



EU's E550m boost for vocational education, youth empowerment

By Silindzelwe Nxumalo
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TO mark the International Day of Education on Wednesday, the European Union (EU) in Eswatini signed new financing agreements with the Government of Eswatini worth E562 million (EUR 27 million), which are aimed at supporting market-driven vocational education and training (TVET) in the country, empowerment of disadvantaged youth and women in vulnerable situations as well as support to civil society organisations.

■ SEE FULL STORY ON PAGE 2



PM strengthens ties with Buganda Kingdom

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EU's E550m boost for vocational education, youth empowerment

By Silindzelwe Nxumalo

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TO mark the International Day of Education on Wednesday, the European Union (EU) in Eswatini signed new financing agreements with the Government of Eswatini worth E562 million (EUR 27 million), which are aimed at supporting market-driven vocational education and training (TVET) in the country, empowerment of disadvantaged youth and women in vulnerable situations as well as support to civil society organisations.

This support will be channeled under the EU MIP 2021 – 2027. EU Ambassador to Eswatini, Dessislava Choumelova, signed the agreements in Mbabane together with the Acting Prime Minister, Thulisile Dladla, in the presence of three Cabinet Ministers, Minister of Economic Planning and Development, Dr Tambo Gina, Minister of Education and Training, Owen Nxumalo, and Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs, Bongani Nzima.

In her speech during the signing ceremony, Ambassador Choumelova said the EU was currently increasing, in a significant way, its investment in education in partner countries, including Eswatini, stressing that education was a cornerstone to economic and social development in pursuit of peace and prosperity and towards achieving the SDGs. The ambassador highlighted the transformational power of education as the strongest social equalizer.

Choumelova went on to detail that following an extensive and inclusive consultation process, the Multi-Indicative Programme (MIP) a cooperation framework between the EU and Eswatini Government for the period 2021 – 2027, was developed and adopted.

She said through the consultation process a single priority area was identified and selected, which was the Human Development and Social Inclusion with two interlinked sectors of intervention which are market-driven vocational education and training (TVET), and empowerment of disadvantaged youth and women in vulnerable situations.

Choumelova stated that this programme is now being implemented with an action plan adopted in the autumn of 2023 entitled Skills



▲ The EU Ambassador to Eswatini, Dessislava Choumelova and Acting Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla show the signed agreements, flanking them are Cabinet ministers.

for Youth Employability, Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Programme in Eswatini and with some separate supporting measures.

“The financial agreements for these two action plans is what we are here to sign today and amount to E557 million (27 million EUR),” she said.

When explaining the focus on the youth, the ambassador recalled that in her exchanges with the youth in Eswatini, she always reminds them that the most precious asset they have is their education and their skills.

“It is the only possession that no one can take away. Education is the smartest, most powerful investment in our future, a cornerstone to economic and social development, and its transformational power is the strongest social equalizer,” she said.

The ambassador said for this investment to work, there must be matching between skills and jobs, and that key challenges for the youth in Eswatini are high unemployment rates coupled with lack of relevant skills for the labour market and or entrepreneurship.

“Our programme prioritises bringing EU support as close as possible to the people in the most vulnerable situation in Eswatini, to support progress towards the SDGs,” she said.

She further stated that concretely, the action plan for 2023 focuses on empowering the disadvantaged youth and women via skills, income generation and employment by improving access to formal and non-

formal education and the quality and relevance of the TVET (technical and vocational education and training) system in close partnership with the private sector and CSOs.

“The first component of the action will support capacity building and facilitate public-private collaboration and in particular focus on strengthening the capacity of TVET providers and private sector organisations to offer inclusive and quality training in priority growth sectors such as the agri-food sector, hospitality and tourism, renewable energy, manufacturing, ICT and the creative industries,” she said.

She said by strengthening the TVET system within Eswatini, economic opportunities would be unlocked and enabling the successful and inclusive transition of young people into the labour market.

“The second component looks at promoting a holistic approach to empower vulnerable groups among youth. It will include school dropouts and their reintegration, support to teachers, linking informal or non-formal and formal education, raising GBV awareness and prevention, provide mental health support, social inclusion of people with disability,” she said.

She added that the action will be building on previous and ongoing programmes (EU and non-EU) in collaboration with local authorities and CSOs, to have bigger impact.

She stated that the two components will be linked and run in parallel to create synergies, and they will also be supported by horizontal measures such as technical assistance,

exchange of public expertise and twinning and well as by strategic communication and visibility activities on EU cooperation to raise wider awareness of the action.

“It is a long-term action with focus on this one sector in order to have a real impact, as we are talking about skills for employment and not only skills for skills,” she said.

Acting Prime Minister, Dladla, in her response, thanked the EU for its support, saying it will go a long way in not only transforming lives through education in Eswatini, but also providing the necessary skills for jobs for emaSwati youth.

Minister of Economic planning and Development Dr Tambo Gina said the new programme which will see the country overcome the challenge of unemployment and the unemployability of the youth while at the same time providing the requisite capacitation of the civil society organisations to conduct their business accordingly and facilitate positive development of the economy and people.

“The financial support going to the two projects is Euro 27 million which is approximately E562 million. On behalf of His Majesty’s government, I wish to thank you, Your Excellency, for the continued support and positive response to our needs,” he said.

The minister stated that this gesture is an indication of a good cooperation that exists between this country and the EU, and demonstrates the EU’s commitment to support the country technically, financially and morally even in times of difficulty.

“The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini remains cognisant of the development milestones achieved in our partnership with the EU over the past 40 years and we look forward to the positive outcomes of the two projects we are gathered here about which we believe will bring about positive changes in the lives of many EmaSwati and in the development of this country,” he said.

Minister of Education and Training Owen Nxumalo said for a long time, the Ministry has been working on improving the provision of technical vocational training.

He stated that they have developed a TVET policy which was launched in 2022 to address some of the challenges they experience in providing inclusive quality TVET programmes.

“The ministry is mainly focusing on aligning skills development with Industry needs. It is exciting to note that the EU Multi- Annual indicative programme will enable the ministry to address this gap in skills development. We are eager to also align our programme with industry 4.0, which emphasizes the production of employees of the 21st Century and beyond,” he said.

Nxumalo stated that as a ministry, they regard entrepreneurship as critical for all the TVET programmes, and therefore intend to integrate it into all the TVET programmes, so as to produce job creators instead of job seekers.

“This will directly impact industrialisation in the country while creating more job opportunities for the youth and marginalised groups. The collaboration between the government and the EU delegation is highly valued as it will help the Ministry of Education and Training drive its interventions targeting to improve access of youth, women and vulnerable groups to TVET programmes,” he said.



▲ The EU Ambassador to Eswatini, Dessislava Choumelova and Acting Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla and some Cabinet ministers posing for a group picture with some ECOT students after the signing ceremony on Wednesday.

Stories by Ncaba Ntshakala

PM concludes Uganda trip, strengthens ties with Buganda Kingdom

... Prime Minister Russell Dlamini acknowledged the importance of cultural ties and shared values but emphasised the critical role African Kingdoms play in promoting peace and stability across the continent.



▲ The Katikikiro Charles Peter Mayiga guides Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini during a tour at Bulange, Mengo on Tuesday. (Photo Cred; Peter Sserugo.)

FOLLOWING a productive week in Uganda for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77 Summits, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini, Russell Dlamini concluded his visit with a courtesy call to the Buganda Kingdom Bulange Mengo on Tuesday.

The Buganda Kingdom is a historical and cultural powerhouse in Uganda. Warmly received by Buganda's Prime Minister also referred to as Katikikiro, Charles Peter Mayiga, the Eswatini delegation, led by the Prime Minister, engaged in private discussions followed by a press briefing. Mayiga outlined Buganda's rich history and highlighted its successful joint investments with the Ugandan government, emphasising the benefits these initiatives have brought to the Ugandan people. He further noted that while valuing this collaborative spirit, Buganda remains steadfast in its pursuit of a federal system, believing it will empower the Kingdom to better serve its people.

During the press briefing, Buganda Premier Charles Peter Mayiga said the two leaders engaged in fruitful discussions that explored opportunities for collaboration between the two Kingdoms and Uganda as a whole. The meeting highlighted the deep-rooted connection between the Kingdoms, woven together by shared customs and traditions.

He shared that the two Kingdoms share a strong bond. Mayiga was speaking on behalf of His Majesty Kabaka Mutebi II. He further encouraged the Kingdom of Eswatini to consider investment opportunities within Uganda, leveraging the existing cultural affinities and strong bilateral relations.

In response, Prime Minister Russell Dlamini acknowledged the importance of cultural ties and shared values but emphasised the critical role African Kingdoms play in promoting peace and stability across the continent. He said that even though we may be willing to compromise on other matters on the issue of peace, African Kingdoms must stand firm. He emphasized that Africans have a responsibility to our people and to the future of our continent to advocate for unity and harmony."

Prime Minister, Russell Mmiso Dlamini, made a compelling call for Ugandans to join forces with other African nations in promoting peace and upholding dignity across the continent.

His visit to Buganda's administration offices at Mengo served as a platform to reiterate the importance of collaboration and respect in fostering strong African partnerships.

The Premier expressed Eswatini's deep appreciation for Buganda and emphasized

the critical role of lasting relationships in Africa's progress. He urged Ugandans to contribute to lasting peace and development across the continent, highlighting the power of collective efforts in overcoming challenges and achieving shared goals.

Challenges

Both Dlamini and Mayiga painted a vision of a future where African nations collaborate freely, sharing knowledge and tackling global challenges with a united front. This vision lies at the heart of the strong relationship between Eswatini and Buganda, with leaders from both sides regularly exchanging knowledge and experiences.

The Buganda Kingdom is a Bantu Kingdom within Uganda. The Kingdom of the Baganda people, Buganda is the largest of the traditional Kingdoms in present-day East Africa, consisting of Buganda's Central Region, including the Ugandan capital Kampala. The 14 million Baganda make up the largest Ugandan region, representing approximately 16 per cent of Uganda's population.



▲ The Prime Minister being welcomed by Buganda Prime Minister Charles Peter Mayiga.

... Minister Pholile Shakantu fosters relations at NAM, G77 Summits

WHILE Prime Minister Russell Dlamini led Eswatini's delegation at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77 Summits in Uganda this week, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Affairs Pholile Shakantu utilised the opportunity to forge crucial bilateral ties on the diplomatic front for the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Minister Pholile Shakantu held productive meetings with two key counterparts; Philippines Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Minister Ivan John Enrile Uy and Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla.

The discussions tackled a range of issues relevant to both the Kingdom of Eswatini and its respective partners. With Minister Uy, the focus centred on harnessing the potential of ICT for development.

Discussions

The discussions explored areas of collaboration in digital infrastructure, knowledge sharing, and cybersecurity. The Philippines has made remarkable strides in ICT. The Minister further met with Minister Rodríguez Parrilla and their discussions delved into strengthening diplomatic relations between Eswatini and Cuba. The two countries share diplomatic relations which was established in 1995.



▲ Minister of Foreign Affairs Pholile Shakantu shares a moment with Philippines ICT Minister Ivan John Enrile Uy.

By Sifiso Sibandze
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DEPUTY Prime Minister (DPM) Thulisile Dladla says the country needs to come to an understanding that it is time that the national curriculum for both primary and high school levels is reviewed.

Dladla said the national curriculum for both primary and high school levels should be reviewed to mainstream entrepreneurship and skills development at the earliest stage of the education system.

She said in that way, the country will be creating a pool of youth with entrepreneurial attitudes and habits who will not only rely on white-collar jobs but will open more job opportunities for themselves and their peers thus reducing poverty, youth unemployability and inequality.

She stated that advancing youth, gender equality and women's empowerment is the government's key development principle as highlighted in the National Constitution of 2005, National Development Plan and other national frameworks.

Frameworks

She said these frameworks ensure that women and the youth are part and parcel of the development agenda of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Dladla said despite the above challenges, His Majesty's Government remains committed to advancing gender equality and youth inclusion which is demonstrated through the adoption of national gender transformative laws, policies, and programmes, such as the National Youth Policy 2020, and the Gender Policy of 2023 to mention a few.

"These national instruments are aligned to other global and regional development

Time to review the curriculum for both primary, high school – DPM



▲The EU Ambassador to Eswatini, Dessislava Choumelova and Acting Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla after the European Union in Eswatini signed new financing agreements with the Government of Eswatini worth E562 million.

frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), African Union Agenda 2063, and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development among other global and regional youth and gender equality frameworks, to ensure that women, men, boys, and girls in Eswatini are not left behind in any development agenda," she said.

The DPM said youth empowerment programs are also in place such as the Youth Development Fund, Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund, and Eswatini Youth Empowerment Program, among others, to improve the lives of young people and contribute to sustainable growth to

the economy of the country.

Dladla further extended sincere gratitude and appreciation to the European Union for such support aimed at contributing towards human development and social inclusion

by strengthening vocational education and training in line with labour market demands and skill needs, and with a focus on the economic empowerment and inclusion of employed youth, women, and other disadvantaged groups.

DPMO has paid school fees for more than 50 000 OVC in 2024

By Nokunceda Magagula
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THE Deputy Prime Minister's Office has paid school fees for 58 847 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in the 2024 academic year.

This was said by the Director of Social Welfare, Mcusi Shongwe. The director explained that for the 2024 academic year, the Deputy Prime Minister's office has paid an undisclosed amount of fees to 278 schools which include Primary and High schools around Eswatini.

Shongwe added that the Deputy Prime Minister's office is still receiving applications and will go through the verification process as per procedure," applications are still being received and will go through the verification process as per procedure," Shongwe asserted. The OVC program is aimed at conducting strategic efforts to strengthen the capacity of orphans and vulnerable children, their families, their communities, and their systems of care and support.

This program is aimed at improving access to essential services, including core HIV treatment and prevention services, for children and their parents or caregivers.

To achieve an AIDS-free generation, strengthening children's resilience, especially among adolescent girls, their families, and communities. This address comes after the government through the Deputy Prime Minister's Office when the year began made an audacious pledge of paying school grants for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) timeously this year. This was disclosed by the Principal Secretary (PS) in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office Melusi Masuku who said the office intends to make the payments early to ensure that no pupils would be sent home due to unpaid fees this year.

"As the DPM Office, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance, we have ensured that one-third of the grants will be paid timeously to avoid inconveniencing the children. This is to ensure that the children are properly admitted and afforded education in the



▲Deputy Prime Minister's office Melusi Masuku.

The PS said the DPM's Office is not anticipating getting reports of OVCs who would be sent home for not paying their school fees, owing deposits, or top-ups.

He said the DPMO and Ministry of Finance will also ensure that by the time the second term kicks off, two-thirds of the money expected to be paid by the government would have been paid in full to avoid children ending up attending classes due to owed money.

Shongwe said the intake for 2024 was almost complete and applications were coming in, allowing the office to consolidate the list of beneficiaries.

According to the Director, the OVC grant is a bursary for secondary and high school education that targets poor OVC and is directly paid to schools. He said the government pays E1 950 for OVC in Forms 1 - 3 and 5, then E2 500 for pupils in Form 4 because of the increase in the number of subjects.

Shongwe said the assessment which will be conducted by the DPM's Office will allow the government to compile a list of the OVC in the country which includes single and double orphans, as well as those who are vulnerable.

According to the 2016/17 Eswatini Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the grant only covers 19 per cent of households, yet 60 per cent of all children in the country were classified as vulnerable and 71 per cent of these are orphans and vulnerable children. The survey recommended that fiscal resources need to be reallocated from nonpriority sectors to cover the full costs of reaching all children in need.

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Former journo allegedly rapes fiancée, granted E15 000 bail

By Bahle Gama
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FROM Journalist to a small business owner and now a rape suspect.

This briefly details what has befallen former journalist Phesheya Ian Kunene who is currently facing rape and assault charges.

Kunene used to work as an entertainment journalist in one of the media houses in the country and is known for his hustle as a businessperson selling house décor including wall mirrors, bed covers, rugs/carpet, and pillows amongst other things.

Kunene was on January 17 arrested by police officers from Lubulini Police Station and subsequently charged with contravening Section 3 (1) as read with Section 3 (2) and (3) (a) of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 15 of 2018 for allegedly raping his fiancée.

He was also charged with contravening Section 77 (1) (a) of the same act for allegedly physically abusing the victim causing harm to her health and well-being.

Upon his arrest on January 17, he was remanded at Big Bend Correctional Facility.

In his bail application, Kunene told the court that in October 2023 he formally proposed marriage to the complainant by asking for her hand from her family and paying some of the lobola.

He stated that on December 24 after being unemployed, opted to reside with the complainant at her workplace.

He said he was responsible for taking care of her children as well as the general upkeep of the home including cleaning and washing.

According to Kunene, his fiancée was unhappy with the fact that he no longer brought income into the house and suggested that he return to his parental homestead.

Petty things

This she supposedly said whenever she would be angry at Kunene.

"We started fighting over petty things, including that I was not properly taking care of her older children. During our arguments she would get violent and said if I dared retaliate, she would have me arrested," Kunene stated.

On December 24, 2023, Kunene said the complainant was drunk and started fighting with him.

She allegedly assaulted and insulted him, and he retaliated by pushing her. However, they talked things out and they continued to reside together in her flat.

On the day in question, January 17, the complainant reportedly returned from work very angry.

Kunene enquired and learned that her staff transport had left her, and it was raining that day and she had to walk to the house.

"She went straight to bed, and I requested that I continue cooking and dish for the children. After the children had gone to bed, I joined her in our bedroom and initiated sexual intercourse. She first mentioned that she was not feeling well, and I let her be," Kunene submitted.

Kunene told the court that they cuddled and after some time, the complainant removed her underwear as she was wearing a kanga to bed.

He requested that they engage in sexual intercourse and this time she agreed, and they kissed and "engaged in consensual sexual intercourse."

In the morning, she left for work and kissed him as usual.

Kunene stated that later in the day she texted him that she did not want to find him in her house when she returned from work because she was tired of feeding a grown man.

"She further stated that I was suffocating her and needed some space in her house. I replied and asked where I was supposed to go at such short notice, she said she did not care. I told her I had nowhere to go," he submitted.

Later in the evening, he responded to a knock and found police officers who requested that he come with them and complied.

Upon arrival at the police station, he was informed that he was being charged with



▲ Phesheya Kunene is suspected for raping his fiancée.

rape and assault.

Kunene alleged that he immediately inquired from the complainant why she was doing such a thing and she responded that she wanted to ruin his life.

He further stated that on different occasions the complainant has done similar things to frustrate his life but would always resort to forgiving and giving her another chance. Bail was granted at E15 000 and Kunene was ordered to pay E3 000 cash and the balance as surety. He is expected to report at the Mbabane Police Station every last Friday of the month.

Preparations in full swing for Parliament opening

Stories by Ncaba Ntshakala

THE Clerk to the Parliament, Benedict Xaba on Wednesday updated the preparatory interministerial meeting with various stakeholders involved in the preparations for the opening of Parliament.

The meeting held in Parliament in Lobamba, served as an opportunity to update everyone on the progress made so far and Xaba reported that preparations on the Parliament side are well underway.

The venue is being prepared, logistics are being finalized, and invitations are being sent out.

He urged all stakeholders to also begin their preparations to ensure a smooth and successful opening ceremony.

Representatives from various stakeholder organizations, including the Eswatini National Fire & Emergency Services, the Royal Eswatini Police Services (REPS), the Eswatini Meteorological Services, and those responsible for the marquee and invitation cards, were all present at the meeting and provided updates on their respective areas of responsibility.

The Eswatini National Fire & Emergency Services assured everyone that they are working diligently to prepare all necessary safety measures. They are currently servicing fire extinguishers and will be on hand during the opening ceremony to ensure the safety of all attendees.

REPS further requested to submit a detailed report on their security preparations



▲ Clerk to Parliament Benedict Xaba giving updates during the preparatory interministerial meeting in Parliament.

at the next meeting, which is scheduled for Wednesday.

The Clerk to Parliament also requested the assistance of the Eswatini Meteorological Services in monitoring the weather forecast for all Fridays in February, as the opening ceremony could potentially fall on any of those days. Discussions also touched on the finalization of the marquee and the printing and distribution of invitation cards. The company responsible for the marquee assured everyone that it will be erected and decorated in time for the ceremony.



▲ The recipients of the donation with other people who were present during the handover by Hlasela Foundation INSET, the shoes worth E12 000 donated to Mkhweni vulnerable children by Hlasela Foundation.

Hlasela Foundation steps up, donates over 100 school shoes in Mkhweni

IN a heartwarming display of community support, the Hlasela Foundation has stepped up to address a crucial need within the Mkhweni Inkhundla.

The foundation, led by Chairperson and Mkhweni Indvuna Yenkhundla Hlasela Shongwe, recently donated over 100 pairs of school shoes to students in the area, valued at over E12,000.

This generous donation forms part of the Hlasela Foundation's ongoing initiatives to champion education within the Mkhweni constituency. By providing students with proper footwear, the foundation expressed

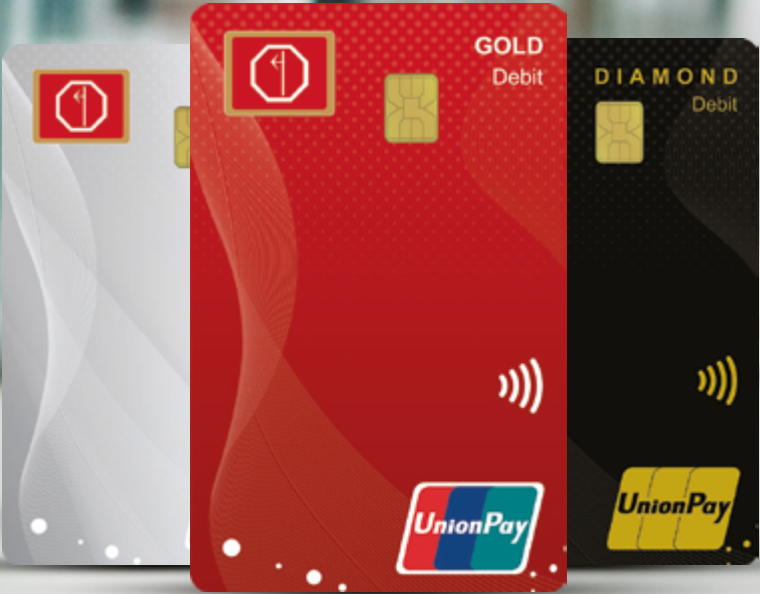
that it aims to remove a potential barrier to learning and ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend school comfortably and confidently.

The Hlasela Foundation's commitment to education extends beyond providing material support. According to Shongwe, the foundation also recognizes the dedication and tireless efforts of teachers who shape the lives of young learners. The shoe donation serves as a token of appreciation for their remarkable work in shaping the future of the Mkhweni community.

The foundation's initiative has been met with immense gratitude from both parents and educators within the Inkhundla.



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By Nokunceda Magagula
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AS of January 22, 2024, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) has assisted 684 people through the rehabilitation of 114 houses that were damaged by the hailstorm.

This was announced by Deputy Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla in a press conference held at the Deputy Prime Minister's Office on Wednesday. The DPM mentioned that the response is continuing as building material has already been delivered to the NDMA warehouse.

DPM gave a history of how the NDMA finds itself in a situation where they have to bring relief to homes affected by the hailstorm, stating that on December 8, 2023, The Kingdom of Eswatini was severely impacted by a devastating hailstorm, causing extensive damage, particularly in the central regions.

She said the Manzini region bore the brunt of the storm, with the Shiselweni and Lubombo regions also being significantly affected. These areas include Mafutseni, Khubuta, Mtsambama, Gilgal, Siphofaneni, Mtfongwaneni, And Ngculwini

She said the storm caused significant damage to homes, furniture, vehicles, and businesses. It adversely affected critical infrastructure such as schools and healthcare facilities.

DPM said in response to the urgent need for shelter, the NDMA in collaboration with Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society and World Vision Eswatini, provided immediate relief to over 6,521 individuals,

This aid included the distribution of 1,300

NDMA has rehabilitated 114 hailstorm-damaged houses



▲ One of the houses damaged by a hailstorm in early December.

tarpaulins and 5 tents, offering temporary shelter to those affected. Following the hailstorm, the NDMA conducted a comprehensive assessment to evaluate the storm's impact, assess the damage, and identify associated risks and vulnerabilities.

She said the assessment revealed that

the storm affected 6,298 households, 78 businesses, and 27 educational facilities. However, 53 injuries were reported, and 14 individuals were temporarily displaced, seeking alternative shelter due to the 95.3 per cent reported varying degrees of house damage, while the rest 4.7 per cent were

destroyed.

Moving to the recent hailstorm attack DPM said on January 11, 2024, the kingdom of Eswatini was once again severely impacted by a storm event, with the Manzini region experiencing the worst of its effects.

The storm, characterized by heavy rainfall, strong winds, and hail, caused widespread damage to residential and commercial properties, educational institutions, and vital infrastructure such as power lines.

The most affected areas were Matsapha, Masundwini, Kashali, Ngwane Park, and Lwandle. The initial rapid assessments revealed that the storm severely affected 349 individuals from 57 homesteads.

The following day, January 12, 2024, another storm event hit the Shiselweni region affecting areas like Mbangweni, Mathendele, Siphumelele, and Khiza, all falling under the Shiselweni II inkhundla. Preliminary rapid assessment results indicate that a total of 323 individuals from 71 households were severely impacted by the storm and most of the affected houses sustained significant damage, with roofs damaged, and windows shattered.

DPM emphasized that the NDMA is responding to the affected communities working with the inkhundla council and community-level structures, therefore pleading for patience from the nation as they cannot reach all areas at the same time.

UNDP, EEA, Kwakha Indvodza refurbish 1 600 old desks in 16 primary schools across the country



▲ UNDP said over 1600 desks were refurbished to assist 16 primary schools.



By Ncaba Ntshakala

IN a heartwarming display of collaboration and resourcefulness, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Eswatini Environmental Authority and Kwakha Indvodza, has refurbished

1 600 old desks in 16 primary schools across the country.

This initiative, aptly named the "Waste for Livelihoods and Resilience Project," has not only improved the learning environment

for countless students but also empowered 16 unemployed youth, including graduates, with valuable skills and income.

The project saw Kwakha Indvodza engage the young apprentices in a variety of tasks, including replacing worn-out wooden desktops and screws and giving the steel frames a fresh coat of paint. This not only revitalized the dilapidated furniture but also ensured a safer and more hygienic learning environment for the pupils.

However, the impact of the project extends far beyond refurbished desks. Aligned with UNDP's commitment to youth empowerment, the initiative provided crucial income for the 16 young participants. Over five months, they collectively earned

E27,880 (approximately USD1,460), a significant boost for their economic well-being.

Furthermore, UNDP expressed that the project has championed sustainability by demonstrating the potential of upcycling. Instead of discarding the unusable wood tops, the apprentices repurposed them into sturdy shoe racks, adding another layer of financial gain and environmental consciousness to the initiative.

As the United Nations' lead agency on international development, UNDP works in 170 countries and territories to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. The agency helps countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnerships

abilities, and institutional capabilities, and to build resilience to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. According to UNDP, their work is concentrated on three focus areas which are sustainable development, democratic governance, and peacebuilding, and climate and disaster resilience

On the other hand, Kwakha Indvodza is an organisation that was founded in 2012, And it is Eswatini's first male mentoring organization.

The organisation specializes in community-led health and behaviour change interventions with men and boys. Since 2012, their activities have been focused on three pillars, which are Male Health, Financial Independence, and Social Responsibility.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

SA inflation falls for second month in December

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa’s consumer inflation fell for the second month in a row in December, to 5.1 per cent year on year from 5.5 per cent in November, statistics agency data showed on Wednesday. The latest reading takes headline inflation slightly closer to the mid-point of the central bank’s 3 per cent-6 per cent target range, or 4.5 per cent, where the bank has said it wants to see inflation before contemplating interest rate cuts.

TFG’s sales growth slows in Xmas quarter

JOHANNESBURG — South African fashion retailer TFG on Wednesday reported slower sales growth in its third quarter, hurt by a softer Black Friday, power cuts and delays at ports that have affected supplies for the industry.

Oil steadies near \$80 as China announces stimulus

LONDON — Oil steadied on Wednesday, with Brent trading near \$80 a barrel, as a Chinese economic stimulus package and geopolitical tensions were offset by concerns over tepid demand and a stronger dollar. The front-month March contract for Brent crude fell 4 cents to \$79.51 a barrel at 1109 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude ticked up 4 cents to \$74.41 a barrel.

EswatiniBank

FX RATES

Notes/Cash	Buy		Sell	
U.S. Dollar	18.4518		18.9478	
G.B. Pound	23.4863		24.1703	
EURO	20.1021		20.7090	
Bank Rate	(July 2023)	7.50%		
Prime Rate	(July 2023)	11%		
Inflation	(July 2023)	4.5%		
Petrol	E20.50/Litre			
Diesel	E21.80 /Litre			
Paraffin	E16.75/Litre			

EU has pumped in E5.8bln in grants to Eswatini since 2010

By Silindzelwe Nxumalo
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SINCE 2010 to date the European Union (EU) has allocated E5.8 billion to the Kingdom of Eswatini in the form of grants.

This was said by the Minister of Economic Planning and Development Dr Tambo Gina during the signing ceremony for the financing agreement held at ECOT.

Gina said for over 40 years now, the Kingdom of Eswatini and the EU have been in good partnership, and they have seen this relationship grow from strength to strength over the years, with the leaders of both parties continuing to value and nurture the cooperation.

The minister highlighted the level of support that Eswatini has received from the EU over the past 14 years stating that in 2010, the country was presented with a 600 per cent increase in EU support when compared to the previous allocation under the 9th EDF.

He stated that specifically the country was allocated E1.3 billion (Euro 63 million) under the 10th EDF while at the same time allocated about E2.5 billion (Euro 120 million) under the Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol countries.

“In 2014 the EU allocated an additional E1.2 billion (Euro 62 million) under the 11th EDF and has now allocated E667 million (Euro 32 million) under the Multi-annual Indicative Programme for 2021-2027. This makes the total



▲Minister of Economic Planning and Development Dr Tambo Gina.

allocated to the country since 2010 to be around E5.8 billion (Euro 277 million),” he said.

He added that it was worth noting that this development assistance from the EU is in the

form of grants that need not be repaid, and also, it is programmed in line with our development frameworks such as the National Development Strategy (NDS) and the National Development Plan.

He said as a result of the good cooperation existing between the Kingdom of Eswatini and the EU, the government have enjoyed unwavering support which enabled them to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on free primary education in 2015, enabled them to expand the health facilities countrywide, and made them provide potable water supply to over 60,000 people in Siphofaneni, Somtongo, and Matsanjeni.

“EU support has also enabled us construct 53 kilometres of road and bridges to assist our farmers transport their sugar and agricultural produce to the markets; it enabled us to engage about 2920 hectares of small holder development; it also facilitated the establishment of 3 Pack houses (at Lavumisa, Nhlanguano and Msahweni) to facilitate grading and packaging of agricultural produce for export,” he added.

He also stated that currently, the government is receiving EU support towards the construction and rehabilitation of some 16 water schemes to extend the growing season of our smallholders and ensure food security for Emaswati, support towards the improvement of our renewable energy, support towards the improvement of our livestock value chain, and as well as support towards the creation of an enabling business environment.

Eswatini mango exports soar to over 1 000 metric tons

IN the year ended March 2023, Eswatini has exported more mango than it has imported.

According to the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard), the Kingdom exported 1 054 metric tons worth 2.49 million which is 14 times more than the 75 metric tons valued at E539 000.

This was shared by the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Bhekizwe Maziya during the first mango value chain actors’ seminar held at the George Hotel on Wednesday.

He stated that these statistics give a clear indication that the country exports more mango than we import, and that self-sufficiency can be easily achieved if the value chain could be well coordinated.

“Ours is to close the borders once that level has been reached,” he said.

Maziya said from their market analysis they have established a total of 3 common varieties produced by local farmers and a total of 34 mango farmers have been registered on their EHIS platform following their call for registration.

The CEO stated that the statistics also present a challenge to the processors in the value chain to up their game.

“As the local production increases, the local markets would be soon saturated. We therefore count the processors as the next market channel. We hope they would have built

adequate capacity to consume the expected production,” he said.

Maziya said the purpose of the workshop is to bring together mango farmers, traders, retailers, and distributors, with the objective of ascertaining mango availability in the country, relaying information on the demand and supply, and initiating linkages between buyers and sellers.

He stated that the workshop was directly linked with their mandate of facilitating markets for local producers.

“We have taken the initiative to register mango producers and identified the common varieties, volumes, and location of the farmers. Our Eswatini Horticulture Information System (EHIS) has been instrumental in registering farmers in such a very short time,” he said.

The CEO explained that this is a platform which they encourage farmers to take advantage of as it helps them gather accurate information about available produce on the ground and is another platform which will open more markets for the farmers.

“Registration can be done even through normal cell phones; farmers don’t need a smartphone to register. We will soon start registering Traders on the system to ensure we also gather their information to play better our regulatory function,” he said.

Maziya stated that as NAMBoard, the quest to secure markets for horticulture farmers remains their life mission, and it is not their



▲NAMBoard CEO Bhekizwe Maziya.

primary mandate to buy produce from farmers and sell to markets.

“Our mandate is to facilitate access to markets both local and export markets. We desire to see more farmers connecting directly with markets. In that way, farmers will be able to directly what qualities are required by the markets,” he said.

SA inflation falls for second month in December



▲Boys help their father pack a vegetable and fruit stall in Soweto, South Africa.

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa’s consumer inflation fell for the second month in a row in December, to 5.1 per cent year on year from 5.5 per cent in November, statistics agency data showed on Wednesday.

The latest reading takes headline inflation slightly closer to the mid-point of the central bank’s 3 per cent-6 per cent target range, or 4.5 per cent, where the bank has said it wants to see inflation before contemplating interest rate cuts.

The average inflation rate for 2023 was 6.0 per cent, lower than 6.9 per cent in 2022, Statistics South Africa said. Inflation is expected to average 5 per cent in 2024.

The South African Reserve Bank will announce a monetary policy decision on

Thursday.

All 20 economists in a Reuters poll published last week predicted it would keep its main lending rate steady at 8.25 per cent.

Analyst Annabel Bishop at Investec said Wednesday’s data was unlikely to change the bank’s view on this year’s inflation.

“MPC (Monetary Policy Committee) ... will likely continue to have a hawkish tone, warning of inflation risks, although on balance is expected to keep interest rates unchanged,” Bishop said.

“The MPC’s last meeting forecast CPI inflation at 5.0 per cent y/y for 2024 ... today’s figure is unlikely to change its 2024 view.”

Core inflation which excludes food and fuel prices, was unchanged in December at 4.5 per cent in annual terms. (Reuters)



▲A shopper walks past a Foschini store at a shopping centre in Johannesburg, South Africa.

TFG’s sales growth slows in Christmas quarter due to soft Black Friday

JOHANNESBURG — South African fashion retailer TFG on Wednesday reported slower sales growth in its third quarter, hurt by a softer Black Friday, power cuts and delays at ports that have affected supplies for the industry.

TFG, owner of the Foschini and Markham clothing stores, said the Black Friday discount event in South Africa was generally soft, with higher levels of power cuts over that weekend.

“Consumers remain under pressure, with higher inflation and interest rates adversely impacting sales,” the retailer added.

Despite the challenging economic context at home, festive season trade delivered “pleasing” results, with core merchandise categories achieving strong growth in December, it said.

Group turnover for the quarter ended Dec. 30 rose 4.5 per cent from the same quarter in 2022 when sales jumped 17.3 per cent. For

the nine-months ended Dec. 30, turnover was up 9 per cent, a slowdown from growth of 20.8 per cent in 2022.

The company’s Africa business grew retail turnover by 5.1 per cent in the quarter, with like-for-like turnover growth of 0.7 per cent. Performance in its London and Australia businesses normalised after demand built up during the Covid-19 pandemic. These businesses saw sales declines of 3 per cent and 7.3 per cent respectively.

Although retailers have been moving production closer to home, they still rely on overseas markets for some products such as fabrics. South African state-owned logistics company Transnet has said backlogs at the Port of Durban and congestion at Richards Bay were due to factors including adverse weather and under-investment in equipment and maintenance.

TFG said the impact of import delays was offset to an extent by the ability to increase volumes from its local manufacturing hubs. (Reuters)

Oil steadies near \$80 as China announces stimulus

By Ahmad Ghaddar

LONDON — Oil steadied on Wednesday, with Brent trading near \$80 a barrel, as a Chinese economic stimulus package and geopolitical tensions were offset by concerns over tepid demand and a stronger dollar.

The front-month March contract for Brent crude fell 4 cents to \$79.51 a barrel at 1109 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude ticked up 4 cents to \$74.41 a barrel.

China’s central bank will cut the amount of cash that banks must hold as reserves from Feb. 5, governor Pan Gongsheng said on Wednesday, the first such cut for the year as policymakers extend efforts to shore up a fragile economic recovery.

The move will free up 1 trillion yuan (\$139.45 billion) to the market, he added.

Meanwhile, U.S. crude stocks fell by 6.67 million barrels in the week ended Jan. 19, according to market sources citing American Petroleum Institute figures on Tuesday. Gasoline inventories, however, increased by 7.2 million barrels, stoking concerns over fuel demand in the world’s top oil consumer.

The Energy Information Administration (EIA), the statistical arm of the U.S. Department of Energy, will release the data later on Wednesday.

A stronger U.S. dollar also weighed on oil prices as demand from buyers in other currencies ebbs as they have to pay more for dollar-denominated oil.

The dollar index hovered near a six-week high against major peers on Wednesday as investors cemented expectations that the Federal Reserve would be in no rush to cut interest rates in the face of a resilient U.S. economy.

Geopolitical tensions, which have led to a massive displacement in global trade, remained in focus.

“Heightened geopolitical risk, including the recent shipping disruptions, will maintain the oil price premium,” ratings agency Fitch said on Wednesday.

“However, without material disruptions to actual oil production, or a wider escalation of attacks ... we do not expect a strong upside to our \$80 a barrel Brent price assumption for 2024, as there is material OPEC+ spare capacity,” it added.

A coalition of 24 nations led by the U.S. and UK conducted new strikes against Houthi fighters in Yemen on Tuesday. The



▲An aerial view shows tugboats helping a crude oil tanker to berth at an oil terminal, off Waidiao Island in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, China.

strikes were aimed at stopping the Houthis’ attacks on global trade, Britain said in a joint statement.

The U.S. said Iran-backed Houthis have mounted 26 attacks since late November on commercial shipping in the Red Sea, a shipping lane used by about 12 per cent of global oil trade before the attacks.

The U.S. also carried out strikes against Iran-linked militia in Iraq on Tuesday, following an attack on an Iraqi air base that wounded U.S. forces. (Reuters)

Amazon reverses course, revokes police access to Ring footage via Neighbors app

AMAZON announced that it is ending its Request for Assistance (RFA), a controversial tool that allowed police and fire departments to request doorbell video through Ring’s Neighbors app.

“Public safety agencies like fire and police departments can still use the Neighbors app to share helpful safety tips, updates, and community events,” Neighbors app head, Eric Kuhn, noted in a blog post.

“They will no longer be able to use the RFA tool to request and receive video in the app. Public safety agency posts are still public, and will be available for users to view on the Neighbors app feed and on the agency’s profile.”

The feature has been a major concern for privacy advocates for a number of years. In 2021, Amazon made police requests public as part of its biannual transparency report. That year, it received 3,147 legal requests

from agencies representing a 65% increase over the previous year.

Public officials have also raised concerns about the practice. In 2019, for instance, Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey penned an open letter to then-CEO, Jeff Bezos, noting,

Markey also cited biases in facial recognition software as a major issue, expressing concern around a disproportionate misidentification among people of color.

“As stated in Ring’s law enforcement guidelines, Ring reserves the right to respond immediately to urgent law enforcement requests for information in cases involving imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to any person.² Emergency disclosure requests must be accompanied by a completed emergency request form,” the company wrote in its own letter. “Based on the information provided in the emergency

request form and the circumstances described by the officer, Ring makes a good-faith determination whether the request meets the well-known standard, grounded in federal law, that there is imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to any person requiring

disclosure of information without delay.”
(TechCrunch)



▲ Google already allows teachers to add questions to a YouTube video as part of its Classroom assignment.

Google announces new AI-powered features

GOOGLE announced a bunch of new features for classroom management, accessibility, and AI-powered features for creating questions and lesson plans as part of the Bett ed-tech event in the UK.

Google already allows teachers to add questions to a YouTube video as part of its Classroom assignment.

The company said that soon, AI will help with suggestions for questions at different timestamps. The company first announced this feature in June 2023. However, at that time, teachers had to apply to get this feature. The company added that the Practice sets feature, which uses AI to create answers and general hints, is now available in over 50 languages. Plus, educators can turn a Google Form into a practice set.

Additionally, Google is introducing a new Resources tab to manage practice sets and interactive questions asked during a video.

Additionally, the company mentioned that its generative AI tool for Google Workspace, Duet AI, can assist teachers in coming up with a lesson plan.

Google said that teachers will now be able to form different groups in the Classroom later this year. They can also assign different

assignments to different groups.

Plus, they can use the speaker spotlight feature in Slides to create a lesson with narration along with the slide deck.

Now, Educators can also easily collect signatures for approvals or contracts through eSignature facility available in the Google Workspace.

The company is also updating Classroom analytics so educators can look at stats like assignment completion and trends for grades.

Google is adding the ability to get text from PDFs for screen readers on ChromeOS. Plus, with the Chrome browser users can highlight and read text aloud.

The company is also adding features to Google Meet such as closed captions in 30 languages and the ability to pin multiple hosts.

The company said that it is exhibiting 15 new Chromebooks at Bett, which will launch this year. Plus, Google is soon updating Chromebooks so that students can look at their upcoming assignments directly from the home screen.

(TechCrunch)

TikTok spotted testing 30-minute uploads

TIKTOK is coming for YouTube. The company has been spotted testing the ability for users to upload 30-minute videos, signaling a significant move away from the short-form video format that made it popular.

Social media consultant Matt Navarra spotted the new option in the iOS beta version of the app in the U.K. Navarra told TechCrunch that he has heard from some users who are seeing the option in the Android beta version of TikTok as well.

TikTok did not respond to TechCrunch’s request for comment.

The company initially rose to popularity for its short-form video format, but has slowly been embracing long-form content.

If the new upload limit rolls out widely, TikTok will have come a long way from its original video time limit of 15 seconds. After bumping up the limit from 15 seconds to a minute, TikTok later expanded it to three minutes, and then 10 minutes. TikTok began testing a 15-minute video upload limit a few months ago.

The change puts TikTok in even more direct competition with YouTube. The move indicates that TikTok wants to attract longer-form video creators who normally post content on YouTube.

In the past, TikTok was seen as the platform for short-form content, while

YouTube was seen as the home of long-form content, with creators using both platforms to reach viewers. The past few years have blurred the lines between the two video platforms as TikTok embraces longer videos and YouTube adopts shorter videos with Shorts.

As with the previous time limit expansions, the new limit would give creators even more time and flexibility when sharing things like cooking recipes, beauty tutorials, education content and comedy sketches.

However, the new 30-minute limit would open up a new type of content that wasn’t possible with the previous time limits, and that is the ability to upload full episodes of TV shows.

Last year, Peacock made episode one of “Killing It” available to watch for free on TikTok, but it was broken up into five parts. With this new 30-minute limit, networks would no longer have to break up an episode into multiple parts, and could instead post entire episodes in one video on TikTok. Networks are already using TikTok to reach viewers, and the new upload time limit could entice them to share content on TikTok.

Of course, we have to consider the side of the viewer. Not everyone wants longer videos on TikTok, especially because most people go to the platform for quick, short videos. (TechCrunch)



▲ If the new upload limit rolls out widely, TikTok will have come a long way from its original video time limit of 15 seconds.



▲ South African police have arrested a man suspected of starting the fire that killed more than 70 people in a hijacked building in downtown Johannesburg in August.

Man to be charged with murder for deadly Jhb fire

JOHANNESBURG - South African police have arrested a man suspected of starting the fire that killed more than 70 people in a hijacked building in downtown Johannesburg in August.

The 29-year-old man confessed to an inquiry tasked with determining responsibility for the blaze that he was involved in starting it, the police said in a statement sent to Reuters on Wednesday.

He is expected to appear before a Johannesburg court soon on charges of arson, 77 counts of murder and 120 counts of attempt-

ed murder, the statement said.

One of the worst disasters in living memory in South Africa's economic hub, the blaze broke out on Aug. 31 in a dilapidated building crammed with mostly foreign migrants. Many of the victims were burned beyond recognition.

The deaths shed light on the unsafe conditions in which many poor people live in Johannesburg's city centre, where dozens of buildings have been abandoned and taken over by criminal groups who charge fees for staying there.

(Reuters)

Egypt begins construction for first nuclear power plant "El Dabaa"

EGYPTIAN President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi said Tuesday that his country and Russia are on "a new brilliant page". He made the comment during a foundation laying ceremony for Egypt's first nuclear plant.

El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant will be built with Russia's state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom.

El-Sissi said during the ceremony that El Dabaa will represent another positive development in Russian and Egyptian relations.

He referenced the global energy "crisis" and supply chain issues as reasons for "reviving Egypt's peaceful nuclear program."

"It contributes in providing safe, cheap and sustainable energy that helps in reducing our dependency on fossil fuel and avoiding the fluctuation in its prices," he added.

Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized his country's commitment to modern industries and bilateral cooperations.

"We will contribute to the creation of modern industries, qualified jobs, and the solution of social issues. We will do this together, since the new energy system allows us to do all this. This is truly a flagship project in the best traditions of our bilateral cooperation," Putin said during the cere-

mony via video-link.

Putin also said he was in "constant contact" with the Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah el-Sissi.

"In particular, we exchange opinions and coordinate stances in connection with the tragic development of the situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," Putin said.

A senior Egyptian official recently said Egypt and Qatar, which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas, are developing a multi-stage proposal to try to bridge gaps in the process.

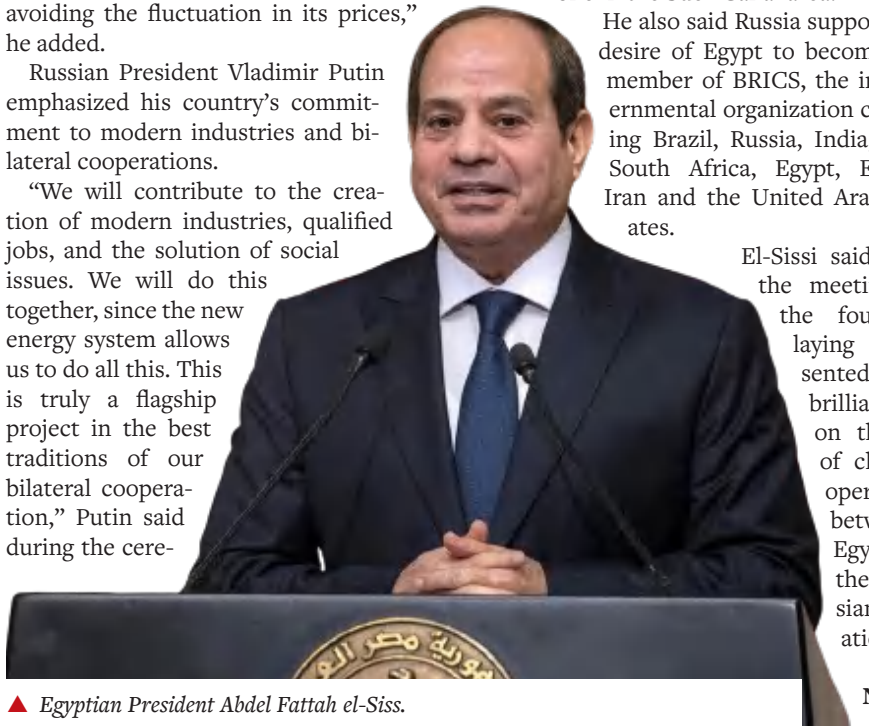
The proposal would include ending the war, releasing the hostages and putting forth a vision for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Putin also highlighted Russia and Egypt work on the creation of a Russian industrial zone in the Suez Canal area.

He also said Russia supported the desire of Egypt to become a full member of BRICS, the intergovernmental organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

El-Sissi said during the meeting that the foundation laying represented a "new brilliant page on the path of close cooperation between Egypt and the Russian Federation".

(Africa News)



▲ Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi.

'US determined to remain strong security partner for Nigeria'

ABUJA/WASHINGTON - Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday said the United States is determined to remain a strong security partner for Nigeria, whose military is backed by the U.S., Britain and other allies in a long war against Islamist insurgents.

Blinken also discussed challenges to democracy and security in the region during his meeting on Tuesday with Nigerian President Bola Tinubu in a visit that comes after last year's coup in neighboring Niger, one of a series of coups or attempted power grabs over the past few years in West and Central Africa.

"The United States is determined to be and remain a strong security partner for Nigeria," Blinken told reporters.

Blinken added that he discussed how it is vitally important there be a focus on ensuring civilians are protected and humanitarian considerations.

Observers have noted a pattern of deadly aerial assaults by the Nigerian military that have killed civilians, which was the subject of a Reuters special report last year.

The U.S. faced a setback in its fight against militants in the Sahel when military officers toppled Niger's



▲ U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends a press conference with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria Yusuf Tuggar at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, Nigeria.

President Mohamed Bazoum, a key ally, in July last year.

The coup in Niger was one of a series of military takeovers or attempted power grabs that occurred in West and Central Africa over the past three years.

The instability has raised concern, particularly as juntas have cut ties with traditional Western allies such as the European Union and France, which withdrew thousands of troops from the Sahel last year.

Blinken, speaking in Abuja as part of a four-nation tour of Africa taking him to Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Angola from Jan. 21-26, also said repatriation of capital and

corruption were among challenges that need to be tackled for companies to invest in Nigeria.

Africa's biggest economy has about \$7 billion in forex forwards that have matured, a major concern for investors as foreign currency shortages continue to weigh down the naira currency, despite assurances by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to clear the backlog.

So far, about \$2 billion of the backlog across sectors such as manufacturing, aviation, and petroleum have been paid, CBN spokesperson Hakama Sidi Ali said in a statement.

(Reuters)

SA expects ICJ judgment on Gaza emergency measures Friday

JOHANNESBURG - South Africa expects the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule this Friday on whether it will grant emergency measures to stop the war in Gaza, South African news website News24 reported on Wednesday, citing two sources close to the matter.

A spokesperson for South Africa's justice ministry told Reuters "no communique yet".

A spokesperson for Israel's foreign ministry said he was not aware and was looking into it.

Earlier this month South Africa asked the ICJ, also known

as the World Court, to order an emergency suspension of Israel's devastating military campaign in the Palestinian enclave, accusing it of carrying out a state-led genocide.

Israel dismissed the genocide allegations as "grossly distorted" and said it had a right to defend itself and was targeting Hamas, not Palestinians civilians.

In the initial ruling the ICJ will not deal with the main question of whether Israel is committing genocide. The court will just look at possible emergency measures, meant as a kind of restraining order while the court looks at the full case, which usually takes years. (Reuters)



▲ South Africa's Minister of Justice Ronald Lamola addresses the media near the International Court of Justice (ICJ), on the day judges hear a request for emergency measures by South Africa to order Israel to stop its military actions in Gaza, in The Hague, Netherlands.

Russian plane crashes with Ukrainian POWs on board – Defence ministry

MOSCOW - A Russian Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane crashed near the Ukrainian border on Wednesday, and state news agency RIA quoted the defence ministry as saying it was carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners of war to be exchanged for Russian captives.

The plane was carrying 74 people, including six crew and three guards when it crashed, RIA cited the defence ministry as saying. There was no immediate information on the cause.

Andrei Kartapolov, a lawmaker in Russia's parliament and a retired general, said during a parliamentary session that the plane had been shot

down by three missiles. He did not say what the source of his information was.

Reuters could not immediately verify details of who was on board, but Russia and Ukraine regularly swap prisoners of war. Ukraine's defence ministry and air force did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

Video posted on the Telegram messenger app by Baza, a channel linked to Russian security services, and verified by Reuters, showed a large aircraft falling towards the ground near the village of Yablonovo in the Belgorod region and exploding in a vast fireball.

Local governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said that an unspecified "inci-

dent" had occurred in the region's Korochansky district, northeast of Belgorod city, and that he was going to inspect the site. He said investigators and emergency workers were already on the scene.

The Il-76 is a military transport aircraft designed to airlift troops, cargo, military equipment and weapons. It usually has a crew of five, and can carry up to 90 passengers.

The Kremlin said in response to a reporter's question that it was looking into the situation.

Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, has come under frequent attack from Ukraine in recent months, including a December missile strike which killed 25 people.

(Reuters)



▲ A Russian Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane crashed near the Ukrainian border on Wednesday.



▲ It would allow the state to seize the property of Russians who have left the country and have criticised the war in Ukraine.

Russia's parliament approves property confiscation for spreading 'fakes' about army

MOSCOW - Russia's State Duma on Wednesday passed the first stage of a bill allowing the confiscation of property from those convicted of a number of crimes including spreading "deliberately false information" about the Russian army.

The measure will also apply to those found guilty of "discrediting" the armed forces, calling for sanctions against Russia or inciting extremist activity.

The Duma, parliament's lower house, passed the bill in the first of three required readings by 395

votes to 3.

It would allow the state to seize the property of Russians who have left the country and have criticised the war in Ukraine, but who continue to rely on revenue from renting out their houses or apartments in Russia.

Since sending its army into Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has intensified a long-running clampdown on all forms of political dissent. Under laws passed in March of that year, discrediting the armed forces or spreading false information about them are already punishable by long jail terms. (Reuters)

Trump cruises to New Hampshire win

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire - Donald Trump cruised to victory in New Hampshire's Republican presidential contest on Tuesday, marching closer to a November rematch with Democratic President Joe Biden even as his sole remaining rival for the nomination, Nikki Haley, vowed to soldier on.

"This race is far from over," Haley, a former U.N. ambassador, told supporters at a post-election party in Concord, challenging Trump to debate her. "I'm a fighter. And I'm scrappy. And now we're the last one standing next to Donald Trump."

At his own party in Nashua, Trump, 77, opened his speech by mocking Haley, 52, calling her an "imposter" and saying: "She's doing, like, a speech like she won. She didn't win. She lost ... She had a very bad night."

The former president's remarks followed a series of angry posts on his Truth Social app, denouncing her as "DELUSIONAL."

The next competitive contest is scheduled for Feb. 24 in South Carolina, where Haley was born and served two terms as governor.

Trump has racked up endorsements from most of the state's Republican figures, and

opinion polls show him with a wide lead there.

In New Hampshire, with 86% of the expected vote tallied, according to Edison Research, Trump held a comfortable 54.4% to 43.5% lead.

Haley had hoped the northeastern state's sizable cadre of independent voters would carry her to an upset win that might loosen Trump's iron grip on the Republican Party. Instead, Trump became the first Republican to sweep competitive votes in both Iowa and New Hampshire since 1976, when the two states cemented their status as the first nominating contests.

The result will likely bolster some Republicans' calls for Haley to drop out so the party can coalesce behind Trump.

Her campaign vowed in a memo earlier on Tuesday to push forward until "Super Tuesday" on March 5, when Republicans in 15 states and one territory vote.

ONE-ON-ONE

Tuesday's vote was the first one-on-one matchup between Trump and Haley, after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, once seen as Trump's most formidable challenger, dropped out on Sunday and endorsed

Trump.

Meanwhile, Edison projected Biden, 81, the winner of the New Hampshire Democratic primary, brushing aside challenger, U.S. Representative Dean Phillips.

Despite Trump's win on Tuesday, exit polls hinted at his potential vulnerabilities in a general election campaign.

Trump faces 91 criminal charges for a range of offenses, including his efforts to overturn his 2020 defeat and his retention of classified documents after leaving the White House in 2021. He has denied any wrongdoing and claimed to be a victim of political persecution.

About 42% of voters who participated in the Republican primary said he would not be fit to serve if convicted in court, according to exit polling by Edison.

There were also warning signs for Biden, however. Three-quarters of Republican primary voters said the economy was either poor or not good, an area where Biden has struggled to highlight his administration's accomplishments.

Republicans made up a slightly smaller share of voters in the primary relative to the state's 2016 Republican contest in the state,



▲ Donald Trump cruised to victory in New Hampshire's Republican presidential contest.

the exit polls showed.

Some 51% of voters considered themselves Republican, compared to 55% in the 2016 primary. Six percent said they considered themselves Democrats, compared to 3% in 2016. The share of independents was little changed at 43%.

(Reuters)



▲ Dr Shakes.

Dr Shakes, Ndosh for Comedy & Music Birthday Sunday

IT will be laughter galore as local comedians, Dr Shakes and Ndosh are set to dish the funniest jokes at Comedy & Music Birthday Sunday.

The event will take place at Polar Park Guest Lodge this coming Sunday. The Comedy & Music Birthday Sunday promises to be a night of mirth, music, and celebration, bringing together the finest talents in comedy and music to create an atmosphere of joy and camaraderie. With an impressive line-up of comedians and musicians, this event is set to leave a lasting impression on all who attend.

The event will feature Dr Shakes and Ndosh and the talented Sbu as the headliner. Attendees are in for a treat as these comedic geniuses take the stage. Dr Shakes and Ndosh have long been regarded as comedic powerhouses, as they have known an ability to entice audiences with their wit, charm, and relatable humour, spiced with well-curated punchlines.

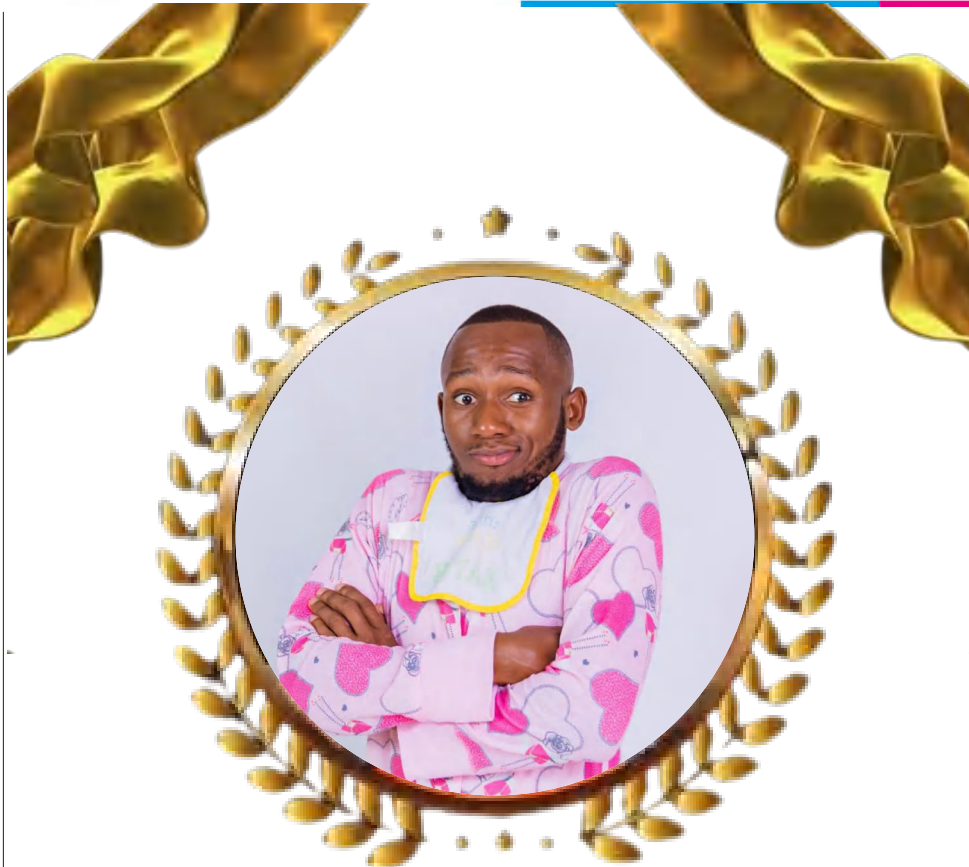
Adding to the excitement, the audience will be treated to live music by the sensational Soul Friends. This star-studded lineup will be further complemented by a roster of hilarious comedians, including Mcola, Cappuccino, Bongiswa, and Darren.

To supplement the laughter-filled performances, attendees will also be treated to an array of musical talents. The event will feature performances by Tempt, Zulu D, Russel, and Ntombz, ensuring that there is something for everyone's musical taste.

To the delight of comedy and music enthusiasts, this event is free of charge to attend, making it an accessible and inclusive celebration of talent and entertainment. Moreover, the venue will be offering a special promotion on ciders, ensuring that attendees can enjoy their favourite beverages while revelling in the evening's festivities.



▲ Ndosh WebeNguni.



▲ Diamond the Comedian.

Meet Zikomo Africa Awards brand ambassador

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini
siphesihled@rubiconmedia.group

ESWATINI'S comic, Diamond the Comedian, has been appointed as the brand ambassador for the prestigious Zikomo Africa Awards.

These awards, which celebrate the excellence and innovation of creatives and corporate entities across Africa, have recognised Diamond's exceptional talent for uplifting the African creative industry.

In an exclusive interview, Diamond expressed deep appreciation for the overwhelming support, encouragement, and guidance he has received from his fellow friends and the people of Eswatini. He acknowledged that their unwavering belief in his abilities has fueled his desire to be chosen as the face of the renowned Zikomo Africa Awards.

As a brand ambassador, Diamond aims to empower and promote local creatives, ensuring that their talent is recognised on an international stage. He plans to achieve this by meticulously analysing the content each creative produces and assessing its impact on their audience. By providing valuable feedback and guidance, Diamond hopes to nurture and elevate the artistic endeavours of his fellow African artists.

Diamond's appointment as a brand ambassador comes as no surprise, given his previous nominations for the Zikomo Africa Awards in the past two consecutive years. Sharing his wisdom with aspiring brand ambassadors, Diamond emphasised the importance of maintaining an active presence on social media. He advised updating one's social media accounts at least once a day if not more, to keep followers engaged and interested in the brand.

However, he also stressed the need for artists to take breaks and avoid burnout, recognizing that finding a balance is crucial for long-term success. Reflecting on his experience, Diamond revealed that he tried to update his social media accounts at least three times a day during his previous role.



▲ Lyrikal Busta.

Nathi Mankayi reposts Lyrikal Busta's 'Imimoya' verse

SOUTH African musician, Nathi Mankayi has taken to social media to share Eswatini artist Lyrikal Busta's impressive verse on his hit song, 'Imimoya,' which took social media by storm.

This move has sparked excitement among music enthusiasts. Nathi Mankayi, known for his soulful music recently announced an opportunity for upcoming artists to contribute a verse to his popular track, 'Imimoya.'

Eswatini musician Lyrikal Busta, a rising star in his right, wasted no time in seizing this chance to showcase his skills. His verse, filled with fiery energy and clever wordplay, quickly caught the attention of social media users.

Lyrikal Busta's Facebook post, featuring a video of his Imimoya verse, garnered an impressive 10 000 views within a short period. The verse resonated with fans, who praised his unique style and lyrical prowess. Among those blown away by Lyrikal Busta's performance was Nathi Mankayi himself, who promptly reposted the verse on his Facebook account.

Notably, this was not the first time Lyrikal Busta had accepted a verse challenge. He has previously participated in verse challenges for renowned artists such as Zakwe's 'Thixo Wam' and Libianca's 'People.' His ability to adapt to different musical styles and deliver exceptional performances has earned him numerous accolades, including four Swaziland Music Awards and two Swaziland Hip Hop Awards.

Lyrikal Busta, a multifaceted artist known for his promotion of Eswatini's music scene, specialises in Hip Hop and Afro Beats. His unique blend of genres and his dedication to his craft have made him a force to be reckoned with in the music industry. With each verse challenge he takes on, Lyrikal Busta continues to prove his versatility and musical prowess.



▶ Nathi Mankayi.

Lady Spshesh, TN\$ Savvy collaborate on Amapiano EP

Stories by Sipheshile Dlamini
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ESWATINI'S talented artist, Lady Spshesh has teamed up with renowned producer TN\$ Savvy for an exciting new project that is set to take the music world by storm.

The talented duo has been working together on various musical endeavours, and their chemistry and shared passion for creating exceptional music have led them to embark on a full-fledged collaboration.

Inspired by the incredible music they have already produced together, Lady Spshesh and TN\$ Savvy decided it was time to create something truly special. The result is an Amapiano Extended Play (EP) that promises to captivate listeners with its heartfelt melodies and thought-provoking lyrics.

The EP explores the theme of love and appreciation for the people who hold a special place in our hearts. The EP also delves into the sensitive topic of depression, shedding light on the importance of mental health and well-being.

Working alongside producer TN\$ Savvy has been an enlightening experience for Lady Spshesh. According to the musician, not only have they been able to exchange musical ideas and push each other's creative boundaries, but she has also gained valuable insights into the world of production. She said this collaboration has been a remarkable journey of growth



▲ Lady Spshesh and TN\$ Savvy are working on an EP.

and learning for the talented artist. What sets this EP apart is that it features only Lady Spshesh and TN\$ Savvy.

Decision

The decision to keep it an exclusive collaboration showcases their confidence in their abilities to deliver an exceptional musical experience. Lady Spshesh is determined to

make 2024 an unforgettable year for her fans. In addition to this highly anticipated project, she has exciting features lined-up with Young Zesh, Samu Once Again, and DJ TPZ. With multiple releases planned throughout the year, Lady Spshesh is determined to stay relevant and continue to push the boundaries of her musical prowess.

Sky Fly Bed and Breakfast to host Valentine's Dinner for singles

LOVE is a beautiful thing that deserves to be celebrated in all its forms, and Sky Fly Bed & Breakfast is taking a unique approach this Valentine's Day by hosting a therapeutic Valentine's Dinner for singles.

This special event aims to provide a healing and comforting space for individuals to come together, share their experiences, and celebrate self-love.

Set to take place on February 14, 2024, from 6 pm to 10:30 pm, the Valentine's Dinner for Singles will be held at Sky Fly Bed and Breakfast in Fairview. The director of Sky Fly Bed and Breakfast, Phetsile Ntuli, expressed the importance of acknowledging and supporting those who may have experienced heartbreak or are currently single.

Ntuli explained that the evening will commence with intimate and heartwarming musical performances by Milton B and Sancheziey, creating a soothing atmosphere for attendees. A relevant movie will also be screened, providing relatable content that resonates with the experiences of the singles present.

Following the musical deliverance and movie screening, the dining experience will begin, accompanied by a dialogue about love led by Mcola Lohlebako, the MC of the day. This open discussion

will allow guests to share their stories, offer support and advice, and foster a sense of community among those who may have faced challenges in love. DJ Black Pearl will then take the stage, providing a relatable set that will keep the atmosphere lively and entertaining.

Ntuli emphasised the importance of recognizing that Valentine's Day can be a triggering time for many individuals, especially those who are single or have experienced heartbreak. She stated, "Let us be realistic when we deal with love; such a day triggers memories that make most of our people fail to heal or even move on. We got you at Sky Fly."

With limited space available, Ntuli urged single emaSwati to come forward and secure their spot at the event. Tickets are priced at E450 per person, ensuring an intimate and exclusive gathering where attendees can truly connect and find solace in the company of others who understand their experiences.

Sancheziey, one of the headliners of the event, commented about the significance of such an experience, and said, "The predicted depression pandemic is on its way, and love is a major contributor. With this event, single people can come together, reflect on what went wrong, and learn how to move on."



▲ One of the Valentine's Dinner for Singles performers Sancheziey.



▲ Hallux who will perform at 5/4 Era Vibes.

5/4 Era Vibes to take place at Siteki Hotel

SITEKI Hotel is set to be transformed into a haven for music enthusiasts as it hosts the highly anticipated "5/4 Era Vibes" event which will feature a good set of DJs.

This carefully curated gathering promises an unforgettable experience, showcasing the talents of some of the most promising DJs in the industry. On January 27, 2024, starting from 7 pm, the event will kick off with a lineup that is sure to captivate the crowd. Moon-Elo, Hallux, Maye Le Muso, Master Vee, Sundeeep, and Gift DeeJay will take the stage, each bringing their unique style and sound to the forefront.

Admission to the event is free, but after 7 pm, a nominal fee of E20 will be charged. This ensures that everyone can enjoy the incredible performances and support the local music scene.

Opportunities

The day's structure promises a perfect balance of established artists, thought-provoking discussions, interactive activities, networking opportunities, and valuable feedback. Attendees can expect to be immersed in a world where music becomes a conduit for personal growth, connection, and self-expression.

The event is unique with its mission to introduce emerging DJs and performers to a wider audience. In an interview with event organiser, Hallux, he revealed that the event aims to raise awareness and understanding of new music, highlighting the transformative power it holds in people's lives. By showcasing lived experiences and personal stories, these talented artists hope to connect with the audience on a deeper level.

Moreover, "5/4 Era Vibes" seeks to provide opportunities for other young acts to share their experiences and perspectives. It serves as a platform for them to express themselves and contribute to the creative process. The event embraces an open, friendly, and informal atmosphere, encouraging attendees to actively engage and share their stories.

LERATO Sengadi, the widow of Motswako legend Jabulani Tsambo, better known by his stage name Hip Hop Pantsula (HHP), is set to anchor the newest reality series coming to screens.

The PR specialist and marketing professional is a part of ‘Widows Unveiled,’ a 10-part Showmax Original that follows the lives of five women who were married to public figures who passed away.

The series was produced by Passionlane Productions, the brains behind Mzansi Magic’s Safta-nominated hit show ‘Uthando Nes’thembu’.

The reality TV show documents the journey of each woman, from pain to triumph, as they navigate the drama and scandal that followed the death of their husbands.

The cast includes; award-winning philanthropist, executive producer of ‘Nkalakatha: The Life of Mandoza’ and stroke survivor Mpho Tshabalala, the widow of musician Mandoza; broadcaster and philanthropist Sikelelwa Ngubane, the widow of actor Menzi Ngubane; businesswoman Fundiswa Molefe, the widow of businessman John Molefe; and businesswoman Lerato Maphatsoe, the widow of former Defence Minister Kebby Maphatsoe.

“I decided to do this because I realised that widowhood is treated like a colossal taboo,” said Sengadi.

“Throughout my journey as a young widow, I realised that black widows, specifically, have it harder. It’s a generational curse and pattern.

“Women can’t speak openly about these experiences; they can’t speak about the pain and the journey to rediscovering yourself after loss.

“Society has made it very difficult to be a widow ... when you show up for each other

HHP’s wife on why she decided to tell her story on ‘Widows Unveiled’



▲The cast of ‘Widows Unveiled’ a 10-part Showmax Original.

you are ridiculed and it’s called ‘trauma bonding’, instead of seeing it as a support system! “I want to show my reality and let people know that it’s not easy, it is nothing to be ashamed of, and you’re not alone,” said Sengadi.

It took some time for Ngubane to agree to be a part of the reality series, but after pondering on all she had gone through after her husband’s passing, she decided, why not.

“I know that I am not the only woman who is dealing with the trials and tribulations

that come with being a widow. My husband was a public figure, so why can’t I tell my story publicly?

“I also want to show other people that it is not only your average Joe that goes through this - we are many.”

Tshabalala wants to show viewers how she dealt with rebuilding after her husband’s passing. “Rebuilding is difficult, but through faith and hope, it can be done.”

Maphatsoe has assured viewers that they can expect a lot of discomfort and honesty

from each lady’s storyline. “Viewers can expect that we are authentic, we are telling our truth, and nothing is scripted, but everything is from our realities.”

But Sengadi wants to also make it clear that she can’t control how viewers receive the show. “I’m telling my story. It is your responsibility how you receive it.”

‘Widows Unveiled’ premieres on Showmax on February 12 with new episodes every week.

(BANG Showbiz)

Lily Gladstone wonders why it’s taken ‘this long’ ... for Native American woman to be nominated for Oscar

LILY Gladstone has wondered why it has taken “this long” for a Native American woman to be nominated for an Academy Award.

The 37-year-old actress has become the first indigenous woman to be nominated for Best Actress at the upcoming 96th Academy Awards after wowing with her role as Mollie in ‘Killers of the Flower Moon’ but argued that such a milestone should have happened before now, especially because of how many films are shot on her homeland.

She told Deadline: “I also just know that I’m not going to be the last. “Why am I the first? Why did it have to take this long for me to be the first Indigenous North American? Most of the films that show up in these categories are shot on Indigenous land in North America, and it’s taken this long.”

Gladstone arranged to hear the nominations in Osage County on the Osage reservation when they were announced on Tuesday.

She explained: “It just felt like I wanted to be as close to Mollie as I could be.” The actress - who is up against Emma Stone, Annette Bening, Sandra Huller, and Carey Mulligan for the coveted award - won a Golden Globe for her role earlier this year and revealed that she wants to dig deeper into her heritage to dis-



▲Lily Gladstone - who is up against Emma Stone, Annette Bening, Sandra Huller, and Carey Mulligan for the coveted award - won a Golden Globe for her role earlier this year.

cover more untold stories of women that she thinks “need” to be put on screen. She said: “There are a lot of Native women at different points in history that have been groundbreaking for whatever fields that they’ve been in, but have gone uncelebrated, or just basically unknown.

“There’s definitely some biographies that need to be out there, because young Native women need

to know that it’s been Native women who have shaped whatever field they’re in: music; science; law.

“There are just a ton of stories, and whether it’s me embodying these or me lending my name and some of my thoughts, even if it’s just notes and encouragement to help lift these stories, that’s honestly, I feel like the greatest gift of all of this.”

(BANG Showbiz)

Dwayne Johnson returns to WWE in a major new role

WAYNE ‘The Rock’ Johnson has returned to WWE in a major new role.

The wrestling icon turned Hollywood megastar - who made his name in the ring before turning his attention to acting - has officially joined the board of directors for TKO, which was formed by parent company Endeavor as part of the UFC and WWE merger in September 2023.

Now, Johnson will bring “decades of experience in live entertainment and sports to the board”.

He said in a statement: “My grandfather, High Chief Peter Maivia, and my dad, Rocky ‘Soulman’ Johnson, would’ve never thought this day would come.

“Which is why I’m very humbled to have a seat at the table that has decades of history and family legacy for me. A table that my family helped to build.”

The deal also sees the star take “full

ownership” of The Rock moniker.

He continued: “Being on the TKO Board of Directors, and taking full ownership of my name, ‘The Rock’, is not only unprecedented, but incredibly inspiring as my crazy life is coming full circle.

“At my core, I’m a builder who builds for and serves the people, and Ari is building something truly game changing.

“I’m very motivated to help continue to globally expand our TKO, WWE, and UFC businesses as the worldwide leaders in sports and entertainment — while proudly representing so many phenomenal athletes and performers who show up every day putting in the hard work with their own two hands to make their dreams come true and deliver for our audiences.”

(BANG Showbiz)



▲Wrestling icon turned Hollywood megastar - Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson.

EARLY data from hospitals suggests the latest Covid variant, known as JN.1, is not leading to more severe disease, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official said Monday, as the agency has tracked the strain's steep rise to an estimated 85.7 per cent of Covid-19 cases nationwide.

The agency is still waiting for more weeks of data to lay out its more detailed assessment of JN.1's impact this season, the CDC official, Dr. Eduardo Azziz-Baumgartner, said at a webinar with testing laboratories hosted by the agency this week.

Asked if JN.1's symptoms seemed to be more severe compared to previous waves, he said "there are early signals that that may not be the case," based on electronic medical record cohorts and other data.

"Now, it's important to remember that how a virus affects an individual is a unique 'n' of one," he added. "It could be very severe. People could die from a virus that, to the general population, may be milder."

Azziz-Baumgartner told the webinar the CDC hopes to release more details about JN.1's severity "during the next couple weeks" as more data on the virus accumulates.

So far, the CDC has been careful to say that there was "no evidence" JN.1 was causing more severe disease, even as it contributed to the spread of the virus this winter.

It is not clear when the CDC's new assessment of JN.1 is scheduled to be published. A CDC spokesperson was not able to immediately respond to a request for comment.

Scientists at the CDC and other federal health agencies have also so far not moved to deem JN.1 a standalone "variant of interest," in a break from the WHO's decision to step up its classification of the lineage last month.

The WHO said Friday that there were "currently no reported laboratory or epidemiological reports" linking JN.1 or its other variants of interest to increased disease severity.

CDC's early findings about JN.1 come as the agency has begun to see a slowing of respiratory virus trends after a peak over the winter holidays.

The agency's disease forecasters also concluded earlier this month that JN.1's spread did not warrant them stepping up their assessment of Covid-19's threat this winter, noting hospitalization rates appeared to be lower than they were last season.

Covid-19 hospitalizations this season continued to outpace influenza nationwide, the agency's data suggests, and weekly rates of both stopped short of topping previous record highs.

Azziz-Baumgartner cautioned data lags could be muddying the picture, as hospitals catch up on delayed reporting of their weekly admissions. Officials have also been closely watching for possible signs of a renewed increase in the spread of influenza, as has been seen in some previous seasons before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some jurisdictions have also been reporting a strain on hospitals, especially in New England, he said. CDC figures tally the region's hospital capacity rate as the worst in the country.

Massachusetts General Hospital warned last week it was taking steps to address an "unprecedented overcrowding" crisis, along with other hospitals in the state.

Are Covid-19 symptoms still the same? What to know about this winter's JN.1 wave

Reports of respiratory illness have now reached "high" or "very high" levels across at least 16 state or big city health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said, as trends of Covid-19 and influenza have accelerated in many



Covid variant JN.1 not more severe, early CDC data suggests



parts of the country. And while a fast-growing new Covid variant called JN.1 is estimated to be driving a large share of the current winter wave of infections, officials say there have so far been no signs of new or unusual symptoms caused by the virus.

Here's the latest about what we know about this winter's wave so far.

Are Covid-19 symptoms still the same?

Experts caution that teasing out subtle changes to the symptoms being caused by different Covid-19 variants has proven tricky, given the now wide-ranging variety of antibodies that people have from either vaccinations, prior infections by different variants, or both. "The types of symptoms and how severe they are usually depend more on a person's immunity and overall health rather than which variant causes the infection," the CDC said in a report on December 8 discussing the JN.1 strain. New survey data from the United Kingdom's health authorities, where Covid-19 and influenza trends are also on the rise, suggest common symptoms being reported from this winter's onslaught of respiratory infections, among all surveyed residents, include:

- ▶ Runny Nose (31.1 per cent)
- ▶ Cough (22.9 per cent)
- ▶ Headache (20.1 per cent)
- ▶ Weakness or tiredness (19.6 per cent)
- ▶ Muscle ache (15.8 per cent)
- ▶ Sore throat (13.2 per cent)
- ▶ Trouble sleeping (10.8 per cent)
- ▶ Worry or anxiety (10.5 per cent)

How those symptoms differ depending on whether people are specifically testing positive for Covid-19 versus other infections is not yet clear, though the U.K. Health Security Agency's Jonathon Mellor said Thursday that those more detailed analyses could come once their sample size grows.

Research through last winter, co-authored by health authorities in the U.K., found symptoms were similar for Covid-19 and other germs that often drive respiratory illnesses during the winter.

"Cough, sore throat, sneezing, fatigue and headache were all among the most commonly reported symptoms for each of the three infections, suggesting that discriminating between SARS-CoV-2, influenza and RSV based on symptoms alone may prove challenging," they wrote in a preprint, that has not been peer-reviewed, released in October. That is also in line with other research from

previous waves of Covid-19.

Research through 2022 from the CDC's nationwide household transmission study, released as a preprint in May, which has also not yet been peer-reviewed, found commonly reported symptoms among household contacts infected by the BA.5 variant were:

- ▶ Any symptom (77 per cent)
- ▶ Cough (63 per cent)
- ▶ Fever (48 per cent)
- ▶ Shortness of breath (22 per cent)
- ▶ Change of taste or smell (20 per cent)

Prevalence of most Covid symptoms were not far off from those reported before even the Delta variant emerged in late 2020.

The exception to this is reports of change in taste or smell, which declined from 42 per cent early in the pandemic. Unlike many other Covid-19 symptoms, researchers around the world have confirmed a steep decline in reports of loss of taste or smell — a symptom that was much more common when Covid first swept the globe.

Faster incubation period?

Other subtle changes that scientists have tracked to the virus is a gradual decline in the "incubation period," or length of time that it takes for people to get sick after being exposed to Covid-19.

Research published by the CDC from authors in Japan and Singapore earlier this year found this time may have shortened to as little as 2 to 3 days on average.

Long Covid rates and symptoms

Data suggests long Covid rates may have declined since the beginning of the pandemic. Exact definitions vary, but the CDC generally considers long or "post-Covid" conditions to be symptoms that persist or emerge at least four weeks after otherwise recovering from the virus.

"Approximately 1 in 10 adults with previous Covid-19 were experiencing long Covid at the end of the study period, highlighting the ongoing importance of Covid-19 prevention actions, including vaccination," a CDC study of Census Bureau survey data said in August,



noting that its prevalence among people who said they previously caught Covid-19 had not changed since January 2023.

In a separate CDC analysis of the same ongoing survey, 4.6 per cent of American adults in October reported having limitations on their activities from long-term symptoms of the virus, down from 5.7 per cent at the same time in 2022.

Another study, published in the medical journal JAMA in May, identified 12 symptoms most commonly associated with long Covid:

- ▶ post-exertional malaise (debilitating fatigue that gets worse after physical or mental activity)
- ▶ fatigue
- ▶ brain fog
- ▶ dizziness
- ▶ gastrointestinal symptoms
- ▶ heart palpitations
- ▶ issues with sexual desire or capacity
- ▶ loss of smell or taste
- ▶ thirst
- ▶ chronic cough
- ▶ chest pain
- ▶ abnormal movements

Other symptoms were reported by smaller numbers of patients, with the study noting 37 symptoms that were more common in those who'd had a Covid infection, after 6 months, than in people who hadn't been infected.

Have Covid-19 testing recommendations changed?

Guidance from US. authorities on testing and treatment remain largely unchanged for this winter.

For most Covid-19 home tests, like the free rapid antigen kits that all American households can request from the Biden administration this winter, the FDA's guidance remains unchanged since last winter.

Do Covid-19 tests still work after they expire? Here's how to tell.

If you at first get a negative result from the antigen test, but have symptoms or think you were exposed to the virus, the FDA says you should swab your nose "again 48 hours after."

That was the result of studies the FDA and National Institutes of Health backed earlier during the pandemic which found the likelihood of false negative results from antigen tests was reduced after repeated testing.

These recommendations only apply to antigen tests, which the CDC says "are generally less sensitive" to picking up infections.

Home molecular tests for Covid-19, like the Lucira kit from Pfizer that in February was first greenlighted by the FDA to test for influenza as well, have yielded more accurate results. Among positive Covid-19 samples, 88.3 per cent were correctly spotted in studies of the test.

Another method some have floated to try to improve the accuracy of Covid testing has been to swab inside the throat or mouth as well, similar to what is done for some tests in many countries overseas. So far, that approach hasn't been authorized by the FDA for use in home tests, in part over safety concerns, though the agency now says it is "open" to considering it.

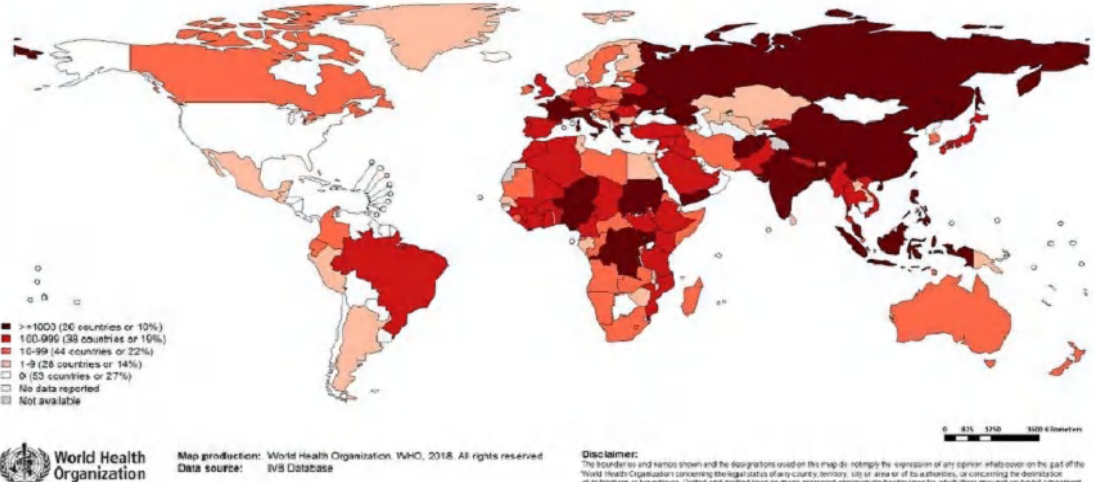
"Although there are not currently any Covid-19 tests authorized by the FDA for self-collection of throat swabs, the FDA is open to reviewing tests with novel sample types," James McKinney, an FDA spokesperson, told CBS News in a statement.

CBS Health

Number of Reported Measles Cases (6M period)



Top 10*	
Country	Cases
India	38505
Ukraine	23070
Philippines	7894
Nigeria	5451
Serbia	4954
Yemen	4797
China	2922
DR Congo	2675
France	2579
Greece	2130



What's causing measles outbreaks?

MEASLES was officially declared eradicated in the US more than 20 years ago, but new outbreaks of the disease are popping up — and experts say declining vaccination rates are jeopardising herd immunity and increasing the risk.

In Philadelphia, nine cases were reported after a cluster started in a hospital and spread to other medical facilities and a day care centre. Measles is a highly contagious and potentially deadly virus that causes a tell-tale rash.

According to data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, during the 2021-2022 school year, 94.3 per cent of kindergarteners in Philadelphia County were fully vaccinated with the MMR vaccine, which protects against measles, mumps and rubella. Last school year, that dropped to 92.8 per cent — below the 95 per cent needed for herd immunity.

"That's really a wake-up call, because the real number in many communities is probably far below 93 per cent," Dr. Peter Hotez, co-director of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for vaccine development and professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine, told CBS News.

He says outbreaks like this one are more likely when vaccination rates drop.

"Measles does not typically occur among highly vaccinated population. So in that sense, low vaccination rates are the indirect cause of measles," Hotez says. "My concern is that we're still going to see additional measles cases, and I worry that ... roughly 20 per cent of measles cases require hospitalization. So if this continues, we're going to start seeing hospitalized kids with measles." This is a trend we could see nationwide, as MMR vaccine levels have been dropping over the last few years and now are at 93.1 per cent.

"We're just seeing now, this is the tip of the iceberg," Hotez says. "We're going to be seeing this in communities across the United States in the coming weeks and



months because of the spillover of the US. anti-vaccine movement of childhood immunisations." And the trend goes beyond just MMR vaccines. In November, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a report that showed a record number of American kindergarten students started school the previous year with an exemption from at least one of the key vaccines health authorities require — a list that includes:

- ▶ Measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR)
- ▶ Diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP)
- ▶ Poliovirus (polio) vaccine
- ▶ Varicella vaccine (protects against chickenpox)

Among children enrolled in public and private kindergarten during the 2022-2023 school year, the report found vaccination coverage remained lower than the pre-pandemic levels, at about 93 per cent, down from 95 per cent.

Vaccination exemptions increased to 3 per cent of kindergarten students — the

highest exemption rate ever reported in the country — and a vast majority of those exemptions were not for medical reasons.

A medical exemption is allowed when a child has "a medical condition that prevents them from receiving a vaccine," according to the CDC. Nonmedical exemptions, for religious or philosophical reasons, are allowed in all but three states, the agency says. In recent years, New York and California have passed laws clamping down on nonmedical exemptions after outbreaks of measles. **CBS Health**

“Measles does not typically occur among highly vaccinated population. So in that sense, low vaccination rates are the indirect cause of measles”



AROUND THE WORLD IN PICTURES



▲ Hindu devotees light earthen oil lamps on the bank of the Sarayu river to celebrate the inauguration of the Lord Ram temple, in Ayodhya, India.



▲ Residents look on at a helicopter helping to extinguish a fire in the mountains around Ocean View, Cape Town, South Africa.



▲ Serbia's Novak Djokovic holds ice packs on his head during his quarter final match against Taylor Fritz of the U.S. at the Australian Open.



▲ Indian soldiers march during the full-dress rehearsal for the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, India.



▲ Brazilian big wave surfer Maya Gabeira rides a wave in Praia do Norte, Nazare, Portugal.



▲ A general view of a tent camp housing displaced Palestinians, as smoke rises in the distance due to an Israeli ground operation in Khan Younis, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, as seen Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Poch desperate to end trophy drought in England

CHELSEA manager Mauricio Pochettino said he is “desperate” to get his hands on silverware in England after his side booked their place in the League Cup final on Tuesday.

Chelsea, who will play either Fulham or Liverpool in next month’s final at Wembley, thrashed Championship club Middlesbrough 6-1 in the second leg of their semifinal at Stamford Bridge. Middlesbrough had won the first leg 1-0.

The 51-year-old Argentine, who previously managed Tottenham Hotspur, Southampton and Espanyol, won Ligue 1 with Paris St Germain in the 2021-22 season. He also guided them to the French Cup and Trophee des Champions.

Pochettino came close to success with Spurs twice when they finished runners-up in the League Cup (2014-15) and Champions League (2018-19).

“I’m desperate to win a title here,” Pochettino told reporters. “In one year and a half in Paris, we won three trophies, and we want to win one here. I’m desperate to win, of course.

“In some point, it’s an amazing achievement. I think it was the objective when we started: with no Champions League, no Europa



▲ Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino.

League, no Conference League, to build a team from nearly zero.

“The job is done but now it is about winning the final.”

Chelsea are ninth in the league after 21 matches. They next host Aston Villa in the fourth round of the FA Cup on Friday. (Reuters)

Union airs Swallows’ dirty laundry in public amid pay crisis

AMID an ongoing scandal involving unpaid salaries and the firing of 22 players, the South African Football Players Union (Safpu) has exposed the Moroka Swallows management.

Leruma Thobejane, the attorney representing Swallows, disclosed on Marawa Sports Worldwide that the team has subsequently fired the 22 players who were charged and appeared before the disciplinary committee.

In December, the Dube Birds failed to honour their DSTv Premiership fixtures against Mamelodi Sundowns and Golden Arrows after players were alleged to have gone on a go-slow after salaries were not paid.

Since then, Safpu has contested the situation by rejecting the player dismissals, claiming the team has acknowledged that it has a history of not paying players’ salaries on time as per their contracts ever since being promoted to the top-flight league.

“Moroka Swallows, in a candid acknowledgement, admits to the longstanding issue of overdue salaries affecting its dedicated players,” said Safpu president Thulaganyo Gaoshubelwe at a press conference in Milpark on Tuesday. “The club declared an earnest commitment to rectify the backlog of payments, shedding light on a historical struggle with salary disbursements.

“The club conceded to critical failures in non-payment of salaries, signing-on fees, and the absence of pay slips, citing a malfunctioning payroll system. “The tipping point was reached in November 2023 when the club failed to meet the salary payment deadline, leaving players without their due earnings for the month.”

According to Safpu, club chairman



▲ Moroka Swallows chairman David Mogashoa is said to have been the man behind dishonouring the Sundowns and Arrows fixtures.

David Mogashoa was the one who called for the cancellation of the games, not the players, and he lashed out at reports that Swallows players skipped the two games against Sundowns and Arrows.

Gaoshubelwe stated: “Chairman David Mogashoa promised and committed to providing players with compensation by December 22 2023, but failed to fulfil this commitment.”

“In a shocking turn of events on December 23, Swallows bore witness to a reprehensible act of betrayal as all team members, in unwavering dedication, dutifully reported for duty and geared up for a fierce battle against Sundowns, precisely as the club’s explicit request.

(Sunday World)

Martial out for 10 weeks

MANCHESTER United forward Anthony Martial has been ruled out until April following surgery on a groin injury, the Premier League giants announced Wednesday.

The 28-year-old, out of contract at the end of the season, has managed just two goals in 19 appearances during another frustrating campaign at Old Trafford.

Martial has been absent from United manager Erik ten Hag’s first team since United fans cheered his substitution in the 3-0 home defeat by Bournemouth on December 9, with the club now announcing he faces a lengthy lay-off.

“Manchester United striker Anthony Martial has completed successful surgery to address a groin complaint and will be out

of action for about 10 weeks as he rehabilitates,” said a club statement.

“We wish Anthony a speedy recovery and look forward to his return.”

Martial made an encouraging start with United after joining from Monaco in 2015 but his career at Old Trafford has tailed off, with the Frenchman scoring 90 goals from 317 appearances in all competitions.

His absence leaves Rasmus Hojlund and Marcus Rashford as the only central striking options in Ten Hag’s senior squad.

But if the Dutch boss wants to add to his forward line-up during the January transfer window, he will need the approval of Jim Ratcliffe as the British billionaire prepares to take control of football operations as part of his minority ownership of United.

(Reuters)



▲ Manchester United forward Anthony Martial.

Alcaraz stunned by Zverev in last 8

ALEXANDER Zverev stunned Carlos Alcaraz in four sets to reach the semi-finals of the Australian Open; Alcaraz came into the match as favourite but couldn’t handle the quality of Zverev in a match that finished after 1am local time in Melbourne.

Carlos Alcaraz is out of the Australian Open after Alexander Zverev produced an incredible display to stun the two-time

Grand Slam champion in the quarter-finals of the Australian Open.

Zverev simply outplayed Alcaraz for the majority of the match to win 6-1 6-3 6-7 (2-7) 6-4 in a memorable quarter-final surprise in Melbourne.

He will face Daniil Medvedev in the semi-finals on Friday after the Russian came through a gruelling five-set match against Hubert Hurkacz.

(Reuters)



▲ Alexander Zverev stunned Carlos Alcaraz in four sets to reach the semi-finals of the Australian Open.



Bafana Bafana hold Tunisia to advance

SOUTH Africa have advanced into the knockout rounds of the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations after they held Group E rivals Tunisia to a 0-0 draw at the Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium in Korhogo on Wednesday evening.

The result sees Bafana Bafana finish second on the log behind Mali, with Namibia in third and the Carthage of Eagles fourth.

All but the North Africans will be involved in the Round of 16, which will get underway this coming weekend.

Tunisia created all the early pressure, though their only genuine scoring chance arrived in the 26th minute when Wajdi Kechrida crossed to find the head of Seifed-dine Jaziri, but his effort was wayward.

South Africa looked the more dangerous team after the half-hour mark, with Thapelo Morena whipping a long-range effort just over the crossbar, before Mothobi Mvala got on the end of Teboho Mokoena's free kick and flicked a header wide.

Nonetheless, the first half closed with the score locked at 0-0.

Bafana Bafana brought on Nyiko Mobbie at the start of the second half to replace Khuliso Mudau, who was involved in a couple of heavy challenges in the opening 45 minutes.

Just as in the first half Tunisia started strongly, before South Africa found their own attacking rhythm – though both teams lacked quality and penetration in the final third.

The Carthage Eagles looked to address this by sending on the likes of Youssef Msakni, Naim Sliti and Haythem Jouini, while Bafana Bafana had their first shot on target in the 77th minute when Sphephelo Sithole fired off a long-range grass-cutter which forced a sharp save from Bechir Ben Said.

The Tunisian goalkeeper was in action again in the 81st minute when he palmed away Evidence Magkopa's header on target from a corner kick.

The Carthage Eagles had a great chance to finally break the deadlock in the 89th minute when Sayfallah Ltaief crossed from the right



▲ Action between South Africa and Tunisia during the final group match.

to find Jouini, but the substitute striker was unable to head on target.

The match closed at 0-0, with South Africa celebrating progression, while Tunisia were eliminated from an Afcon in the group stage for the first time since 2013. (Supersport)



▲ Namibia and Mali played to a goalless draw which saw both teams, together with South Africa, progressing to the Round of 16.

Namibia joins SA, Mali in Round of 16

IN what were scenes of jubilation at Stade de San Pedro, Namibia progressed to the Round of 16 in the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations for the first time in their history, following their 0-0 draw with Mali on Wednesday night.

The Brave Eagles joined South Africa and Mali as the teams to progress to the next round of the competition, with Tunisia finishing last in Group E.

Mali got the game off to a positive start with Yves Bissouma producing the first attempt at goal as early as the first minutes. Not holding back, the likes of Peter Shalulile and Deon Hotto progressed the ball up field on numerous occasions.

The Brave Warriors continued to press on, with Prins Tjiueza coming close to opening the scoring in the 16th minute with a shot inside the Mali 18-yard-area. Mali won a couple of free-kicks in the offensive half as the half-hour mark approached but were unable to make the most of their opportunities.

Kennedy Amutenya was presented with one of the chances of the half in the 37th minute. With Hotto playing the ball across the area, Amutenya's attempt on the side of the six-yard box went agonisingly wide.

Namibia looked lively after the restart, with Amutenya once again proving to be a tough customer to deal with, this time coming close with a headed effort from the

centre of the penalty area.

The game reached a tacky period en-route to the 75th minute, with Mali struggling to make their passes stick in the middle of the park. Namibia likewise battled to get themselves into the game, as a result of Mali edging the Brave Warriors to the ball possession count.

Mali began seeing more of the ball as the clock ran down, as Namibia looked content at surrendering the ball to the opposition midfield. With Namibia clinging on by defending on the edge of the 18-yard-area, the Brave Warriors continued to frustrate Mali with rugged defending toward the end of the tie.

(Supersport)

I. Coast, Algeria sack coaches

AFRICA Cup of Nations hosts Ivory Coast have sacked coach Jean-Louis Gasset midway through the tournament, the country's football federation (FIF) announced on Wednesday.

"The contracts of coach Jean-Louis Gasset and his assistant Ghislain Printant are terminated due to insufficient results," the FIF said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Algeria also sacked their coach Djamel Belmadi on Wednesday after the two-time winners crashed out of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Belmadi's tenure ended prematurely after Tuesday's shock loss to Mauritania in their final group game in the Ivory Coast.

(Supersport)



▲ Sacked Ivory coast coach Jean-Louis Gasset.

‘Wanderers’ apologises to supporters for early exit in Ingwenyama Cup

By Ntokozo Magongo
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AFTER the disappointing early exit in the Ingwenyama Cup, the Manzini Wanderers Management Committee (MC), players and technical Tteam have apologised to the club’s supporters. The Hub giants, watched by over 1 000 of their fans, were beaten by Madlenya FC 7-6 after penalties on Sunday at Mavuso Sports Centre in the last 16 of the Ingwenyama Cup. The fans were left dejected having won the last 32 match 3-0 convincingly against Sis-onke. Madlenya was beating Wanderers for the third having knocked them out of the Trade Fair Cup and also beating the hub side 2-1 in the MTN Premier League first round 2-1 in December 2023.

“Dear Fans, Supporters and Everyone involved. We understand how disappointing it must have been for all of you who always stand by us, cheering us on through thick and thin. We genuinely appreciate your unwavering support, believing in us when the going gets tough.

We acknowledge that we fell short of your expectations, and for that, we are truly sorry. Please know that we share the same feelings of frustration and disappointment, and we feel the weight of the loss just like you,” reads the statement released by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Diana Johnson.

Johnson said the team is still committed



▲ Disappointed Manzini Wanderers players after the 6-7 defeat by Madlenya on Sunday after penalties in the Ingwenyama C.

and dedicated to doing everything it can to get positive results on and off the field.

“We promise to pull tooth and nail to secure victories in the upcoming games. Our collective aim is to restore your trust and bring back the exhilaration you all deserve. We owe it to you, our passionate and loyal supporters, to give nothing short of our absolute best throughout the remainder of the season.

Please continue to stand by us, as your unwavering support means the world to us. In times like this, your belief in our abilities encourages us to push beyond our limits and strive for greatness.

Together, we will overcome any obstacles and emerge stronger on the other side. We are even more determined to bounce back

and make you proud, this pain was just temporary. Thank you for being the best fans we could ever ask for,” the statement reads in conclusion.

Wanderers will play Moneni Pirates on Saturday in the MTN Premier League and the Manzini derby is set to kick-off at 2:30pm.



▲ Top boxer Thabiso Dlamini exchanging blows with Nitcho Lartches during EBA all Africa Games qualifying tournament held at Olymp Africa Centre.

EBA names African Games tentative squad

By Sibusiso Masilela
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THE Eswatini Boxing Association (EBA) has named a tentative seven-member national team for the African Games.

The boxers excelled during the recent qualifying tournament held at the Olymp Africa Centre ahead of the continental games in March in Ghana.

The squad includes two top boxers Thabiso Dlamini, Zweli Dlamini and the veteran Sifiso ‘Ommo’ Ngwenya.

EBA Secretary Nkosinathi Dlamini confirmed the list.

“We would like to congratulate the seven boxers for making it to the tentative national team. We will prepare a special training program for the team meanwhile we are working on the budget for the trip with the Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association (EOC-GA),” he said.

Meanwhile, the Association President Webster Lukhele stated that they were on the verge of introducing a national league.

“We will soon kick-off a national league that will be played by boxers within the various categories. The new tournament is aimed at keeping our boxers active so that we can be able to identify champions for the different categories. We are still cur-

rently in talks with a potential sponsor for the new league,” he said.

EBA have previously sent boxers to various international tournaments such as the 2023 World championships and the African Games which were staged in Uzbekistan and Senegal respectively.

The full tentative squad	
Mphile Dlamini	under 54kg
Khaya Shongwe	under 57kg
Zweli Dlamini	under 60kg
Sibongiseni Shongwe	under 60kg
Khaya Mkhabela	under 63.5kg
Thabiso Dlamini	under 67kg
Sifiso Ngwenya	under 71kg

Pennington first to tee off in Mediclinic Invitational

By Ntokozo Magongo
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PROFESSIONAL golfer James Pennington will be the first to tee off in the Mediclinic Invitational, at the Maccauvlei Golf Course, South Africa.

He will tee off at 6:60am alongside Wade Jacobs. There are over 120 golfers who will be playing in the four-day tournament, ending on Sunday. The Eswatini Royal Insurance Corporation (ESRIC) Brand Ambassador has entered the tournament with Brandon-Jude Rennie and Mandla Dlamini Jnr.

The duo of Brandon-Jude Rennie and Mandla Dlamini Jnr will tee off at 1:10 pm and 1:20 pm respectively.

The tournament is the first in 2024 under the Sunshine Tour.



▲ Professional golfer James Pennington.

The tee-off times:	
6:50	James Pennington
	Wade Jacobs
13:20	Steven Le Roux
	Mandla Dlamini Jnr
	Shalan Govender
13:40	Siyanda Mwandla
	Nicholaus Frade
	Brandon-Jude Rennie

About the tournament:	
Dates:	January 25th - 28th, 2024
Tournament:	Mediclinic Invitational
Venue:	Maccauvlei Golf Club
Defending Champion:	Stefan Wears-Taylor
Rounds:	4 (Four)
Prize fund:	E2 million

Minister of Sports for Shukuma

By **Sibusiso Masilela**
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MINISTER of Sports, Culture, and Youth Affairs Bongani Nzima is set to attend his first Shukuma event since he came to office on November 14, 2023.

The first 2024 edition of the national flagship programme will be held on Saturday at Zakhele Sports Ground.

Eswatini Sports and Recreation Council (ESRC) Officer Dumisani Ntiwane said the minister might be part of the upcoming event.

“We are expecting the minister to grace the event together with other officials from the ministry even though he is having a tight schedule. We will be having several games on the day such as aerobics and indigenous games. We are also expecting associations to showcase their various

sports codes on the day, and we are still finalizing the full logistics of the event,” he said.

He further invited residents of Manzini and surrounding areas to attend the event in numbers.

“This is an event that cannot be missed for members of the public as we will be having several wellness programs that will keep them active through the day. We will announce the venue for the next edition in due course,” he said.

Shukuma provides an excellent platform for our recognised sports and recreation bodies to their respective sports codes. Collaboration with these has resulted in growth in the number of people participating in some of these sports codes.

The program allows communities to tackle other socio-economic issues affecting communities as activities are infused with life skill education.



▲ Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs Bongani Nzima.



▲ Banele ‘Stiga’ Ndzabandzaba.

‘Stiga’ back in action in Botswana

By **Ntokozo Magongo**
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IT’s all good news for local football players in Botswana as the Football League will return to action this weekend.

Mxolisi Mkhonta who recently signed for Jwaneng Galaxy on a two-year deal is expected to jump to action earlier than expected as the league will resume action after about four weeks in the cold after it was suspended by the Botswana Football Association (BFA).

He is set to join Banele ‘Stiga’ Ndzabandzaba who plays for Botswana Police VI.

The country now boasts of two players plying their trade in the Botswana Premier League after Mkhonta won the hearts of Jwaneng Galaxy while Ndzabandzaba, who played for Mbabane Highlanders, signed for the Police side in August.

According to Botswana’s Daily News, Botswana Football League (BFL) and the BFA finally reached a common ground to return to play. BFL shareholders had suspended the league games including those of First Division League.

BFA president Maclean Letshwiti said as the football fraternity, they had come out of the impasse united.

He was quoted by the Daily News saying the last few weeks had been extremely difficult for Botswana football, adding that at the end of it all they managed to resolve

the issues because football was about unity, peace, friendship and entertainment.

He said now that football was back, important lessons had been learnt from the impasse, adding that what they went through would not be repeated.

Letshwiti told the press conference that they had also learnt from the debacle that effective communication and adherence to the constitution were important. He stated that football was not run in a vacuum, but through statutory instruments and adherence to all the regulations was necessary to ensure the smooth running of the game.

He added that the BFL was an institution and the BFA as a mother body would only move in if the BFL failed to resolve its issues.

I will make the country proud in Bots — Mxolisi

By **Sibusiso Masilela**
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MXOLISI Mkhonto has promised to make the country proud during his stint with Jwaneng Galaxy.

The Sihlangu player said this after signing a two-year contract with the Botswana outfit.

“I will make the country proud during my stint with Galaxy by putting in good performances for my new team. I am confident that we will achieve great things,” he said.

Mkhonto has become the second Liswati to ply his trade in Botswana after former Mbabane Highlanders playmaker Banele ‘Stiga’ Ndzabandzaba who is in the books of Botswana Police XI.

The ex-Malanti Chiefs player also thanked the entire Green Mamba family for supporting him during his eight-year stay with the Correctional Services side.

“I am grateful for the support that I received from the club president and His Majesty’s Correctional Services

Commissioner General Lamakhosini Dlamini, management committee and teammates. Green Mamba will forever remain my home,” he said.

The player has taken a two-year unpaid leave with the Government since he was employed under the Correctional Services.

He will jet off to Botswana on Thursday at His Majesty King Mswati III International Airport as he is expected to make his debut for his new team on Saturday against VTM at the Galaxy Stadium.

Mkhonto boasts of various Sihlangu caps under Serbian mentor Kostadin Papic and the incumbent coach Dominic Kunene.

He featured in the 2023 CAF Champions League preliminary round tie with Green Mamba, where they were knocked out by Mozambique champions UD Songo.

This was after he led the Ernest Mavusole side to the 2022/23 MTN Premier League title which was ‘Inyoka eluhlazana’s third in history. The towering attacking player also won the 2019 Ingwenyama Cup, the 2023 Trade Fair Cup and the E100 000 first-round carrot with ‘Inyoka eluhlazana’, among others.



▲ Mxolisi Mkhonto.

Mandla Palma leaves ‘Bull’ kraal

Stories By Sibusiso Masilela
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MBABANE Highlanders veteran defender Mandla Palma has walked out of the ‘Bull’ kraal. The former Manzini Wanderers and Mbabane Swallows player resigned from the capital city giants on Tuesday afternoon after he was suspended together with goalkeeper Mxolisi Dlamini and Enzo Motsa.

Transfer

He is on the verge of joining Ezulwini United in the current transfer window. The ex-Sihlangu player was recently suspended with the other players for misconduct. A source within the Highlanders camp revealed that the player that the player submitted his resignation to club Chief Executive Officer

(CEO) Musa Masuku. “The player has resigned from the team following fallout with the Management Committee. He is now weighing other options as he is also having other premier league offers from Ezulwini United who have shown interest to sign him in the current transfer window,” the source said. Masuku declined to comment and quickly referred queries to Public Relations Officer (PRO) Kenneth Dlamini. Dlamini could not be reached for comment on the matter. Palma had formed a strong defensive partnership with South African defender Thamie Zulu at the Dumisani ‘Du’ Makhanya-led outfit this season. Palma missed the past two matches for the crowd pullers before his resignation this week.



▲Outgoing Mbabane Highlanders defender Mandla Palma.

Police Deputy PICO in EFA safety committee

ROYAL Eswatini Assistant Police Service Deputy Public Relations Officer Superintendent Nosipho Mnguni has been appointed as a member of the Eswatini Football Association (EFA) Safety and Security.

Mnguni is part of the four-member committee headed by Shiselweni Regional Football Association (SRFA) Chairman Nkosinathi Kunene. The EFA sub-committees were recently handed a two-year term of office between November 2023 and July 2025. Kunene has replaced former SRFA Chairman Bhekani Khumalo. Other committee members include FIFA recognised safeguarding officer Lucky Dube, Eswatini Referees Association (ERA) executive Member Banele Nhlengetfwa and Royal Leopard Management

Committee Member Bongani Shiba. EFA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Frederick Mngomezulu could not be reached for comment on the matter. The role of the Safety Committee is to ensure safety during local and international competitions involving national teams. Other heads of the sub-committees include Dr Comfort Shongwe (competitions), Nichodemus ‘Ace’ Mashwama (Technical committee), and Sipho Kunene (Referees), among others. The football mother body recently announced technical changes in the Sihlangu technical bench that saw the roping in of Green Mamba coach Ernest Mavuso and ex-Royal Leopards mentor Sifiso ‘Nuro’ Ntibane as assistants to the incumbent Dominic Kunene.



▲Royal Eswatini Assistant Police Service Deputy Public Relations Officer Superintendent Nosipho Mnguni.



▲Denver Sundowns players celebrating a goal.

Denver defeat Ezulwini 1 – 0 in a pending MTN League fixture

By Ntokozi Magongo
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DENVER Sundowns has moved out of the relegation zone after their 1-0 win over Ezulwini United in the MTN Premier League. A goal by Enock Kofi Kele from the penalty spot kick in five minutes from the hour mark secured the three points for the Milton Dlamini-led side. The game was played at Tambankulu Sports Ground. Sundowns are from a 0-2 defeat by Nsingizini Hotspurs in the Ingwenyama Cup last 16 while Ezulwini United won 5-3 against Seven Dreams after penalties to reach the quarter-finals of the knockout tournament. The fixture was played on Wednesday after it was postponed in December to give Sundowns time

to mourn their late player Mukelo Nkambule. The victory saw Sundowns moving to the 11th spot in the 14-team log with 13 points after 14 games while Ezulwini United moved to second from the bottom of the table with 11 points after 14 matches. **Venue** Sundowns will face Manzini Sea Birds under week 15 on Saturday at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium while Ezulwini United visit Nsingizini Hotspurs at the same venue, kick-off at 3:30 pm. **MTN Premier League week 15 fixtures:** All games to be played on Saturday: King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium: M. Sea Birds vs D. Sundowns 1:30 pm N. Hotspurs vs Ezulwini 3:30pm **Mayaluka Stadium:** M. Highlanders vs Rangers 3:30 pm

KaLanga Technical Centre: Y. Buffaloes vs Illovo 3 pm **Mavuso Sports Centre:** M. Pirates vs M. Wanderers 2:30pm **Green Mamba vs M. Swallows 5 pm** **Prince of Wales Sports Ground:** R. Leopard vs Madlenya 3:30pm **MTN National First Division League, week 14:** **Saturday:** **Mayaluka Stadium:** U. Flyers vs L. Spurs 1 pm **Prince of Wales Sports Ground:** Malanti Chiefs vs T. Callies 1:30 pm **Killarney Sports Ground:** PPB. Swallows vs S. Dreams 2:30 pm **Sunday:** **Mayaluka Stadium:** Sisonkhe vs T. Celtics at 3 pm **King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium:** Nyanyali vs CK Survivors 3pm **Manzini Club:** M. Hotspurs vs PPK. Rangers 1 pm Louis XIV vs L. Killers 3 pm



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**Eswatini
Daily News
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Palma walks out of 'Bull' kraal

... Tough-tackling veteran defender Mandla Palma resigns from Mbabane Highlanders and looks set to join Ezulwini United. **Page 23**