causes of holiday stress include:

- finding and affording holiday gifts
- planning and affording holiday meals
- working long hours
- traveling
- discussing politics
- spending time with family

The holidays can also be a difficult time of year for people who have lost friends and family members. The memory of the loss can make it harder to cope with holiday season stressors.

### 2. Plan ahead

Finding time for all of your holiday activities can be tricky. In addition to holiday commitments, you may also have to contend with increased traffic. Or you may feel extra pressure to get ahead of work so you can take time off to travel.

Creating an action plan can help relieve stress. Write down all the things you need to do so you can prioritize those that are most important. A list also makes it harder for things to slip your mind.

### 3. Put yourself first

The act of giving gets so much attention during the holidays, it can be easy to forget to give back to yourself. Taking care of yourself can help make it easier for you to take care of others. Set aside some time to do things you enjoy. Find time to exercise, plan a dinner out, or just get a few minutes of fresh air. And don't forget the importance of a regular good night's sleep.

### 4. Keep your finances in check

If you're worried about spending and how it will affect you after the holidays are over, be realistic about what you can afford. The sentiment behind a gift is more important than the cost. Create a budget and stick to it. Spend only what you can afford, and if you can't spend anything, bake a treat or offer your talents and time to your friends and loved ones.

### 5. Honor loved ones you have lost

It may be difficult to celebrate the holiday season if you've lost someone dear to you or

distance makes it challenging to spend time together.

Spend this holiday season reflecting on special memories of lost loved ones. Consider doing something meaningful in their honor.

And if you're unable to spend time with loved ones, volunteer your time to a local organization where your smiling face could change someone's day.

### 6. Don't be afraid to say no

Understand that it's okay to say no. Try to say "yes" to the events and things you know will bring you joy. Say "no" to obligations you know will cause you heartache and disappointment.

If working a few extra hours of overtime will make you happy so you can treat someone you love, it may be worth doing. But if your boundary-crossing relative invites you to a holiday party, feel free to decline. You'll experience less stress and worry by saying no.

### Who is most likely to experience holiday stress?

A 2021 survey notes that some people may be more likely to experience holiday stress than others, such as:

- younger adults

- healthcare workers
- retail workers
- parents

Even among parents, moms are 14% more likely than dads to feel increased stress during the holidays.

### Symptoms to look for

Holiday stress looks much the same as regular day-to-day stress. It can affect the body in many different ways. Symptoms can include the following:

- anxiety
- sadness
- headaches
- body aches
- inability to sleep
- irritability

### Should you see a doctor?

If you've tried the tips above and your mood hasn't improved or your symptoms continue well after the holidays, consider speaking with a mental health professional.

They can help you determine your biggest stressors and find ways to better cope with holiday stress.

**Q: Could my holiday stress be caused by major depressive disorder with a seasonal pattern?**

### Anonymous patient

**A:** Major depressive disorder with a seasonal pattern can be difficult to differentiate from holiday stress. The major difference is the duration and severity of your symptoms. Major depressive disorder with a seasonal pattern must meet all of the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder, including symptoms and duration of symptoms. The criteria for this condition are significantly different than feeling "down in the dumps" for a day or two or having anxiety about holiday events. If you suspect that you're having a bout of major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern, consult your doctor immediately.

*\*Answers represent the opinions of our medical experts. All content is strictly informational and should not be considered medical advice.*

### Takeaway

When it comes to stress, it's important to listen to what your body and mind are telling you. If a situation is too stressful, ask yourself why you feel the way you do and consider what you can do to better manage your stress. By learning how to cope with day-to-day stress, you can be better prepared to tackle holiday stress.

**Healthline**





# Chicago coach expecting ‘immediate impact’ from Mbokazi

CHICAGO Fire FC director of football and head coach Gregg Berhalter says they are expecting an immediate impact from newly-signed defender Mbekezeli Mbekezeli Mbokazi. The US Major League Soccer outfit announced the signing of the Orlando Pirates defender on Tuesday.

“Chicago Fire FC today announced that the Club has acquired defender Mbekezeli Mbokazi from Orlando Pirates of South Africa’s Betway Premiership.

“Mbokazi will occupy a U-22 initiative slot and an international roster position, and his contract will run through 2029, with a Club option for the 2029/30 season. Per Club and MLS Policy, terms of the deal were not disclosed,” read a statement from Chicago.

Berhalter has welcomed the signing of the 20-year-old Bafana Bafana defender.

“We are excited to welcome Mbekezeli to the Club as we further strengthen our back line,” Berhalter told the club’s official website.

“In his young career, he has already shown high potential and proven himself to be a strong leader and competitor on the international level. We expect immediate impact and room to grow in future.”

Will Mbokazi play in the Carling KO final?



▲ Newly-signed defender Mbekezeli Mbekezeli Mbokazi.

Following the announcement about his departure, questions have been raised on whether Mbokazi will be available for Saturday’s Carling Knockout final against Marumo Gallants. Pirates, however, have since announced that Mbokazi will remain with the club until the final official fixture of 2025.

“He will then embark on a new chapter of his football journey across the Atlantic, joining Chicago Fire as the next step in what promises to be an exceptional career,” read a statement from Pirates.

Mbokazi’s growth has been noth-

ing short of meteoric. In his debut year as a professional, he has already lifted the MTN8 and has earned a Bafana Bafana call-up. The young Hluhluwe-born defender has been named by Hugo Broos in his final squad for the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Morocco.

He made his senior national team debut in May 2025 in a 2-0 win against Mozambique and was also called up for FIFA World Cup qualifiers against Lesotho and Nigeria during the September 2025 FIFA International window.

(The Citizen)

# Serena Williams denies she plans tennis return

SERENA Williams insisted on Tuesday she had no plans to make a return to tennis after her registration with the sport’s drug-testing body sparked reports of a dramatic comeback. The 23-time Grand Slam singles champion has not competed since a third-round loss at the 2022 US Open left her one short of the all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, held by Margaret Court in the women’s game and Novak Djokovic in men’s tennis.

“It is correct that she is back on the Registered testing Pool list,” Adrian Bassett, a spokesman for the the International Tennis Integrity Agency, the sport’s drug-testing body told AFP in London on Tuesday in response to media reports the 44-year-old American had registered.

“At this stage we have no other information.”

But Williams denied she was planning a return to competitive tennis by posting later Tuesday on X: “Omg (Oh My God) yall (you all) I’m NOT coming back. This wildfire is crazy”.



▲ Serena Williams.

Following her three-set defeat by Australia’s Ajla Tomljanovic at Flushing Meadows three years ago, Williams said she did not want to use the word “retiring” but instead explained she was “evolving” away from tennis.

Players who decide to return to testing need to provide information about their time and locations when they are available to give samples.

They also need to complete testing for six months before they are allowed to return to competition.

Williams’s older sister, Venus, – seven times major singles champion – returned to tennis in July at the age of 45 after almost two years away from the Women’s Tennis Association tour.

When Venus, a seven-time major singles champion, came back at the DC Open, she spoke about wishing Serena would join her on tour again.

The sisters won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles as a pair and three Olympic gold medals as well.

(Supersport)

# Oosthuizen, Grace, Burmester headline Alfred Dunhill Champs field

LOUIS Oosthuizen and a host of former Alfred Dunhill Championship winners will lead an immensely strong South African challenge chasing glory in the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Royal Johannesburg next week.

Oosthuizen, the 2023 champion, will be joined on the famed East Course from 11-14 December by former champions Branden Grace, Christiaan Bezuidenhout, Brandon Stone, Richard Sterne, Shaun Norris and Ockie Strydom.

Together they make up an impressive collection of seven of the last 12 winners of the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

All are looking to become only the third multiple winners of the Alfred Dunhill Championship in its history.

The home challenge is fur-

ther strengthened by PGA Tour champion Aldrich Potgieter and multiple DP World Tour champions Dean Burmester and Thriston Lawrence.

Spain’s Pablo Larrazabal will form part of an impressive list of European challengers seeking to end South Africa’s dominance of this title.

Larrazabal was the last European to win the Alfred Dunhill Championship in 2019 when he claimed one of the most memorable victories in the history of this Sunshine Tour and DP World Tour co-sanctioned tournament as he battled through the pain of blistered feet to win at Leopard Creek.

England’s John Parry also heads to South Africa looking to break the local hold on this title, and amidst a successful past season for him.

(Supersport)



▲ Louis Oosthuizen

# Barca’s Olmo out for month after shoulder dislocation

Barcelona midfielder Dani Olmo faces a month on the sidelines after dislocating his shoulder, the club said on Wednesday.

“Olmo suffered a dislocation in his left shoulder during yesterday’s match against Atletico Madrid,” said Barca in a statement.

“Following the tests carried out, a conservative treatment has been chosen. The approximate recovery time is one month.”

Spain international Olmo

suffered the injury falling as he scored in the 3-1 LaLiga win over Atletico on Tuesday which took Barca four points clear at the top of the table.

The 27-year-old has suffered various injury problems since joining the Catalan giants in 2024 from RB Leipzig.

Olmo joins Fermin Lopez, Gavi and Marc-Andre ter Stegen on the sidelines, ahead of a key Champions League match against Eintracht Frankfurt next week. (Supersport)



▲ Barcelona midfielder Dani Olmo.



# Haaland hits century in Man City's historic thriller



ERLING Haaland made history as the Manchester City striker became the fastest player to reach 100 Premier League goals in a remarkable 5-4 win against Fulham on Tuesday.

Haaland's clinical finish in the first half at Craven Cottage took him to his century in just 111 league appearances for City.

He shattered the previous record set by former Newcastle and Blackburn star Alan Shearer, who took 124 matches to reach 100 goals.

After Haaland's landmark, Phil Foden scored twice to help City race into a 5-1 lead.

But Fulham scored three times in a furious second-half fightback that fell just short when Josh King's shot was cleared off the line by Josko Gvardiol in the final seconds.

Second-placed City moved within two points of leaders Arsenal, who host Brentford in their game in hand on Wednesday.

It's incredible, impressive.

▲ Erling Haaland.

He was outstanding, today he was unbelievable. He made a fantastic goal. Hopefully, he's starving hungry to continue with this club to make more and more goals," City boss Pep Guardiola said of Haaland.

Yet after squandering a two-goal advantage in their last-gasp 3-2 win against Leeds on Saturday, Guardiola was alarmed by the latest meltdown from his leaky defence.

"Of course, I was concerned. But this will help us in future games. Every game is a new team for some players. You have to make a process to start to correct," he said.

"I'm so old, and the players don't respect me! They don't have to treat their manager in that way.

"It only happens in this league. We played a fantastic game. Listen, there were some really positive things in what we have done. In the end, it was a question of character and resilience."

If City are to overhaul Arsenal and win the

seventh English title of the Guardiola era, they will need Haaland to maintain his astonishingly prolific form.

Haaland had failed to score in his previous three games against Newcastle, Bayer Leverkusen and Leeds.

The 25-year-old, signed from Borussia Dortmund in 2022, ended that mini-drought with the latest milestone in his glittering City career.

- City survive -

Haaland produced a sumptuous finish to put City ahead in the 17th minute, giving him 15 league goals this term and 20 in all competitions.

Jeremy Doku's precise cut-back arrowed towards Haaland and he timed his run perfectly to unleash a ferocious blast that whistled past Fulham keeper Bernd Leno from 12 yards.

Haaland turned from scorer to provider in the 37th minute as City doubled their lead with another eye-catching effort.

Showing strength and poise in equal measure, Haaland worked space to clip a pin-point pass through to Reijnders and the Dutch midfielder scooped a deft chip over Leno for his first goal since August.

Foden notched City's third in the 44th minute, lashing a superb strike into the top corner from the edge of the area.

Smith Rowe reduced the deficit in first half stoppage-time, steering a header past Gianluigi Donnarumma from Harry Wilson's cross.

(Supersport)

## Appollis warns Orlando Pirates ahead of Gallants clash

ORLANDO Pirates winger Oswin Appollis has warned his teammates not to underestimate Marumo Gallants when the sides meet in the Carling Knockout final this coming weekend.

The Buccaneers are set to meet with Bahlabane Ba Ntwa in what is expected to be a thrilling final at the New Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane on Saturday (kickoff is at 6pm).

"Marumo Gallants are a very strong team and we won't go there and undermine them. It's our job to work as hard as they do to get the trophy," said Appollis during a Carling Knockout media day at the Rand Stadium on Tuesday.

Appollis has hit the ground running since joining the club from Polokwane City at the start of the season and he credits the Pirates management for making it easier for him to improve his game by signing quality players.

"There is a lot of work still to be done. It is obvious, there have been improvements in the team with all the players that have been signed," said Appollis.

"For me, I have to continue doing my job, and with the players that we have and the quality that they have, it has also helped me as a person. As you can see, I'm not the only one who is improving. There are a lot of players who are improving with the number of qualities that we have in



▲ Orlando Pirates winger Oswin Appollis.

the team. "I think with the quality of the players that the club has with its depth, as you can see, and I will mention names like Rele (Mofokeng), Spola (Mbule), Tshepang (Moremi), it is already a step for us who came here new.

"We already have to deal with the quality in the team, so it is for you to adapt to the style of play, and then eventually you will improve."

How Mbule initiated Appollis' move to Pirates

Meanwhile, Appollis has revealed

that Sipho Mbule initiated his move to Pirates from Polokwane City.

"Yes, he did that [asked for me to come to Pirates], he did tell the chairman that.

"We came from SuperSport [United] already and created a small bond. Even when I went to Polokwane, he always checked up on me to see if I'm okay," commented Appollis.

(The Citizen)

## Teenager follows Verstappen's path to Formula 1

RED Bull fast-tracked Max Verstappen into Formula One as a 17-year-old in 2015 and in Arvid Lindblad, confirmed as a Racing Bulls driver on Tuesday, they believe they have another special teenage talent.

Only four-time world champion Verstappen, Canadian Lance Stroll and Italian Kimi Antonelli were younger when they started out.

Formula 1's governing body changed the rules after Verstappen made sure that the sport's drivers were over 18 before they raced at the highest level.

Even so, they granted Lindblad a super licence as a 17-year-old after the team requested a

dispensation.

**SPEED AND MATURITY**

Red Bull have long spoken of the youngster in glowing terms as a face of the future and nothing has swayed their thinking even after a difficult Formula Two season, where he is sixth with a round remaining.

The statement confirming his arrival alongside New Zealander Liam Lawson spoke of his raw speed, maturity and potential.

"Arvid's rapid progression marks him as one of the standout young talents in the sport," said Racing Bulls principal Alan Permane.

(Supersport)



▲ Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez.



MTN PREMIER LEAGUE BUILD-UP

Stories By Chris Dlamini

This league is unprecedented – no one would have thought the so-called minnows would have such dominion over the so-called big guns, at least not up to midway through the first round. As is, Nsingizini Hotspurs are going for their consecutive league title - they took the summit last week from Manzini Sea Birds and look good to go all the way to win it again, come May.

On second, you find Sea Birds, a yet-to-lose Ezulwini United on third, then Rangers on fourth. Mind you, any of these teams can be at the summit after this weekend. Nsingizini

Hotspurs have giants Royal Leopard to beat to retain the top spot, and Sea Birds will look to reclaim the summit on Friday against Ubombo Sugar, while Rangers and Ezulwini will also be eyeing nothing but a win, making it all so interesting as they pile pressure on the defending champions and other big guns playing catch-up underneath them.

RANGERS AIMS TO SHOOT DOWN STINGERS

Rangers vs. Ezulwini United

**Date:** Saturday, Devenber 6, 2025  
**Venue:** King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium, Nhllangano  
**Kick-off:** 3pm

Victorious in the past week against giant teams, fourth-placed Rangers (Bolova) and third-placed Ezulwini United (Stingers) face off. Rangers come from a hard-fought 1-0 win over an unlucky Mbabane Highlanders, while Ezulwini, the only unbeaten team so far in the league, stunned a star-studded army outfit, Young Buffaloes with a 1-0 defeat. Ezulwini currently has 16 points, two short of leaders and defending champions Nsingizini Hotspurs and level with second-placed Manzini Sea Birds. The Stingers are away to Rangers at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium, the home team’s slaughterhouse. Could this be the Stingers’ first fall of the season? Rangers will be in front of their home crowd and hoping to be land the first blow to Ezulwini and go above them inside the top four as they are all in the E120 000 first round leaders’ incentive race. It will be one game that teams like Nsingizini Hotspurs and Manzini Sea Birds, as well as those looking to get ahead of the two, will be so keen on. This match piles pressure on both Nsingizini and Sea Birds - should either slip, Rangers or Ezulwini will be ready to pounce, especially if one of them wins. It is also an unpredictable fixture, but with the potential of a thriller with goals. Last season, Ezulwini had the last laugh with 2-1 win in the second round following a share of the spoils with a 1-1 margin in the opening round.

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

Hleliso Gamedze (Rangers forward)  
Alvin Shabashie (Ezulwini defensive midfielder)

LOG STANDINGS:

Rangers - 4th (15 points)  
Ezulwini - 3rd (16 points)

PERFORMANCE GUIDE:

**Rangers**  
W D W D W  
**Ezulwini**  
W D W D W

PREVIOUS MATCH RESULTS:

M. Highlanders 0-1 Rangers  
Ezulwini 1-0 Y. Buffaloes

HEAD-TO-HEAD:

01/02/25  
Ezulwini 2-1 Rangers

29/09/24  
Rangers 1-1 Ezulwini

TOUGH DEBUT MATCH FOR UBOMBO’S MILTON

Manzini Sea Birds vs. Ubombo Sugar

**Date:** Friday, December 5, 2025  
**Venue:** Nsukuwansuku Stadium, Mhlume  
**Kick-off:** 3pm

Coming from a 5-1 baptism of fire at the hands of Royal Leopard last Saturday, Ubombo Sugar visits a red-hot Manzini Sea Birds on Friday. It feels like jumping out of the pot right into the fire – that’s just the situation for Bafana Bashukela, as Ubombo fondly goes.

However, they have in the space of just over two weeks brought in two technical experts, first Percy Shongwe from Red Rhinos and now Milton Dlamini as the new head coach to replace Gcina Dlamini who joined struggling Manzini Wanderers a month ago. Dlamini comes in when Ubombo Sugar must move out of the relegation quagmire and also put up a good challenge in the lucrative Ingwenyama Cup. He must overturn a misfortune of results gripped by four consecutive defeats, a win, and another defeat last weekend in their last six matches. These statistics bring little or no hope at all when put up against those of Izinyoni Zolwandle (Sea Birds). The latter, amid having the squad to challenge for honours, had been on a five-match winning spree before they crashed 1-0 to Nsingizini Hotspurs last Saturday in a top-of-the-table clash. Interestingly, Ubombo Sugar beat Sea Birds 2-1 and then played a goalless draw last season, which could be one thing they look up to for boosting their morale.

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

Philani Mkhonto (Sea Birds attacking midfielder)  
(U. Sugar midfielder)

LOG STANDINGS:

Sea Birds - 2nd (16 points)  
U. Sugar - 14th (7 points)

PERFORMANCE GUIDE:

**Sea Birds**  
L W W W W  
**U. Sugar**  
L W L L L

PREVIOUS MATCH RESULTS:

U. Sugar 1-5 R. Leopard  
Ns. Hotspurs 1-0 Sea Birds

HEAD-TO-HEAD:

03/05/25  
U. Sugar 0-0 Sea Birds  
08/12/24  
Sea Birds 1-2 U. Sugar

WHO’S THE DAILY BREAD HERE?

Moneni Pirates vs Mbabane Swallows

**Date:** Sunday, December 7, 2025  
**Venue:** Mavuso Sports Centre, Manzini  
**Kick-off:** 3.45pm

Both are inconsistent so far, and Moneni Pirates has already played their first match since parting with Malawian gaffer Meck Mwase and his fellow countryman assistant Charles Manda ahead of last weekend, it remains an open game. Interestingly, Moneni’s spokesperson Mlungisi ‘Sluga’ Simelane was on national radio saying they are playing their daily bread or sinkhwa sangemihla without mentioning their actual rivals on match week nine. However, it is

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▲ Gogo with teqball coach Naomi Du Pont and youngsters.



▲ Local comedians Gogo and Slwane having a light moment kids during the national disability day.

# Sport is joy for all – ‘Scara’ Thindwa

Stories by Chris Dlamini

## FOSTERING disability inclusion for socio-economic development.

This was the theme for the International Day for People with Disabilities (IDD) 2025. The special day was celebrated at Mavuso Sports and Exhibition Centre with some entertainment and sports activities in the presence of mainly children, adults, and the country’s political figures, among others.

One of dignitaries who joined the children in this celebration was football legend, Absalom

‘Scara’ Thindwa.

“Sport is unique. You can use it anywhere and today it has united us, the children with disabilities and even those who cannot play are still having fun,” said Thindwa.

A South Africa’s Kaizer Chiefs and Eswatini legend, Thindwa said the power of sport did not

have boundaries as it permitted those with disabilities to enjoy and play it as well.

“Sport is for all, disabled or not. It’s sports that United blacks and whites in South Africa

where apartheid once ruled. So, it’s a wonderful day to see the country united in sports here,” said Thindwa.

Thindwa was about to watch a football game between Members of Parliament (MPs) against

Local Government. Also set to feature was Eswatini Sports and Recreation Council (ESRC)

and People with Disabilities while others had aerobics to partake in. Joining Thindwa and

others for the football match was Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Thulisile Dladla.

Also present was Minister Richard Chauke, Athletics Eswatini’s (AE) Hamilton Mhlanga, and ESRC CEO Darius Dlomo, to name a few.



▲ Eswatini legend Absalom ‘Scara’Thindwa during the national discability sports day held on Wednesday at Mavuso Sports Centre.

# Pool’s Bhubesi, Zim’s Bhibhido in E30k pot battle



▲ Zimbabwean Blessing ‘Bhibhido’Mazarurwi to face local pool star Nathi ‘Bhubhesi’ Sihlongonyane in the E30 000 Pool tournament.

WHOEVER sinks the black the right way will be E30 000 richer on Friday.

A big money match is on the cards at the Manzini Sports Lounge, with E30 000 at stake for

the winner. Only two players are involved, and they will be doing this not just themselves but their countries too.

Eswatini’s Nathi, Bhubesi, Sihlongonyane will face off with Zimbabwe’s Blessing and Bhibhido.

## sports Lounge

Muzarurwi in the E30 000 pot battle match billed for the Manzini Sports Lounge, located at

Cardo Square, Ngwane Park in Manzini.

This is a sponsored match. Similar pot battles have been playing in different parts of the

kingdom and beyond the borders. The highest battle between locals has been between

REPS Pool Club star Norman Khoza and Manzini Pool Club star Sithembiso and Dodge Matsebula.

## Three battles

The latter has won all three battles against Khoza, the lowest pot being set at E20 000.

Bhubesi will take on Zimbabwe’s Bhibhido, a very top player who is well respected

back at

home,” said one of the people behind the renewed partnership with the Sports Lounge,

Sithembiso ‘Dodge’ Matsebula.

It is expected that the Eswatini versus Mozambique clash will be broadcast live in the Dodge

SM Media-Live Pool Facebook page specialising in billiards or cue sports. Kick-off is at 3pm.

Matsebula said they hosted a six-player mini tournament on Wednesday to help players

## Pool Tournament

prepare for the upcoming E138 000 Guaranteed Pool Tournament full of stars from South

Africa (SA), Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique.

The tournament to feature teams and singles is the second edition after last year’s was

valued at E90 000 and hosted by the Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS) Pool Team.

The second edition package has increased to E138 000 and will be held at the Police.



By Sibusiso Masilela  
sibusisom@rubiconmedia.group

# EOCGA signs MoU with Taipei NOC

**HISTORIC!**  
The Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Taipei Olympic Committee. This follows a fruitful meeting between the two sports bodies held in Taipei. The MoU includes high performance training between the two countries ahead of the 2028 Olympic Games.

This is the fourth international MoU signed by the national sports body after the standings one with Namibia, Lesotho and Seychelles. The Eswatini delegation comprised President Adam ‘Bomber’ Mthethwa, Treasurer Zakhele Zulu and Chief Executive Officer Maxwell Jele. The Asian nation was represented by Vice President Chia Fu Tsai and Secretary Lisa HSU. Jele said the new agreement will enhance the development of Sports in the country.

“We are pleased with one new partnership, which will certainly take local sports to greater heights. This partnership will help us implement various programs such as the national High-performance strategy,” he said. EOCGA is currently preparing a mixed junior national team for the 2025 ANOCA games in Angola.

The organisation has further announced an E7 million scholarship program for the 2028 Olympic Games.

The team comprises nine Athletes from four sporting codes: Athletics, Taekwondo, Boxing and Swimming. The biennial international youth Games will take place between December 10-20, 2025.

The squad comprises prospects such as Luca Fraser (Swimming), Robert Bhila (Boxing) and Siphowokuhle Ndlela (Taekwondo). Fraser is fresh from winning the Cathy Doyle championships, while the



▲ Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association personnel and members of the Taipei Olympic Committee after signing the memorandum of understanding in Taipei.

duo of Robert and Siphivokuhle won medals during the Inaugural African Schools games in Algeria earlier this year.

The team leader of the delegation will be EOCGA board member Thobile Magagula.

The coaches from the various disciplines include Sibusiso ‘SwaziBolt’ Matsenjwa (Athletics), Mbongeni ‘Ndo’ Sibandze (Taekwondo), Maxwell Ngwenya (Boxing) and Mduduzi Xaba (Swimming).

## Tough run for Zesco United in Confed. Cup

By Sibusiso Masilela  
sibusisom@rubiconmedia.group

THE going is getting tougher for Eswatini international defender Lindo Mkhonta in the CAF Confederation Cup.

The utility defender’s Zesco United has lost two matches in the group stages of the continent’s second premier club competition. This follows their recent 3-2 loss to Al Masry at the Levy Mwanawasa Stadium in Ndola. They opened the group stages with a 1-0 away loss to Zamalek in Group D. Zesco still four games to play in the tournament to boost their chances of advancing to the knockout stages.

The matches include back-to-back clashes with Soweto giants Kaizer Chiefs. Mkhonta did not comment on the matter when compiling this report.

Mkhonta is part of the country’s foreign-based stars, which include Justice Figuaredo (Richards Bay, South Africa), Mxolisi Mkhonto (Morapule Wanderers, Botswana), Banele Ndzabandzaba (Botswana Defence Force) and Sizwe Gwebu (Uganda police). He has got various Sihlangu caps under several coaches, such as Kostadin Papic (Serbia), Dominic Kunene, Zdravko Logarusic (Croatia), among others.

Zesco recently clinched an over E2 million one season sponsorship with Access Bank. The money will help the Ndola-based side cover its expenses in the current campaign, including the CAF Confederation Cup and the Zambian Super League.



▲ DiskiBet Head of Marketing Thuthu Mbingo, Teddy Hlophe (Head of Operations), Ngonini FC representative Bheki Dlamini, HRFA’s Comfort Shongwe and Ntokozo Tsela.

## Ngonini FC enters DiskiBet Hall of fame

By Sibusiso Masilela  
sibusisom@rubiconmedia.group

**NGONINI FC are the first team to enter the DiskiBet hall of fame.**

The Northern Hhohho promotion side became the first team to win a brand new DiskiBet kit, having accumulated over 1,500 votes.

This was during the registration campaign for the inaugural knockout tournament, sponsored by the betting

company under the auspices of the Hhohho Regional Football Association (HRFA).

The exercise was part of the E250 000 DiskiBet knockout.

DiskiBet Head of Marketing and Public Relations Officer, Thuthu Mbingo, congratulated the team for its achievement in a presentation held at Sigwaca House on Wednesday.

“We are pleased to announce the winners of the kit following their good record during the registration exercise. We will continue partnering with the Hhohho in developing

football in the country,” she said.

Ngonini FC representative Bheki Dlamini thanked the sponsor for the gesture.

“We are honoured to be the first winners of the kit and will continue supporting the sponsor in its business endeavors,” he said.

HRFA Chairman Comfort Shongwe also thanked the sponsor for supporting regional football.

“We thank Diski Bet for investing in Hhohho, and they have encouraged us to continue coming up with innovations in developing the sport,” he said.





**Chicago coach  
expecting ‘immediate  
impact’ from Mbokazi**

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**Ngonini FC  
enters DiskiBet  
Hall of fame**

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**EOCGA signs MoU  
with Taipei NOC**

... The memorandum of understanding between EOCGA and the Taipei Olympic Committee include high-performance training between the two countries ahead of the 2028 Olympic Games. *Page 19*