

# Eswatini should be a God-pleasing nation — King

By Bahle Gama

**H**IS Majesty King Mswati III has urged emaSwati to always strive to please God.

Speaking during the 2024 beginning-of-the-year prayer for guidance service held at Mandvulo Hall at Lozitha Royal Residence on Saturday, the King extended appreciation to the Lord for another year of life.

His Majesty was joined in prayer by Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, Emakhosikati, Princes, Princesses, members of the Royal family, dignitaries of different portfolios from within and the outskirts of the Southern African region, and emaSwati.

His Majesty said it gave him joy to see emaSwati attending the service in numbers such that there was an overflow due to the unavailability of space, which he said was all God's grace.

The King said every liSwati needs to position themselves and live to please the Lord to reap the blessings of being faithful to God.

"Our faith in God must increase and rise over all mountains. God must be happy with us and when looking at the Swati nation, He must be pleased with our way of doing things. The Lord is happy with this gathering today (Saturday)," His Majesty said.

The King noted that the prayer was held at the beginning of the year before any national activities kickstarted, which he said was an important thing to do as it positioned the nation to receive more blessings for the year ahead.

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▲ His Majesty King Mswati III speaks during the 2024 beginning-of-the-year prayer for guidance service held at Mandvulo Hall at Lozitha Royal Residence on Saturday.

## Fewer child marriages in Eswatini

By Ncaba Ntshakala

ESWATINI is making great strides in reducing the number of child marriages.

This was contained in the sixth Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6) conducted by the Ministry of Economic Planning and UNICEF. The survey added that while progress is undeniable, the practice persists, highlighting the need for continued efforts to curb child marriages.

There is a significant decrease in early marriage according to the survey, which says that only 2% of women aged 20-24 years were first married or in union before the age of 18, compared to 12% for women aged 45-49 years. And this demonstrates a significant downward trend.

The survey on gender disparity highlights that no men aged 20-24 years were married before 18, highlighting a gender gap in this practice. In rural areas, more women (6%) were married before 18 compared to urban areas (3%). Women with only primary education were three times more likely to be married before 18 than those with higher education.

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## Eswatini and Taiwan celebrate over five decades of fruitful bilateral relations

By Ncaba Ntshakala

ESWATINI and Taiwan have marked over five decades of strong bilateral relations, highlighting the numerous successes achieved in various sectors like economy, trade, public health, agriculture, and ICT.

During a meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Friday, Eswatini's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Pholile Shakantu reaffirmed the country's unwavering support for Taiwan's international participation.

Minister Shakantu's five-day visit to Taiwan served as an opportunity to celebrate the long-standing partnership between the two nations. The Minister's meeting with the President underscored the commitment to continue fostering this mutually beneficial relationship.

Over the past five decades, Eswatini and Taiwan have collaborated on numerous projects that have yielded significant results. These include boosting the economy where Taiwan has been a key player in supporting Eswatini's economic development through investments and trade partnerships.

Also in public health, the Taiwanese have played a crucial role in improving healthcare infrastructure and medical expertise in Eswatini. Taiwan has also shared agricultural practices and technologies, contributing to increased food security and productivity in Eswatini.

Also, the partnership and collaboration have yielded cooperation in technology which has helped bridge the digital gap in Eswatini, promoting greater connectivity and access to information.

Beyond these specific sectors, the partnership between Eswatini and Taiwan extends to cultural, and educational opportunities and capacity-building initiatives.

These multifaceted engagements have fostered a deep sense of friendship and understanding between the two nations' people.

During the meeting, the Minister Shakantu reiterated Eswatini's support for Taiwan's participation in international organizations and on the global stage.

Minister Shakantu is the first foreign minister to visit Taiwan since the nation's presidential and legislative elections on January 13th, as well as the first official from the Kingdom of Eswatini's new Cabinet, which was sworn in November last year.

The Minister further congratulated Taiwan on successfully holding peaceful, fair, transparent, and efficient elections last month, adding that the high turnout demonstrated Taiwanese confidence in the electoral system and their commitment to democratic values.

Minister Shakantu applauded Taiwan for its assistance to the Kingdom in healthcare, education, agriculture, and technology, which significantly contributed to the socioeconomic development of Eswatini and the well-being of its people.

"Eswatini firmly supports Taiwan and is strongly committed to upholding the principles of sovereignty, self-determination, and international solidarity," Minister Shakantu said. "Taiwan should be able to participate fully and equally in international society. Eswatini will continue to voice support for the international space Taiwan deserves."

The Minister commended President Tsai for promoting diplomatic relations, trade and human rights despite external pressure, which has earned Taiwan recognition from the world.

President Tsai's tenure has been a source of inspiration for the people of Taiwan and would continue to inspire future generations, she said.

President Tsai thanked Eswatini for its long support for the nation's international participation, including its support at the UN General Assembly and the World Health Assembly.

"With a good bilateral cooperation mechanism, Taiwan and Eswatini have achieved fruitful cooperation results in economy, trade, public health, and information and communications, creating benefits for the people of both sides," Taiwan's Tsai said.

"During my visit to Eswatini in September last year, I witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on funding for female entrepreneurs in Eswatini, a sister city agreement between Kaohsiung and Mbabane, and an MOU on building oil reserve facilities in Eswatini, which all helped enhance the friendship between our two countries."

President Tsai hoped that the delegation would gain a deeper understanding of Taiwan through the visit and wished to see the two sides continue to deepen their partnership in various fields.

The five-decade milestone serves as a testament to the enduring strength of the relationship between Eswatini and Taiwan. As both nations look towards the future, they highlighted that they are committed to further deepening their ties and achieving shared goals for prosperity and development.



▲ Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Pholile Shakantu smiles during their discussions with Taiwan President Tsai Ing Wen.

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# ALL EYES ON THE THRONE AS ...

## Nation awaits King Mswati III's Speech during first session of Parliament

By Ncaba Ntshakala

This coming week all eyes will be on His Majesty King Swati III who will deliver the annual speech from the Throne, during the opening of the first session of the 12th Parliament where he is expected to outline the government's agenda for the year.

Some emaSwati are of the view that this year will be much about the historic Sibaya People's Parliament in November where the King commissioned the new government based on public deliberations.

Last year's address focused on economic achievements, social stability and a call for national unity.

The traditions surrounding the State Opening and delivery of a speech by the Monarch can be traced back to the British model of Westminster Government, which predated from as early as the 16th century.

Eswatini, like most Commonwealth Countries, inherited this tradition from their British Colonial Masters when the Country was still under colonial rule. On Independence Day, the 6th of September 1968, His Majesty King Sobhuza II, delivered the first Speech from the Throne in Parliament (Official State

Opening Address).

The State Opening marks the start of a parliamentary year, which is usually referred to as a Session. The Constitution provides that 'there shall be a Session of Parliament at least once in every year.

The Procedure of the State Opening Address is largely provided by the Standing Orders of both Houses of Parliament. House of Assembly Standing Order 14 provides for the announcement of the time of His Majesty's Address.

Standing Order 15 provides for the reporting of the Opening Address. The State Opening is when His Majesty reads the Speech from the Throne, which sets out the Government's agenda and key legislative plans.

The Speech from the Throne could be considered one of the many factors which influence government policy which could be aligned with any national development strategy or plan bestowed upon the responsibility of Cabinet by the Constitution.

### 2024 key areas of interest

Economic Outlook: With global economic uncertainties, emaSwati are keen to hear the King's perspective on domestic economic challenges and the government's plans for growth.

Implementation of Sibaya resolutions: Will His Majesty the King provide detailed specifics

on how the government will address issues raised by the people at Sibaya and the full implementation of Sibaya policy guidelines?

Social Issues: What will the speech highlight about ongoing social concerns like youth unemployment, education, and healthcare?

Dialogue and Unity: EmaSwati are eagerly waiting for His Majesty's guidance and call to peace, unity, and harmony in the Kingdom as the nation makes strides towards development and first-world status.

### Action

While the Speech from the Throne sets the official agenda, its true impact lies in the government's ability to translate words into action. As His Majesty said during Sibaya, calling on the government to be visible and be on the ground with the people. EmaSwati likewise will observe how effectively the government tackles raised issues and implements the Kingdom's aspirations articulated at Sibaya.

This year's Speech from the Throne carries added weight. Following a challenging year and heightened public engagement, the King's address will bring more clarity, direction, and commitment towards development and addressing the concerns of the nation. As Eswatini embarks on a new chapter, the King's words will undoubtedly shape the course of the year and influence the hopes and aspirations of emaSwati.

## Fewer child marriages in Eswatini



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Ntombi Mncwango of Siphila Sonkhe Sibomake, an organisation that champions women and girls' rights in Eswatini said the declining rate of early marriage is encouraging news, indicating progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5.3, which aims to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child marriage, by 2030.

Mncwango said that as an organisation, they wish that there could be legislation that will be adopted to curb such as she believes that it violates young girls' rights.

Child marriage, defined as the formal or informal union of a child under the age of 18, remains a widespread human rights violation across Africa, despite ongoing efforts to eradicate it. While some countries have shown significant progress, others continue to grapple with high prevalence rates, jeopardising the health, education, and overall well-being of millions of girls.

While child marriage persists throughout the continent, its prevalence varies significantly by region. Central and Eastern Africa currently hold the highest rates globally, with nine out of ten countries with the highest child marriage prevalence located there. Niger, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, and Mozambique top the list, with over 60% of young women aged 20-24 married before 18.

Poverty, gender inequality, and harmful traditional practices are deeply intertwined with child marriage in Africa. In impoverished communities, families may view marrying off their daughters as an economic strategy, reducing financial strain and increasing perceived social standing. Additionally, deeply ingrained beliefs about girls' role in society and traditional practices like bride price contribute to the normalization of child marriage.

UNICEF says despite a steady decline in this harmful practice over the past decade, child marriage remains widespread, with approximately one in five girls married in childhood across the globe.

"Today, multiple crises – including conflict, climate shocks and the ongoing fallout from Covid-19 – are threatening to reverse progress towards eliminating this human rights violation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for global action to end child marriage by 2030."

Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one-sixth that among girls.

"Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their well-being. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain

in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers, which are eventually passed down to their own children, straining a country's capacity to provide quality health and education services," UNICEF says.

Child brides often become pregnant during adolescence, when the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth increases. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends, taking a heavy toll on their mental health.

The consequences of child marriage are far-reaching and devastating for girls. It disrupts their education, limiting their opportunities and future prospects. Early marriage and childbearing significantly increase health risks, including complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, child brides are more vulnerable to domestic violence and exploitation, jeopardizing their physical and emotional well-being.

Despite the challenges, several African countries have demonstrated remarkable progress in reducing child marriage through legislative reforms, community awareness campaigns, and educational initiatives. Countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, and Tanzania have seen significant declines in prevalence rates, showcasing the effectiveness of comprehensive multi-pronged approaches.



Her Majesty the Indlovukazi sings during praise and worship.



## Eswatini should be a God-pleasing nation — King

Continued from Page 1

His Majesty said before the service, he prayed, and the Holy Spirit guided the word he was to share with the congregation. The King highlighted that making it to 2024 was God's grace and said every liSwati must give thanks to the Lord for the miracles and blessings received, as well as all that which had survived in the previous years.

"There is a lot to gain from the Lord and as a nation we must stick to God for if we part from Him, we risk losing all the blessings that await us as a nation. We must Worship God for those who do so are always blessed. To be blessed, we must be strong in prayer and grow our faith in the Lord," His Majesty said.

The King said emaSwati needed to create a lot of time with God, ensure to interact, and build a strong and deep relationship with the Almighty. Adding that even in moments when the Lord does not answer prayers instantly, none should lose faith and reduce their momentum but should persevere.

By doing so, God will bless emaSwati, only if they remain faithful and desperate for the Almighty and seek Him deeply in their hearts. The King said for that to happen, emaSwati should make it a habit to go to church and allow themselves to be fed with the word of God and grow in the spirit.

The King advised the nation to refrain from going to church to fill up seats or appease their pastors but instead should do so because they seek God and in return will receive blessings.

"If we lose sight and faith in God, a lot will go wrong. As many as we are, just like the Israelites, some lost faith in God and did not make it to the promised land. If you are a child of God, it is imperative that you follow His ways always," the King said.

His Majesty said it was important for emaSwati not to lose faith in God and prevent situations where the flesh takes over and jeopardises one's relationship with God, adding that he would be proud of the nation if they would position themselves with the Lord.

The King went on to make an example with Jonah who did not heed an instruction from the Lord and ended up in a predicament. His majesty cited that what he liked about Jonah was that even though he had conflicting ideas, upon hearing the word of God, he straightened up and continued his path as directed, which he said applies to emaSwati. They must ensure they align with God and not lose sight of God's word for them.

"I pray that the entire Swati nation may love, seek and do everything as expected by God and avoid all that displeases God. And for that to happen, we must stay away from that which displeases God. When we leave here we should depart a changed nation that has felt God and with a visible faith," His Majesty said.

The King further prayed that God touch every liSwati who is sickly at home and further extended appreciation for the gifts presented to him at the service.

The King also promised to tell the nation how it feels to be sung praises by praise singers. The King was responding to a request forwarded to him by the Programme Director Reverend Nhlahlhla Hlatjwako, who asked him



to share how he felt when praise singers sang his praises.

Hlatjwako's request was referenced to how King David of the Israelites in the bible felt when he was praised, and with a smile, he requested His Majesty to share his feelings, the same as King David had done.

This was an unexpected request, leaving everyone in awe and stitches including Their Majesties who were following the sermons that were being rendered by the different religious leaders who had been tasked with the role on the day.

Before delving into his sermon, His Majesty highlighted that Hlatjwako's request had been heard and would indeed be responded to, leaving the room in stitches.

"I am unable to tend to the request at the moment because I have not prepared myself for this question. For the past three months, I have been enclosed in a building where I could neither speak nor do anything. Therefore, I will have to find another moment to respond to this request," His Majesty said.

The King said as he continued to listen to the sermons, he noted that those who were preaching had the opportunity to go to church. However, even though he could not go to church, he knew emaSwati would be safe as long as they continued to seek God's presence.

### Country in need of truthful prophets — Indlovukazi

Her Majesty the Indlovukazi emphasised that Eswatini is lacking in truthful prophets and issued a stern warning to Christians to refrain from telling lies.

Her Majesty said that lies were becoming

the order of the day in churches and the entire nation. Preaching during the service, the Indlovukazi said prophets in the world and Eswatini were prone to talking and making false prophecies which they failed to follow up on.

To curb such, Her Majesty recommended that prophets must communicate with God for a clear direction thus allowing the nation to prosper.

Her Majesty referenced an Assyrian King who wanted to destroy the Israelites. However, this was not a possibility, because they had Prophet Elisha who was in constant communication with God. When an army of Assyria went to attack, they could not because, through Elisha, God had warned the King of Israel what to do to avoid the onslaught.

The Indlovukazi said the Assyrian King suspected that someone among them had sneaked to inform the Israelites' King that the Assyrians wanted to destroy him.

However, the Assyrian generals were trustworthy and did not inform anyone about their plan. They realized that Elisha had known about the plans and decided to attack him as well.

To their unfortunate luck, the Assyrian generals could not succeed because they dealt with Elisha, a prophet who was in constant communication with God.

Her Majesty asked for prophets to be truthfully communicated with God so that the country could be saved.

"As a country, we need prophets that are in alignment and in direct communication with God for the nation to thrive through all situations," Her Majesty said.

By Karabo Ngoepe  
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# Emaswati come in large numbers for prayer service led by the King

... His Majesty said it gave him joy to see emaswati attending the service in numbers such that there was an overflow due to the unavailability of space, which he said was all God's grace.

**H**UNDREDS of emaswati attended the prayer service led by His Majesty King Mswati III at Mandvulo Hall at Lozitha Royal Residence on Saturday, to kick start national events for the rest of the year.

People from all walks of life and denominations attended the sermon where His Majesty called upon the nation to put its faith in God and live by His Word.

His Majesty was joined in prayer by Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, Emakhosikati, Princes, Princesses, members of the Royal family, dignitaries of different portfolios from within and from the Southern African region and emaswati.

His Majesty said it gave him joy to see emaswati attending the service in numbers such that there was an overflow due to the unavailability of space, which he said was all God's grace.



▲ His Majesty King Mswati III has called upon Emaswati to embrace a life of faith and devotion. During the open year prayer at Mandvulo Grand Hall, the King emphasized the importance of knowing, respecting, and living with God, urging the nation to align their actions with the will of the divine.



▲ Her Majesty the Indlovukazi sharing the Word to congregants.



▲ His Excellency the right Honourable Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini shared an inspiring message, emphasizing the significance of coming together in prayer.



▲ The Royal family (Sigodlo) following the sermon.



▲ Pastors and members of the Royal family following the sermon.



▲ Members of the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe) were also present.



▲ Dignitaries from different portfolios during the national prayer at Mandvulo Grand Hall.



▲ Dignitaries following proceedings.

By Ncaba Ntshakala

THE Southern African Development Community (SADC) is stepping up efforts to tackle a Cholera outbreak in the region and member states met on Friday to map a way forward.

Eswatini Prime Minister Russell Dlamini, on behalf of His Majesty King Mswati III and the Eswatini nation, participated in the virtual Extraordinary Summit on the Cholera Outbreak.

The Summit focused on coordinating regional efforts to combat the ongoing outbreak that has affected several member states.

During the Summit, the Prime Minister highlighted Eswatini's successful interventions in containing the cholera outbreak. While the country reported only two cases in 2023, the Prime Minister recognised the continued risk and emphasised the importance of a regional approach.

Eswatini and SADC expressed their deepest condolences to member states that have suffered fatalities due to the outbreak, including the tragic loss of a Swati student in Zambia. Additionally, the country voiced its concern regarding the slow implementation of proposed interventions and recommendations to address the global health emergency.

As a member state, Eswatini congratulated Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema on his appointment as the regional cholera champion tasked with spearheading the fight against the disease. This appointment underscores the crucial role Zambia will play in leading the collective effort.

The cholera outbreak in Zambia declared in Lusaka in October 2023, has escalated into a critical public health emergency, with the epidemic now affecting all ten of the nation's provinces and urgently demanding an integrated response.

The alarming spread has resulted in 62 districts grappling with the outbreak, leading to 14 900 reported cases and 560 deaths, translating to a case fatality rate of 3.8%.

Zambia has asserted that this situation calls for an immediate, multidisciplinary strategy that includes rigorous surveillance, effective case management, and ensuring access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), complemented by robust community education efforts.

To combat and control cholera, it is critical for partners and donors to unite in a coordinated effort, emphasizing WASH interventions tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Such measures must incorporate the reinforcement of water treatment, regular testing for water safety, promotion of better hygiene and sanitation practices, fortifying infection prevention and control in medical settings, and ensuring safe burial practices.

Since last year, five SADC countries have reported cholera outbreaks, accounting for 73% of all the cases recorded in Africa: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania.

In January this year, the SADC Council of Ministers convened virtually to discuss measures to prevent and control cholera.

The Council of Ministers received a report of the meeting of the SADC Ministers of Health held on Janu-

# Eswatini joins SADC efforts to combat cholera outbreak in the region

ary 27 on the cholera situation in some member states, and the preparedness of and response to cholera outbreaks in the region.

Angola's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Tete Antonio and Chairperson of the SADC Council of Ministers emphasised the necessity of consolidating regional efforts in combating cholera and other climate-related diseases.

He emphasised the need for the region to collectively take comprehensive and coordinated action guided by the expertise of health professionals and cooperating partners such as the Africa CDC, World Health Organisation, UNICEF, and World Food Programme.

"In light of this situation, it is imperative that we respond to this challenge as a united region since no single country can combat a disease like cholera that transcends borders," he stated.

The Summit endorsed the following recommendations of the Ministers of Health on measures to be put in place by the SADC region in addressing the Cholera outbreak, urging Member States to:

1. develop and implement multi sectoral cholera response plans that encompass natural disasters and climatic effects on cholera reemergence to effectively control its spread;
2. strengthen regional collaboration on cross-border outbreak risk assessment and public health surveillance to enhance early detection and prevention of outbreak-prone diseases;
3. jointly plan and implement synchronised cross-border vaccination campaigns against Cholera, if necessary, and mobilise vaccines for affected and non-affected countries at risk, and report annually to the Council;
4. increase investment in the current cholera emergency response while maintaining long-term investment for a sustainable solution to the recurrent cholera crisis;
5. develop and implement climate-resilient Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Disaster Risk Reduction programmes to prevent future cholera outbreaks;
6. accelerate local and regional manufacturing of cholera vaccines to scale up production and increase access to commodities such as Oral Rehydration Solutions (ORS), and cholera beds, to improve control on the supply chain security and accelerate technology and knowledge transfer;
7. increase investment in WASH infrastructure, and provide efficient waste management and sustainable supply of clean water;
8. increase budget allocation towards WASH programmes; and
9. Strengthen accountability tools for monitoring WASH interventions and local governments reporting on their WASH performance annually.



▲ Eswatini Prime Minister Russell Dlamini, on behalf of His Majesty King Mswati III and the Eswatini nation, participated in the virtual Extraordinary Summit on the Cholera Outbreak



▲ THE Southern African Development Community (SADC) has designated His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, as the regional Champion to spearhead the fight against the ongoing cholera outbreak in the region.

## Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema is SADC's new regional cholera champion

By Ncaba Ntshakala

THE Southern African Development Community (SADC) has designated His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, as the regional Champion to spearhead the fight against the ongoing cholera outbreak in the region.

This announcement came during the recent Extraordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government convened by the Chairperson, H.E. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola.

President Hichilema's appointment acknowledges Zambia's proactive efforts in managing its own cholera outbreak and its commitment to regional collaboration. As Champion, he will coordinate regional efforts.

He will facilitate communication and collaboration between member states, ensuring a unified approach to combating cholera. Moreover, the President will advocate for resources and mobilise regional and international resources to support countries affected by the outbreak.

The Zambian President will also promote best practices and share successful strategies and interventions from across the region to maximize their impact. Raise awareness: Advocate for public health education and awareness campaigns to promote preventive measures.

The SADC summit also extended its appreciation to President Lourenço of Angola for his leadership in convening the extraordinary summit. This timely gathering allowed member states to share experiences, assess the regional situation, and develop a more coordinated response to the cholera crisis.

## International tourism numbers soar in 2023 – Minister De Lille

Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille has expressed delight at the impressive number of travelers coming to South Africa from the African continent and has highlighted the strategic decisions that contributed to the growth in specific markets.

Bumper tourism figures

This comes after Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) said from January to December 2023, South Africa recorded an increase in the number of international arrivals which underscored the rising momentum of South Africa's tourism sector.

According to Stats SA, international tourist arrivals from January to December 2023 totalled 8.5 million, representing a remarkable 48.9 per cent increase when compared with the same period in 2022.

Visitor numbers from other African countries soar

South Africa welcomed 6.4 million visitors from the rest of the African continent between January and December 2023, marking a significant 75.6 per cent of all arrivals.

Zimbabwe and Kenya stood out for their remarkable growth, with Zimbabwe experiencing a 70.8 per cent increase in tourist arrivals to South Africa when compared to 2022, totalling 2.1 million arrivals, while Kenya recorded a 99 per cent surge when compared to 2022, reaching 42 403 arrivals for January to December 2023.

"Kenya's remarkable performance can be attributed to the strategic decision by government to simplify the visa regime in 2023 as well as targeted and effective insights-driven marketing campaigns," de Lille said.

"This recovery can be attributed to consistent efforts to showcase South Africa as a welcoming, responsible tourism destination, highlighting experiences that align with intrepid, green economy conscious travellers," the Minister said.

Tourist arrivals from the Americas registered at 455 901 reflecting a 39.8 per cent growth compared to the same period in 2022.

The United States of America saw 353 975 arrivals to South Africa, marking a 35 per cent increase compared to 2022.

Strength in European markets

From January to December 2023, South Africa saw 1.2 million tourist arrivals from Europe, a 38.2 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2022.

The United Kingdom remains the top European source market with 356 160 tourists choosing South Africa, marking a 25.8 per cent growth compared to 2022.

Germany experienced a 41.6 per cent increase in arrivals compared to 2022, amounting to 245 259 tourists.

This was followed by the Netherlands which saw an increase of 45.5 per cent when compared to 2022, amounting to 131 371 tourist arrivals between January and December 2023.

Russia exhibited a dramatic growth of 74.7 per cent when compared to 2022, contributing 28 357 arrivals in 2023

Noteworthy growth from the Asian markets

Asian markets also showed significant growth with a total 199 308 arrivals from the region, representing an astounding 69.1 per cent when compared to the same period in 2022.

South Africa welcomed 79 774 tourists from India, a 43.7 per cent growth compared to 2022

Notably, there were 37 164 arrivals from China, a massive 204.9 per cent surge in 2023 when compared to 2022

Robust gains in the Middle East



▲ SA Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille.

The Middle East saw a robust increase with 54 339 arrivals in the January to December 2023 period – a 33.7 per cent growth when compared to the same period in 2022. South Africa received 16 351 arrivals from Saudi Arabia in 2023, marking an increase of 42.6 per cent when compared to 2022. The United Arab Emirates saw 6 511 arrivals to South Africa, a remarkable 110 per cent increase when compared to 2022.

The Minister emphasised the charm and magnetism of South

Africa as a tourism destination, with specific mention of the reopening of the Chinese market and the resumption of direct flight routes in 2023.

Looking ahead, de Lille said there was a need to unlock barriers such as visa regulations and limited air access and airlift for sustained growth. The Minister expressed commitment to working with partners and government colleagues to facilitate policy and regulation revisions. (Sunday World)

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has launched a \$10 million global grant program aimed at nonprofits that are developing projects that support the growth of an open and globally interoperable Internet.

ICANN is a nonprofit organization that coordinates the Domain Name System (DNS), and the grant program is focused on supporting projects fostering an inclusive and transparent approach to developing stable, easy-to-use, secure Internet infrastructure offerings that support the Internet's unique identifier systems.

This will be the first phase cycle of grants that will distribute a total of \$210 million over time.

"With the rapid evolution of emerging technologies, businesses and security models, it is critical that the Internet's unique identifier systems continue to evolve," Sally Costerton, ICANN's interim president and CEO, said about the program.

"The ICANN Grant Program offers a new avenue to further those efforts by investing in projects that are committed to and support ICANN's vision of a single, open and globally interoperable Internet that fosters inclusion amongst a broad, global community of users," she added.

Internet connectivity continues to increase worldwide, particularly in developing countries like those in Africa, but millions still remain offline.

The GSMA's latest Mobile Economy Sub-Saharan Africa Report found that in 2022, sub-Saharan Africa had around 287 million mobile Internet subscribers but 680 million Africans are still not online.

Applicants for the ICANN grant in developing markets need to be charitable organizations with projects that run for a maximum of 24 months. The types of initiatives that the program will fund include those: benefitting the development, distribution and evolution of the services and systems that support the Internet's unique identifier systems; providing capacity development; advancing developments, innovation and open standards for the benefit of the Internet community; and contributing to diversity, participation and inclusion across stakeholder communities and geographic regions.

Applicants can apply for grants of between \$50,000 and \$500,000 but will be subject to admissibility and eligibility checks by ICANN.

The application cycle for the first \$10 million in grants will open in March 2024. ICANN will begin accepting grant applications on March 25, 2024, and applications close on May 24, 2024.

African digital finance projects ICANN joins

# ICANN launches \$10M grant program for Internet innovators



## domain registry process

a list of companies and institutions providing grants and financing for digital transformation projects in Africa. In May 2023, the African Engineering and Technology Network (Afretec) awarded US\$3.3 million in grants to university research teams to advance digital technologies across the continent.

In April 2023, The World Bank Group approved finance deals worth \$390 million for Kenya and \$150 million for Senegal to advance both countries' digital transformation projects and to expand access to high-speed Internet.

In March 2023, the African Development Bank, Nigeria's government and other partners launched a \$618 million fund aimed at supporting tech and creative sectors for young people in Nigeria to spur the growth of innovation on the continent.

On the startup front, seed investor Flat6Labs in March 2023 announced the launch of a \$95 million seed fund aimed at nurturing the growth and development of early-stage tech startups in Africa. All of these finance projects are good news for the sector because this week Disrupt Africa's African Tech Startups Funding Report 2023 showed that investment into tech startups dropped by almost 28% year-over-year to US\$2.4 billion in 2023.

The article first appeared on Connecting Africa

## Vision Pro headset is Apple's next Mac and TV combined

APPLE'S Vision Pro could upend how people watch television at home and how they use computers at work, potentially positioning the headset to be a successor to both traditional television and the Mac.

The \$3,500 headset, which blends three-dimensional digital content with a view of the outside world, landed in the company's physical U.S. stores on Friday. It enters a market crowded with lower-cost rivals from Meta Platforms HTC and others that have mostly been confined to the video game market and failed to find a mass audience.

Apple has had mixed results courting developers. Netflix, one of the most popular consumer video apps, said late Friday it is not making a new app for the Vision Pro, though consumers can watch movies and series on the device's web browser.

YouTube, which could not immediately be reached for comment, said in a Bloomberg report that it is not planning to launch a new app for the device but consumers can instead use the Safari web browser. The music streaming service, Spotify, also has not developed an app for the product's launch, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The pricey device comes with custom computing chips and difficult-to-manufacture displays that rivals lack. Analysts who have tried the headset say these features could make the device a threat to almost every large two-dimensional screen at home or work.

Walt Disney has quietly worked with Apple for years on an app for the Vision Pro's launch, the latest in a history of collaboration between the two companies.

"When we saw this, it became evident it was a new canvas for how we can tell stories in a way that hasn't been done before," said Aaron LaBerge, chief technology officer of Disney Entertainment. "And so it became pretty obvious that we wanted to do something here just as a way to stretch ourselves."

The Disney+ app envelops movie viewers in one of four environments, so they can watch "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," from the seat of a fictional X-34 land speeder craft on the planet of Tatooine, like a futuristic drive-in movie theater, or catch "Avengers: Endgame" from inside Avengers Tower in midtown Manhattan. Viewers can also watch 42 Disney films in 3D, including box office hits "Avatar: The Way of Water," "Black Panther" and "Inside Out."

Jamie Voris, chief technology officer at Walt Disney Studios, said filmmakers such as "The Lion King" director Jon Favreau and James Cameron of "Avatar" are interested in telling stories in new ways. Disney will



soon introduce an experience it teased in a clip screened at Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference last June, in which consumers interact with its Marvel Studios animated anthology series, "What If?"

The device also opens new ways to experience live sporting events or theme park rides, LaBerge said.

"It speaks really well to what we do best, which is bring our characters and stories into the real world and bring you closer to the people that you care about," said Voris.

It's not clear that a mixed-reality device

vice was what late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs had in mind when he confided to biographer Walter Isaacson that, in developing a next-generation television, "I finally cracked it." But to analysts like Ben Bajarin of Creative Strategies, the Vision Pro seemed like it fulfilled that long-ago promise.

"I don't know if this is what Jobs meant when he said 'I cracked TV,'" said Bajarin. "But the platform element is what makes it more interesting than if they launched a TV. It can be productivity. It can be social. ... It could become a much bigger deal and a much bigger opportunity than if it were just a TV."

To be sure, the pricey Vision Pro will not be a quick best-seller. In a note to investors, Bernstein analyst Toni Sacconaghi said Apple has told its supply chain to expect to build only 1 million units - and even that might be Apple preparing excess capacity ahead of consumer demand.

Apple's approach "suggests a lack of confidence that consumers will feel compelled to buy immediately without needing to be convinced by in-store demos," Sacconaghi wrote.


However, the high price presents less of a barrier to business purchasers.

Jay Wright, chief executive of Campfire, a startup that makes software for using headsets to collaborate remotely on three-dimensional files such as engine designs, noted that the original Mac computer in 1984 cost the equivalent of nearly \$7,500 today. However small businesses flocked to the Mac for its ability to create and print documents and brochures.

"It's important to recognize this is not a consumer accessory device, like Apple Watch. This is a whole new computing platform," Wright said. "I'm of the opinion that this is more like what comes after the Mac than what comes after the iPhone."

(Reuters)

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# CIC urges minister to prioritise local businesses in budget

By Silindzelwe Nxumalo

AS the country prepares to listen to the budget speech that will be delivered by the finance minister, Neal Rijkenbrg, different sectors are calling on him to ensure local businesses thrive.

Representing one of the biggest sectors in the country, the Construction Industry Council (CIC) says they hope for a budget that is targeted at the economic empowerment of local consultants, contractors, and building material suppliers which will ensure money is circulated in the local economy and thus stimulate job creation.

CIC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Maghawe Mnisi said in the year 2024, they would like to see projects that will ensure increased participation of SMMEs.

Mnisi said this year, priority will need to be given to refurbishment and maintenance of existing public infrastructure to ensure the effective management of Government assets, and this will ensure the continued generation of jobs.

Mnisi said there were big government projects anticipated by the industry that will boost the economy at large including the ongoing Mpakeni Dam by Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE), the commencement of the Phuzumoya Strategic Oil Reserve by Eswatini National Petroleum Company (ENPC), and the 12MW Lower Magudzuza Hydro Power Scheme by Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC).

The CEO said in 2023, the construction industry observed tenders being awarded through public, private, parastatals, and municipalities, and during this period, there were projects with a huge economic impact awarded to different contractors.

He stated that the project owners were but not limited to Eswatini Water and Agricultural

Development Enterprise (EWADE) for the Mpakeni Dam, Eswatini Water Services Corporation (ESWSC) for multiple projects that also involved alteration and additions; First National Bank (FNB) for their Head Quarter, Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM) for their Head Quarter, Matsapha Lifestyle; Pigg's Peak Mall; the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MOPWT), the Ministry of Economic Development (MEPD) for multiple projects under microprojects, Royal Eswatini Sugar (RES) Corporation and UBOMBO Sugar.

Mnisi explained that on their turnaround plan, the Council continuously engages the government on the importance of ensuring that the construction budget allocation is sufficient to have a knock-on effect on economic growth, job creation, income generation, and economic development.

"We are looking forward to His Majesty the King's speech on National priority areas for construction activity during the opening of Parliament and the Minister of Finance on the government's budget allocation for the sector," he said.

He stated that they were hopeful of a significant budget allocation for construction activity which will have spillover effects on the country's socio-economic landscape.

Furthermore, the CEO said during the year 2023, CIC registered about 1 591 contractors compared to the previous year's 1 512 contractors and 1 480 in 2021.

"According to CIC's contractor and project registration records, there have been a number of tenders which has led to the creation of employment which depicted that either existing contractors were seeking continuity within the construction business space or potential contractors were encouraged to venture into the space," he said.

Adding that they noted that the registration of contractors in the third quarter decreased from its peak which is the first quarter of every year that is normally the official registration period.

"Of the 1 591 registered contractors (which includes 1395 contractors, and the rest being consultants and manufacturing and suppliers of construction material combined), there were 755 contractors either under the building, civil, mechanical, electrical or specialized works who registered for projects," he said.

On a quarter-to-quarter review, the first quarter for 2023 (April-June) had several projects allocated mostly under general civil and building works which are still ongoing, Mnisi said.

He explained that of the projects awarded, 45% and 44% of the contract sum were awarded to civil and building works, respectively, while all other categories were awarded much smaller contract sums of nearly 3% or less.

He said the general mechanical workers, electrical specialists, manufacturers or suppliers, joint ventures, allied professionals, and individual artisans were awarded the remainder of the contract sum.



▲ Construction Industry Council Chief Executive Officer Maghawe Mnisi.

"However, the second quarter (July-Sept) was dominated by works done by foreign contractors occupying about 73% of the overall projects' contract sums," he said.

The main projects awarded to foreign companies during the second quarter were the

construction of the multi-billion Mpakeni Dam and associated works that included the main access road which were all EWADE's projects.

Moreover, for the year 2023, a positive trend was observed for the construction industry,

with growth in contractor registrations and active contractor participation projects, he said.

"However, a more comprehensive analysis done through CIC's Industry Performance 2022/23 Report, considering other economic indicators and potential challenges, provides a clearer picture of the overall status of the construction sector in the country," he said.

He explained that the construction growth rate is informed by the importation of raw materials which is mainly used to gauge private activity and actual activity is monitored through government spending on capital projects; all of which saw an increase.

"According to the Central Statistics Office, construction activities were estimated to have increased by 4 per cent relative to the 17.9% that was anticipated in September 2023, the 4 per cent was an improvement even though not as weighty as it was projected to be, and the slowdown was largely attributed to a slow implementation rate on standing projects and delays in the commencement of new mega projects like MNWAP," he said.

Mnisi added that the increase in the number of registered contractors from 2021 to 2023 (1,480 to 1,591) alone, suggests growth and interest in the construction industry, and the rise in potential contractors entering the space suggests that the construction industry is perceived as viable and lucrative.

He said the construction industry is often considered a leading indicator of economic growth. Increased activity in construction can stimulate other sectors, such as manufacturing and services, leading to overall economic growth.



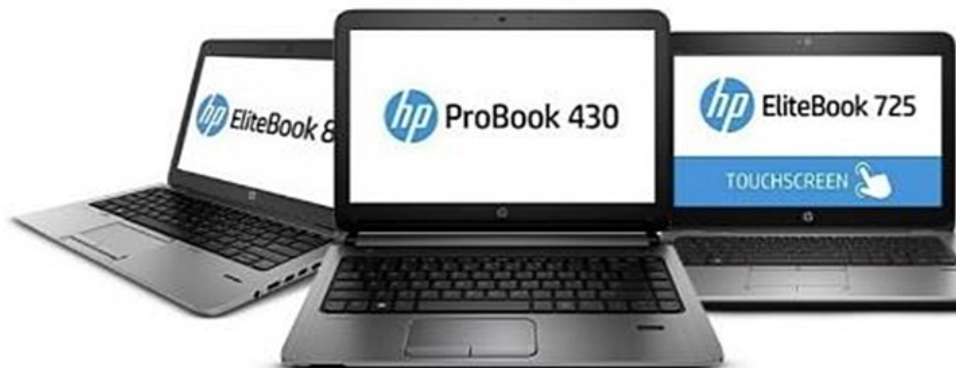
▲ Mnisi said there were big government projects anticipated by the industry that will boost the economy at large including the ongoing Mpakeni Dam by Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise.

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# Western miners lag as oil powers enter race for Africa's critical metals

By Felix Njini and Clara Denina

JOHANNESBURG/LONDON - Risk aversion is likely to leave major Western miners lagging in a race to tap Africa's reserves of critical raw materials that has gathered pace now that Middle Eastern oil powers have begun to emulate China's years of investment on the continent.

Attracting the capital needed to advance copper, cobalt, nickel and lithium projects in Africa will be high on the agenda when executives, bankers and government officials gather in Cape Town, South Africa, for the annual African Mining Indaba beginning on Monday.

For the big listed mining companies, the problem is convincing board members anxious to keep shareholders' onside, an issue China and the state-backed funds from the Middle East with a mandate to diversify from oil and gas do not face.

Major mining companies' mergers and acquisitions teams have been busy negotiating in countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, the world's top cobalt supplier, and third biggest source of copper. Potential deals in the country, however, are being held up in the boardrooms of Rio Tinto and BHP Group, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The sources said boards were mindful of the shareholder focus on ESG (environmental, social and governance) concerns and past scandals in countries viewed as high risk.

The reserves of a country such as Congo, however necessary for the transition to cleaner energy, have to be weighed against political strife, the danger of corruption and a lack of vital infrastructure.

Rio Tinto and BHP have held informal talks with Ivanhoe Mines to explore partnerships in the Canada-listed miner's Western Foreland project in Congo, one of the world's richest copper deposits, the sources said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly on the issue.

Anglo-American has also sought projects in Congo, showing interest in Eurasian Resources Group (ERG) assets in the country, a third source said, adding a potential deal might have foundered as the company tries to control costs.

Rio, BHP and Anglo declined to comment.

"Any mining company knows that it will face tough questions from shareholders if it makes a move into the DRC," Patrick Edmond, Managing Consultant for Africa at advisory firm J.S. Held, said.

"The majors especially will need to think very carefully about how to answer investors' questions, and how to build strategies to succeed in the DRC in a way where the rewards for shareholders outweigh the risks."

Other African countries also have challenges that alarm many investors.

After a wait of almost three decades, Rio Tinto has begun advancing

the giant Simandou iron ore project in Guinea. It almost walked away from the deposit in 2016, citing the risk of operating in the West African country.

Together with BHP and Anglo, Rio also backs smaller explorers in Angola, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia, but the majors have avoided bigger deals.

## RISE IN COSTS

The costs of gaining a stake are being inflated by an increased appetite for critical minerals needed for the transition to a greener economy, of which Africa's Copperbelt, stretching from southern Congo and Zambia to Botswana, has an abundance.

Oil powers Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are among those most able to take risks. For Western companies, the hunt for assets is complicated by emerging challenges in jurisdictions previously seen as safer.

Copper and lithium mining projects in Latin America, for example, are threatened by factors including adverse weather conditions, a lack of water, poor ore grades and regulatory challenges that have sometimes forced existing mines to close.

Chinese miners, meanwhile, have strengthened their hold in Congo and are broadening investment throughout Africa. Late last year, state-backed MMG agreed to spend \$1.9 billion to buy the Khoemacau copper mine in Botswana.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia "is a neutral player with a big wallet," and together with the UAE "could potentially be a source of funding for Africa," Ivanhoe CEO Marna Cloete told Reuters. China's Zijin Mining has a 39.6% stake in Ivanhoe's Kamoa-Kakula copper mine.

Ivanhoe, founded by billionaire Robert Friedland, said in December investors interested in helping advance its Western Foreland project range from "major international corporations to sovereign wealth funds".

Saudi Arabia's mining company Ma'aden last year formed a joint venture with Ivanhoe Electric for mining projects in Saudi Arabia. It also created a fund set to source iron ore, lithium, copper and nickel abroad.

A unit of Abu Dhabi's giant International Holding Company (IHC) agreed to invest \$1.1 billion in Zambia's Mopani Copper Mines in return for a 51% stake.

"It behoves us to take advantage of our natural competitive advantages to try and knit together a mineral strategy that stretches from Asia to the tip of Southern Africa," Robert Wilt, Chief Executive Officer of Ma'aden, told Reuters. (Reuters)



▲Lithium deposits.

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By Sifiso Sibandze

THE remarkable increase of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) receipts by 11.15% from the E11.7 billion received in the 2022/23 financial year to E13.06 billion strongly suggests that the Minister of Finance Neal Rijkenberg will present a fully funded budget which would be higher than the E26.4 billion presented in 2023 and with a lower deficit.

For the longest time, Eswatini's budget has been funded by four revenue components; SACU receipts, grants from development partners, tax revenue collected by the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) and loans from international lenders.

Compounding the observations that the government will present a budget that will be slightly higher than E26.4 billion is the fact that the ERS is expected to collect over E11 billion for the 2022/23 financial year and grants are expected to be around E18 billion. Combined, the government resource envelope is expected to be above E40 billion, but this does not suggest all the money would be what the government will direct to the national budget.

**Fiscal budget**

When announcing last year's budget, Rijkenberg highlighted that the budget was putting Eswatini on a sustainable economic path, mentioning the country's fiscal deficit (the difference between the revenue that a country earns and its expenditure) which is usually covered by loans).

When reached for comment on Saturday, Rijkenberg evaded questions about anything relating to the budget and pleaded with the Eswatini Sunday "to be patient as all will be revealed in the budget speech."

In 2020/21 our fiscal deficit was 3.6%, in 2021/22 it increased to 6.5%, in 2022/23 it declined to 4.9%. Strikingly, last year's (2022/23) budget had a fiscal deficit of 2.2% of GDP which was a record low.

Over and above the four conventional ways of funding the budget (tax revenue, SACU revenue, grants and loans), in 2022, the government approached the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) to raise money for budget support.

In May 2022, Rijkenberg tabled a Bill in Parliament, seeking authority to raise money in the form of several bonds not exceeding E5 billion, through the bond issuance programme listed with the JSE.

Most recently, the minister told the media that they are expecting to receive about

# Expect Govt to present E26bn fully-funded budget



▲For the longest time, Eswatini's budget has been funded by four revenue components; SACU receipts, grants from development partners, tax revenue collected by the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) and loans from international lenders.



E500 million from the JSE in February, adding that he was hoping that this amount will bring them up to date with payments of government arrears.

He stated that should the country try to accelerate coming out of arrears by accumulating expensive debts, it would result in the country plunging into expensive debts.

He said this was the reason why the government felt that the only way to decrease the country's arrears was through the listing in the JSE where they are hoping to raise E4 billion.

"We plan that the money we will raise in the JSE will settle the country's arrears once and for all to have this problem put behind us," he said.

Rijkenberg added that all that was left was that their pricing in the JSE was correct and not rushed, and all that they would get in February would be able to put the country in a good position to make more and have money available.



## NOTICE

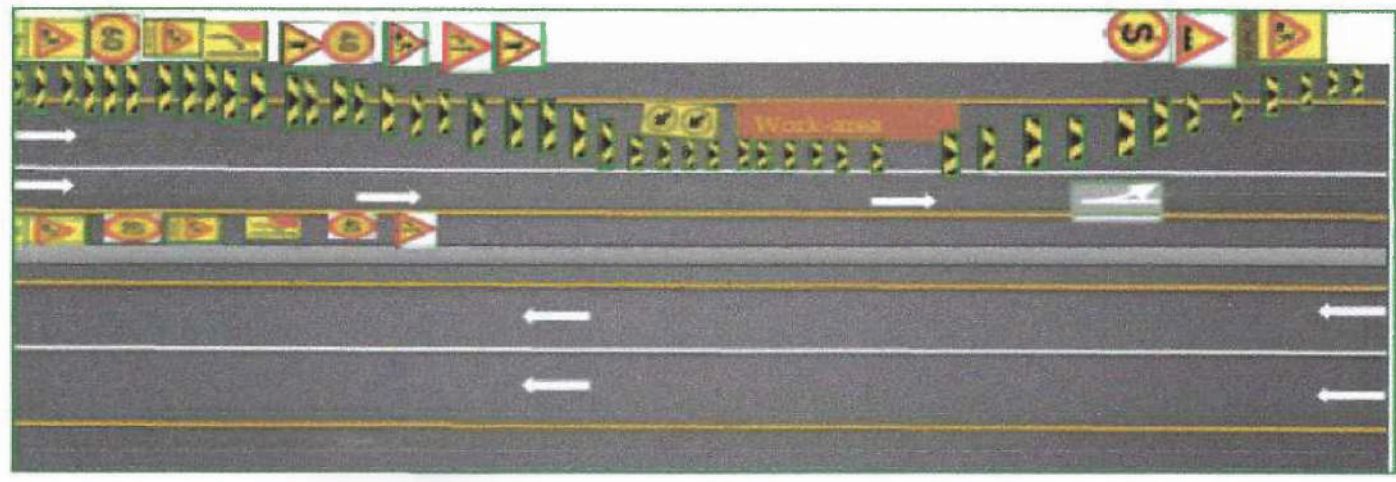
### ANTICIPATED TRAFFIC FLOW INTERRUPTION ALONG THE MR3 MANZINI - MBADLANE HIGHWAY

The General Public is advised that from the 29th of January 2024, Inyatsi Construction Ltd will be working on the Manzini to Mbadlane lane of the blue Highway, beginning just after the recently constructed Golf Course interchange. The construction works are expected to continue until the 8th of February 2024.

For the duration of the construction, the Contractor shall ensure that:

- Temporary (Roadworks) Signage informing road users of the on-going construction works are in place.
- Floggers are stationed to assist in the safe flow of traffic on the affected portion of the MR3 public road.

All road users are urged to drive cautiously on the affected road sections and adhere to all warning and regulatory road signage on site to avoid any accidents. Any inconvenience caused by the planned works is regretted.



**Principal Secretary  
Ministry of Public Works and Transport  
Thulani Mkhaliphi**

## Bezos to sell up to 50 million Amazon shares by Jan. 31 next year, filing shows

AMAZON founder Jeff Bezos will sell up to 50 million shares in the online retail and cloud services firm over the next year, according to a company filing on Friday.

The securities are worth \$8.6 billion at the current price of \$171.8 per share.

The sale plan, which is subject to certain conditions, was adopted on Nov. 8 last year and will be completed by Jan. 31, 2025, according to the company's latest annual report.

Amazon shares ended nearly 8% higher on Friday after the e-commerce heavyweight reported higher-than-expected sales for the holiday quarter and its lucrative cloud business signalled early gains from AI-powered features.

They had surged more than 80% last year amid a broader rally in tech stocks and outperformed the benchmark S&P 500 index.

Bezos founded Amazon as a bookseller in 1994. He stepped down as its chief executive and took over as executive chairman in 2021. He is currently the world's third richest person with a net worth of \$185 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

(Reuters)



▲ Amazon founder Jeff Bezos will sell up to 50 million shares in the online retail and cloud services firm

By Ncaba Ntshakala

RECENT incidents in Eswatini, involving minors harming others have sparked a difficult conversation about responsibility and generational behaviour.

While it's natural to seek an explanation, placing blame solely on the current generation is an oversimplification that ignores complex social and individual factors.

Attributing negative behaviour solely to age ignores the various influences that shape individuals. Family dynamics, socioeconomic pressures, exposure to violence, and mental health issues all play a crucial role in shaping a person's choices. Blaming an entire generation risks overlooking these nuanced factors and potentially dismissing individual accountability.

Support systems

To understand the root causes of such behaviour, it is pivotal that we must examine broader societal issues. Such societal issues include access to support systems. Do young people have adequate access to mental health services, family support, and positive role models?

Also, are they exposed to violence: Are there efforts to address societal violence and its potential impact on young minds? Moreover, it is essential to view educational opportunities on whether our education system equips young people with the skills and knowledge to navigate challenges and make responsible choices.

Recently, the Kingdom of Eswatini was appalled by news of a six-year-old girl who was accidentally shot and killed by her seven-year-old cousin with a pallet gun. The incident, which marked a terrible start of the New Year for the family, happened in the Elawini community under Ekutsimuleni Chiefdom in Mkhweni Constituency.

The six-year-old girl was shot once in the chest at close range with the gun, which was

allegedly removed from the safe by one of the family's older children without parents' permission.

Again, in one of the most shocking incidents to be recorded in the recent history of the Kingdom of Eswatini, a twelve-year-old boy purportedly bludgeoned his five-year-old neighbour to death with a hammer.

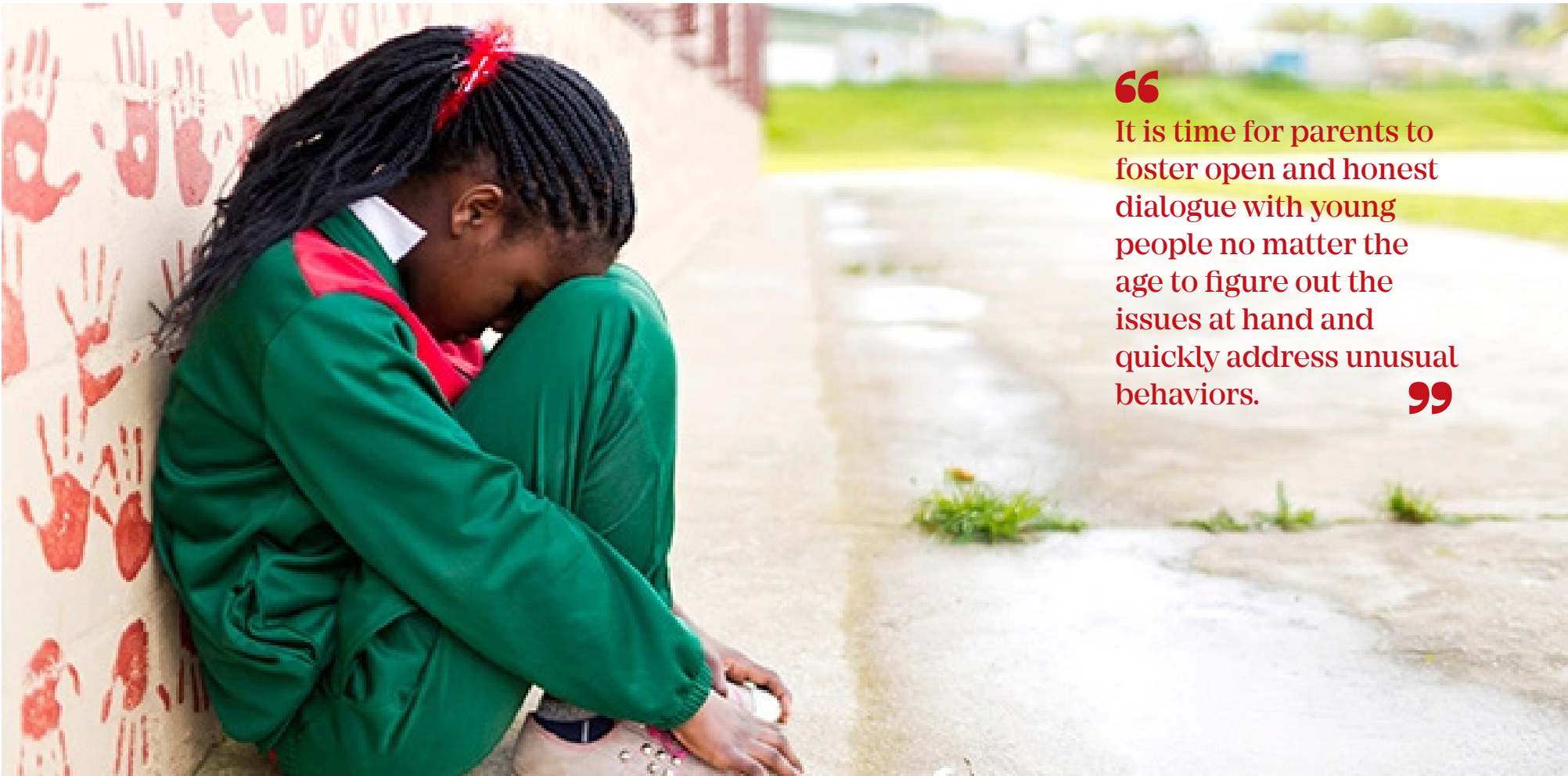
According to the Royal Eswatini Police Services (REPS), the boy assaulted the victim with a hammer on the head several times. When the five-year-old boy was rushed to hospital after the incident, his face had been severely disfigured. It is said the twelve-year-old boy became enraged after the younger boy (victim) insulted him. In fury, the twelve-year-old reportedly struck the victim on the head with the hammer three times.

Behaviours

As many are attributing the horrendous behaviours to the current generation of elders, we must know that we have a responsibility to create a better future for younger children. We need to invest in youth. It's a responsibility to strengthen support systems, promote positive social norms, and provide access to quality education are crucial investments in the next generation.

It is time for parents to foster open and honest dialogue with young people no matter the age to figure out the issues at hand and quickly address unusual behaviors.

This is essential for understanding their challenges and providing guidance. The current generation of elders needs to address the root causes of the problems that have emanated lately. Tackling societal issues like poverty, inequality, and access to resources can create a more conducive environment for



▲ Family dynamics, socioeconomic pressures, exposure to violence, and mental health issues all play a crucial role in shaping a person's choices.

positive development.

The recent events in the country are clear-cut reminders that addressing societal issues

requires a multifaceted approach. Blaming one generation won't solve the problem.

Instead, we must focus on understanding

the complex factors at play, promoting open communication, and investing in support systems that empower young people to make

positive choices. Only through collective action can we create a brighter future for all generations.

“It is time for parents to foster open and honest dialogue with young people no matter the age to figure out the issues at hand and quickly address unusual behaviors.”

# ‘Eswatini one of only six countries to have data on informal employment’

AFRICA needs to catch up in data collection. The poor collection of data affects the continent's ability of governments to improve public service design, delivery and effectiveness and ensure that government policies consider the most vulnerable groups and individuals, leaving no one behind.

Without data, we are driving blind – policies are misdirected, and progress on the road to development is stunted. We must act urgently to close the data gap in Africa if we genuinely want to leave no one behind.

Only six other African countries have data on informal employment within the last three years: Angola, Comoros, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. South Africa is the African country with the most data across the last ten years, with all data available up to 2022, while Mauritius has eight data points across this period.

Data gap in Africa is a major challenge for monitoring and evaluating the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 respectively. Almost 70% of indicators pertinent to health and wellbeing (SDG 3) cannot be captured in African countries.

Governance

“As far as good governance, rule of law and promotion of democracy is concerned, the overall reporting on SDG 16/Aspiration three of Agenda 2063 remains faint across African countries. The picture is quite mixed towards promoting democratic practices, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Only 6-10 out of 23 indicators of SDG 16 are measurable with available data,” according to Sara Tawfik Hamouda of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

The report said sound data is at the heart of Africa's governance and development agendas, and the report underscores its role in driving progress, assessing government performance, setting policy priorities, and ensuring trust in governments. The report from the 2022 IIAG dataset reveals a strong positive correlation between access to high-quality statistics and effective governance across African countries from 2012 to 2021.

“Data is critical to achieving the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN's Sustainable Development,” warned Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

Only 3 African countries have a death registration system that registers at least 90% of the deaths that occurred. SDG1 calls for eradicating extreme poverty by 2030, but just 5 African countries have data for 2019-2022 on the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line.

The data gaps on the African continent were an in-depth report, dubbed the 2023 IIAG Series Report: The Power of Data for Governance, by



▲ A vegetable vendor sorting her wares in Mbabane. (Right) Mo Ibrahim, Founder and Chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (MIF), launched its IIAG Series 2023 Report, “The Power of Data for Governance: Closing data gaps to accelerate Africa's transformation,” in Accra on 29 January.

However, Africa remains the continent most impacted by data gaps globally, with the region possessing the lowest availability of civil registration and vital statistics. The

report said many African countries are missing crucial data when it comes to the basic building blocks of statistics that are key to defining public policies, such as population censuses and birth and death registration.

Even in areas where strides were made, critical governance data gaps persist on issues including health structures, the informal economy, the environment, violence against

women, child labour, and illicit financial flows.

Philippe N. Gafishi, Inter-Regional Adviser, OECD/PARIS21, said better data and statistics are critical for setting development targets, measuring progress, and accelerating action, including good governance.

With the unprecedented increase in

and evolving demand for data in terms of scope, quantity, quality, timeliness and disaggregation from national development plans, Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 for sustainable development goals, recent crises including Covid-19, climate change and conflicts affecting Africa in particular; national statistical offices (NSOs) in Africa continue to be at the forefront of developing and coordinating national statistical systems (NSS) as well as engaging with the larger data ecosystem to fit for purpose.

Therefore, Africa's National Statistical System (NSS) must innovate and adapt quickly regarding data production and more effectively re-using, analyzing, disseminating, and communicating statistics, including from other alternative data sources.

Dr Tarek Mouganie, Founder and Group CEO of Affinity Africa, said small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are major drivers of social and economic growth and are key to unlocking Africa's resilience and prosperity.

“Africa is the world's youngest continent, where 60% are under the age of 24. With a population of 1.1bn projected to go up to 2.3bn by 2050, millions of new jobs need to be created. Africa is also the lowest tax-paying region at 16.6% tax to GDP versus the OECD average of 33.8% and almost 55% of taxation is derived from indirect taxes like VAT (versus 35% in OECD countries), a clear sign of the narrow taxpayer base. A big reason for these differences is the size of the informal sector, estimated to employ up to 86% of the African population,” he said.

Dr Claire Melamed, CEO of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, said that halfway through the 2030 Agenda, only half of all countries can produce data on even 80 of the 231 SDG indicators.

“At a time of growing crises and shrinking budgets, when governments and donors need to make the most of every dollar, it is particularly critical to invest in the data that can increase the efficiency and impact of all other spending. As AI, digital services, and other technologies driven by data enter the mainstream, investments in data also become foundational for strategies of economic growth and stronger service delivery. Recent research found that, on average, investing one dollar in data systems delivers a return of \$32 in the form of economic benefits for the country.”

Looking at best practices from the continent, the report said Kenya used national surveys to measure women empowerment in 2020, the Gender Data Network (GDN) and UN Women released a Counted And Visible toolkit as a reference guide for how to produce

disaggregated gender statistics in education from household surveys. In Kenya, this initiative spurred the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UN Women to conceptualize and launch a new Kenya Women's Empowerment Index (WEI), drawing upon data from existing national surveys.

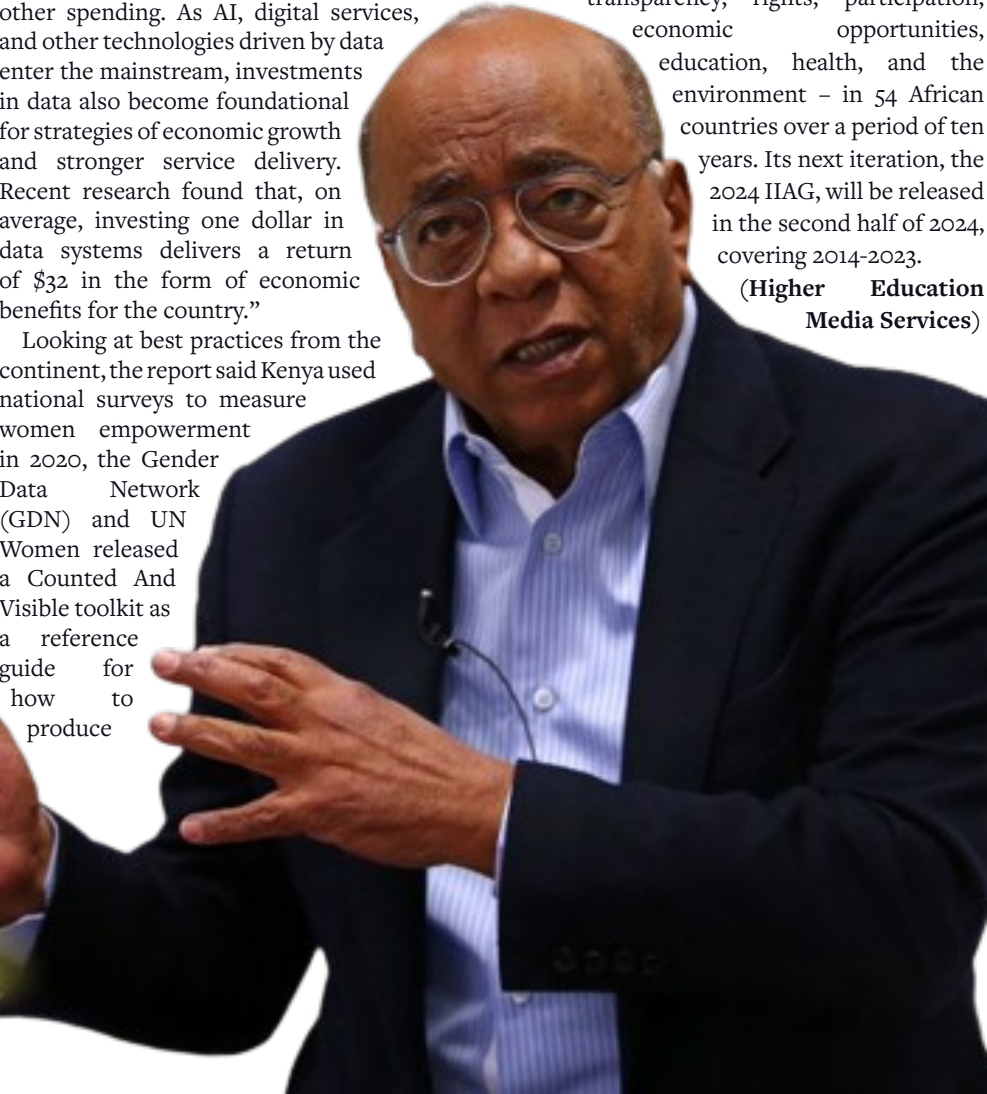
In South Africa, digital methods track the gendered effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The country's new National Income Dynamics Study—Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDSCRAM) is a nationally representative panel survey of 28,000 South African individuals conducted via phone in 11 languages.

The same individuals were contacted each month to ascertain the changing impact of Covid-19 on income and employment, their household welfare, receipt of grants and their knowledge and behaviour related to Covid-19. The survey, which includes questions on men's and women's wellbeing and other gendered dynamics, has helped highlight inequalities resulting from the pandemic.

The report was launched in Accra, Ghana, at an event co-hosted with Afrobarometer. From its inception, MIF has strongly supported Afrobarometer, which is now the leading African research institution conducting public attitude surveys on the continent. The Afrobarometer is the only source of the Citizens' Voices dataset, which complements the IIAG dataset.

The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), published by MIF in 2007, is the most comprehensive publicly available dataset measuring governance performance across African countries. Every two years, the IIAG provides comparable data on the whole spectrum of African governance – from security and safety to the rule of law, transparency, rights, participation, economic opportunities, education, health, and the environment – in 54 African countries over a period of ten years. Its next iteration, the 2024 IIAG, will be released in the second half of 2024, covering 2014-2023.

(Higher Education Media Services)



# Vigilance needed in testing ANC’s election strategy ‘regime-change’ claims



▲ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa.

By Sara Gon

ACCORDING to the SABC, the ANC is on high alert for possible attempts at regime change in South Africa by Israel. The national broadcaster reports that ANC president Cyril Ramaphosa says he expects a full-blown fightback from the Israelis.

In closing the ANC’s National Executive Committee (NEC) lekgotla last week, Ramaphosa said: ‘The fightback may also focus on our domestic politics, and our electoral outcomes, in order to pursue a regime change agenda.’

President Cyril Ramaphosa is deploying

a propaganda strategy as old as time, and reminiscent of former President Jacob Zuma’s ‘White Monopoly Capital’ slur.

The purpose is to misattribute any possible failure of the ANC’s fortunes in the upcoming election. The right to freedom of speech is being exercised, as it should, but the obligation to use it wisely is being flouted. We at the Free Speech Union of SA believe citizens and civil society must be alert to the risks and expose them fearlessly.

As journalist Ivo Vegter has written in the Daily Friend, this strategy involves establishing that ‘a group of people, foreign or domestic, have nefarious intentions towards the country, thereby directing the attention of the people away from the record of the incumbents in government’.

‘Creating such an enemy, and pre-emptively accusing them of dirty tricks and election interference, positions the ANC to reject any and all challenges to its incumbency as an Israeli plot.’

Vegter describes this as an open ‘blame-the-Jews strategy’. The aim is to denounce the ANC’s political enemies as ‘agents of their supposed “genocidal apartheid state”’.

So energised was the President that he called a televised “family meeting” on Friday 26 January to celebrate the International Court of Justice’s findings and measures against Israel.

On 31 January Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Naledi Pandor accused Israel of ignoring the ‘U.N.’s top court by killing hundreds more civilians in a matter of days in Gaza’.

Pandor relied on unverified figures from Hamas’ Health Ministry in Gaza. These figures never distinguish between Hamas operatives and civilians.

In a reference to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Pandor said: ‘We are allowing this to happen again, right before our eyes, on our TV screens.’

In an interview by Stephen Sackur on HardTalk on 30 January, on the question of the rise of anti-Semitism in South Africa, Minister of Justice and Correctional Services Ronald Lamola said: ‘And in South Africa, there is no threat, harm whatsoever to the Jewish people. They continue to participate in all forms of social life.’

When Sackur raised the concerns of non-executive chairman of the SA Jewish Report

Howard Sackstein – ‘I sit here staring at my suitcase, contemplating whether it’s time to leave the only home I’ve ever known... Everything has an expiry stamp, and South Africa is looking like we’re fast approaching the “best before date”’ – Lamola replied: ‘As you speak to me now, nothing has happened to him and nothing will happen to him or any Jewish community on the basis of their creed, sex or religion....’

In response to Sackur’s comment that there had been a rise in anti-Semitic attacks since October 7, Lamola said: ‘No...There’s no such. As I’m speaking to you today the President wrote in his weekly newsletter...which was very clear that our action is not the basis of anti-Semitism. It is on the basis of our obligation as a nation to believe in human rights and to

stand for the vulnerable children of Palestine. So there is no anti-Semitism in South Africa against the Jewish people...’.

On 31 January, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies issued a press release claiming that antisemitic incidents in 2023 reached the highest levels since 1993 when it began compiling figures. ‘For Oct-Dec 2023 there were 139 recorded incidents compared to 19 over the same period in 2022, an increase of 631%.’

In an election campaign in which the ANC can say nothing good about its own governance, South Africans ought to listen carefully to what it does say.

Sara Gon is from the Institute for Race Relations in South Africa

# Elon Musk charts largely painless Delaware exodus

By Jonathan Guilford

NEW YORK - It’s hard for a company to find its way out of Delaware, but Elon Musk may be mapping a safe route. The Tesla boss is angling to reincorporate the electric car maker in Texas after the First State’s corporate judiciary unwound his \$56 billion pay package. Investing devotees could help ease the exodus, and might even give other chief executives ideas about revaluing corporate governance.

Tesla, like 68% of its Fortune 500 kin, is domiciled in Delaware, long the preferred choice for big business. A well-established court system, presided over by specialized jurists leaning on a century of precedent, provides shareholders with predictability and security.

Even better, the state’s deference to management and directors generally makes life easier for boards that simply follow some basic protocols. Judge Kathleen McCormick on Tuesday ruled that Tesla fell short of even that standard and ordered Musk’s 2018 compensation deal be rescinded.

Decamping for Texas would invite yet another lawsuit, especially since it can be cast as an effort to reinstate the lucrative payday. And the very thing that makes Tesla worth \$575 billion – Musk’s cavalier approach to leadership – probably makes it impossible to meet the same procedural test McCormick applied.

Nevertheless, investors almost certainly would be willing to go along for the southwesterly ride. After all, they approved Musk’s reward, at 250 times what the typical

CEO makes. In most cases, a company protected by foreseeable legal outcomes is, in theory, worth more than one without them.

For Tesla, the value of enforcing certain principles and laws is eclipsed by the amount imputed by its megalomaniacal captain. The company’s billions of dollars in cash flow means it doesn’t need money from backers who prefer Delaware’s safeguards. Even if the odds of Musk quitting over his paycheck are low, voting to support his relocation makes rational sense.

The ramifications also could extend beyond Tesla. Texas has set up its own business courts to rival Delaware’s, but they have yet to open and face potential constitutional challenges. And although Musk probably reckons his clout can overawe a new regime, the state may not be as amenable to his whims as he expects.

Other domineering CEOs might still surmise that once they’ve achieved enough success, arbitrating regulatory regimes is relatively painless. Indeed, media mogul John Malone’s empire is attempting a similar manoeuvre. Its online travel agency TripAdvisor is being sued over a move to Nevada. Founders of

hot startups, including Meta Platforms boss Mark Zuckerberg, have already used super-voting shares to prevent the masses from having a say. Musk, as he so often does, might push things even further.

Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk on Feb. 1 posted to the social media website X that the electric car company would move to hold a shareholder vote on transferring its state of incorporation from Delaware to Texas.

The decision follows a Jan. 30 Delaware court ruling ordering that Musk’s 2018 incentive-based pay package, worth about \$56 billion at the time, be rescinded. (Reuters Breakingviews)

►Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk.





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▲ The U.S. military launched airstrikes on Friday in Iraq and Syria against more than 85 targets linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and the militias it backs, in retaliation for last weekend's attack in Jordan that killed three U.S. troops.



▲ U.S. forces hit more than 85 targets spanning seven locations, four in Syria and three in Iraq, said the military. The strikes targeted the Quds Force - the foreign espionage and paramilitary arm of the IRGC that heavily influences its allied militia across the Middle East, from Lebanon to Iraq and Yemen to Syria.

# US starts retaliatory strikes in Iraq, Syria against Iran-linked targets

WASHINGTON - The U.S. military launched airstrikes on Friday in Iraq and Syria against more than 85 targets linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and the militias it backs, in retaliation for last weekend's attack in Jordan that killed three U.S. troops.

The strikes, which included the use of long-range B-1 bombers flown from the United States, were the first in a multi-tiered response by President Joe Biden's administration to the attack by Iran-backed militants, and more U.S. military operations were expected in the coming days.

While the strikes did not target sites inside Iran, they signalled a further escalation of conflict in the Middle East from Israel's nearly four-month-old war with Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza.

The strikes hit targets including command and control centres, rockets, missiles and drone storage facilities, as well as logistics and munition supply chain facilities, the U.S. military said in a statement.

U.S. forces hit more than 85 targets spanning seven locations, four in Syria and three in Iraq, said the military.

The strikes targeted the Quds Force - the foreign espionage and paramilitary arm of the IRGC that heavily influences its allied militia across the Middle East, from Lebanon to Iraq and Yemen to Syria.

U.S. Lieutenant General Douglas Sims, the director of the Joint Staff, said the attacks appeared to be successful, triggering large secondary explosions as the bombs hit militant weaponry, though it was not clear if any militants were killed.

The Syrian Defense Ministry said that U.S. forces' "blatant air aggression" led to a number of civilians and soldiers being killed and others being wounded and some significant damage to public and private property.

"Occupying parts of Syrian lands by American forces cannot continue ... the Syrian army affirms continuing its war against terrorism until it is eliminated and is determined to liberate the entire Syrian territories from terrorism and occupation," the ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

The Pentagon's Sims said the strikes were undertaken knowing that there would likely be casualties among those in the facilities. He added that the weather was a key factor in the timing of the operation.

The Iraqi military said the strikes were in the Iraqi border area and warned they could ignite instability in the region.

"These airstrikes constitute a violation of Iraqi sovereignty, undermine the efforts of the Iraqi government,

and pose a threat that could lead Iraq and the region into dire consequences," Iraqi military spokesman Yahya Rasool said in a statement.

There has been no public response yet from Iran. Iranian state television, in its report on the strikes, described the Americans as terrorist forces.

## MORE TO COME

Last weekend's Jordan attack was the first deadly strike against U.S. troops since the Israel-Hamas war erupted in October. The United States has assessed that the drone that killed the three soldiers and wounded more than 40 other people was made by Iran, U.S. officials have told Reuters.

"Our response began today. It will continue at times and places of our choosing," Biden said in a statement. Earlier on Friday, Biden and Pentagon leaders attended the Dover Air Force Base in Delaware as the remains of the three soldiers were returned.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Biden had directed additional action against the IRGC and those linked to it.

"This is the start of our response," Austin said.

But the Pentagon has said it does not want war with Iran and does not believe Tehran wants war either, even as Republican pressure has increased on Biden to deal a blow directly.

"We do not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else, but the president and I will not tolerate attacks on American forces," Austin said.

The top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Roger Wicker, criticized Biden for failing to impose a high enough cost on Iran and taking too long to respond.

Before the retaliatory strikes on Friday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said that Iran would not start a war but would "respond strongly" to anyone who tried to bully it.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said the Biden administration had not communicated with Iran since the Jordan attack.

Iranian advisers assist armed groups in both Iraq, where the United States has around 2,500 troops, and Syria, where it has 900.

U.S. troops have been attacked over 160 times in Iraq, Syria and Jordan since the deadly Hamas rampage in Israel that sparked the conflict on Oct. 7. In response to the Hamas attack, Israel has bombarded the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, leaving Palestinians in the enclave with few places to escape to.

Houthi fighters in Yemen have been firing drones and missiles at ships in the Red Sea, which they say is intended to support Palestinians against Israel. (Reuters)



▲ US President Joe Biden attends the dignified transfer of the remains of three US service members killed in the drone attack on the US military outpost in Jordan, at Dover Air Force Base in Dover, Delaware

## Reactions to US airstrikes in Syria, Iraq

FOLLOWING are reactions by leaders and officials to U.S. retaliatory strikes on Friday in Iraq and Syria, after an attack in Jordan last weekend that killed three U.S. troops and injured some 40 others.

### Democratic Senator Jack Reed, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee

"Iran's proxy forces in Syria and Iraq have been dealt a significant blow, and Iranian-linked militias around the Middle East should understand that they, too, will be held accountable. "I salute the brave U.S. military members who carried out today's strikes, and I support President Biden's robust action.

These strikes, in concert with wise diplomacy, send a clear signal that the United States will continue to take appropriate action to protect our personnel and our interests."

I salute the brave U.S. military members who carried out today's strikes, and I support President Biden's robust action.



### Republican Senator Roger Wicker, ranking member Armed Services Committee

"These military strikes are welcome, but come far too late for the three brave Americans who died and the nearly 50 wounded.

Iran and its proxies have tried to kill American soldiers and sink our warships 165 times while the Biden administration congratulates itself for doing the bare minimum.

Instead of giving the Ayatollah the bloody nose that he deserves, we continue to give him a slap on the wrist."

"These military strikes are welcome, but come far too late for the three brave Americans who died and the nearly 50 wounded.



# Pakistan ex-PM Imran Khan, wife jailed 7 years for unlawful marriage

ISLAMABAD - Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Khan were sentenced to seven years in prison and fined on Saturday by a court that ruled their 2018 marriage broke the law, his party said.

It was the third ruling against Khan this week and comes ahead of national elections on Thursday that he is barred from contesting. Khan, 71, has in recent days been sentenced to 10 years for leaking state secrets and 14 years along with this wife for illegally selling state gifts. His representatives say he will launch appeals in all three cases. It was not immediately clear if his various sentences would run concurrently.

Khan is in prison in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, while his wife will serve her sentence at their hilltop mansion in nearby Islamabad. He already faces a 10-year disqualification from holding public office.

“After hours of rushed hearings at court, no cross examination of witnesses, and no due process - a mockery of the law,” Khan’s party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), said in a statement.

“With the way these trials are being conducted, there will be a huge question mark on the February 8th elections. This is a test case for Pakistan’s higher judiciary.”

The couple were each fined 500,000 rupees (\$1,800), ARY News reported.

Bushra was accused of not completing the waiting period mandated by Islam, called “Iddat”, after divorcing her previous husband and marrying Khan.

The Khans signed their marriage contract, or “Nikkah”, in January 2018 in a secret ceremony seven months before the former cricket superstar became prime minister for the first time.

There was controversy over whether they had wed before the period was complete. After initial denials of the marriage, PTI confirmed it weeks later.

The Khans both denied wrongdoing.

“Can say I’m a witness in the Nikkah and it’s a categorically yet another fake case,” Khan’s media advisor Zulfi Bukhari told Reuters. “From witnesses to the evidence to the procedure.”

**CRIMINAL COMPLAINT**

Bushra’s ex-husband, Khawar Maneka, to whom she was married for about 30 years, brought a criminal complaint against the Khans, said a person with direct knowledge of the matter.

Khan has often called Bushra his spiritual leader. She is known for her devotion to Sufism, a mystical form of Islam.

Born Bushra Riaz Watto, she changed her name to Khan after her marriage. Her husband and followers commonly refer to her as Bushra Bibi or Bushra Begum, titles that denote respect in Urdu.

It was not clear when or how Khan met Bushra, but former aide Aun Chaudhry said Khan was impressed with her spirituality.

Khan, who had acquired a playboy image in the 1990s as his cricket career took off, has said he is keenly interested in Sufism.

Khan’s two previous marriages - to Jemima Goldsmith, daughter of tycoon James Goldsmith, and television journalist Reham Nayyar Khan - ended in divorce.

Khan has been fighting dozens of cases since he was ousted from power in a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in 2022. He says his removal was backed by the powerful military with whom he fell out while in office.

He and his party say they have been subjected to a military-backed crackdown, including arrests of hundreds of supporters, party members and key aides.

The military, which has for decades held sway over Pakistan’s politics, denies the claims.

NAB, the anti-graft agency that put Khan on trial, has at various times investigated, tried and jailed all prime ministers to have served since 2008, including Nawaz Sharif, whose party is considered the frontrunner in next week’s election. (Reuters)



▲ Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Khan were sentenced to seven years in prison and fined on Saturday by a court that ruled their 2018 marriage broke the law

## Polish president criticised for doubting Ukraine can retake Crimea

WARSAW - Poland’s president declared on Saturday he had always been unwavering in his support for Ukraine after coming under strong criticism for saying he was unsure whether Kyiv would be able to regain control over Russian-occupied Crimea.

Warsaw has been one of Kyiv’s staunchest supporters since Russia’s February 2022 invasion and has said Ukraine must regain control over all of its territory in order to deter Moscow from further aggression.

President Andrzej Duda reiterated this position during an interview on YouTube channel Kanal Zero late on Friday. However, when asked if he believed Ukraine would really be able to retake Crimea, he said, “It is hard for me to answer that question”.

“I don’t know if (Ukraine) will regain Crimea, but I believe it will regain Donetsk and Luhansk,” he said.

He said the Crimean peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014, eight years before launching its full-scale invasion, “is a special place... also for historical reasons. Because in fact, if we look historically, it was in Russia’s hands for most of the time.”

Parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine were also taken by Moscow-backed forces in 2014 and have been embattled during the course of the current war, unlike Crimea.

Ukraine has vowed to recover every inch of its territory including Crimea in the war with Russia.

Ukraine’s Ambassador to Poland, Vasyi Zvarych, wrote on X on Saturday that “Crimea is Ukraine: it is and will remain so”.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, a member of the new pro-European governing coalition that has been at odds with the nationalist Duda, said Warsaw “recognises the independence of Ukraine within its internationally established borders”.

**SHOULDER TO SHOULDER**

On Saturday Duda sought to defuse the row over his statement on Friday, saying in a post on X that his “actions and position on Russia’s brutal aggression against Ukraine have been



▲ Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Poland’s President Andrzej Duda attend a meeting during the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland

and are clear from day one”.

He added: “Russia’s attack on Ukraine and occupation of internationally recognised territories of Ukraine, including Crimea, is a crime... We all stand shoulder to shoulder for a free, sovereign and independent Ukraine against aggression and brutal imperialism!”

Duda’s earlier remarks were sharply criticised by lawmakers from Poland’s pro-European ruling coalition.

He is an ally of the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party which lost power December after failing to build a coalition following the loss of its majority in an October election.

## Trump looms over Texas border rally targeting illegal immigration

QUEMADO, Texas - Protesters who trekked in a vehicle convoy to Texas this week, including some flying pro-Donald Trump banners alongside American and Texas flags, are expected to rally against illegal immigration near the U.S.-Mexico border on Saturday.

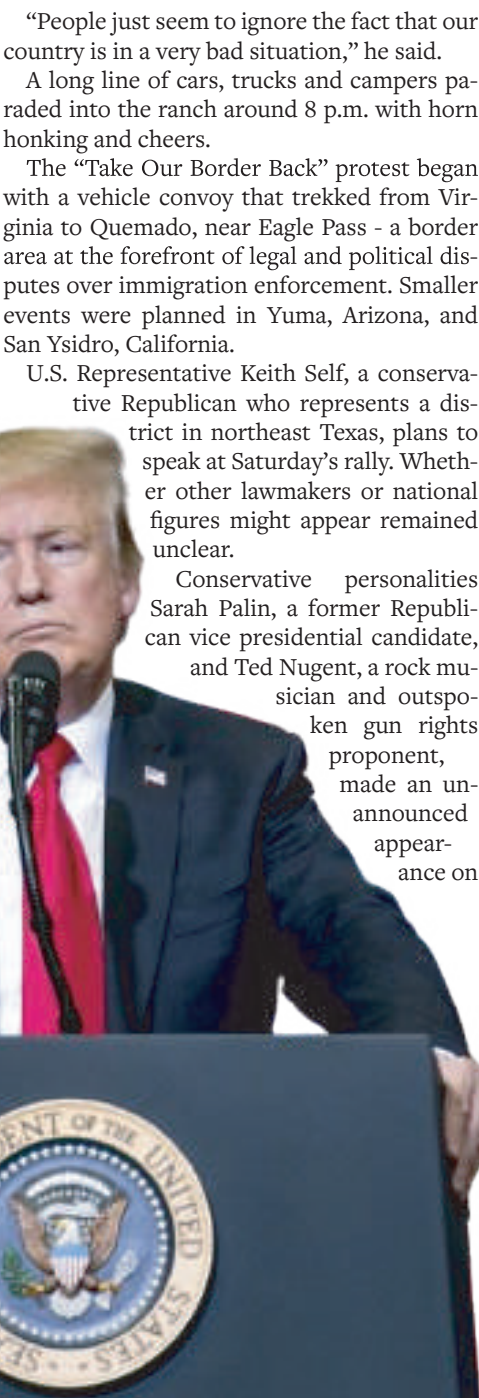
Dozens of cars gathered outside a Christian children’s ranch in the remote town of Quemado on Friday night, some adorned with Trump paraphernalia and other conservative messages.

Border security remained an overarching theme, but protesters also carried signs opposing the Black Lives Matter movement while others spoke of unfounded government conspiracies related to COVID-19 vaccines.

Immigration has become a potent political issue in an election year likely to see a rematch between Trump, a Republican, and his Democratic successor, President Joe Biden.

Trump has motivated his base voters with calls for more restrictive border practices, while critics worry such policies and events like the convoy could fuel anti-immigrant sentiment.

Rob Brace, a 79-year-old retired podiatrist, rode his motorcycle alone eight hours from McAllen, Texas, to greet the convoy, saying he felt compelled to come because of the high levels of illegal immigration.



▲ US Presidential Candidate Donald Trump.

“People just seem to ignore the fact that our country is in a very bad situation,” he said.

A long line of cars, trucks and campers paraded into the ranch around 8 p.m. with horn honking and cheers.

The “Take Our Border Back” protest began with a vehicle convoy that trekked from Virginia to Quemado, near Eagle Pass - a border area at the forefront of legal and political disputes over immigration enforcement. Smaller events were planned in Yuma, Arizona, and San Ysidro, California.

U.S. Representative Keith Self, a conservative Republican who represents a district in northeast Texas, plans to speak at Saturday’s rally. Whether other lawmakers or national figures might appear remained unclear.

Conservative personalities Sarah Palin, a former Republican vice presidential candidate, and Ted Nugent, a rock musician and outspoken gun rights proponent, made an unannounced appearance on

Thursday as the convoy overnighted further north in Dripping Springs, Texas.

While some at Thursday’s event spoke of religious values, Nugent called Biden a “devil-scum snake” in a caustic speech before performing the U.S. national anthem on guitar.

Organizers have billed the convoy and rally as peaceful, but some extremism experts are concerned about the message it sends.

Minnesota-based pastor Doug Pagitt tried to enter the ranch on Friday after stopping in the area as part of a tour to combat what he calls “Christian nationalism,” but was denied entry as participants told him “you’re not wanted.”

“We want to engage,” Pagitt said afterward.

The number of migrants arrested trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border has climbed to record highs since Biden took office in 2021. After a spike in December, migrant arrests fell by 50%, opens new tab in the first half of January, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Internal CBP statistics reviewed by Reuters showed 216 migrant arrests on Tuesday across the entire Del Rio Sector, which covers a 245-mile (400-km) stretch of the Rio Grande and encompasses Eagle Pass. In mid-December, that figure at times topped 4,000 per day, internal figures show.

U.S. officials have cautioned the slowdown could be seasonal although the Mexican government also increased enforcement.

Eagle Pass has achieved national prominence in recent months as Texas’ Republican Governor Greg Abbott has clashed with Biden over the state’s aggressive tactics to deter crossers, including troops, concertina wire and a floating buoy barrier in the Rio Grande.

Abbott and 14 other Republican governors plan to hold a press conference in Eagle Pass on Sunday to defend the state’s border security tactics.

Reuters witnesses on Friday saw two migrants who crossed the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass penned in between two barriers of concertina wire as they shaded themselves with cloth to avoid the sun. (Reuters)

# Human interest



Senegalese President postpones presidential vote  
Page 19

President Macky Sall on Saturday postponed Senegal’s planned Feb. 25 presidential election, announcing in a televised address to the nation that he had cancelled the relevant electoral law due to electoral disputes he warned could fuel unrest.

MONTEVIDEO - Thousands of devotees of different African-based religions on Friday flocked to the waterfront of the Uruguayan capital, part of an annual Feb. 2 offering to the Yoruba goddess of fertility and prosperity, Yemanjá.

Followers of African-based religions are on the rise in South America, new data shows, a reflection of how the region’s African heritage is gaining a greater voice beyond Brazil where such traditions are widely recognized.

Surveys on religious beliefs in Argentina and Uruguay point to a rising number of people who identify with African-inspired faiths.

Sasha Curti, who was brought up in a predominantly Catholic Uruguayan family, had come down to Ramirez beach in Montevideo with members of her Umbanda temple to give thanks to Yemanjá.

“We are no longer hidden,” said Curti, who works as a hairstylist specializing in afro hair, a change she attributed to greater education about their history. “There is still a lot of discrimination and work that needs to be done.”

Along Ramirez beach, groups were digging shallow altars in the sand, laying candles, watermelons and corn as offerings to Yemanjá often called the sea queen to ask for good fortune.

Umbanda, like its sister Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé, was first popularized in northeastern Brazil and has its roots in the transatlantic slave trade. Worshipers blended native Yoruba beliefs from Africa with elements of Catholicism and local Indigenous traditions creating syncretic religions so that they would go undetected by Europeans, according to researchers.

Over 2% of Uruguayans identify as followers of African-inspired faiths like Umbanda. The small South American nation is home to a greater proportion of believers than in neighbouring Brazil, where the religion has gained greater international recognition through annual New Year’s Eve Yemanjá festivities

Research by Uruguayan sociologist Victoria Sotelo at the University of the Republic found that the numbers practising an African-based religion in the country have more than doubled in 12 years, to 2.1% of the population in 2020 up from 0.7% recorded in 2008.

In Argentina, worshipers are also on the rise, even if from a low base. Non-profit pollster Latinobarómetro found that 0.3% of the Argentine population in 2023 said they had practised an Afro-American religion for at least 6 years, up from 0.1% in 2008.

One possible contributing factor is the increasing recognition of the Afro-descendant cultural identity that has long been silenced in Argentina and Uruguay.

In a sign of the changing perceptions of racial identity, Argentina formally included a question about people of African descent in its 2022 national census, considered a sizable victory by activists.

That same year Paraguay passed an anti-discrimination law to protect people of African descent. This year Uruguay’s Children of the Diaspora Collective, a group dedicated to the recognition of African-based culture, expects the percentage of those who self-identify as Black or of African descent to far exceed the 8% figure recorded in the 2008 census when 2023 findings are released.

“Because of our historical process, much of the (Black) population in Argentina doesn’t self-identify as Afro-descendants,” said Greta Pena, former head of Argentina’s National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI). There is a “founding myth” of a strictly European Argentina, she said, which has helped to erase Black culture from the nation’s consciousness.

Devotees of these faiths are not exclusively of African heritage, but the greater adherence to traditional spiritual practices is helping to boost racial awareness more broadly.

While the religions have gained traction, with their relatively liberal social mores and community focus, more work needs to be done to fight stigmatization, Andrade cautioned. Oral histories and traditions associated with the African-based religions have long been misunderstood or demonized as “witchcraft,” she said.

“We’ve made strides in terms of the laws around practising our religion, that in theory protect against discrimination,” she said. “But we don’t have tax exemptions like churches and simply aren’t treated the same.” (Reuters)

“Because of our historical process, much of the (Black) population in Argentina doesn’t self-identify as Afro-descendants, There is a “founding myth” of a strictly European Argentina, she said, which has helped to erase Black culture from the nation’s consciousness. Devotees of these faiths are not exclusively of African heritage, but the greater adherence to traditional spiritual practices is helping to boost racial awareness more broadly.”

## In South America, African-inspired religions gain more followers



▲ Worshipers of Yemanjá, the African-inspired Umbanda goddess of motherhood and fertility pay tribute, in Montevideo, Uruguay



▲ A woman lights a candle at a statue of Yemanjá, the African-inspired Umbanda goddess of motherhood and fertility, in Montevideo, Uruguay



▲ Candles lit by worshippers of Yemanjá, the African-inspired Umbanda goddess of motherhood and fertility, burn in Montevideo, Uruguay



▲ Worshipers of Yemanjá, the African-inspired Umbanda goddess of motherhood and fertility, pay tribute in Montevideo, Uruguay.

# Lifestyle

**TALKING  
MUSIC  
AND MORE  
WITH DR. P**

**inside**



**M Nation to hoist the  
Eswatini flag**



**Romantic place to  
visit this February**

Eswatini Sunday Reporter

Through a passion for underground dance music like House and the 80s-90s Hip Hop/RnB scene, Dr. P first started experimenting with DJ gear and mixing, in primary school in the late 90’s, under the guidance of his brothers - Simiso and the late local legend, DJ MaBongza.

Dr. P went on to form DJ duo, The Spin Doctors, in 1997, with high-school friend, DJ Simza and the duo immersed themselves in music and DJ culture; spending hours listening to mix-tapes from DJs and radio stations from all over the world.

Dr. P lists artists and DJs such as Larry Heard, Frankie Knuckles, Masters at Work, DJ Clue, Funkmaster Flex, Tim Westwood, Wu-Tang, 90’s East and West Coast Rap or R’nB, early Kalawa, Tim White, Christos, Thebe and Mdu, as some of his influencers.

DJ Simza and Dr. P then purchased turntables and started using vinyl, the rite of passage for any true DJ, and in early 2001, the two were introduced to DJ Snoop, by Lusolotja Ginindza and DJ Kold Krash V.

Most DJs were grown-ups and only a handful could DJ using turntables, so two young boys on turntables were unheard of in the country and soon, they secured their debut club-gig at Swaziland’s dance mecca, Sibebe, that same Easter weekend.

With DJ Snoop, the Spin Doctors went on to play and headline some of the country’s biggest parties and premier venues, seeing the DJ’s star rise with notable performances at shows like Foam Parties at Club Y2K, MTN Golf Park and the Raves put on by DJ Geoff Kemp and crew, as well as playing alongside the numerous international acts wanting to enter the Swati market in the days of post-apartheid South Africa.

Dr. P went on to live in Canada, where exposure to a higher level of performance and presentation enhanced his knowledge and sharpened his skill, in terms associated with DJing; song selection, mixing, timing, scratching and overall entertainment.

While in Canada, Dr. P forged ties and relationships that led to a weekly residency at a premier nightclub, as well as, projects and performances in North America and Europe, sharing the stage with the likes of Jazzy Jeff, Iz & Diz, Kaskade, Ben Watt, Jay Tripwire, Joe Silva, Fin-S, Moses Mayes and Balanced Records, as well as countless raves and underground parties.

It was during this time that, Dr. P started exploring other aspects of the music business and became more ‘behind the scenes’. Working or participating in events like Winnipeg Jazz festival, Folk Fest, Miami Winter Music Conference, ‘Peg City Holla, Much Music Fest and Awards, Southport Weekenders, media/film productions and promoting parties, turned Dr. P more into an executive producer of creative concepts than a performer.

With the music business in mind, Dr. P shifted focus onto the Swati music and creative arts industry. Dr. P moved back to the kingdom and hit the ground running, playing both locally and neighboring countries, collaborating with many notables in the local industry stage or perform at events like; Savanna Parties, Mhlambanyatsi pre and during Summer Showdowns, Swazi Party – Capitol edition, STORM-Hawane edition, help local artists with music advice or other aspects of the industry, open and close the Shelter, and run recording studios in eSwatini and South Africa.

We catch up with the DJ/Producer to get an update on activities, as well as, get his thoughts and perspective on the state of the industry and future of our music and why he feels it is time for a gearshift.

**Q. Let’s take it from when you decided to move back to eSwatini. You were living and working in Canada, most of those who leave to stay overseas hardly return. When and why did you decide to move back?**

A. It was always part of the plan; I would often fly home in the time I was away, but also kept a pulse on what was going on in South Africa through my brother MaBongza, as well as contact through friends and colleagues in eSwatini. When, exactly? I would say it was after doing a party we dubbed, “Swazi Gold”, before New Year’s Eve 2005-2006.

After a working trip to the UK, earlier that year to visit Paul Wasswa, who at the time was involved in the London club scene, the idea came to take the experience home, so to speak, and do something in December.

With the help of an exceptional team made-up of family and friends, we pulled-off a great party at the brand new Café Mogambo at Esibayeni. The space had just been finished and was perfect, complete with DJ booth over the pool for effect.

Together with my observations of what was happening next-door (Mozambique), the event at Mogambo proved that with quality production and event management, an all-local line-up is just as value for



money and of high standard as any foreign act, which at the time, the second wave of ‘the Mzansi Invasion’ hadn’t gained momentum.

I saw an opportunity in the vast lack of services needed to create a viable entertainment and creative arts industry, the potential for the creation of our own unique brand of entertainment and opportunity to take advantage of advances in internet/telecoms and of the global attention the region was enjoying at the time.

MTV had just set-up shop in South Africa, and more international media houses and entities were active in the region, so I felt that if Eswatini positioned herself right, we’d have something great going.

Concepts, markets and technologies like hardware, social media etc. I had been familiar with, and were slowly coming in and I wanted eSwatini to use these things to her benefit, as well as mine.

Having secured ties and my business interests, I made the move.

**Q. How has it gone so far, are you near or far from your goal? What has been your experience or findings?**

A. Let’s use a major supermarket chain; Spar, Pick n’ Pay, the like, as an example. The global music and entertainment industry is Spar, eSwatini music and creative arts is that small stall of handmade crafts outside the main door, trying to get noticed by or sell to the passerby going into the supermarket, where most of the big money is going to be spent.

The items inside the shop have gone through all the tedious but essential steps to get their product shelf-worthy; ISO standards, food safety, packaging, branding, barcodes etc. all in place. Once this happens, a product can easily find itself distribution deals and the like, landing on shelves in major markets. This is no different in music.

Technically, music from Eswatini does not exist. Now before you crucify me, hear me out. You’ll mention artists like Sands, for example. Yes he’s doing a fantastic job flying our country’s flag high, but technically, his music is not classed as from Eswatini or a Swati artist, here’s why.

People in the corporate sector will be familiar with International Standards Organization (ISO) and compliance, well something that deals with music and other forms of creative works.

There are codes used to identify music, which gives a potential user of the music a lot of key details they need to know before they can even consider using the product. Radio stations, streaming sites, playlists, advertising

companies, TV stations, film companies etc., all use these codes because they know the music is properly registered and it will be simple for legal and accounts to deal with royalties etc.

Without these codes, forget. They will not even listen to it, no matter how good, they cannot put it in their system. ISRC was developed by the international recording industry through the ISO as a response to a need to identify sound and music video recordings. This way they ensure efficient protection and royalty distribution where applicable.

The people selling the RISA/SAMRO narrative are killing any potential for the establishment of a local and lucrative music industry. Yes, they have started a valuable conversation, but I feel that the whole ‘register with RISA/SAMRO’ thing is like a game of Chinese Whispers/Broken Telephone.

As a signatory to the Berne Convention (Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works), which is overseen by WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation) Eswatini, South Africa and other signing countries, are required to recognise the copyright of the works of authors from other signatory countries, in addition to the copyright of its own nationals.

This means that each country must have a means of tracking creative works. As part of the rules of being part of international bodies, RISA has no authority to issue codes for anything but South African music, thus no muscle outside of its’ borders unless there is an affiliate organization in that country.

This has two effects; first, it means that when you take your music to be registered with RISA/SAMRO first, you will be issued a South Africa code on your work, which means that your art is subject to South African industry conditions, which at first may seem great, but I’ll elaborate on that, don’t want to lose my train of thought, and second, in the databases and spreadsheets that matter, the ones the likes of BET, Tidal etc. use, Eswatini has a blank space, no activity whatsoever because our music is technically South African.

The code is what you must have first, before you even try to shop the song to a label or even release; the code is proof of ownership, before you even think of royalties etc.

So when an editor of Source Magazine wants the research team to find new emerging markets, they get info from the databases, if we are zero, we’ll get zero; interest, coverage, investment. It’s a numbers game.

Once Nigeria, Ghana and other countries set their own bodies up, their industries boomed. Instagram, You-tube etc. are all set-up to benefit the sites and are easily manipulated, so real numbers and data is sourced from the international code managers, even most major awards like Billboard and MTV use them.

They will not tell you that putting your content online is a waste of time, because they benefit from leveraging traffic to advertisers, but a true picture of numbers and how well you are selling comes from the code managers and the international bodies, that all organizations like SAMRO have to submit reports and numbers to. World music commerce in most forms is centralized through these bodies to that

The people who are supposed to get this done, stakeholders of the various bodies and councils who deal with the arts, are preoccupied with paap, there needs to be serious work done by brave and holistically savvy people to take the arts in eSwatini from hobby-amateur status to a robust professional industry.

They are making this whole thing seem far more difficult and complicated than it is. This issue would take a month to solve with the tools we have in the right hands. This lack of self-confidence and dependence

on outside input is another clear indication we as a nation haven’t recovered from the negative effects of ‘The Mzansi Invasion’.

Once we are internationally compliant and meet standards to enter the value-chain, a whole new world of opportunity presents itself. Take for example, how many streaming or other entertainment platforms restrict services to Eswatini or flat out cut-off service when you cross the border, this is large in part due to lack of compliance. We need to get from outside the door, on to the supermarket shelf, where the world is exposed to our product.

**Q. You mentioned something about art being subject to South African industry conditions. Given how it seems a far better option for local artists, what would be so bad about it?**

A. Ah, yes, another symptom of ‘The Mzansi Invasion’. All that glitters ain’t gold, ask Zahara and the actors on TV, there is a lot of info available on shady goings on, in SA. Yes, you can make a great living in SA or the rest of the world, but you need to make sure you know what you are getting into, do not leave your education; of rights, business ins and outs, to someone else.

I’ve spent a lot of time first-hand and researching the music/entertainment industry, both abroad and in Africa, and have realised that the whole system survives on slavery and not intended to reward, but exploit the creators of art.

Those who benefit from the music industry in its current form; from studio to radio, then to stage, to image, to Google, all cannot afford the artist to have a lion-share or control of their



work, it’ll crumble. The case is no different in South Africa. We must be careful not to want to emulate others so much; it blinds us to their pitfalls.

Take for example the myth that you get paid every time your song is played on radio or TV. Radio stations have a set price they negotiate with SAMRO etc. for how much they will pay to license music played on air per year.

Given the drop in revenue from advertising, radio stations could never afford to pay-per-play for all they play. This then creates a situation where undue influence from record labels etc. to play certain artists arises because they want a bigger slice of what SAMRO etc. will distribute in payments.

International music often is given to stations as promo in-return for playing their particular local artist, a freebie, so even if you think you have international distribution and you’ll earn something from radio play, look at the fine print. It is not in their best interest to inform you the creator/public because it messes with their leverage and collective bargaining power when it comes to negotiating deals, money and such, in short the less you know, the more they make.

If your music shows up on their system with a foreign code and isn’t part of the promo-stuff big labels give media houses, it is a different story, because collection societies have to remit foreign payments to where the music comes from, if that country has a collection society.

Also, back to the global-music supermarket, we need to show up on the map, big fish in our pond, not a little fish in the ocean, you are most likely to be noticed. On the shelf there is Thai rice, Basmati, Brown rice etc., not all classed as rice from China, so we need to present our art as a unique option, not part of a collective.

Local artists need to learn and appreciate that if you haven’t conquered and are relevant at home, you will be nothing outside. People use that as a key indicator if you are worth the time, if they call a friend from Eswatini and the report is poor, what next? They can’t consult the databases to verify.

You are more likely to make an impact and use that momentum from your immediate surroundings, but social media has got people convinced that out of all the people in South Africa or worldwide, your datafile host link will get noticed or your video will show up on the Youtube homepage.

To make it in bigger markets, you need serious money to pay for the necessary services needed to make an impact, so local acts need money-up to get anywhere near the level to be able to compete for attention. Let’s master the Build-It U13 league before we try PSL, we’ll get there but there are some boxes to be ticked and steps we cannot skip.

**Q. You like to mention ‘The Mzansi Invasion’, care to elaborate?**

A. No xenophobia, here, seen. I’ve got nothing against SA or people/artists from SA, I’m in between often, love the place and culture, of course, the arts scene. I just take issue with Eswatini apparently being stunned into inactivity and lack of innovation due to the effects of our interaction with our neighbors.

I use it as my twist on ‘The British Invasion’ that gripped the USA, when The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and other UK bands broke and took over the American and world music scenes.

Pre-apartheid South Africa’s laws put us in a prime position as a tourist destination, which in-turn saw major international acts performing in the country, I mean, Eric Clapton, Paul Simon, Tosh, Joan Amatrading, massive. Our TV station was on par in some aspects; with BBC shows, latest music courtesy of the French and the South African acts all wanted to play in some of the many clubs in the country; Maxim’s, Club Sun, Happy Valley etc.

Even just after 1994, our artists, models, fashion designers etc. were sought after by their South African counterparts, we saw each other as peers. Even the corporate sector sought Swati’s to fill their new BEE quota requirement as most black South Africans had not yet reached the level of education en masse to push the transformation agenda.

We had Siyavuka Festival, basketball tournaments that were rocking, we were on par, with black South Africa at least. The post-apartheid era saw substantial changes in sports and the arts as a result of the re-inclusion of South Africa, into various worldwide sports federations, marketplaces and industries.

These changes enabled people to make a living from their talent, as industries and jobs were created to educate, entertain and promote the new South Africa and capitalize on the vast amounts of advertising, or sponsorship cash being invested.

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Siphesihle Dlamini

In a major and historical move, talented musician Wandile Ndlovu popularly known as M Nation and a cultural troupe from Eswatini will have their names written in history books after being billed to perform at the Surajkund International Craft Mela Festival in India.

Ndlovu described the opportunity as a dream come true. "I am grateful for this chance to showcase my talent on a global platform," he said.

The Surajkund International Craft Mela Festival is renowned for celebrating art, culture, and music from around the world, making it the perfect stage for M Nation to showcase his skills.

This prestigious event, known for showcasing the artistic prowess of various

# From Eswatini to India: M Nation to hoist the Eswatini flag

countries, will provide M Nation with a global platform to hoist the Eswatini flag and share his talent with the world.

With infectious hits such as 'Limuva Lami' under his belt, M Nation is ready to bring the rich cultural heritage of Eswatini to an international stage.

In an exclusive interview, Ndlovu expressed anticipation for the performance, seeing it as the culmination of his hard work and dedication and declared that this year is set to be his time to shine.

During his time in India, M Nation plans to collaborate with a local cultural dance group, creating a captivating fusion of indigenous Swati music and dance moves. This unique blend promises to leave the audience in awe and adds an authentic touch to his performance.

Ndlovu said he is thrilled about this collaboration, as it will be his first time exploring such a creative and diverse combination. He said securing the India gig was made possible by the support of the Office of Arts and Culture, through the embassy.

He added that he is grateful for their assistance in turning his dream into a reality. This opportunity not only allows him to showcase his talent but also serves as a cultural ambassador for Eswatini, promoting the nation's rich cultural heritage.

Ndlovu hails from Piggs Peak in Eswatini. Since his debut in 2015, he has been making waves in the music industry, captivating audiences with his soulful voice. His success was further solidified when he emerged as one of the top ten winners of last year's MTN Bushfire Firefly competition, opening doors for him to perform at various high-profile events including the MTN Bushfire Festival.

On Monday, January 29, 2024, the Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs Bongani Nzima bid farewell to the artists at the Ministry's boardroom. The Minister expressed pride in the talented artists and commended them for their dedication and hard work in promoting Eswatini's rich cultural heritage.

Eswatini can proudly celebrate M Nation's achievements as he represents the nation on a global platform. His performance at the Surajkund International Craft Mela will not

only showcase the talent of this young artist but also shine a spotlight on the rich cultural heritage of Eswatini.

The 37th edition of the Surajkund International Craft Mela Festival started on February 2, 2024, and will run until February 18, 2024, at Surajkund, Faridabad. The cultural troupe and M Nation will embark on a 19-day tour of India, promoting Eswatini's cultural heritage and fostering cultural exchange and understanding between nations.

The Surajkund International Craft Mela Festival is renowned for its vibrant atmosphere, offering a wide array of crafts, music, and cultural performances. Visitors to the festival can immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of global traditions, witness captivating folk performances, and indulge in the flavours of diverse cuisines. It is an event that celebrates shared humanity and the beauty of cultural diversity, reminding people of the power of art to bridge gaps and bring people together.

What does the M Nation's performance mean to the local entertainment industry?

M Nation's participation in this renowned festival holds immense potential for Eswatini's economy. The exposure gained from performing on an international stage can attract foreign investment, boost tourism, and create opportunities for cultural exchange.

As visitors from all over the world witness the unique sound and performance of M Nation, they would be enticed to explore the beauty and vibrancy of Eswatini, leading to increased tourism revenue and economic growth.

The performance at the Surajkund International Craft Mela Festival would elevate the country's entertainment industry to new heights. By showcasing the talent and creativity of a local artist on a global platform, Eswatini's music scene would gain recognition and respect worldwide.

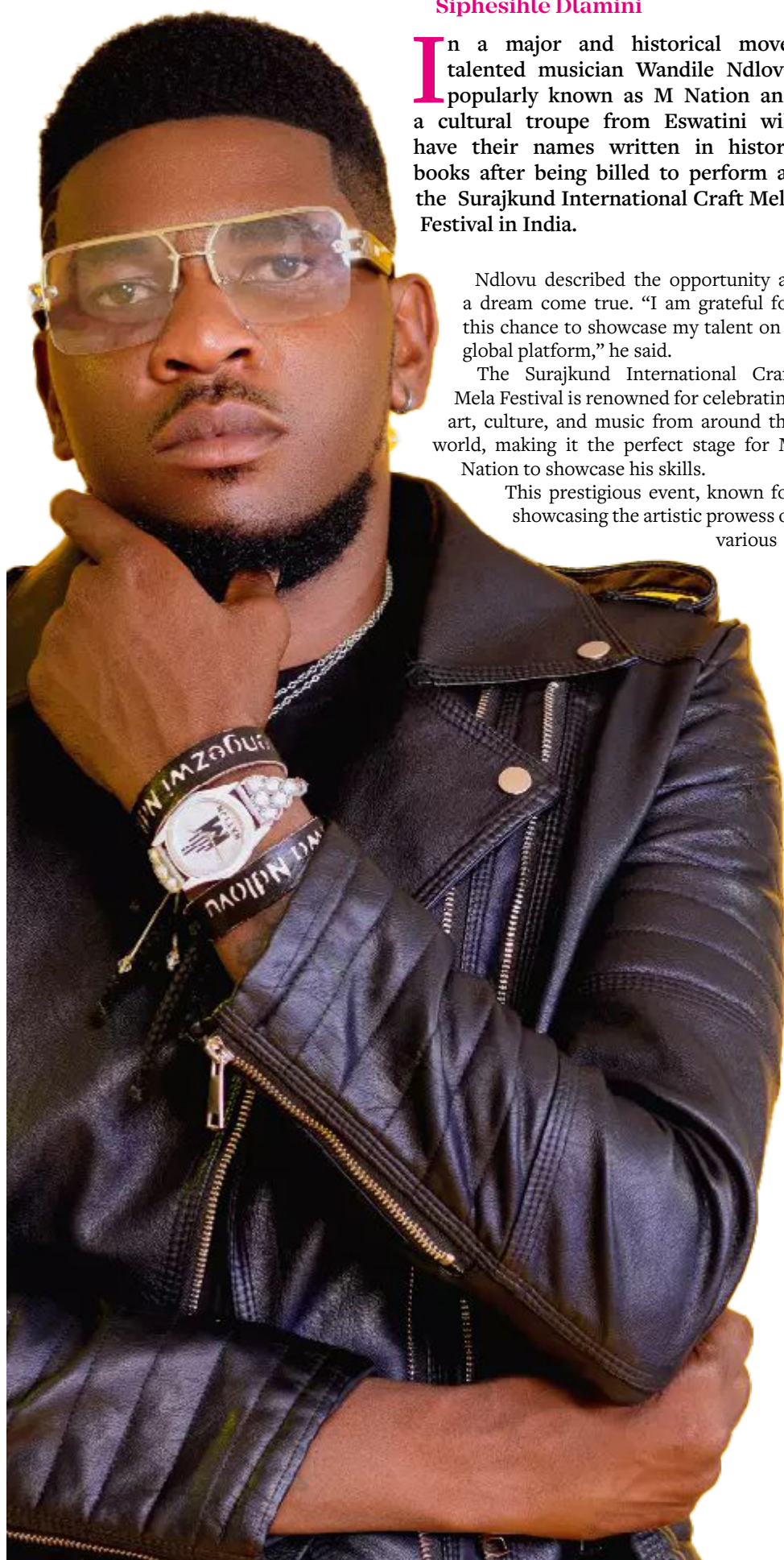
This exposure can open doors for collaborations, international tours, and partnerships with industry professionals, ultimately leading to the growth and development of the local music industry.

The impact of M Nation's performance goes beyond the immediate economic benefits. It also serves as an inspiration for aspiring

artists in Eswatini, proving that dreams can be realized, and that talent knows no boundaries.

M Nation's success story would encourage other artists to pursue their passion, hone their skills, and strive for excellence, contributing to the overall growth and vibrancy of the country's entertainment industry.

►Wandile Ndlovu popularly known as M Nation.



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Instead of catching the new wave of interest in black or local content; as siSwati is an official language, and emulating the rapidly growing industries in Africa, Eswatini lagged behind, slow to recognise the various benefits that come with having sports and creative arts, which are dynamic, professionalised, and with robust infrastructure.

It seemed as if Eswatini went from a hive of multicultural activity and promise in the apartheid years, to being preoccupied with the South African transformation, her bright lights and attractions, instead of building her own, which ultimately led to a climate where there's a lack of confidence in local ability, the 'it can't happen la kaGogo', mentality developed, with locals being star-struck by foreign talent, sidelining their own and consign the local industry to permanent curtain-raiser status.

The significant change in approach happened when local promoters started bringing SA acts every weekend and the influence from students going to school in SA tertiary gained momentum, the inferiority complex or groupie mentality kicked-in.

Once venue owners got a hold of the commercial gains, it was curtains. You have to realise, locals were getting paid peanuts to start with, venue owners didn't really see the need to pay much, so the game was predominantly passion-driven or self-promoted.

With no proper finances, no local artist could hope to keep up, let alone get to a level of a Thebe. South Africans were investing in their own, we weren't, and the gap started to show. They first started coming to Eswatini in Citi Goffs, eating Steer's and sleeping at Mountain Inn, to Viano's and demanding Villans.

When you pay an artist, that money goes towards the next level; after one show, AKA can pay for a music video that goes on Trace, here? The shiny cars and bright lights made people dizzy, I guess.

If local artists were paid better, they would be able to reinvest into their craft and progress. The current climate exploits local talent, and dumps vast sums every year out of our economy and inhibits growth in Eswatini.

The large fees foreign acts demand is due to the understanding of the need to reinvest; marketing, wardrobe, transport etc., they charge like a business because they are a business who know their budgets, worth and targets.

The creative arts industry in Eswatini has struggled to come out of the shadows of the influx of South African content and influence that flooded the nation in recent years. The Mzansi Invasion saw an increase in South African art and culture coming into Eswatini, which had more negative than positive effects on the local creative arts industry and economy, nothing good has really come from our interaction with South African artists etc., instead they reap massive cash payments to spend in Sandton and no benefit to local arts.

## Talking music and more with Dr. P

Local talent complains of often being subjected to inferior conditions, treatment and payment, which cannot possibly bode well for a large number of youth in Eswatini who aspire to careers in creative media and arts.

We first managed to navigate the 1994 - 1999 years fine, then it changed with Channel O. Then the 'News Café crowd' brought the lounge life and nightclub culture died, as lounging, talking the whole night, was the new chic.

Once the lounging was putting people to bed and everyone broke from champagne bottles with sparklers, Gqom shook the heck out of the lounges and Eyadini was the temple everyone wanted to replicate; venues all took on that feel and now it's amaPiano time. All fun and great stuff, but not our brand of fun, sound and overall culture, not made in Eswatini.

Save for Jiggs; who atleast makes an effort to stage highly-produced events and concepts, promoters are using the same methods, tired themes or behaving like local booking agents for SA acts; same faces ten times a year, and are preoccupied with popularity not real business, its evident in the lack of growth or equity/assets anyone doing business this way has; all that money passing through hands with nothing to show for it, just more likes on Instagram.

Those who should be pushing for the furtherance of local arts, are star-struck fans, evident in their reverence for foreign acts and commitment to initiatives where there are SA acts, over local projects.

Our artists and creative works can be world-class with the right investment. Marketing people in major companies also have a tendency to behave like they have a personal issue with paying locals well, it's not your money, your company told you to spend it on marketing and promo, not save it to add to the end-of-year party budget.

Unless I missed the memo, we aren't pushing to be another province, why can't we be gung-ho about all aspects of our culture, even urban or youth driven culture. We have great designers, singers, actors and more, who's talent would go far with real money being put behind them.

All countries take a serious interest in marketing and exporting their culture, it creates business and tourism, we need to tell and sell our stories. Besides money, there are a lot of nation building benefits from taking pride and creating or pushing your own local heroes, in these trying times, it would help with an increasingly disconnected and hopeless youth.

Time to compete, no more being a 'groupie nation', it has cost us enough already, the 4th



industrial revolution is upon us, we missed quite a few buses, let's catch this one.

**Q. With all the issues with music and arts in Eswatini you've highlighted, any positives, hope for the future?**

A. Oh, yeah. I've always been hopeful for the future, otherwise I would've scrapped the whole endeavor; mining for gold is always challenging at first, but you know what's waiting for you in the end, which is fuel for persistence and belief.

The talent I come across in the studio, alone, is hope enough. If I didn't know what was needed to change things around and get things going, maybe I'd be disillusioned, the task is different when you know the nature of the beast you face.

I applaud the increasing corporate support, big budgets are needed to do big things. I'm also encouraged by the dialogue around the arts, intellectual property, copyright and the need to ensure local acts are protected. I also like some of the talk coming out of ICT and Commerce ministries.

I just pray the powers that be, to engage the right people to make things happen. The intended Creative Hub, sounds great, but

without the right policies and people, it'll just be another white elephant, there are a lot of Swazis who can produce world-class work but are often sidelined for trivial reasons or jealousy, the hub mustn't be another shed full of tools with nobody to work with them. The increase in an array of the services needed for great content creation, is also a major source of joy; more cameras, graphic designers, stylists, etc. all will help package local art better.

We now need to shift our mentality to get the business end wrapped-up once and for all, so we can see the establishment of a professional industry; for emaSwati by emaSwati.

**Q. You mentioned that if you didn't know what was needed to change things around in the industry, you'd be disillusioned or scrapped the whole endeavour. Can you share any of those things needed or are they your own secrets?**

A. For sure. The information and tools are available to anyone who takes the time to really research the creative arts and entertainment industries. People are just lazy to read, and then get surprised when they are taken advantage of or cannot make a success of whatever it is they set out to do. 'Knowledge

is power', that's fact not cliché.

First, savvy people working on the establishment of an arts industry, fulltime. This is a no part-time, by the way. Nothing will happen if the focus and concentrated effort isn't there.

Second, we need a technically knowledgeable and critical press that covers art and entertainment. We need people who know how things are created, the dynamics of being or creating art, music theory, music history, music business, theatre arts, TV production, costume, make-up etc.

We need people who know what they are talking about, to review local music, for example. Give 3 out of 5 thumbs type critics. These play a key role in keeping artists on their toes and striving to always produce quality. Critics also educate the public on musical terms etc. making them a more informed audience, which usually results in the public being more open to new music, art or experiences.

Mass education has to take place; starting from the studio process, performance, styling, to educating on the roles of publicists, technical aspects; stage, sound systems, stage management, contracts, booking and etiquette.

Most artists that I've come across have no

clue about the scale of work needed to be a successful artist. They think, 'Facebook, iTunes, send it to my cousin who knows Entee' and that's it.

Mass education of artists and the public, will help everyone manage their expectations. Most people think they need to get signed and get rich, that easy, and when it doesn't happen, depression or suicide.

Music registration and royalties saga. It's not complicated and hard to do, if you give it to those who know what to do.

We also need policies in place that encourage investment or sponsorship in local art. ERA is key as tax incentives are a very good starting point. That's usually why companies sponsor in the first place, to lessen their tax bill.

These are a few in my long list, but you'll be here all day, these are a good starting point if we want to 'monetize our music' as SWAMA puts it.

**Q. You talk of a new role or next move. Are you near or far from your initial goals? What's next?**

A. I think it's time we get the boring but essential work done, in order to truly see commerce in our creative, arts and music industries. I can only measure success once Eswatini gets into the supermarket and our stuff is on the shelves.

That's my focus and mission, is to do what it takes to get our situation right, be a driving force behind change and progress. Our artists, DJs, actors, designers etc. need to eat and live well, need to support families and be happy, that's my next role and ultimate goal; no 'Messiah/savior complex', the way business is being conducted, is blocking me from my gold as well, I'm in the music business, after all and the aim is to make money at the end of it all.

**Q. Any parting shots?**

A. I think I've said enough for now. I can keep you on this topic for days, lots of work to be done.

More than anything, I think it is time to put our own, first. Enough lip-service, time to do real work and professionalize the creative arts industries, we need to give our country and youth hope, and something to be proud of.

I am here, I'm hitting the streets, time to get this thing right. My door is open and available to anyone for advice or who is interested in getting our industry moving in the needed direction. A collective effort is needed from all who are affected by the current situation, otherwise our industry will stay 'going nowhere slowly'.

You can keep up to date on my social media, I tend to keep it formal, so no funny DMs please. I just got IG, so follow me @drp\_sd, it's linked to my FB, which makes life for those of us who aren't so hooked on phones, easier.

I'm hopeful for Eswatini's prospects, we just need to make sure we do the right things to make her future bright and successful.

# Romantic places to visit this February

By Siphesihle Dlamini  
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February is the month of romance and love and many lovers are starting to worry about where they will celebrate Valentine's Day or the days after.

Below are a list of romantic spots for lovers to get away and lose themselves in luxury and fun.

## ENDONINI HOUSE AND MTH PROPERTIES

The optimum choice. Reliable and safe environment. Cleanliness is a habit, while comfort is compulsory in their business. Nature and art blend into their uniqueness. The First Priority is the pinnacle of Airbnb where a symphony of elegance and practicality merge.

This is where luxury meets exclusivity in the realm of unparalleled hospitality. Unleash your culinary prowess in the fully equipped kitchen, stay effortlessly connected with complimentary Wi-Fi, and revel in the exclusivity of your private bar. Air-conditioning is an added bonus for the sweltering heat.

- House Specifications
- 4 bedrooms
  - 3 bathrooms
  - Swimming pool
  - Free Wi-Fi
  - Air conditioning

And then there is The Second Priority which is a world of refined comfort and seamless charm where patrons experience a delightful fusion of grace and functionality. It is an exclusive retreat where visitors can dive into luxury offered by Airbnb, a stunning three-bedroom, two-bathroom house featuring a tempting pool, an air conditioning, and the added perks of free Wi-Fi and convenient parking. Your perfect escape awaits - indulge in comfort and unwind in style.

- House Specification
- 3 bedroom
  - 2 bathroom
  - Swimming pool
  - Free Wi-Fi
  - Air conditioning

## VILLA CASA LIFESTYLE

Villa Casa Lifestyle offers three beautifully crafted and luxurious apartments designed for pure and distinct escape to both the short time as well as the long-term visitor. Discover the epitome of luxury in this exquisite Airbnb, featuring luxurious two-bedroom units, each adorned with two opulent bathrooms. Just a stone's throw away from Ilanga Mall and the Tarentaal Spar complex, brimming with esteemed restaurants and shopping centers, Villa Casa places you at the epicenter of convenience and style.

The place features a living room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, free Wi-Fi, air conditioning, and free private parking. Unwind on your private terrace, as you immerse yourself in the plush comforts of your bedroom, cocooned in premium linens and surrounded by an ambience of serene sophistication.

The establishment is situated only 8 minutes away from the Nelspruit CBD and only 32 minutes from Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport R538, Nelspruit. This ideal location means visitors can enjoy the many aspects of Nelspruit as well as the province of Mpumalanga while residing at one of the most secure and luxurious accommodations in Nelspruit.

## HAWANE RESORT

Hawane Resort, Eswatini's highland paradise. Framed by Malolotja's majestic peaks rests Eswatini's northern highland paradise, Hawane Resort. The breathtaking beauty of the area and its spectacular views transport visitors into a multi-dimensional experience offering as much adventure, solitude, adrenaline, or tranquility as desired.

If the stunning views aren't enough to keep you entertained, there is a fully equipped games room and toys for indoors that will amuse all ages. On-site facilities include a swimming pool, horse riding, archery, bush spa, sauna, shop, babysitting services, and fully equipped, private conference facilities for up to 78 people.

Hawane also encourages guests to experience its houseboat on Maguga Dam on an overnight or day basis as well as a premium Malolotja Canopy Tour experience located in the nearby Malolotja National Park.

Its renowned restaurant is not only a culinary delight but also forms a holistic part of the Hawane experience. Thatched, intertwined wood and a huge central fireplace provide warmth while the step-down glass porch with seating brings in the light. African-fusion cuisine from across the continent graces the menu with a wide selection of vegetarian and spiced dishes to suit all palettes.



▲ Silverstone Lodge.



▲ Endonini House and MTH Properties.

● If the stunning views aren't enough to keep you entertained, there is a fully equipped games room and toys for indoors that will amuse all ages. On-site facilities include a swimming pool, horse riding, archery, bush spa, sauna, shop, babysitting services, and fully equipped, private conference facilities for up to 78 people.

Feel free to sample something special from the resort's wine cellar. You will also find a hand-picked selection of South African wines and spirits there for you to enjoy.

## COME AND EXPERIENCE UMUSHI WENKOSAZANE

Umushi weNkosazane Resort and Spa is a hotel perched on the mountainside in Mhlosheni in the Forbes Reef community. It is 18km away from Mbabane and very close to the beautiful Malolotja Nature Reserve. This tourist leisure center prides itself on offering a personalised experience to its guests.

Umushi offers standard and executive suite self-catering rooms that are comfortable with a homely feel. Onsite activities include quad biking, hiking, and walks around the property with beautiful and scenic views. The resort also caters for corporate events, baby showers, family, community and school visits.

Umushi weNkosazane has an onsite restaurant and a cozy bar that offers a diverse menu to tickle even the pickiest of taste buds. One can be assured of a great time with family or friends in this resort. Take a moment away from the hustle and bustle of city life, put a pause from Januworries, and visit Umushi weNkosazane for that much-needed break.

## DOMBEYA, NATURE'S HOME

Dombeya Game Reserve is a nature reserve in central Eswatini, about 20 minutes NE of Manzini (off the Mafutseni-Luve Road). It is the perfect place for people who love nature and the solitude of the bushveld.

The Nature Reserve is 330 hectares of beautiful rolling hills, distant views of Mliba Mountain, and, on clear days, views straight across the country to Mananga Mountain.

The self-catering lodges are private, stylish, and very well-equipped. Each lodge has 2 - 4

bedrooms, with en suite bathrooms, a large wrap-around verandah, a private swimming pool, and a big braai (BBQ area). This Valentine's season, visitors can explore the reserve at their own pace- taking their game drives and going for walks or hikes on the network of trails. Conservation management activities are very active, and the Reserve is in excellent ecological condition. The Reserve is home to giraffe, zebra, impala, kudu, nyala, bushbuck, common and red duiker, steenbok, warthog, bushpig, jackal, caracal, and others. Birdlife is excellent, and over 210 species have been identified.

## COME DINE AT JK'S STEAKHOUSE

The menu at JK's Steakhouse Matsapha features a variety of steaks, as well as other dishes such as chicken, fish, and pasta. The steaks are cooked to perfection and always juicy and flavorful. This Valentine's season, JK's Steakhouse Matsapha is a great place to go for a casual meal with friends or family. The prices are reasonable and the portions generous. The restaurant is also located just a short drive from the Ezulwini Valley. If you're looking for a great steakhouse in Matsapha, Eswatini, JK's Steakhouse Matsapha is worth checking out.

## SILVERSTONE LODGE, A HAVEN FOR NATURE LOVERS

This Valentine, step into a lodge whose grounds are akin to entering a storybook, a place where rustic charm blends seamlessly with modern comforts, and nature unfolds its wonders at every turn. A beautiful gem hidden deep in the valley just outside the capital city of Eswatini. Silverstone Lodge is famous for its stunning views over the river and waterfall, spacious rooms, and homey feel. The Lodge boasts an idyllic location alongside



▲ Dombeya Game Reserve.



▲ Ariel view of Umushi Wenkosazane Resort.



▲ JK's Steakhouse.



▲ Villa Casa Lifestyle.

the Mbuluzi River, offering breathtaking views that serenade guests from sunrise to sunset. Lush gardens teamed with vibrant

flora invite strolls, while the rhythmic sounds of cascading waterfalls lull the senses into a state of deep relaxation.

# Senegalese President Sall postpones presidential vote

**D**AKAR - President Macky Sall on Saturday postponed Senegal's planned Feb. 25 presidential election, announcing in a televised address to the nation that he had cancelled the relevant electoral law due to electoral disputes he warned could fuel unrest.

With little more than three weeks to go before the vote, the unprecedented step of delaying the poll, to an unspecified date, pitches Senegal into uncharted constitutional waters that some opposition and civil society groups warn could destabilise the country.

Sall's decision follows the constitutional council's January decision to exclude some prominent contenders from the electoral list, which has fuelled discontent about the election process.

"These troubled conditions could seriously undermine the credibility of the ballot by sowing the seeds of pre- and post-electoral disputes," Sall said in his address.

He did not set a new date for the vote, but said there would be a national dialogue to ensure the election would be free, fair and transparent.

He said the postponement would not affect his decision not to run for a third term - an issue that has helped fuel recurrent and sometimes deadly protests in what is normally one of West Africa's most stable democracies.

The capital Dakar appeared calm after Sall's announcement with no immediate sign of people taking to the streets in protest.

## BALLOT BOX

What happens next is unclear. Senegal has never delayed a presidential vote. Its four largely peaceful transitions of power via the ballot box since independence from France in 1960 have built up its reputation for stability.

Earlier on Saturday, the coalition of opposition candidate Khalifa Sall warned that delaying the vote would undermine the legitimacy of the election and amount to an "institutional coup d'etat".

The opposition Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), whose candidate Karim Wade was among those excluded from running, had formally requested a postponement on Friday.

The excluded candidates, who include opposition firebrand Ousmane Sonko, say the rules for candidacy were not applied fairly. The authorities deny this.

There was no immediate response to Sall's decision from Sonko's now-dissolved PASTEF party, whose supporters have regularly taken to the streets in recent years to protest alleged attempts by the authorities to sideline the opposition. The presidency and government deny this.

"Now that (the postponement) has been confirmed, this will likely relapse the country into a political uncertainty and revive civil unrest threats," said West Africa political analyst Wendyam Herve Lankoande.

The influential League of Imams and Preachers of Senegal also warned that postponing the vote would be "fraught with risks".

"As Senegal is stable in all respects and on track for elections, the wisest decision for the head of state would be to do everything possible to ensure that free and transparent elections are held," it said.

Senegalese voters are due to choose a successor to President Sall. For the first time in Senegal's history, the incumbent is not on the ballot. His handpicked successor, Prime Minister Amadou Ba, is among 20 candidates cleared to run.



▲ Senegal's president Macky Sall attends a national dialogue that aims easing political tension and violence ahead of the February 2024 presidential election in Dakar, Senegal



▲ Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed addresses the nation's parliament in the capital Addis Ababa.

## Ethiopia extends state of emergency in Amhara

**ADDIS ABABA** - Ethiopia's parliament on Friday extended by four months a state of emergency declared in August to respond to an insurgency in the northern region of Amhara that has resulted in hundreds of deaths and drawn accusations of widespread human rights abuses.

Fighting erupted in Amhara last July between federal forces and a local militia called Fano, which has accused the government of undermining the region's security.

The state of emergency handed the government powers to impose curfews, restrict people's movement and ban public gatherings. Since August, government forces have pushed Fano fighters out of cities but fighting has continued in smaller towns and rural areas.

Parliament said the extension was granted following a request by the justice minister and deliberations among lawmakers. The government denies it is seeking to undermine Amhara's security.

The conflict there erupted less than a year after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government reached a peace deal in November 2022 to end a two-year civil war in the neighbouring Tigray region that killed tens of

thousands.

Fano militiamen fought alongside the army against Tigrayan forces, but relations between the two sides quickly soured. This was in part due to the peace deal, which many in Amhara said failed to address their concerns about security threats from Tigray and another neighbouring region, Oromiya.

The state-appointed Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has documented a range of alleged abuses in the Amhara conflict, most of which it has attributed to government forces.

In October, it said dozens of civilians had been killed by drone strikes and house-to-house searches by government forces.

The government has not responded to specific allegations of abuses in Amhara but said in November that an EHRC report on the subject lacked balance.

EHRC head Daniel Bakele said on social media on Friday that his organisation was "gravely concerned" about the implications of the extension for human rights and the humanitarian situation.

(Reuters)

## AU urges dialogue between ECOWAS, junta-led states

The African Union (AU) on Tuesday called for dialogue between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and junta-led countries Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso who have said they will leave the bloc.

The trio's decision to exit ECOWAS, which they announced on Sunday, is a blow to the bloc's regional integration efforts after it suspended them following coups.

The AU had backed ECOWAS' efforts to restore democracy.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger's foreign ministries formally notified the ECOWAS Commission of their decisions to leave the bloc in written notices dated Jan. 29.

According to the bloc's treaty, member states wishing to withdraw must give a written one-year notice. So the move to quit the 15-member bloc could yet take time to implement, opening a door for negotiations.

The trio's stance towards ECOWAS has highlighted tumult across the region where armies have struggled to contain Islamist militants since seizing power in several countries. (Reuters)



▲ The African Union (AU) on Tuesday called for dialogue between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and junta-led countries Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso who have said they will leave the bloc.

## Kenya gas truck explosion torches Nairobi cylinder depot, kills 3

**NAIROBI** - A gas truck exploded in Kenya's capital Nairobi, sending a huge fireball into the night sky and causing a blaze that killed at least three people and injured 300, authorities and first responders said on Friday.

Residents in a nearby building screamed as a column of flame shot hundreds of feet into the air just before midnight, briefly forming a mushroom cloud, video posted on social media and verified by Reuters showed.

The government said three people had died in the explosion at a gas refilling plant and 280 more were being treated at hospitals around Nairobi. The Kenyan Red Cross said others were being treated at a triage point.

The fire engulfed a nearby textile and garment warehouse, while damaging several vehicles and commercial and residential properties, the government said.

"The fire caught up with me from almost one kilometre away as I was escaping," survivor Edwin Machio told Reuters.

"The flames from the explosion knocked me down and burnt me on my neck," he added, taking off his shirt to show burnt flesh on his



▲ A gas truck exploded in Kenya's capital Nairobi.

shoulders and upper arms.

A Reuters picture from the scene of the fire showed one body lying on the ground, covered with a blanket, while smoke billowed from several burning houses nearby. Kenya's Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA) said last year it had rejected three applications for construction permits for a Liquefied Petro-

leum Gas (LPG) storage and refilling plant at the site of the explosion because of the high population density around it. EPRA said it had asked the applicant to submit a risk assessment "indicating the radiation blast profiles in the unfortunate case of an explosion" but that this was never done. It was not immediately clear who owned the site. (Reuters)

# Racing for Ferrari fulfils a childhood dream, says Hamilton

Lewis Hamilton said he was determined to leave Mercedes on a high this season before fulfilling a childhood dream by racing for Ferrari in 2025.

Britain's seven-times Formula One world champion stunned the sport when his move on a multi-year deal was announced on Thursday. Hamilton, 39, said in a post on Instagram on Saturday that the decision felt right and reminded him of his move to Mercedes from McLaren at the end of 2012. "I feel incredibly fortunate, after achieving things with Mercedes that I could only have dreamed of as a kid, that I now have the chance to fulfil another childhood dream. Driving in Ferrari red," he wrote. "Mercedes has been a huge part of my life since I was 13 years old, so this decision has been the hardest I've ever had to make," he added. Hamilton said the time was right to take on a new challenge. "I still remember the feeling of taking a

leap of faith into the unknown when I first joined Mercedes in 2013," he recalled. "I know some people didn't understand it at the time but I was right to make the move then and it's the feeling I have again now. I'm excited to see what I can bring to this new opportunity and what we can do together." Ferrari have not won a drivers' title since 2007, the year Hamilton made a stunning debut with McLaren and missed becoming champion by a single point. "I still remember the feeling of taking a leap of faith into the unknown when I first joined Mercedes in 2013," he recalled. "I know some people didn't understand it at the time but I was right to make the move then and it's the feeling I have again now. I'm excited to see what I can bring to this new opportunity and what we can do together." Ferrari have not won a drivers' title since 2007, the year Hamilton made a stunning debut with McLaren and missed becoming champion by a single point. — Reuters



▲ Lewis Hamilton.

# Everton salvage point, Newcastle fight back in 4-4 draw with Luton

By Lori Ewing

LIVERPOOL — Relegation-threatened Everton rescued a point against Tottenham Hotspur in a 2-2 draw thanks to Jarrad Branthwaite's last-gasp goal on Saturday as Brighton & Hove Albion climbed to seventh in the Premier League table with a 4-1 victory over Crystal Palace.

Newcastle United fought back from two goals down in a rollercoaster 4-4 draw with Luton Town, who stayed just outside the drop zone, and new signing David Datro Fofana scored twice to earn relegation-threatened Burnley a 2-2 draw with Fulham. At Goodison Park, Branthwaite headed in the equaliser at the back post in the 94th minute. Tottenham striker Richarlison had netted a first-half brace against his old team. "It is a massive point, we have had a rough patch recently," Branthwaite told BBC. "We took our chances, obviously a bit disappointed with the goals we conceded but it is a good point and shows the fight we have as a team. "We worked putting pressure on the keeper (at set-pieces) through the week and it worked well." Spurs are fourth in the table on 44 points while Everton are 18th on 19 points.



▲ Everton fans hold up a sign in protest to the Premier League in the stands at Goodison Park, Liverpool.

Brighton ended a run of three games without a win to move level on 35 points with Manchester United who have a game in hand. Palace, whose loss piled more pressure on manager Roy Hodgson, are five points above the drop zone in 14th. Lewis Dunk opened the floodgates for Brighton in the third minute and they were up 3-0 at halftime after goals from Jack Hinshelwood and Facundo Buonanotte.

"We killed the game off in the first half. A top performance from everyone," Brighton captain Dunk told the BBC. "It is always nice to score a goal and especially in a derby. "Hopefully, now we can go on a run of winning games." At St James' Park, Newcastle's Sean Longstaff scored twice in a first half that ended 2-2, but Luton went 4-2 up through a Carlton Morris penalty and Elijah Adebayo's strike.

**Extraordinary draw** On an extraordinary afternoon, Kieran Trippier pulled one back and substitute Harvey Barnes equalised in the 73rd minute. Newcastle are ninth with 33 points and Luton are 16th on 20. "To be honest, I don't know what the feeling is," Longstaff said. "I feel as though, with no disrespect to Luton, we should win at home. And going twice ahead, we should win it. It could be an important point come the end of the season." Burnley clawed back from two goals down against Fulham and Fofana bundled home the equaliser in the 91st minute. Joao Palhinha and Rodrigo Muniz had struck within four first-half minutes to put Fulham in a commanding position, only to be undone at the death. Chelsea loanee Fofana had pulled a goal back for Burnley in the 71st minute before sliding in to push Wilson Odobert's cross over the line. "Completely disappointed, we should win this game," Fulham midfielder Willian said. "It was completely our fault as well. "The game was under control for 90 minutes, we should have taken the three points for sure. To concede two goals like we did is really disappointing." The draw kept Burnley second-bottom of the standings, seven points from the safety zone. Fulham are 12th. — Reuters



▲ A view of the mainstage during the Tyson Fury v Oleksandr Usyk press conference at the Outernet in London.

# Fury injury forces postponement of title fight with Usyk

LONDON — The undisputed heavyweight championship bout between Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk in Saudi Arabia has been postponed after Fury suffered a cut during sparring, promoters Queensberry Promotions said on Friday.

The 'Ring of Fire' bout, scheduled for Feb. 17 in Riyadh, was set to unify Fury's WBC heavyweight championship with his Ukrainian rival's WBA, IBF, WBO and IBO belts, crowning the first unified heavyweight boxing champion since 1999. "I am absolutely devastated after preparing for this bout for so long and being in such superb condition. I feel bad for everyone involved," Briton Fury said in a statement. "Once the doctors have appraised Tyson's eye we will have a better idea of the period of recovery needed," a spokesperson for Queensberry Promotions said. Fury, 35, won his WBC championship after knocking out Deontay Wilder in February 2020, while 37-year-old Usyk won his belts after outscoring Anthony Joshua in September 2021. Both boxers are undefeated in their professional careers. "I will work diligently towards the rescheduled date once the eye has healed. I can only apologise to everyone affected," Fury added.

Flights and hotels had already been booked for many of those attending the fight from abroad. Usyk's camp expressed scepticism about the news, despite Queensberry posting a picture of the 'freak cut' above Fury's right eye that it said required 'significant stitching'. The Ukrainian's manager Egis Klimas told Sky Sports television that Fury "will do anything to not face Usyk" and suggested that maybe the Briton was "hit by a frying pan which he asked for". Usyk's promoter Alex Krassnyuk also replied to an Instagram post by Fury with the comment: "Wish you soonest recovery. God sent you a sign. Think of retirement, brother." Queensberry's Frank Warren told talkSPORT radio that the fight would definitely happen once Fury had recovered. "It's the fight that everybody wanted and because of the Riyadh Season, His Excellency (Saudi entertainment head Turki Alalshikh) and all his team, that's why the fight is happening and nothing is going to impair it or stop it going on," Warren said. "It's unfortunate where we are but we will make sure that it will occur because it's the fight that everybody wants to see." Warren said Fury had been sparring with a Croatian heavyweight whose elbow caught Fury over the eye. — Reuters

# Iran eliminate Japan from Asian Cup after penalties

By Rohith Nair

AL RAYYAN, Qatar — Iran knocked four-times champions Japan out of the Asian Cup with a 2-1 victory in their quarter-final clash after skipper Alireza Jahanbakhsh converted a penalty in stoppage time at Education City Stadium on Saturday.

With the match between Asia's top-two ranked sides tied at 1-1, Iran won a penalty in the fourth minute of added time and Jahanbakhsh stepped up to blast the ball into the top corner, drawing a loud roar from the Iranian fans in the arena. The victory also saw Iran avenge their 2019 semi-final loss to Japan and when the final whistle blew, the Iranian bench emptied onto the pitch and an emotional Jahanbakhsh dropped to the turf in relief while many players wept tears of joy. Iran, who are seeking a record-equalling fourth Asian Cup title, had not beaten Japan in 19 years while their victory also extended Amir Ghalenoei's unbeaten streak to 16 matches since he took charge in March. "Iran should be proud of their sons, they gave everything they had for their people. I think the result can be a turning point for Iranian football," Ghalenoei told reporters. Iran will find out their semi-final opponents later on Saturday when defending champions Qatar take on Uzbekistan. Jordan play South Korea in the other semi-final. After a cagey start to a physical contest, Japan had taken the lead through Hidemasa Morita who made a run past four defenders

before beating Alireza Beiranvand in goal to silence the Iran fans in the stadium. But the volume went up when Iran equalised 10 minutes into the second half with a sublime move where Sardar Azmoun played the ball through to Mohammad Mohebi, who ran around his marker before slipping his shot past Suzuki into the bottom corner. Japan had dominated possession in the first half but it was Iran who controlled proceedings after the equaliser as they pressed hard in defence and initiated wave after wave of attacks and the pressure finally paid off in second-half added time. Japan's Ko Itakura made a mess of a clearance in the 94th minute and as he tried to recover, he tripped Hossein Kanani in the box and the referee immediately pointed to the spot, with Jahanbakhsh converting to whip their fans into a frenzy. "I'd like to congratulate Iran. Unfortunately we have to leave the tournament now at the quarter-final stage. I feel sorry for our fans and everyone involved in Japanese football," Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said. "I regret I couldn't give the earthquake victims a happier moment. I feel responsible for the result. "We have to improve in many aspects, we conceded a goal in all five matches in this tournament. If you don't keep a clean sheet you can't win... We couldn't handle the pressure they put on our defence." Meanwhile, defending champions and hosts Qatar beat Uzbekistan 3-2 on penalties in a thrilling Asian Cup quarter-final that ended 1-1

after extra time at Al Bayt Stadium on Saturday to set up a tantalising clash with Iran. With nearly 59,000 fans in attendance, Qatar goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham stood strong to save three penalties in the shootout before Pedro Miguel converted the decisive spot kick to send Qatar through to the semi-finals once again. Qatar had taken the lead shortly before the half-hour mark when captain Hassan Al Haydos dribbled into the box and his attempted cross took a deflection which went through the gloves of Utkir Yusupov into his own net to go down as an own goal. But Uzbekistan did not give up and took the game to Qatar, having several attempts on goal until the 59th minute when Odiljon Hamrobekov managed to take a shot that brushed the fingers of Barsham in goal before finding the net. Neither side could find a breakthrough in 90 minutes while Uzbekistan survived a late rally from Qatar in extra time to force penalties, where Uzbekistan's Rustam Ashurmatov and Qatar's 2019 top scorer Almoez Ali had their efforts saved. Qatar had their hearts in their mouths when Al-Mahdi Ali Mukhtar skied his effort but Barsham turned saviour to seal their progress and give the hosts a memorable night in the desert. Earlier on Saturday, Iran knocked out four-times champions and the continent's top-ranked side Japan after skipper Alireza Jahanbakhsh converted a penalty in second-half stoppage time to seal a 2-1 victory. — Reuters



▲ Iran players celebrate after the match at Education City Stadium, Al Rayyan, Qatar.

MTN Premier League games in pictures



Royal Leopard's Banele Shongwe vying past a Manzini wanderers player during the two teams' MTN Premier League clash at Mavuso Sports Ground. Royal Leopard secured an emphatic 4-2 win over the Westians.



Dejected Westians fans watching the game as their teams struggled to force a come back.



Royal Leopard's Muzi Mzoro Dlamini (17) scored one of the 4 goals for the club securing the emphatic victory over Manzini Wanderers.

EZULWINI UNITED 0 - 1 MBABANE HIGHLANDERS



Ezulwini United fell short after losing to Mbabane giants, Mbabane Highlanders by a lone goal during their MTN Premier League clash at Mayaluka Stadium.



Mbabane Highlanders players dashing past Ezulwini defenses.

Dejected Ezulwini United after being handed their lose by the 'Black Bull'.



Nsingizini Hotspurs Part 3:



# Leveraging community work to build a strong team

By Karabo Ngoepe  
karabon@rubiconmedia.group

ESWATINI's most professional and organised soccer team, Nsingizini Hotspurs has found a formula that works to benefit communities while spearheading its ambition to become a continental powerhouse.

Unlike other teams who find success and change their home base, 'Nsingizini Yezulu' is keeping its roots in Hluthi and investing back into the community.

Chief Executive Officer, Banele Ngobe says the fact that they are not changing their location is a testament to their vision and also gives the team its identity. The team has invested heavily in upgrading its training ground and this has resulted in numerous economic spillovers.

"The training ground projects have had a massive impact on the community. It brings business and it empowers people to spin this into an economic activity to make money. As a football club, the fact that we want to remain there tells you of who we are and what we stand for," he says.

The club has also gone the route travelled by some of the most successful clubs in the world. They have partnered up with schools to unearth raw talent and nurture it. This follows in the footsteps of teams like Mamelodi Sundowns in South Africa which has a partnership with Clapham High School. The programme has become a lucrative part of the talent pool to feed the first team.

"The first preference is to develop the youth from Nsingizini and surrounding areas. By doing so as a football club, you are changing lives because the players will be taken care of in terms of school fees and uniforms, thus transforming their lives. We have a partnership with Evelyn Baring whereby our Under 19 attend the school and the club contributes towards their education".

Ngobe maintains that in itself is a positive impact as football is a very short career and needs to be supplemented by a career outside the field.

"Even if the pupils do not sign their first contract with the club after high school, they are already positively impacted. Mamelodi Sundowns success has taught several teams to have a proper plan and patience for executing and implementing. It's not an overnight thing," he says.

"They've been doing this for quite some time. It is just that now it is a properly oiled machine. But the ingredients are there like development and proper partnership with surrounding schools. It is very critical, that is what we are trying to emulate as a club."

The Hluthi-based side will be introducing youth camps, a concept which we have seen from Amazulu, another collaborative effort that they have embarked on to strengthen what they do.

"During the school holidays at least for a week, we will have the youngsters from different age groups where they will train and camp just to give them experience and education of what it's like in a professional set-up. By doing so we will expose them to the culture of the club and how things are done," Ngobe says.

The team is also looking at setting up scouting networks throughout the world, something also being done by Sundowns. The South African side has managed to attract

## ... The first preference is to develop the youth from Nsingizini and surrounding areas



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs FC.

talents from as far as South America.

"We can copy a lot from Sundowns in terms of their scouting networks and to achieve what they have, we need resources, but before committing resources, we need to plan. Their planning is on another level and different stakeholders are playing their role to ensure that the machine is grinding. We can really learn a lot from them," he says.

The Nsingizini Hotspurs approach is already yielding positive results. The club has managed to attract talents from different corners of the continent. They recently added to their firepower and brought in a deadly striker from Zimbabwe.

Nyasha Chintulu has set the local scene ablaze with his goal prowess and deadly eye. Ngobe attributes these

qualities to his strong mindset.

"I found that he has a very strong mentality in terms of confidence in what he can offer the club. He was very clear that he was here to score goals, and to help the team and he wanted to align with the vision".

Ngobe adds that in their recruitment process, they tell the players the Vision and Core Values that they live by. This, Ngobe believes is what sold Chintulu and swayed him to sign with them.

"What we do when we recruit is sell the vision and project to the player. This is a quality striker looking at the number of

teams that wanted him in the SADC region, that is the quality we have. For us to convince him was not the monetary part alone but selling the vision also," he says.

*Catch the final edition of our four-part coverage looking at Nsingizini Hotspurs and what sets them apart in next weekend's edition of the Eswatini Sunday:*



## Premier League Previews:



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs' Thubelihle Mavuso.



▲ Manzini Sea Birds' Muzi Tsabedze.

## Redemption moment for Nsingizini, Sea Birds

By Sibusiso Masitela  
sibusisom@rubiconmedia.group

**SUNDAY:**  
**Sea Birds vs Nsingizini Hotspurs**  
**Venue: King Sobhuza II Stadium**  
**Kickoff time: 1 pm**

MANZINI Sea Birds and Nsingizini Hotspurs will both seek redemption in Sunday afternoon's clash at the King Sobhuza II Stadium.

The two teams are currently occupying mid-table positions with the Hluthi-based side perched at position seven with 21 points, two ahead of their ninth-placed opposition.

Positive results can push either side into the upper side on the log table in the second round following a dull first-round outing. The first-round encounter between these two sides did not produce a winner, as the match ended in a stalemate.

The new Nsingizini head coach Alex Sergion needs to build the perfect combination in the expensively assembled outfit. The green and white outfit on one hand is blended with experienced and youthful stars, such as Reagen Kagumbu, Bhhekinkosi Mlota, Thubelihle Mavuso and Yekisizwe Khumalo - the best midfield combinations.

'Insingizi yeZulu', as the team is fondly known, have beefed up their squad in the recent transfer window, with a couple of players such as Zimbabwean marksman Nyasha Nyuntuli, who announced his arrival with an avalanche of goals, and Sambulo 'Masoso' Simelane - both leading the green and white ensemble's attacking prowess.

Sea Birds have managed to maintain the core of their seasoned troops in Muzi Tsabedze, Mthokozisi Tsabedze and Sibusiso Dlamini, who all boast of vast experience.

Meanwhile 'Izinyoni Zolwandle' coach Sibusiso Mngometulu will need to ensure his players are at their element best for this tricky encounter.



▲ Rangers' Sandile Mhlanga.



▲ Young Buffaloes' Sandile 'Saviola' Gamedze.

## Rangers in Buffaloes scare

**Rangers vs Young Buffaloes**  
**Venue: King Sobhuza II Stadium**  
**Kickoff time: 3 pm**

IT'S another battle of David vs Goliath between Rangers and the revamped Young Buffaloes in the main match of the Sunday doubleheader at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium.

It is a mountain to climb for the home side, as they will be facing an in-form opposition while sitting at an unsafe position on the log standings.

The home side coach, Mthunzi Ginindza needs to be extra-vigilant against their ruthless opponents. The ex-Manzini Wanderers assistant coach has the mammoth task to make sure his players, such as Mphilwenhle Khumalo and Sandile Mhlanga are at their best to get something in this crunch encounter.

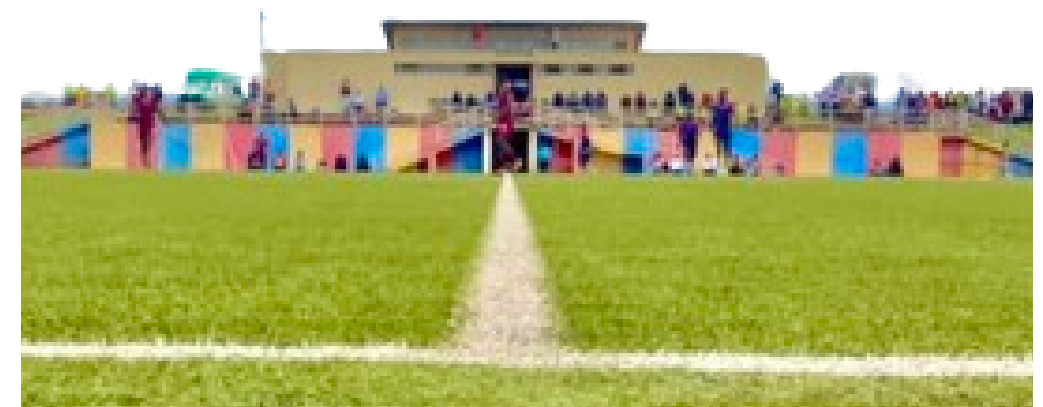
Rangers recently lost two of their key players, Albert Nkosana and Sambulo 'Masoso' Simelane to their parent club, Nsingizini Hotspurs.

Buffaloes rediscovered their vengeance in the second round, which brought the army side closer to the title race.

'Amathole Ezinyathi' has scored an impressive 10 goals in two matches in all competitions, which should send a clear message to their opponents to expect attacking football from them.

Buffaloes coach Mandla 'Sitofu' Dlamini has done well to reignite the careers of Sandile 'Saviola' Gamedze and Bongwa Matsebula this season, who have been a thorn in the flesh for many teams.

The army side will also parade their new signing former Madlenya FC captain Lucky Gamedze, who is set to be deployed in the defensive midfield role.



# Eswatini’s volleyball national team’s dream up in smoke

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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Eswatini will now have fewer sporting codes during the 2024 African Games in March in Ghana.

This follows the exit of the beach volleyball national team during the recent qualifiers held in Botswana. The country lost both men’s and women’s categories, ending their dream of making it to the continental games.

The men’s duo of Nduku Masangane and Mlamuli Simelane lost all their pool matches against South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. The women’s side comprising Nonhlanhla Khoza and Nokulunga Kunene suffered the same ordeal as they went down to Botswana, Mozambique and Angola.

Top male player Masangane said he was happy with their performance despite the loss.

“We did our best even though we didn’t have enough time to gel as a team. I am confident that we will improve in the next international competitions. We are grateful for the support that we have received from the Eswatini Sports and Recreation Council and the Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association (EOCGA) during the tournament.”

**TEAM ESWATINI RESULTS**

► **Males**  
Mozambique 2-0 Eswatini  
South Africa 2-1 Eswatini  
Namibia 2-0 Eswatini

► **Ladies**  
Mozambique 2-0 Eswatini  
Angola 2-0 Eswatini  
Botswana 2-0 Eswatini

... The men’s duo of Nduku Masangane and Mlamuli Simelane lost all their pool matches against South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia.



▲ Volleyball duo Nduku Masangane and Mlamuli Simelane.



▲ Nonhlanhla Khoza and Nokulunga Kunene.

## Ghana to open University of Sports

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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A big moment awaits local athletes after the 2024 African Games in Ghana.

The West African nation will convert the multimillion Borteyman indoor sports facility into a Sports University after the multi-continental sports spectacle between March 8 and 23 in Accra.

This will make Ghana the second African country to have a University of Sports on the continent after South Africa. This was revealed by Team Eswatini Chief de Mission Zakhele Zulu following his recent trip to Ghana where he attended the Chief de Mission seminar.

“Ghana has announced that they will convert their indoor facility into a university which will benefit all 54 African Countries. This is a great opportunity which we will grab with both hands as a country,” he said.

He further stated that the faculties for the new sports universities will be announced in due course.

The seasoned sports administrator further encouraged local athletes to continue working hard to be part of the team that will represent the country during the continental assignment.

● Ghana has announced that they will convert their indoor facility into a university which will benefit all 54 African Countries. This is a great opportunity which we will grab with both hands as a country

## ‘Swazibolt’ gears up for African Games

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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THE country’s fastest man Sibusiso ‘Swazibolt’ Matsenjwa continues with his extensive preparations for the 2024 African Games.

The Royal Eswatini Police Service sprinter will be attending the AGN 300m race on February 18 at the Pilditch Stadium ahead of the continental spectacle in March in Ghana.

He is currently undergoing training at the Tshwane High-Performance Center together with his female compatriot Bongive Mahlalela.

Matsenjwa said his preparations were proceeding smoothly.

“I am currently working hard in training in preparation for my major competitions. I am confident that the AGN race will boost my endurance as I continue to prepare for both the African Games and the Olympic Games where I want to do well for my country,” he said.

He further thanked the local sporting bodies and the Royal Eswatini Police Service for supporting his career.

“I am grateful for the support that I have been getting from the Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association (EOCGA), Eswatini Sports and Recreation Council (ESRC) and my team (REPS). The love that I am getting from the three organizations encourages me to work hard every day. I am confident that I will achieve a podium finish in the big assignments”.

Matsenjwa has reached the finals of the 2022 Commonwealth Games and rescheduled 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games semifinals. He is part of the EOCGA Olympic scholarship training program together with Thabiso

“I am currently working hard in training in preparation for my major competitions. I am confident that the AGN race will boost my endurance as I continue to prepare for both the African Games and the Olympic Games where I want to do well for my country”



▲ Sibusiso ‘Swazibolt’ Matsenjwa.

## Olympic qualifiers good preparations for African Games – Taekwondo President

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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ESWATINI Taekwondo Federation (ETF) President Zakhele Dlamini strongly believes that national participation in the 2024 Olympic Games qualifiers will spearhead the country’s preparations for the African Games.

Dlamini said this after confirming the four-member national team’s participation in the Olympic Games qualifiers ahead of the continental spectacle. The current Taekwondo national team comprises the quartet of Wandile Maziya, Mfanewekhaya Dube Carlota Munave and Nonhle Maduma. The four-member team will be under the tutelage of internationally recognized coach Mancoba Motsa.

“We strongly believe that the Olympic Games preparations will sharpen our preparations for the African Games,” he said.

- THE FULL TAEKWONDO NATIONAL TEAM**
- Females**
- Callota Munave
  - Nonhle Maduma
- Males**
- Wandile Maziya
  - Mfanawekhaya Dube



▲ Eswatini Taekwondo Federation President Zakhele Dlamini.



▲ Eswatini Taekwondo athletes.

