



PM moves motion for Parly to applaud King's Speech from the Throne



By Ncaba Ntshakala

PRIME Minister Russell Dlamini moved a motion on Wednesday for legislators of the 12th Parliament to applaud His Majesty the King for his “astounding” Speech from the Throne as a gesture of appreciation and support for being a visionary leader. This follows the King’s articulation of a clear roadmap for the nation last week Friday, the Prime Minister urged parliamentarians to unite behind the vision outlined. His Majesty also laid out a comprehensive plan, addressing critical issues impacting Eswatini.

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**Govt’s over
E605m boost
to basic
education**

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PM moves motion for Parly to applaud King’s Speech from the Throne

Stories by Ncaba Ntshakala

PRIME Minister Russell Dlamini moved a motion on Wednesday for legislators of the 12th Parliament to applaud His Majesty the King for his “astounding” Speech from the Throne as a gesture of appreciation and support for being a visionary leader.

This follows the King’s articulation of a clear roadmap for the nation last week Friday, the Prime Minister urged parliamentarians to unite behind the vision outlined.

His Majesty also laid out a comprehensive plan, addressing critical issues impacting Eswatini. Tackling poverty, improving service delivery, creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and prioritizing national security were among the key areas highlighted. The King’s speech resonated with many legislators, who expressed hope and commitment to realizing the outlined goals.

Emphasizing the profound impact of the King’s words, the PM stated: “The King has laid a foundation for the government to act upon. His speech is a guideline for us to work on and deliver to the nation.”

Expectedly, the legislators unanimously seconded the PM’s motion to applaud His Majesty the King for his comprehensive and inspiring Speech from the Throne.

The King’s address, outlining a roadmap for tackling poverty, improving service delivery, and fostering economic growth, resonated deeply with legislators across party lines.

Following the Prime Minister’s statement, Minister of Tinkhundla Administration

and Development Sikhumbuzo Dlamini expressed: “His Majesty’s speech was a road map. He emphasized service delivery which is very key for us as Member of Parliament. His sentiments were echoed by Hhukwini MP Alec Lushaba, who highlighted the responsibility of the government to act upon the King’s directives. Lushaba also said that they must also act on other stumbling blocks which include corruption.

Prince Mshengu on the other hand emphasized the potential for national development if Parliament heeds the King’s call, particularly regarding service delivery and economic growth.

To formally express their appreciation, Parliament elected an eight-member committee to deliver their collective gratitude to the King. This committee, led by the PM, Speaker of the House of Assembly Jabulani Mabuza, and Senate President Lindiwe Dlamini, represents the diverse voices and shared commitment of the 12th Parliament.

The Elected Committee Members:

- MP Tanele Magagula (Hhohho)
- MP Princess Nkosingumenzi
- MP Prince Mshengu
- MP Nathi Hlophe (Mtfongwaneni)
- MP Ntando Mkhonta (Zombodze Emuva)

‘Heads Must Roll’ in corruption crackdown – Mbabane East MP

Mbabane East Member of Parliament, Welcome Dlamini, urged the government to follow the King’s call for decisive action against corruption, declaring “Kute Lotobhaca ngeNkhosi” (There’s no one who will use the King as his or her shield). His statement follows His Majesty’s Speech from



▲Members of Parliament seconded a motion by PM Russell Dlamini to go and pay homage to His Majesty the King for the Speech from the Throne.

the Throne, which emphasized the need to tackle corruption and hold perpetrators accountable.

Dlamini emphasized the King’s statement that “heads must roll” for those entrenched in corruption. He criticized the current focus on “small fishes,” calling for decisive action against powerful individuals (“bo Bhabhuli”) implicated in corrupt practices.

Dlamini also highlighted the King’s commitment to providing Parliament with adequate resources. He warned against excuses of insufficient funds, stating that:

“The King has declared that we will have funds to work with, so no one should claim otherwise.”

Budget Speech Day revealed

Eagerly awaited news arrived yesterday as the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Jabulani Mabuza, announced the date for the upcoming Budget Speech. Marking a crucial event in the nation’s fiscal calendar, the speech will be delivered on February 23, 2024, by the Minister of Finance Neal Rijkenberg in Parliament.

WITH financial assistance from the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini will inject over E605 million into strengthening Early Childhood Development and Basic Education.

The World Bank will pump in about E514.6 million (US\$27 million) and it will be supplemented by E90.5 million (US\$4.75 million) from GPE for supporting human development capital in the Kingdom.

According to a report shared by the World Bank, this year’s theme emphasizes educating Africans who will be fit for the 21st century and building resilient education systems to increase access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa. The people of Eswatini are not being left behind. The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the World Bank recognize the importance of the education sector and the role it plays in building the country’s human capital and transforming its economic and social landscape.

The World Bank approved the government’s request for an E514 674 000 (US\$27 million) loan to support its efforts to strengthen Eswatini’s education service delivery and management systems. In addition, the Government successfully mobilized co-financing from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) amounting to the E90 544 500 (US\$4.75 million) grant.

Govt’s over E605m boost to basic education



The project, which was approved in 2022 and concludes in 2027, aims to ensure the delivery of quality education in the early years and for junior secondary students, prioritizing areas with high rates of poverty and low educational outcomes.

The project aims to address two main issues: Firstly, strengthening the foundations of learning by ensuring children from the poorest communities in the Kingdom of Eswatini can acquire the literacy and numeracy skills they need for future learning; and secondly, supporting children to stay in school and empowering them with sufficient knowledge and skills to become productive citizens.

Orphans and vulnerable children are amongst those specifically targeted in the

interventions. Across most of the project priority areas, the Ministry of Education is collaborating with other ministries, including the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

The Government of Eswatini, the World Bank, and the GPE will jointly launch the Strengthening Early Childhood Development and Basic Education Systems to Support Human Capital Development project later this month. The partners will host a vibrant event with stakeholders and beneficiaries, including school children and teachers. Building up to the launch, young people were invited to take part in a competition to create a unique SiSwati name for the project. This is intended to contribute to creating a

sense of ownership and excitement for the road ahead. The winner will be announced at the upcoming event.

World Bank expressed that the project is aligned with the new Education Strategic Sector Plan (2022-2034), which has a strong focus on improving learning levels, access to and completion of education; strengthening teacher management and development; and building the resilience of the education sector to respond to future crises.

Also, the project implementation is led by the government of Eswatini through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) working with its multiple partners to scale up multi-sectoral interventions to support school children to remain in the education system and gain the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in life.

“The World Bank Group supports the use of country systems for procurement and financial management of this and other projects,” reads part of the report. “This approach contributes to building state capacity to implement policies, deliver programs, and improve the efficiency of public investments and spending. To contribute to project success while building local skills and capacity, the Bank provides training support to officials and builds monitoring and evaluation into all Bank supported projects.”

Relief to emaSwati as...

Government fully restocks travelling documents, passports

By Bahle Gama
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THE scramble for limited travel documents and international passports will come to an end as the government has fully restocked the booklets in surplus.

On Wednesday, the Ministry of Home Affairs informed the public about the arrival of a new stock of documents that emaSwati have been desperate to acquire for various reasons, personal and professional.

According to the Ministry, this long-awaited restocking will facilitate efficient and timely service delivery to emaSwati.

On March 3, 2023, the Ministry notified the public that the 32-page travel document booklets were depleting due to high demand.

This was attributed to the removal of travel restrictions, which resulted in the Ministry issuing about 800 travel documents

per day, which was considered to be above 100 per cent of the normal average of 300 travel documents per day.

A high demand for the 32-page document was observed and the Ministry had to place orders in advance. However, it faced difficulties with the booklets arriving in time due to supply chain challenges from the source at the time. Fast forward to November 7, 2023, the Ministry issued another statement announcing the arrival of a new limited stock of 32, 48, and 64-page travel documents.

However, the 32-page travel document was strictly reserved for emergency purposes, which included sickly individuals, the elderly, and children.

This selection was based on the fact that travel documents for children expire in five years, unlike adults which last for 10 years.

The Ministry said by reserving the 32-page documents, the aim was to provide swift assistance to those who required immediate travel due to unavoidable circumstances.

On Wednesday, February 14, the Ministry said in line with the new development and dedication to improve service delivery, all service centres across the country as well as selected Tinkhundla centres would commence operations.

This is with the intent to provide prompt and reliable services to the public.

Grateful

“We are grateful for the patience, understanding, and cooperation demonstrated by the public during the period of limited-service availability,” said Minister Princess Lindiwe in the statement.

She stated that the Ministry is committed to ensuring that the passport application

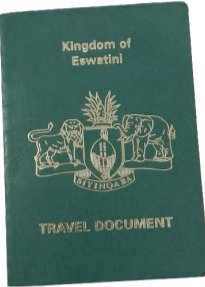
process is as seamless and efficient as possible and looks forward to serving the citizens of Eswatini with the highest standards of professionalism and excellence.

The Minister also gave assurance that her team was ready to assist citizens in obtaining the necessary travel documents to facilitate their domestic and international journeys.

“The public is requested to visit their nearest service centre or Tinkhundla centres to apply for their travel documents. As always, we advise citizens to come prepared with the required documentation and to follow the prescribed guidelines and procedures to ensure a smooth and seamless application process,” the Minister said.

The categories of passports include:

- ▶ 32 pages Travel Document @ E150
- ▶ 48 pages Travel Document @ E300
- ▶ 68 pages Travel Document @ E500
- ▶ Ordinary international Passport @ E300
- ▶ Service Passport @ E400
- ▶ Diplomatic Passport @ E600



MSF opens new clinic to eliminate STIs in Matsapha–Manzini corridor

By Nokunceda Magagula
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THE Medic Sans Frontières, also known as Doctors Without Borders, has opened the Sitsandziwe Clinic to combat sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the Matsapha–Manzini corridor.

The unveiling of the Sitsandziwe Clinic on Wednesday was attended by the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Khanya Mabuza. In his remarks, Mabuza emphasised that the clinic is specifically designed to cater to the young, urban population in the area, ensuring their access to comprehensive sexual health services.

“Today I’m delighted and humbled to be part of this noble event where we are officially opening this clinic, which is specifically designed to cater for the young, urban population in the area, ensuring that they have access to comprehensive sexual health services,” Mabuza said.

Mabuza highlighted the significance of Matsapha being at the centre of the Manzini–Mbabane business corridor, indicating that the clinic will serve a large number of Emaswati and empower them to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections.

He acknowledged the partnership between the Ministry of Health and Medic Sans Frontières, particularly in addressing the Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis epidemic, which has resulted in a reduction in morbidity and mortality associated with the disease. Mabuza commended MSF as a great partner in the Ministry’s efforts to improve healthcare in Eswatini.

Mabuza stressed that Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) remain a global, regional, and national public health priority. He emphasised the Ministry’s mandate to prioritise STIs due to their strong correlation with other conditions such as HIV, infertility, and reproductive cancers.

“Sexual Transmitted Infections (STI) remain a public health priority globally, regionally and here in Eswatini. As a Ministry we are mandated to prioritise STI’s, because of their strong correlation with other conditions including HIV, Infertility and Reproductive cancers,” Mabuza asserted.

Health records indicate a significant number of

STI cases among individuals of reproductive age, particularly in densely populated urban areas of the country. Mabuza emphasised the importance of prevention measures and proper treatment to mitigate the adverse effects of STIs on individuals’ health and socio-economic aspects. He highlighted the introduction of the HPV vaccine for young girls as a preventive measure against cervical cancer, encouraging parents and guardians to consent to vaccination for girls between the ages of 9 and 14.

Mabuza emphasised the availability and free access to the HPV vaccine, as well as the promotion of condom use and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) methods. He mentioned ongoing efforts by the Ministry and its partners to ensure the availability of these prevention methods.

Status

The Ministry acknowledged the need to strengthen STI programming, including surveillance of all STIs to enable the treatment of index cases and their contacts. Improving data collection was also identified as crucial to obtaining a comprehensive and accurate picture of the STI status in the country.

“We are aware of the need to strengthen the STI programming and include surveillance of all such infections which will enable the treatment of index cases and their contacts. There is a need to also improve on Data collection to give a comprehensive and distinctive picture on the STIs status in the country” Mabuza said.

Mabuza emphasised the importance of integrating STI services, including viral hepatitis services, into larger sexual and reproductive health services, ART services, and community health services for adolescents and young adults.

He highlighted the progress made in reviewing relevant Standard Treatment Guidelines for the proper management of STIs, emphasising the importance of health education and behaviour change in the fight against STIs.

“Much progress has been made in terms of reviewing relevant Standard Treatment Guidelines for proper management of STIs which is very important in guiding the proper use of antibiotics. Health education, leading

to behaviour change continues as our first line of defence. As a nation, we have covered great milestones in the HIV response hence we achieved the UN target 95-95-95 earlier than the set time” he emphasised.

Mabuza concluded by encouraging individuals to seek early care when signs and symptoms of STIs are noticed, emphasising

the advantage of having a facility like Sitsandziwe Clinic nearby to ensure wellness. He expressed special gratitude to MSF and other partners for their commitment to ensuring the health of Emaswati. Mabuza officially declared the Sitsandziwe Clinic open for business, considering it a singular honour.

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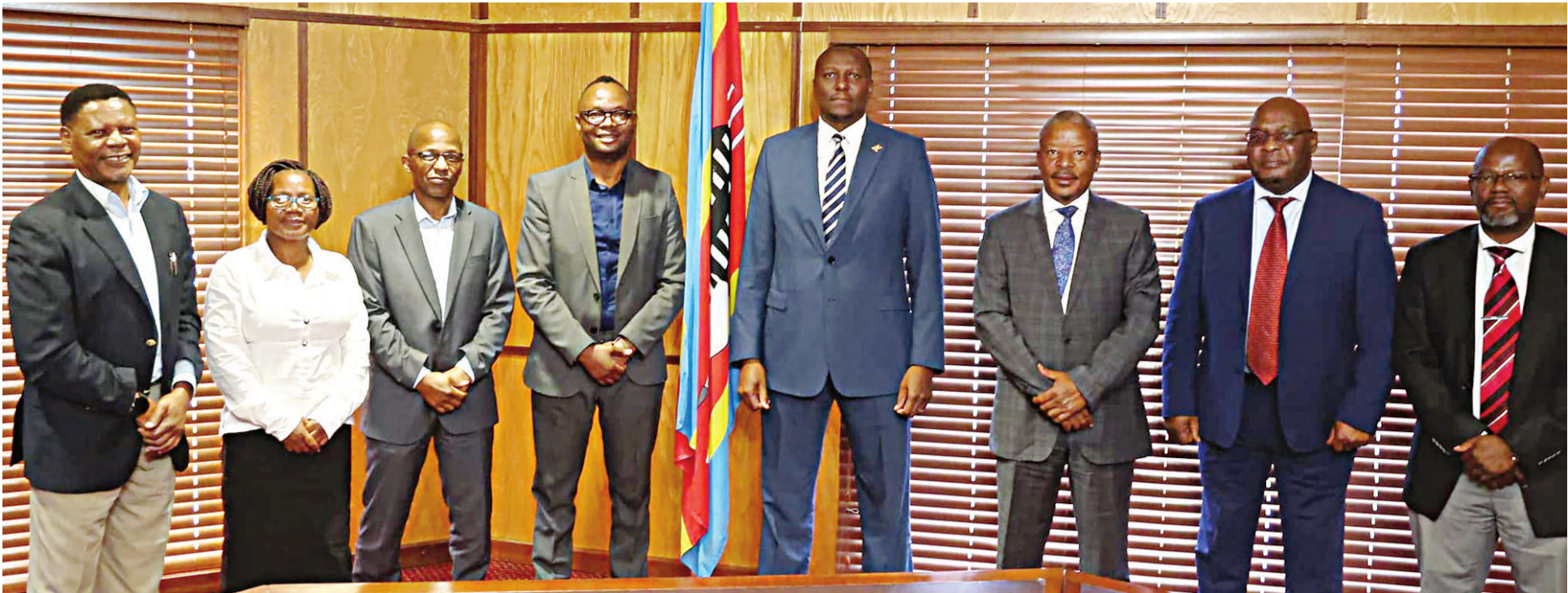
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▲ The PM Russell Dlamini, Editors Forum Executive members and the Prime Minister's office officials posing for a picture after the meeting on Wednesday.

Prime Minister meets editors, calls for collaboration, responsible reporting

The PM expressed the government's desire to work collaboratively with the media, recognizing them as key stakeholders.

By Ncaba Ntshakala

IN a meeting marked by open dialogue and shared goals, Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini met with the Executive Committee of the Editors' Forum at the Private and Cabinet Office on Wednesday.

The discussion centred on strengthening the relationship between the government and the media, with both sides acknowledging the crucial role each plays in national development.

The PM expressed the government's desire to work collaboratively with the media, recognizing them as key stakeholders.

He emphasized the importance of responsible and balanced reporting, urging editors to move away from sensationalism.

Journalism

He challenged the forum to champion improvements in journalism by investing in journalist training and reinvesting media profits back into the industry. "I urged Editors to ensure that they inculcate a culture of responsible and balanced reporting and advised them against sensationalism." The Premier shared. "I challenged them to play a leading role in improving the quality of journalism in the country by adequately training journalists and ensuring that media houses invest their profits back into the media business."

The PM called for a "fair and patriotic

stance" from the media towards the government and the country. He highlighted his concern for media worker welfare, urging editors to address issues of remuneration and inequality within media organizations. "I further asked that they adopt a fair and patriotic stance towards Government and the country, respectively," said the Prime Minister. "I am passionate about the welfare of workers, and I asked Editors to look into the remuneration of all media workers and ensure that it is decent while addressing the inequality that persists within media organizations."

The Editors' Forum reciprocated the commitment to collaboration, emphasizing their dedication to serving the best interests of the nation. They raised concerns regarding the government's investment in public radio and television, seeking transparency and a level playing field. Editors also reiterated their commitment to their watchdog role, holding the government accountable and exposing wrongdoing.

The PM expressed his gratitude for the "fruitful engagement" and pledged continuous dialogue with the media. "I am grateful for this fruitful engagement, and I look forward to continuous engagement with our media."

The Editors Forum is an organisation that was founded in 1999 as the Swaziland Editors Forum (SEF) to concern itself with issues of importance to editorial leaders, their profession, and journalism in general. Its executive includes editors from various media houses in Eswatini.



▲ The Executive Committee of the Editors Forum at the Private and Cabinet Office during their meeting with the Prime Minister.



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By Nokunceda Magagula
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WFF supports 20 beekeepers with E80 000 worth of equipment

TWENTY beekeepers were filled with excitement as they received beekeeping equipment worth E80 000 from the Woman Farmer Foundation (WFF).

In a statement, the WFF, a non-profit organization empowering women and youth through sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture, recently supported 20 beekeepers from Macudvulwini who part of a cooperative are called Libhaca Labomake. They were provided with beekeeping equipment valued at over E80 000.

The equipment delivered includes Langstroth beehives, trap boxes, queen excluders, hive tools, bee brushes, and smokers. These tools will assist the beekeepers in increasing honey production and quality, as well as in protecting themselves and their bees from predators and diseases.

The statement further explains that the project aims to improve rural livelihoods, food security, and income, and strengthen environmental protection through the honey value chain.

"It will contribute to the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of Eswatini, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and acknowledges the importance of achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 15, which is 'Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems,'" the statement reads.

Additionally, the initiative aims to revive an apiary site that the foundation has identified in collaboration with the beekeepers. Fruit trees will be planted on the site not only to support beekeeping but also to serve as a food source and income-generating activity.

Before receiving the equipment, cooperative members were allowed to ask questions and inspect the items. WFF Officer Sanele Mtsetfwa provided training on the proper use of the equipment and conducted demonstrations.

The statement highlights that WFF is a leading organization in promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development in Eswatini. It has been supporting women farmers with various interventions such as training, mentorship, market linkages, and access to inputs and equipment.



▲ The beneficiaries posing with the equipment received from WFF.

Ntfonjeni farmers advised to conduct soil testing

IN a separate development, Ntfonjeni farmers were advised to conduct soil testing to achieve higher yields.

The advice was given during training sessions with two cooperatives, Sisimo Multipurpose Cooperative and Mavulandela Multipurpose Cooperative, conducted by the Woman Farmer Foundation (WFF) with support from the International Trade Centre (ITC) on Tuesday.

According to WFF Communications Officer Mpumalanga Zwane, the training is part of a larger EU-funded project called "Eswatini Promoting Growth through Competitive Alliances," in which WFF has been an implementing partner since 2022, providing capacity building and input support to farmers.

The recent training sessions aimed to enhance farmers' skills in cultivating potatoes and carrots more effectively to improve the quality of their yields and increase profits. National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard) Extension Officer Sipho Dlamini facilitated the sessions and emphasized the proper use of fertilizers and the importance of soil testing to meet specific needs at different stages of production.

Fertilizers

Dlamini explained, "We often use fertilizers, but many farmers do not know how to identify the right fertilizer to use at a particular production stage and the science behind it." He provided guidance on the appropriate fertilizers for each production stage and cautioned against using chemicals without understanding their purpose.

He further highlighted that farmers sometimes become accustomed to a particular yield without realizing that they could achieve higher yields by correctly applying fertilizers at the right time.

Farmers were also educated on best practices for pest and disease control. An interesting fact shared during the session was the use of brown packaging for potatoes to prevent exposure to sunlight,

which can cause them to turn green.

At the end of the training, the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard)

offered to supply inputs and technical expertise to a farmer who volunteered a plot for a demonstration of carrot farming.

The farmer's responsibility will be to ensure that all necessary farm operations are carried out promptly.

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HMCS officer charged with rape of wardress

Stories by Nokunceda Magagula
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A junior officer of His Majesty Correctional Service (HMCS), stationed at Sidwashini, Mbabane Correctional Facility, has been charged with rape of a wardress.

Officer Mthokozisi Simelane (31) of Nkoyoyo made his appearance at the Mbabane Magistrate's Court before Magistrate Lenhle Zulu on Wednesday. According to Simelane's charge sheet, he is accused of allegedly engaging in unlawful sexual intercourse with Simile*, who is a wardress at the same correctional institution, on January 27, 2024. It is alleged that the incident occurred at the warder's campus at Sidwashini.

The charge sheet further states that he is charged with contravening Section 3(1) of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018 (SODVA), a section which classifies rape as an unlawful act.

"On January 2024, at Sidwashini in the Hhohho region, the accused person engaged in an unlawful sexual act with Simile, who is 27-years-old, thereby contravening the aforementioned act," reads the charge sheet in part.

During court proceedings, the state requested that the accused's blood specimen be taken and the accused's



▲ Mthokozisi Simelane the Correctional officer who has been charged with alleged rape of a female colleague.

phone be handed over to the police for further investigation. The state also applied for Simelane to be remanded into custody pending his committal to the High Court on

February 28, 2024. Magistrate Zulu granted the state's application, and Simelane was advised to move his bail application to the High Court. ***Not real name**

28 foreign nationals arrested for Immigration violations

THE Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS) apprehended 28 foreign nationals for breaching the Kingdom of Eswatini's immigration legislation.

This information was disclosed by the Ministry of Home Affairs on Tuesday through its social media page. "28 foreign nationals were arrested in Manzini on Monday as part of efforts to tackle violations of immigration law," the statement reads.

The statement explained that immigration officers conducted inspections in the city centre, resulting in the apprehension of a total of 44 foreign nationals. However, some were released after presenting the necessary documents to prove their legal status.

Ultimately, 28 foreign nationals were officially charged with various offences. Out of the 28 individuals charged, 17 were given the option to pay an admission of guilt ranging from E500.00 to E1000.00 for their violations. These violations included working outside the designated area mentioned in their permit. All 17 individuals chose to pay the fine.

The remaining 11 foreign nationals were detained due to overstaying their permitted time in the country or not having any permits at all. These individuals will appear before the Manzini Magistrate Court to face charges of violating the Immigration Act No. 17 of 1982.

The statement emphasises that the operation serves as a clear message that the Ministry is committed to clamping down on immigration violations. By conducting rigorous inspections and taking necessary measures, the department aims to ensure the proper enforcement of immigration laws and maintain the integrity of the country's



▲ Some of the foreign nationals who were arrested in Manzini pictured at the Manzini Police Station after their arrest.

borders

It adds that cases like these highlight the importance of complying with immigration regulations and possessing the appropriate documentation when residing or operating in a foreign country.

Immigration

The Ministry of Home Affairs also encourages foreign nationals to adhere to

immigration laws and regulations to avoid any legal consequences.

"The Ministry, along with immigration officers, will continue to safeguard national security and maintain order, creating an environment in which both citizens and foreign nationals can coexist peacefully and lawfully within the bounds of immigration laws," the statement reads.

Man (35) arrested for repeatedly raping minor (14)

IN another rape matter, a 35-year-old man from Dlangeni, Hhohho region, Mduduzi Gama, appeared before the same court after he was arrested on allegations of repeatedly raping a 14-year-old minor over a year.

According to the accused's charge sheet, it is alleged that in 2023, Gama engaged in unlawful sexual intercourse with the minor, who was unable to fully comprehend the nature of the sexual act due to her age.

Additionally, Gama is alleged to have not used a condom during the sexual acts.

The charge sheet specifies that he is charged with contravening Section 3(1), 3(2) as read with 3(c) of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018.

Charge sheet

"During the year 2023 in the Nkwadini area in the Hhohho region, the accused unlawfully engaged in sexual acts multiple times with the 14-year-old victim without using a condom," reads the charge sheet.

Gama's charge is accompanied by aggravating factors, including his failure to use a condom during the commission of the offence, thereby exposing the victim to sexually transmitted infections. Furthermore, the victim was under the age of 18 at the time of the offence and, by law, was incapable of fully understanding the nature of the sexual acts.

In Court, Gama was remanded into custody until February 23, 2024, pending committal to the High Court.

Two men fined E1 000 each for stealing from vendor

AFTER stealing 25 items worth E3 840 from a street vendor, the suspects have been found guilty and fined E1 000 each.

The two men can be identified as Nhlanhla Myeni (31) from Nkhamba and Andile Dlamini (36) from Mnyokane. The duo appeared at the Mbabane Magistrate's Court before Magistrate Sifiso Vilakati. According to the duo's charge sheet, on January 10, 2024, at the Mbabane bus rank, both men stole clothing items sold by Khetsiwe Dlamini, a street vendor at the Mbabane bus rank.

The charge sheet explains that the stolen items include jean trousers, t-shirts, and socks, to mention just a few of the 25 stolen items.

Theft

"On January 10, 2024, near the Mbabane bus rank in the Hhohho region, the said accused persons, acting jointly in furtherance of a common purpose, unlawfully stole 25 clothing items," the charge sheet reads.

During Court proceedings, Myeni and Dlamini represented themselves. They pleaded guilty to the charge of theft, and the crown accepted their plea.

Delivering their mitigation statements, Myeni told the court that the owner of the items owed them money which she was refusing to pay back, so they decided to take the clothes. He further asked the court to be lenient when handing down the sentence. On the other hand, Dlamini also pleaded for leniency from the court stating that he is currently unemployed.

Vilakati sentenced both men to 10 months imprisonment or to pay a fine of E1 000.

BUSINESS NEWS

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Schools advised to register for the 2024 JA in-school programme

JUNIOR Achievement (JA) Eswatini has called for local schools to register for the JA In-school programme for 2024. JA Eswatini Communications and Marketing Specialist Siphesihle Mkhonta said there are three programmes offered under JAE In-school, which are Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship, and Career Development.

MTN Bushfire calls on Barn Marketplace traders

THE MTN Bushfire has opened applications to experienced vendors who wish to trade at the 17th edition of the MTN Bushfire Festival.MTN Bushfire Marketplace Curator Philippa Thorne said application forms are available on the MTN Bushfire website, www.bush-fire.com, as well as on MTN Bushfire social media platforms. The 17th edition of the MTN Bushfire Festival will be taking place at House on Fire in the scenic Malkerns Valley from May 31 to June 2, 2024.

Stocks extend slide as traders take an axe

LONDON — Global stocks fell on Wednesday, while the dollar and Treasury yields stayed strong, as traders pared back expectations for the pace and scale of rate cuts by the Federal Reserve this year. The latest shift in rate expectations came after an upside surprise in U.S. inflation on Tuesday that showed the consumer price index (CPI) rose 3.1 per cent on an annual basis, above forecasts for a 2.9 per cent increase.

E28 million gauging station presented to Eswatini and SA

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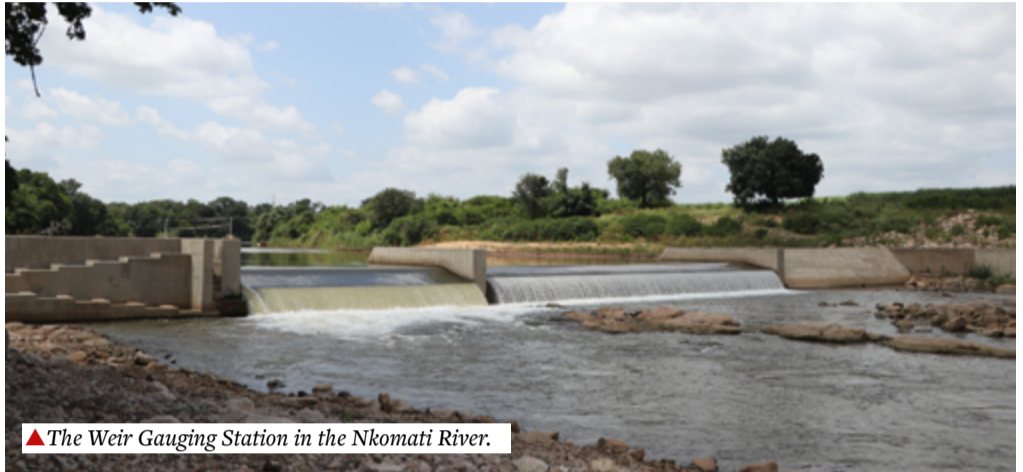
AFTER two years of construction, the Mananga Weir Gauging Station at the Nkomati River worth E28 million (£1.1 million) has been finally handed over to Eswatini and the Republic of South Africa which are sharing the water resources of the Komati River.

This was done during the site visit and tour event held at Mananga Country Lodge on Tuesday in the presence of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy Principal Secretary (PS) Dorcas Dlamini who was represented by Under Secretary (US) Gabisile Mabuza.

Dlamini said the ministry continues its responsibility of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) by improving its water monitoring and management system for increased access and availability of water for all its uses. She explained that between 2019 and 2020, Eswatini and South Africa through its Joint Water Commission, took it upon themselves to identify collaborative partners to address the negative impacts that Climate Change presents to the availability of water.

The PS said with the assistance of the JWC Secretariat, the Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA), an engagement was made with the Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility (CRIDF) for an activity to improve water management of the Komati River Basin.

She stated that the resultant engagements and the funding opportunity by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UKAID) acting



▲ The Weir Gauging Station in the Nkomati River.

through the Department for International Development yielded the formulation of a project - the Rehabilitation of the Mananga Weir Gauging Station, known in Eswatini as Gauging Station 30 (GS 30) for the repairs of the weir, the reconstruction of the gauging hut and the provision of telemetric equipment for easy transmission of the status of the river (height and flow).

"This project aims to improve our water measurements and allocation for adequate abstractions and efficient use by all stakeholders in the Komati River system," she said.

She noted that even though the Gauging Station is in the boundary of Eswatini, it serves the Komati system as a whole and in addressing the water sharing agreement, Piggs Peak Treaty of 1991, the system assumes no boundary and is for the benefit of the two riparian states with Mozambique as a downstream beneficiary.

She stated that the Komati Basin Project had some challenges duration the construction phase of 2021 to 2023.

"We thank our technical teams from JWC,

KOBWA, and CRIDF for the perseverance, determination, and patience to reach this milestone that we are viewing today with the result of having a solid infrastructure that is resilient to climate change whilst improving our water measurement and monitoring systems," she said.

She further thanked the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UKAID) through the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office with the assistance of CRIDF and its representatives, for the opportunity of financial, technical, and administrative support that has been shown to projects in the Southern African region with emphasis on the Mananga Weir Gauging Station in the Komati River.

"This collaboration has been one of a kind and greatly appreciated in our operation area. It is the belief that the newly rehabilitated weir will stand the test of time and will be of great assistance to the future Komati Water System development. We also hope for many projects for the future," she said.

AFTER years of consideration and deliberation on the liquidation of the Swaziland Women Economic Empowerment Trust (SWEET) Trust, the liquidators have taken drastic steps towards finalizing all the processes.

This was demonstrated by the inspection of the individual statements of accounts by the public at various stipulated locations around the country from February 7 to 9, 2024, where over 4 800 emaSwati showed up and submitted their claims.

The Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE) Head of Strategy and Communications Mandla Luphondvo confirmed these numbers stating that even though they were expecting over 8 000 people to claim, they were still a long way to finish the liquidation. Luphondvo stated that the viewing process has been closed and they will proceed to process undisputed claims.

"We will be guided by the court in a lot of processes because liquidation is inherently a legal process," Luphondvo said.

In a statement issued by the CBE, it said the inspection of the individual statements of accounts is a procedural requirement in liquidation proceedings instituted under the Financial Institutions Act, 2005.

The bank also stated that it was pleased to notice that a sizable number of emaSwati visited these locations to engage with the team dispatched by the appointed liquidator to view

SWEET liquidation nearing finalisation



▲ CBE Head of Strategy and Communications Mandla Luphondvo.

and verify their investments.

"The CBE would like to bring it to the attention of the public that the inspection and verification exercise is not the final distribution process," the bank explained.

The bank said that this exercise was meant to allow SWEET investors to verify the information that had been obtained in the records during the investigations.

"As part of the inspection of statements of account, members were encouraged to bring along SWEET deposit books or receipts as proof of their investment and were allowed an opportunity to either accept or object to the assessment of their investment," read part of the statement.

The bank further assured SWEET investors

and the public that information obtained during this exercise will be considered to amend the balances accordingly to inform the final distribution. The CBE went on to say that the disputed claims will be dealt with in line with ordinary liquidation procedures.

"The Central Bank once again reassures SWEET investors that they will be refunded in full the amounts that they invested as soon as the verification exercise has been completed and all supporting documents have been received," read part of the statement.

The bank also reported that criminal proceedings will be instituted against those responsible for the mismanagement and misappropriation of SWEET resources.

In January 2024, the CBE reported that over 8 000 emaSwati were to benefit from the Swaziland Women's Economic Empowerment Trust (SWEET) liquidation payout.

The SWEET collapsed under a cloud of controversy and hundreds of thousands of Emalangenani were invested by ordinary women. SWEET was under the patronage of Her Majesty the Indlovukazi.

The CBE and FSRA were triggered into action by an online petition by investors, upon noticing that SWEET had ceased operations after its offices had shut down, demanding to be refunded their monies and action taken against those responsible.

FX RATES

Notes/Cash	Buy	Sell
U.S. Dollar	18.7513	19.2263
G.B. Pound	23.4496	24.1336
EURO	20.0405	20.6508
Bank Rate (July 2023)		7.50%
Prime Rate (July 2023)		11%
Inflation (July 2023)		4.5%
Petrol	E20.50/Litre	
Diesel	E21.80 /Litre	
Paraffin	E16.75/Litre	

Schools advised to register for the 2024 JA in-school programme

Stories by Silindzelwe Nxumalo
silindzelwen@rubiconmedia.group

JUNIOR Achievement (JA) Eswatini has called for local schools to register for the JA In-school programme for 2024.

JA Eswatini Communications and Marketing Specialist Sipheshile Mkhonta said there are three programmes offered under JAE In-school, which are Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship, and Career Development.

Mkhonta stated that Headteachers from local schools are called upon to register for these exciting programmes by February 29, 2024, and joining forms are available online on the link ja-eswatini.org/online-registration/ and can also be accessed from the regional education offices, country-wide.

“Alternatively, school head teachers can send messages to the Whatsapp number 78724899 requesting joining forms. This year’s target is to work with 150 schools across the four regions,” she said.

She explained the benefits of schools joining the JAE stating that employment opportunities are scarce, and the job market cannot realistically absorb all graduates, therefore JA developed a program that prepares scholars at the high school level to widen their horizons beyond job-seeking by teaching them entrepreneurship.

She stated that the entrepreneurship programme is done in Form 4, and another programme run by JAE in Form 4 is Job Shadow also known as work readiness where JAE links scholars to companies to get a feel

of what the work environment is like and what is required on the ground.

“Financial Literacy is another programme offered that educates scholars about the importance of managing their finances, saving, opening a bank account, and putting some money aside for future financial aspirations,” she said.

She added that JA in partnership with Lubane encourages students to join a savings co-op under the Financial Literacy programme, and Eswatini Bank also is a partner that enables scholars to open Siyakhula Account and become eligible with their savings to buy Inala shares.

“JA Financial Literacy programme has been developed from being a series of 6 activities that help learners explore personal financial education and career options based on their skills, interests, and values into introducing valuable finance lessons such as Tax education, how to formulate and run cooperatives, and also delve more on the concept of savings and investments,” she said.

Mkhonta said this programme has been extended from 6 hours and is implemented throughout the Form 2 learning period of a child.

“Eventually, this programme will be executed throughout the high school life of a student to extensively delve into the practical aspect of this programme. Currently, the program is rolled out in a total of 56 schools,” she said.

She also stated that in March selected scholars from member schools will be participating in Global Money Week under the Financial Literacy Programme.



▲ JA Eswatini Communications and Marketing Specialist Sipheshile Mkhonta.

She said the JACO (JA Company) is an exciting entrepreneurship program where member schools form companies and come up with innovative products.

“These companies end up participating in a competition where the leading company wins 1st prize locally and participates in the COY against other countries under JA Africa. This year the winners of the COY2024 will be going to compete and present their program in Mauritius,” she explained.

Furthermore, Mkhonta said the JACO program is time-sensitive therefore schools that are interested in joining this year are urged to do so timeously so the program rolls out in its stipulated timeline leading up to July where this year’s theme is Greenovation.

“The idea is generating innovative solutions around the green economy. Scholars are expected to create products that are eco-friendly. As the world is faced with climate change there is a need for solutions to address this,” she said.

She stated that the program encourages scholars to think outside of the box and be vigilant in observing existing problems so they can provide solutions.

“Also on the exciting news, DotGood returns in April in partnership with Premier Bakery, where scholars who are interested in being innovative in the food space are given the chance to compete in the DotGood programme. These participating schools must be part of the JA programs,” she said.

She further added that these programmes enable students to develop an understanding of enterprise and business as well as entrepreneurship, and it has provided them with insight into what it takes to run a small business.

She said this programme provides the students with practical and real-world experience in small business activities.

“Through this programme, there are at least 150 business companies that have been formed by students who are now JA Alumni and most of them have completed high school and are either in tertiary education or still searching for jobs and better opportunities in life,” she said.

Mkhonta said they have been well equipped on the principles of entrepreneurship and how to run a profitable company, and upon completion of these programmes, scholars are given certificates, which are internationally recognised.

THE MTN Bushfire has opened applications to experienced vendors who wish to trade at the 17th edition of the MTN Bushfire Festival.

MTN Bushfire Marketplace Curator Philippa Thorne said application forms are available on the MTN Bushfire website, www.bush-fire.com, as well as on MTN Bushfire social media platforms. The 17th edition of the MTN Bushfire Festival will be taking place at House on Fire in the scenic Malkerns Valley from May 31 to June 2, 2024.

She stated that the application window will

MTN Bushfire opens applications for prospective Barn Marketplace traders

close on February 29, 2024, and selection will be made a month later on March 29, 2024.

Thorne said several opportunities exist at the MTN Bushfire Barn Marketplace, a curated space of unique handmade products, and applicants will be assessed based on quality and uniqueness, creativity, experience, considered professional setup as well as the quality of customer service.

“We are looking for brands that are memorably creative and sustainably sourced that deliver quality products and services. This space is designed for the ethical consumer, with each company or artisan contributing in a positive way to the environment and their communities,” said Thorne.

She said that they are looking for creative entrepreneurs with distinctive and beautiful designs, as well as those who bring diverse product offerings to their festival patrons.

She went on to say that due to the high number of applicants they usually receive, only short-listed applicants will be contacted.

“Shortlisted applicants will be required to attend an orientation workshop in person at House on Fire or virtually,” she said.

According to Thorne, the MTN Bushfire Barn Marketplace’s selection criteria involve unique, high-quality, and locally or regionally hand-made products with a strong brand and USP.



▲ A vendor at the MTN Bushfire Barn Marketplace pictured during the 16th Edition (2023) of the MTN Bushfire.

She added: “The criteria also involve looking at handmade products from recycled, natural, and environmentally friendly materials, having a social or environmental mission, supporting youth or women’s empowerment, respecting traditional culture, and crediting the artisans for their use of craft or motifs.”

She stated that they would offer a selection of products across different product categories to everyone in the audience, prioritize Swati-made products, and have limited space for regional and African brands.

In addition to the Barn Marketplace, vendors can also apply to be food sellers as the festival welcomes seasoned vendors with authentic quality cuisine, this includes ready-to-eat fresh produce, gourmet street

food, and artisanal beverages.

“Vendors can also apply for Experiential Services of which the applicants looking to enhance the festival experience for festival guests, including children at the KidZone. e.g. fitness, yoga, and face painting,” she said.

She said MTN Bushfire’s trader policies are inclusive, small business-focused, and promote ethical and fair trade.

“Traders are reminded that MTN Bushfire is a 100 per cent cashless environment, using the NFC chips on festival wristbands for transactions. MTN Bushfire is committed to being an eco-friendly event and all traders are required to use eco-friendly packaging,” she emphasized.

For any queries relating to trading at the festival please email traders@bush-fire.com.

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TotalEnergies CEO says IMF debt rules hobbling African green energy projects

By America Hernandez

PARIS — Renewable energy investments in Africa are being hobbled by insufficient government loan guarantees, as the International Monetary Fund keeps a tight leash on country indebtedness, TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne said Wednesday.

Pouyanne said currently electricity projects in Africa suffer from “a problem of solvency... you have a risk not to be paid”. “So when a renewable developer wants to develop, and it’s obvious you have huge potential, he will go and see the government and ask for guarantees,” he said.

“But the African governments, they will tell you, are not able to give these guarantees because the IMF is coming and telling them, ‘Don’t go and give these guarantees, you are already over-indebted’.”

Pouyanne said the result was that in Africa, his company was largely limited to business-to-business mining projects, because it is an industry where they know they will receive payment.

TotalEnergies has oil and gas operations in 30 African countries, plus two solar parks in Egypt and plans for a solar power and battery storage project in South Africa to come online in 2025.

Its global renewable energy projects totalled 22 gigawatts (GW) of installed capacity by the end of 2023, the most of the oil majors, located in Latin America, Eurasia,



▲ TotalEnergies chairman and CEO Patrick Pouyanne.

the U.S. and the Middle East.

The comments were made at a government-industry dialogue hosted by the International Energy Agency focusing on Africa and renewable energy.

“I am disappointed not to see ... a real international financial body to counter-guarantee all these African states — and not to ask them more than what we are asking,” Pouyanne said.

He said that on TotalEnergies’ 1 GW solar plant in Iraq, the project’s international financiers were asking the Iraqi government for more loan guarantees than TotalEnergies, leading the French company to fully self-insure the project to avoid burdening the government with more debt. (Reuters)



▲ A man stands in front of an electric board displaying the Nikkei stock average outside a brokerage in Tokyo, Japan.

Stocks extend slide as traders take an axe to rate bets

By Amanda Cooper

LONDON — Global stocks fell on Wednesday, while the dollar and Treasury yields stayed strong, as traders pared back expectations for the pace and scale of rate cuts by the Federal Reserve this year.

The latest shift in rate expectations came after an upside surprise in U.S. inflation on Tuesday that showed the consumer price index (CPI) rose 3.1 per cent on an annual basis, above forecasts for a 2.9 per cent increase.

The data has prompted traders to slash their bets on where U.S. rates will go this year. Futures now point to about 90 basis points worth of cuts from the Fed by December, roughly four quarter-point drops, compared to 110 bps prior to the data release and 160 bps at the end of 2023.

With the prospect of a steep drop in interest rates ebbing, investors kept the pressure on global stocks, which had rallied strongly towards the end of last year on aggressive bets for rate cuts by major central

banks globally in 2024.

The MSCI All-World index which hit two-year highs on Monday, was down 0.1 per cent, following a drop on Wall Street overnight that pulled the S&P 500 back below 5,000 points. U.S. futures, were up 0.2-0.3 per cent.

Worryingly for investors, the CPI report showed an unexpected pickup in stickier elements, such as service-sector inflation and shelter, helped drive the overall increase.

“When you get a jump like this, and the year-on-year figures really show this rather than the monthly ones, that’s a shock because it just shows that it’s not all plain sailing and we may get more increases in inflation,” Trade Nation senior market analyst David Morrison said.

“We should be surprised by the jump in inflation, because I don’t think anyone was thinking about that. It was more how slowly do we get down towards 2 per cent and this is like kicking the ladder away a bit,” he said.

In Europe, the STOXX edged up 0.1 per cent, as a flurry of stronger earnings boosted the regional index.

Even Japan’s Nikkei which hit its highest in 34 years on Tuesday, was not spared from the beating and fell 0.7 per cent. (Reuters)

China, US-led global refill of depleted oil stocks seen buoying demand

By Natalie Grover, Noah Browning and Ahmad Ghaddar

LONDON — A push to replenish depleted oil stocks notably in China, the United States and Europe could buoy demand and prices in coming months, analysts and traders said, as tensions in the Middle East threaten key shipping lanes.

Heavily depleted by supply disruptions wrought by sanctions on Russia in the middle of 2022, as well as protracted OPEC+ output cuts, global oil inventories have barely recovered with traders unable to justify the costs for storing oil.

Shipping disruption in the Red Sea due to escalating attacks by Iran-aligned Houthis rebels has increased concerns about supply, spurring buyers to rebuild inventories.

Morgan Stanley raised its quarterly outlook for Brent crude prices on Tuesday to an average of \$82.50 a barrel in the first and second quarters - compared with \$80 and \$77.50 previously - suggesting the bank now expects a tight oil market this year.

Consultants FGE said that available data so far this year has shown a large counter seasonal fall in crude and fuel stocks of almost 29 million barrels, compared with a



▲ A model of petrol pump and a rising stock graph are seen in this illustration.

typical average build of 20 million barrels during January in 2015-2019.

Energy watchdog the International Energy Agency said global inventories had slipped by 8.4 million barrels last November - the last month for which full data exists - to the lowest since July 2022, but that preliminary December data indicated a rise.

Restocking inventories

Traders say they have so far seen strong buying from China, Europe and the United States.

“Chinese buying is high as it restocks in the first half”, a trader for a European refiner

told Reuters. “U.S. and European buying is also stronger this month as the situation for barrels from East of Suez could get much worse at any time.”

The Chinese are buying heavily oil arriving this spring to replenish stocks while the United States is gradually topping up its Strategic Petroleum Reserve after selling a record amount from the government oil stores in 2022. “In terms of days of demand cover (from oil storage), we expect the market to get to around 67 days by year end 2025 from current 64 days, which is still above pre-pandemic levels of around 60 days, assuming OPEC+ keeps cuts in

place through 1H25.” Citi energy strategist Francesco Martoccia told Reuters.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies like Russia (OPEC+) have sought to rein in supply with output cuts to buoy prices since 2022.

Those plans were underscored when the group’s de facto leader Saudi Arabia halted plans to boost its maximum production capacity.

Riyadh’s energy minister on Monday suggested the reason behind the decision was to aid the energy transition, adding the kingdom has plenty of spare capacity to cushion the oil market.

Oil prices largely shrugged off the decision late last month, with high demand in the form of stock rebuilding and a gush of non-OPEC+ oil supply appearing to more than offset Riyadh’s change of tack.

“We continue to see a long-term imbalance, with OPEC supply around 2 million bpd too high relative to the implied call on OPEC crude by 2028”, HSBC analysts said.

In a note last week as Brent crept near \$80 a barrel, J.P. Morgan analysts predicted a price rise of \$10 by May, assuming no geopolitical shocks and that Saudi Arabia and Russia will reintroduce a combined 400,000 barrels per day back into the market starting in April. (Reuters)

PICK n Pay has given IOL News more details on the peanut butter issue in South Africa and why the company decided to recall its product from stores.

During in-house testing, the company picked up that one supplier's Aflatoxin levels were found to be higher than regulated levels, it said.

Aflatoxins are molds produced by the fungus *Aspergillus flavus* that can be found growing on peanuts, maize and other grains.

"We immediately informed the supplier, National Consumer Commission and the National Department of Health, Directorate of Food Control, removed the affected products from our shelf and notified our customers," Pick n Pay told IOL News. The peanut butter brands that have been recalled are produced by one supplier — House of Natural Butters.

Pick n Pay had stocked one of their brands, Eden All Natural, and they produced the retailer's No Name 1kg Smooth peanut butter brand.

Peanut butter saga: Pick n Pay explains what really happened

These products were removed from the shelf around two weeks ago, and according to Pick n Pay, the supplier has been delisted from Pick n Pay.

"The safety of our customers is our highest priority. For all food products, suppliers undergo regular independent audits to meet required food safety standards. "As required, we will also conduct our own testing on products as an added assurance. It was during one of our tests that we found higher than regulated levels of Aflatoxin in the Eden All Natural and No Name peanut butter," it said.

"We immediately removed the products from our shelf and informed the National Consumer Commission and the National Department of Health, Directorate of Food Control."

Last week, Pick n Pay recalled three

brands of peanut butter from its stores around the country with immediate effect for health and safety reasons. It pulled No Name Smooth Peanut Butter, Eden Smooth Peanut Butter and Eden Crunch Peanut Butter from its shelves.

The PnP Peanut Butter brand that is made by RCL Foods and was not impacted, and therefore not removed from their shelves.

On February 3, Pick n Pay publicly issued a recall to notify customers.

On February 9, the NCC communicated recalling more brands from the same supplier.

The company said that they will continue to engage with customers to assist during the recall.

(IOL)



How Skeletons of prehistoric ancestors evolved to modern human frames

IT'S no surprise that modern-day human bone structure varies greatly from that of our ancient ancestors. As society has advanced and new technologies developed, so too has our bone structure.

Thanks to modern technology, researchers are now better able to pinpoint just when those bony changes began. Food played a major factor in shaping our skeletal frame, but not in the way you may think.

Although the study of anthropology dates back centuries, biological anthropology is a relatively new discipline made possible in the 1990s with the rise of computer tomography and other technology, says Timothy M. Ryan, professor and head of anthropology at Pennsylvania State University.

"That spurred a lot of what we do," Ryan says. "That was the beginning of the modern approach to skeletal variation."

Within the last 10 years, Ryan says many researchers have been able to access micro scanners and computer software that allow them to analyze and compare bones.

This means they can compare bones among prehistoric peoples as well as modern humans. They can even add in athletes from various sports and then see how people living in the Late Stone Age compared with modern swimmers, cross-country runners, or couch potatoes.

In general, anthropologists have found that modern humans have lighter skeletons when compared to hominids and earlier humans like *Homo erectus*.

"We relatively lightly built," Ryan says. "This contrasts sharply with what we see in the fossil record."

Ancient humans had to be more active in order to survive, and their bones reflect their constant on-the-go lifestyle.

"Early modern human bones were more robust," Ryan says. "There seems to be a transition with the shift to agriculture. When we reduced our mobility and our physical activity, we began to not build as much bone because we weren't as active."

Ancient bone structures differ from modern skeletons in many ways. When it comes to heft, heavier bones began to become lighter around 12,000 years ago as



▲ Thanks to modern technology, researchers are now better able to pinpoint just when the bony changes began.

most civilizations transitioned from nomadic to agrarian.

Lighter skeletons can mean that modern humans are more prone to fractures as well as bone diseases such as osteoporosis. Earlier humans' heavy skeletons typically had more rigidity, which meant they could better withstand stress from bending, compression, tension, or torsion.

However, not all early humans lived similar lifestyles, and anthropologists have found variations among ancient and modern humans, particularly among athletes.

According to research, athletes have stronger bones. In a 2013 study in *Journal of Evolution*, researchers looked for variations among a wide range of bone samples. They looked at fossils from the Pleistocene period (the Ice Age) that lasted from 258 million years to 11,700 years ago.

They also looked at fossils from the Upper Paleolithic age (about 35,000 years to 10,000 years ago) and the Holocene period (last 11,700 years or so). This included both *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalensis*. The study also had access to bone scans of modern humans, including a control group, cross-country runners, and swimmers.

There was variation among the Holocene *H. sapiens*. Southern Africans living in the Later Stone Age had the highest relative

rigidity in their tibial bones. In contrast, Maritime Andaman Islanders had the lowest. Although modern humans had less bone rigidity, some had more rigidity than others. Cross-country runners had more than swimmers. Controls were typically in the middle.

Anthropological biology has typically favored males during analysis, and often this has to do with the availability of fossils. However, researchers are increasingly trying to understand how ancient female bones were different from their male counterparts as well as women today. Understanding these distinctions can tell scholars more about how ancient women lived and what duties they assumed.

In a 2017 study in *Science Advances*, researchers looked at fossils from prehistoric Central Europeans who lived an agrarian life sometime between 5300 B.C.E and 850 A.D. They compared their bones with modern women, including a control group and then athletes involved with rowing, running, or soccer.

The ancient tibial bones varied in terms of rigidity and actually tended to be more similar to modern sedentary women. Modern soccer players and runners' tibial bones actually had higher rigidity than the ancient fossils. (MSN)

Airbnb plans to use AI

... including its GamePlanner acquisition, to create the 'ultimate concierge'

IN November, Airbnb acquired a stealth AI firm launched by Siri's co-founder, called GamePlanner.AI.

The deal valued the secretive startup at around \$200 million, according to reports.

Though the hosting company didn't telegraph its plans for GamePlanner at the time, Airbnb co-founder and CEO Brian Chesky today shared a high-level overview of Airbnb's larger plans for AI, saying that it planned to accel at the "application layer" of AI, building one of the "most innovative AI interfaces ever created."

Hyperbole aside, Chesky explained that Airbnb doesn't see itself as an AI infrastructure company — meaning it's not going to build its own large language models, but will rely on AI technologies from others, like OpenAI, Meta and Google. Instead, the company believes it can create a new interface for accessing modern AI models. That's something the GamePlanner acquisition could help with.

Models

"...Though the (AI) models are very powerful, the interface is really not an AI interface. It's the same interface as the 2000s," Chesky told investors on the company's fourth-quarter earnings call. "It's a typical, classical web interface. So we feel like the models, in a sense, are probably underutilized," he said. "Here's another way of saying it. Take your phone and look at all the icons on your phone. Most of those apps have not fundamentally changed since the advent of generative AI. So what I think AI represents is the ultimate platform shift," the CEO continued.

After the internet's creation, the rise of mobile technology lifted Airbnb's business, but AI is going to change things once again, Chesky believes. "(This) is also a shift in power. It's a shift in behavior. And so I think this is a zero-zero ballgame," he said.

Airbnb plans to leverage AI technology and particularly generative AI to provide a more personalized experience for its users, the exec told investors.

(TechCrunch)

Man wanted for murder rearrested in Kenya after a week-long escape

A man wanted in Massachusetts to face murder charges has been rearrested, a week after he dramatically escaped from police custody, Kenyan police said Wednesday.

Kevin Adam Kinyanjui Kangethe escaped while awaiting extradition on a Massachusetts warrant alleging he killed his girlfriend and left her body in a car at a Boston airport. Last week he slipped out of a police station and jumped into a privately owned minivan.

Kangethe was arrested in Embulbul, Kajiado County on the outskirts of Kenya's capital city on Tuesday evening as he sought refuge at one of his relatives' homes, Nairobi police boss Adamson Bungei said.

"We have rearrested him and we thank all that helped in this," he said.

In a country where corruption endemic and the police force has been ranked for decades the most corrupt institution in the country, Kangethe's escape raised suspicion the police officers on duty that day may have been bribed to allow his escape.

The four officers who were on duty at the report office that day have been suspended awaiting disciplinary action and may face prosecution.

The officer's report seen by the Associated Press said that on the day Kangethe escaped, a

man named John Maina Ndegwa introduced himself to the officers as Kangethe's lawyer and said he wanted to speak with his client.

"The officers agreed to his request and removed the prisoner from the cells and took him to (an) office ... leaving them there. After a short while the prisoner escaped by running away and left the (lawyer) behind," the report said.

Officers pursued Kangethe but did not catch him, the police report said, adding that Ndegwa was arrested.

Kangethe, 40, had been detained pending a ruling on whether he should be extradited to face a first-degree murder charge in connection with the death of Margaret Mbitu on Oct. 31, 2023.

Massachusetts State Police said in early November that Kangethe had left her body in a car at Logan International Airport and boarded a flight to Kenya. Massachusetts officials said they were working with Kenyan authorities to locate him, and he was arrested in a nightclub on Jan. 30 after being on the run for three months.

A police official told the AP that Kangethe said he had renounced his U.S. citizenship. The police official, who insisted on anonymity in order to speak freely about an ongoing investigation, said if Kangethe were an American citizen he would have



▲ Kevin Adam Kinyanjui Kangethe escaped while awaiting extradition on a Massachusetts warrant alleging he killed his girlfriend and left her body in a car at a Boston airport.

been repatriated without a court process.

The court approved a police application for him to be detained for 30 days while the extradition issue was heard.

Mbitu, a health care aide in Halifax, was last seen leav-

ing work Oct. 30 and reported missing by her family. The preliminary investigation showed Mbitu had left her workplace and travelled with Kangethe to Lowell, where he lived, the prosecution said.

(Africanews)



▲ Senegal President Macky Sall was urged to restore electoral calendar.

US urges Senegalese President Sall to restore Senegal's electoral calendar

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday urged Senegalese President Macky Sall to restore Senegal's electoral calendar and timeline for presidential transition, the U.S. State Department said after a call between the two leaders.

In the call, Blinken raised "serious concerns" about Senegal's current political situation following actions to postpone the presidential election.

The abrupt postponement of the Feb. 25 vote to December has plunged Senegal into crisis and intensified a backlash against what many see as an attempt to extend Sall's mandate and a threat to one of the remaining democracies in coup-hit West Africa.

(Reuters)

Ghana president replaces finance minister in reshuffle

ACCRA - Ghana's president has replaced finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta in a cabinet reshuffle after criticism of the ex-banker's leadership during the country's worst economic crisis in a generation.

The office of President Nana Akufo-Addo said that Ofori-Atta would be replaced by Mohammed Amin Adam, currently the minister of state at the finance ministry and previously deputy energy minister responsible for the petroleum sector.

It did not give a reason for the change.

Ofori-Atta has been overseeing Ghana's debt restructuring efforts after the West African gold, oil and cocoa producer defaulted on most of its external debt in December 2022.

Inflation rose above 50% that year and the local cedi currency plummeted. Ofori-Atta faced calls for his resignation from street protesters and both opposition and ruling party MPs, which he survived.

The move to dismiss him, announced on Wednesday, comes ahead of a December election in which Vice President Mahamadu Bawumia, also an economist, will be seeking to distance himself from country's recent economic woes as he runs for president.

"There is a feeling that doing this... will create a much-needed new narrative for (the Vice President's) slow-building campaign," said Bright Simons, an analyst at Accra-based think tank IMA-NI Africa.

He said that overall, the reshuffle did not appear to signal any clear shift in po-



▲ Ghana's president has replaced finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta in a cabinet reshuffle after criticism of the ex-banker's leadership during the country's worst economic crisis in a generation.

litical strategy.

Akufo-Addo chose Ofori-Atta, a relative of his, as finance minister when he became head of state in 2017, pledging to create jobs, fight poverty and boost economic growth by cutting taxes and red tape.

Ghana's economy has

started to recover since the government last year secured a \$3 billion loan programme with the International Monetary Fund, and in January reached a deal to restructure \$5.4 billion of loans with its official creditors.

(Reuters)

Italian judge rules U.N. staffers cannot be tried over Congo deaths

ROME - An Italian judge has ruled that two employees of a U.N. agency cannot be tried over the deaths of the Italian ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, his bodyguard and a driver in 2021 because they have diplomatic immunity.

Luca Attanasio, bodyguard Vittorio Iacovacci and their driver Mustapha Milambo were killed during a botched kidnapping on a road in eastern Congo as they were heading toward a World Food Programme (WFP) project.

Rome prosecutors had requested a trial for Rocco Leone and Mansour Luguru Rwagaza, who at the time of the attack were respectively the deputy chief of the WFP

in Congo and a security officer, accusing the pair of negligence in organising the trip. The prosecutors said they would appeal.

A Democratic Republic of Congo military court last year sentenced six men to life in prison for the killings.

Eastern Congo has been beset by violence for decades as rival militias fight government troops and each other for control of land and resources.

Kidnappings and attacks on aid convoys had been on the rise at the time of the assault on Attanasio and his entourage.

However, Judge Marisa Masetti ruled on Tuesday that as employees of the United Nations, the two men enjoyed diplomatic immunity and cannot therefore be tried.

(Reuters)

Putin's suggestion of Ukraine ceasefire rejected by United States, sources say

MOSCOW/LONDON- Russian President Vladimir Putin's suggestion of a ceasefire in Ukraine to freeze the war was rejected by the United States after contacts between intermediaries, three Russian sources with knowledge of the discussions told Reuters.

The failure of Putin's approach ushers in a third year of the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two and illustrates just how far apart the world's two largest nuclear powers remain.

A U.S. source denied there had been any official contact and said Washington would not engage in talks that did not involve Ukraine.

Putin sent signals to Washington in 2023 in public and privately through intermediaries, including through Moscow's Arab partners in the Middle East and others, that he was ready to consider a ceasefire in Ukraine, the Russian sources said.

Freeze

Putin was proposing to freeze the conflict at the current lines and was unwilling to cede any of the Ukrainian territory controlled by Russia, but the signal offered what some in the Kremlin saw as the best path towards a peace of some kind.

"The contacts with the Americans came to nothing," a senior Russian source with knowledge of the discussions in late 2023 and early 2024 told Reuters on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

A second Russian source with knowledge of the contacts told Reuters that the Americans told Moscow, via the intermediaries,

they would not discuss a possible ceasefire without the participation of Ukraine and so the contacts ended in failure.

A third source with knowledge of the discussions said: "Everything fell apart with the Americans." The source said that the Americans did not want to pressure Ukraine.

The extent of the contacts - and their failure - has not previously been reported.

It comes as U.S. President Joe Biden has for months been pushing Congress to approve more aid for Ukraine, but has faced opposition from allies of Republican presidential nomination frontrunner Donald Trump.

The Kremlin, the White House, the U.S. State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) all declined to comment.

Full-scale war

Putin sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, triggering a full-scale war after eight years of conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian forces on the one side and pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russian proxies on the other.

Ukraine says it is fighting for its existence and the West casts Putin's invasion as an imperial-style land grab that challenges the post-Cold War international order.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy says he will never accept Russia's control over Ukrainian land. He has outlawed any contacts with Russia.

A U.S. official, speaking in Washington on condition of anonymity, said that the U.S. has not engaged in any back channel discussions with Russia and that Washington had been consistent in not going behind the back of Ukraine.

The U.S. official said that there appeared to have been unofficial "Track II" conversations among Russians not in the government but that the United States was not engaged in them.

The U.S. official said Putin's proposal, based on what has been publicly reported, was unchanged from past demands that Russia hold on to Ukrainian territory. The official suggested that there appeared to be frustration in Moscow that Washington had repeatedly refused to accept it.

Putin told U.S. talk-show host Tucker Carlson last week that Russia was ready for "dialogue".

CONTACTS

Intermediaries met in Turkey in late 2023, according to three Russian sources.

A fourth diplomatic source said that there had been Russian-U.S. unofficial contacts through intermediaries at Russia's initiative but that they appeared to have come to nothing.

The U.S. official said he was unaware of unofficial contact through intermediaries.

According to three Russian sources, Putin's signal was relayed to Washington, where top U.S. officials including White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Central Intelligence Agency Director Bill Burns and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met.

The idea was that Sullivan would speak to Putin's foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, and set out the next steps, one of the Russian sources said.

But when the call came in January, Sullivan told Ushakov that Washington was willing to talk about other aspects of the relationship but would not speak about a



▲ Russian President Vladimir Putin's suggestion of a ceasefire in Ukraine to freeze the war was rejected by the United States.

ceasefire without Ukraine, said one of the Russian sources.

The U.S. official refused to be drawn on any details of Sullivan's purported calls, or whether such a conversation with Ushakov took place.

One of the Russian sources expressed frustration with the United States over Washington's insistence that it would not nudge Ukraine towards talks given that the United States was helping to fund the war. "Putin said: 'I knew they wouldn't do anything,'" another of the Russian sources said. "They cut off the root of the con-

tacts which had taken two months to create." Another Russian source said that the United States did not appear to believe Putin was sincere. "The Americans didn't believe Putin was genuine about a ceasefire - but he was and is - he is ready to discuss a ceasefire. But equally Putin is also ready to fight on for as long as it takes - and Russia can fight for as long as it takes," the Russian source said. The Kremlin sees little point in further contacts with the United States on the issue, the Russian sources said, so the war would continue.

(Reuters)

Netherlands joins coalition to supply Ukraine with advanced drones

THE Hague - The Netherlands is joining a military coalition with allies including Britain that will supply Ukraine with advanced drone technology and bolster its offensive capabilities in the war against Russia, the Dutch defence minister said.

The pledge from the Netherlands comes in addition to F-16 fighter jets, artillery, ammunition and air defence systems provided by the Dutch to Kyiv.

For the Netherlands, there may be additional costs on top of 2 billion euros earmarked already for 2024, Dutch Defence Minister Kasja Ollongren told Reuters in an interview ahead of two days of NATO defence minister meetings in Brussels starting on Wednesday.

"We know of course that drones are very important in this war," Ollongren said. "That's why we are joining the drone coalition that Ukraine has started together with Latvia, together with other countries, to make sure that we do just that - increase production, use the latest technology and to provide exactly what Ukraine needs."

Ukraine's Defence Ministry announced

Britain's participation last month.

Drones have become a crucial part of both Ukraine and Russia's wartime strategies for reconnaissance and striking targets, thanks in large part to their relatively low cost.

Both sides are now using thousands of small, inexpensive drones originally built for enthusiasts and racers to conduct battlefield-level surveillance and attacks, while also growing their fleets of larger, longer-distance unmanned craft which can fly much further and carry heavier cameras or more explosives.

Both Britain and the Netherlands had already been helping Ukraine build out its drone fleet.

"What is new is that we are now forming this coalition. So we're connecting, let's say, the things that we're doing separately into one coalition that will be able to respond to the new demands of Ukraine, as they see the battle developing on the frontline. And I think that's the strength of this coalition," she said at her offices in The Hague.

Ukraine intends to manufacture thousands of long-range drones capable of deep strikes into Russia in 2024 and already has up to 10 companies working on production,



▲ The Netherlands is joining a military coalition with allies including Britain that will supply Ukraine with advanced drone technology and bolster its offensive capabilities in the war against Russia

Ukraine's digital minister, Mykhailo Fedorov, said in a Reuters interview on Monday.

By working together, the coalition will be able to respond to Kyiv's changing wartime tactics.

"And I think that's going to be the strength

of this coalition, to be able to provide in the very short term what they need," she said.

Ollongren said the Netherlands will contribute high-tech expertise from the commercial sector, but declined to provide technical or financial details. (Reuters)

“Niyethembana Na?”

King Ginger brings Valentine's Day anxiety to Eswatini

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini
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COUPLES in Eswatini had an extra reason to be cautious on Valentine's Day as South African Niyethembana Na?'s host, King Ginger announced that he was in Eswatini's streets for Valentine's Day.

The announcement of his visit sent shockwaves through social media on February 14, leaving many couples on the edge and hesitant to publicly celebrate their love.

King Ginger, renowned for his street show, 'Niyethembana Na?' gained fame for exposing dishonest couples. In his videos, he confronts couples, forces them to exchange phones, and searches for evidence of infidelity.

His unorthodox methods have garnered him a massive following and have also sent fear waves to the hearts of those who have something to hide.

As news of King Ginger's presence in Eswatini spread like wildfire, social media went abuzz, with apprehensive comments from users who expressed their concerns about the potential intrusion into their relationships.

Many vowed to keep a watchful eye on their surroundings, fearing that King Ginger might show up with his cameras, ready to expose any secret affairs.

Mvelo to drop a new single

MELODIES of anticipation are reverberating in the air as the local music scene braces itself for the highly anticipated release of Mvelo's newest single, aptly titled 'No Words.'

With her enchanting voice and undeniable talent, the songbird is ready to take her artistry to new heights by dropping the single on Friday.

In a video shared on social media, Mvelo could not contain her excitement as she revealed the upcoming release of her song on February 16, 2024. With a smile that radiated pure joy, she expressed hope that fans would fall in love with 'No Words,' a deep house love song that perfectly encapsulates the essence of February. "It's all about love, you know, because it's February," Mvelo shared. She said she hopes people will feel the same way about the song as she does as the song is a whole vibe. "We cry as we dance, you know us Africans."

Mvelo's musical prowess has already earned her a loyal following, having

graced the stages of popular events including the House Music Fest. Beyond Eswatini's borders, she has enticed audiences in neighbouring Lesotho, where she performed at an All-White music festival alongside artists Mandisa Mamba and DJ Cup.

Collaborations have also played a significant role in Mvelo's musical journey, with her angelic voice gracing EPs and songs alongside notable artists like Neapolitan Soul, DJ Cup, and Zwile.

Her versatility as a performer has allowed her to share the stage with the likes of Velemseni, Floewe, and even Ghanaian sensation Abianna, showcasing her ability to seamlessly blend genres and captivate diverse audiences.

► Song bird Mvelo.



▲ CMTV's 'Niyathanda Na?' show host King Ginger is in the country for Valentine's edition.

"Enjoy it while it lasts, because if King Ginger catches you, it might be your last hug," warned one social media user,

Valentine's Day, traditionally a time for expressing love and affection, has taken on a new dimension as King Ginger was spotted around Ezulwini on Valentine's Day exposing couples. Instead of carefree celebrations, some couples find themselves burdened with anxiety,

constantly glancing over their shoulders, and second-guessing their every move.

Despite the worry that King Ginger's presence brought, some social media users saw his arrival as a silver lining in situations of infidelity.

They believed that the fear of being caught in the act might deter potential cheaters, leading to more genuine and faithful expressions of love.



▲ Makotis during the last Makoti Festival.

Four Makotis for Makoti Festival

THE Makoti Festival, a highly anticipated event which celebrates Eswatini culture and pays homage to modern women, is promising to be an unforgettable experience following the confirmation of four Makotis from Eswatini, South Africa, Mozambique, and Lesotho.

Set to take place on April 27, 2024, at the prestigious Malkerns Country Club, this festival is already making waves with its star-studded line-up.

Joining the already confirmed Maskandi artist Mthandeni SK, Gospel sensation Ntokozo Mbambo, and local music sensation M Nation, these four Makotis are set to captivate the audience with their exceptional talent and stage presence. The Makoti Festival promises to be a celebration of music, culture, and the power of women.

Tickets for the Makoti Festival are now available for purchase, with early bird prices starting from E200. Music enthusiasts are encouraged to secure their spot at this extraordinary event through Howler, Computickets, and Galitos outlets.

Performances

While the Makoti Festival is primarily focused on delivering outstanding musical performances, it goes beyond to offer attendees a diverse range of experiences.

The festival grounds will be decorated with vibrant fashion and food stalls, providing an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to showcase their creativity and culinary skills. From traditional attire to contemporary fashion trends, the Makoti Festival embraces the rich diversity of women from all walks of life, celebrating their strength, beauty, and unique contributions to society.

The Makoti Festival is not just a music event; it is a true celebration of Eswatini's vibrant culture and the essence of womanhood.

It serves as a platform for artists, entrepreneurs, and music lovers to come together and honour the spirit of Makoti. This festival is a testament to the power of unity, creativity, and the celebration of diversity.



Nhlonipho working with Black Mambazo

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini
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A harmonious collaboration is set to captivate music lovers as Eswatini-born artist Nhlonipho has joined forces with the legendary South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, to create a song.

The news of this exciting partnership was announced by Nhlonipho, who took to social media to share his enthusiasm. “I have been busy in the studio with Soweto Central Chorus & Friends and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Something big is coming,” Nhlonipho revealed.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo, a male choral group hailing from South Africa, is renowned for its mesmerising vocal style of ‘Isicathamiya’ and ‘Mbube’. Their rise to worldwide prominence came after they collaborated with Paul Simon on his iconic album, Graceland. With a string of accolades to their name, including three Grammy Awards, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has solidified their status as music legends.

Nhlonipho, with his innate ability to evoke deep emotions through his music, is arguably a force to be reckoned with in the industry.

As a music producer, singer, and pianist, Nhlonipho Lihle Dlamini was born in Mankayane, Eswatini, where his passion for music was ignited. His musical journey began at home, under the guidance of his



▲ South African male choral group Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Eswatini-born artist Nhlonipho (inset) will be dropping a collaboration project soon.

mother, a teacher who conducted choirs and instilled in him a love for choral music from a young age.

His talent quickly earned him recognition, and he won his first solo competition while singing with his primary school choir.

Music

Throughout high school and college, Nhlonipho continued to shine, receiving five Tenor Soloist trophies. In 2015, he further pursued his passion for music, studying and obtaining a Diploma in Music Performance (piano) alongside a Diploma in Civil Engineering.

Nhlonipho’s musical prowess has enabled him to collaborate with esteemed South African and international artists, including Luyolo Yiba, Thando Mngomezulu, Shuffle Muzik, Zintle Kwaaiman, Nathi Mankayi, Amanda Mankayi, Samthing Soweto, Citizen Deep, Amanda Black, Nathan Blur, Siyakha Khitha, Wanda Zonke, Anele and Neliswa, The Soweto Central Chorus, Bakhe Dlamini, and Nhlakanipho Dlamini. Each collaboration has showcased his versatility and ability to seamlessly blend genres, captivating audiences with his unique sound.

Miss Culture Fair to host traditional food-tasting event

INTERESTED attendees should get their taste buds ready for a culinary journey like no other as Miss Culture Fair has announced a traditional food-tasting event to be held at Woodlands in Ezulwini.

Under the theme, “The Delicious Flavors of Traditional Food,” this event promises to be a celebration of diverse cultures and their delectable cuisines. On March 9, 2024, from 9:30 am onwards, Woodlands will come alive with the vibrant colours, tantalising aromas, and mouthwatering tastes of traditional dishes from various countries.

This event will bring together people from Ghana, DR Congo, Kenya, Zambia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of each nation.

The highlight of the day will undoubtedly be the traditional food tasting, where attendees will have the opportunity to savour a wide array of dishes prepared with love and authenticity.

In addition to the tantalising food, the event will feature performances that celebrate the cultural diversity of the participating nations. From mesmerising dances to soul-stirring music, attendees will be treated to a sensory feast of sights and sounds that will leave them in awe.

The Miss Culture fashion show will also take centre stage, showcasing the beauty



▲ Miss Cultural Heritage 2023 finalists. Miss Culture Fair organisers have announced that they will host a traditional food-tasting event.

and elegance of traditional attire from different countries. Models will grace the runway, adorned in vibrant garments that reflect the unique cultural identities of their respective nations, further enhancing the immersive experience of the event.

Pageant

The event will also feature fruit and Miss Culture stalls, offering a variety of delicious fruits and showcasing the beauty of Miss

Culture, a pageant that celebrates the essence and grace of women from diverse backgrounds.

The Miss Culture Fair’s traditional food-tasting event is not just an opportunity to indulge in mouth watering delicacies; it is a celebration of cultural heritage, unity, and the power of food to bring people together. It is a chance to appreciate the richness and diversity of our world, one bite at a time.



▲ DJ Zulu D is among the added artists for the Corona Experience show.

Local artists added to Corona Experience

EXCITEMENT is building as the Corona Experience announced the addition of local artists to support the renowned duo, Lemon & Herb.

The Corona Experience has confirmed an impressive line-up of local artists, including Zulu D, Wassabee, Obsession, and The Scientists. These talented performers will share the stage with the Afro House powerhouse DJs, Lemon & Herb, who have been announced as the headliners for this unforgettable event. This highly anticipated event promises to be a musical extravaganza, showcasing the best of the best musical talent.

On February 25, 2024, the Sundeck in Manzini transformed into a haven of groove for music enthusiasts. The Corona Experience promises an immersive and electrifying atmosphere, where attendees can lose themselves in the pulsating beats and soulful melodies of the artists.

Bliss

Tickets for this extraordinary event are now available for purchase, offering different tiers to suit various preferences. For those opting for the general admission experience, presale tickets are priced at E100, ensuring access to a night of pure musical bliss. For those who prefer a more exclusive experience, presale VIP tickets are available for E200, offering additional perks and privileges.

On the day of the event, gate tickets will be available at a slightly higher price, with general admission tickets priced at E150 and VIP tickets at E250. It is advised to secure tickets in advance to avoid missing out on what promises to be a night to remember.

● The Corona Experience promises an immersive and electrifying atmosphere, where attendees can lose themselves in the pulsating beats and soulful melodies of the artists.

RODDY Ricch has defeated a copyright lawsuit that claimed the rapper stole key elements of his chart-topping 2019 song “The Box” from a decades-old soul song, with a judge ruling “no reasonable jury” would find the two songs similar.

Songwriter Greg Perry sued Ricch (real name Roderick Wayne Jr.) and Atlantic Records in 2022, claiming the hit track (which spent a whopping 11 weeks at the top of the Billboard Hot 100) had been ripped off from Perry’s 1975 “Come On Down” - an oft-sampled song in the hip-hop world.

But in a decision Monday (Feb. 12), Judge Analisa Torres ruled that the two songs were clearly very different: “No reasonable jury could find that the works are substantially similar,” the judge wrote, noting “significant dissimilarities” between the “aesthetic appeal” of each track.

While Perry’s track is a “soul song that contains a melodic tune” and is performed with acoustic instruments, Judge Torres said, Roddy’s track is “a hip-hop song delivered in a monotone rap” created primarily with a synthesizer. The tempo of the older song is “significantly faster” than that of “The Box,” the judge added, and the overall “feel” of the two songs is also clearly distinct.

“[‘Come On Down’] is a sentimental song about ‘love and heartbreak,’ while ‘The Box’ is a braggadocious song about ‘amassing wealth, sleeping with multiple women, and being more skilled than other rappers,’” the judge wrote.

Roddy Ricch beats copyright lawsuit over No. 1 hit ‘The Box’

... the suit claimed his No. 1 hit ‘The Box’ stole from 1970s soul track

Perry’s lawyers filed the case back in December 2022, claiming an average music fan would be able to hear the “strikingly similar” aspects of the two tracks simply by listening to them, but that more thorough investigation by music experts has more conclusively proven the theft.

“Comparative analysis of the beat, lyrics, hook, rhythmic structure, metrical placement, and narrative context by a musicology expert demonstrates clearly and convincingly that ‘The Box’ is an unauthorized duplication and infringement of certain elements of ‘Come On Down,’” the suit read.

“‘Come On Down’ is a popular sample in hip-hop - featured in both Young Jeezy’s 2008 ‘Wordplay’ and Yo Gotti’s 2016 ‘I



▲ Hip hop star Roddy Ricch.

Remember.” Perry’s lawyers said both of those songs had been fully cleared and licensed by giving him a songwriting credit and an ownership stake.

“Other [artists] in the rap world that have chosen to copy elements of ‘Come On Down’ have done so legally and correctly,” Perry’s lawyers wrote. “Defendants chose not to license the musical composition from plaintiffs

and instead chose to intentionally infringe upon the copyright.”

But in Monday’s decision, Judge Torres said there was no need for Ricch to secure such a license because his song did not infringe Perry’s tune. She said that the central alleged similarity - a so-called “ascending minor scale played by violin” that Perry claimed was repeated 24 times in Ricch’s song - was “expressed differently” in the two works. Other important elements of Perry’s work, like a so-called tremolando, are “notably absent” from “The Box,” she added.

“The musical composition ... differs from ‘The Box in each of the components where plaintiff claims similarity,” the judge wrote. “Plaintiff has failed to demonstrate that defendants copied any protectable portion of the musical composition.”

With her ruling, Judge Torres dismissed Perry’s case permanently, ending the lawsuit entirely. Attorneys for both sides did not immediately return requests for comment on Tuesday. (Bang showbiz)



Usher’s ex-wife surprised by his wedding news

▲ Usher’s wedding to Jennifer marked his second trip down the aisle. He was previously married to Tameka — the mother of his sons Usher ‘Cinco’ Raymond V, 16, and Navid Ely, 15 — from 2007 until 2009.

USHER’S ex-wife Tameka Foster thought he was already married to Jennifer Goicoechea.

The 45-year-old pop star tied the knot with his long-time girlfriend Jennifer on Super Bowl Sunday while they were in Las Vegas for his performance at the half time show.

Now his former wife Tameka — mother of his two teenage sons — has insisted she was surprised by the wedding news because she thought the couple had already exchanged vows.

She told TMZ.com: “I thought he’d been married. I don’t know. I stopped keeping up with that type of thing.

“That’s like his second ... third ... I don’t know. I don’t even keep up with his personal [life].

Usher’s wedding to Jennifer marked his second trip down the aisle. He was previously married to Tameka — the mother of his sons Usher ‘Cinco’ Raymond V, 16, and Navid Ely, 15 — from 2007 until 2009. He also has two

kids with Jennifer.

Tameka added of her ex: “He’s a good dad. That’s what I care about.”

Prior to his Super Bowl performance, Usher opened up about his relationship with music executive Jennifer.

“Listen, when you find someone that you know is a great partner, of course it is an honour and a pleasure to be able to share life with someone who wants to share it with you and loves you, who you are,” he told PEOPLE.

“We’ve obviously made a commitment to life for life together because of our children. It wouldn’t be odd for us to get married.

“We already did here. You know what I’m saying? And we’re going to be in each other’s lives until we die, obviously, because we have something to share.

“That’s beautiful. Our children. But not because of that. I really do feel like I have an amazing partner that I respect.” (IOL)

Russell Simmons accused of raping, harassing former Def Jam executive

RUSSELL Simmons has been sued for allegedly raping a former music video producer and Def Jam Recording executive.

A woman, identified in a civil complaint filed in the Southern District of New York court on Tuesday as Jane Doe, alleged Simmons assaulted her sometime in the 1990s at the music mogul’s Manhattan apartment.

“As detailed in the complaint, our client was sexually assaulted and harassed by her boss, Russell Simmons, while pursuing her professional ambitions as an executive at Def Jam,” her attorney Kenya Davis said in a statement Tuesday. “She was proud of her contributions to the burgeoning musical genre of hip hop, but her hard work and her career in music was disrupted and derailed by Mr. Simmons, a rich and powerful celebrity whose wealth and influence allowed his abusive behavior to go unchallenged for decades.”

Davis added: “Now a successful writer and producer in the entertainment industry, Jane Doe’s traumatic experiences with Simmons echo those of so many other women who he has preyed upon for decades.”

In the complaint, Jane Doe describes a culture in which “both women and men” at the company and other music industry professionals would go to the Def Jam Recordings

co-founder’s apartment to conduct business. Prior to the alleged assault, she said she had delivered music videos at his home “with no incident.”

Jane Doe alleged that one day while reviewing a music video in Simmons’ bedroom, a practice that was “not uncommon,” the hip-hop executive pinned her down with a “wrestling move” and proceeded to rape her.

She told Simmons to stop “several times” but he ignored her pleas, according to the complaint.

Before the assault, Jane Doe said her working relationship with Simmons slowly went from professional interactions to sexual harassment at the workplace that was “so pervasive” that another senior executive told him to leave Jane Doe’s office one day. USA TODAY has reached out to Simmons and Def Jam.

Simmons’ career was upended in 2017 following other allegations of sexual assault fueled by the #MeToo movement.

“When Ms. Doe learned about the accounts of the other survivors, she was struck by how similar they were to her own horrible experience at the hands of Mr. Simmons,” the complaint states. (XXL Magazine)



▲ Hip hop mogul Russell Simmons.

If you ask a group of people what eating healthy means to them, you'll probably get a different answer every time.

For some, healthy eating means reining in a fast food habit or consuming more fruits and vegetables, while for others it may mean occasionally enjoying a piece of cake without feeling guilty.

Still yet, those who have certain medical conditions and even food allergies may conceptualize the concept of healthy eating in their own unique way.

In short, there's no single right answer to what healthy eating means.

Healthy eating is human, and as humans, we all have different wants and needs, which inevitably affect our food choices.

What's more, what healthy eating means to you may even change throughout the different stages of your life as you grow and adapt to your ever-changing needs.

What healthy eating means for me

The definition of healthy eating has changed for me a couple of times in the past few years.

By the time I was in college, healthy eating was about following nutritional guidelines and doing everything by the book. However, it meant that my view of the food on my plate had changed. I went from seeing meals I enjoyed to only seeing nutrients.

Suddenly, I went from seeing traditional Costa Rican gallo pinto — or rice and beans — to seeing complex carbs and plant-based proteins.

Then, when I started practicing as a nutritionist, the notion that a dietitian should look a certain way or fit into a specific body type led me to believe that healthy eating meant measuring my food to know exactly what I was consuming. I would eat whatever I wanted, as long as the nutrients I needed were accounted for.

I gave my body everything it needed to be healthy, but healthy eating goes beyond the nutrients. It's also about how it makes you feel, and with food being an essential part of culture and social events, eating should be something we enjoy.

Today I have a different approach to healthy eating. I'm far more flexible with my meals, and I understand that balance is key to being nourished and happy with food.

Healthy eating now means that, most of the time, I make sure to have food from all food groups on my plate without measuring anything or thinking about plant-based vs. animal-based protein or simple vs. complex carbs.

It also means that I get to enjoy a bit of everything — including sweets, fast food, and desserts — with moderation and without the need to measure or account for it.

As you can see, finding the balance that worked for me didn't happen overnight. On the contrary, my definition of healthy eating has been

Healthy eating is human: Joys, challenges and 3 things you can do

... If healthy eating means being flexible with what you eat, you'll need to learn to adapt to the circumstances, which may happen more often than not.



changing as I've gone through the different stages of my life.

As long as you aim to nourish your body and listen to what it needs, you can also give healthy eating your own meaning, because healthy eating is for everyone.

Seeing the bigger picture

As with many things in life, eating healthy doesn't always end up as you planned.

You may find yourself stuck at work late at night or too tired to prepare a home-cooked dinner, and that doesn't mean that you shouldn't order take-out and actually enjoy it.

If healthy eating means being flexible with what you eat, you'll need to learn to adapt to the circumstances, which may happen more often than not.

In cases when I'm choosing food on the spur of the moment, I try to opt for the best choice out of what I'm given. Whenever I can, I try to order the closest thing to a home-cooked meal or go for a sandwich, salad, or bowl.

Yet, sometimes I do crave some pizza — so I eat and enjoy that, too!

At times like this, I remember to see the bigger picture. That is, that healthy eating is not defined by single meals but by the choices we make day after day.

A close friend once told me a saying that goes, "One bad meal will not make you sick, just as one good meal will not make you healthy."

It may be challenging sometimes

When you're a dietitian, many people think that eating healthy comes naturally to you. Yet, we're human beings, too, and we love dessert and crave foods like anybody else.

In my case, one of the biggest challenges I've had to face was when I had to give up most carb-containing foods to manage recurring infections.

Carbs are present in many food groups, including grains, starchy vegetables, legumes, fruit, and dairy. They're also present in processed foods and sweets.

Experts often categorize them into two groups according to their fiber content:

► **Whole grains:** retain their naturally occurring fiber

► **Refined carbs:** are processed to remove their fiber and contain added sugar

In theory, I was supposed to eliminate refined carbs, which some people would argue is the healthiest thing to do.

However, in practice, I ended up giving up all kinds of processed carbs, including whole wheat bread and pasta, alongside starchy vegetables, grains, and dairy.

Thus, the list of carb-rich foods I could eat was limited to fruits, oats, quinoa, and legumes — lentils, beans, chickpeas, and edamame.

Some people told me that this transition wouldn't be so hard for me as a dietitian. However, it took me a while to adjust to my

new eating pattern, especially when planning on-the-go snacks or eating out.

I learned that organization and creativity are key to managing my nutritional needs.

3 things I do that you could also do

As I mentioned above, organization and creativity help me make the best food choices every day. This is because, the way I see it, healthy eating is a choice we make every time we eat.

For this reason, I try to make the decision-making process as easy as possible when I'm choosing a meal or snack. That way, I can continue to choose what is best for me.

Here are three things I do on a daily or weekly basis that make it easier for me to eat healthily.

► **Meal prep**

While this may sound cliché, preparing my food beforehand for the week really does the trick.

Cooking can take up a lot of time, but having food that just needs to be heated and served allows me to have a nutritious meal ready in minutes.

One of my go-to meal-prepping tips is to cook a batch of proteins — usually chicken or another lean meat — that I can portion and freeze for over a week and just defrost as I need them.

I also make sure to prep vegetables for the week. This way, I don't think twice before



having some salad or cooking a side of veggies with each meal.

I try to prepare them in different ways to avoid getting bored and choosing not to eat them.

For example, when it comes to carrots or zucchinis, I'll either slice, dice, grate, or spiralize them, all of which help me incorporate them into my meals easily.

► Keep fruit within arm's reach

Keeping my fruit visible reminds me to eat fruit during the day.

Research shows that you're most likely to eat more of whatever foods you place near you, regardless of whether they are fruits or sweets.

I implement this principle daily and choose to have my fruit on display on a table and my snacks and sweets stored away.

► Follow a routine

While I don't officially plan a weekly menu, I do have a specific set of dishes that I stick to at every meal.

For example, my breakfast choices usually include:

- a Costa Rican classic of gallo pinto and eggs
- toast with peanut butter and a side of eggs
- oatmeal with fruit
- oatmeal pancakes

The same goes for the rest of my meals and snacks, where I have at least three different options to choose from without giving it much thought. Having a predetermined set of dishes that I know I like saves me time having to decide what to eat, and it allows me to vary my meals depending on whether I crave something sweet or savory.

It's also very convenient for grocery shopping, as you already know what you'll most likely be having at every meal.

The bottom line

We're all humans who are constantly growing and adapting to change, and so does our concept of healthy eating.

Here I shared with you how the definition of healthy eating has changed for me through the years, the biggest challenge in my healthy eating journey, and my tips and tricks to make healthy eating easier.

However, my way definitely isn't the "right way" — or the only way — to eat healthy. It's only what works for me, and it may or may not work for you.

Healthy eating is human, and it looks different for each and every one of us. Consider what you could do in your own routine to set yourself up for success with healthy eating.

If you're unsure about where to start, consider working with a registered dietitian, as they can help you conceptualize a sustainable, nutritious eating plan that works for your specific needs and lifestyle.

Healthline

66

One bad meal will not make you sick, just as one good meal will not make you healthy



Sniffing Vicks Vaporub could help ease depression

SMELLING familiar odors could help improve mood in people suffering from major depression, a new study suggests.

Neuroscientists from the University of Pittsburgh found that patients who sniffed 12 recognizable scents had better access to positive memories - stopping negative thought patterns that perpetuate the mental illness.

The participants recalled specific memories from their lives when they smelled Vicks Vaporub, coffee, vanilla extract, lavender hand soap, and more common household items.

Problems with autobiographical memory are a hallmark of major depressive disorder, which often lulls patients into focusing only on negative events or interpreting events in a negative light.

The scientists say that by helping depressed individuals access their memories more effectively with smell, negative thought cycles can be intercepted.

For their study, neuroscientists enrolled 32 people aged 18-55 with major depression. They were exposed to 12 smells in airtight jars along with a written clue as to the scent.

Scents included coconut oil, cumin powder, clove bulbs, red wine, wax shoe polish, vanilla extract, ketchup, and orange essential oil.

Eyes closed, they took a whiff from each jar and were asked to consider a memory sparked by the smell.

Each participant rated memories on how good or bad it made them feel, how exciting it was, how clear it was, and how

often they thought about it. They were then asked to identify each scent but were told it wasn't important to get it right.

Participants identified the smells correctly about 29 percent of the time on average. Smells evoked more specific memories from their lives than word cues. For instance, hearing the word 'menthol' was far less evocative than opening a jar and smelling Vicks Vaporub.

Smell-triggered memories tended to be more emotionally arousing, vivid, and took longer to recall than word-triggered memories.

The researchers said: 'Odor-evoked memories may be unique relative to other stimuli, such as auditory and visual, and contain emotionality.'

Humans' sense of smell is more active when we are frightened

Scientists from Rutgers University in New Jersey found smell receptors at the top of the nostrils go into overdrive when they detect certain odours. They believe sensory cells learn to associate some smells with fear - even before the message has reached the brain.

The olfactory bulb, responsible for processing smells, directly connects to key brain regions associated with memory and emotion, such as the amygdala and hippocampus.

Unlike other senses, smells can directly access the emotional part of the brain, which experts believe may explain why smells have such a profound impact on our memories and emotions.

Dr Kymberly Young, neuroscientist and co-author of the study, said: 'If

we improve memory, we can improve problem solving, emotion regulation and other functional problems that depressed individuals often experience.'

There are some approaches to treating depression that include scent to evoke positive memories.

Therapists may include aromatherapy as part of their normal cognitive behavioral therapy practice that trains depressed people to rethink their negative thought patterns.

They may also try what is known as reminiscence therapy, which involves recalling and sharing past experiences facilitated by sensory stimuli such as smells, photos, or music. The idea is that by tapping into positive memories and emotions, reminiscence therapy can improve mood, self-esteem, and overall well being.

The findings were published in the journal JAMA Network Open.

MailOnline

● Unlike other senses, smells can directly access the emotional part of the brain, which experts believe may explain why smells have such a profound impact on our memories and emotions.



▲ A delivery worker rides a bicycle on East 125th Street in heavy snowfall during winter weather in Manhattan in New York City.



▲ Democratic congressional candidate for New York’s 3rd congressional district, Tom Suozzi, arrives to campaign in Westbury, New York.



▲ Revellers take part in a traditional event marking the last day of the carnival season called “Kusaki”, a folk party and a re-enactment showing the “defeat of Death” where all roles are played by males, which takes place on Shrove Tuesday in Jedlinsk, Poland

AROUND THE WORLD IN PICTURES



▲ Cast member Jennifer Lopez attends a premiere for the film “This Is Me... Now: A Love Story” in Los Angeles, California.



▲ Palestinians with children wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies, as the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas continues, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip.



▲ Visitors look at a giant inflatable heart called “Chubby Hearts”, an installation by designer Anya Hindmarch, on Valentine’s Day in Hong Kong.

‘Emotional’ Lewis Hamilton unveils Mercedes 2024 car

Lewis Hamilton admitted it felt “emotional” and “surreal” to take part in the final Formula One car launch of his Mercedes career on Wednesday.

Hamilton, a seven-time Formula One world champion, will leave Mercedes at the end of the 2024 season in a stunning switch to Ferrari.

The 39-year-old had signed a new two-year deal with Mercedes worth £100 million in August.

But Hamilton recently activated a break clause to seal his move to the Italian team after admitting the prospect of “driving in Ferrari red” was too hard to turn down.

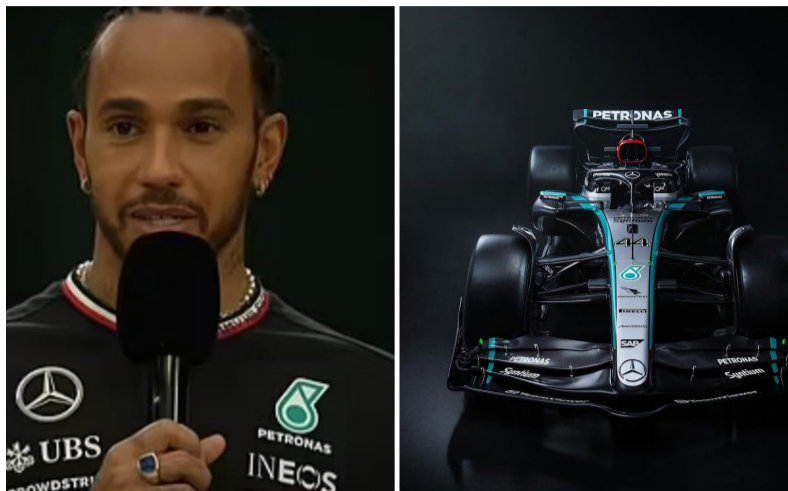
Speaking at the Mercedes launch for the first time since his blockbuster move was confirmed, Hamilton said: “The last few weeks have obviously been emotional and it is very surreal to be here.

“The focus through the whole of winter training is getting the team back to where we once were.

“We have had these difficult couple of years which have been really grounding for us. It has helped us re-group and really look at things.”

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, standing alongside Hamilton at the launch, added: “It has been a very busy winter. It will be our last season with Lewis so we are keen on bringing a quick car.”

Hamilton, who joined Mercedes



▲ Lewis Hamilton admitted it felt “emotional” and “surreal” to take part in the final Formula One car launch of his Mercedes career.

from McLaren in 2013, won six of his record-equalling seven world championships with the Silver Arrows.

But the British driver has struggled to match Red Bull rival Max Verstappen since he missed out on what would have been a record eighth world championship in 2021 in controversial fashion.

His long goodbye to Mercedes made for an awkward final car launch at the team’s Northamptonshire base.

Hamilton answered just three questions from the Mercedes moderator during the brief nine-minute event.

“I came here in 2013 so 11 years with the team and now I am starting

my 12th,” he said.

“It is such a privilege to work with a group of people where you see the work they do over the winter and you see a car come together at the beginning of the year and it is the most exciting part of the season.”

Hamilton, without a win in two years, and teammate George Russell, will get their first taste of this season’s Mercedes car during a shake-down test at rain-lashed Silverstone on Wednesday.

“We have to be diligent, maximise practice and even one lap, George and I might get in the rain today will give us a feeling of what is to come,” Hamilton said.

(Reuters)

Jordaan promises Broos will stay with Bafana

THE SA Football Association president, Danny Jordaan, has given a thorough update on Hugo Broos’s position as the Bafana Bafana coach.

Following a successful Africa Cup of Nations competition in Ivory Coast, there has been growing speculation that Broos has drawn interest from Tunisia, a major country in north Africa.

With a bronze medal to his name, Broos led Bafana to a podium finish after they finished the tournament as the third-best team.

Jordaan has now affirmed that the outspoken 71-year-old Belgian tactician will continue to lead the Bafana ship ahead of their crucial World Cup qualifiers and the 2025 Afcon in Morocco.

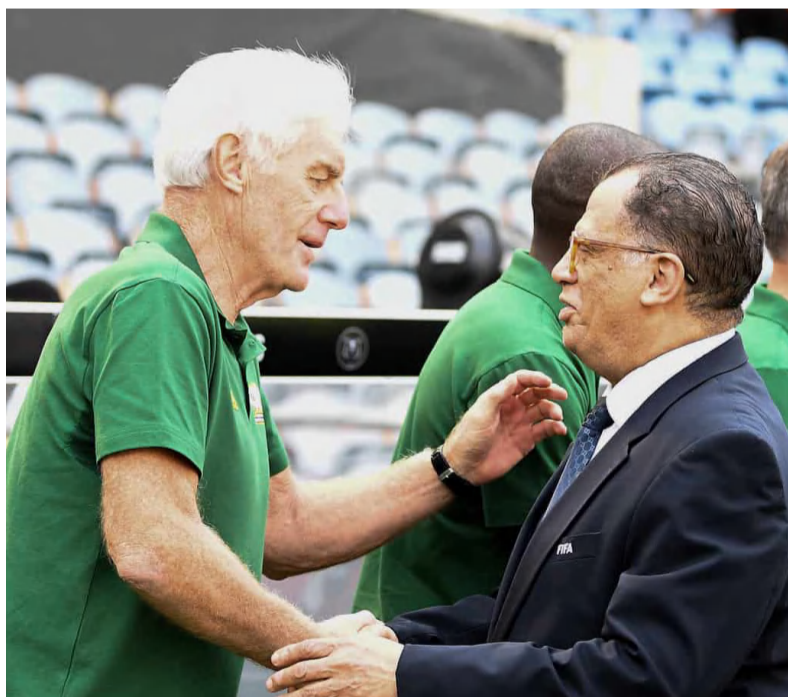
The journey continues

“I want to thank the coach; we started a long journey where we had many fights with him,” Jordaan said during a media briefing at the OR Tambo International Airport on Wednesday.

“He is one not to run away from a fight, but he runs towards it, and you know that. He has strong views, and he is not afraid to express them.

“In the end, we could shape the team, and the team that played was created by him. So, I want to thank him for not stepping back and for being relentless in pursuit of building the team that he thought would win the Afcon.

“We are very appreciative of his



▲ Danny Jordaan (right) says Hugo Broos (left) will be staying on as Bafana head coach.

efforts and his energies that he put in away from his family. But our journey is going to continue; there is still another mission ahead of us, and we must complete the task.”

Titanic battle looming

Later in March, Bafana will return to action when they play two international friendlies against Algeria and Andorra. Both matches will take place in Algeria on March 21 and 26, respectively.

In their third World Cup qualifying match on June 3, South Africa will face their greatest adversary, Ni-

geria, in a titanic battle to settle the score.

Recently, Nigeria defeated Bafana in a penalty shootout in the Afcon semi-finals.

In Group C, Bafana and the Super Eagles of Nigeria are presently ranked second and third, respectively, behind Rwanda, who lead with four points.

Nigeria has two points after their disappointing back-to-back draws, while South Africa has three points.

(Sunday World)



▲ Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez says a change of attitude has given them hope they can still reach Europe’s elite club competition next season.

‘Chelsea still chasing Champions League spot’

CHELSEA’s poor Premier League campaign has left them 13 points off the final Champions League qualifying spot but midfielder Enzo Fernandez says a change of attitude has given them hope they can still reach Europe’s elite club competition next season.

Back-to-back Premier League defeats by Liverpool and Wolverhampton Wanderers early this month were the latest setbacks for Mauricio Pochettino’s side, but an FA Cup win over Aston Villa and 3-1 league victory over Crystal Palace on Monday has restored some belief.

Chelsea, who spent more than 400 million pounds (\$506 million) during last year’s close season, are 10th

in the league, 13 points behind fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur.

“The victory at Crystal Palace is worth a lot to us. Last week we defeated Aston Villa in the FA Cup,” Argentine international Fernandez told ESPN in an interview published on Tuesday.

“We are changing our attitude above all, and obviously this victory gives us confidence for what follows ... Throughout the season, we’ve had ups and downs in the league and that is why we find ourselves a little far away of the first places.

“But there is a long way to go, we have trust in our work, in a new team, and day by day we are improving to be able to meet the objective, we want to play in the Champions League next year.” (Reuters)

Osaka gets walkover Qatar Open

NAOMI Osaka received a walkover into the Doha quarterfinals on Wednesday, while Leylah Fernandez knocked out Australian Open runner-up Zheng Qinwen 7-5, 6-3. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka advanced after Ukraine’s Lesia Tsurenko, who beat Ons Jabeur in round two, pulled out with an elbow injury.

Osaka will meet another former world No 1, Karolina Pliskova, or Czech teenager Linda Noskova for a place in the last four, as the Japanese star continues her comeback from maternity leave.

Chinese fifth seed Zheng let slip a strong position in the opening set where she led 5-3, as Fernandez broke twice in a row and reeled off the final four games.

Fernandez then punished a loose service game from Zheng in the sixth game of the

second set before closing out an impressive victory.

“I’m extremely pumped up, I’m super happy with my level. There’s still a lot of work to do, but so far so good, so we’re just going to keep going,” said Fernandez. World number 38 Fernandez, a former US Open finalist, goes on to meet third seed Elena Rybakina or 16th-seeded American Emma Navarro for a spot in the semifinals.

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova also progressed to the last eight with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova.

Katerina Siniakova, who took out Coco Gauff in the second round, could not build on Tuesday’s success as the Czech lost in straight sets to Danielle Collins.

Top seed Iga Swiatek plays Ekaterina Alexandrova in the last 16 later on Wednesday.

(Reuters)

Former Ajax star Quincy Promes sentenced to six years in prison

FORMER Ajax star Quincy Promes has been handed a six-year prison sentence for his involvement in smuggling over 1,350 kilos of cocaine.

Promes was charged last May over his alleged involvement in smuggling the cocaine, which was intercepted in Antwerp in January 2020 in the form of two batches of 650kg and 713kg each.

Now, the Public Prosecution Service have officially found Promes and a 32-year-old co-suspect, guilty of importing, exporting, transporting and possessing the drugs.

It is alleged the cocaine was hidden in a shipment of sea salt from Brazil, where the drugs were transported from in two containers to Antwerp.

According to NOS, the former Ajax

winger failed to turn up for the trial and, thus, never made a statement about the offenses charged against him.

Further reports suggested that the former Netherlands international feels 'he's untouchable' - given the fact he avoided attending the court dates.

According to NL Times, prosecutors said: 'He seems to think he is untouchable in Russia or abroad'.

It's also reported that prosecutors wanted to know 'how such a successful footballer allowed himself to be drawn so deeply into crime.'

Dutch officials had initially sought out a nine-year prison sentence for the Spartak Moscow forward, when the case was brought forward last month.

When demanding the nine-year sentence, prosecutors alleged that Promes 'normalises and almost romanticises the cocaine



▲ Prosecutors claim Promes' wealth meant he had money to invest and was one step higher on the organisational ladder as a result.

trade'. Prosecutors claim Promes' wealth meant he had money to invest and was one step higher on the organisational ladder as a result.

'The case came to light after the police Criminal Intelligence Team received information that the 32-year-old man who now lives in Russia was involved in the cocaine trade,' the Dutch Public Prosecution Service said.

'He is also said to own crypto phones and has invested 200,000 euros in the trade.'

'That information prompted an investigation to be launched. Eavesdropping equipment was placed in the suspect's car and the



suspect was observed. 'The accuracy of the TCI information was confirmed, partly by seized telephones from others in which conversations were found in which the suspects also participated.

'Many chat messages made it clear that both suspects were involved in bringing in, removing and further transporting and selling these two consignments.'

Back in June, Promes was sentenced to 18 months in prison for stabbing his cousin.

The 31-year-old forward, who plays for Russian club Spartak Moscow, was arrested in December 2020 regarding the incident which happened in July that year.

(Daily Mail)

Ireland, Wales consider shirt changes to aid colour-blind rugby fans

IRELAND and Wales could face each other in their traditional plain green and red shirts for the last time during a Six Nations game later this month in a bid to assist colour-blind rugby supporters.

The green-red combination poses particular problems for those suffering from colour-blindness and it will be an issue when reigning Grand Slam champions Ireland face Wales in Dublin on February 24.

Around one in 12 men suffer from colour vision deficiency (CVD) and one in 200 women, globally.

World Rugby regulations that will come into force from January next year mean Six Nations teams will be expected to avoid kit clashes that make it harder for spectators and television viewers suffering from CVD to follow a game. The onus will be on the visiting team to make a change if needed.

'Kit colour clashes do change the way you watch a game, and I have absolute empathy with those whose enjoyment is affected as a result,' Welsh Rugby Union chief executive Abi Tierney said Wednesday.

'Our current alternate kit is black, and we have used green in the recent



▲ Around one in 12 men suffer from colour vision deficiency (CVD) and one in 200 women, globally.

past. Neither of these examples particularly help with this issue,' she added. 'But there are other ways to work around the issues, and kits with significantly different designs can help avoid the problem too...If one team is in checks and the other is in stripes, for example, then colours become pretty irrelevant.'

The tradition in rugby where both teams have similar colours for their first-choice shirts is for the home side to wear their second-choice strip.

The practice dates back to rugby union's amateur era, when the home team

were more likely to have a change of shirt to hand and the away side were considered guests.

So matches between 'blue' teams in the Six Nations - Scotland, France and Italy - would usually see the host nation wearing their alternative strip. France, however, wore white for their controversial 20-16 win over Scotland in Edinburgh on Saturday, with the Daily Telegraph reporting the move was pushed by the Six Nations committee, with CVC Capital Partners owning a 14.3 per cent stake in the Championship. (Supersport)

Rafael Nadal puts return on ice, admits 'not ready to compete'

RAFAEL Nadal on Wednesday was forced to shelve his plans to return to action at next week's Qatar Open, admitting he is "not ready to compete".

The 37-year-old missed most of last year with a hip injury sustained at the Australian Open before making his comeback at last month's Brisbane International.

However, a small muscle tear then forced the 37-year-old to pull out of this season's first Grand Slam in Melbourne.

The 22-time Grand Slam title winner now hopes to return to the tour at the Indian Wells Masters in California from 6-17 March.

"I would have loved to play in Doha, where the tournament team, as well as the amazing Qatar fans have always supported me greatly," Nadal said in a statement on X.

"Unfortunately I am not ready to compete and I won't be able to come to Doha where I really wanted to be and play again.

"I will focus on keep working to be ready for the amazing Indian Wells tournament."

Nadal was named on the entry list last month for the Qatar Open, to be held 19-24 February, and where he was champion in 2014.

Earlier on Wednesday, the former world No 1, whose ranking has plummeted to 646, admitted he had been suffering "some discomfort these past few weeks and I'm a bit on the limit".

"At this point every blow I take, every injury, is a setback not only in tennis and physically, but also mentally," he told La Sexta television.

He added: "I am 100 per cent confident of being in Indian Wells, it's a very special tournament for me. I don't know if it's going to be the last time I play in it, so I would like to be in Indian Wells, for sure." Nadal reiterated that his "main goal is to try to get to the clay season as healthy as possible, to at least give me the chance to enjoy this part of the season", which the Spaniard has dominated in his career.

He has won a record 14 French Open titles and holds an astonishing 112-3 win-loss record at Roland Garros.

(Supersport)



▲ Young Buffaloes Celiwe ‘Cece’ Nkambule won player of the month for November.



▲ Manzini Wanderers' Lindiwe Dlamini receive the awards for being the best player in December.

Stories By Ntokozo Magongo
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THE duo of Manzini Wanderers Lindiwe Dlamini and Young Buffaloes Celiwe ‘Cece’ Nkambule won Player of the Month awards under the Women’s Football Association (WFA) League. Dlamini was the best player in December while ‘Cece’ was sensational in November. They were each awarded with a E2 000 cheque sponsored by Wandervilleon Saturday by the WFA Executive. The awarding of the players was confirmed by the WFA through a statement. “Lindiwe Dlamini of Manzini Wanderers was presented with the player of the month award, together with Celiwe ‘Cece’ Nkam-

Lindiwe, ‘Cece’ win WFL ‘Player of the Month’ awards

bule of Young Buffaloes. They were presented last Saturday by the WFA Executive members. Player of the month awards are sponsored by Wanderville with a sum of E2 000. Congratulations Ladies,” reads the statement. The duo has inspired their teams to the top of the tough competition with Young Buffaloes at the top of the table and Manzini Wanderers in second. The WFA League will be starting its second round fixtures this weekend with games set

to be played on Saturday and Sunday at different venues around the country. 12 teams are campaigning in this league. Manzini Wanderers and Young Buffaloes ladies will face off on Sunday at Manzini Club in a thrilling match. The game will kick off at 11 am.

The fixtures:
Saturday:
King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium:
S. Divas vs G. Mamba 11 am

Eqiniswa Sports Ground:
Mbekelweni vs R. Leopard 12 pm
Elangeni vs Interladies 2 pm
Sunday:
Manzini Club:
M. Wanderers vs Y. Buffaloes 11 am
Tambankulu Sports Ground:
T. Callies vs Nsingizini 12 pm
Eqiniswa Sports Ground:
S. Roses vs M. Swallows 11 am.

Siwakhile for tough test in Qatar, World Aquatics Championships

Thailand-based swimmer Siwakhile Dlamini is set for the big stage on Thursday at the World Aquatics Champions in Doha, Qatar. She will be competing in the 100m freestyle where she will be up against top swimmers from around the world. Dlamini is in Doha, Qatar with Chad Ning, and Coach Mark Hoare as they represent the country in the championships. Ning competed on Sunday on the first day of the event where he clocked a Personal Best of 1:10:55 from 1:10:68 which he swam at the African Junior Swimming Championships in Mauritius last year. Ning was competing in the 10mm

breaststroke. Coach Mark Hoare confirmed the schedule on Wednesday. “Siwakhile Dlamini races on the 15th of February in the Women’s 100m Freestyle. She is working tirelessly in fine-tuning her technique and getting into racing mode. She is really looking forward to her race and competing with the best in the world,” he said. Siwakhile is currently based in Thailand after being awarded a World Aquatics Scholarship for the 2023-24 season. The scholarship allows Dlamini to train at the prestigious Thanyapura Sports and Health Resort in Phuket, Thailand, for a year.



▲ Swimmer Siwakhile Dlamini will compete on Thursday in Qatar.

SWIMMING FOCUS: Luca Fraser, Coach Welcome in Dubai

SWIMMER Luca Fraser has honoured the invitation to compete in the Dubai Open Swimming Championship. He left the country with Coach and Eswatini Swimming Association (ESA) Interim President Welcome Nhlabatsi. The competitions will be held at the world-class Complex Sports Hamdan in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The event will be held from February 15 -18, 2024. Fraser is set to miss out on the Open Water Swimming Championships to be held at the Luphohlo Dam on Saturday as he will still be away in Dubai. ESA confirmed the departure of the two through a statement.

“Swimmer Luca Fraser and Coach Welcome Nhlabatsi left for Dubai on Tuesday afternoon to compete in the Dubai Open Swimming Championship. They will be representing our country from February 16-18. Let’s show our support and cheer them on as they make our nation proud. It is time to soar,” reads the statement.

Opportunity
“With our sights set on the 2026 Olympic Youth Games, this competition is the perfect opportunity to gauge our progress and see if we’re on track to achieving our goals. Organized by the Emirates Swimming Federation, this competition is considered one of the most significant swimming events in the



▲ Luca Fraser and Coach Welcome Nhlabatsi.

entire Middle East region,” reads the statement. Some of the events for the Open Championships include all strokes in 50m, 100m and 200m, medley individual 40m and 200m, 400m freestyle while the juniors will compete in all strokes in 50m,

100m and medley individual. Fraser, got the invitation after his sterling performance in the 8th Africa Aquatics Zone III championships in Kigali, Rwanda last year in November. He won two gold medals from the event, hoisting the country’s flag high.

Stories by Ntokozo Magongo
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#Resolution Run reaches 7 000 runners target

THE #Resolution Run has broken its attendance record after reaching the 7 000 runners target for the 2024 edition.

The event which comprises three events; the 21km, 10km and 5km will be held on Saturday at Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary. There are already 636 runners that have entered for the event with more still to register in the next coming two days (Thursday and Friday).

The annual event saw 345 runners competing in the three events last year and the numbers have doubled this year. The half marathon run is hosted by the Big Game Parks in partnership with the Athletics Eswatini (AE).

Big Game Parks Sales and Marketing Manager Xolani Gama said it's all systems go for the event with the route already cleared inside the Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary.

She said the runners now must come and pick up their goodie bags and race numbers.

"We will be open at Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning before the first race starts. Runners



▲Runners at the start of the #Resolution Run in the 2023 edition.

are encouraged to come for their goodie bags as early as 10 am on Thursday and Friday while on Saturday we will be available as early as 4:30 am," she said.

The 21km will start at 5:30 am with the 10km starting at 6 am and the 5 km will start 10 minutes later. It's E230 for the 21km, E140 for the 10 km and E100 for the 5 km.

"We encourage people to come early on the race day as there is speed limit inside

the Sanctuary. Animals have got the right of way as this is their home. People will enjoy the friendly environment as there are lot of wildlife animals that they will be seeing along the routes," she said.



▲Runners enjoy every part of the race.

Makoti Festival tickets up for grabs in #Resolution Run

WINNERS in the 21 km and 10 km in the #Resolution Run will win the Makoti Festival tickets as part of their prizes.

The run will be held on Saturday at Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary. 23:28 Lounge Owner Thembinkosi Mthethwa confirmed that they were partnering with the Big Games Park in terms of the prizes.

There will also be cash prizes for the winners that have been boosted by Lactalis Eswatini who pumped in E70 000 and E45 000 towards the cash prizes.

The Makoti Festival is set to take place on April 27, 2024, at Malkerns Country Club. The event will feature performances from Maskandi artist Mthandeni SK, Gospel sensation Ntokozo Mbambo, legendary traditional group Lodanda neMalangeni and local music sensation M Nation.

Free Wi-Fi for all from Wanderport Networks

SPONSORS are pouring in for the #Resolution Run as Wanderport Network Eswatini has offered E5 000 which will add to the cash prizes.

Runners will also enjoy free Wi-Fi to be provided by the Wanderport. This was unveiled by Big Game Parks Sales and Marketing Manager Xolani Gama on Wednesday during a press briefing held at 23:28 Lounge in Mbabane.

Wanderport Network Eswatini will also be promoting their E750 per month internet subscription during the event.

She said this will allow the runners to enjoy and share their experiences while enjoying the runes that feature 21km, 10km and 5km.

"We are happy that companies are coming on board in assisting in hosting a successful event. Thanks to all the sponsors and others are still coming through," he said.

Some of the sponsors include Oracle, Lactalis Eswatini, Umbuluzi and Ligcabho Construction among others.



▲(From left to right) 23:28 Lounge Owner Thembinkosi Mthethwa, Big Games Park Sales and Marketing Manager Xolani Gama and Athletics Eswatini (AE) Communications Officer Victor 'Mavikane' Dlamini during the briefing on Wednesday.

Stories by Ntokozo Magongo
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‘Birds’ casualty ‘nest’

... Utility player and captain, Kwakhe Thwala has joined the injury list of Felix Badenhorst, Sandile Hlatshwako, Sifiso Mabila and Mancoba Vilakati. The Capital City giants hope Kwakhe and Sandile will recover in time for their clash against Nsingizini on Sunday.

WITH as many as four players battling different injuries, utility player, Kwakhe Thwals has also joined the growing list of players watching from the sidelines at the Mbabane Swallows camp.

The Capital City giants, however, are hoping and praying that the duo of Thwala and Sandile Hlatshwako, who has missed two games already, will recover in time for the mouth-watering clash against Nsingizini Hotspurs.

The two sides will clash on Sunday in the MTN Premier League game at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium, kick-off at 2:30 pm.

Kwakhe Thwala was injured on Sunday during the semi-final clash against Pigg’s Peak Rangers they won 4-0 while Hlatshwako has been on the sides for the past two weeks after sustaining an injury during the 4-0 win over Madlenya.

Swallows will be without Felix Badenhorst who underwent a successful operation and is on his way to full recovery.

The red and white outfit is also set to welcome the duo of Sifiso Mabila and Mancoba Vilakati for the Nsingizini Hotspurs game. Both players are making tremendous progress with their recoveries.

Swallows Public Relations Officer (PRO) Knowledge Ngwenya confirmed the duo of Hlatshwako and Thwala were yet to make a full comeback at training as they are currently monitored by their medical teams.

“The players are not doing full training, but we are hopeful that by the time we play on Sunday, they will be ready. Our medical team is working hard to ensure the players recover on time,” he said.

Swallows are part of the four teams that qualified for the Ingwenyama Cup semi-finals after their 4-0 win over Pigg’s Peak Rangers on Sunday at Mavuso Sports Centre.



▲ Mbabane Swallows’ Sisolwethu ‘Nunu’ Shabalala celebrating with teammates and technical bench after a win in one of Ingwenyama Cup games.

Ingwenyama Cup semi-final draw on Monday

THE four teams remaining in the Ingwenyama Cup will know their semi-final opponents when the draw is conducted on Monday.

The four remaining teams are three times winners Mbabane Swallows, defending champions Green Mamba, 2019 edition champions Young Buffaloes and two-time losing finalists, Mbabane Highlanders who had played twice in the finals without luck.

The semi-finals will then be played on the weekend of February 24 and 25 at venues yet to be confirmed. Ingwenyama Cup Spokesperson Nkosikhle ‘Makawosi’ Masuku said they were still planning to stage the draw on Monday (February 19).

The four teams reached the semi-finals after conquering the quarterfinals played last weekend.

Green Mamba beat Nsingizini Hotspurs 1-0 with Young Buffaloes winning 2-0 against Madlenya. These games were played on Saturday at Mayaluka Stadium where over 2 000 fans turned up.

Mbabane Highlanders made it through to the semis by the skin of their teeth, beating a hard-fighting Ezulwini United 4-3 after penalties having scored the equalising goal in the last minute of the game. Mba-



▲ Nkhosingphile Masuku conducting Ingwenyama Cup Draw last 8 in this undated photo.

bane Swallows cruised to a 4-0 win over National First Division League side Pigg’s Peak Rangers.

The four teams are now guaranteed E230 000 for reaching the

semi-finals while the runner-up will receive E530 000 with the winners getting E1.4 million and a ticket to represent the country in the CAF Confederation Cup.

‘Malindi’ to step down as Gymnastics President

LINDELWA ‘Malindi’ Dlamini is set to step down as the Eswatini Gymnastics Federation (EGF) President. This comes after he was appointed the African Union Sports Council (AUSC) Senior Sport Officer. Dlamini is set to leave the country and be based in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

He was elected as the EGF President on September 22 taking over from Muriel Hofer. He confirmed on Wednesday that he had to quit his position as President where he had served for one and half years.

“There are still some things I have to finalise before I vacate the office. It’s been a great journey and experience and I’m confident that I will leave the federation in good hands,” he said.

He said he was quitting the position due to his new assignment in Cameroon. Dlamini who also worked at the Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games (EOCGA) is set to leave the country before month’s end for Cameroon.

He resigned as the Marketing Manager at the Premier League



▲ Lindelwa ‘Malindi’ Dlamini is set to step down as the Eswatini Gymnastics Federation President


of Eswatini (PLE) last year in November.

The African Union Sports Council is a specialized Technical Office of the African Union responsible for sports. Its mandate is the coordination of the African Sports Movement and being a forum for concerted action between Member States for the promotion and development of sports and development through sports in Africa.



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Broos will stay
with Bafana**

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**BIRDS’
CASUALTY
‘NEST’**

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