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21 January, 2024

Eswatini Sunday

EPH E2 000 admission fee raises health concerns

Karabo Ngoepe and
Sitindzelwe Nxumalo

PATIENTS seeking medical attention at the Ezulwini Private Hospital (EPH) have been left frustrated after being told to fork out an E2000 upfront payment before being admitted.

The Eswatini Sunday can today reveal that EPH, which is owned by Swazi Med is forcing patients affiliated to its competitors to make cash payments upfront before they can be admitted. This despite some medical aids having told their customers that their covers don't come with a co-payment.

Lidwala and Oracle Medical Aid customers have found themselves at the centre of a power struggle between the service providers and this has forced them to dig deeper into their already bleeding pockets.

An investigation carried out by the publication has been able to corroborate the experiences of patients who are now crying for help. On Friday, a patient was sent home to

recover from an illness that required her to be admitted because she is using Lidwala Medical Aid.

"I went to the hospital earlier in the week and I was prescribed medication but my condition deteriorated. I returned to the hospital on Friday to inform the doctor I was getting worse. The doctor wanted to admit me but said it would be difficult with my medical aid. I use Lidwala Health Medical Aid," the patient who spoke on the condition of anonymity said.

The patient was told to go and recover at home and if she saw no improvement then she should go to another hospital.

A doctor who also spoke on the condition of anonymity also confirmed the practice. The doctor expressed frustration over the practice, saying it was hindering the process of administering much-needed medical care to patients.

"I can confirm that EPH now requires medical aid holders to pay an upfront E2000 before they are admitted. This applies to Lidwala, Oracle and Emaswati care schemes. I have clients who are unable to access much-needed medical services as a result," the doctor said.

According to sources privy to the matter,

the situation allegedly started when Swazi Med 'lost a huge client' to Lidwala Health Medical Aid.

An Oracle employee who also spoke on the condition of anonymity told the publication that they were once called into a meeting by EPH management where they were told that they would be implementing this E2000 admission policy.

"They said we must inform our clients about this to avoid any complaints. They then told us off the record that this was because Lidwala Medical Aid had 'stolen' a client from them," said the source.

The person further indicated that they tried to reason with the hospital but no positive outcome was achieved.

"We were then forced to advise our clients to rather go to other hospitals such as Mbabane Clinic and Manzini Clinic to avoid being turned away in an emergency."

Attempts to get a comment from both Swazi Med and EPH were unsuccessful. They failed to respond to a questionnaire sent to them during the week. EPH is owned by Swazi Med which is a direct competitor to Lidwala and Oracle.

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▲ JOY OF PARENTHOOD: It's that time of the year again for parents to prepare their children for the future. (Credit: Mkhoseli Sizani/GroundUp)

Back-to-school jitters hit the nation

Karabo Ngoepe and
Sifiso Sibandze

THIS week will see bundles of joys clad in their different colours starting their academic journeys as schools in the country open.

While this is a momentous and proud moment for parents, the period brings its own challenges, frustrations and at times, annoyance. Parents that the Eswatini Sunday spoke to indicated that the period was extremely stressful and a bit costly.

Sifiso Maseko, a parent said the most frustrating thing for a parent is the uncertainty that is associated with the start of the academic year.

"Even with good results, a pupil going to Form 1 is not guaranteed an easy transition to a secondary school. The acceptance model has been made more difficult with some schools opting to phase out the entrance exam method, but rather relying on passing symbols to grade pupils," he said.

The father added that another issue is the expenses involved.

"As a parent with two children going to new schools (one in Grade 1 and the other in Form 1), I found myself having to dig deep to manage all the fees involved. On top of the deposit money, which is in the thousands, you also have to contend with the other expenses, such

as stationary and a new uniform. My advice to parents is to start planning early and using whatever extra money you have at the end of the year to prioritize those expenses as they can become a major headache in January," he said.

Another father who asked to remain anonymous said it's an exciting time of the year for so many but for him, it is a very costly time of year. He said the unanticipated expenses coupled with inflation had him trying to figure out how to make it all work.

"Honestly speaking for me, this year has been tough. Preparing for my 13-year-old boy to return to class has triggered plenty of stress from worrying about getting a space for him in Form 1 to ensuring that I raise the required school fees money as soon as I possibly can be very challenging," he said.

The father added that soon after the Standard V results were released, he was momentarily happy after learning that the boy had done exceptionally well, obtaining a first-class pass.

"But soon after that, I was filled with anxiety as I had to ensure that I got him space for Form 1 and further ensure that I paid on time to secure the space. It was not easy, but I managed to secure him the space and paid the school fees. Over and above the school fees, I had to buy a uniform. Even though the prices were a bit higher, I afforded them, and I am relieved that the boy will be happy and looking forward to the opening of schools on

Tuesday."

Another parent, Mduduzi Hlophe said his 'little adventurer' was set to embark on a grand journey, going to Grade 6. While excitement bubbles in his heart, it's also overshadowed by a practical grey cloud of the financial constraints that hold the reins of school choice.

"I am still adrift in the sea of options for his school, with three schools dangling and available spaces which are however very costly, charging between E3000 - E3500 per term. Don't get me started on the uniform and transport which is another E2000," he said.

He said the process for him was a dance between aspirations and budgets.

"It is enough to fry anyone's nerves. Deadlines loom, and the weight of finding the perfect school for your child's learning journey can feel crushing. Yet, beneath the administrative avalanche, a tiny ember of joy flickers in every parent. For amidst the hustles and school fees, the greatest reward remains unchanged, witnessing my child blossom, leaf by leaf, under the nurturing basket of knowledge," he said.

Other parents encountered in Mbabane and Manzini could not even spare a moment to converse as they hurried to try and find uniforms and school bags for their children. From the hustle and bustle of towns over the weekend, one thing is certain, parents are at their wits ends.

Criminals set up shop for illegal abortion pills in Manzini

Eswatini Sunday Reporter

THE country's business hub, Manzini, is seeing a proliferation of online and social media markets for unapproved and illegal abortion pills.

Dozens of social media pages state they ship abortion drugs anywhere from overseas countries without a prescription, which violates the laws of the Kingdom of Eswatini as abortion remains illegal.

Most of the sites don't clearly state who operates them or where they get the pills but they only leave their contact details, mostly South African cellphone numbers.

According to details on the different social media sites, the pills cost from E500 to E1500. In a bid to ascertain if the

different social media sites were indeed in the real business of marketing the abortion pills, Eswatini Sunday made about three calls to the numbers and only one of the calls was answered.

However, the recipient of the call was hesitant to give details of her exact location, but only said she was around Manzini, further asking if the caller was indeed in need of the pills and not playing 'monkey tricks'.

When another follow-up call was made, the purported abortion drug dealer suddenly suffered a change of heart and directed the publication to another social media page (Facebook page) which also markets abortion pills.

Upon reaching out to the number found on the new site, the number rang unanswered when called several times. Police Information

and Communication Officer, Senior Superintendent, Phindile Vilakati has advised the public to come forward with information about the illegal sale of abortion pills, adding that even those who are marketing it in whatsoever way could face the wrath of the law should they be found.

Vilakati urged the public to use the 999 toll-free line so that the culprits could be apprehended. Abortion remains illegal in Eswatini and has resulted in criminal convictions and continues to do so if the state manages to prove beyond reasonable doubt that an individual committed an abortion or assisted anyone to commit it.

In October 2012, more than 1,000 women were treated for abortion-related complications at a single clinic in Manzini, the Family Life Association of Swaziland (FLAS).



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Collaboration between govt and business yields results — Inyatsi Group Holdings Chairman

By Ncaba Ntshakala

POLITICS, the private sector and business, go hand-in-hand and when the relationship is built on a solid foundation, service delivery takes place.

This is the view of Inyatsi Group Holdings Chairman Michelo Shakantu. The businessman said in a video on his Tik Tok account that a radical shift in thinking was needed when one thinks of the role of the government and business. He said the two are not adversaries, but partners in progress.

“When you separate the two, then the goals become different. When you bring them together, the goals are purposefully the same”, Shakantu said.

This philosophy, rooted in the belief that development necessitates collaboration, challenges the traditional dichotomy between government and business in Africa.

The Executive Chairman argues that both sectors operate within the same society, serving the same customers and communities. Therefore, their objectives should be intrinsically linked. He emphasises that “if the government has a program, the private sector should support it. If the private sector has a program, governments must support it.”

This synergy, he believes, is the key to unlocking a “meaningful and sound impact” on societies.

Inyatsi Group Holdings is a diversified corporation with a presence in nine African countries. It is also one of the leading and most successful corporations in the region.

Originally established in 1982 as a construction company, the Group has established itself as a leading player in multiple sectors including construction, mining, telecommunications, financial services, health care, insurance, manufacturing, media, and property.

The construction division of the Group has a reputation for delivering high-quality infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, airports, water treatment plants, dams and commercial buildings. With a team of experienced engineers and project managers, the construction arm has completed several high-profile projects across the countries of operation.

Inyatsi is a 100% Eswatini-owned company which strives to be Africa’s Leading Integrated Business Partner.

Expanding on his reasoning, Shakantu is of the view that governments, with their broad reach and regulatory power, can create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

Conversely, a vibrant private sector generates taxes and employment, providing the resources governments need to address social issues and invest in infrastructure. This symbiotic relationship, Shakantu argues, is the very essence of development.

Inyatsi’s Executive Chairman has dispelled the notion that either sector can achieve progress alone. “Government on its own can’t deliver development,” he asserts.

“The private sector on its own without government support will not deliver development.” Instead, Shakantu advocates for “cohesion,” for “partnership,” for a unified pursuit of common goals.

This alignment, Shakantu believes, will yield

tangible results. “That’s the only way we can begin to see the results and see actual positive growth in economies,” he declares.

Shakantu paints a picture of a future where both sectors pull in the same direction, driving “win-win” outcomes for communities, businesses, and governments alike.

The Inyatsi leader’s words are in line with what is fulfilling development in the globe. The age-old narrative of government versus business is crumbling. In its place, a new paradigm has emerged, one where governments and businesses join hands as co-pilots, navigating the complex skies of development together.

This synergistic dance, far from being theoretical, has already yielded breathtaking results in nations that have embraced collaboration as their compass.

Singapore, the gleaming jewel of Southeast Asia, stands as a testament to this power. Its remarkable economic transformation, from an impoverished backwater to a global powerhouse, was fueled by a strategic partnership between a proactive government and a dynamic private sector.

The government provided fertile ground with visionary infrastructure projects, skilled workforce development, and transparent regulations.

The private sector, in turn, responded with innovation, investment, and job creation, propelling the nation forward.

Moreover, Rwanda, rising from the ashes of genocide, offers another poignant example. Public-private partnerships tackled healthcare challenges, spearheaded digitalisation efforts, and revitalised the agricultural sector.

Government investment in irrigation



▲Inyatsi Group Holdings Chairman Michelo Shakantu.

systems was met with private sector expertise in sustainable farming practices, leading to a remarkable agricultural boom. This collaborative approach transformed a nation on the brink into a beacon of hope and progress.

Across the Atlantic, Denmark’s green energy success story further underscores the potency of this partnership. Audacious government targets for renewable energy were met with private sector ingenuity. Wind farms sprang up across the landscape, powered by Danish

engineering prowess and fueled by government incentives.

Today, Denmark is a global leader in wind energy, its streets humming with electric vehicles, a testament to the transformative power of collaborative ambition.

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EPH 2k admission fee raises health concerns

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With this change, we are actively exploring ways to take away this inconvenience from our members without depriving them of the quality of healthcare of their choice,” he said.

“Clients are gravely inconvenienced by this move from EPH. When you are a medical aid member and are diligently servicing your membership, you do that so that at the unfortunate time when the unforeseen happens, you get the necessary medical attention or treatment. When you then get such surprises it becomes a shock and a great inconvenience as some of the clients could not have the cash.”

Nkambule declined to comment on the claims that Lidwala had ‘stolen’ a client from Swazi Med. He instead said businesses use different models informed by their strategic objectives and pressures, which could result in certain decisions that could be misinterpreted by a normal layman without all the underlying information that led to such decisions.

“I am thus not in a position to make a prediction, but what I can mention is that it is a decision that excludes the customer and is

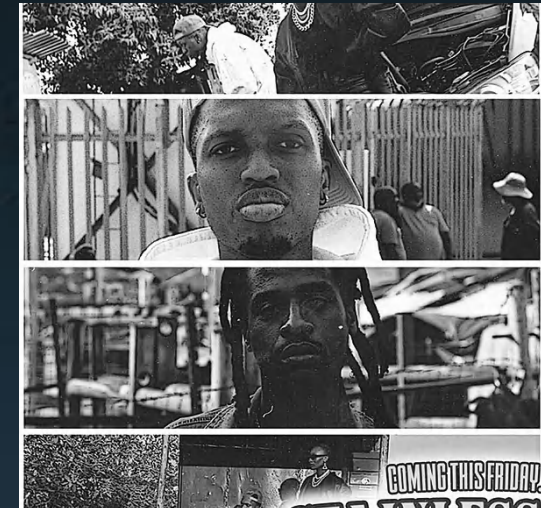
in no way in the customer’s best interest. The customer is king, and should be at the centre of all business decisions made,” he said.

Nkambule would also not be drawn to comment on whether the conduct was tantamount to anticompetitive behaviour.

“It would be very partial of me to comment on the fairness and competitiveness of this behaviour since I am conflicted. I play in the same space as Swazi Med as a direct competitor, so the objectivity of my view will be prejudiced,” Nkambule said.

He however called on the powers that be to look at possibly regulating the industry and having a neutral organisation that would play the role of a referee in similar matters.

“I believe we should be having regulatory bodies who should take interest in this and deal with it as appropriately as humanly possible. It would be an unfortunate situation if it’s a game without a referee, then it will be all systems go. I am inclined to believe however that consumer protection laws should then be considered in this instance,” he said.



What's **new** in 2024

THE year 2024 is approaching its third week but the entertainment industry has already dished out some mouthwatering delicacies for fans to enjoy.

From new television series' to movies and music. We look at what has come out of the beautiful Kingdom of Eswatini. Some of the artists that have given us something include Amarii, Lyrikal Busta, Mr Kangaroo and Tenele Shongwe.

1. AMARII - STAINLESS MUSIC VIDEO

Hip-hop/rap artist Amarii released his LP "From Bremersdorp With Love" in December last year. A few weeks before the year ended, he then went on to release the music video of his record Stainless, which raised the bar high and got the producer more fans.

From a production point of view, this video is one of the most creative visuals to come out of Eswatini; the concept is well-executed and captivating. A lot of 90's babies should find it easier to understand the inspiration behind the message. The video is futuristic, and I see it becoming a point of reference for upcoming artists in the country. Shot in Manzini, Stainless is in line with the title of the LP and follows suit as a love note to the town that has so much influence on Amarii's music.

I appreciate seeing Bremer from a different perspective because Manzini is the heartbeat of Eswatini. A must-watch and great work by Silverspoon Pictures, Amarii, and the whole production team.

2. LYRIKAL BUSTA - IMBITA FEATURING LIZ HARRIS LM

Lyrikal Busta has been consistently

dropping one music video after another. 5th single taken from his album Afro Bliss, Imbita celebrates the culture and heritage of EmaSwati with a fresh take from a young artist.

Shot at the beautiful Sibebe Resort, video directors Direktor Kwenu and Lyrikal Busta remind us of a time when the people of Eswatini celebrated milestones by inviting family and friends in a more traditional setup. Imbita is doing well with over five thousand streams on YouTube and is getting airplay on MTV Base South Africa.

3. TENELE SHONGWE - NGENELELA

Released on the 5th of January 2024, Tenele's new single brings us right into the throne room of worship. Ngenelela is a plea to the Lord, requesting him to intervene in our lives and the issues we feel are not equipped to carry on our own.

The lyrics of the song say "Ngazi wena, ngihambe nawe ngenelela Mhlengi wami" which means God you know me and my life story because you have been with me on this journey. As we start this year, Tenele calls to us, to surrender our lives, and trust that God will see us through anything we go through.

4. MR KANGAROO - SWATISTAR

It's been a while since we heard anything from our Swati Star, Mr Kangaroo. His latest single is taken from his forthcoming album set to drop this year and it sounds exciting.

The Award-winning producer is a well-known artist in the local industry for dropping mega hits. This song carries a message we can all relate to; the struggle faced by an artist trying to make it big in this world. The beat is undeniably good, and the lyrics carry so much weight. This song embodies what this column is about, we want to celebrate all the stars that come out of Eswatini.



DNA from ancient Europeans reveals surprising Multiple Sclerosis origins

DNA obtained from the bones and teeth of ancient Europeans who lived up to 34,000 years ago is providing insight into the origin of the often-disabling neurological disease multiple sclerosis, finding that genetic variants that now increase its risk once served to protect people from animal-borne diseases. The findings stemmed from research involving ancient DNA sequenced from 1,664 people from various sites across Western Europe and Asia. These ancient genomes were then compared with modern DNA from the UK Biobank, comprising about 410,000 self-identified “white-British” people, and more than 24,000 others born outside the United Kingdom, to discern changes over time.

One striking discovery related to MS, a chronic disease of the brain and spinal cord that is considered an autoimmune disorder in which the body mistakenly attacks itself. The researchers identified a pivotal migration event about 5,000 years ago at the start of the Bronze Age when livestock herders called the Yamnaya people moved into Western Europe from an area that includes modern Ukraine and southern Russia. They carried genetic traits that at the time were beneficial, protective against infections that could arise from their sheep and cattle. As sanitary conditions improved over the millennia, these same variants increased MS risk.

This helps explain, the researchers said, why Northern Europeans have the world’s highest MS prevalence, double that of Southern Europeans. “We are a product of the evolution that happened in past environments, and in many ways we are not optimally adapted to the environment we have created for ourselves today,” said University of California, Berkeley population geneticist Rasmus Nielsen, one of the leaders of the research published on Wednesday in the journal Nature. Around 11,000 years ago, farmers from the area of modern Turkey expanded into Western Europe, replacing hunter-gatherers.

It was these agriculturalists who the Yamnaya later replaced.

“The Yamnaya were Europe’s first true nomads. They used domesticated cattle and horses to access the interiors of the Asian Steppe, where there is little to eat or drink, so carried everything with them on wagons. Physically they were unusually large, which we can see by measuring the skeletons and also genetically, and apparently fairly violent,” University of Cambridge geneticist and study co-author William Barrie said.

“We think that much of the replacement that happened involved warfare,” Nielsen added.

High Yamnaya-related ancestry exists in Northern Europeans, peaking in Ireland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and decreasing further south.



▲ Groundbreaking conclusions have been drawn by scientists analyzing fossilized DNA stored in the world’s largest bank of prehistoric human genes. It turns out that neurodegenerative diseases “arrived” in Europe with the migration of pastoral peoples 5,000 years ago.

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High Yamnaya-related ancestry exists in Northern Europeans, peaking in Ireland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and decreasing further south. (NBC News)

Japan’s “Moon Sniper” robotic explorer landed on the lunar surface, but the mission may end prematurely since the spacecraft’s solar cell is not generating electricity, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said. The agency said it is currently receiving a signal from the lander, which is communicating as expected.

The uncrewed Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, mission landed just after 10:20 a.m. ET Friday (12:20 a.m. Saturday Japan Standard Time), according to telemetry data shared on JAXA’s live broadcast. Currently, the lander is operating on limited battery power, only expected to last several hours, and the JAXA team is analyzing the data to determine the cause of the solar cell issue and the next steps for the lander. It’s possible that the solar cell issue is due to the fact that the spacecraft is not pointing in the intended direction, JAXA officials said.

There is hope that as the solar angle changes on the moon, the solar cell may be able to charge again, but that may take some time and will depend on whether SLIM can survive the frigid lunar night, the team shared during a news conference.

The agency believes the mission has met the criteria to declare it a “minimum success,” because the spacecraft achieved a precise and soft lunar landing using optical navigation. The touchdown makes Japan the third country this century — and the fifth ever — to land on the moon.

When asked to score the landing operation for SLIM, JAXA director general Dr. Hitoshi Kuninaka gave it a “60 out of 100,” while also mentioning that he is known for making “harsh comments.”

The team is also working to gather all of the scientific data obtained by the lander.

The lander was able to release its two lunar rovers, LEV-1 and LEV-2. The LEV-1 rover moves using a hopping mechanism and is equipped with wide-angle visible light cameras, scientific equipment and antennas that allow it to communicate with Earth.

And LEV-2, also outfitted with cameras, can change shape to move across the lunar surface.

The team is receiving a signal from LEV-1 and will see whether its cameras were able to capture any images. JAXA officials said they will not definitively confirm the status of LEV-2 until more data is received.

The small-scale SLIM robotic explorer, which launched in September, goes by the nickname “Moon Sniper” because it carried new precision technology to demonstrate a “pinpoint” landing.

Previous lunar missions have been able to

Japan’s lunar lander reaches the moon

target and reach specific zones that spanned many kilometers, but the SLIM lander targeted a landing site that stretches just 100 meters (328 feet) across. The lander’s “smart eyes” — an image-matching-based navigation technology — rapidly photographed the sloped lunar surface on approach and autonomously made adjustments as the spacecraft descended toward touchdown.

The JAXA team is still working to determine the accuracy of SLIM’s landing, which could take up to a month.

MOON SNIPER'S JOURNEY

The Moon Sniper targeted a landing site near the small Shioli crater within a lunar plain called the Sea of Nectar that was created by ancient volcanic activity and lies just south of the Sea of Tranquility, where Apollo 11 landed in 1969. The lander is designed to briefly study rocks at the site that could

reveal insights into the moon’s origin.

When meteorites and other objects strike the moon, they create craters as well as rocky debris that litters the surface. These rocks intrigue scientists because studying them is effectively like peering inside the moon itself. Minerals and other aspects of the rocks’ composition can potentially shed more light on how the moon formed.

Landing near the sloped, rock-strewn areas around craters is a hazardous process that most missions usually avoid, but JAXA believes its lander has the technology to touch down safely on rocky terrain.

NEW SPACE RACE

Multiple space agencies and countries have attempted moon landing missions over the past year,

leading to a historic first as well as failures.

India became the fourth country — after the United States, the former Soviet Union and China — to execute a controlled landing on the moon when its Chandrayaan-3 mission arrived near the lunar south pole in August.

Meanwhile, Japanese company Ispace’s Hakuto-R lunar lander fell 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) before crashing into the moon during a landing attempt in April. Russia’s Luna-25 also crash-landed in August during the country’s first attempt to return to the moon since the Soviet Union’s fall.

Astrobotic Technology’s Peregrine spacecraft — the first US lunar lander to

launch in five decades — met a fiery end Thursday after a critical fuel leak made safely landing on the moon out of the question.

Part of the motivation behind the new lunar space race is a desire to access water trapped as ice in permanently shadowed regions at the lunar south pole.

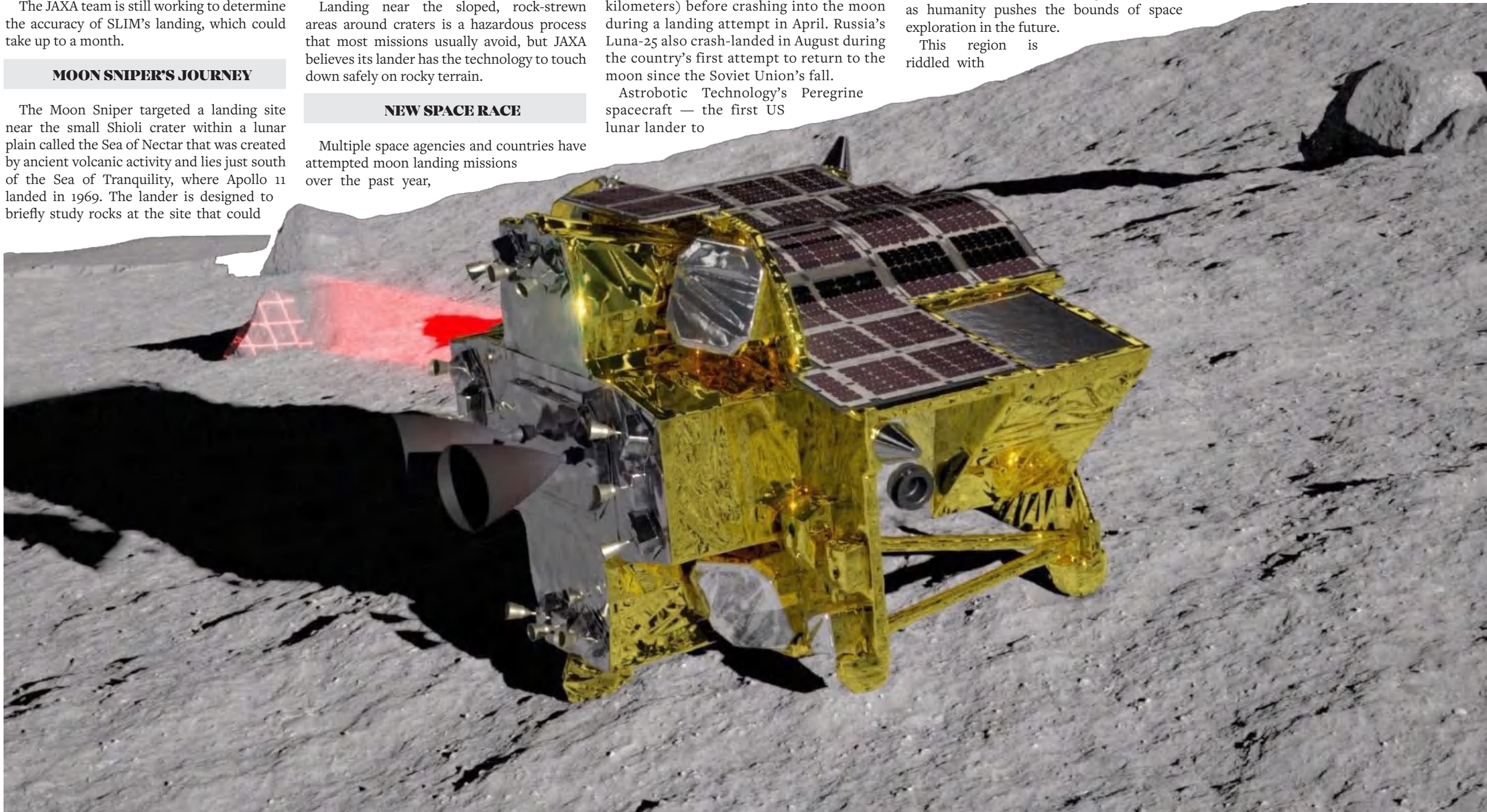
It could be used for drinking water or fuel as humanity pushes the bounds of space exploration in the future.

This region is riddled with

craters and strewn with rocks, leading to narrow landing sites.

The lightweight SLIM lander might be an effective design that could not only land in small areas of interest on the moon but also on planets such as Mars, according to JAXA.

(CNN)



▲ An artist’s illustration depicts what the SLIM lander will look like on the lunar surface.

Celebration for South Africa's matric Class of 2023, disappointment for some

By Edwin Naidu

SOUTH Africa celebrated its highest National Senior Certificate (NSC) pass rate of 82.9% since the examinations began in 2008 as the Class of 2023 triumphed against Covid-19 pandemic.

However, a blight on the increased numbers of matriculants who have passed is the fact that around a third of youth do not complete twelve years of education, leaving the education system without a formal qualification with which to join the labour market. Also, the issue of high youth unemployment in South Africa is a cause for concern.

According to the 2023 Exam Results Technical Report, annually, it has been estimated that at least 300 000 matriculants join the ranks of unemployed.

Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga told matriculants, parents, and national and provincial education leaders that the class of 2023 was severely impacted by the disruption to schooling due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

The full Grade 9 and Grade 10 curricula could not be covered in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The latter part of the Grade 11 year can be considered closest to an ordinary academic year, as all learners returned to full schooling in 2022.

The DBE attempted to establish the potential of this cohort compared to previous cohorts and to ensure that learner support programmes are tailored to meet their needs.

As a result, Learner support from 2021 to 2023 at national and provincial levels, was customised to mitigate reduced contact time and to address learning gaps and learning losses. These support programmes further attempted to improve learner performance across the system.

A total of 715 719 full-time (FT) and 182 056 part-time (PT) candidates respectively registered to sit for the October/ 2023 NSC examinations. But 897 775 candidates wrote the examination.

"The Class of 2023 was subjected to unusual and adverse learning conditions during their Grade 9

and Grade 10 academic years in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The cumulative effect of Covid-19 and the resultant learning losses and disengagement from education had a significant impact on this cohort," said Motshekga.

The pandemic has affected schooling, including Grade 12 results, through three key factors: declines in learner attendance during the pandemic; declines in the availability of teachers due to illness and death; and pandemic-related household traumas. These effects, in turn, impacted negatively on what learners could learn, the minister said.

The national pass rate for the Class of 2023 is 82.9% which is an increase of 2.8% from the 80.1% in 2022.

Significant performance improvements have been recorded in all subjects, except a few.

An improvement is noted in all subjects except History and Mathematical Literacy.

The National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination is in its sixteenth year of implementation in its current format and structure, and 2023 signifies 28 years of successful administration of public examinations in South Africa.

Motshekga was pleased to announce that an increase in admission to Bachelor studies, at 5.0% a year for the entire 1994 to 2023 period, has been the strongest. Youths qualifying annually for entry into a bachelor's programme at a university has increased from around 100 000 in 1994, to over 250 000 in the last three years.

But there was no doubt that the pandemic has affected schooling, including Grade 12 results, through three key factors: declines in learner attendance during the pandemic; declines in the availability of teachers due to illness and death; and pandemic-related household traumas. These effects, in turn, impacted negatively on what learners could learn.

The Minister praised the swift and collaborative responses of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), teachers, parents, our partners in education and South Africans at large, which led to the development of a holistic recovery plan that, to a large degree, mitigated the negative impact of the achievement of the key learning milestones.

"The father of our great nation, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, believed that "Educating all our children must be one of our most urgent priorities. We all know that education, more than anything else, improves your chances of building better lives", she said.

"These words resonate with the 2023 State of the Nation Address when the President of the Republic of South Africa, the Honourable Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, highlighted that "the performance of learners from poorer schools is steadily improving, confirming the value of the support that the Government provides to them".

The President coined the improvement in Grade 12 results as "a silent revolution taking place in our schools", she added.

Edwin Naidu is Editor of Inside Education.



▲ The Western Cape's Melissa Müller has been named the No 1 learner in South Africa.



▲ Top achiever in KZN Olwethu Khumalo from Mandla Mthethwa School Of Excellence.



▲ Madiba Comprehensive School in Kagiso former learner Tebogo Mohutsioa.



▲ Deputy Minister of Education Dr Reginah Mhaule with the class of 2023's Top Achievers at a congratulatory breakfast hosted at the MTN Innovation Centre in Fairland on 18 January 2024 in Johannesburg.

Mother, son survive Zambia's deadly cholera outbreak

LUSAKA - Sandra Nyendwa used to drink unfiltered water in Zambia's capital Lusaka without concern, until she and her seven-year-old son got cholera in an outbreak sweeping the country.

Both fell badly ill last week, joining more than 10,000 people infected by the disease that has killed at least 432 since October, according to government figures.

Nyendwa's son complained of stomach pain, turned pale and started vomiting. When Nyendwa succumbed, her grandmother had to come in to look after the rest of the children. The whole family feared for their lives as medics cared for them in a clinic.

But they both recovered and made it back home. "I didn't believe I would come back alive from the hospital. It was very bad," Nyendwa told Reuters.

"I can only thank God and the nurses. I wasn't expecting to be in my house by this time because I was in a terrible state."

Nine out of Zambia's 10 provinces have reported cholera cases, although the vast majority are in Lusaka, a city of some 3 million people,

where authorities have set up a makeshift treatment centre outside the National Heroes Stadium. "We never used to chlorinate and we were just using direct (water) from the tank," Nyendwa said. "We didn't know that there was an outbreak of the disease, but now we know."

Cholera is spread through contaminated food or water, typically in crowded environments where people lack access to clean water and sanitation. Serious cases can cause acute diarrhoea and, if untreated, death.

Neighbouring Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique have also been battling cholera since last year as outbreaks surged worldwide and vaccines ran out.

Zambia has had to mobilize retired health workers and volunteers to help with the cholera effort, Health Minister Sylvia Masebo said at the treatment centre in Lusaka.

"We've had to remove certain staff from other facilities to bring them here. And that itself is a negative because it does affect the operations of the health centres," she said.

(Reuters)



▲ Sandra Nyendwa used to drink unfiltered water in Zambia's capital Lusaka without concern, until she and her seven-year-old son got cholera in an outbreak sweeping the country.

African leaders criticize Israel's military campaign in Gaza

The criticism was during a conference in Uganda, hosted by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a coalition of 120 states that do not align formally with any major power bloc.

The President of the United Nations General Assembly, Denis Francis, expressed deep concern and dismay over the continuing calamity in the Gaza Strip.

In a strong statement, he implored the NAM to leverage its influence to bring a halt to the devastating violence, questioning how much more suffering the region could endure.

"I must tell you that I am deeply concerned and indeed dismayed about the ongoing calamity in the Gaza Strip, and so, I call upon this movement to exert its influence in bringing a halt to the carnage that we are all helplessly witnessing. That situation behoves us to ask, how much is enough?" Francis stated.

Uganda's President, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who is also set to assume the chairmanship of the NAM, echoed these sentiments. He emphasized the importance of prioritizing the freedom of the people, condemning what he described as the shallowness of some global actors' philosophical, ideological, and strategic perspectives.

"We, the resistance fighters of Uganda, are flabbergasted and look down with contempt at the philosophical, ideological, and strategic shallowness of some of the actors in the world. Why not respect the freedom of everybody if you say you are a democrat? How can you say you are a democrat and yet you want other people to be slaves?" President Museveni questioned.

The Non-Aligned Movement, originating during the collapse of colonial systems and the peak of the Cold War, holds significant historical importance. According to its website, the NAM has played a pivotal role in decolonization processes, shaping its mission to foster



▲ Dennis Francis, president of the U.N. General Assembly, speaks during the 19th summit of Non-Aligned Movement in Johannesburg.

global peace and cooperation.

As the Gaza conflict persists, the organization finds itself at the forefront of international

efforts to address the humanitarian crisis and advocate for a peaceful resolution. (Reuters)

Mining Focus: Part 1

Mining remains an integral part of our future

... The unlocking of the mining sector is expected to lead to employment opportunities as, during both the prospecting and mining stages, emaSwati are expected to be employed.

By Karabo Ngoepe
karabon@rubiconmedia.group

AS industries continue to evolve and change and people look at new frontiers to create more opportunities while growing economies, one sector continues to stand the test of time - mining.

With the advent of technology, mining morphs itself but continues to grow from strength to strength. Archaeological evidence suggests that mining first occurred in prehistoric periods. The first mined material was flint, which humans broke into sharp-edged bits to use as scrapers, knives, and arrowheads due to its conchoidal breaking pattern.

Early mine shafts uncovered in France and Britain containing flint dated back to the Neolithic Period, or New Stone Age, and were up to 100 metres deep.

The Kingdom of Eswatini has a rich history in mining and the world's oldest known underground mine was located at Bomvu Ridge in the Ngenwenya mountains. It is believed to be over 40,000 years old.

People extracted ochre, a natural clay earth pigment used as body colouration during funeral and ceremonial rituals. Currently, the Kingdom still mines, with coal being shipped globally. The story doesn't end there with coal, the mining sector in the country is expected to continue and grow even bigger.

Explorations in Eswatini have uncovered Gold and diamond deposits to mention just a few, laying the foundation for future excavations and guaranteed job opportunities for emaSwati.

The discoveries take us back to the advent of mining and remind us of its history. Gold was one of the first metals mined from sand and gravel streambeds, where it appeared naturally as a pure metal due to its chemical stability.

Early civilizations prized gold for several reasons — it is visually appealing, does not corrode, is multifaceted, and useful in many different applications.

Ancient cultures saw the value in gold, and lavishly decorated tombs and temples while paying homage to gods and significant figures. In Bulgaria, archaeologists uncovered the oldest piece of gold jewellery, dating back roughly 6600 years.

WHY MINING IS CRUCIAL

Nearly every mineral and metal in use today is the product of mining. And demand is increasing. According

to the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) which was founded in 2001, as a CEO-led leadership organization, on the premise of improving sustainable development in the mining and metals industry, even if we were to recycle all the freely available metals and minerals in the world today, we would only meet a small percentage of the total mineral and metal requirements of society.

It says this is due to the demands of a growing global population but also the reality that metals and minerals can remain in use for many years and are, therefore, simply unavailable for recycling.

"For example, steel forms the framework of buildings; it can't be recycled until the building has been demolished. Mining is, therefore, key to almost every facet of our lives, from construction to the technological innovations that improve our lives," the ICMM said.

Despite the important role played by mining and the extraction of minerals from the earth, ICMM warns that we need to be mindful of the broader balance of benefits and impacts and how mining operations should be managed.

The organisation says the means to achieving that balance lies in the concept of sustainable development.

"Its central idea is that any human activity, including mining, should be undertaken in such a way that it provides a net positive contribution to people and the environment. This means that the benefits (which cannot be measured in purely economic terms) must outweigh the costs. The growing demand for minerals and metals is sure to keep mining and the management of its impact and benefits front and centre," it says.

MINE OPERATIONS

Mining and metal production has evolved from being manual, unsafe, dirty and small-scale to being partially- or fully-automated, safer, cleaner and large-scale. Unlike their predecessors, today's workers are highly trained personnel performing skilled work by the highest health, safety and environmental standards.

EXPLORATION

Before a mine is established a long process of metal and mineral exploration is required. Advanced scientific techniques (e.g. geochemical

analysis of the Earth's crust or airborne surveys to measure magnetic, gravitational and electromagnetic fields) are used to help determine whether a location has a sufficient mineral deposit to warrant mining.

Once this preliminary investigation has been carried out, more and larger rock samples are drilled and sent to a laboratory for testing. Very few rock samples contain metals or minerals of a high enough grade (quality) to be worth mining.

Each exploratory step is based on the information available at that time. Money and effort are spent to raise the degree of confidence in the measurement of the shape, size (quantity) and grade of the mineralisation held in the Earth's crust.

Eswatini's Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy is currently searching for funds to conduct the second phase of the Multi-Disciplinary Geoscience Mapping meant to identify available minerals. This comes after the initial probe identified the available minerals in the Manzini and Hhohho regions and they are still looking at other areas to see what riches lie there.

Chief Geologist Dr Noah Nhleko in 2023 told our sister publication, the Eswatini Financial Times they have already filed the request for a budget to conduct the exercise in the remaining two regions.

"We have forwarded a request and are hopeful that Parliament will approve it. If the budget request is passed, we will conduct the exercise in the next financial year because we need to conclude it as soon as possible so that the mining sector potential can be unlocked in order to boost the economy," Nhleko said.

Even though he did not state the exact amount that has been requested, he highlighted that it was determined by the amount that was spent in the first phase of the exercise which was around E20 million. To conduct all three phases, the government needed about E60 million.

Nhleko revealed that following the discovery of the four minerals, there has been an impressive response from interested investors. The first phase of the exercise was conducted in the Manzini and Hhohho regions and the findings, which were then made public, revealed the discovery of four major minerals' potential occurrences.

The four major minerals identified in the first phase are gold, iron ore, diamond and copper-nickel-platinum group Elements. Gold mineralisation was confirmed in areas

northwest of the country.

These areas stretch from the Nsingizini area in the north to Lomati (current Lomati Mine lease), Luhhumaneni area and Forbes Reef area in the south.

While iron ore targets were identified from various areas north of the current Ngenwenya Iron Ore Mine.

Three of the deposits lie in the Malolotja Game Park in Makonjwa Hills and Luhhumaneni. There is another target north of the current Lomati Mine. Interpretation of the collected data revealed a large area of otherwise unknown Copper-Nickel-Platinum Group Elements.

This is split into three target areas which are Siphocosini, Mhlambanyatsi and Langabhi-Luyengo area.

Meanwhile, three diamond targets were revealed from the survey surrounding the dormant Dvokolwako Diamond Mine.

Nhleko said following the discovery of the four minerals, there has been an impressive response from interested investors. He said most of those who have enquired about the minerals are emaSwati who, however, do state that they want to partner with businesspeople from other countries such as South Africa.

For years, there has been a concern that in mining, the limited number of minerals (coal, quarry and iron ore) being extracted, combined with the lack of processing industries affects the value-add prospects in the sector.

This reality has resulted in the sector's low revenue contribution to the economy — the mining and energy sector contributes less than one per cent to the local GDP. The government then decided that issuing mining licences would develop the sector and show emaSwati the prospects of being professional miners, managers, and owners.

The unlocking of the mining sector is expected to lead to employment opportunities as, during both the prospecting and mining stages, emaSwati are expected to be employed.

According to the Eswatini National Skills Audit Report presented in 2023, mining has the lowest (0.01%) ranking in the list of employers in Eswatini.

It is important to note that the result of the exploration phase is measured in terms of mineral resources and ore reserves.

► **Mineral resources:** The concentration of materials in or on the Earth's crust that have reasonable prospects for economic extraction.

► **Ore reserves:** Those parts of a mineral resource that can be economically mined.

DEVELOPMENT

When a company decides that a mining operation is

feasible, a social and environmental impact assessment is undertaken and submitted to the relevant environmental regulatory authorities for approval.

This important process should include provisions for public hearings and submissions. It takes one to three years. Even with legal permission in place, there's still no guarantee that a mine will be built. A company's final decision is based on a feasibility study which builds on the pre-feasibility study. A feasibility study covers every aspect of the mine's future, including:

- Mining method (open pit or underground).
- Processing plant design.
- Waste treatment and disposal.
- Labour agreements.
- Safety, health and environmental requirements.
- Logistics and supply chain.
- Risk controls.
- Capital costs investment.
- Duration of construction.
- Operating costs.
- Production volume.
- Cash flow.
- Taxes.
- Royalties.
- Valuation.

A feasibility study is also concerned with mine closure, i.e. what happens to the mine when there is no more economically mineable ore to extract.

A feasibility study typically takes from one to three years, but it can be longer.

It depends on the need to test at small and large-scale the planned mining and processing technologies, and the nature of the mine being built, whether it is a brownfield project (an extension to an existing mine) or a greenfield project (a new mineral deposit).

In total, the start-up phase for a mine (from exploration to first mine production) may take more than ten years.

The article is part of a series focusing on Mining and its economic impacts on communities.

Mining Focus Part 2 will be published in next week's Eswatini Sunday.



Politics

Eswatini eyes growth in 2024

Optimism buzzes through the Kingdom of Eswatini as the dust settles on a successful Cabinet retreat, setting the stage for a promising 2024.

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By Ncaba Ntshakala

The Kingdom of Eswatini amid a global surge in support for environmental initiatives, has emerged as one of the frontrunners, leveraging the generous over E100 billion (US\$5.33 billion) pledged by 29 donor governments to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for tackling pressing nature and climate challenges.

The Kingdom's ambitious plans hinge on a project proposal from the Incomati and Maputo Watercourse Commission (INMACOM), a trilateral body overseeing the basins shared by Eswatini, Mozambique and South Africa.

The centrepiece of Eswatini's strategy is to strengthen integrated transboundary management of the Incomati and Maputo River basins" project (IncoMaputo). This critical undertaking, secured through a Project Preparation Grant (PPG) from the GEF Secretariat, aims to develop a comprehensive Full-Size Project (FSP) proposal. The PPG phase involves extensive data collection and stakeholder engagement, transforming the initial project concept into a detailed implementation plan.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a family of funds dedicated to confronting biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and strains on land and ocean health. Its grants, blended financing, and policy support help developing countries address their biggest environmental priorities and adhere to international environmental conventions.

Over the past three decades, the GEF has provided more than E418 billion and mobilised E2.28 trillion in co-financing for more than 5,000 national and regional projects. Eswatini is utilising its focal point which is the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Principal Secretary Khangeziwe Mabuza and working jointly with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy under the Department of Water Affairs. As reported in our sister publication, Eswatini Daily News, on the Incomati and Maputo Watercourse Commission (INMACOM) significant workshop on January 18 at Emafini Country Lodge. The stakeholder consultative workshop marked a major step forward in strengthening integrated transboundary management of the Incomati and Maputo River basins project (IncoMaputo). This workshop was a crucial initiative, aimed to develop a comprehensive Full-Size Project (FSP) proposal to be presented to the Global Environment Fund.

During the workshop, INMACOM Interim Executive Secretary Edward Mswane said the GEF 8 project which will commence in the first quarter of 2025 will address key environmental challenges and barriers.

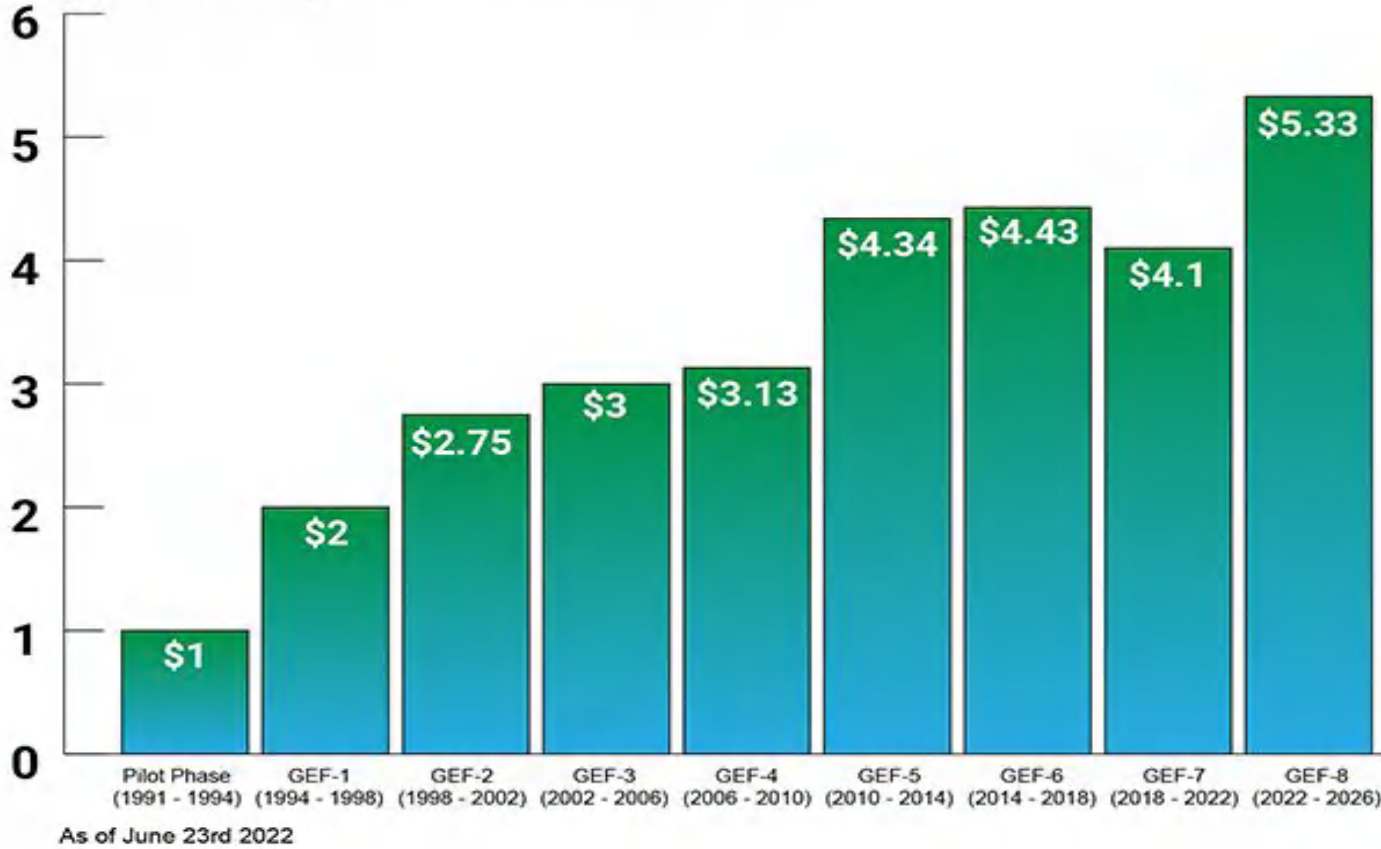


▲ INMACOM Interim Executive Secretary Edward Mswane.

Eswatini aiming at leveraging over E100bln GEF-8 funding



GEF Replenishment Cycles (in billions of USD)



According to Mswane, such includes high water demand and associated changes in the flow regime, unsustainable use of natural resources, deteriorating water quality, and climate change, especially an increase in extreme weather events experienced in the Incomati and Maputo basins.

"Some of the key barriers to be addressed include limited technical, institutional, and operational capacity, data and information gaps, inadequate transboundary data and information exchange, lack of coordination between relevant management authorities, scientific knowledge gaps, absence of key transboundary management instruments, and lack of basin-wide development and

investment plan," Mswane said. Mswane said that the Commission is grateful to GEF 8 for the grant they have availed. "As we are mandated by the 3 Member States to deliver on the project, we commit as INMACOM together with the Implementing agency (UNDP) and the Executing Agency (GWPSA) to adhere to the timelines that will be developed and also involve the stakeholders as we move along.

No one must be left behind," said the Interim Executive Secretary. UNDP Eswatini is the project implementing agency. During the workshop, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Nessie-Gould Golaki acknowledged the role of the UNDP Country Office in coordinating involvement and support

from South Africa and Mozambique COs, highlighting successful instances of resource mobilization and stakeholder engagement. Golaki also applauded the existing robust partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy, emphasizing their crucial roles in the environment, climate change, water, and energy sectors.

Global Environment Fund stated that much of the funding will be delivered through a set of eleven integrated programs (IPs) that address multiple environmental threats at once. A set of information briefs highlights the issue, integrated solutions, and expected outcomes for each programme.

Botswana voter registration continues surging

By Eswatini Sunday Reporter

THE number of registered voters is continuing to surge during the second week of the registration period, statistics released by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) show.

A total of 130 157 Batswana were registered in week two, bringing the overall number to 205 723 on Wednesday, January 17. "This marks a substantial increase from the 75 566 individuals who were captured during the first week," the IEC said.

IEC spokesperson Osupile Maroba told Botswana's publication Mmegi Online that the surge in registrations is a positive sign of civic engagement and yearning for participation by Batswana in the upcoming October general elections.

"The IEC has been working tirelessly to ensure that registration is accessible to as many eligible voters as possible," Maroba told Mmegi Online, adding that no major issues have so far been encountered.

Maroba said the IEC was positive that it would achieve 80 percent voter registration representing 1.7 million voters.

As the registration continues to gain traction, Maroba said the IEC was committed to facilitating a seamless and inclusive process. He urged every eligible voter to feel duty-bound to participate in the country's electoral process and use the remaining registration period to register.

The 2024 general elections voter registration exercise started on January 5 and will end on February 3, 2023.

Long considered one of Africa's most stable and longest-standing multiparty democracies, Botswana is set to have its general elections by October. Botswana's president is indirectly elected by the National Assembly for up to two 5-year terms.

President Mokgweetsi Masisi will be running for re-election as the standard-bearer for the ruling Botswana Democratic



▲ Botswana's voter registration number continues surging.

Party (BDP). Despite Botswana's strong democratic credentials, the BDP has held a parliamentary majority since Botswana's first post-independence elections in 1969.

The opposition Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) coalition, formed in the lead-

up to the 2019 elections and led by Duma Boko, represents the strongest challenge yet to the long-ruling BDP. Botswana's historically fragmented and weak opposition has experienced an upswell in confidence since its victory in the 2022 by-elections.

One of the UDC's proposals is to develop a National Health Insurance Scheme that will make access to quality health care a priority.

The BDP's support has been hurt by a personal feud between Masisi and his predecessor, former president, Ian Khama.



Khama has been living in South Africa since leaving office and faces arrest on firearms charges that have been upheld in court. A series of policy reversals and personnel changes under Masisi's government have soured Khama into supporting the opposition Botswana Patriotic Front to unseat the current president.

Masisi's tenure has been marked by mixed results. High youth unemployment and deteriorating public infrastructure have generated increased public attention. However, press freedom has significantly improved under Masisi's tenure after media space had deteriorated under Khama. The passing of the

Media Practitioners' Association Bill in 2022 was a tangible step toward strengthening media independence long sought by press freedom advocates, though some have expressed concerns over the creation of a formal register for journalists.

Regardless of which party comes out on top in Botswana's elections, the increased competitiveness is strengthening the country's multiparty system. This incentivises all parties to put forward innovative policies that are responsive to popular interests and challenging attitudes of entitlement that can set in under dominant party systems.

Eswatini eyes growth in 2024 after productive Cabinet Retreat



▲ Prime Minister Russell Dlamini and Cabinet Ministers pose for a group photo after their retreat.

Ncaba Ntshakala

OPTIMISM buzzes through the Kingdom of Eswatini as the dust settles on a successful Cabinet retreat, setting the stage for a promising 2024.

Prime Minister Russell Dlamini announced the retreat's fruitful deliberations, unveiling a roadmap that prioritizes economic growth, citizen welfare, and improved service delivery. The Premier was addressing the nation on the retreat's outcomes which was held at the Royal Villas, Ezulwini. This renewed focus has not only sparked excitement within Eswatini's borders but also promises positive ripples across the continent and region. The country is still focusing on implementing its National Development Plan 2023/24 – 2027/28 where the Kingdom has a total expenditure plan of E157 billion (US\$ 8.3 billion).

Growth and Development

The retreat saw extensive discussions on key areas crucial for Eswatini's advancement. Top on the agenda was economic revitalization, with plans to diversify the economy, attract foreign investment, and boost job creation. This renewed focus on economic growth aims to build on the momentum of Eswatini's projected GDP increase of 3.27% in 2024, as predicted by the African Development Bank. Alongside economic revitalization, the government pledged to prioritize the well-being of its citizens. Investments in social programs, healthcare, and education are poised to enhance the quality of life for all emaSwati. Additionally, improving service delivery

across various sectors will be of paramount importance, ensuring efficient and effective governance that meets the needs of the people.

Regional Implications

Eswatini's renewed focus on growth and development holds significant implications for the region. As a key player in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a stable and prosperous Eswatini translates to positive outcomes for its neighbours. Increased trade and economic cooperation will be mutually beneficial, creating new opportunities for businesses and individuals across the region. A thriving Eswatini will contribute to regional stability and security. By addressing internal challenges and fostering economic growth, the Kingdom can serve as a model for development and collaboration within SADC. This, in turn, can pave the way for a more prosperous and interconnected Southern Africa.

Key areas of focus by the Eswatini Government in 2024

Service Delivery at the Forefront

The retreat placed service delivery at the heart of the government's agenda. Recognizing the importance of responsiveness to the needs of the people, the government pledged to prioritize all Sibaya submissions. These submissions, a cornerstone of Tinkhundla system of governance, have served as a direct channel for emaSwati where they shared their concerns and aspirations for the Kingdom. His Majesty King Mswati III further declared and adopted the submissions as a guideline policy which the government has said will be a priority as they execute their duties. Prime Minister expressed that government,

addressing these submissions effectively will ensure that government services reach the people.

"Our retreat focused on how we can grow the economy and improve the lives of emaSwati," said the Prime Minister. "We based much of what we discussed on the submissions made by emaSwati at Sibaya. Cabinet agreed that we must develop and implement ambitious plans that should be implemented aggressively to grow the economy."

Boosting the Economy

Economic growth received significant attention during the retreat. Development partners, acknowledging the Kingdom's steady but sluggish economic progress, encouraged the government to develop ambitious plans and implement them with urgency. The government, receptive to this advice, vowed to focus on fostering an environment conducive to investment and job creation. This renewed focus on economic growth promises a brighter future for emaSwati.

Performance Management

To ensure that government officials and civil servants deliver on their duties, the Prime Minister said that on the retreat, there were discussions on the importance of robust performance management systems (PMS). The existing PMS strategy, designed by the previous government, will be fully implemented and further refined to ensure accountability and efficiency.

Decentralization

Decentralization emerged as a key strategy for bringing government closer to the people. Leveraging the Tinkhundla system, the government aims to ensure that services reach



▲ Prime Minister Russell Dlamini addresses Cabinet Ministers during the retreat.

communities and constituencies effectively. This decentralized approach promises to enhance responsiveness to local needs and empower communities to participate in shaping their own development.

Investing in Education

Recognizing the crucial role of education in shaping the future, the government highlighted the need for improvements in the education sector. Development partners pledged their

support in this endeavour, aiming to equip young emaSwati with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Sustainable Energy

Prime Minister Dlamini also shared that on the retreat, the government also addressed the critical issue of energy. The government acknowledged the need to streamline processes and engage with the Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC) to develop

sustainable energy solutions and ensure reliable electricity generation.

Unity

The Premier further issued a heartfelt plea to the nation, urging all emaSwati to join hands in the collective endeavour to develop the country. Again, the Premier said that in due course, the government will share the full Government working programme which will be an outcome of the retreat.

African continent sees modest growth upturn despite lingering risks, UN observes

Ncaba Ntshakala

WHILE global economic prospects remain cloudy, African nations can anticipate a slight uptick in growth this year, according to the United Nations' World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2024 report.

The continent's average GDP is forecast to rise to 3.5%, a modest improvement from 2023's estimated 3.2%. This projected increase offers a glimmer of hope for Africa, which suffered disproportionately from the Covid-19 pandemic's economic fallout. Major regional economies such as that of Egypt, are anticipated to slow to 3.4% from 4.2% in the previous year, mainly due to foreign exchange scarcities that may weaken import capacity and domestic demand. The 2024 UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) is produced by UN DESA in partnership with the five UN Regional Commissions, UNCTAD, UN-OHRLS and UNWTO. It features the global economic outlook for 2024 and 2025, and regional growth forecasts for developed and developing economies, as well as economies in transition.

Debts and Deficits

In South Africa, the persistent energy crisis has limited the growth to just 0.5% in 2023, and no significant change is expected in 2024. In Nigeria, the country's growth prospect points to a moderate increase, largely due to government reforms in the oil sector. The



▲ Container ships wait to load and offload goods in port in Cape Town, South Africa.

growth is forecast to be at 3.1%. The UN report cautions that several significant challenges threaten to dim this glimmer. One major concern is the rising debt burden facing many African countries. Years of crisis-response spending and currency depreciation have pushed debt-to-GDP ratios to alarming levels, raising the spectre of fiscal distress. The report warns that over a third of African nations are now at high risk of debt crisis, making them vulnerable to interest rate hikes and market volatility. Compounding the debt issue are chronic fiscal pressures. Domestic revenue generation remains weak in many countries, limiting

governments' ability to invest in essential infrastructure and social services. This underinvestment, in turn, hinders long-term economic growth and development. For instance, Zambia is navigating a debt-to-GDP ratio that soared past 70% in recent years. Yet, the country is not alone: "18 countries in Africa recorded a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 70% in 2023, with many of them facing debt distress," the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) said in a release accompanying the report. Ghana's financial health is also under scrutiny, with a staggering fifth of its tax revenue devoted to servicing debt. These

instances are not anomalies but rather stark representations of the debt dilemma many African nations confront.

Fiscal health and inflation

Fiscal stability remains elusive, the report highlighted, with many countries wrestling to increase their tax revenue, a vital lifeline for economic sustainability. Energy subsidy reforms in nations like Nigeria and Angola reflect attempts to recalibrate fiscal policies amidst pressing economic realities. At the same time, inflationary pressures are widespread, with countries like Nigeria and Egypt experiencing severe surges in food

prices. In response, Central banks across the continent have tightened monetary policies, trying to stabilize currencies and curb inflation. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures in the face of global economic turbulence remains a critical question.

Trade

The report asserts that the global slowdown in trade has also slowed down economic growth in Africa. This is due to less demand from the main countries that buy Africa's exports and the prices for raw materials and goods sold by the continent have stopped increasing. Although overall intra-African trade remains relatively low continent-wide, hovering below 15 per cent, this general trend masks regional variations. East and Southern Africa stand out with their relatively higher levels of intra-regional trade, where intra-African exports correspond to almost 30% of these subregions' overall exports. These regions contrast with other parts of the continent, where trade is more externally oriented. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) emerged as a central initiative intended to address these intra-African trade issues. Its goal is to enhance economic integration and increase trade flows within the continent by creating a single market for goods and services. Yet, despite its potential, the actual impact of AfCFTA has been limited so far, the report remarked.

Climate Change

The WESP 2024 also highlights the ever-present threat of climate change to Africa's

economic prospects. The continent is disproportionately vulnerable to extreme weather events like droughts, floods, and cyclones, which disrupt agricultural production, damage infrastructure, and displace populations. These disruptions erode economic gains and exacerbate poverty and inequality. Southern Africa's vulnerability was laid bare by Cyclone Freddy in March 2023, with losses mounting into hundreds of millions.

Sustainability Investment

Despite these challenges, the report emphasizes that hope remains. The UN urges African governments to prioritize policies that address debt sustainability, enhance domestic resource mobilization, and promote climate-resilient development. This includes fostering diversification away from commodity dependence, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and strengthening social safety nets. Investing in renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture is also crucial to building a more resilient and sustainable future for the continent.

International Cooperation

The report further emphasizes the need for international cooperation to support Africa's development. This includes debt relief initiatives, increased concessional financing, and improved access to technology and knowledge transfer. Developed countries and multilateral institutions must step up their support to help African nations navigate these complex challenges.

AI, climate change threatens nearly half of the world's business

... some businesses could fail in 10 years, study finds

A study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers has come up with startling findings that artificial intelligence (AI) and climate change are threatening nearly half of the world's businesses. The study found that almost half of global chief executives said their business models would not be viable within a decade due to the pace of technological advances such as AI and climate pressures, according to the survey. PricewaterhouseCoopers' poll of 4 702 company leaders around the world found that 45% said their businesses could fail in 10 years unless they adapt, up from 39% in 2023.

Optimistic
"They are less optimistic than last year about their revenue prospects, and more acutely aware of the need for fundamental reinvention of their business," said Bob Moritz, global chair of PwC when unveiling the survey at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Moritz went on to say: "As inflationary fears ease, business leaders are becoming more focused on AI and climate change."

Furthermore, Moritz added that countries needed better infrastructure and clean energy to keep up with the soaring demand for AI. "Everybody's jumping to the bright, shiny new toy and we don't even have enough computing power to

get the world up and running on it yet," he said, adding that economic growth is needed to fuel investment in AI and energy demand will keep rising, he added.

Business leaders are becoming less concerned about macroeconomic challenges, the survey also found, with more than a third of CEOs expecting their workforce to increase by 5.0 per cent this year.

Similarly, another study conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) also found that the advent of generative AI and, in particular, large language models (LLMs), underpinned by advancements in machine learning and natural language processing, represent a paradigm shift in how people interact with information and, by extension, how they work.

The WEF observed that these technologies can create original content, generate insights from large amounts of data, translate languages with near-human accuracy and potentially even make complex decisions.

Again, the versatility and efficiency of these technologies, including new LLM-powered human-machine interfaces such as intelligent agents, could have profound implications for jobs and the future of work.

While the application of

LLMs could lead to significant productivity gains and the creation of new types of jobs, there is also a risk that they could displace existing roles, exacerbating socioeconomic disparities and creating a sense of job insecurity among the global workforce.

As such, integrating AI into our workplaces is a balancing act between seizing opportunities and managing potential disruptions, the WEF underscored.

Furthermore, concerns have arisen that the latest wave of generative AI technologies, specifically LLMs, could lead to the automation of job tasks and, ultimately, job loss. The World Economic Forum posits that while labour market predictions are never 100% certain, recent research took a structured approach and found that the adoption of LLMs could automate some tasks and augment others.

Optimistic
The WEF's Jobs of Tomorrow: Large Language Models and Jobs white paper found that job tasks with the highest potential for automation by LLMs tend to be those that use language in a routine and repetitive manner. "While LLMs will impact tasks, rather than jobs as a whole, jobs emphasizing these types of language tasks could see a decline and some workers are aware of this potential," the World Economic Forum has observed.

Additionally, the paper found there is potential to generate new employment opportunities by creating roles that oversee, complement, and enhance AI's capabilities. The Future of Jobs Report 2023 echoes many of these findings, indicating that many of the jobs with high potential for automation by LLMs were also expected by business leaders to undergo employment decline within the next five years, such as bank tellers and related clerks, data entry clerks, and administrative and executive secretaries.

In juxtaposition, jobs with higher



▲ Half of global chief executives said their business models would not be viable within a decade due to the pace of technological advances such as AI and climate pressures, according to the survey.

potential for augmentation are expected to grow, such as AI and machine learning specialists, data analysts and scientists, and database and network professionals.

As technology is undeniably rapidly transforming the labour market, the Future of Jobs Report 2023 found that global business leaders expect 23 per cent of current jobs to transform within the next five years. The report says this transformation is driven by key trends like technology adoption, the green transition, and the global macroeconomic outlook.

"In particular, technology adoption is driving change in labour markets: 82% of business leaders expect increased adoption of new technologies to drive business transformation, while 37% of business leaders anticipate that new technologies will be a net job creator, and 21% believe that they will be a net job displacer," the report postulates.

Capabilities
Furthermore, the report found that throughout 2023, specifically, generative AI has developed at a rapid pace in terms of capabilities and adoption, and that pace is not slowing down. It has been noted that three out of every four companies across the globe are expected to adopt technologies that include generative AI in the next three to five years, and 98% of global executives agree AI foundation models will play an important role in their organizations' strategies in that same period.

Noticeably, one week into its November 2022 launch, ChatGPT, OpenAI's trained language model, reached one million users.

By January, ChatGPT had reached one hundred million monthly active users, making it the fastest-growing consumer application in history at the time.

It was also noted that generative transformer models can impact all classes of creative

work, possessing the capability to generate novel images, videos, music, sounds and written language.

While there are myriad possible use cases for generative AI, large language models (LLMs) and their unique language-generating capabilities have an outsized potential to impact the greatest number of jobs shortly. LLMs, such as those powering ChatGPT, have demonstrated this rapid development and have the potential to impact many jobs and workers across industries.

In September 2023, to increase understanding of how LLMs could impact jobs, the World Economic Forum, in collaboration with Accenture, published the Jobs of Tomorrow: Large Language Models and Jobs white paper. It provides a structured analysis of the potential impact of LLMs on jobs and finds that it will both automate and augment job tasks, ultimately having a transformative effect on jobs.

Occupations
The September 2023 white paper found that an estimated 62% of total work time across occupations involves language-based tasks – tasks that could be exposed to the potential impacts of LLMs.

The paper also found that over 19 000 individual tasks across 867 occupations were assessed to understand the potential exposure of each task to LLM adoption, classifying them as tasks with high potential for automation (the task could be performed by LLMs, without humans), high potential for augmentation (the task will continue to be performed by humans, with LLMs increasing human productivity), low potential for either (humans will continue to perform the task with no significant impact from LLMs) or unaffected (non-language tasks).

The analysis found that over 40% of working hours could be transformed by LLMs through automation or augmentation. Jobs with the highest potential for automation of tasks include those that emphasize routine and repetitive procedures and do not require a high

degree of interpersonal communication, including many clerical occupations.

"Jobs with the highest potential for augmentation by LLMs are those that emphasize critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills, especially those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. They include a mix of highly specialized roles often requiring advanced degrees, such as computer programmers, plus roles that require human validation, such as assessors, monitors, and screeners," the paper found.

Jobs emphasizing face-to-face communication and interpersonal interactions are expected to be less exposed to the impacts of LLMs, and those emphasizing non-language tasks will be even less exposed or not exposed at all. Lastly, the paper also found that new jobs could emerge, for example, AI model and prompt engineers, interface and interaction designers, AI content creators, data curators and trainers, and ethics and governance specialists.

Development
Nevertheless, the WEF noted that the labour market predictions are never completely certain and will likely evolve with the development of LLMs, therefore businesses must be proactively engaged in addressing the concerns of their workers while preparing them to adapt to the transition to come.

In this regard, the WEF suggests that businesses must employ responsible business strategies which include worker awareness by deploying proactive forecasting and communicating expectations using predictive analytics to forecast which jobs will most likely be affected by LLMs and other disruptions and communicating actively with management and employees to proactively provide pathways to mitigate negative employment impacts.

(Reuters)

Jobs in SA: the labour market is recovering from Covid-19

By Derek Yu

For more than three decades the South African economy has had very high rates of joblessness. The country's economy has been unable to create enough jobs for its growing army of workers. This has partly been because of the stagnant economic growth rate of only 1.7% during the 2010s (it was even lower at 0.9% in 2015-2019).

Another factor that limited the economy's capacity to create jobs at a rapid enough pace to absorb new job seekers and previously employed people was the impact of restrictions imposed during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Compared with the global financial crisis of 2008/2009 the impact was much greater. Then about 600,000 jobs were lost in South Africa. During the COVID restrictions there were a staggering 1.5 million job losses.



▲ African males aged 15-44 years who did not have post-secondary school qualifications and had no prior work experience suffered the greatest increase of unemployment.

... but unskilled and less educated people are still being left behind

We examined the labour market during the lockdown period. We compared the 2020 first quarter and 2022 second quarter data of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey data released by Statistics South Africa. 2020 first quarter was the last survey before the pandemic hit the country. The 2022 second quarter survey took place just before all the remaining lockdown restrictions were abolished. To complement the findings of this study, we also analysed the most recently released 2023 third quarter survey data to find out whether the most vulnerable groups had recovered and whether their labour market outcomes had at least returned to the pre-COVID levels.

We found that the employment number (as per 2023 third quarter data) had recovered to its pre-pandemic levels. But, we found, this hadn't been enough to keep up with the increase in the new working-age population joining the labour force. This finding is once again consistent with the performance of the labour market over the past 30 years. That is, job creation is not rapid enough to absorb all the job seekers.

We also found that most of the

gains from the recovery had gone to semi-skilled and skilled workers, leaving out the unskilled and those without 12 years of schooling, who make up more than 40% of the labour force. These were people who took a big hit from the pandemic-related job losses. (For those without the school leaving qualification, in absolute terms there was still an increase of unemployment of over 200,000 after the lockdown restrictions were lifted.)

This is a repetition of the pattern over the last 30 years – that South Africa's unskilled and less educated (without grade 12) are left behind in terms of job opportunities.

LOCKDOWN

Employment dropped by 822,000 (from 16.42 million to 15.59 million) when comparing the 2020 first quarter (just before the start of the lockdown) and 2022 second quarter (the end of lockdown) period. The unemployment

rate increased from 30.1% to 33.9%. The demographic groups that suffered the most job losses included Africans aged 25-44 years without grade 12 and those previously involved in unskilled occupations. These include craft and related trades, elementary occupations and domestic workers.

During the same 2.25-year period, the number of unemployed rose by almost a million – from 7.07 to 7.99 million. In fact the 2022 second quarter total unemployment number of 7.99 million was the highest ever in the South African labour market. On the other hand, the unemployment rate increased from 30.1% to 33.9% (this rate was at its peak level of 35.2% during the fourth quarter of 2021).

African males aged 15-44 years who did not have post-secondary school qualifications and had no prior work experience suffered the greatest increase of unemployment.

AFTER LOCKDOWN

We uncovered two encouraging findings in the latest 2023 third quarter data.

First: employment increased to 16.78 million, which was higher than the 2020 first quarter (just before COVID) level of 16.42 million.

However, the 0.34 million employment growth was lower than the increase in the labour force (from 23.48 to 24.63 million – a rise of 1.15 million) during the same period. The second encouraging finding was that the unemployment rate showed a gradual downward trend, dropping from the all-time high of 35.2% in the last quarter of 2021 to 31.9% in the third quarter of 2023. Nonetheless, the latter rate was still higher than the unemployment rate recorded before 2020 (below 30%).

In addition, 31.9% is still much higher than the key labour market goal of the New Growth Path. This was launched in November 2010, and aimed at enhancing economic growth, employment creation and equity. The goal was to reduce the unemployment rate to 6% by 2030.

UNEMPLOYMENT NUMBERS

Given the dire and chaotic state of the economy during the lockdown, this 6% goal was unofficially and temporarily "put aside" without any official announcement.

The goal nevertheless remains in place. But it's a tall order. South Africa's unemployment rate would need to drop by about 3.7 percentage points per annum between 2023 and 2030 before the country would be able to achieve it! It is obvious that this rapid decline is very unlikely to happen in the next seven years.

One worrying finding was that only a slight drop of total unemployment took place. The number remained very high in 2023 third quarter at 7.85 million. This is not far from the all-time high level of 7.99 million in 2022 second quarter. This implies that despite job creation taking place again after the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, it was not great enough to absorb the more rapidly increasing labour force entrants. Thus unemployment increased. This is what happened to the country's labour market before COVID-19 took place.

Lastly, between 2020 first quarter and 2023 third quarter, employment actually increased marginally by nearly 0.4 million. Most of the increase went to female Africans aged 45-54 years in the urban areas of two provinces: the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. They had the grade 12 secondary school leaving qualification (or more) and were involved in either high-skilled or semi-skilled occupations, in the finance and community, social and personal services industry categories.

This finding aligns with structural change in the country's economy: highly educated and high skilled workers are of greater demand in the labour market.

The road ahead

The findings show that the South African labour market has moved on from its worst ever state, and that various aspects have been gradually improving.

However, two worrying – yet expected – findings are that unemployment levels remained high while most of the job gains post-COVID went to highly skilled and highly educated people. The long-term challenge is how relatively less skilled and less educated people (some of whom suffered job losses during the lockdown period) can find work again (through greater promotion of informal entrepreneurial activities, for example). Otherwise they could end up as chronic unemployed who may not be employable in the long term.

This article is based on a journal article which the writers co-authored with Jade Botha, an economics master's graduate at the University of the Western Cape.

(Derek Yu is Professor, Economics, at the University of the Western Cape. The story was first published in The Conversation.)

Economics pushing US swing voters to pick Trump

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Houthi attacks expose China's commercial stakes in Red Sea

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Russia/Ukraine – Israel/Hamas Conflict:

Living through a world at war with itself



By Abbey Makoe

IN a week of intensely growing global tensions, Russia poured scorn over the overtures of the US aimed at rekindling talks over nuclear proliferation.

Russia's veteran foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov revealed the Kremlin's unmistakable disinterest in any talks with the US for as long as the Biden administration continues to serve as oxygen to Ukraine in its conflict with neighbouring Russia.

In a nutshell, the total summation of this week's geopolitical tensions paints a picture of an international community that is devoid of peace.

So far, more than 25,000 Palestinians have been cruelly killed in a relentless barrage of bombardment by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) aided by the US Army through military, financial and human capital support.

Medical supplies

Despite an uninspiring Qatar-brokered mini-deal between Israel and Hamas to allow medical supplies to the more than 100 captives in the custody of Hamas and Israel's permission for international aid to be delivered to the annihilated Gaza Strip, hope about the future is all but non-existent.

The Houthis have vowed to carry on with the attack on the US, UK and Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea until the genocidal war on Gaza is halted. For the fourth time in a week, the US and UK shelled the Houthi positions inside Yemen, sparking fears of a rapidly expanding Middle Eastern conflict.

Still in the beleaguered region, Iran launched attacks on the neighbouring Iraq, and later Pakistan, arguing that it was targeting the positions of terrorist groups that had recently launched attacks inside Iran itself.

Turkey, meanwhile, launched its air raid on positions in Syria. And Lebanon continues to exchange firepower with Israel across their

border.

I raise the above examples as an illustration of a world that is hardly at peace with itself, and also to make sense of the importance of Russia's disinterested stance towards the US overtures to sit around the table and discuss matters about nuclear arms.

Minister Lavrov explained: "Amid a 'hybrid war' waged by Washington against Russia, we aren't seeing any basis, not only for any additional joint measures in the sphere of arms control and reduction of strategic risks but for any discussion of strategic stability issues with the US."

He further claimed that Washington's push for the revival of nuclear talks "has been driven by a desire to resume inspections of Russia's nuclear weapons sites".

In light of Washington's lead role as Ukraine's handler in Kyiv's war with Moscow, Minister Lavrov described the overtures of the US as downright "indecent".

Harsh words indeed, made more stinging by the absence of any semblance of diplomatic decorum in their articulation. But then again, that explains precisely the reasons behind the lingering jitters in geopolitics and multilateralism.

The sense of mistrust between the world's two biggest nuclear powers runs river, nay, ocean deep. The US-led hegemony faces massive threats from the constant and continuous reconfiguration of the international world order.

Voice and Purpose

The global south has found its voice and purpose. South-south cooperation is on the rise. From the Caribbean Islands and Latin America to Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the nations of the global south are demonstrating a break with their suppressive past.

By and large, their solidarity with one another is evident, as is their audible disapproval of Western arrogance in geopolitics, a hang-over from colonialism.

Most of the global south flatly refused to participate in the Western economic sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine conflict. Historically, when the US ordered the global south nations to jump, all they did was always ask: How high? Not anymore.

This "anomaly" has become a new normal.

The rapid rise of China's status as the world's fastest-growing economy over the past decade, coupled with Beijing's status as the world's second-biggest economy after the US, places enormous strain on the hegemony of the West.

As key leaders of the BRICS-Plus bloc, the gradually influential global south network that is regarded in global affairs as an antithesis to the G7 is further evidence of a world order that is undergoing a metamorphosis of its own.

This week's rebuke by the Russian foreign minister amidst a flare-up of cross-border military activities is worrisome in the extreme. They caused the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to immediately call for de-escalation, similar to his initial calls for a ceasefire in the Israeli war on the people of Palestine.

The UN chief should be worried, very worried. Not only by the emerging spate of diseases across the Gaza Strip but also by the very NATO-led escalation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Kyiv has been buoyed by the financial bottomless pit of support from the West, coupled with tons of sophisticated lethal weapons in what Lavrov describes as America's "hybrid war" against Russia.

This week, Ukraine said it had struck an oil terminal in Russia's economic hub, St Petersburg. It is inconceivable that Russia will not up the ante. And that could mean anything, including increased bombardment of the Ukrainian targets throughout President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's territory.

Brand of democracy

The US and its allies in the G7, EU and NATO had laid down the gauntlet by insisting on a "rules-based international world order" that is based on their brand of democracy, values and norms.

In pursuit of this world order, the US has used its might as the global enforcer of its will, with her allies invariably in tow. Russia, China, South Africa, Latin America and many other nations in our continent, Asia and the Middle East have raised serious objections to the wilful undermining of the UN Charter, the principles of multilateralism



▲ A Ukrainian serviceman prepares 155-mm artillery shells at a position near a front line, in Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine.



▲ Palestinians wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.



▲ Israeli soldiers operate in the Gaza Strip.

and international law.

The above picture, I believe, does paint a picture of a troubled world, a world ravaged by wars and conflict with more still looming.

The situation in Sudan continues to be a blot on Africa's push to break away

from her heinous past.

Tanzania and Kenya recently got tangled in a stand-off. Ethiopia and Tigray have given us a respite.

Further afield, the Korean Peninsula is on a knife-edge following the rapidly escalating tension between North and South Korea.

The solution, perhaps, truly lies in the expedited reforms of our multilateral institutions as well as global governance systems.

(Abbey Makoe is a former journalist and an analyst focusing on geo-politics)



▲ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy.

Leaders need to set an example

By Edwin Naidu

HONESTY and ethical behaviour are the hallmarks of a good upbringing. In the 21st century, as many parents struggle to eke out a living, this duty has been abdicated in some instances to teachers.

Lessons on honesty and ethical conduct must start early so it is rooted in the minds and hearts of our children. The need for this becomes clear when one considers South Africa's matric quality assurance body Umalusi's remarks when giving the release of the results for the Class of 2023 the green light.

Umalusi was perturbed, and rightly so, by incidents of copying by almost 1 000 pupils, the majority of them in KwaZulu-Natal. Is this South Africa's most dishonest province?

"Life is the most difficult exam. Many people fail because they copy others. Not realising that everyone has a different question paper," according to Benjamin Perumal, a humble pastor/brother from Phoenix.

The evidence of cheating is a positive indictment on society, considering that almost one million learners registered to write the final exams nationwide. A thousand bad apples, most in the province of my birth, should not take the gloss away from the majority who worked hard to achieve their dreams.

To his credit, Umalusi CEO Dr Mafu Rakometsi assured that there would be no tolerance for fraudsters. Similarly, the good doctor must explain what will happen to the matriculants who cheated. How does one send a strong message to stop cheating?

Of course, being dishonest is human nature, epitomised by South Africa's morally bankrupt ANC leadership which once pledged "a Better Life for All", while selling the Reconstruction and Development Plan more than 30 years ago. That phrase, meant to benefit the people of our country, has transitioned into "A Better Life for Us" if you're

part of the gravy train.

If President Cyril Ramaphosa can be found to have done no wrong when he kept foreign currency under his mattress, why should one expect the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, to cut it as an honest broker in advocating for ethics to become cherished values of those under his watch, unless his friends or party benefits?

Can one trust a communist who demanded a R1.1 million BMW 750i as his ministerial car in 2009, when he was given the keys to choose via the government kitty? So much for pro-poor, when living large is his order of the day.

Ours is a government that dishes out grants, a miserly R350 monthly payment to the poor, while 1.1 million students receive bursaries and a monthly R1,650 allowance from the state. What they don't tell you is that billions are split among the service providers, who happen to be connected. This is the reason why this function was taken away from universities.

The same Nzimande once extolled the virtues of Nelson Mandela, saying that by emulating Madiba "one can roll back the greed, corruption and selfishness of capitalism".

If the minister considered another career, he could have given Trevor Noah competition in the comedy stakes. But Nzimande would not have cut it as an Emmy



▲ Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi and Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attend the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding agreement, that allows Ethiopia to use a Somaliland port, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

winner unless someone decided to pardon the phrase "kiss his ass" with a meaningless award like they do when they dish out worthless honorary doctorates.

The legacy of Nzimande will one day be honestly interrogated. Is he anything like Mandela? A lifestyle audit would provide answers. But Nzimande will be remembered for the politics of patronage and for allowing corruption to fester under his watch.

As minister, his choices of director-general have been friends with whom it seems he fell out. Nzimande's special adviser, Gwebinkundla Qonde, was named acting director-general for the department, after then-incumbent Mary Metcalfe went on leave in October 2010. The story goes that she allegedly did not toe the line.

But Metcalfe, a respected academic who did a great job, always maintained a diplomatic silence. However, the fallout with his former communist colleague was bitter. Once dispatched, Nzimande brought in another friend, Nkosinathi Sishi, as a replacement.

Jobs for pals is a pattern that follows Nzimande throughout, with appointments of SACP people at universities, colleges and Sector Education Training Authorities (Setas).

Corruption within the National Students Financial Aid Scheme at universities, detailed by leading academic Professor Jonathan Jansen in

a book last year, and evidence of financial mismanagement at skills training institutions which fall under the 21 Setas, has been unrelenting.

If cheating was a past-time for a small number of matrics, that narrative is taken to another level by the government, elected by the sweat of by and large honest South Africans, believing in their broken promises from Mandela to Mbeki, and Zuma to Ramaphosa.

Civil society body the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (Outa), which focuses on exposing government corruption and the abuse of taxes and public funds in South Africa, has published a damning exposé on the corruption at the national student funding body. The chairperson of NSFAS, Ernest Khosa, has taken leave of absence following allegations that he, and the minister, had allegedly defrauded the student funding body through kickbacks from service providers.

Following the release of the Outa report in December, which contained leaked recorded conversations as part of its evidence, the minister publicly denied the claims, saying Outa was trying to derail the start of the 2024 academic year, and accused them of looking after the interests of the elite.

Nzimande threatened legal action against them but did not dispute the most pressing claim in the report, that the SACP, which he leads, benefited from cash or services worth R1 million for its 2022 conference from the student funding body.

While he did not respond to the specific allegations in the report related to the SACP, he said he had never used money from any of his department's entities for funding the party, dismissing the allegations as "malicious and

false".

So why not go to court and clear your name, dear Minister of Bluster and Threats? In October last year, NSFAS chief executive Andile Nongogo was axed over "irregularities" related to four firms selected to pay around 1.1 million students their R1,650 monthly allowance directly and not through tertiary institutions, which had been the previous payment method.

Whenever there has been impropriety under Nzimande's watch, he's quick to deny and shoot the messenger – or the media. But Outa has him firmly in a corner. The minister must prove that the SACP did not benefit from taxpayers' money – and fall on his sword.

Sadly, when you have a president who turns a blind eye to corruption, the chances are that Nzimande could be given another term in the name of the poor. That would be disastrous. The retirement age in the corporate sector is 60, while in the public service, it's 65. But government leaders go on forever. Instead of dishing out grants that fuel corruption, it's time to give young people a chance to lead.

As Outa said, it's time to cut the rot at the head. But what hope for our beloved South Africa when you have a president who is deaf to the people – and corruption in his ranks? Few would disagree, except his praise singers, that it is time for Nzimande to go.

With honesty and ethics at the heart of his leadership, one would bet on Deputy Minister Buti Manamela doing a far more invigorating job than his boss.

Edwin Naidu is a communications professional and Editor of Inside Education. (This article first appeared on the African)



▲ The Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, Blade Nzimande



▲ Saudi Arabia is still considering an invitation to become a member of the BRICS bloc of countries after being asked to join by the group last year

Saudi Arabia still considering BRICS membership

DAVOS, Switzerland - Saudi Arabia is still considering an invitation to become a member of the BRICS bloc of countries after being asked to join by the group last year, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters on Thursday. The group in August invited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iran, Argentina, and Ethiopia to join starting Jan. 1, although Argentina signalled in November it would not take up the invitation.

The two sources said Jan. 1 was not a deadline for a decision, with one adding there were strong benefits to joining the bloc as members China and India are the kingdom's biggest trading partners.

"Saudi Arabia is assessing the benefits and then will make a decision, there is a process happening," one of the sources said.

The expansion of the group would add economic heft to the BRICS, whose current

members are China, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa. It could also amplify its declared ambition to become a champion of the Global South.

Faisal Alibrahim, Saudi Arabia's economy minister, later confirmed the kingdom was still in a decision-making process on joining the bloc.

"The kingdom is a part of many multilateral platforms and multilateral institutions and whenever the kingdom is invited into one of them it goes through a process that is a multi-step process and at the end of it a decision is made," he told Reuters in an interview.

"Right now we are in a similar process and I will comment at the end of it."

Riyadh is weighing its options against a backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions between the U.S., China and Russia, and the kingdom's warming ties with Beijing have caused concern in Washington.

Despite its strong ties with the U.S., Saudi

Arabia has increasingly pursued its own path out of concern that Washington is less committed to the Gulf's security than in the past.

"While officially joining the group is advantageous for the Kingdom's economy, it must carefully consider the political implications it may have on its relations with other major powers," Hesham Alghannam, director general of the Security Research Center at Naif Arab University for Security Sciences said.

"The Kingdom aims to maintain an equal distance from all major powers and, at present, it does not want to send any signals that could be misinterpreted by any party."

On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia's minister of commerce stated that Saudi Arabia had not joined the BRICS in a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, without elaborating.

Following the minister's statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that integrating Saudi Arabia into the BRICS bloc was very important work that was continuing on

Wednesday.

Saudi state TV reported earlier this month that the kingdom had joined the bloc, only to remove the reports from its social media accounts later.

Fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member, the UAE, said it had accepted the invitation and joined the bloc, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Its decision was based on economic considerations and not political ones, Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq al-Marri said on Thursday.

"We are not living in a cold war ... joining the BRICS is not from a political stance, it's from an economic stance," Marri said in a session at Davos.

"Yes polarisation has happened, it's unprecedented since the 1980s, but the joining of BRICS is more of a south-south agenda ... the UAE will always engage the West."

(Reuters)

Aramco CEO predicts tighter oil markets, sees Red Sea risks

DAVOS, Switzerland - Global oil markets will cope with Red Sea disruptions in the short run, although prolonged attacks by the Houthis on ships would lead to a shortage of tankers due to longer voyages and a supply delay, the CEO of Saudi oil giant Aramco said.

Amin Nasser told Reuters he expected the oil market to tighten after consumers depleted stocks by 400 million barrels in the last two years, which left OPEC's spare capacity as the main source of additional supply to meet rising demand.

Attacks by the Houthis on ships in the Red Sea have forced many companies to divert cargo around Africa. The Iran-aligned Houthis say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians during Israel's ongoing war with Gaza.

"If it's in the short term, tankers might be available ... But if it's longer term, it might be a problem," Nasser said in an interview on the sidelines of this week's World Economic Forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos. "There will be a need for more tankers and they are going to have to take a longer journey".

Container vessels have been pausing or diverting from the Red Sea that leads to the Suez Canal, the fastest route from Asia to Europe, where about 12% of world shipping passes.

The alternative route around South Africa's Cape of Good Hope adds 10-14 days to the journey.

Aramco can bypass the Bab

al-Mandab strait near Yemen, from where the Houthis launch attacks, via a pipeline connecting its eastern oil facilities with its western coast and giving it quicker access to the Suez Canal, Nasser said.

Some oil products might have to sail around Africa, Nasser said, adding that he does not expect the Houthis to attack Aramco's facilities again as a result of peace talks between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

SPARE CAPACITY
Nasser said he saw oil demand at 104 million barrels a day (bpd) in 2024, meaning growth of roughly 1.5 million bpd after growing by 2.6 million bpd in 2023.

And demand growth, combined with low stocks, will help tighten the market further, he added.

Nasser said global stocks have shrunk to the low end of a five-year average after consumers depleted offshore and inland reserves by 400 million barrels over the past two years.

"The only card available today is the spare capacity, which is around 3.5% globally. And as demand picks up, you will erode that spare capacity unless there is additional supply."

Nasser said he could not predict when oil demand would peak or plateau as fossil fuel consumption was migrating from developed to developing countries, which were getting richer.

"There is good growth and demand is very healthy in China," he said.

(Reuters)



▲ Mr. Amin H. Nasser has been President & CEO of Aramco since 2015.



Lauren Silva Laughlin

NEW YORK - Ask an American Democrat about current presidential polling data, and they'll bellyache about the irrationality of those who want to vote for former U.S. President Donald Trump. Thanks to President Joe Biden's policies, they'll say, inflation has come down and the economy has avoided recession. The job market is strong, and, as a bonus, the stock market is up.

If, as Bill Clinton's strategist James Carville famously said, U.S. presidential elections are all about "the economy, stupid", then Biden's second term should be a no-brainer. Voters beg to differ. In the most recent Reuters/IP-SOS poll, Biden and Trump would be in a dead heat if the election were to take place today rather than on Nov. 5. But a December poll drilling into swing states showed Biden with just a slim lead in the seven states where the election was closest in 2020 - Nevada, Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia. If Robert F. Kennedy, an independent candidate, were added to the ballot, Trump would handily win.

WINNER TAKES SOME

The U.S. election is decided by electoral votes in each state, which means that the winner of the popular vote gets that state's full allocation. These allocations are then added together to form a national tally. The system confers oversized influence on "swing states", where voters are either on the fence or an equal mix of Democrats and Republicans. In several past elections, the winner didn't carry the popular vote but headed to the White House by taking the swing states.

On Monday, Trump won handily the first Republican caucus in Iowa, a state that used to "swing" but is now firmly in the conservative party's camp. And unless legal cases being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court keep him off the national ballot, he is likely to be the Republican pick to challenge Biden in a closely run presidential race.

Part of Biden's problem is that he took on the world's most powerful job just as the United States was ravaged by Covid-19. He injected \$1.9 trillion in stimulus into the economy, which included, opening new tab direct payments of \$1,400 to some households.

He also implemented the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CHIPS Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act, a flurry of emergency laws aimed at creating jobs and reviving parts of the economy in desperate need of a jolt. Some of the effects of those policies are yet to be felt. For example, workers in some states that lean conservative, like Arizona, should benefit as government subsidies spur the construction of microchip factories.

Thanks in part to those measures, the economy has avoided a recession, the labour market is strong and inflation, which had spiked due to the aftershocks of the pandemic and Biden's fiscal splurge, has tapered off.

In this context, it's easy to see how voters inclined to support Biden would view his victory as inevitable.

BRINGING HOME LESS BACON...

The trouble with this narrative is that the first couple of years have taken their toll on overall perceptions of Biden's tenure. Because inflation had risen so much, by 2022 real household incomes across the United States were down 5% compared to 2019, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. In Nevada, Michigan, Arizona, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, Americans did even worse. In Nevada and Pennsylvania, for example, real incomes were down more than 10% during that period.

Though the rate of consumer price increases has slowed and incomes are rising, it is hard for many Americans to shake off the feeling that they have become poorer in the last few

years.

Two states buck the trend. Georgia, a southern state that has historically gone to Republican candidates but is now considered "swing", where real incomes have risen 5% since 2019. And Wisconsin, where incomes tracked the national average.

... IN A SMALLER HOME

Housing is another sore point for Biden, especially at the local level. Political nerds have homed in on a handful of counties and opened a new tab that will decide the 2024 election in each of the swing states because they punch above their weight. In 2020, the residents of Maricopa County, Arizona, for example, influenced the vote for the whole state. Biden won that county by just two percentage points.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta offers granular data on housing by county, and affordability metrics do not look good for the president. Take Kent County, Michigan, which includes the city of Grand Rapids and is a key area for the election. In January 2020, around 22% of the average person's annual income went to pay for their home, within the 30% threshold that the Fed considers "affordable" for the average American. That calculation takes incomes, housing prices, and interest rates into consideration. By September last year, that figure had jumped to more than 35%.

In Phoenix, which is inside Maricopa County, that data point went from 28% to 45%. In Reno, Nevada, the largest city in the key Washoe County, more than 54% of a person's annual median income now goes to housing, up from 34% in early 2020. In Wilmington, North Carolina, which Biden flipped in 2020 for the first time in decades, the same figure went from 30% to 48%.

And even if inflation is now abating thanks to aggressive increases in interest rates by the Federal Reserve, many voters are still to feel the benefit. Because such a big chunk of Americans' paychecks is going towards a roof over their head, even if prices of eggs fall or incomes pick up, moving the needle on their overall financial well-being is hard.

The economy may be pushing swing voters to pick Trump. That said, not everyone lets their wallet dictate electoral preferences. And a lot can change between now and Nov. 5. With Fed Chair Jay Powell signalling cuts to interest rates in the coming months, growth might pick up and people could start to feel better.

The trouble for Biden - and those that support him - is that while they can logically argue he succeeded at the herculean task of steering the country during a devastating pandemic, and Pennsylvanians or Arizonians, say, might have been even worse off without the CHIPS Act, for voters, there's no easy way of telling. For now, all they know is that they feel poorer than they were four years ago. Unless their mood improves by Nov. 5, they'll inevitably blame the man in charge.

(Reuters)

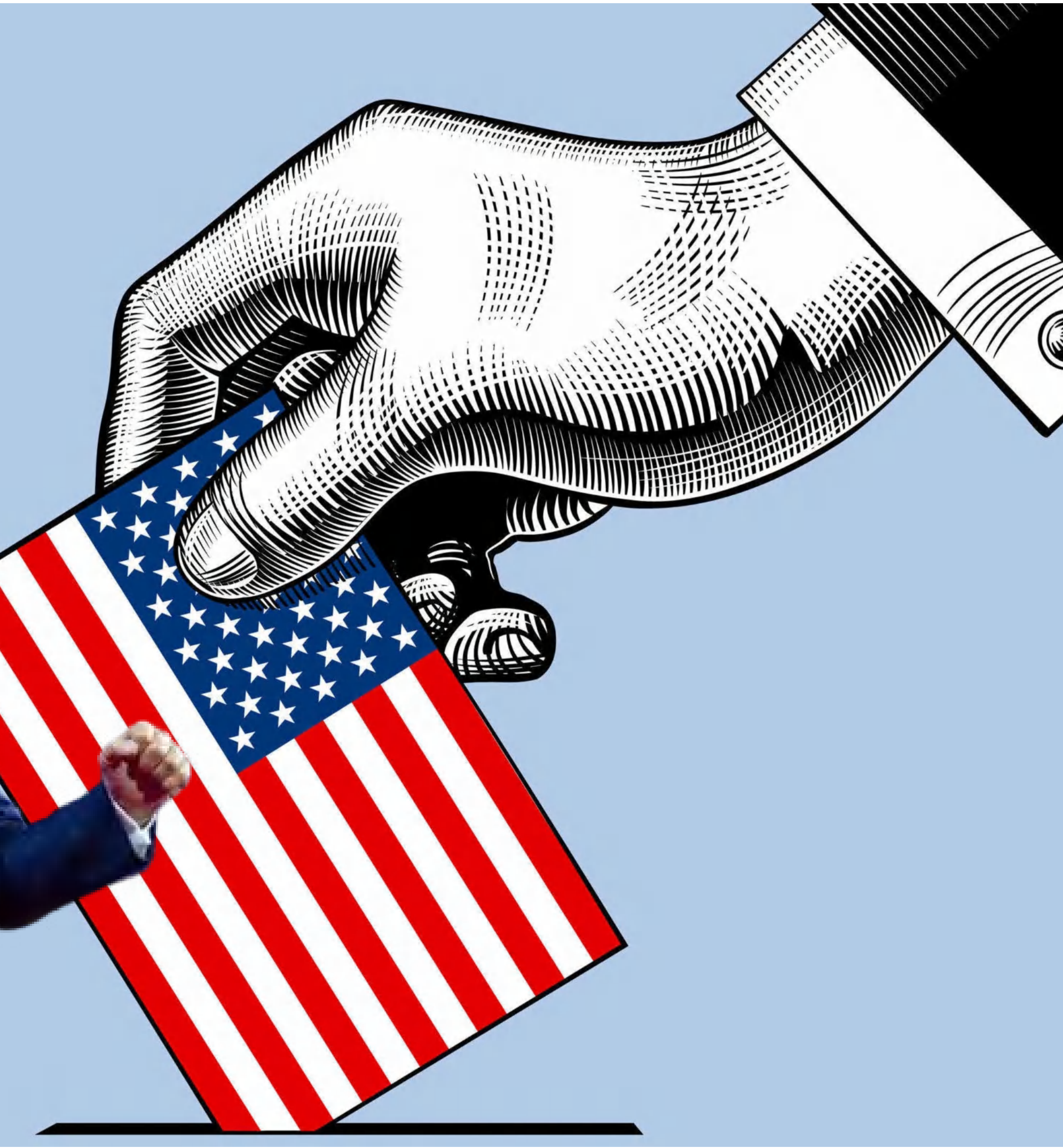


▲ Former US President Donald Trump.

Economics pushing US swing voters to pick Trump



▲ The U.S. election is decided by electoral votes in each state, which means that the winner of the popular vote gets that state's full allocation.



BEIJING - China has called for an end to attacks on civilian vessels in the Red Sea that have dramatically widened the Hamas-Israel conflict and placed Beijing's commercial interests along the Suez Canal at risk.

The Iran-backed Houthi militia from Yemen that seeks "Death to Israel" is challenging the ability of the world's biggest trading nation to defend billions in strategic investments in Egypt.

Since President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi came to power in 2014, China has stepped up its investment and commercial activities along Egypt's Suez Canal, through which a significant amount of the Asian giant's West-bound goods flow.

INVESTMENT AND TRADE

Beijing has encouraged state-owned companies to invest tens of billions in Egypt's logistics, transport and energy sectors, data from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) think tank shows and has extended \$3.1 billion in loans, according to the World Bank.

And in the months leading up to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel alone, firms from China and Hong Kong pledged at least \$20 billion in various projects along Egypt's arterial waterway.

Attacks deterring commercial shipping from the Red Sea and Suez Canal could frustrate Chinese investors who have committed huge sums to the waterway's development to profit from their safe passage.

State-owned shipping giant COSCO, which on Jan. 7 joined Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, Evergreen, and other major shipping lines in suspending services to Israel, last March invested \$1 billion in Egypt's port infrastructure, according to the AEI.

COSCO was joined by CK Hutchison Holdings, a prominent Hong Kong-based conglomerate, which in March announced plans to put up a further \$700 million to develop a new container terminal in the Red Sea port of Ain Sokhna and in B100, a new container terminal in the Mediterranean port of Alexandria.

That same month, demonstrating China's broader commercial interests in Egypt as a link between Asia Mediterranean and European markets, Xinxing Ductile Iron Pipes made known plans to invest \$2 billion in iron and steel plants, also in Ain Sokhna.

In October, Egypt's Suez Canal Economic Zone struck a \$6.75 billion deal with state-owned China Energy to develop green ammonia and green hydrogen projects in the Sokhna Industrial Zone, as well as a \$8 billion agreement with Hong Kong-listed United Energy Group to establish a potassium chloride production site.

Equally at stake is President Xi Jinping's flagship Belt and Road Initiative, of which Egypt, Yemen and Iran are all members.

China consistently maintains it will not interfere in the domestic affairs of other sovereign states, leading analysts to question how it should respond when problems emerge among BRI members.

The dilemma arises in particular when the issue fundamentally undermines the BRI's stated purpose, which is to connect Asia with Europe through the creation of a series of continent-spanning investment and trade corridors.

REPUTATION ON THE LINE

Beijing is under pressure to prove that its involvement in an unexpected detente between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023 went further than dotting the "i"s and crossing the "t"s.

Following that agreement, China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, currently in Egypt as part of a tour of four African countries, said Beijing wants to play a constructive role in handling global "hotspot issues."

U.S. officials believe China to be instrumental in reining in Iran, and have reportedly pressed Beijing to use its influence over Tehran to help prevent the conflict between Hamas - which is also backed by Iran - and Israel from spreading.

When COSCO was still visiting Israeli ports despite its competitors having already re-routed Asia-to-Europe voyages via South Africa's Cape of Good Hope, some analysts questioned whether Chinese influence over Iran was playing a part. Iranian oil makes up some 10% of China's crude imports.

Bloomberg reported on Thursday at least five vessels transiting the Red Sea were signalling "all Chinese crew" or words to that effect in a space on a communications network that would normally contain the ship's destination to try and avoid the attack.

China's Wang Yi in Cairo on Sunday told his Egyptian counterpart that Beijing backed a larger, more authoritative Israeli-Palestinian peace conference and a timetable for implementing a two-state solution.

So far, China appears restrained in its diplomacy because of its position of non-interference in other sovereign states' internal affairs. Yet at the same time, it aspires to raise what Wang has referred to as China's "international influence, appeal and power" to shape events through diplomacy.(Reuters)

Houthi attacks expose China's commercial stakes in Red Sea



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Sectors most exposed to disruption from Red Sea attacks

Global companies are dealing with rising supply logjams due to ongoing attacks by Iran-backed Yemeni Houthi militants in the Red Sea which have disrupted the flow of shipments through the key Suez Canal trade route.

Automakers Tesla, Geely-owned Volvo Car, and Suzuki Motor said they were suspending some production in Europe due to a shortage of components in the first clear sign that the attacks are hitting manufacturers.

The United States and Britain launched a series of strikes on Yemen on Jan. 11 aimed at the Iran-backed Houthi militia. Container shipping prices have risen and companies are rerouting vessels via a much longer southern Africa route that adds about 10 days to shipping, about \$1 million in fuel and could potentially create product shortages and delays.

Data from S&P Global showed the Suez Canal route accounts for 14.8% of all European Middle Eastern and North Africa (MENA) imports. Its analysis showed consumer goods, clothing and chemicals were among the sectors at most risk.

S&P Global analyses more than 300 industrial categories and over 6,000 products, and when assessing industrial and product exposure, it looks at the Suez route as a proportion of all freight in the region: a higher ratio implies fewer alternatives from other markets or transportation modes.

Meanwhile, seaborne deliveries represented 55.1% of all shipments from Europe/MENA to Asia or Gulf destinations. But deliveries via the Suez Canal accounted for just 8.6% of all those imports.

(Reuters)

Red Sea war insurance rises with more ships in firing line

LONDON - War risk insurance premiums for shipments through the Red Sea are rising after further attacks on merchant vessels by Yemen's Houthi movement and the expectation that ships with a UK or U.S. connection will be targeted, insurance sources said on Tuesday.

The Iran-aligned Houthis, who are well-equipped and trained, have launched multiple attacks on ships in the Red Sea since November. They will expand their targets to include U.S. ships, a Houthi official said on Monday.

Even before the recent Houthi attacks, the London insurance market listed the southern Red Sea among its high-risk areas and ships needed to notify their insurers when sailing through such areas and pay an additional premium, which until earlier this month was typically for a seven-day cover period.

Insurance industry sources said that war risk premiums had risen to around 1% of the value of a ship, from around 0.7% last week with various discounts applied by underwriters. They added that rates were expected to move higher.

This translates into hundreds of thousands of dollars of additional costs for a seven-day voyage.

The terms being offered for war risk quotes are now significantly shorter, "with 24 hours being the norm", said Munro Anderson, head of operations at marine war risk and insurance specialist Vessel Protect, which is part of Pen Underwriting.

"Rates are increasing which is reflective of the significant and opaque risk exposure within the Red Sea," he told Reuters.

"Since the naval and air strikes in Yemen, it is now broadly considered that, in addition to Israeli-connected vessels, there is an elevated threat to vessels associated with the UK, U.S., including dependent flags, as well as those connected to Australia, the Netherlands, Bahrain and Canada," he added referring to a U.S-led navy coalition trying to safeguard commercial shipping.

U.S.-based operator Eagle Bulk Shipping said on Monday one of its vessels was hit by an "unidentified projectile" while sailing 100 miles (160 km) off the Gulf of Aden.

"The Houthi attacks are encompassing all vessels with less and less clear criteria," an insurance source said. "U.S. and UK flags are advised now that they should not go through the Red Sea."

The Houthi militant group, which controls the most populous areas of Yemen after nearly a decade of war against the Western-backed and Saudi-led coalition, has emerged

as a strong supporter of the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas in the latter's war against Israel.

In recent days, commercial ships have halted voyages through the Red Sea, with more taking the longer voyage via the southern Africa's Cape.

"With tensions rising in the Red Sea, the cost of transporting goods globally will increase and inevitably trickle down to the end consumer," said Nicole Hudson, director at supply chain platform ezopen.

A combination of higher insurance rates and also rising fees for using the Suez Canal has meant that it is becoming cheaper to take the longer route, which could also mean less certainty over delivery times, shipping sources said.

"Shipowners and charterers may find that rerouting around Africa is more cost-effective than incurring the combined costs of Suez Canal transit fees and insurance premiums," broker Clarksons Securities said in a note this week.

The U.S.-led coalition is weak because regional powerhouses Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt did not take part, Yemen's vice president said on Tuesday.

"If the U.S.-led coalition fails to thwart further attacks and ensure the freedom of navigation in the region, we anticipate that war insurance coverage will become unavailable, forcing most of the traffic to use the much longer route around the Cape of Good Hope," Ratings service Morningstar DBRS said in a note on Monday.

(Reuters)

“ Since the naval and air strikes in Yemen, it is now broadly considered that, in addition to Israeli-connected vessels, there is an elevated threat to vessels associated with the UK, U.S., including dependent flags, as well as those connected to Australia, the Netherlands, Bahrain and Canada ”



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▲ China has called for an end to attacks on civilian vessels in the Red Sea that have dramatically widened the Hamas-Israel conflict and placed Beijing's commercial interests along the Suez Canal at risk.

What’s the Israel–Palestinian conflict about & how did it start?

LONDON- Israel and Hamas have been waging war for 100 days since gunmen from the Palestinian militant group went on the rampage in southern Israel, triggering an Israeli military campaign in which nearly 24,000 Palestinians have been killed.

The war between Israel and Hamas that has raged since October is the latest in a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians that has rumbled on for seven decades and destabilised the Middle East.

Since the devastating Hamas attack on Oct. 7, in which Israel says about 1,200 people were killed and around 240 taken hostage, Israel has carried out an air and land offensive on the Gaza Strip which it says aims to eradicate Hamas.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT?

The conflict pits Israeli demands for security in what it has long regarded as a hostile Middle East against Palestinians' unmet aspirations for a state of their own.

In 1947, while Palestine was under British mandate rule, the United Nations General Assembly agreed on a plan to partition it into Arab and Jewish states and for international rule over Jerusalem. Jewish leaders accepted the plan, giving them 56% of the land. The Arab League rejected the proposal.

Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, proclaimed the modern state of Israel on May 14, 1948, a day before the scheduled end of British rule, establishing a haven for Jews fleeing persecution and seeking a national home on land to which they cite deep ties dating to antiquity.

Violence had been intensifying between Arabs, who made up about two-thirds of the population in the late 1940s, and Jews. A day after Israel was created in 1948, troops from five Arab states attacked.

In the war that followed, some 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes, ending up in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Palestinians lament this as the “Nakba”, or catastrophe. Israel contests the assertion that it forced out Palestinians. Armistice agreements halted the fighting in 1949 but there was no formal peace. Palestinians who stayed put in the war and their descendants make up about 20% of Israel's population now.

WHAT MAJOR WARS HAVE BEEN FOUGHT SINCE THEN?

In 1967, Israel made a pre-emptive strike against Egypt and Syria, launching the Six-Day War. Israel captured the West Bank and Arab East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria and the Gaza Strip from Egypt and occupied them.

An Israeli census that year put Gaza's population at 394,000, at least 60% of them Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

In 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israeli positions along the Suez Canal and Golan

Heights, touching off the Yom Kippur War. Israel pushed both armies back within three weeks.

Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and thousands of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) fighters under Yasser Arafat were evacuated by sea after a 10-week siege. Israeli troops pulled out of Lebanon in 2000.

In 2005 Israel unilaterally withdrew settlers and soldiers from Gaza.

Hamas won parliamentary elections in 2006 and seized full control of Gaza in 2007. Gaza saw major flare-ups of fighting between Palestinian militants and Israel in 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021.

In 2006, Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militants captured two Israeli soldiers in the volatile border region and Israel launched military action, triggering a six-week war.

Besides wars, there have been two Palestinian intifadas, or uprisings, from 1987 to 1993, and 2000 to 2005. During the second, Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups carried out suicide bombings against Israelis, and Israel carried out tanks and airstrikes on Palestinian cities.

Since then there have been several rounds of hostilities between Israel and Hamas, which refuses to recognise Israel and is regarded as a terrorist organisation by Israel, the European Union, the United States and other countries. Hamas says its armed activities are resistance against Israeli occupation.

WHAT ATTEMPTS HAVE THERE BEEN TO MAKE PEACE?

In 1979, Egypt became the first Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel.

In 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Arafat shook hands on the Oslo Accords establishing limited Palestinian autonomy. In 1994, Israel signed a peace treaty with Jordan.

U.S. President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Arafat took part in the Camp David summit in 2000 but failed to reach a final peace deal.

In 2002, an Arab League plan offered Israel normal relations with all Arab countries in return for a full withdrawal from the lands it took in the 1967 Middle East war, the creation of a Palestinian state and a “just solution” for Palestinian refugees. The presentation of the plan was overshadowed by Hamas, which blew up an Israeli hotel full of Holocaust survivors during a Passover seder meal.

Further peace efforts have been stalled since 2014.

Palestinians stopped dealing with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration after he broke with decades of U.S. policy by recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Palestinians seek East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Qatar and Egypt have acted as mediators in the latest war, securing a truce that lasted seven days, during which hostages held by Hamas were exchanged for prisoners held by Israel, and more humanitarian aid flowed into Gaza.

WHERE DO PEACE EFFORTS STAND NOW?

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has focused



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on trying to secure a “grand bargain” in the Middle East that includes normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, custodian of Islam's two holiest shrines.

The latest war is diplomatically awkward for Riyadh as well as for other Arab states, including some Gulf Arab states next to Saudi Arabia that have signed peace deals with Israel.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN ISSUES?

A two-state solution, Israeli settlements on occupied land, the status of Jerusalem, agreed borders, and the fate of Palestinian refugees.

Two-state solution: An agreement that would create

a state for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip alongside Israel. Israel has said a Palestinian state must be demilitarized so as not to threaten its security.

Settlements: Most countries deem Jewish settlements built on land Israel occupied in 1967 to be illegal. Israel disputes this and cites historical and biblical ties to the land. Continued settlement expansion is among the most contentious issues between Israel, the Palestinians and the international community.

Jerusalem: Palestinians want East Jerusalem, which includes the walled Old City's sites sacred to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, to be the capital of their state. Israel says Jerusalem should remain its “indivisible and eternal” capital.

Israel's claim to Jerusalem's eastern part is not recognised internationally. Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, without specifying the extent of its jurisdiction in the disputed city, and moved the U.S. embassy there in 2018.

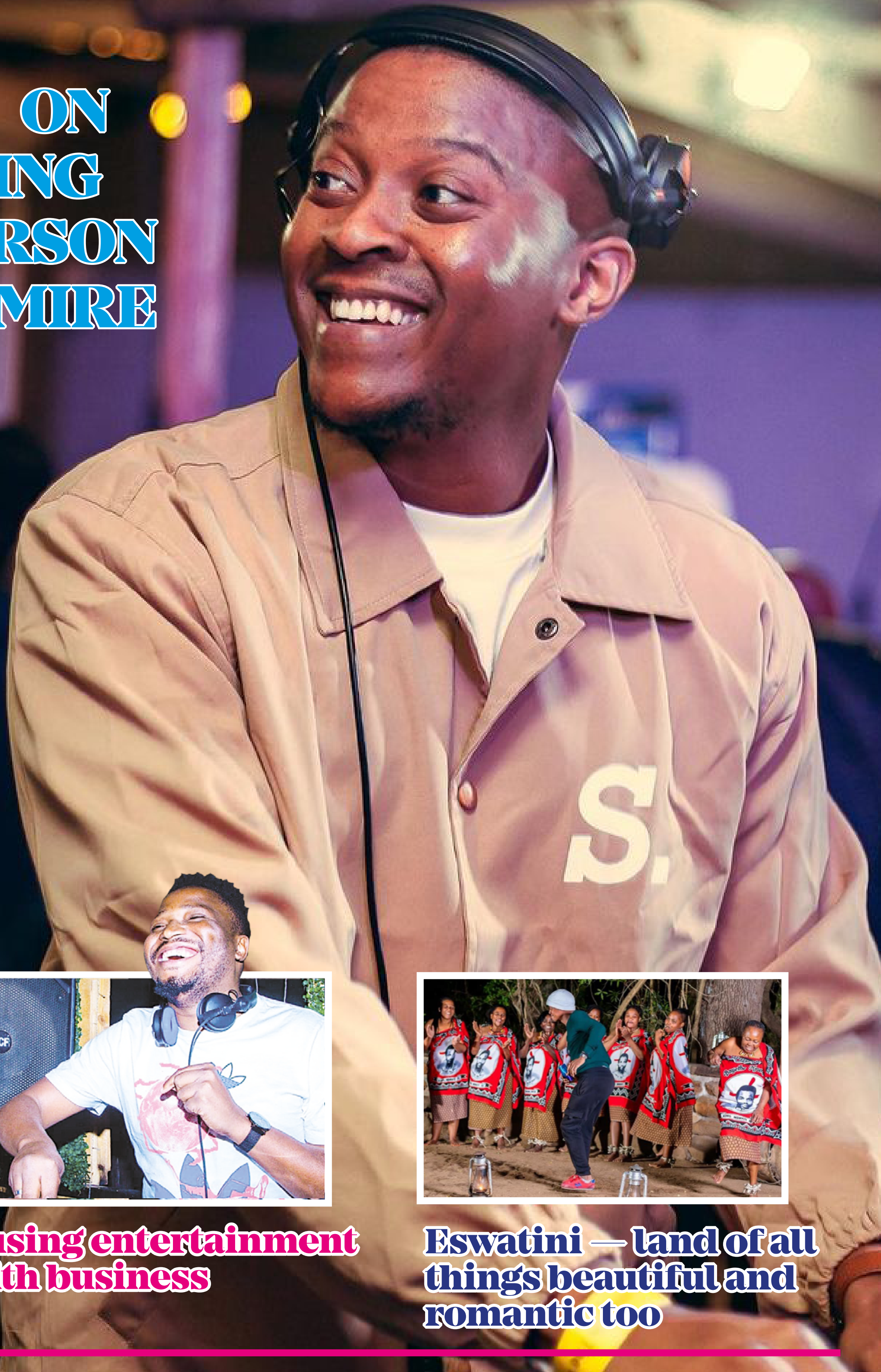
Refugees: Today about 5.6 million Palestinian refugees - mainly descendants of those who fled in 1948 - live in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza. About half of registered refugees remain stateless, according to the Palestinian foreign ministry, many living in crowded camps.

Palestinians have long demanded that refugees should be allowed to return, along with millions of their descendants. Israel says any resettlement of Palestinian refugees must occur outside its borders.

(Reuters)

Lifestyle

!SOOKS ON
BECOMING
THE PERSON
YOU ADMIRE



inside



Fusing entertainment
with business



Eswatini — land of all
things beautiful and
romantic too



▲!Sooks aka Sukuluhle Dlamini.

Becoming the person you admire

Eswatini Sunday Reporter

WHAT has more weight when it comes to achieving success? Talent or discipline? This is a question and a subject of debate for many. Before going any further maybe we should delve into each of these concepts.

Talent: The ability a person has to learn things easily or to develop an activity with great skill but again, discipline is the ability to put into practice a series of principles related to consistency.

So with that said I believe the answer to the above question is discipline. Discipline can take you further than talent. In the year 2016, I was introduced to a very talented you man in Mbabane.

On a chilly Sunday afternoon at a friend's place Sibusiso 'Sbuda' Mhlanga, going about our business, mingling with the guys, and listening to the Deep, one unusual face caught my attention. Music is a universal language and through music, so many relationships can be formed.

So what was so intriguing about this guy? Nodding to every track played, he was beaming with passion for music, I couldn't help myself but approach Mmeli Hlanze from Antidote Music, "Outy ngubani lentwana lena." With a smile on his face, "Ngu Suku lo, actually let me introduce you to him, he just released a new project," he responded.

And just like that, that was the beginning of a great friendship but more than that, I was given the true definition of the words discipline and talent on that day.

!Sooks is an electronic music artist, hailing from the Kingdom of Eswatini, whose musical escapades persist in listing him as one of Southern Africa's leading electronic music stars. Real name Sukuluhle Dlamini, he began his journey at an early age when he became fascinated by African music and synth sound creation.

He fully made his mark in the electronic music scene in 2016 when he released his first EP titled "7 Years of Colour" under Antidote Music, followed by a release under international label Deepstitched Records titled "A Different Place".

The success of his music has led him to be

invited to perform in various major events in his home country eSwatini, Mozambique and South Africa, with the most notable events being MTN Bushfire Festival, Soul Candi Spring Fiesta and Mixmag's The Lab Johannesburg.

The Power of Discipline and becoming the person you admire

You might think that these qualities are innate and beyond your reach. Think again! You have the power to turn yourself into the person you admire by demonstrating willpower, effort, and self-discipline.

Granted, it's easier said than done, but remember it's NOT IMPOSSIBLE, as proven by the successes of the people you admire! You see Suku proved that this was possible. I was fortunate to stay in the same hood as !Sooks in Fontein where he lived with his Mother. Suku

would always give 90 per cent of his time to his music, he would always tell me *kutsi Boi kwamele ngi spane*. He never compromised his time for what he was passionate about. I would always complain that out of the blue he would disappear for a good three weeks where he would concentrate on a project he was working on.

You can never doubt the talent of this young man, but the level of discipline he displayed at a young age was remarkable. Self-discipline, resilience, commitment, self-motivation, and organisation are words I could use to define !Sooks.

Self-discipline requires fuel to work and that fuel is motivation. Sukuluhle has always been motivated by becoming one of the best in the house music scene. From his first five-track project titled "7 Years Of Colour" this project proved to be the moment the Wolf would eventually be unleashed.

From releasing his music under Antidote Music, Deepstitched, LW Recordings, Stay True Soundz, Les Disques du bord de l'eau, Atjazz Record Company, and Wolf Unleashed Records to name a few, house music lovers were treated to some of the best underground and Electronic music.

Tracks like Oasis, approved by some of the best in the industry like the legendary Vinny Da Vinci were club bangers week in, week out in clubs locally and outside the borders. Dlamini's biggest achievements to date are winning three awards in 2019 including "Best Underground Record of the Year" for his song "Oasis" and "Best Compilation Album" for House Afrika Records' Mzansi House Vol.9 (which includes his debut album "Symmetry") at the Dance Music Awards South Africa as well as "Best House Artist" at the MTN SWAMA Awards. Through his hard work and dedication, Sukuluhle released his remix package 'Imagine' under Atjazz Record Company in 2021

and I believe that was the turning point for the producer.

Earlier, I spoke of self-discipline needing fuel. One cannot mention the brand !Sooks and not praise the Antidote team who were able to spot and nurture this raw talent. The house music scene in Eswatini truly owes *lamajita lawa lokunenkinge*.

Another pillar in !Sooks career has been Kinglenhle Mavuso, an artist manager based in Johannesburg. I have never met this gentleman in person but from afar I have kept track of the amount of work he has put into the rise and shine of the Wolf! Kudos Brother.

Unleash The Wolf

Most creatives are usually born from a family that is musically oriented. One of Sukuluhle's biggest motivations has always been his Dad (May his soul continue to rest in eternal peace). In 2018, Suku released a track titled 1962 which was dedicated to his old man.

More of a token of appreciation for the support he had given him as he pursued his journey in music, so when Babe Dlamini passed away, I wondered what would follow of Suku. Resilience. For me, this was when the Wolf was eventually unleashed.

The following year, !Sooks decided to pursue his studies in Sound Engineering at the Academy of Sound Engineering (ASE) in Johannesburg, South Africa. Moving away from home, was a very bold step which has proved to be the best decision ever for him.

!Sooks recently released two singles which will be featured on his upcoming album. The first release 'Cry Me A River' introduced us to a new sound, which was followed by 'Kingdoms' a track featuring UK's best, Atjazz.

!Sooks's journey in the music industry is a lesson to all of us. With discipline and having identified your purpose, you now need to set clear and specific goals with realistic deadlines and milestones to measure your progress.

Small steps every day. *Lokuhle kodrwa* my guy as you continue to make us proud!

Popular tracks

1. !Sooks, Atjazz - Kingdoms(Original Mix)
2. !Sooks - Cry Me A River(Original Mix)
3. !Sooks, Dwson - Eva
4. !Sooks - Schadenfreude
5. !Sooks, Krippsouliso - PX2(Original Mix)
6. !Sooks, Velemseni - Musa
7. !Sooks - Chasing Dubs
8. !Sooks, Avi Subban - Oasis(Original Mix)

!Sooks in numbers

1. 42,000 monthly listeners on Spotify
- a. Kingdoms - 43,183 streams
- b. Cry Me A River - 41,678
- c. Eva - 30,433
- d. Musa - 56,570
2. 600 000 on Apple Music

Being signed as an artist vs 'owning your masters'

Siphesihte Dlamini

A FEW days back, I was conversing with one of my well-established entertainment industry friends. Just like the Keanakakoi eruption (the world's biggest volcanic burst recorded), a 30-minute 'no break' argument erupted.

We had a quarrel about which one is the best decision for an artist's career between being signed to a record label or owning masters. The 'KO' punch my industry friend, whose name I would like not to disclose, smacked me down with was: "My friend, it is either you become a master at your craft, and own your masters, or get masters of the art, and be mastered."

In the ever-evolving landscape of the music industry, artists face a crucial decision. Whether to sign with a record label or pursue an independent career while retaining ownership of their masters. There are advantages and disadvantages of both paths.

The record label experience

For decades, record labels have been the traditional gatekeepers of the music industry. Signing with a label offers artists a range of benefits, including financial support, marketing expertise, and access to established networks. Labels often provide artists with the resources necessary to produce high-quality albums, book tours, and secure lucrative licensing deals.

Moreover, record labels have the power to amplify an artist's reach by leveraging their existing platforms and connections.

They can introduce artists to a wider audience, helping them break into mainstream markets, and provide extensive promotional campaigns to boost their visibility.

Additionally, labels often have the financial muscle to invest in artist development, allowing them to grow and refine their craft.

However, the allure of a record label comes at a cost. Artists who sign with labels typically surrender a significant portion of their creative control, as labels often dictate the



direction of their music, image, and branding. Additionally, the label's financial investment is recouped through the artist's earnings, meaning that artists may receive a smaller share of their revenue.

Being your own boss

In recent years, the rise of digital platforms and social media has empowered artists to take control of their careers like never before. Independent artists have the freedom to create music on their terms, without the interference of a label. They retain full ownership of their masters, allowing them to make decisions about licensing, distribution, and creative direction.

By leveraging social media platforms, independent artists can build a dedicated fan

base and establish a direct connection with their audience. They have the flexibility to experiment with different genres and styles, maintaining artistic integrity and authenticity. Furthermore, independent artists have the potential to earn a larger share of their revenue, as they are not bound by the contractual obligations and revenue splits imposed by record labels.

However, the independent route is not without its challenges. Artists must shoulder the responsibility of financing their projects, including studio time, production costs, and marketing campaigns.

They also need to invest time and effort in building their own networks and industry connections, which can be a daunting task for those lacking experience or resources.

Distribution

The music industry has witnessed a seismic shift in recent years, thanks to the advent of digital platforms and the rise of independent artists. With these changes, the traditional role of music distributors has been both challenged and redefined.

Historically, music distributors played a crucial role in connecting artists with their audiences.

They acted as intermediaries between artists and retailers, ensuring that physical copies of albums reached stores and ultimately found their way into the hands of fans.

Distributors handled logistics, such as manufacturing, shipping, and marketing, while also leveraging their industry connections to secure shelf space and promotional

opportunities.

However, the digital revolution disrupted this traditional model. With the rise of streaming platforms and online music stores, physical distribution became less prominent, and digital distribution took centre stage.

Digital distributors, such as TuneCore, CD Baby, and DistroKid, emerged as platforms that allowed artists to independently distribute their music to a global audience. These platforms simplified the process, enabling artists to upload their music, set release dates, and distribute their work to various streaming services and online stores.

The advantages of digital distribution for independent artists are numerous. Firstly, it offers artists complete control over their music, allowing them to release their work on

their terms. Artists can choose when and how to distribute their music, without being bound by the timelines and constraints of traditional distribution deals.

This flexibility enables artists to experiment with different release strategies and adapt to the rapidly changing music landscape. Moreover, digital distribution platforms provide artists with direct access to their audience and real-time analytics.

Artists can monitor their streaming numbers, track listener demographics, and gain insights into the performance of their music. This data can be invaluable for planning future releases, targeting specific markets, and engaging with fans.

Choice

On the contrary, the music industry is undergoing a transformative shift, with increasing numbers of artists opting for a hybrid approach. Many artists now sign short-term deals with record labels or prefer to be outsourced allowing them to maintain ownership of their masters while benefiting from the label's resources and expertise. This approach offers artists the best of both worlds, striking a balance between creative freedom and industry support.

The decision between signing with a record label or pursuing an independent career with ownership of their masters is a deeply personal one for artists. Each path offers unique advantages and disadvantages, and artists must carefully consider their goals, artistic vision, and financial circumstances.

While record labels can provide a platform for exposure and financial support, they often come with a loss of creative control and a smaller share of the revenue.

On the other hand, independence allows artists to retain ownership and creative freedom but requires them to take on more responsibilities and invest in their careers.

Ultimately, the best choice for an artist lies in finding the right balance between artistic fulfilment and commercial success. Regardless of the chosen path, the music industry continues to evolve, and artists must adapt to the changing landscape to thrive in an ever-competitive market.

Fusing entertainment with business

Eswatini Sunday Reporter

THE entertainment industry is just that: an industry for performers to showcase what they're good at with an audience expecting that it will be entertaining.

This week I decided to focus on a gentleman I believe is a true performer and an icon in the entertainment industry, Zulu D.

No matter what you're doing in the industry, it is best if you stand out, or else you can't expect to make a name for yourself. I've watched him grow in the industry and as an individual.

It's a cut-throat business that requires you to use your talent, skills and personality to resonate with an audience and get people interested in what you can do for them. If you're impressive enough and have that 'wow' factor, people will feel more inclined to watch both you and your

performances.

It sounds much easier said than done. From an entertainer venturing into business, Samkelo has proven that determination can take you a long way. I've come across my fair share of those who managed to pave the way for themselves because their passions fuelled the fire within them and kept them going, and Zulu D is one of them.

Batsi asibanike timbali tabo basaphila. Ngitsi nami angendlulise loko Mageba. So, how can you experience a similar fate and build a successful entertainment industry business? Consider following this advice.

1). Business is everything — make sure you understand it

One mistake people often make when they want to get involved in entertainment is not looking at the business side of it. Instead, they focus solely on the performance aspects and what they need to do to get noticed by others.

And while it's crucial to have a competitive edge and perform in a way that connects with and attracts the audience, it's equally important to learn and understand the industry's business side of things. There are a few ways to do this.

Learn from those around you

Let's say you've started in entertainment as a performer but know you want to climb the ladder and secure a spot at the top. Start paying more attention to business management and operations to learn what you can. Surround yourself with individuals with different areas of expertise from whom you can learn. Staying close to the most successful individuals you encounter may also create opportunities to get the right support when starting your own business.

Widen your skill set

Don't be afraid to do more than one thing and move beyond being a one-trick pony. Instead, branch out and wear multiple hats. For example, you can learn the perspective of the owner and manager to see how they successfully market and promote their business, and perhaps even learn what doesn't work for you.

Entertainment business owners usually have no difficulty promoting people who continue to broaden their skills and are willing to take the steps needed to achieve their goals.

Cultivate your passion for the industry

Anyone who wants to succeed in the entertainment industry needs to be passionate about their role. However, to really experience growth, you should also have passion for the industry itself and everything it stands for. For example, someone who wants to act in

films can benefit from acting classes, but they'd also benefit from getting a job in set design or doing something behind the scenes. Making these kinds of moves helps entertainers to learn how the business works and allows them to knowledgeably decide if they want to be part of the industry or not.

2). Don't be afraid of new and exciting opportunities

Some people let fear hold them back from new opportunities that have the potential to work out in their favour. For example, if not for one chance meeting with a man at the New Jersey Institute of Technology that got me started as a dancer, it's hard to say if I'd be in the position I'm in today.

That experience is new and different from what you've done before and shouldn't hold you back from pursuing significant opportunities. Otherwise, fear wins over progress.

Alternatively, trying new things and using your natural abilities to entertain and connect with folks involved in every aspect of the industry will generate new potential all around you. I always encourage others to take that leap, step outside the box and try something different because it could open the doors to some of the most incredible opportunities.

3). Seek inspiration from others

Don't be afraid to look for inspiration from others. Doing this doesn't mean you're copying their style or trying to be someone you're not. Entertainers can benefit from having a mentor who shows them the ropes and gives them advice and guidance here and there.

If you want to perform well in the entertainment industry, keep an eye on what others are doing—in regards to both performance styles like yours and how other entertainment businesses are run—and combine what works best for you into something uniquely your own.

Build your skills by watching others, but be true to yourself throughout the process. This will pay off in the long run by setting you apart from everyone else.

Wherever you are in your entertainment career journey, apply energy and focus to learning and understanding the business. Stay close to successful owners and operators, draw inspiration and seek advice from them, and constantly look for and pursue new opportunities.

If you stay willing to step outside your comfort zone and mimic the winning methods of your mentors, you, too, can become a successful entertainment entrepreneur.

4). Set yourself goals

I like the analogy of goals being just like a



captain of a ship. You have to first know where you want to go, what route you're going to take, a continual re-adjustment on the way there, work and lead the people around you in the right manner, enjoy the journey, and most importantly, be patient.

Goals are achieved incrementally, not in one day (unless you're baking a cake or a muffin). If we're building a career, then realise that it's a continuous chase, and requires layering multiple bricks one by one. This will eventually build your end goal.

Take responsibility

This is a big one. No one gives a damn about your career AKA your business as you will. This cuts deep, but it's true. Build a system where you take all the blame for whatever happens, even if it isn't your fault. Know the ins and outs of every sector of the music business. Get smart - it's your business remember?

And if that means you have to be a control freak (like me), so be it.

All successful artists behind the scenes have this sense of wanting to control as many aspects of their career and music as possible (Lady Gaga/Prince/Taylor Swift). That's what makes them unique as a leader.

Aim to be practical

This one's controversial, I know. My point here is you have to learn to walk before you can fly. This is totally separate from having an end goal in mind. I'm talking about the ability to break down to the bone what it will take for you to achieve your dreams/goals. Here are some expectations you can manage:

- You can't expect to perform a 45-minute set when you don't even have material for it.
- You can't expect to get on an active Spotify playlist if you don't even have an idea what your songs' genre or sub-genre is. How will you even pitch the song to them? Can you contextualise your artist brand?
- You can't expect to gain fans if you aren't a fan of yourself (not talking about ego here). You gotta love and stand by your artist persona and music! Don't drift left and right chasing trends. Stay on course but be open to change if necessary.
- You can't expect to gain fans and an audience if you aren't consistently releasing relevant content on socials. Attention is the new currency. Jump on it now, while the algorithms favour free impressions.

Eswatini — land of all things beautiful and romantic too

Siphesihle Dlamini

IF I were to mention one charismatic fact about Eswatini, I would probably highlight the rich range of scenery.

I have seen people proposing at the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, and the Grand Canyon in Arizona, but my future wife should rest assured that I will propose to her in one of Eswatini's scenic locations. I doubt that she would have the audacity to say no if I were to propose to her at these two scenic locations.

Mkhaya Game Reserve - What a beauty!

Nestled between Manzini and Big Bend, Mkhaya Game Reserve is one of the best local wild animal habitats. It is a private reserve located in the Lowveld wilderness of south-eastern Eswatini and is named after the knob thorn tree, known as "mkhaya" in SiSwati, which is prevalent in the area.

Established in 1979 to protect the country's last indigenous Nguni cattle, Mkhaya has evolved into a sanctuary for endangered species and a haven for diverse wildlife. Some of the animals you might encounter during your safari here include White Rhinos, Black Rhino, Giraffes, Zebras, Hippos, Warthogs, Buffalos, Roan, Sable, Tsessebe, Wildebeest, Kudu, Impala and Nyalas.

Beyond the wildlife, Mkhaya Game Reserve boasts stunning scenery with acacia-dominated thornveld in the south and broadleaf sandveld in the north. Dry riverbeds snake through the reserve, dotted with water holes that attract animals and birds.

A network of game-viewing roads allows you to explore the reserve and get up close

to its natural wonders. Accommodation at Mkhaya is offered at Mkhaya Stone Camp, a comfortable bush camp set along a dry riverbed. The camp features 12 semi-open stone and thatch cottages, each offering a unique perspective on the surrounding wilderness. With no electricity, the camp embraces the rhythms of nature, lit by paraffin lanterns and candles at night. Activities at Mkhaya Game Reserve include guided game drives, bush walks, birdwatching, and cultural experiences. Visitors have an opportunity to learn about the Swazi culture and traditions through visits to local communities.

Unveiling the magic of Benka Luxury Country Cottages

Nestled within the enchanting Swazi-Lizkhar Equestrian and Wildlife Estate in Ezulwini, this haven welcomes you to a world of luxury and adventure.

Whether you're a jet-setting professional, a couple in search of a romantic escape, or a family ready for an adventurous retreat, Benka extends a warm welcome to all! It redefines hospitality with its luxurious accommodations and exceptional services, ensuring a stay that exceeds all expectations.

Immerse yourself in unparalleled vistas, surrounded by majestic mountains and blessed with frequent visits from roaming wildlife. At Benka, tranquility is at your doorstep, promising an unforgettable escape into nature's embrace.

Benka Lifestyle's prime location serves as an ideal launchpad for your Eswatini adventure, granting easy access to the wonders that await in the surrounding areas. Benka also offers guests a gourmet picnic experience like no other, accompanied by a professional photoshoot.



Karabo Ngoepe
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WITH a light breeze blowing through the sliding door and the smell of the ocean, you get out of bed and stretch your arms.

You put on your flip-flops and step outside to take in the breath-taking views of blue lagoons, dolphins and sea lions flapping in the ocean.

If beachfront living is not your thing, you can still wake up in a bustling metropolis, with Michelin-starred restaurants, art galleries and museums housing some of the world's famous works. If you crave such things or harbour the allure of globe-trotting and chasing the sun when winter strikes your homeland, it might be worth your while to look into the countries that offer citizenship to foreign nationals.

- **Armenia:** Fast-track naturalization in just three years awaits with investment, mainly in real estate, or enrolling in a university. Once you get the residence permit, maintaining a presence in the country is vital. Be prepared for an Armenian constitution test... aided by a translator, of course, if need be!
- **Dominican Republic:** Caribbean charm beckons with fast-track citizenship in three years for wealthy investors (\$ 200,000+ in real estate of business) or those demonstrating steady income and residency commitment.
- **Peru:** Stand out in Latin America with a two-year path to citizenship after getting residency. Be ready for stricter requirements like investment and local employment.
- **Paraguay:** Embrace South American ease with a potential three-year citizenship, although complexities may extend the timeframe. The reward? A strong passport of one of the easiest countries for citizenship with visa-free access to Europe and South America.
- **Uruguay:** Family ties are key here, and the country favours those part of a family unit residing in the country. After three years of residency and demonstrating strong local connections (through owning real estate or joining clubs), citizenship becomes a possibility.
- **Bolivia:** Unconventional choice for citizenship maybe, but budget-friendly options exist, from \$10,000 to \$1 million investments, but expect a two-year commitment with over six months of annual residency. Dual citizenship is yours for the taking!
- **Honduras:** This country offers various options, including for retirees and those with \$50,000 to invest! Despite challenges in the country, it offers diverse avenues to citizenship, particularly in places like Roatan.
- **Ireland:** Skilled professionals in ICT, engineering, and life sciences, take note! The "Green Card" scheme grants permanent residency in just two years, with citizenship soon after. Europe awaits particularly those in high-demand fields!
- **Portugal:** A Golden Visa program paves the way to permanent residency within 5 years for property investors or job creators. Citizenship beckons after another five years. A popular EU entry point for investors!
- **Singapore:** Global Talent Visa and Employment Pass unlock fast-track permanent residency for exceptional talents and specialised professionals, potentially leading to citizenship within 2-5 years. Business hub allure, anyone?
- Citizenships come in different forms but the fastest way to attain them is by investing in property in some countries or starting a business and then acquiring what is called a 'golden visa'. Here are some of the top countries where you can live that golden lifestyle if the bank balance allows.

- **Spain: Minimum property investment: €500,000 (E10.26m) with in-country finance.** A 12-month Golden Visa that can then be converted into a two-year residency permit. This can be renewed for up to five years provided that the qualifying property investment is maintained. After five years, visa holders can become eligible to apply for permanent residency but you have to live in Spain for at least 183 days a year. After having permanent residency for 10 years you can apply for Spanish citizenship.

- **Greece: Minimum property investment: €250,000 (E5.13m)** A five-year golden visa that can be renewed every five years. You can apply for Greek citizenship after seven years in the country but you will need to complete a Greek language test as well as a civic test. This Golden Visa is a residence permit, not a work permit, so while you can live in Greece you cannot work there, or in any EU country, without a separate work permit. However, you can earn money by renting out the property purchased or earning interest on the investment made.

- **Türkiye (Turkey):** Minimum property investment: €400,000 (E8.2m). You can gain Türkiye citizenship in three to six months and there is no minimum stay requirement to renew and retain citizenship in the country. As Türkiye also holds an E2 Visa Treaty Agreement with the USA, citizens who have lived in Türkiye for at least three years can apply for a non-immigrant visa in the USA by establishing or investing in an existing business there.

- **Hungary: Minimum property investment: €500,000 (E10.26m).** A 10-year residency permit that can be renewed for life. There is no minimum stay requirement. Once you have lived in Hungary full-time for five years you can upgrade the visa to permanent residency. However, you cannot gain citizenship.

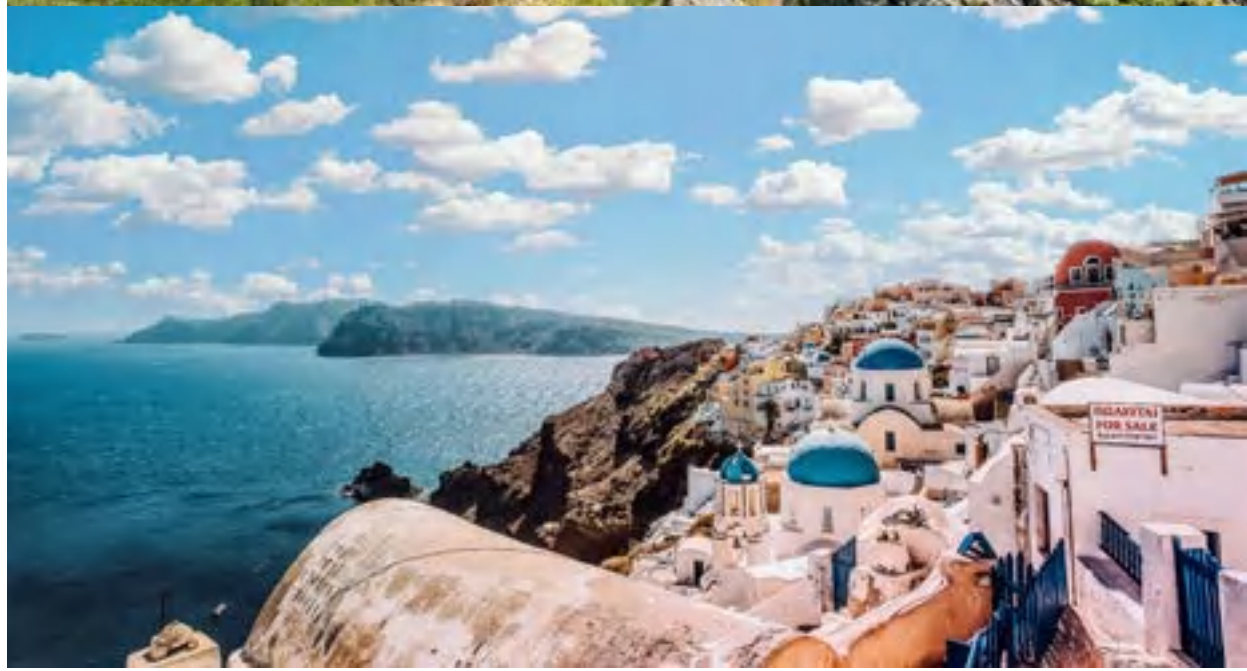
- **GRENADA: Minimum property investment: US\$220,000 (E4.11m).** You can gain Grenada citizenship in three to four months, and there is no minimum stay requirement. This investment program also holds an E-2 Investor Visa Treaty with the USA, allowing citizens to be eligible to apply for a non-immigrant visa after living in Grenada for a continuous period of three years.

- **DUBAI, UAE: Minimum property investment: US\$550,000 (E10.29m).** A 10-year residency visa that grants the holder the right to live and work in any of the seven Emirates. You can also spend extended periods outside the UAE and still keep your residency rights. However, this visa does not lead to citizenship.

- **ANTIGUA & BARBUDA:** Minimum property investment: US\$200,000 (R3.74m) plus government fees. You can be granted citizenship in three to four months. Antiguan citizens can also work in the USA and Canada with the proper work permits and visas.

(Additional information was sourced from Citizenship Invest and SAAMA)

Top countries where you can get citizenship



Memorandum of Understanding for Partnership and Cooperation between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Somaliland



▲ Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi and Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attend the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding agreement, that allows Ethiopia to use a Somaliland port, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Somalia rejects mediation efforts with Ethiopia over port deal

NAIROBI - Somalia rejected any discussions with Ethiopia about Addis Ababa's agreement to lease a port in the breakaway region of Somaliland, as regional heads of state gathered on Thursday to try to defuse a growing diplomatic crisis.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed on Jan. 1, Ethiopia would consider recognising Somaliland's independence in return for gaining access to the Red Sea, partly through the port lease.

Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 but has not won recognition from any country and the port lease deal, which would be a boon to landlocked Ethiopia, has enraged Somalia.

An escalating war of words, including threats by Somalia to go to war to prevent the deal from going through, led the African Union to call on Wednesday for restraint and "meaningful dialogue".

"There is no space for mediation unless Ethiopia retracts its illegal MOU and reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia," Somalia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Thursday.

Under the deal, which still has to be finalised, Ethiopia would lease 20 km (12 miles) of coastland around the port of Berbera, on the Gulf of Aden, for 50 years for military and commercial purposes.

Ethiopia's current main port for maritime exports is in the neighbouring country of Djibouti.

Heads of state from a regional group, the eight-member Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), met in Entebbe, Uganda, on Thursday to seek a peaceful solution.

Those in attendance included the presi-



▲ Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud attends the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) 42nd Extraordinary Session, at the State House in Entebbe, Uganda.

dents of Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan as well as the leader of the Sudanese paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

AL-SHABAAB FEARS

The U.S. special envoy for the Horn of Africa, Mike Hammer, who attended as an observer along with the European Union, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, said the MOU threatened to further undermine regional security and

had been weaponized by Al Shabaab militants.

"We have already seen troubling indications that al-Shabaab is using the MOU to generate new recruits," he told delegates in Uganda, according to a copy of the remarks seen by Reuters.

Ethiopia did not send a delegation, saying it was informed too late about the summit.

At a news conference on Thursday, Amba-

sador Meles Alem, Ethiopia's foreign affairs spokesperson, rejected a statement by the Arab League on Wednesday that called the MOU "a clear violation of international law".

"The statement is a disservice to the organisation itself as well as member countries. More than anything it shows a disregard for Africans," Meles said.

(Reuters)



▲ Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema arrives to attend the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia February 19, 2023.

US Treasury official discusses cholera outbreak, debt with Zambia minister

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Treasury Department's top international official spoke with Zambia's finance minister on Wednesday and discussed Zambia's ongoing debt restructuring and its response to a recent cholera outbreak, the U.S. Treasury Department said.

Zambia faces a major cholera outbreak that has killed at least 333 people since October, with over 8,000 cumulative cholera cases during this period, according to the website of the U.S. Embassy in Zambia.

U.S. Treasury Under Secretary for International Affairs Jay Shambaugh reiterated the U.S. government's "commitment to partner with Zambia" to end the outbreak when he spoke to Zambian Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane, according to the Treasury Department.

Zambia, one of Africa's largest copper producers, also defaulted on its debts three years ago, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and its restructuring efforts have been beset by delays.

Shambaugh "welcomed Zambia's performance to date under its IMF program and encouraged continued progress on the remaining economic reforms," the Treasury Department said.

In a major setback for Zambia, its official creditors, which include China and members of the Paris Club of creditor nations, rejected a preliminary restructuring deal in November.

The International Monetary Fund's board in December approved an immediate \$187 million loan payout, opened a new tabo Zambia and said the country was revising a restructuring proposal for \$3 billion of bonds that official creditors had rejected in November.

(Reuters)

Blinken to discuss security challenges during West Africa trip next week



▲ U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during the plenary session at the Congress Hall during the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, WEF, in Davos, Switzerland, Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024.

WASHINGTON - Security challenges in West Africa following the coup in Niger last year will be among key topics U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will discuss with African leaders next week during his trip to the region, the State Department's top Africa diplomat said on Thursday.

Blinken will travel to Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Angola from Jan. 21 through Jan. 26, the department said in a statement, where he will discuss U.S.-African partnerships over trade, climate, infrastructure, health and other issues.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee told reporters the U.S. has a known record and hopes the junta in Niger will choose Washington over a partnership with Russia.

"If they chose to have a partnership with countries like Russia, that would be very complicated," Phee said. "We have a demonstrated track record there that they're well aware of, and we hope they make the right decision."

Phee pointed to Mali as an example, where she said there have been increased civilian casualties and security attacks since the government there invited Russia's Wagner mercenary group.

Russia and Niger, under military rule since a coup last year, have agreed to develop military cooperation, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

Niger's junta has kicked out French troops and severed security pacts with the European Union, leaving Western allies concerned that the country could become a new foothold for

Russia in the region.

The military takeover in Niger was one of a series of coups or attempted power grabs over the past few years in West and Central Africa. Niger has been an important ally in Washington's fight against Islamist insurgents who have killed thousands of people in West Africa's Sahel region.

Tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo also will likely be a topic of discussion during Blinken's trip. The trip is in part a follow-up to a summit in Washington with African leaders in 2022, Phee said, where U.S. President Joe Biden pledged that the U.S. was "all in" on Africa's future.

Phee said on Thursday that Biden remained serious about his desire to travel to Africa but that had no plans to announce it.

(Reuters)

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If they chose to have a partnership with countries like Russia, that would be very complicated," Phee said. "We have a demonstrated track record there that they're well aware of, and we hope they make the right decision."
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McIlroy back in Dubai hunt after magical 63

Rory McIlroy conjured up a magical third round 63 to reignite his quest for a fourth Dubai Desert Classic title on Saturday. After rounds of 71 and 70 the Northern Irishman appeared to be out of the running, going into the weekend trailing overnight leader Cameron Young by 10 shots.

McIlroy knew he needed to produce something special to defend his title and he did just that with his brilliant bogey-free 63.

An eagle putt from off the green on the par-five last hole moved him to 12 under.

"It would be amazing," the 34-year-old said. "First player to get my name on it four times, it would be awesome."

"I've had so much success in Dubai, whether it be at this tournament or over at Jumeirah Golf Estates and Race to Dubais. It's been a really, really good place to me.

"I love coming back here. I really enjoy my time here. It would be amazing if I was able to get another win."

(Supersport)



▲Rory McIlroy conjured up a magical 63 in Saudi Arabia.

Conor Benn calls himself 'the most wanted fighter'

Conor Benn says he's the most wanted fighter in Britain despite his absence from the ring, whilst calling out a number of high-profile welterweight rivals to take him on.

The welterweight star has found it difficult to take on a top-level opponent since his return to the ring after failing two drugs tests in 2022.

Benn will fight little-known American Peter Dobson in Las Vegas on February 3, after his grudge match with Chris Eubank Jr fell through, in only his second fight since the initial Eubank clashes were postponed.

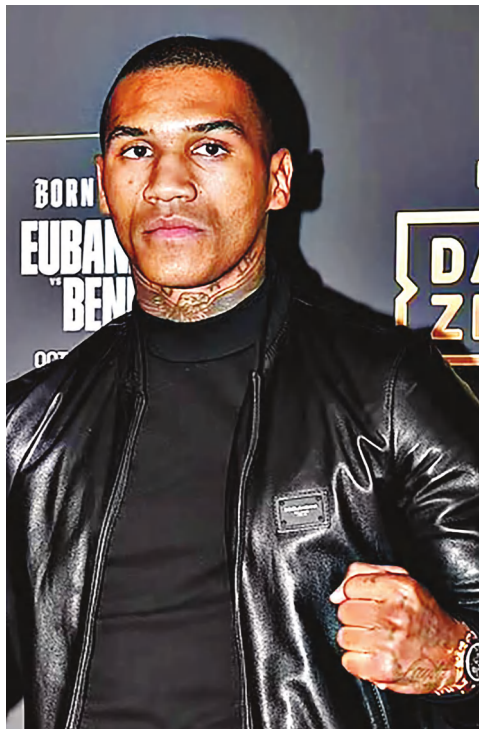
In a new interview clip, the 27-year-old boxer from Greenwich believes that he remains one of British boxing's biggest names, despite his absence, and calls upon any welterweight star to take him on.

Benn told Boxing Social: 'I'm a promoter's dream. Now what more do you want me to do? 'I'm the most wanted man in Britain, the most wanted man in the welterweight division. From [Devin] Haney, from [Kell] Brook, from Eubank, from Gervonta [Davis], from [Josh] Taylor, from [Josh] Kelly.

'It's like what more do you want me to do? Even I think [Adrien] Broner once said, then [Manny] Pacquiao. What do you want me to do? 'I haven't fought for a year and a half, and I'm still there. Still at the tops of people's tongues, still at the forefront of people's minds in these mega fights.

'It's frustrating, not because of Eubank, so I couldn't care less about him. Just a big name, just anyone. Like any one of the name's mentioned, let's make it happen.'

(Daily Mail)



▲British boxer Conor Benn.



▲Arsenal romped to a 5-0 win over Crystal Palace.

Gunning for glory

... Arsenal run riot to close gap on Liverpool to two points

SET-PIECE kings Arsenal ended their drought of goals and wins with a comfortable victory over Crystal Palace. Two angel Ga-

...riels, Margalhaes and Martinelli, claimed a brace apiece as the Gunners at last found their groove in front of goal.

Mikel Arteta's team put their struggles to find the net behind them and will hope to have turned a corner, thanks initially to a couple of corners.

Centre back Gabriel headed home Declan Rice's delivery and then connected with a Bukayo Saka cross well enough to force Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson into an unfortunate own goal.

Arsenal have now scored 13

times from set plays, more than anyone else in the Premier League.

Leandro Trossard justified Mikel Arteta's decision to drop Gabriel Martinelli by grabbing a third on the break to kill the game against the lacklustre visitors.

Martinelli himself answered the challenge by coming on to grab two of his own in stoppage time.

Arsenal had managed 48 shots on goal without scoring in back to back defeats in their previous two home games.

The returning Gabriel Jesus took the tally to 49 with an early effort that was high, wide, and far from handsome.

But number 50 was a bullseye.

From Rice's corner, Gabriel lost his marker Chris Richards and then climbed above him to head the ball home.

VAR Stuart Attwell saw no reason to intervene and, after a 25-minute lull, was also happy enough to see the lead extended by similar means.

Once again Gabriel escaped Richards and sent Saka's corner delivery towards the net from close range.

It was on target but was given as an own goal to Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson, whose head diverted the ball into the net.

The visitors offered little threat, even from their own set-pieces.

They forced David Raya into one decent save, when the Arsenal 'keeper passed the ball straight to Jefferson Lerma and then made amends by diving to his right to push the shot away.

Trossard fluffed one good opportunity after the break but made no mistake when Gabriel Jesus broke and squared the ball perfectly.

The Belgian kept his composure, took his time, and smashed the ball past Henderson.

Raya pushed Eberechi Eze's free kick over the bar but Palace never looked like getting back into the game.

Martinelli scored two identikit goals in added time to put gloss on the performance and scoreline.

The Palace fans booed at half time and the final whistle, as well as displaying a banner that read: "Wasted potential on and off the pitch. Weak decisions taking us backwards."

(The Sun)

Novak Djokovic is told to 'get vaccinated mate' by heckler

Novak Djokovic was heckled by a fan who told him to 'get vaccinated mate' as he prepared to serve on match point. And he had a little extra motivation to complete the job against Andy Murray's conqueror on match point.

That is because someone in the Rod Laver Arena crowd taunted Djokovic by shouting out just before he served to close out the 6-3 6-3 7-6 win.

A rowdy spectator yelled: "Get vaccinated mate."

The comment was in reference to Djokovic refusing to get the Covid-19 jab - which prompted his deportation from Australia in 2022 and then getting banned from entering America until last year.

And he had a little extra motivation to complete the job against Andy Murray's conqueror on match point.

That is because someone in the Rod Laver Arena crowd taunted Djokovic by shouting out just before he served to close out the 6-3 6-3 7-6 win.

A rowdy spectator yelled: "Get vaccinated mate."

The comment was in reference to Djokovic refusing to get the Covid-19 jab - which prompted his deportation from Australia in 2022 and then getting banned from entering America until last year.

Tree-lover Djokovic stepped away from the baseline as the umpire said "please" asking for quiet.

The 24-time Grand Slam champ then stretched his neck, flipped his tennis racket in his hands and then walked back to the line while wiping his sweat.

However, it did not put the steely Serbian off.

In fact, it seemed to channel an extra bit of focus as he silenced the supporter with an emphatic ace out wide to seal the win.

But rather than let out an almighty roar, Djokovic celebrated with a focused and composed shake of the racket and stared at his box.

Earlier on in the third set, Djokovic was visibly annoyed when he was given a time violation warning for taking more than the permitted 25 seconds over a serve.

That prompted injured commentator Nick Kyrgios to leap to his defence by slamming the controversial call as "ridiculous, just ridiculousness".

And Djokovic continued his love-hate relationship with the Aussie crowd when he could not resist a very pointed finger to the ear.

It is the third time in three matches that the reigning champion has clashed with supporters. In round one, he let rip as he did not know about a new rule allowing fans to move between games.

Then in his second match, the Serb clashed with a heckler and told him to "come down and say it to my face" - before Kyrgios offered to "do WWE" if it happened again.

(Supersport)



▲The Serbian great was told to 'get vaccinated mate' by a member of the Melbourne crowd.

Saudi shock

Troy Deeney: I was offered mega money to play in Saudi Arabia... but they wouldn't let me live with my partner and kids

Jordan Henderson is taking some serious stick after the end of his brief stint in Saudi Arabia.

But I would like to know how many critics would dismiss out of hand the chance to earn a net salary of £20million.

I was offered an eye-watering sum last summer to play in the Saudi Pro League — and thought long and hard about it.

At the age of 35, knowing my playing days were numbered, I received a pay offer which — although not on Hendo's scale — would have been comfortably the most money I'd ever

earned.

It far exceeded anything I took home captaining Watford in the Premier League.

It was sorely tempting but I had my own reasons for turning down the move.

I am not married to my partner — we are due to tie the knot this summer — and under Saudi law, I wouldn't have been allowed to live in the same house as her and our kids.

There are no exceptions for professional footballers and, if you agree to go and work in a country, you have to respect their culture and laws.

My missus and kids would have probably lived in Dubai, while I lived in Saudi.

I would not have coped well mentally with being away from them for the vast majority of the time — being left to my own devices isn't good for me.

Hendo is married, so wouldn't have had that dilemma, and a friend and former teammate in Steven Gerrard was managing his club, Al-Ettifaq.

Knowing he was no longer fully wanted at Liverpool, it seems Hendo made a rash knee-jerk decision and has now realised even a vast amount of money doesn't necessarily make

you happy.

Henderson might not now earn a penny from his brief time in Saudi after ripping up his contract to join Ajax on a free.

Like every other player who was offered a deal by the Saudis, he will have been well aware of the tax implications.

That if you did not stay for two years, you'd be absolutely clobbered by the taxman when returning home.

Had I struggled with the lifestyle as Henderson has done, I would have had to stick it out.

Apparently a few other players who left the Premier League for Saudi also want to leave — and anyone offered huge amounts to move next summer will think longer and harder about making a similar move.

Some will still go — it takes a brave man to turn down that sort of money, especially when you are nearing the end of your career.

Don't fall into the trap of believing every Premier League player is seriously minted and financially set up for life.

Many have had serious gambling problems, or made bad financial investments or had expensive divorces.

Players might also be tempted to play against Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Neymar — I know I liked the sound of that challenge — and to help grow an emerging league.

Until you go and live in another country,

with a very different way of life, it's impossible to know whether you can handle it.

I don't know which club in the Saudi top flight I would have been playing for.

I was made an offer by Michael Emenalo — the former Chelsea executive who is now sporting director of the Saudi Pro League — and if I had agreed, I would then have been allocated a club.

I know some of the crowds in Saudi are very low but that wasn't a consideration for me.

For Henderson, it might have been. He could not have got anything like the same buzz playing for Al-Ettifaq, where the average gate is 8,000, as in front of a full house at Anfield.

He is now joining Ajax — a massive club suffering a difficult season — and knows that he still has plenty to give.

It will also help his chances of playing for England at the Euros next summer.

If I am honest, I didn't seriously consider human-rights issues when I thought about moving to Saudi.

But for Henderson, this must have been a real issue because he had been such an outspoken advocate of LGBTQ rights and was moving to a country where homosexuality is illegal.

(The Sun)



▲Jordan Henderson joined Ajax Amsterdam earlier in the week after his stint in the Saudi Pro League.



▲Troy Deeney is due to marry partner Anna Hounmah this summer but would not have been able to live with her in Saudi Arabia.



Angola win five-goal affair

BOUAKE, Ivory Coast :Two goals from Gelson Dala edged Angola closer to a place in the next stage of the Africa Cup of Nations finals as they beat Mauritania 3-2 on Saturday to go top of the Group D standings in a match full of high quality goals.

Winger Gilberto netted the other for the winners while Amar Sidi Bouna and Aboubakary Koita scored fine individual efforts for Mauritania, who lost a second game at the tournament in Ivory Coast and sit bottom of the standings.

Angola are ahead of Burkina Faso on goals scored with top seeds Algeria third in the group on two points after they scored in stoppage time to force a 2-2 draw with the Burkinabe earlier at the Stade de la Paix.

Angola dominated the early exchanges and deserved their 30th-minute opener which came from a corner that Mauritania failed to clear with the ball falling to Gelson Dala, who hit his acrobatic effort hard down into the ground and saw it bounce over the opposing defence and into the net.

Mauritania were back level two minutes before the break following a superb individual effort from Bouna, who slalomed past five

Angolan defenders before delivering a left-footed finish.

Angola then scored twice in the space of three minutes as Gelson Dala looked to emulate Bouna's effort, picking the ball up near the halfway line, accelerating at the Mauritania defence who tried to force him wide, but he ended up chipping the ball in from a difficult angle in the 50th minute.

Gilberto, who had been a late call-up to the tournament, then netted from an even tighter angle after stripping possession from the Mauritania defence, cutting in from the byline and scoring at the near post.

But the two goal advantage was quickly reduced by another scorching effort in the 58th minute as Koita thrashed home a powerful shot from outside the Angola penalty area.

He also collected the ball near the halfway line, cutting inside as he headed towards goal and unleashed an effort that gave the Angola goalkeeper no chance.

There were opportunities for both sides to add more in an exciting encounter.

Angola next take on Burkina Faso in their last group game on Tuesday while Algeria are up against Mauritania, with all four having a chance to go through to the next round.

(Cafonline)



▲Angola are ahead of Burkina Faso on goals scored with top seeds Algeria third in the group on two points after they scored in stoppage time to force a 2-2 draw with the Burkinabe earlier at the Stade de la Paix.

Late equaliser keeps Algeria's hopes alive

This last gasp draw spared the 2019 champions from yet another disappointing result at the tournament. Baghdad Bounedjah netted from a corner five minutes into stoppage time at the end to ensure a share of the spoils and deny Burkina Faso early progress to the next stage.

Bounedjah scored both Algeria's goals while Mohamed Konate and Bertrand Traore netted for the Burkinabe, who remain top of Group D on four points to two of Algeria.

The two other teams in the group – Angola and Mauritania – were playing later on Saturday in Bouake. (Cafonline)



▲Ibrahim Blati Toure of Burkina Faso is challenged Sofiane Feghouli of Algeria.

Cape Verde thrash Mozambique 3 - 0, into last 8



▲Cape Verde have booked their knockout ticket after a 3-0 win over Mozambique in their second group game of the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations Côte d'Ivoire 2023. The Blue Sharks put up a dominant performance to pick the emphatic win.

In a riveting encounter at the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations Côte d'Ivoire 2023, Guinea emerged victorious against Gambia following their earlier draw with Cameroon in the opening game.

The match, characterized by few chances in the first half, saw a thrilling turn of events in the second period.

It wasn't until the 70th minute that Guinea managed to break the deadlock, with 22-year-old Aguiou Camara showcasing his prowess

Guinea triumphs over Gambia

by finishing off a remarkable team play. Camara capitalized on a well-timed pass from Morgan Guilavogui to score the opening goal, sending the fans into a frenzy.

In a bid to secure the equalizer, Gambia's coach, Tom Saintfuit, made tactical changes by introducing attackers Mohamed Badamossi and Ali Sowe into the game. However, the

resolute Guinea defense proved unyielding, thwarting all attempts to level the score.

With this victory, Guinea has accumulated 4 points from two games, currently holding the second position in the group standings. Their next challenge awaits as they prepare to face the already qualified Senegal at the Charles Konan Banny Stadium in Yamoussoukro on

Tuesday, January 23.

Meanwhile, Gambia, still without a point, faces Cameroon in their last group stage game on the same day. As the tournament unfolds, fans eagerly anticipate the drama and excitement that each match of the CAF Africa Cup of Nations promises. (Cafonline)



▲South Africa Coach Hugo Broos.

I'm sure Bafana can beat Namibia - Broos

Coach Hugo Broos has emphasised his belief that South Africa can defeat Namibia in an Africa Cup of Nations Group E match at the Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium in Korhogo on the evening of Sunday 21 January 2024. Kick-off is at 22h00 CAT.

South Africa got their Afcon off to a poor start, suffering a 2-0 loss at the hands of Mali on Tuesday night. Prior to that, Bafana had recorded a 0-0 draw with Lesotho in a pre-tournament friendly, and a 2-0 loss to Rwanda in a 2026 World Cup qualifier in November 2023.

Namibia, meanwhile, got their Nations Cup up and running with a first-ever

tournament win, defeating heavyweights Tunisia 1-0 thanks to a late strike from Deon Hotto. Prior to that, the Brave Warriors had recorded a 0-0 draw with Ghana in a pre-tournament friendly, and a 2-0 win over Sao Tome & Principe in a 2026 World Cup qualifier in November 2023.

South Africa may look to sharpen up in attack by replacing Evidence Makgopa and Thapelo Maseko

with Zakhele Lepasa and Mhlali Mayambela. Siyanda Xulu could also be on the chopping block after an error-prone showing against Mali.

Namibia have no reported injury issues and coach Collin Benjamin is likely to mostly stick to the same XI that did such a great job against Tunisia.

"Again, I think the performance was good, though not good enough. Now we play Namibia, we have to win that game," said South Africa coach Hugo Broos after the 2-0 defeat to Mali. "If we draw, it'll be tough to go into the knockout. We can win that game. I'll tell the boys to 'go just like you played today'. (But) I'm sure we can win."

He added, "We lost the game on two facts. First, missing the penalty; secondly, the physical power of Mali in the second half. I think if we scored the penalty, the game should be different. But that's comments after the game that does not change the results."

"This is huge for Namibia. Namibia has always been getting beatings; us as a country, we get beaten politically, economically and in a lot of spheres," said Namibia coach Collin Benjamin after their win over Tunisia. "So what these Brave Warriors did was to bring some restoration in Namibia as a country. We are all proud."

(Supersport)

PLAYERS TO WATCH

South Africa: Themba Zwane was at the heart of much of South Africa's attacking play against Mali, though it was notable that as he faded in influence, so did the team's passing rhythm. Bafana Bafana will need Zwane to again get the team's forward play 'clicking'.

Namibia: Deon Hotto scored a superbly-taken goal against Tunisia to underline his status as one of Namibia's most technically-gifted players. His pace and experience will be crucial against South Africa, and he'll be hungry to perform strongly against the country where he plays his club football.

Kolisi 'only getting better' after first Racing try - Lancaster

South Africa's double Rugby World Cup-winning captain Siya Kolisi said Racing 92 are "100%" committed to the Champions Cup after scoring his first try for the club in a 48-26 victory over Cardiff which secured a place in the last 16 of the Champions Cup on Saturday.

The Parisians moved above Ulster to fourth in Pool 2, after the Irish province were hammered 47-19 by Harlequins earlier in the day, claiming a spot in the next round to be held in April.

Planker Kolisi, 32, who joined Racing after lifting a second World Cup last October, crossed during the first-half on his eighth club appearance and was among seven try scorers for the French side, three-time Champions Cup runners-up.

"We haven't had a good competition, we've lost some games we could have won but today held our own," Kolisi told BeIn Sport after their first win in four Champions Cup matches this season.

"We are 100% in the Champions Cup, even though things didn't go our way we knew it was in our hands today, so we gave it everything," he added after finishing the win as Racing captain.

A youthful Cardiff surprisingly led 7-3 after just 10

minutes as Wales prop Rhys Carre crashed over before Racing took control of the tie.

No 8 Kitone Kamikamica went over in the corner before scrum-half Nollan Le Garrec, included in France's Six Nations squad, set-up Kolisi five metres out for the try.

Back-rower Kolisi then turned the provider setting-up centre Inia Tabuavuou before Wales scrum-half Tomos Williams cut the deficit and the hosts led 20-12 at the break.

Victory was clinched with half an hour to play as Kolisi's compatriot, fullback Tristan Tedder and wingers Christian Wade and Juan Imhoff scored to make it 41-12.

Despite having less than a quarter of Racing's budget this season, Cardiff refused to go out of the competition with a whimper as half-back Williams claimed his second try with 15 minutes to play.

Flyhalf Tinus De Beer then broke free to clinch a deserved bonus point for the Welsh club with nine minutes remaining before replacement hooker Jannick Tarrit made sure of the rout for the home side with a late try.

Elsewhere, four-time winners Leinster claimed a home tie in the next round, beating Leicester 27-10 to

maintain their unbeaten record in the pool stage.

Northampton made a statement with a 26-23 victory at Munster as they made it four wins from four in the tournament.

Later, three-time winners Saracens welcome already-qualified Lyon but Owen Farrell's side are at risk of missing out on the last 16.

Sunday's highlight is holders La Rochelle's trip to Sale. The French club need a win to guarantee their progress before record five-time winners Toulouse play Bath at a sold-out Stade Ernest-Wallon.

(Supersport)

“

We are 100% in the Champions Cup, even though things didn't go our way we knew it was in our hands today, so we gave it everything

”

▲ Siya Kolisi, 32, who joined Racing after lifting a second World Cup last October, crossed during the first-half on his eighth club appearance and was among seven try scorers for the French side, three-time Champions Cup runners-up.



By Karabo Ngoepe
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FROM playing football for recreational purposes and enjoying the beautiful game in stokvel tournaments to becoming cup specialists, the story of Nsingizini Hotspurs is an incredible one.

It is a story of hard work, determination, patience, investment and a clear vision.

'Nsingizini Yezulu' are on a mission: conquer Eswatini football and make a mark on the African continent and then take on the best in the world. It's a bold move for a team that comes from a country that is currently struggling to grind out results in the international arena.

The club's Chief Executive Officer, Banele Ngobe beams with pride and joy as he narrates the story of Nsingizini Hotspurs. From its humble beginnings to where it currently sits and the audacious plans for the future.

As an avid football fan, the name is intriguing. The majority of teams in Africa are inspired by successful and huge clubs from Europe and America, with many of them opting for the Monica of United, City or like the Glamour boys of SA football, fusing the name of the owner and the team like with Kaizer Chiefs.

It's the same story with 'Nsingizini Yezulu' but they went with the name of a club that doesn't have a significant following on the African continent compared to the likes of Manchester United, Arsenal or even Liverpool. Their name comes from Tottenham Hotspurs.

Now it's interesting to know that two days before the interview with Ngobe, I was having a conversation with a friend who told me that her father is a Tottenham Hotspurs fan and not a Man United follower as she had grown up thinking.

I bring this up because it taught me one thing, exposure and going to people's levels can yield positive results. Ngobe explains that the English team's visit to Eswatini to play at Somhlolo Stadium in the 1980s won them a huge following in the Kingdom and even inspired them.

"The name is historic. The founders of the team picked Hotspurs because, at the time, I think 1984, this team came from the UK to Somhlolo at a time when football was gaining momentum in terms of standard. The founders liked Hotspurs from that point on and adopted the name," he says as he smiles.

Going down memory lane, Ngobe explains that Nsingizini began as an amateur team which used to compete at the community level and was big for stokvel tournaments. It was also a vehicle for community members to get jobs when security forces were recruiting.

"It used to be a team for first-division and premier league teams to recruit talent from. It was not a formal set-up. It was a team made up of people who loved soccer and just wanted to bring together the community.

"It was also used as a vehicle to develop the community in terms of updates about what was happening. The community members and chiefs would gather in the sports ground for discussions and updates. It played a crucial role in developing the community of eNsingizini," Ngobe said.

Having realised that the potential existed, a visionary, Derrick Shiba, opted to reshape the team and turn it into a force to be reckoned with. Ngobe then saw the team's fortunes turn around.

"Everything was formalised and properly structured, birthing the logos and colours as well as our branding," he said.

It did not happen overnight. The formalisation and professionalising of the team presented numerous challenges.

"In terms of formalizing the team, being new in a professional setup and playing in the first division, presented several challenges in terms of the playing personnel. Remember it was a community team, so we were utilizing the people from the community before that.

"But at the level we were growing, it was coming with the challenge that we could not utilize people from the community alone, resulting in a conflict with the community members. We were now taking another step in developing the team, so we had to bring talent from outside the community and the country," he said.

This did not sit well with some of the community members who felt entitled and thought their children had to play for the team because it was from the community. Another challenge encountered was in the background of the team, the administration side of the business.

"In terms of administration, the club was not properly structured. It was just members of the community who had 9-5 jobs and were working remotely and on a part-time basis in the club but they still did a wonderful job," said Ngobe.



Nsingizini soars high – aims to reshape football landscape in Eswatini



1984

▲ In 1984 Tottenham Hotspurs visited the Kingdom of Swaziland (Eswatini) to play at Somhlolo. The visit inspired the now Nsingizini Hotspurs to get the name from such a historic moment.



For the vision to come true, the club's leadership had to look at the football landscape locally and benchmark it with international standards, not an easy process. Eswatini's football is unique and has quite a few challenges. Although professional, the MTN Premier League of Eswatini is plagued by challenges and problems that are mostly seen in Sunday soccer and township football.

Attacks on referees when decisions go against teams are common. Mbabane Highlanders Chairman Chief Ally Kgomongwe bemoaned this behaviour, having paid close to E800 000 in fines since taking over the club in 2019.

Last year, the South African businessman and his team were slapped with a E120,000 fine after the club's fans caused mayhem at Mavuso Sports Centre after a 2-1 loss to Manzini Sea Birds. They attacked referee Mbongeni Shongwe after Manzini Sea Birds striker Sandumuzi

Zwane looked like he had used his hand to score a winning goal against Highlanders.

Kgomongwe at the time told our sister publication, the Eswatini Financial Times that the money spent on paying fines due to fans' misbehaviour was a huge concern for him.

"When I took over I found that Highlanders were owing close to E200 000 with the PLE in fines. I had to settle that bill and already I have spent close to E600 000. This is too much. This money could be used to settle other expenses of running the team. We need to get to the bottom of the issue because it is crippling us," Kgomongwe said at the time.

Situation

Nsingizini, having observed the situation in the league and the conduct of players, supporters and club bosses, wanted to do things differently. Ngobe said as a club, they put discipline and professionalism at the centre of everything they did.

"We decided to maintain our professionalism at all levels. You would find yourself dealing with the issues of teams not keeping time and bad refereeing. From our angle, we always maintained our professional setup because of our leadership. It requires one to set a standard in terms of how we approach the game, from players to management and supporters. The discipline that we portray in our games and accepting difficult decisions taken by the referees."

"Referees are humans and they make mistakes that can even cost you a game. But

because of where we are as a team/brand we always speak about discipline and to always keep the standard in terms of how we interact with external stakeholders," he said.

Ngobe added that they have been fortunate not to have found themselves in similar situations and attributes this to the levels of communication and the sharing of the club's vision.

Communicate

"We communicate and share the vision with them. They know a certain behaviour is not associated with us as a brand. So, whoever does anything outside our vision is chucked out by the system. We must portray a good image for us and beyond the club. We intend to ensure that our football gets the respect it deserves not only in Eswatini but internationally.

"We want to use ourselves as a benchmark for other clubs to set the standard. If other clubs take the same direction, it will improve our standard in Eswatini. If we maintain the same standard in terms of discipline and commitment, we will attract sponsors, meaning more money for the players and the club. It is important for us to maintain good conduct as well," he said.

The charismatic CEO added that for them to move to where they are now, it required them

to have core values and to also define them as a football club.

"It is a must, and I believe we are the only club that has core values. It helps in orienting everyone that comes to the club. It's what drives us as a club despite the challenges we face and makes everyone understand who we are as a club. It speaks to the commitment of our leadership, in our case the President Mr Shiba, his level of commitment to the vision and project is something else.

"Without his level of commitment to the vision by putting his resources, some of us would not have been attracted to the vision because we were looking from a fan's perspective," he said.

Shiba's ability to pull in like-minded people who came with support, not only money but support in the form of ideas and setting up the structure has been hailed as a key driver for the club. Ngobe said the commitment part by leadership has made the team attractive, which has in turn resulted in the club being able to attract sponsorships.

Grab a copy of next weekend's edition to read part two of the series that looks at Nsingizini Hotspurs Football Club.





Somhlolo facelift introduces exciting features

By Karabo Ngoepe
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SOCCER lovers in the Kingdom of Eswatini are set to enjoy world-class facilities when they go to watch matches following significant upgrades to the country's football mecca, Somhlolo National Stadium.

Construction work at the stadium has been finalised and new features have been unveiled. The new features include an innovative ticketing system integrated into the public gates.

The project was spearheaded by Construction Associates (CA), a subsidiary of Inyatsi Group Holdings.

CA Managing Director, Merica Vilakati said the system not only facilitates entry for fans and spectators but also includes a turnstile gate equipped with a counting mechanism to accurately track the number of individuals entering the stadium.

"Additionally, each entrance point is equipped with CCTV surveillance designed to monitor and record every person entering the stadium, ensuring compliance with security standards and regulations," he said.

The project, which included the construction of a boundary wall and the addition of various facilities, was commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development through Micro Projects in collaboration with the Ministry of Sports.

Stadiums in Eswatini have been deemed below Confederation of African Football and FIFA standards and this has led to matches being played outside the Kingdom.

Also, the national team, Sihlangu plays its home games in South Africa's Mbombela Stadium in Mpumalanga.

Even the country's CAF Champions League representatives, Green Mamba had to play their home match in the tournament at



▲ The refurbished turnstile gate equipped with CCTV surveillance with a counting mechanism.

the Estadio Nacional Do Zimpeto in Maputo, the home ground of their opponent- UD do Songo due to the stadium ban in Eswatini.

However, the renovations to Somhlolo National Stadium paint a positive picture for fans who are yearning for the return of international football matches in their backyard.

Project

The project also involved the construction of a boundary wall around the outside perimeter of the stadium, along with the installation of four public gates, two service gates and a clear view fence around the stadium in fulfilment of the FIFA requirements to host international matches.

"This was part of the third phase of rehabilitation for the stadium, which aimed to modernize the infrastructure to meet international standards. CA was also entrusted with additional works to refurbish various facilities within the stadium," Vilakati said.

The additional works encompassed a wide range of enhancements, including the extension of the Royal box, installation of new chairs, VIP toilets, additional entrance points, and the fixing of the PA system, audiovisual equipment, and CCTV around the boundary wall.

Upgrades

Vilakati added that the project also involved cladding the VVIP Gate, building a new ramp for the Libandla Room, and other essential upgrades. The construction also created job opportunities for emaSwati who were able to put food on the tables in their homes.

"The project has had a positive impact on employment, with over 150 employees, including staff and 27 subcontractors, being engaged to bring the project to fruition.

"The completion of this project underscores CA's commitment to delivering high-quality construction solutions and contributing to the enhancement of sporting infrastructure," said Vilakati.

Each entrance point is equipped with CCTV surveillance designed to monitor and record every person entering the stadium, ensuring compliance with security standards and regulations



▲ An aerial view of the rennovated Somhlolo Stadium.

INGWENYAMA CUP LAST 16 STAGE MATCH PREVIEWS:

‘Bull’ out to gore Louis XIV

By Sibusiso Masilela
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Mbabane Highlanders vs Louis XIV
Sunday:
Venue: Mavuso Sports Centre
Kickoff time: 1:30 pm

Mbabane Highlanders' journey to taste the SMVAF Ingwenyama Cup glory continues today (Sunday) as the capital city giants host minnows Louis XIV.

The 'Black Bull' is still longing to clinch the prestigious knockout tournament after reaching two finals since its inception six years ago.

The road for 'Inkunz' emnyama' will go via the National First Division side that still wants to make its name in local football. Highlanders Head coach Dumisani 'DU' Makhanya will have to do a proper assignment to ensure he delivers the job for the throngs of club supporters who have endured 12 years without a major trophy since the back-to-back EswatiniBank Cup glory between 2009 and 2010.

The ex-Sitsebe mentor must play his cards well and deliver the job using his trusted servants, such as Banele 'Pupu' Sikhondze, Emmanuel Owusu and Menzi Sithole, who have been some of the best performers for the club this season.



▲ Banele 'Pupu' Sikhondze.

On another note, Louis XIV will be out to make their name in the tournament after they bootied out fellow compatriots Malanti Chiefs in the Last 32.

Resilience and tenacity are the strengths of the Ekuikhanyeni-based side, which helped them to come from three goals down against Malanti Chiefs to clinch victory on penalties.

‘Westians’ in a tricky redemption mission

Manzini Wanderers vs Madlenya
Venue: Mavuso Sports Centre
Kickoff time: 4:00 pm

UKUTHULA Kulomhlaba wezono!

The old Methodist Church worship song is expected to be sung by the thousands of Manzini Wanderers supporters this afternoon, as the hub giants will be looking to conquer a tough challenge from Madlenya FC.

The two sides will face off in the biggest match of the SMVAF Ingwenyama Cup Round 16 with teams looking to advance to the last eight of the tournament.

Pressure will be on Wanderers as they have to achieve a lot of missions against the Siphofaneni-based side, known as giant slayers, including revenge for their first-round league loss against them.

The hub giants will also continue with their revival crusade, which has seen them record back-to-back wins, including the recent

emphatic 1-0 league win over Green Mamba on Tuesday at the same venue.

The 'Weslians' captain Mlamuli 'Mlaba' Nkambule is once again expected to steer the side into the Last 8 following his beautiful cracker that saw them beat Green Mamba.

Nkambule, together with speedy striker Banele 'Banny' Mdluli will be key players for the crowd-pullers on this tricky date. Mdluli has already won the hearts of Wanderers' supporters after netting a hat-trick against Sisonkhe FC during the Last 32 set of games.

Success won't come easy for the crowd-pullers, as they have to overcome a team that has broken the hearts of many big teams this season, both in the league and cup competitions.

The William 'Masondeza' Gamedze-troups are a formidable side that conquers every battle in front of them, with their never-say-die attitude.

Madlenya striker Lethokuhle Gamedze will once again carry the hopes of the team in this tough encounter.

Wounded Mamba out to bite Sea Birds

Green Mamba vs Sea Birds
Venue: King Sobhuza II Stadium
Kickoff time: 1:00 pm

WOUNDED Ingwenyama Cup defending champions Green Mamba will be seeking redemption in the Last 16 encounter against Sea Birds.

The Correctional Services side is still licking their wounds after their midweek league defeat to Manzini Wanderers.

The Ernest Mavuso-led side must fold their sleeves and focus on the new challenge to keep their title defence hopes alive against the hub outfit.

Mavuso is in a must-win situation to prove his credentials and needs to make sure his troops regain their confidence. The soft-spoken mentor is blessed with cream and quality in his squad, that can dismantle any team on any given day.

'Inyoka Eluhlazana's battalion includes Sabelo 'Sikhali' Ndzinisa, Mthunzi 'Xavi' Mkhontfo and Njabulo Tfwala. Mavuso will also come up with a masterplan to deal



▲ Sabelo 'Sikhali' Ndzinisa.

with the Sea Birds threat, as the hub outfit possesses some of the best strikers in the land, such as Muzi Tsabedze and Mthokozisi Gwebu, who will be key in today's battle.



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs.

Tough test for new Nsingizini coach

Nsingizini Hotspurs vs Denver Sundowns
Venue: King Sobhuza II Stadium
Kickoff time: 3:00 pm

NEWLY appointed Nsingizini Hotspurs head coach Alex Sergion will have to pass his first assignment for the Shiselweni-based side with a tricky assignment against Denver Sundowns.

The Zimbabwean coach recently joined the expensively assembled cup specialists. Nsingizini seems to be having a secret approach to winning cup tournaments, including the MoMo Cup double.

The coach seems to have the correct arsenal at his disposal to help him maintain

the club's cup feat in Zimbabwean striker Nyasha Chintuli, who made a strong arrival to local football with a 3-1 league hat-trick during their recent victory over Royal Leopard.

This is also going to be an emotional match for Ghanaian international Alvin Shabashi who will be facing his former team for the first time since his move to the Hluthi-based side.

Nsingizini must worry about Sundowns, who have a strong technical bench, including head coach Milton Dlamini and the seasoned Musa Manyatsi.

The two coaches have quickly become father figures to the youngsters in the team, and they can stun the home side.

