

Eswatini pushes to become ICT giant

- King Mswati III stresses the importance of advancing Eswatini's value chains
- Improved ICT infrastructure can establish telemedicine applications
- ICT infrastructure enables the proliferation of digital financial services
- ICT plays a crucial role promoting sustainable environmental practices

Ncaba Ntshakala

THE Kingdom of Eswatini has set its sights on becoming a dominant player in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector.

His Majesty King Mswati III in his Speech from the Throne address when opening the first session of the 12th Parliament laid out a vision for Eswatini's future, emphasizing the need for investments in ICT infrastructure and value chain development to stimulate industrialization and economic diversification.

The King acknowledged the challenges facing the nation, stating, "We are operating in a highly competitive global environment, and we must adapt and innovate to remain relevant."

He identified ICT as a key driver of progress, urging the government to "enhance its ICT infrastructure to create an enabling environment for businesses and entrepreneurs."

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▲His Majesty King Mswati III delivers the Speech from the Throne.

USA hits back at SA over ICJ move

Karabo Ngoepe

SOUTH Africa's move to take Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over allegations of genocide seems to have sparked a retaliation attack by the United States of America.

It is believed that a bill has been submitted to the United States Congress calling for a full review of Washington's bilateral relationship with Pretoria. The country's publication, Mail & Guardian on Saturday published an article that looked at the bill which was introduced by US Republican Congressman John James and Democratic Party Congressman Jared Moskowitz.

The bill will still need to be discussed and passed by Congress. The publication reported that the bill states that 'not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, US President Joe Biden in consultation with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, shall certify to the appropriate congressional committees and release publicly an unclassified determination explicitly stating whether South Africa has engaged in activities that undermine United States national security or foreign policy interests.'

It further states that the US government must provide an unclassified report submitted to the appropriate congressional committees justifying the determination upon its certificate.

The bill accuses the ANC of acting inconsistent with its publicly stated policy of nonalignment in international affairs. It states that the South African Government has a history of siding with malign actors,

including Hamas and the Russian Federation.

The US Congress bill argues that the South African government's support of Hamas dates back to 1994, when the ANC first came into power, taking a hardline stance of consistently accusing Israel of practising apartheid.

The ANC and the South African government have however been known to have ties with the Palestine Liberation Organisation dating back to former president Nelson Mandela's term in office.

"Following Hamas' unprovoked and unprecedented horrendous attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, where Hamas terrorists killed and kidnapped hundreds of Israelis, members of the South African Government and leaders of the ANC have delivered a variety of anti-semitic and anti-Israel-related statements and actions," it reads.

The move threatens South Africa's continued prospects to benefit from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Different stakeholders warned when the matter was taken to court that there could be retaliations that could affect trade opportunities for South Africa and countries in the SADC region which rely on SA. Any sanctions that might get imposed on South Africa will hit Eswatini which is the country's biggest trade partner.

Israel and Palestinian group Hamas have been at war since October. The war began when Hamas gunmen launched an attack on Israel from Gaza and took hostages while leaving a trail of destruction.

Israel retaliated with a full-out attack which has killed thousands in the Palestinian territory. The ongoing war between the two sides led to South Africa approaching the ICJ.

Buganu Festival begins in Buhleni next week

Bahle Gama

THE first stage of the Buganu (Marula) festival will be celebrated next weekend at Buhleni Royal Residence.

This was announced by Indvuna yeLutsango in the Hhohho region Lontfombi Ndzimandze on Saturday afternoon at Ludzidzini Royal Residence.

The Lutsango Regiment has been summoned by His Majesty King Mswati III for the Buganu ceremony to be held from Friday, February 16 to Sunday, February 18.

According to the leader of the Lutsango Regiment, the women are expected to

make their presentations at the Royal Residence on Friday with the main festivities, including singing and dancing on the second day (Saturday) beginning after lunch and on Sunday, the Lutsango Regiment will disperse.

The Buganu ceremony is known among emaSwati as the celebration of the 'first fruit' which comes after the Incwala Ceremony. Essentially, this is about cleansing and renewal in a new year.

During the ceremony, women get to network and showcase the various products they produce within their communities. It has over the years evolved into a session where business ideas are shared and markets for products are availed, not only within the premises but

beyond the festival itself.

Additionally, the Minister for Home Affairs Princess Lindiwe announced on behalf of Their Majesties that the dress code is a Red cotton Lihya on Saturday and an Orange Lihya on Sunday respectively. The Minister also cautioned Lutsango from wearing colourful clothing for uniformity.

His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, Royal family, Emabutfo Regiments, the entire Eswatini nation, and international guests from neighbouring countries and abroad will also partake in the ceremony.

The Buganu festival is one of the ceremonies that unite emaSwati through culture, values, traditions, and respect for the monarch.



▲Buganu announcement by Indvuna yeLutsango in the company of lutsango.



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Eswatini pushes to become ICT giant

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Values chains

Furthermore, King Mswati III stressed the importance of advancing Eswatini's value chains, stating that "we must move beyond simply exporting raw materials and focus on adding value to our products."

His Majesty called for closer collaboration between government and businesses to create an environment that supports investments in this area. Many applauded the King's call for ICT development and upgrade. In today's interconnected world, a robust ICT infrastructure is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for any nation's progress.

For Eswatini, investing in and upgrading its ICT infrastructure presents a golden opportunity to leapfrog into a more prosperous and equitable future. This is in line with His Majesty King Mswati III's vision of attaining the First World status.

Many countries are also going a similar route. Neighbouring South Africa is looking at tapping into the ICT sector. Technology is involved in almost every facet of the economy – from telecommunications to increasing productivity in manufacturing with robots, and more efficient computer hardware and software.

According to Statistics South Africa, in 2014, the ICT sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) was R114 487 or 3% of the GDP. In 2014, South Africa was a net importer of ICT products and services with an estimated ICT trade deficit of R97 189 million.

South Africa imported ICT products and services of R130 983 million and exported ICT products and services of R33 794 million. ICT imports contributed 10,4% of total imports into the economy, whilst ICT exports contributed only 2,8% of total exports.

The largest imported ICT product was radio, television and communication equipment totalling R62 237 million. In 2014, telecommunication services contributed 1,9 percentage points towards the total ICT sector contribution to GDP (3,0% of total GDP), followed by related industries (contributing 0,5 percentage points), computer services and activities (contributing 0,3 percentage points), manufacturing (contributing 0,2 percentage points), and content and media (contributing 0,2 percentage points).

The SA Technical Advisory Centre said the negative trade balance showed that they were exporting jobs by depending on foreign-produced ICT goods and services.

"This is an indication that we are lagging as a country in terms of the fourth industrial revolution. South African ICT companies rank among world leaders in areas such as mobile software, electronic banking services, prepayment, revenue management, fraud prevention systems and the manufacture of set-top boxes, with some of the products destined for the export market," it said.

Eswatini has gradually been making inroads towards catching up to the fourth industrial revolution. The Royal Science and Technology Park has been a key driver towards this.

The RSTP was created through the vision of His Majesty, King Mswati III. The Vision is well enshrined in the Act of Parliament, the Royal Science & Technology Park Act of 2012. The Vision is the first comprehensive effort, to promote science, technology, and innovation, in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

The RSTP aims to provide steadfast support for basic research and innovation. In doing so, provide a coherent approach to maximizing the innovation dividend.

The idea to develop a science and technology



His Majesty King Mswati III at the opening of the 12th Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

park, started in 2007, with the creation of an initial concept. In 2008, a team of experts, did a study, to decide the feasibility of launching such a park. They completed the study in 2009 and found that the idea was feasible and that it would be a gain to the economy of Eswatini. A

master plan was developed in 2010.

The King said Eswatini needs to become a nation of innovators and creators to assist in diversifying its economy to better cope with external shocks.

"The Kingdom needs a strong National

System of Innovation (NSI) as it embarks on a mission to shift from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy that values ideas, discoveries, and innovation. This effort requires that we cultivate collaboration and partnerships to fulfil our research, scientific,

technology, and invention goals as a nation," the King said.

It is worth mentioning that a modern ICT infrastructure facilitates seamless communication, data transfer, and access to online platforms, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. Businesses can reach wider markets, collaborate globally, and attract foreign investment.

Additionally, e-commerce flourishes, boosting economic activity and job creation across various sectors. Eswatini's economy heavily relies on agriculture. More ICT solutions will improve farm management, access to markets, and information sharing, boosting agricultural productivity and income.

Moreover, upgraded ICT helps increase productivity. Faster and more reliable internet access enables businesses to communicate, collaborate, and share data more efficiently, leading to increased productivity and ultimately, economic growth.

It also has an impact on e-commerce expansion which states that improved ICT empowers businesses to participate in e-commerce, expanding their reach beyond local markets and creating new opportunities for growth and export.

The King acknowledged this and called upon the government to create a conducive environment that would also encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship among the youth.

"Our focus must be on fostering a more conducive environment for business and investment. Simplifying the process of registration for SMEs should be considered by implementing digital solutions as well as reducing the tax compliance burden for small, emerging businesses. Particular attention must also be paid to increasing access to business development services, for our minority groups to ensure that they invest in diversity and the world of opportunities out there," the King said.

Upgraded ICT infrastructure also paves the way for e-learning initiatives, offering quality education to remote areas and marginalized communities. Online resources and interactive platforms enhance traditional learning methods, preparing students for the demands of the digital age. Again, ICT skills training empowers individuals to participate in the growing knowledge economy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in lockdowns, schools from around the world turned to online learning. This however exposed the technological divides that still exist globally. Even in the most developed countries, the have-nots were not able to participate due to the unavailability of infrastructure in their areas.

Healthcare and service delivery

With its goal of attaining the first world status, Eswatini's improved ICT infrastructure can establish telemedicine applications that allow for remote consultations and specialist diagnoses, expanding access to quality healthcare even in rural areas. Efficient online platforms can streamline government services, making them more accessible and citizen-friendly. This transparency and accountability fosters trust and improves governance.

Financial inclusion

Secure and reliable ICT infrastructure enables the proliferation of mobile banking and other digital financial services. This brings previously unbanked populations into the formal financial system, promoting financial inclusion and empowering individuals to manage their finances effectively.

Sustainable development

ICT plays a crucial role in monitoring and managing environmental resources and promoting sustainable practices. Precision agriculture, smart grids, and efficient waste management systems all rely on robust ICT infrastructure.

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Bags and shoes at Party opening

The ladies came dressed to the nines for the opening of the 1st session of the 12th Parliament on Friday. As with every stylish outfit, you need to properly accessorise. The attendees did just that with trendy bags and stylish shoes. We bring you more glamorous fashion pictures from the occasion.



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January was world's warmest on record, EU scientists say

BRUSSELS - The world just experienced its hottest January on record, continuing a run of exceptional heat fuelled by climate change, the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on Thursday.

Last month surpassed the previous warmest January, which occurred in 2020, in C3S's records going back to 1950. The exceptional month came after 2023 ranked as the planet's hottest year in global records going back to 1850, as human-caused climate change and the El Nino weather phenomenon, which warms the surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean, pushed temperatures higher.

Every month since June has been the world's hottest on record, compared with the

corresponding month in previous years.

"Not only is it the warmest January on record but we have also just experienced a 12-month period of more than 1.5 C (1.7 F) above the pre-industrial reference period," C3S Deputy Director Samantha Burgess said.

"Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are the only way to stop global temperatures increasing," she said.

Phenomenon

U.S. scientists have said 2024 has a one-in-three chance of being even hotter than last year, and a 99 per cent chance of ranking in the top five warmest years. The El Nino phenomenon began to weaken last month, and scientists opened a new tab have indicated it could shift to the cooler La Nina counterpart later this year. Still, average global sea surface

temperatures last month were the highest for any January on record.

Countries agreed in the 2015 Paris Agreement to try to prevent global warming surpassing 1.5 degrees Celsius, to avoid it unleashing more severe and irreversible consequences.

Despite exceeding 1.5 C in 12 months, the world has not yet breached the Paris Agreement target, which refers to an average global temperature over decades.

Some scientists have said the goal can no longer realistically be met, but have urged governments to act faster to cut CO2 emissions to limit overshooting the target - and the deadly heat, drought and rising seas that this would inflict on people and ecosystems - as much as possible. (Reuters)

“Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are the only way to stop global temperatures increasing”



Carbon Dioxide	Global Temp	Methane	Arctic Sea Ice	Minimum Extent	Ice Sheets	Sea Level	Ocean Warming
▲ 422 parts per million	▲ 1.4 °C since preindustrial	▲ 1923.6 parts per billion	▼ 12.2 per cent per decade since 1970		▼ 424 billion metric tons per year	▲ 4 inches since January 1993	▲ 345 zettajoules since 1955

By Karabo Ngoepe and Bahle Gama

The recent weather conditions associated with climate change have forced the government to set up measures to deal with the erratic patterns and destructions associated with the aftermath.

His Majesty King Mswati III on Friday admitted that the impacts of climate change were wreaking havoc in the Kingdom and the government needed to do something to address the issue.

"Extreme weather is becoming more frequent and intense in Eswatini, eroding economic achievements. Last year and recently, mild cyclones, hailstorms, and windstorms destroyed infrastructure, crops and animals across the Kingdom."

"These occasional and severe climate-induced disasters have forced the country to quickly construct the Disaster Management Fund to improve disaster preparedness and response."

The King said the government was committed to strengthening early warning services, catastrophe risk reduction and management to mitigate the extreme weather and climate change effects.

"Let us build on our efforts to address this phenomenon which has earned us the best urban development NDC initiative of the year, for 'strengthening of urban resilience' in Eswatini."

His Majesty's announcement comes as the country is busy with mop-up operations following Monday's storm that plunged parts of the country into darkness and caused infrastructure damage. On February 5, the country was hit by a severe hailstorm that caused extensive damage in the Hhohho and Manzini regions.

It was characterized by heavy rains, strong wind, and hail resulting in significant destruction across the affected areas. At around 6:30 p.m., what started as a drizzle escalated into a heavy hailstorm that caused an electricity blackout in all parts of the capital city and surrounding areas. In Mbabane, it only calmed at around 8 p.m.

On Tuesday, the NDMA hailstorm situational report stated that the storm had a widespread impact disrupting the living conditions of 858 people and affecting 143 households at the time, which increased drastically.

On February 8 the number of people and homesteads affected by the hailstorm increased to 2,626 and 436 respectively. The storm also caused damage to critical infrastructure, including seven schools, four NCPs, four churches, and 18 businesses.

The NDMA reported that the agriculture sector was hit the hardest with the storm destroying maize fields, beans, and vegetable gardens. In response to the storm, 75 people have been provided with 15 tarpaulins and three tents for temporary shelter, and food parcels have been distributed to households whose food stocks were damaged by the storm.

The NDMA further issued a storm advisory, calling upon emaSwati to trim weak or overhanging branches near their houses to prevent damages during a windstorm, inspect roofs for loose or damaged shingles, and make necessary repairs to prevent rain from entering the homes.

Motorists have been advised to park their vehicles in a garage or away from trees and structures that may pose a threat, further monitor for signs of structural damage, such as shifting or creaking noises, and be ready to evacuate if necessary.

"Avoid downed power lines; always assume they are energized/live and report them to Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC). We also advise that people seek refuge in an interior room away from windows to avoid potential shattering or flying debris, as well as securing or bringing indoors any objects susceptible to being blown around by strong winds," reads the report.

The National Aeronautics and Space



▲▼ Houses and classrooms that were not spared by the recent storm the country suffered, leaving a trail of destruction.



Administration (NASA) says climate change is not a future problem but one that needs to be attended to now. The organisation says changes to Earth's climate driven by increased human emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases are already having widespread effects on the environment: glaciers and ice sheets

are shrinking, river and lake ice is breaking up earlier, plant and animal geographic ranges are shifting, and plants and trees are blooming sooner.

Effects

Effects that scientists had long predicted would result from global climate change are now occurring, such as sea ice loss,

accelerated sea level rise, and longer, more intense heat waves.

Some changes such as droughts, wildfires, and extreme rainfall are happening faster than scientists previously assessed. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the United Nations body established to assess

the science related to climate change — modern humans have never before seen the observed changes in global climate, and some of these changes are irreversible over the next hundreds to thousands of years.

Scientists have high confidence that global temperatures will continue to rise for many decades, mainly due to greenhouse

gases produced by human activities.

Scientists have found that the Earth's average temperature has increased by about 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) during the 20th century. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment report, published in 2021, found that human emissions of heat-trapping gases have already warmed the climate by nearly 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1850-1900.

The global average temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees C (about 3 degrees F) within the next few decades. These changes will affect all regions of Earth.

NASA adds that the severity of the effects caused by climate change will depend on the path of future human activities. More greenhouse gas emissions will lead to more climate extremes and widespread damaging effects across the planet. However, those future effects depend on the total amount of carbon dioxide emitted.

RECENT STORMS

Since around July 2023, Eswatini has seen significant changes to its weather patterns and rainfall. Below is a timeline of some of the storms that have battered the Kingdom since the second part of 2023.

►► August 25-26, 2023, windstorms affected the country

The National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) conducted a rapid assessment which revealed significant damages to households, schools, and businesses.

The assessment indicated that the windstorm affected 233 households and 1,221 people, mainly in the Manzini and Hhohho regions. The windstorm also destroyed 18 schools and 15 business structures.

It further caused damage to food items and disrupted vital household assets such as vegetable gardens, piggery farms, chicken coops, and other small businesses.

►► In October, the country experienced torrential rains that lasted until October 31 2023. These resulted in flooding in different parts of the country and the process disrupted the proceedings of the Sibaya People's Parliament.

►► On December 8, 2023, the country faced severe hailstorms that caused extensive damage, especially in the central regions.

The Manzini, Shiselweni, and Lubombo regions felt the impact, with areas like Mafutseni, Khubuta, and more facing significant destruction. Homes, businesses, vehicles, and critical infrastructure, including schools and healthcare facilities, were all affected.

The situation called for immediate action to provide shelter to those in need. The NDMA, in collaboration with the Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) and WVE, swiftly responded to the urgent need for shelter, offering relief to over 6,521 individuals.

They distributed 1,300 tarpaulins and five tents, providing temporary shelter to those affected. An assessment was conducted to evaluate the storm's impact and damage and identify risks and vulnerabilities. It revealed that 6,298 households, 78 businesses, and 27 educational facilities were affected. Unfortunately, injuries were reported, and 14 individuals had to seek alternative shelter due to their homes being destroyed.

►► January 22, 2024, the NDMA had already assisted 684 people by rehabilitating 114 damaged houses. The response is ongoing, with resources such as building materials already delivered to the NDMA warehouse.

►► On February 5, the country was hit by a severe hailstorm that caused extensive damage in the Hhohho and Manzini regions.

It was characterized by heavy rains, strong wind, and hail resulting in significant destruction across the affected areas.

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Investigative

‘People involved in corruption must be held accountable’

His Majesty King Mswati III made a firm call to the government of the 12th Parliament to ensure that all measures are taken to prioritize taking action against corruption in the country.

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By Karabo Ngoepe and Bahle Gama

The nation needs to invest in the agricultural sector and further take advantage of the technological advancements that have been made to ensure food security.

This is the view of His Majesty King Mswati III who added that the agriculture sector has identified key areas of focus to not only change farming practices but also enhance the well-being of the country's population.

“There is a significant concern regarding the inability to meet our food security requirements domestically, resulting in a heavy reliance on imports. In addressing this imbalance, government has added a horticulture subsidy and information system to help with the marketing of fresh produce and agri-businesses. The existing maize, beans, and sorghum input subsidisation and tractor hire services will continue,” the King said.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis conducted in November 2019, less than half of the population of Eswatini is considered food secure (44 per cent) – IPC Level 1. Approximately 558,000 people (56 per cent) are chronically food insecure across the four regions. Of these, 60,000 people (6 per cent) are in Severe chronic food insecurity (IPC Level 4), 138,000 people (14 per cent) are in Moderate chronic food insecurity (IPC Level 3), and 360,000 people (36 per cent) are in Mild chronic food insecurity (IPC Level 2).

Of major concern are the regions of Lubombo and Shiselweni, which have been overall classified in IPC Level 3 (Moderate chronic food insecurity), with Lubombo having the highest proportion of its population in Severe chronic food insecurity (IPC Level 4).

The other two regions, Hhohho and Manzini, were overall classified in IPC Level 2 (Mild chronic food insecurity). The period that was analysed in this chronic food insecurity analysis was 2010-2019.

From June to September 2023, an estimated 238,500 people, equivalent to 20 per cent of the population, were considered to be experiencing IPC Phase 3. In the projected period, from October 2023 to March 2024, the number of people experiencing IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse) is expected to rise to 268,000 people in IPC Phase 3 an additional 14,700 individuals classified as IPC Phase 4, Emergency.

The IPC said the country was still grappling with the lingering effects of high food insecurity stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbated by the repercussions of the war in Ukraine, which has led to spikes in essential commodity prices, resulting in price shocks, loss of income, and unemployment.

“Further exacerbating the situation are extended periods of drought and flooding, contributing to the overall food insecurity in Eswatini,” the report stated.

Maize production falls below average in 2023 reflecting poor rainfall distribution

Production of maize for the previous year was estimated at 85 000 tonnes, about 15 per cent below the previous five-year average. The low production was attributed to reduced yields, with plantings estimated at near-average levels.

The low yields in 2023 were primarily caused by an erratic temporal distribution of rainfall, despite cumulative seasonal rainfall amounts being close to normal levels. Dry spells in January and March 2023, crucial months for maize yield development, adversely affected crop productivity.

Additionally, high costs of mineral fertilisers throughout 2022 led to reduced application rates, which was a secondary factor in curbing yields in 2023.

The decrease in fertilizer use was evident in the number of farmers participating in the government's input subsidy programme, down from 15,000 in 2021/22 to 11,500 in 2022/23.

This was coupled with a steep increase in fuel prices that pushed up tractor rental costs for ploughing services and caused a reduction in tractor use.

The prevailing El Niño event is expected to bring drier than normal weather conditions between October 2023 and June 2024, posing a downside risk to the 2024 production. To mitigate this, the King said the government needs to avail funds and make the process of acquiring them easy.

“An agricultural development fund has been established which is expected to boost investment and enhance the performance of value chains. Let us nurture our land to give us more value addition,” His Majesty said.

Expanding on His Majesty's calls and looking at the role played by agriculture on the African continent and the economies, urgent interventions are needed. Agriculture remains one of the highest job creators on the continent.

A study titled Agricultural Technology in Africa by Tavneet Suri and Christopher Udry in 2022 echoed the sentiments, indicating

Investments needed in agriculture to meet food security needs



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that economic development typically involves a structural transformation in which a dominantly agrarian economy moves towards being more manufacturing- and services-based.

However, economies of countries across Africa have an especially high reliance on agriculture, both for output and jobs, compared with the rest of the world.

The study found that the high shares of agriculture in GDP and employment in Africa largely reflect the low level of GDP per capita on the continent. Agriculture is almost 20 per cent of GDP in Africa, compared with a world average of about 5 per cent. Moreover, the share of agriculture in the GDP of the African region has remained stable over the last 50 years, whereas the share for other regions that started high in 1970—South East Asia and South Asia—has fallen a lot.

Agricultural shares of employment have declined across regions of the world in the last 30 years. Africa now has the highest share of employment in agriculture at about 50 per cent, given the declines in the South Asia region, while the world average of employment in agriculture is closer to 30 per cent.

There is also wide variation in these shares across regions within Africa, the highest being in East and West Africa and the lowest in South Africa.

Agriculture's share of GDP has been falling in East Africa, where it has historically been highest, but not in other regions. The authors said a first step towards structural transformation happens as the agricultural sector evolves from smallholder farmers growing mainly food crops (cereals) for self-consumption to larger-scale farmers growing food crops primarily for sale.

At present, about 80 per cent of African farmers are smallholders with under two hectares of land, who together account for 40 per cent of cultivated area, although farm sizes do seem to have been on the rise recently in some African countries.

The study found that to fully reap the benefits associated with agriculture, investments are needed in technology and education, echoing King Mswati III's clarion call.

The study said increasing agricultural productivity through improved technology is key to this process of agricultural and structural transformation. There are documented causal links from increased agricultural productivity to reduced poverty and improved child nutrition.

“There are many historical examples of the flexibility and openness to innovation of farmers across Africa: centuries-old examples like the introduction of maize, cassava, and sweet potatoes to Africa as part of the Columbian exchange; decades-old examples like the transformation of the economy of Ghana with the introduction of cocoa and more recent examples like the emergence of commercial flowers for export from Kenya and Ethiopia,” the study said.

But overall, these changes have not been sufficient to generate sustained productivity

growth across the board in agriculture in Africa, and productivity growth in African

agriculture has been slow relative to that in the rest of the world.

“Across the world, the value added per worker in agriculture is lower than it is in the

rest of the economy, but the gap is larger in Africa than it is elsewhere.”

SIDE BAR

• Import requirements estimated at average levels in 2023/24

Based on national cereal production and expected utilization in the 2023/24 marketing year (May/April), cereal import requirements, mainly maize, rice and wheat are estimated at a near average level of 221 000 tonnes.

An anticipated drawdown in stocks in 2023/24, which has been built up in previous years, is seen to limit import needs in 2023/24.

• Maize meal prices declined from record highs reached in January 2023

Prices of maize meal reached a record high at the start of 2023, reflecting trends in the international market, specifically in South Africa, the country's main source of grains.

Since peaking in January 2023, the average price of maize meal has declined but remained up to 33 per cent higher every year as of May 2023. Falling prices of maize in South Africa and the commercialization of the 2023 domestic harvest are attributed to the recent softening of local prices.

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▲People involved in corruption must be held accountable.

People involved in corruption must be held accountable — King

Bahle Gama

CORRUPTION is a major thorn and pain for most countries in the world, with many trying to develop strategies to pluck it and restore order within the governments.

His Majesty King Mswati III made a firm call to the government of the 12th Parliament to ensure that all measures are taken to prioritize taking action against corruption in the country.

The King said corruption stands in the way of progress in the nation's plans, programmes, and projects for development. His Majesty was speaking during the official opening of the first

session of the 12th Parliament on Friday where he said it was high time the nation witnessed judgments passed on individuals involved in corruption, "holding them accountable for their actions."

"Law enforcement agencies and structures must work together in our quest for zero tolerance for corruption in Eswatini," His Majesty said.

The King further referenced submissions made by emaSwati during the Sibaya People's Parliament, where they expressed their frustration with the lack of tangible progress in addressing this issue.

During the submissions made at Sibaya, many sectors were labelled as corrupt including the health sector which happened to be the main thorn for emaSwati with the

drug shortage that was a headache for the government at the time.

This resulted in Prime Minister Russell Dlamini putting together a National Drug Crisis Committee chaired by the Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade Manqoba Khumalo.

The committee was tasked with conducting investigations and making recommendations about the corruption that engulfed the health sector in the country, particularly the Central Medical Stores (CMS).

On November 29, 2023, the PM ordered the Ministry of Health to expedite the makeover of the CMS and its conversion to a semi-autonomous government institution.

Post the conversion, the CMS will be responsible for the acquisition, distribution, and disbursement of pharmaceuticals. The government spends about E2.6 billion on the health sector annually, which is equivalent to about 10 per cent of the Annual National budget.

At least E700 million of the E2.6 billion is used to acquire pharmaceuticals, which has been considered a huge investment by the government in the health sector and comes at the expense of other sectors.

The PM said it was almost impossible to stretch the envelope any further. He added that despite this huge investment, the government health system has continually deteriorated with serious shortages of medicines and drugs effectively putting the lives of emaSwati at risk.

A directive was made regarding the different issues faced by the sector to ensure appropriate and immediate service delivery to emaSwati. Earlier this year, on January 16, Chief Justice Bheki Maphalala appointed the Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate the Master of the High Court on allegations of impropriety, maladministration, abuse of power, and incidental matters.

This too was a response to the submissions made by emaSwati at Sibaya, which the CJ acknowledged and said his office felt it necessary to respond and have the office of the Master of the High Court probed.

CJ Maphalala said the commission would inquire into, make findings, report, and issue recommendations concerning the Master of the High Court.

This is an ongoing process that is slated to be concluded in three months.

The Commission is expected to conduct investigations about allegations of impropriety in handling the estate of deceased people, the winding up of companies, and the administration of the Guardian Fund.

The commission will further investigate whether there were any irregularities, undue enrichment, corruption, and influence in the appointment of executors in contested estates and the appointment of liquidators in the winding up of companies.

In 2022, Eswatini was ranked 122 out of 180 states and territories that were most corrupt. This was stated in a report by Transparency International and was an assessment of 2021.

Transparency International is a global movement that works in over 100 countries to end the injustice of corruption



by promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity.

The organization defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain and it advocates ending it, while it also advocates for people with power to be held accountable.

In 2022 Transparency International reported that Eswatini had an increment in corruption as it moved from position 33/180, and in computing the rate of corruption, the organization stated that it used the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) which it reported was the most widely used global corruption ranking in the world.

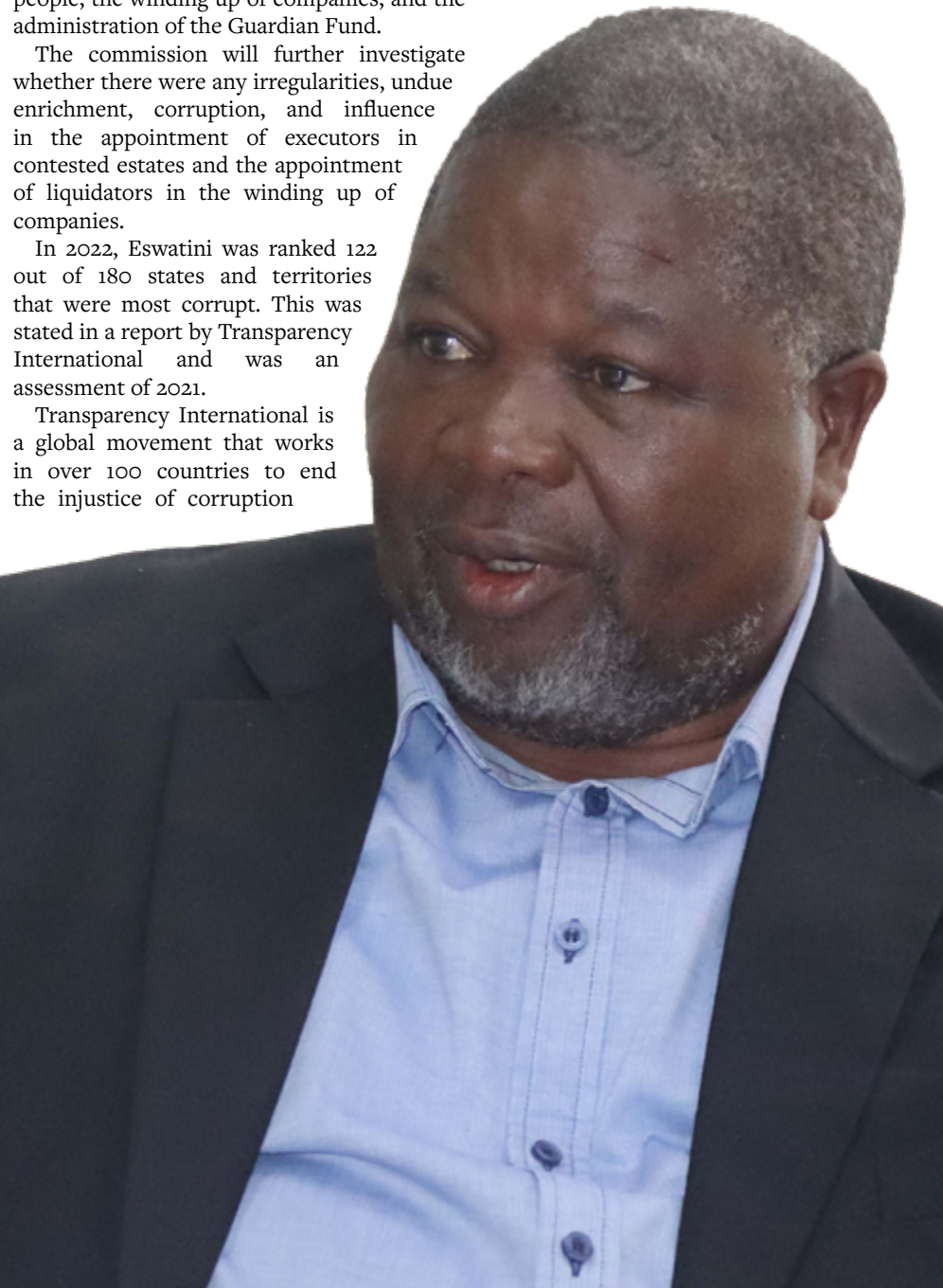
The report stated that CPI was used to measure how corrupt each country's public sector was perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople.

Transparency International reported that each country's score was a combination of at least three data sources drawn from 13 corruption surveys and assessments. It was also reported that those data sources were collected by a variety of reputable institutions, including the World Bank and the World Economic Forum.

The CPI is the leading measurement for public sector corruption worldwide. The process for calculating the CPI is regularly reviewed to make sure it is as robust and coherent as possible. This was done most recently by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in 2017.

Eswatini was further ranked number 32 on the list of African countries with the worst corruption. This was out of 52 countries. Transparency International stated that it looked into issues of bribery, diversion of public funds, and also officials who were using their public office for private gain without facing consequences.

▼Chief Justice Bheki Maphalala.



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MORE PICTURES FROM THE 1st SESSION OF PARLIAMENT OPENING



▲ His Majesty King Mswati III arrives in Lobamba Parliament on the first session for the opening of the 12th Parliament on Friday.



▲ Her Majesty the Indlovukazi arriving at Lobamba House of Parliament on Friday.



▲ His Excellency the Right Honourable Prime Minister Russell Dlamini during the singing of the National Anthem.



▲ Members of the 12th Parliament pose for a picture with their Majesties.



▲ Emakhosikati to His Majesty and Princess Sikhanyiso arrives at the National Parliament.



▲ 12th Parliament Mr Speaker Jabulani Mabuza with Senate President Lindiwe Dlamini arrive for the 1st session of the Opening of the Parliament on Friday.

Politics

Stories by Ncaba Ntshakala

PRIME Minister Russell Dlamini has challenged State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to effectively contribute to the country's economy.

In his remarks to State-Owned Enterprise CEOs and Chairpersons, the Prime Minister issued a bold challenge for them to develop ambitious, E1 billion projects that will create jobs and elevate the lives of all emaSwati.

The Premier urged the entity leaders to step up and play a leading role in driving economic development in Eswatini.

"Government needs great ideas, not just dreams," declared Dlamini, emphasizing the need for ambitious and viable projects worth over a billion Emalangeni.

He challenged the SOEs to develop concepts that "create jobs and make the lives of every liSwati better," aligning with His Majesty's vision for a developed state.

He added, "I want to declare here today; Government needs great ideas not just dreams. I am proffering a challenge to all of you to develop concepts of high value in any discipline or field that the Government can adopt, support, sell, or finance."

Traditionally, Eswatini's economic strategy relied on a more passive approach, where the government provided a conducive environment for the private sector to lead. However, Dlamini argues that this approach has not yielded the desired results for developing countries.



▲ Prime Minister Russell Dlamini.

King Mswati III pledges commitment to sustainability, education

IN his address when officially opening the first session of the 12th Parliament, His Majesty King Mswati III emphasized Eswatini's commitment to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 for a prosperous and sustainable continent.

King Mswati III highlighted the alignment of Eswatini's development initiatives with both agendas, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation and peace in achieving ambitious goals.

He specifically commended the African Union's declaration of 2024 as the "Year of Education," pledging Eswatini's continued focus on transforming its education system for the benefit of future generations.

"We wish to applaud the African Union for declaring 2024 the Year of Education, and Eswatini will remain focused on transforming our education system for the benefit of our children," stated the King.

Reflecting on progress towards the SDGs, the King acknowledged both achievements and challenges. He pointed to strides made in healthcare and education but recognized enduring obstacles in poverty, food security, and employment, exacerbated by recent global crises.

"To mention a few, we take pride in the strides made in sectors such as health and education," emphasized the King.

"We also acknowledge the persistent challenges in areas like poverty, food security, and employment, some of which have been impacted by the multiple crises faced across the globe in recent times."

"All our development initiatives fall within and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063," the King said.

"In line with the AU Agenda, we have repeatedly called for the silencing of guns so that we can pursue development for our countries."

The King told the Nation that the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063 are a collective responsibility.

"Our goal towards the SDGs and Agenda 2063 is a collective responsibility. Let us reaffirm our commitment to this ambitious plan

and work tirelessly towards a more sustainable, equitable, just and prosperous nation," the King said in his address.

The Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, are 17 interconnected goals that tackle global challenges like poverty, hunger, inequality, climate change, and peace. They serve as a universal call to action for countries, businesses, and individuals to contribute to a more just and sustainable world by 2030.

Key themes of the SDGs include ending poverty and hunger where the UN ensures that all people have necessities like food, shelter, and access to education. They also highlight the protection of lives and ensuring everyone has access to quality healthcare.

SDGs address climate change, ensure sustainable use of resources, and conserve biodiversity. The goals emphasize creating decent jobs and promoting sustainable economic growth. They also promote human rights, peace, and security for all.

AU Agenda 2063 on the other hand is an African-led blueprint that outlines the continent's aspirations for the next 50 years. It builds on the SDGs and adds further emphasis on African priorities like continental integration.

This promotes a seamless movement of people, goods, and capital across Africa. The agenda also embraces technology to drive economic growth and development, industrialization and economic transformation which is fostering a vibrant and diversified African economy, peace and security and good governance and democracy.

This is upholding democratic principles and ensuring accountable leadership.

66

All our development initiatives fall within and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063

PM to SOEs: 'Develop E1 Billion project to stimulate economic growth'

... The Premier challenged the SOEs to develop concepts that "create jobs and make the lives of every liSwati better," aligning with His Majesty's vision for a developed state.

He proposes a more proactive role for the government, with SOEs acting as key drivers of industrialization and investment.

The Prime Minister also stressed the importance of SOEs fulfilling their founding mandates. Failure to deliver on these mandates, he warns, could render them obsolete and justify the removal of government subsidies.

While acknowledging the importance of the private sector, Dlamini emphasizes the need for collaboration between SOEs, private businesses, and government ministries. He encourages joint efforts to leverage each other's strengths and achieve shared goals.

"You should begin to think about collaboration, not only amongst yourselves but also with the private sector as well as Government

ministries," the Premier said.

"You must always be conscious of your founding mandate and reflect it. If you fail to deliver on your mandate, it will mean you have outlived your purpose as SOE. There is no reason the Government should subvert that entity," Dlamini reminded the leaders that when doing their duties, they must remember that they serve society.

Patriotic

"As you carry out your different mandates, remember that you are part of society. For our country to thrive across all spheres, we need to be patriotic," he stated.

"After all, we only have one country, and we owe it to ourselves and future generations to make it a safe and peaceful haven for all. You must also join hands with Government in fighting

the scourge of corruption, in all its forms."

The Prime Minister emphasized, "As you lead your organisations, you must make sure that you lead with excellence and a high level of integrity. Government will initiate regular engagements with SOEs and the private sector for the common goal of strengthening the country's economy and creating employment for emaSwati."

SOEs occupy a unique position in Eswatini's economic landscape. Their presence aids the government in driving economic and social development.

Historically, SOEs in Eswatini emerged for various reasons which include infrastructure development. In the early stages of development, private investment may be scarce. SOEs were established to invest in critical

infrastructure like power, water, and transportation, laying the foundation for future economic activity.

They were also established to enhance strategic sectors. Governments sometimes deem certain industries – like mining or telecommunications – crucial for national interests. Eswatini SOEs were created to control and manage these strategic sectors, ensuring alignment with national goals of development.

The Kingdom of Eswatini also established SOEs to facilitate job creation and social development. The Kingdom's SOEs are instrumentally used to create employment opportunities and provide essential services in underserved areas, contributing to social development and poverty reduction in the country.



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Page 10

**Vodacom
vows to fight
'Please Call Me'
court ruling**

**South African
mobile data
prices likely
to rise**

Page 10



Africans need to 'Think Global' to compete on the world stage

Stories By Ncaba Ntshakala

AFRICAN nations need to adopt a more global mindset to compete effectively on the world stage. This is the view of Michelo Shakantu, Executive Chairman of Inyatsi Group Holdings. He shared this in a video on TikTok. Shakantu argues that the West's success can be attributed to a shift in perspective, focusing on markets and regional blocs like Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, rather than individual countries. This "global thinking" allows them to achieve scale and muscle, crucial for operating effectively in the international market. He criticizes the current state of African regional blocs like SADC and ECOWAS, stating that they lack the formalization, free trade capabilities, and free movement of people necessary to truly function as a unified force.

Small "Our countries are too small," Shakantu emphasizes. "Our populations are small. We will only work as Africans when Africa is a block from a business and a global point of view."

Shakantu's call to action resonates with ongoing discussions about Pan-Africanism and economic integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in

2020, aims to create a single market for goods and services across the continent, potentially boosting intra-African trade and attracting foreign investment. However, progress towards full implementation has been slow, hampered by infrastructure challenges and bureaucratic hurdles. His Majesty King

Mswati when opening the first session of the 12th Parliament, urged the government and the private sector to explore the regional and global trade markets like AfCFTA.

Shakantu's company, Inyatsi Group Holdings is a diversified corporation with a presence in at least nine African countries. It is one of the leading and most successful corporations in the region.

Originally established in 1982 as a construction company, the Group has established itself as a lead-

ing player in multiple sectors including construction, mining, telecommunications, financial services, health care, in-

surance, manufacturing, media, and property.

While Inyatsi boasts a renowned construction arm with a portfolio of high-profile projects across its operating countries, it's far from a one-trick pony. The company's mining division delves deep, responsibly exploring, extracting, and processing diverse minerals. Ad-

vanced technology and state-of-the-art equipment ensure safety and efficiency, while a commitment to sustainable practices keeps the environment in mind.

Inyatsi Group Holdings is a major player in the African telecoms market, the company provides mobile, fixed-line, and broadband services, bridging the communication gap and fostering connection.

The company doesn't stop there. It holds significant investments in financial services, healthcare and manufacturing. Its media arm keeps the public informed with daily and weekly publications, while its property division manages a vast portfolio of commercial and residential properties.

According to the Group, their development and progress are fueled by strong corporate values, ethical practices, and sustainable

partnerships which form the bedrock of the company's success. Led by experienced executives with a proven track record, Inyatsi is poised for continued growth and expansion across Africa.



▲ The bridge constructed along the Manzini to Mbadlane (MR3) Highway. (Right) Inyatsi Group Holdings Chairman Michelo Shakantu has advised African nations to "Think Global" to bridge the gap with western countries.



▲ Eswatini, SADC MSMEs empowered on trade through EU-funded program.

Eswatini, SADC MSMEs empowered on trade through EU-funded program

ESWATINI, alongside other Southern African Development Community (SADC) nations, received a boost in its agricultural trade capacity.

The SADC Secretariat, funded by the European Union (EU), implemented the Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) aimed at enhancing the ability of small-scale farmers and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to comply with Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures for food safety. This empowers them to participate in regional and international trade with confidence.

SPS measures are essential regulations that ensure the safety and quality of food products throughout the supply chain. By understanding and adhering to these protocols, farmers and MSMEs can access wider markets, potentially leading to increased income and economic growth.

The SADC-EU TFP held a capacity-building workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa from January 24-26 2024 and in

Maputo, Mozambique from January 29-31 2024 to address gaps in knowledge and practical experience in the production of food products to meet SPS requirements which are specific to food safety standards and other technical regulations.

Food safety regulatory measures adversely impact small-scale farmers and MSMEs who, in many cases, lack adequate expertise to understand and interpret the role played by standards, technical regulations and conformity assessments in their business.

These problems are compounded when MSMEs aspire to diversify into new or foreign markets, where they are required to demonstrate that their products and production processes comply with safe food requirements.

The agriculture and food production value chains in the SADC region account for a significant share of economic activity and are fundamental to human and animal survival.

Consequently, there are several strict regulatory instruments, Technical Barriers to

Trade (TBT) and SPS measures that govern the movement of food, food products and pre-packaged foodstuff across borders to ensure that food is safe for consumption.

The Region is making progress in identifying and reducing unnecessary trade barriers that are related to food safety regulatory measures by adopting common standards and recognising the equivalence of measures and assurances provided in one country across all SADC Member States.

Small-scale farmers, MSMEs and public sector representatives of the agricultural sector from Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe were made aware of the standards and measures that are required at present for the safe production and handling of food in line with international best practice.



▲ Ten tech titans vie for iHub leadership in SEDCO pitch session.

Ten tech titans vie for iHub leadership in SEDCO pitch session

TEN IT entrepreneurs battled it out last week in a nail-biting pitch session to win the coveted opportunity to run the iHub Centre at SEDCO's Pigg's Peak Estate.

This initiative, born from a partnership between the Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO), the Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCOM), and UNDP, aims to establish and operate ICT Hubs across the country, fostering innovation and digital transformation.

The esteemed adjudicating panel comprised experts from ESCCOM, UNDP, Eswatini Bank, Junior Achievement (JA), and Limkokwing University, ready to be captivated by the contenders' ideas.

Among them, Siyabonga Dlamini of Lourie Technologies exuded confidence, drawing on his proven IT expertise. Sandile Siphepho of Superior Sabolanga Investments expressed his gratitude for the platform, highlighting the potential for wider reach and business growth.

ICT hubs play a crucial role in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. These hubs serve as centralized spaces equipped with technology infrastructure, training resources, and collaborative workspaces, empowering individuals and businesses to harness the power of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Beyond captivating storytelling and impactful delivery, the judges meticulously evaluated each pitch based on strategic planning and long-term vision. More than personal aspirations, the contestants recognized the iHub as a game-changer for the Pigg's Peak community.

Access to cutting-edge IT tools, coupled with expert business training, promises to revitalize the area by providing vital services and generating employment opportunities.

Moreover, ICT hubs provide reliable and affordable internet access which is essential for online activities, research, and communication. It also provides professional workspaces fostering interaction and teamwork, and access to advanced equipment like 3D printers, software platforms, and digital tools. Hubs often connect budding entrepreneurs with experienced mentors and offer training programs to build digital skills.

The Small Enterprises Development Company (SEDCO) is a public enterprise that is wholly owned by the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini. SEDCO exists as a legal persona that was established in 1970 under the Companies Act No.7 of 1912 as a limited company and is a category "A" public enterprise under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Trade.

SEDCO is an organization established to create, develop, and promote Small, Micro, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Kingdom of Eswatini. We exist primarily to stimulate homegrown entrepreneurship with sustainable economic growth through entrepreneurship development and growth.

To date, MSME development features prominently in the country's strategy for economic development as articulated by the National Development Strategy (NDS), the Strategic Road Map for Economic Recovery, and the MSME Policy 2018.

BBeyond captivating storytelling and impactful delivery, the judges meticulously evaluated each pitch based on strategic planning and long-term vision. More than personal aspirations, the contestants recognized the iHub as a game-changer for the Pigg's Peak community.

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▲ Small scale Eswatini farmers.



▲ Africa Analysis believes there are factors at play that will see prices forced up again in the short-to-medium.

SA mobile data prices likely to increase

By Paula Gilbert

SOUTH Africa has seen major price reductions in mobile data rates per GB over the past two decades, but ICT market research and analysis firm Africa Analysis warns that consumers should prepare for price increases from local operators going forward.

Ofentse Dazela, director of pricing research at Africa Analysis, provided Connecting Africa with detailed data on the pricing changes for capped 30-day prepaid mobile data bundles that were offered from 2005 through to 2023.

The analysis draws on the company's extensive pricing database and is based on the median data rates per GB.

"Since 2005, we have tracked seven prepaid data bundles in our pricing database, namely the 100MB, 250MB, 500MB, 1GB, 2GB, 5GB and 10GB. By December 2023, the overall median price per GB of these bundles had declined by 88%," Dazela explained.

However, Africa Analysis believes there are factors at play that will see prices forced up again in the short-to-medium term due to increasing operational and capital costs for operators linked to SA's unstable power grid, inflation and currency weakness.

Pricing cycle reductions since 2005

Starting off with the positives, Dazela said

there have been three significant cycles of price reductions over the past 18 years.

During the first cycle, between 2005 and 2011, the median rate per 1 GB declined 61.9% from R880 (US\$46.28) to R335 (\$17.62). This period saw 3G launch in 2005 and roll out across the country.

"The second cycle saw the launch of LTE in 2012 which led to the introduction of various LTE packages between 2012 and 2019. This uptake spurred price-based competition paving the way for more price cuts in this seven-year period," Dazela said.

The median rate declined by 29.5%, from R244 (\$12.83) per GB to R172 (\$9.05). The third and current cycle started in 2020, and resulted in further prepaid data rate cuts through the end of December 2023, partly because of direct intervention by the Competition Commission which forced some local operators to drop prices in early 2020.

The median rate per GB fell 45.4% from R129 (\$6.78) to just under R70 (\$3.68) by the end of 2023, Africa Analysis found. Dazela said the 30-day prepaid data bundle prices remained relatively flat in the past two years, with the median rate declining by only 5.4%, from R74 (\$3.89) per GB to R70 (\$3.68) per GB.

Overall, the median rate per GB of the 30-day prepaid bundles saw a compound annual decline of 13% per annum between 2005 and 2023.

The focus of the analysis was based on the leading mobile operators in South Africa – Cell C, MTN, Telkom and Vodacom – that

offer monthly prepaid capped data bundles.

SA's data pricing future

Over the years, it's been clear operators have implemented significant price cuts. But Dazela believes the question on everyone's mind is whether there is still room for further cuts in the prepaid data segment.

The release of additional spectrum in SA created a market expectation that this would lead to accelerated price decreases of mobile data.

However, Africa Analysis believes several factors have acted against this expectation and continue to do so.

These include the persistently weak economic climate characterized by subdued consumer spend; inflationary pressures; the weak South African rand to US dollar exchange rate; and unabating episodes of load shedding.

He said that, in a bid to protect revenues, operators will likely continue to roll out expensive additional measures to mitigate ongoing power outages, like buying more backup generators for mobile towers.

Load shedding has been happening intermittently in SA since November 2007. The term refers to the deliberate shutdown of electric power by state-owned power utility Eskom in parts of the power distribution system when capacity is strained.

"SA has experienced the most extensive episodes of load shedding in the last two years

(2022/23) and it most certainly appears that load shedding will still be with us for some time going forward," Dazela explained.

Additionally, vandalism and battery theft at telecom network sites – which often spike during blackouts – resulted in further unplanned expenses for operators.

Earlier this week, MTN South Africa said it was joining forces with Community Police Forums (CPF) to tackle network infrastructure theft and vandalism in the country.

In March 2023, MTN said it would invest \$84.3 million in South Africa to help mitigate ongoing power blackouts in the country, and it plans to get its base stations completely off the grid in the future.

Since 2020, Vodacom South Africa has spent over R4 billion (\$210 million) on backup power solutions such as batteries and generators and a further R300 million (\$15.8 million) in the 2023 financial year on additional running costs in the form of diesel, security and maintenance.

"All these factors strongly suggest that prepaid data prices could rise in the immediate future, thus bucking the past 18-year trend of price declines," Dazela explained.

He said SA is likely entering a fourth cycle that is characterized by price increases in the short-to-medium term.

"Consumers should prepare for price increases from the operators," he concluded.

- The story first appeared on Connecting Africa



▲ The San Jose, California-based company has a total employee count of 84,900 as of fiscal 2023, according to its website.

Cisco to cut thousands of jobs ... as it seeks to focus on high growth areas – sources

NETWORK giant Cisco is planning to restructure its business which will include laying off thousands of employees, as it seeks to focus on high-growth areas, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

The San Jose, California-based company has a total employee count of 84,900 as of fiscal 2023, according to its website.

The company is still deciding on the total number of employees to be affected by the layoffs, one person said.

An announcement could come as early as next week, as the company prepares for its earnings call on February 14. In November 2022, Cisco announced during an earnings call a restructuring that impacted roughly 5% of its workforce which led to \$600 million (£11.5 billion) in severance and other charges.

Cisco declined to comment.

The move would come at a time when tech

companies, including telecom makers Nokia and Ericsson, cut thousands of jobs last year in a bid to lower costs.

Several big tech firms such as Amazon, Alphabet and Microsoft have implemented layoffs in recent weeks.

Cisco had cut its full-year revenue and profit forecasts in its previous earnings call, in a sign that demand for its networking equipment was slowing.

It blamed the weakness on a slowdown in orders in the first quarter, saying "Customers are currently focused on installing and implementing products in their environments."

The company has in recent years grappled with supply chain issues and a post-pandemic slowdown in demand, which has hastened its push into software offerings like cybersecurity.

(Reuters)



▲ The company is still deciding on the total number of employees to be affected by the layoffs.

SA's Vodacom vows to fight 'Please Call Me' court ruling

PAN-AFRICAN operator Vodacom has vowed that it will appeal a South African Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) judgment about the now infamous "Please Call Me" (PCM) case.

South African-headquartered Vodacom suffered another loss in a long legal battle, with the SCA ruling against it on Tuesday but said it would appeal the case before the Constitutional Court of South Africa (ConCourt).

Vodacom's loss stems from an appeal it brought against an earlier high court judgment that found it had not offered PCM inventor Nkosana Makate enough by way of compensation for the service.

Makate is credited with coming up with the PCM idea back in 2000, which allows mobile users without any airtime to send a free text message requesting that someone call them.

The SCA ruled that Makate is entitled to receive between 5% to 7.5% of the total money generated from the idea, including interest - revenue generated over 18 years, from 2001 to 2019.

The SCA ordered Vodacom to determine a new compensation for Makate within 30 days of the judgment.

"Vodacom notes the judgment of the supreme court of appeal of South Africa in the case of Vodacom (Pty) Ltd

v Makate, which was handed down on February 6, 2024," the telco said in a statement via the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE).

"Vodacom is surprised and disappointed with the judgment and will bring an application for leave to appeal before the

ConCourt within the prescribed period," the statement continued.

'Please Call Me' saga

Makate began his legal battle in 2008 after subsequently leaving Vodacom and receiving no compensation for the idea. The case has been in and out of various SA courts many times since then.

In 2022, the Pretoria High Court told Vodacom it needed to pay Makate more than the R47 million (US\$3.1 million at the time) it offered for his idea.

In April 2016 the Constitutional Court ordered Vodacom to "negotiate in good faith" and provide "reasonable compensation" to Makate for his PCM idea.

Negotiations ensued between Vodacom and Makate but no agreement was

reached and the Constitutional Court ordered Vodacom's current CEO, Shameel Joosub, to determine a reasonable amount of compensation to be paid to Makate.

In January 2019, Joosub offered R47 million (US\$3.1 million at the time).

That offer was way below

what Makate thought he deserved. He had originally asked Vodacom for 15% of all PCM revenue should the product be successful. In 2016, his legal counsel argued that would amount to around R10.5 billion (\$693.6 million at the time).

After two decades and numerous setbacks, one thing that has never changed is Makate's determination not to back down until he is paid what he believes he is owed for his invention. - The story first appeared on Connecting Africa



▲ 'Please Call Me' inventor Nkosana Makate is in a long running legal battle with Vodacom.



“When former US President Donald Trump re-focused America's foreign policy interests from global dominance to domestic politics fashioned on the slogan “Make America Great Again”, both the EU and NATO suffered tremendously and the underlying weaknesses around dichotomous approach to international and regional relations among member-states threatened their unity of purpose.”

”

Thought Leaders

USA is an open secret behind Israel's unparalleled power to kill



▲ As the US set out to conquer and dominate the international world order, closer ties with Israel have served to keep the entire Middle East under constant surveillance,

To criticise Israel is regarded as tantamount to being anti-Semitic. The charge is almost at the same level as treason, if not above. It implies that to condemn Israel is to condone Hitler's diabolic systematic annihilation of Jews.

But the power of Israel not only emanates from the country's uppermost economic and military development. It is premised on its very source – the US – the world's only remaining superpower since the end of the Cold War at the turn of the 1990s.

Washington not only arms Israel to the teeth. From one US administration after the other – Democrats or Republicans – the country's foreign policy on Israel remains consistent and unwavering.

Being the surrogate of the US, the benefits for Israel are immeasurable. They range from dozens of billions of US dollars in annual flow of aid to the Jewish state, coupled with trading preferential treatment. Bilateral relations between Tel Aviv and Washington are not only cosy and romantic; they flourish at every turn

and opportunity.

Since the Jewish state was established on the blood and annihilation of the Palestinians in 1948, Israel has thrived on nothing else but the subjugation of their fellow beings across the length and breadth of Palestine – from the river to the sea. I elect not to go back to 1967, another watershed moment – an interval in history during which the Jewish State annexed the humanity of the Palestinian people.

But then, why is the suffering of the Palestinians such a subject of apparent global indifference through so many years? Methinks because, since the end of WW11 in 1945 when the US became a mighty superpower, Israel's insulation from criticism, attack or diplomatic ramifications has been among America's top foreign policy objectives.

As the US set out to conquer and dominate the international world order, closer ties with Israel have served to keep the entire Middle East under constant surveillance, monitoring and on any other convenient occasion, invasion.



▲ A mosque bombed in the Israel/Hamas war.

Most people in the Islamic world across the Middle East loathe Israel ostensibly for the Jewish State's illegal occupation of Palestine, and subjecting the oppressed Palestinian people to a form of apartheid that is far worse than that of South Africa pre-1994.

But in defence of Israel, Washington regularly points out that the detractors of Israel in the region resemble a blood-thirsty mob that is hell-bent on destroying the Jewish nation. It is a narrative that any sitting administration in Israel dangles. The incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader – has thrived on this narrative and truly has to be thankful to this narrative for his political fortunes.

Since the end of WW11 and the formation of the United Nations, the majority of the nations of the world had thought that the UN's founding Charter which is premised on the ethos of multilateralism would foster global cooperation.

Global system

But lo and behold, the global system has systematically been tweaked and altered into what the US-led Global North describes as a “rules-based international world order”. Surreptitiously, this has replaced the multipolar world order with a unipolar one that is based on the “rules-based” world order of the powerful Western powers.

At the heart of this parallel global governance system that operates in juxtaposition to the UN is the US-led G7, a society of the world's wealthiest economies that is exclusionary, and operational. Among them are the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan. Together, they represent a fraction of the world's population but their collective economic power and cooperation have positioned them as a force to reckon with.

Together, they dominate the European Union (EU), an organisation of some 29 countries

most of which are the relatively impoverished former members of the Soviet Union.

This domination by the few but powerful G7 group also dominates the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), where their wishes and desires easily translate into policies and resolutions. This reminds me of the English idiom that reads: “He who pays the piper, calls the tune.” Operationally, the US grossly funds NATO and serves as a financial and economic heartbeat of the EU's very sustainability. It is no wonder, therefore, that at the heart of the EU and NATO policies and resolutions are the fundamental interests of Washington's foreign policy dictates.

When former US President Donald Trump re-focused America's foreign policy interests from global dominance to domestic politics fashioned on the slogan “Make America Great Again”, both the EU and NATO suffered tremendously and the underlying weaknesses around dichotomous approach to international and regional relations among member-states threatened their unity of purpose.

Worst still, when Trump pulled back America's funding of NATO and implored all member-states to honour their financial commitments to the organisation the wheels almost came off!

Until, luckily, the choice of the Establishment in the form of President Joe Biden replaced Trump and breathed new life into the struggling strategic entities. The US resumed pumping money into the two organisations, thereby ascertaining that Washington's foreign policy goals would be repositioned at the heart of both the EU and NATO once more, until this date.

The looming spectre of Trump's return to the White House after the November elections in the US is a source of deep anguish and sleepless nights for many EU and NATO member-states.

At the top of their genuine reason to worry is a triumphant Trump's return with a vengeance,

as he will almost certainly stop the funding of the Ukraine war with Russia. Trump's detractors in the Democratic Party already paint him as a dangerous pro-Russian, pro-Putin man who should not be trusted.

I paint this seldom explored status of Israel's remarkable status as an “untouchable” in international relations within the context of the omnipotent power of the US in geopolitics.

Nations such as South Africa can invoke their morally upright status and approach global judicial institutions such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but as the world can see, already Israel has shoved a middle finger at the court's ruling to stop the plausible genocide against the people of Gaza and the greater Palestine. Long before the ICJ could make any determination in the SA v/s Israel, Netanyahu had publicly vowed to carry on regardless. And, boy doesn't he?

Tel Aviv is acutely aware of the extent and depth of their insulation from harm by Big Brother Washington. It is this assurance that makes Israel break every international humanitarian law with impunity. The brazen fearlessness with which nearly 28,000 Palestinians have perished under Israel's unwavering bombardment since October 7 is guaranteed to continue despite a growing chorus for a ceasefire from the civilised peoples of the world.

More than 11,000 Palestinian children including toddlers and newborn babies – plus nearly 10,000 women – mostly mothers and the pregnant, form a part of a rapidly growing list of innocent civilians that the world has all but turned their backs on.

Trust me, if Washington so decides, and stops providing Israel with personnel, bombs and arms to kill the Palestinians, Netanyahu and his war cabinet would have no leg to stand on. Israel would simply be forced to bring their heinous genocidal military operation in Palestine to an abrupt halt.

Such is the power of only one nation – the US – in the entire universe. The power to decide who lives, and who dies. The power to play God, to play Allah. And the US has since delegated that authority to Israel in the full glare of a stupefied international community.

The lingering falsehood that through the UN system, all nations are equal has been laid bare for all to see by Israel's go-to-hell attitude. The UN works at best when the US stands at its centre, calling the shots, such as condemning Russia's war with Ukraine.

The loud cries of the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres remain inaudible in the wake of the unfolding genocide. His plea for Israel's mercy – and by extension America's – constantly falls on deaf ears.

It is the reality of our global governance system. As George Orwell noted in his seminal novel, *Animal Farm*: “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

Efficiency, public trust and leadership on USAf's radar



By Edwin Naidu

DESPITE ongoing controversy over South Africa's troubled National Student Financial Aid Scheme's (NSFAS) potentially tumultuous start to the 2024 academic year, the new head of the vice-chancellors' body, Universities South Africa (USAf), Professor Francis Petersen, says he wants to work towards operational efficiencies, addressing leadership gaps in the sector and strengthening the higher education system.

The country's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the student funding or bursary scheme both face challenges that are impacting education delivery. Outlining his vision to raise the profile of USAf and gain public trust in making tertiary institutions stronger, Petersen, the vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State, told University World News that it is essential to understand the amount of funding NSFAS would require over the next five years to avoid the annual uncertainty resulting in a topsy-turvy start to the academic year, with recurring doubts over the ability of the student funding scheme to manage payments.

“We need to promote efficiencies of the higher education system,” he said.

Sector's financial woes

With the tertiary education sector affected by subsidy cuts and science bodies such as the

National Research Foundation also facing severe budget cuts, Petersen said the research enterprise is under pressure. Funding agencies will be affected, making it necessary to build strong relationships with the private sector to relieve some of the financial pressure institutions will face.

Petersen acknowledged that the issues facing NSFAS are of concern and added to the sector's challenges in dealing with the repercussions of subsidy cuts.

In addition, the DHET has lost key staff members over the past three years, which has affected vital programmes. Petersen said staff had left the education ministry, affecting the time it took to receive approvals for new initiatives, the ability to motivate the national Treasury against budget cuts, and adding to the loss of institutional memory. This often meant that programmes had to start from scratch.

“Robust arguments from people who understand the system might not be always forthcoming. So, from a user perspective (and I've also reiterated this recently in a meeting with the minister), for the system in the sector to operate effectively and efficiently and for the public to have confidence in the sector, we must work together, understanding the capacity constraints, and using capacity in the overall system to help one another,” Petersen said.

Staff exodus is a warning sign

Indeed, the capacity issues, the lack of continuity, and the skills gap have made an impact on how the sector has been functioning. Dr Whitfield Green, CEO of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), said a fully staffed and capacitated university education branch in the DHET is critical for the higher education system to function smoothly.

“The CHE is aware of the vacancies in the branch and the department's efforts to fill the positions. The positions must be all filled as soon as possible. The CHE is not directly impacted. It is an independent organisation with independent processes and procedures. To date, it has received the usual communications and fund transfers,” Green said.

Between 2021 and 2023, several experienced individuals left the DHET. Many of their roles are now played by acting staff members.

The former chief of staff, Eudy Mabuza, who apparently had an acrimonious relationship with colleagues, was posted to Brussels in Belgium. Chief Financial Officer Pretty Makukule left to take up a similar role at SANParks. Sources say she had had enough.

Deputy Director General (DDG) Bheki Mahlobo (branch coordinator) took early retirement but stayed on for

until he left for a consulting role in higher education.

Allegations of irregularities

DDG Lulama Mbobo (branch coordinator) took early retirement and joined the Eastern Cape Development Corporation. It is alleged that Advocate Mariana Erasmus (the director of contract management) was driven out because she was “too solid when it came to procurement”.

Thandi Lewin, respected former chief director of governance and institutional support who replaced former DDG Diane Parker as head of the higher education branch, was acting DDG when she left on early retirement.

Lewin is at the University of Johannesburg, while Parker is a special adviser to the vice-chancellor at the University of Pretoria. Long-serving Mahlubi Chief Mabizela, the former chief director responsible for the chief directorate of higher education policy and research support, joined USAf as a director in April 2023.

“If people are leaving close to retirement, it suggests that something is wrong, or that the situation is untenable,” said a staff member who did not wish to be named.

Ishmael Mnisi, the media liaison officer, jumped from the frying pan into the fire as the chief communicator at NSFAS, while Seema Ramnarain, chief director of communications, quit

to join the Eskom Pension Fund.

While the department has remained below the radar despite its acting cast, NSFAS has been unable to keep out of the news.

NSFAS troubles still unresolved

As the new academic year looms, NSFAS still needs to complete a deadline that it set itself to pay outstanding allowances from last year to what it said was about 20,000 students.

According to the fund, only about 9,000 have been “successfully resolved” so far. On January 23, 2024, the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, said NSFAS had received 1,545,822 applications for the 2024 academic year.

NSFAS has provisionally funded 657,703 applicants – with the deadline for additional applications for the 2024 application cycle being on January 31, 2024. The minister said NSFAS will process up to ZAR4.2 billion (about US\$221 million) as an upfront payment to all institutions during the registration period.

Compounding the problems have been damaging allegations by the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA), a civil society body, which shared as evidence voice recordings of Ernest Khosa, NSFAS chairperson who subsequently took leave of absence, with representatives of NSFAS service providers. OUTA alleged payments reportedly include a donation of ZAR1 million to the South African Communist Party, which Nzimande chairs, from the husband of a company director.

Amid calls that Nzimande be axed, he denied the allegations and threatened to take legal action against OUTA. Following new claims at the weekend that a student accommodation crisis is brewing, the minister, according to OUTA, has not followed through with his threat.

Collaboration is critical

Petersen said that understanding what the



▲ The University of Cape Town.

Xi can wait out the Anywhere–But–China trade

SOMETIMES it is best to wait it out, and that may be what Chinese President Xi Jinping decides to do with the stock market.

The Anywhere-But-China trade, wryly dubbed “ABC” by strategists at BofA, is driving down equities in the People’s Republic close to the 2016 lows plumbed following the collapse of an epic stock market bubble. Both domestic and foreign investors are selling and clawing at other destinations.

The decision on Wednesday to replace the chair of the securities regulator does little to address the underlying problem of waning confidence.

The removal of Yi Huiman is largely symbolic. It may encourage calm before the annual spring festival that will see mainland markets close for 10 days starting Friday. His replacement, Wu Qing, was anyway tipped to be the new head of the China Securities Regulatory Commission since last year.

The appointment of the “the broker butcher” who led a crackdown against traders in the mid-2000s may make domestic institutions already under pressure not to sell become wary of doing so.

What it won’t do is stem the exit of foreigners, who dumped nearly \$3 billion of Chinese equities in January and were net sellers for a sixth consecutive month. They are a small force in the overall mainland market but their decade-low allocations and



▲ Sometimes it is best to wait it out, and that may be what Chinese President Xi Jinping decides to do with the stock market.

heavy selling are suppressing valuations.

It upended the status quo of Asian markets. The forward price-to-earnings ratio of Chinese stocks is 11, less than in Japan and roughly half that of the U.S. and India. For the country’s 200 million-plus retail investors, which account for about 60% of A-share turnover, it’s harder to go elsewhere.

Still, they are pouring into onshore exchange-traded funds tracking overseas stocks and paying premiums of as much as 40% to the underlying assets.

Xi does have options. He could channel more funds through state-backed companies to prop the market up. The “National Team” has bought roughly 70 billion yuan (\$9.7 billion) of onshore shares in the past month, Goldman Sachs estimates.

The bank reckons 200 billion yuan - 0.8% of the free float market capitalisation - is the minimum needed to halt the downward spiral. Chinese authorities are considering a 2 trillion yuan stabilisation fund, according to Bloomberg.

Yet that alone is unlikely to turn the market around over a longer term and heavy-handed interventions have backfired in the past.

A sustainable uptick would require more consistent policies in the world’s second-largest economy and a plan to address weaknesses in property and rising local government debt. Consumer prices fell 0.8% in January from a year earlier, contracting for a fourth consecutive month and at the fastest pace since 2009, official data released on Thursday showed, hammering home the urgency to boost domestic demand. For the stock market at least, Xi’s best option may be to let the dust settle.

(Reuters Breakingviews)



▲ The removal of Yi Huiman is largely symbolic. It may encourage calm before the annual spring festival that will see mainland markets close for 10 days starting Friday.



▲ Maersk CEO Soren Skou answers questions from the press after publishing the company’s quarterly accounts, in Copenhagen, Denmark

Maersk will struggle to fix leaky boat

SHIPPING giants are paying the price for going overboard following the pandemic. Take Denmark’s Maersk, which on Thursday delivered just \$839 million of EBITDA in the fourth quarter, a dramatic fall from the \$6.54 billion it made a year earlier and 26% below the \$1.13 billion analysts had pencilled in.

Looking ahead, CEO Vincent Clerc also warned that industry overcapacity could hit earnings for the next three years. In a further blow to investors, Maersk cancelled its share buyback programme.

The surprise gloomy outlook sent the \$28 billion company’s shares down 14%. That contrasts with a previous perception that Maersk and rivals like Hapag-Lloyd would benefit from disruption in the Red Sea. And indeed the benchmark Shanghai Containerized Freight

Index has more than doubled since December of last year.

But with too many vessels chasing too few customers, shipping companies may struggle to raise prices more dramatically from having to reroute ships around the southern tip of Africa to avoid attacks from Iranian-backed Houthis militants in the Red Sea.

Maersk’s unhelpful guidance will make it hard for investors to navigate the sector’s rough waters. The company said it expects underlying EBITDA of between \$1 billion and \$6 billion this year, a \$5 billion gap in its range.

But even if Maersk can generate more revenue and hits the top of its target, it’s still a long way down from the \$9.6 billion achieved last year. With no calm seas in sight, shipping giants will find it hard to fix their leaky boats.

(Reuters Breakingviews)



▲ Shipping giants are paying the price for going overboard following the pandemic.

Meta enters the dividend multiverse of madness

NEW YORK,- One of the world’s most inventive companies just enlisted a centuries-old financial confidence trick. Just ahead of its 20th anniversary, Meta Platforms, opens new tab said last week that it would start paying a quarterly cash dividend to shareholders.

The recipients of the money pushed the market value of Facebook’s owner up by 20% the following day, perhaps considering the decision a symbol of financial discipline.

They should, however, see it for what it is: a distraction. Meta’s dividend places the social media giant led and controlled by Mark Zuckerberg in a storied group.

The habit of returning regular cash to investors, initiated by the Dutch East Indies Company more than 400 years ago, is a staple at over 85% of the world’s publicly traded companies worth more than \$10 billion, according to LSEG data. It’s easier to single out those that don’t, including big technology outfits Alphabet , opens new tab and Amazon.com, opens new tab, than those that do.

Dividends are popular and becoming more so: Morningstar analysts count \$1 trillion of funds targeting dividend payers, a number that has increased 10% annually since 2018. Companies that hike their payouts for 25 consecutive years, longer than Meta has existed, are knighted as “aristocrats” by S&P Global and slotted into their own index of nobility. As of January, there were 67 of them, opens new tab. Dividends have simplicity on their side.

They’re clear-cut and equitable, since all holders of regular shares get them in proportion to their economic stake. But just because something is common or coveted doesn’t make it smart. In practice, dividends provide zero value for shareholders. For some, they’re worse than being given no cash at all, and for tax reasons are often less appealing than other ways companies can distribute funds, if they decide they have no better use for the money.

NOTHING FROM SOMETHING

In a very straightforward sense, dividends don’t give investors anything they don’t already own. If a company pays \$1 in cash to its investors, the value of what’s left, which is represented by its share price, should fall by exactly \$1. This makes dividend payments a very different proposition from, say, interest paid on a bond. An investor that wants to wring cash from backing Meta could simply sell a fraction of a share every three months. Once, that would have been complicated. Now it’s not: brokerages including Robinhood Financial and Charles Schwab, opens new tab let U.S. customers offload slivers of shares without fees or commissions.

In the real world, receiving dividends can prove worse than no payout at all. The typical U.S. investor gives up to 20% of what they receive to Uncle Sam in taxes if they’ve held the stock for more than a couple of months.

If they instead sell shares to generate cash, a similar tax rate is applied, but only to the capital gain achieved since the original purchase. Assuming they eventually sell their entire holding, the tax paid should even out. But investors who manufacture dividends themselves would have chosen exactly when to pay, and deferred some of the cost. For the many foreign investors who pay higher tax rates on income than capital gains, dividends are positively punitive.

The question then is why investors like dividends at all. It’s hard to find a rational answer. Samuel Hartzmark and David Solomon at Boston College Carroll School of Management concluded that one reason is a logical disconnect, opens new tab: investors simply don’t grasp that dividends reduce the value of the companies paying them. Instead, they act as if dividends and share-price performance exist in parallel universes.

Indeed, the herd-like quest for dividends, say when interest rates are low, could lead to valuation distortions that shave 4% off investors’ returns over a one-year period, the study estimated.

Even investors who do understand the mechanics may just like the idea of having extra money in their pockets. They are more likely to spend dividends, opens new tab than job income on non-recurring purchases, a study by German and Austrian scholars found, further supporting the idea that dividends are seen as free money.

Not all investors have fallen under the spell, including some famously old-school ones. Warren Buffett has resolutely distanced his Berkshire Hathaway, opens new tab from the cult of the dividend. He prefers stock buybacks, opens new tab, which allow him to exploit perceived low prices in his conglomerate’s shares.

Yet Buffett also invests in plenty of companies that pay dividends, and says he likes it when those payouts rise, suggesting that even the Oracle of Omaha is not immune to their logic-defying allure.

SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

From a company’s perspective, dividends make more sense. For one, they are financially a little more appealing than buybacks. President Joe Biden approved a tax, opens new tab on stock repurchases in 2022, based on the dubious notion that companies would therefore invest more in their operations and employees.

He later said he hopes to quadruple the levy’s rate to 4%. Dividends may also be slightly cheaper to administer than buybacks since they eliminate any investment banking fees for scooping up shares in the market.

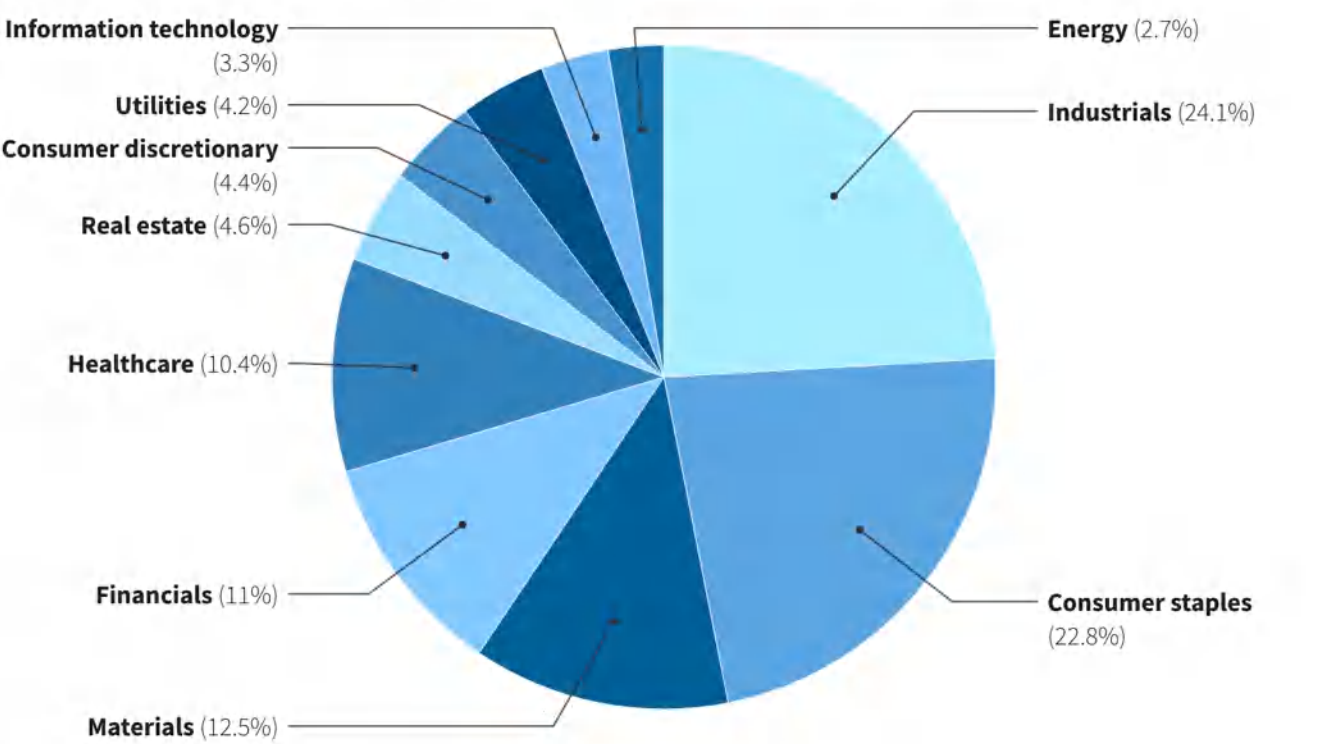
Furthermore, if investors stick with their dividend fetish, it’s perfectly rational for chief executives like Zuckerberg to take advantage. Paying a dividend could allow Meta shares to be included in mutual and exchange-traded funds that only hold shares in companies making regular payouts. Such funds buy 0.5% of a company’s outstanding shares the year after it initiates a dividend, Goldman Sachs analysts have found. The Wall Street bank, in a report published on Monday, cites data suggesting that debuting a regular payout can push a stock’s price up 2%, while missing a dividend payment can wipe out 9% of a company’s market value.

(Reuters Breakingviews)



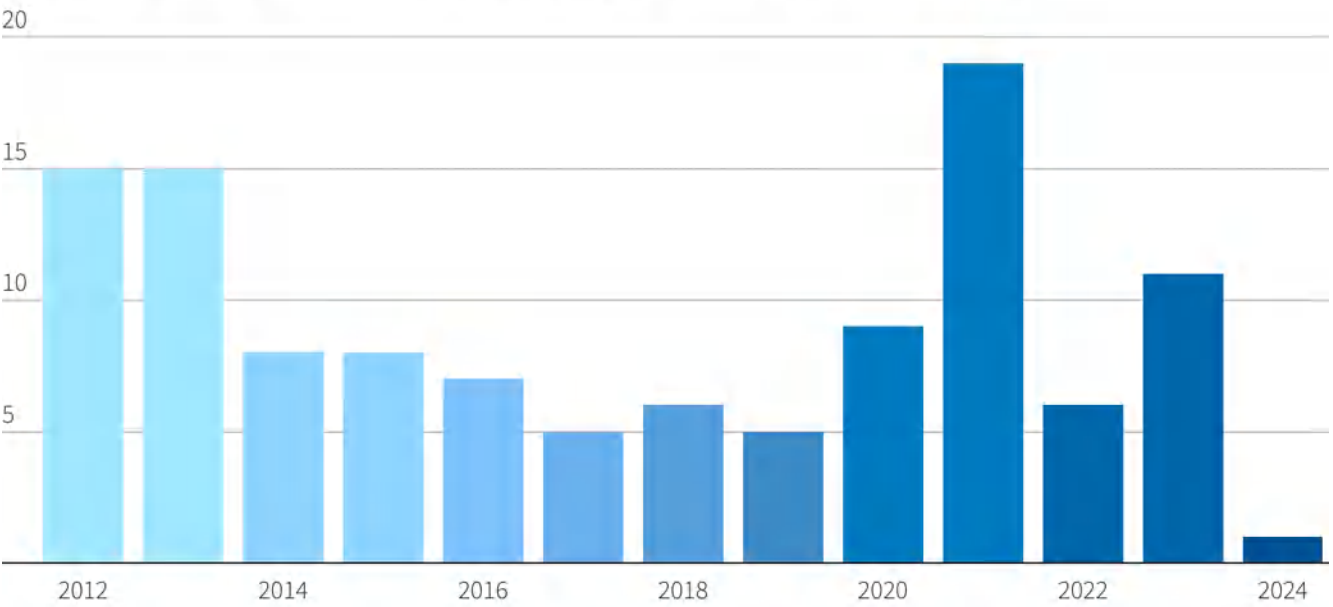
▲ Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg

Where are the most faithful U.S. dividend payers?



Note: Constituents of S&P 500 Dividend Aristocrats index that have increased their payouts for 25+ consecutive years
Source: S&P Global | J. Foley | Breakingviews | Feb. 8, 2024

New dividend payers among the S&P 500 by year



Source: Goldman Sachs Investment Research | J. Foley | Breakingviews | Feb. 8, 2024

NEW DELHI - Lawmakers in a small Indian state ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday approved landmark legislation to unify personal laws across religions, a move opposed by many minority Muslims.

Approval by the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand makes it the first in the country since independence from Britain in 1947 to implement a Uniform Civil Code, a contentious decades-old BJP promise, months before national elections.

Currently, India's Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other minority groups follow their own personal laws and customs, or an optional secular code for marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance.

The move by Uttarakhand banning polygamy and other Muslim practices is expected to pave the way for other BJP-ruled states to follow suit despite angry opposition from some leaders of India's 200-million-strong Muslim minority.

"The Uniform Civil Code will give the right to equality to everyone without any discrimination...We must make history by clearing it," said Pushkar Singh Dhami, the state's chief minister, just before BJP lawmakers and some others voted in favour of the bill.

A political aide to Dhami confirmed that the state assembly, where the BJP enjoys a majority, passed the bill.

Routed in the framework of the Indian Constitution, the code puts an end to religious interpretation of laws guiding marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption and succession.

Dhami said it "provides security to women and empowers them".

The code sets a minimum marriageable age for both genders. It guarantees equal rights to men and women on issues about divorce, and share in ancestral property and offers rights to adopted children, those born out of wedlock or were conceived through surrogate births.

A legal expert working on the UCC bill in Uttarakhand said Islam's Sharia laws permit polygamy and have no stringent rules to prohibit the marriage of minors.

India is around 80% Hindu and about 14% Muslim and is the world's third-largest Muslim country. Muslims accuse Modi's right-wing nationalist party of pursuing a Hindu agenda that discriminates against them and directly imposes laws interfering with their faith. Modi denies this but the situation has led to sporadic violence between members of the two communities.

A regional Muslim politician from south India, Asaduddin Owaisi, said the code was nothing but a "Hindu code of conduct".

"I have a right to practice my religion and culture but UCC stops us from exercising our fundamental rights," he told Reuters.

The new code makes it mandatory for a man and a woman to register their marriages and also submit a notice if they are in a live-in relationship to a government office. Terminations of live-in relationships should also be reported to the police.

"The Uttarakhand UCC is patriarchal to the core," said Subhashini Ali, a senior member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said on X.

It "denies women the right to choice. An inter-caste couple going to register their marriage is inviting death," she said.

A national civil code is one of the three core promises of Modi's BJP and the only one that remains unfulfilled.

The other two were removing the autonomy of the only Muslim-majority region of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 and building a contested temple to the Hindu deity Ram, replacing a centuries-old mosque razed by Hindu radicals in 1992.

(Reuters)

Small Indian state passes landmark civil code opposed by Muslims



▲ Lawmakers in a small Indian state ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday approved landmark legislation to unify personal laws across religions, a move opposed by many minority Muslims.



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What is India's civil code and why does it anger Muslims?

NEW DELHI - Uttarakhand, a small northern Indian state governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party, passed a bill to replace religion-specific civil laws with a Uniform Civil Code, which could be used as a template by other states.

The bill, debated by Uttarakhand's legislature on Wednesday, sailed through as Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) commands a majority in the state.

Many Muslims see it as curbing their religion, interfering with centuries-old practices such as polygamy.

WHAT IS THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE?

Indians from different religions can follow laws specific to their faiths or opt for a secular code. Laws on who and how many people a person can marry, how to end a marriage and inheritance differ by religion.

The code envisions the same set of rules for everyone.

The constitution adopted in 1950 placed the code in a section that recommends laws for future governments. It encouraged the state to "endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory".

A uniform set of laws has remained elusive because it is communally contentious.

PROVISIONS UNDER THE NEW LAW

It bans polygamy, a practice allowed under Muslim laws that permits a man to have up to four wives.

It sets minimum ages for men and women to marry. While Hindu and secular laws only allow men to marry at 21 and women at 18, there is no restriction for Muslims and other communities.

It prohibits a person from

marrying relatives including cousins, uncles, and aunts, which is allowed in many communities.

It grants equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters. At a national first, it also tries to regulate live-in relationships, which critics said was government overreach and interference in personal lives. The law proposes jail or fines for failing to inform the authorities within a month of entering a live-in relationship.

WHO IS AGAINST IT?

Muslim theologians see the code as a threat to Islamic law and religious practices such as polygamy. Muslims are India's largest minority, making up more than 14% of the population.

A prominent Muslim body recently said that the code goes against India's diversity. Some tribal groups have also opposed the code.

WHY NOW?

A national code is one of the three core promises of the BJP and the only one that remains unfulfilled. The other two were removing the autonomy of the only Muslim-majority region of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 and building a contested temple to the Hindu deity Ram, replacing a centuries-old mosque razed by Hindu radicals in 1992.

The BJP has promised a national code for decades and introducing it, even in individual states, is expected to boost Modi's popularity among Hindus in his re-election bid by May.

(Reuters)



▲ Uttarakhand, a small northern Indian state governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party, passed a bill to replace religion-specific civil laws with a Uniform Civil Code, which could be used as a template by other states.

▲ Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday approved landmark legislation to unify personal laws across religions, a move opposed by many minority Muslims.



▲ A person walks past destroyed houses, as a result of a forest fire that left thousands of homes burned in the hills of Vina del Mar, Chile.



▲ A fireman works to extinguish a wildfire.

How climate change made Chile’s wildfires so deadly

SANTIAGO - Survivors of Chile’s recent deadly wildfires described a hellish nightmare, a hurricane of fireballs leaping from hill to hill, lighting up everything within its path in seconds. While the region faces wildfires almost every year, the speed and lethality of last week’s

blaze was unprecedented. At least 131 people were killed and hundreds are still missing in what was Chile’s worst natural disaster in years.

Scientists say the main driving factor for such a devastating event is simple: hotter temperatures.

Part of the reason the wildfires spread so far

and so quickly was high winds. Raul Cordero, a climatologist at the University of Santiago, says strong summer winds are common in central Chile since air coming down from the Andes mountain range and other elevated areas compresses and heats up.

“What’s different this time is that the temperatures were much higher than before,”

Cordero said. He noted the region was going through a heat wave likely caused by climate change and the El Nino phenomenon, when unusually warm water temperatures off the Pacific coast of South America roil global weather patterns.

“What happened last week is not normal,” he said.

Aside from the heat wave that brought scorching temperatures to the Andean nation, Chile has also been suffering from a devastating drought for the last 15 years that helped fuel the wildfire.

“(The drought) created this mass of vegetation that dried out quickly and lost its water content,” said Cesar Morales, a water

expert at the University of Chile. “So it’s really easy with high temperatures for this to catch fire.”

Morales added that a similar phenomenon is happening across the Andes in Argentina, but across a larger space with lower population density.

Last week the Nahuel Huapi National Park in neighboring Argentina’s Patagonia region caught fire and thousands of hectares (acres) were burnt. In Brazil, wildfires surged in Amazonas state, at the heart of the Amazon rainforest, in October amid a drought driven by climate change.

As climate change worsens, scientists say extreme weather will become more frequent and severe, making deadly events like last week’s fires more common.

“Without El Nino or global warming, it’s very unlikely we would have had last week’s deadly forest fires,” Cordero said. (Reuters)



▲ Houses and properties have been impacted by wildfires.



▲ The death toll from wildfires that ravaged central Chile for several days increased to 131.

Zimbabwe bets on no-till farming to reduce El Nino impact on grain

HARARE - Zimbabwe expects to harvest 2.28 million metric tons of maize this year, enough to meet its annual consumption, due to the promotion of farming practices aimed at reducing the impact of climate change, such as no-till farming and water harvesting.

“Water harvesting techniques, soil and moisture conservation and the minimal disturbance of soil under this program have seen a good crop around the country,” Zimbabwe’s Deputy Agriculture Minister Vangelis Haritatos told Reuters.

No-till farming minimises soil disturbance, which helps keep carbon in the soil and also enriches soil biodiversity, reducing the need for chemical fertilisers that emit greenhouse gases.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries worst affected by the El Nino weather pattern and struggles to feed itself.

Zimbabwe produced 2.3 million tons of maize last year. The country requires 2.2 million tons of the staple grain annually for human and livestock consumption.

Last December, during an extended spell of dry and hot weather conditions, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube said Zimbabwe’s maize harvest could be halved to 1.1 million tons in 2024 due to an El Nino-induced drought.

El Nino, a natural climate phenomenon

in which surface waters of the central and eastern Pacific become unusually warm, causing changes in global weather patterns, is expected to hit crop yields during the 2023/24 farming season.

However, rains received during the second half of December and throughout January revived Zimbabwe’s hopes for a good harvest.

Smallholder farmers, who produce most of the country’s maize, doubled their planted area to 744,588 hectares in the 2023-24 season, from 366,706 hectares previously, according to government data.

“This is a reflection that farmers are adopting the recommended climate-proofing interventions, especially during the El Nino condition,” the cabinet said in a statement released late on Tuesday. (Reuters)

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No-till farming minimises soil disturbance, which helps keep carbon in the soil and also enriches soil biodiversity, reducing the need for chemical fertilisers that emit greenhouse gases

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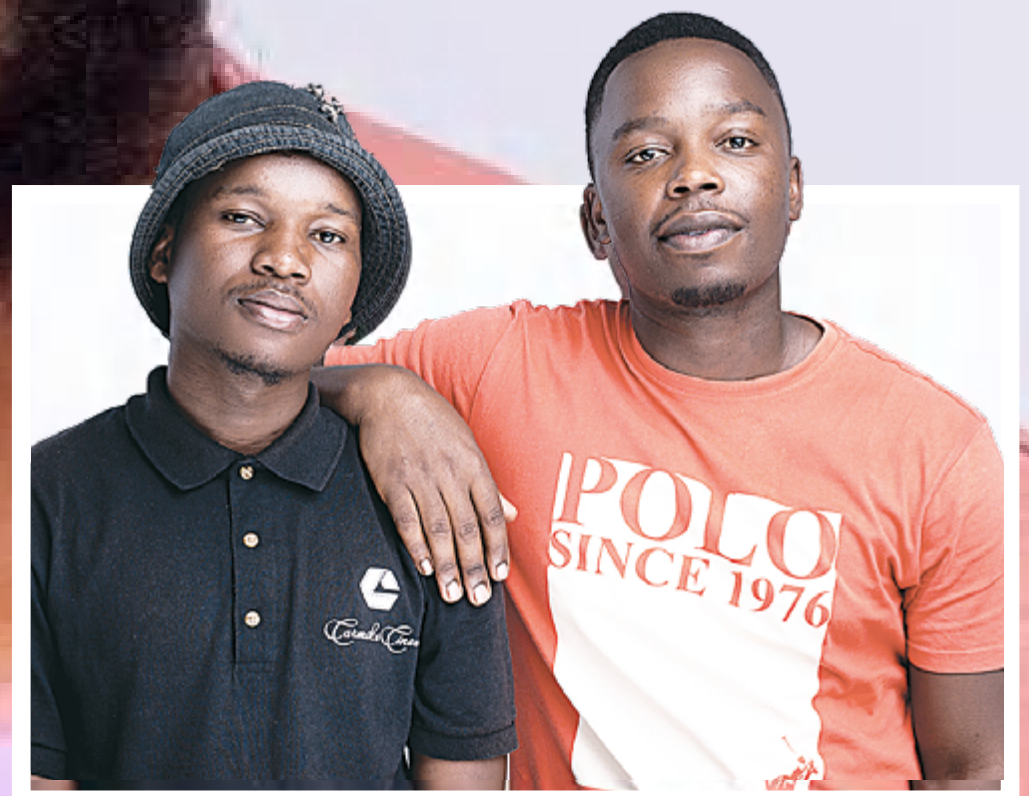


▲ A woman works in maize fields on a resettled farm near Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe.

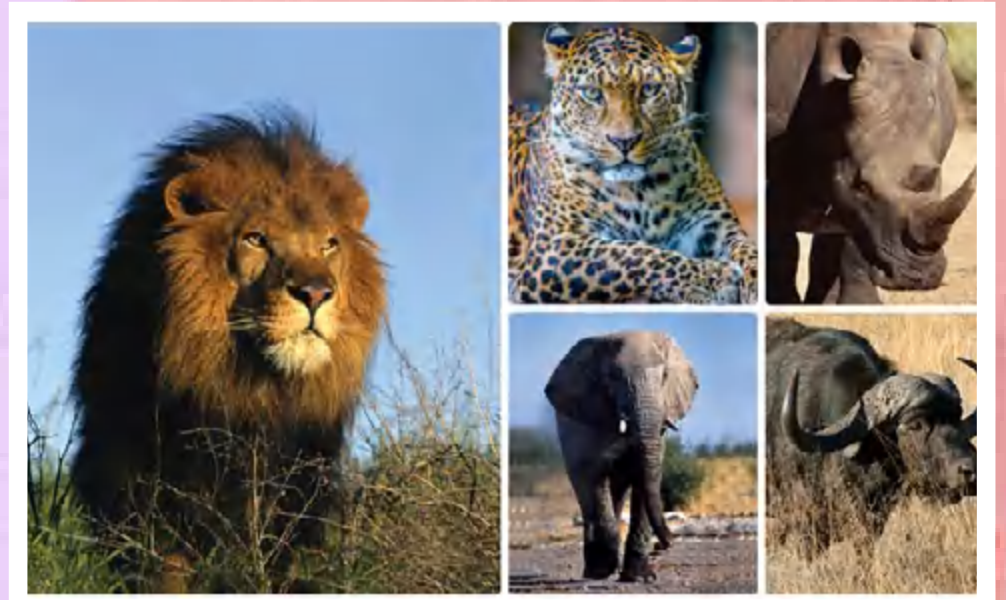
Lifestyle

The sad trajectory of Eswatini artists

inside



Unpacking the power of two with Virtousouls



Welcome to some of Eswatini's best tourist attractions

The sad trajectory of Eswatini artists

... Why do Eswatini artists get into the spotlight only to disappear as if they were never there?



▲ Former Smallz's manager Philani Mpanza.

Siphesihle Dlamini

ESWATINI has witnessed the rise and fall of numerous stars whose talents have dazzled audiences and left an indelible mark on the industry. However, their journeys often follow a perplexing trajectory, as they soar into the spotlight only to disappear as if they were never there just like morning dew at the face of the sun.

The entertainment industry has always been a fickle mistress, and Eswatini is no exception. Artists who once basked in the adoration of fans find themselves grappling with the ephemeral nature of fame. The reasons behind their meteoric rise can be attributed to a combination of talent, timing, and the right connections. However, sustaining that success has proven to be a formidable challenge.

If I could make an unapologetic list of such artists, I would mention Popzin, who gave us an anthem, 'Umnyango', and later an album, then disappeared. I could also count arguably the best rapper to come out of Eswatini, Diba Diba. Where are LK Baba and Mvilas, who were jointly known as Chakalaka?

Why does it all have to end with 'eyi mfana, ibhola beyilapha', 'comedy yakhe beyistrong', 'he was untouchable with the pen, or he was a killer poet', 'no one could touch him with bars, flow and delivery', 'a super-talented fashion creative he was'. All said to individuals who are 25-30 years old, and who have quit from being swallowed by the industry.

One of the key factors contributing to the disappearance of artists from the spotlight is the lack of a robust support system. Eswatini's entertainment industry, while vibrant and brimming with talent, often struggles to provide the necessary infrastructure and resources for artists to thrive.

Limited access to professional training, inadequate marketing strategies, and a dearth of growth opportunities all contribute to the precariousness of their careers.

Furthermore, the allure of international markets often beckons, leading artists to seek

▼ Mvilas and LK Baba during their time as Chakalaka.

greener pastures beyond Eswatini's borders. The pursuit of global recognition and success can be both a blessing and a curse. While some artists manage to carve out successful careers abroad, many find themselves lost in the vast sea of talent, struggling to make their mark, and ultimately fading into obscurity.

One example of this is Flameboy Universe. He won Best Newcomer of The Year at the MTN SWAMA awards in 2017. In 2020, he featured on the legendary Jazz Musician Don Laka's album UNO MUNDO on a track called 'Let Me Breathe'. He then signed a Global publishing deal with Sony/ATV, making him the first Eswatini artist to sign with Sony/ATV.

However, the greatness could not last, as today, he is nowhere to be found.

Another additional factor affecting local artists is that societal pressures and expectations also play a significant role in the vanishing acts of Eswatini's artists. Traditional career paths are often prioritised, leaving artists to navigate a precarious balancing act between pursuing their passion and conforming to societal norms.

This struggle can lead to a loss of motivation, as artists find themselves torn between their dreams and the need for stability.

However, amid the shadows, there are stories of resilience and reinvention. Some artists, faced with the challenges of the industry, choose to adapt and evolve. They explore new avenues, experiment with different genres, and redefine their artistic identities.

These individuals refuse to be confined by the limitations imposed upon them, and in doing so, they carve out new paths for themselves, reemerging in the spotlight with renewed vigour.

In an interview with the late comedy genius, Smallz's manager, Philani Mpanza, he expressed his view on why Eswatini artists get into the spotlight only to disappear as if they were never there. He compared their existence and prospects to tributaries feeding a river and ultimately the ocean. He said this calamity is decades old - and he thinks it starts with a poorly structured arts and sports support ecosystem and infrastructure.

Mpanza opined that the national investments in our sports and art scene have the perfect reflection of how the careers of even the most talented of Eswatini's stars end. He

said, "Passiveness breeds passiveness and unsustainable breeds unsustainable".

He also said the parties, who are the talented artists, tend to have a "know-a-lot" mindset but sadly, they don't actually "know-a-lot". Constructive admonishments and tested and data-driven counsel are construed as envy and projecting envy. "Wati kakhulu," is what they say when we give them advice. "Argh, that tayma naye, uyabhora naye, they usually say," Mpanza said.

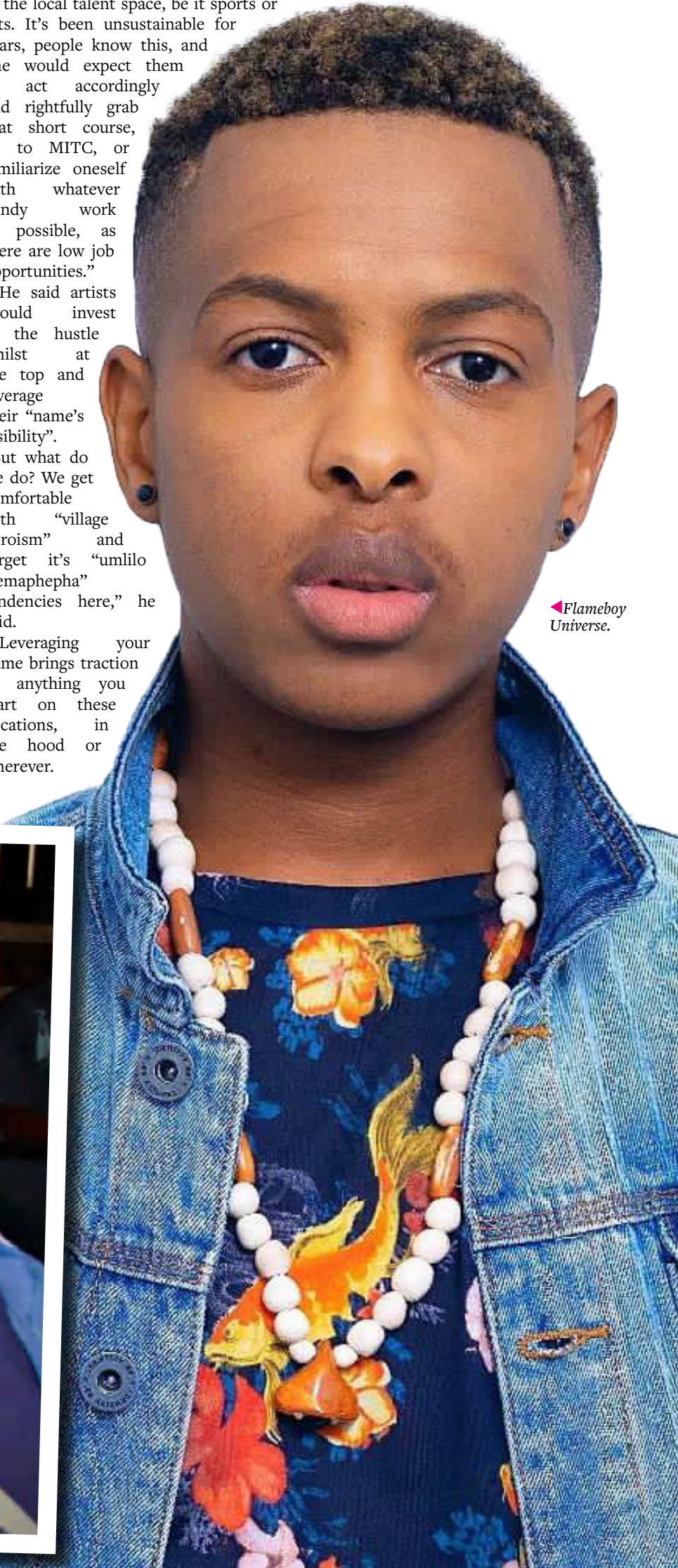
Mpanza also cited another downfall of the artists - short-sightedness. "Local talents have for decades failed to act honestly to the reality of the local talent space, be it sports or arts. It's been unsustainable for years, people know this, and one would expect them to act accordingly and rightfully grab that short course, go to MITC, or familiarize oneself with whatever handy work is possible, as there are low job opportunities."

He said artists should invest in the hustle whilst at the top and leverage their "name's visibility". "But what do we do? We get comfortable with 'village heroism' and forget it's 'umlilo wemaphepha' tendencies here," he said.

Leveraging your name brings traction to anything you start on these vocations, in the hood or wherever.

"Don't bank on ill-informed permanent fame, it does not work like that here. No one is coming to save you" he said.

When asked about what artists can do to stand the test of time, he said it all starts and ends with honesty. "You are in Eswatini and obviously, you know how things are here and probably, how they will be even in the next 30 years. So, act accordingly, invest in yourself, honour all the steps of education, and get that qualification. Grab that vocational skill, carpentry, painting, car mechanics, anything - and thank yourself later."



▲ Flameboy Universe.

Mthandeni Mangele, Cassper Nyovest prepare for exhibition fight



▲ Mthandeni Mangele

MASKANDI sensation Mthandeni "Igcokama Elisha" Mangele and hip-hop heavyweight Cassper Nyovest are preparing to exchange blows in a boxing exhibition fight.

The fight is scheduled to be held in Durban in the next two months.

Both performers have enormous social media followings, and when they perform live, they consistently draw large crowds of fans.

Even though they have never sparred or publicly bickered about who is better than the other, they would want to settle the score inside the ring to clear the air.

Reputable sources have informed Sunday World that renowned professional boxing promoter Dr Hlula Dladla has approached Cassper Nyovest and Mangele about facing off in the ring.

Winning back the boxing fans

They are said to have shown a great deal of interest because they both adore the sport and want to help bring it back to life. The popularity of the fistic sport has lagged behind other sporting codes over the past few years.

To attract fans, the mother body of boxing, Boxing South Africa, has recently started holding boxing exhibition fights.

Three times before, in December 2021, April 2022, and October 2022, Cassper Nyovest entered the ring and squared off against Slik Talk, NaakMusiQ, and Priddy Ugly.

Dladla, a businessman from Estcourt in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, successfully staged the Big Zulu and Phumlani Njinji bout in Durban in December.

The hefty Big Zulu lost to businessman Njinji.

Who's the boss?

Despite Mangele's posting of videos of himself working out on social media, neither Cassper Nyovest nor Mangele responded to Sunday World's request for comments.

A source said: "Don't blame them for not attending to your query at this juncture because, from what I gathered, they are ironing out a few things on contracts."

"But trust me, they want to get on that ring and show people who's the boss."

Dladla laughed out loud when asked for a comment.

"Please don't spoil the fun because there are a few things we are working on. When the time is right, we shall communicate with the nation about this big event," he said. (Sunday World)



▲ Cassper Nyovest.

Unpacking the power of two with Virtuousouls



Eswatini Sunday Reporter

THERE is power in collaboration and teamwork. The music industry has been harnessing this power for generations with artists featuring each other on songs.

This, however, used to work best with singers, rappers and DJs producing beats and getting artists to jump on them. Of late, that trend has been changing. We have seen the evolution of DJs taking to the stage in pairs. You have the likes of Major League DJs, Kabza Da Small and DJ Maphorisa and in recent times, Thuli Phongolo who has partnered with Slenda da dancing DJ to form “2 Faced”

The Eswatini Sunday sat down with Virtuousouls, a duo that is taking the Amapiano scene by storm to speak about their journey and working as a collective.

Eswatini Sunday (ESN) - Gents! Trust you are well. Can you briefly tell us about your stage name? How did it come about?

Virtuousouls (VS) - Virtuousouls is a combination of two words Virtuoso and soul. Virtuoso is someone who is exceptionally skilled and talented in music and souls represent the two of us.

ESN - Congratulations on your new single “Kuzodlula”. How would you describe the track “Kuzodlula”?

VS - The song “Kuzodlula” Which features Lethokuhle Magagula aka Mae Lee is a soulful amapiano single that explores the experience of facing and overcoming challenges.

The lyrics describe the challenges of life, while the music provides a sense of hope and resilience. The song invites listeners to embrace the idea that even when life is hard, it is possible to move forward and emerge stronger than before. “Kuzodlula” is an inspiring and uplifting single that will resonate with anyone who has faced challenges in their life.



ESN - How did you come to work with the guys you did on this project?

VS - The three of us were facing difficult circumstances in our respective industries, and we found solace in coming together to create a song that would express our feelings and offer hope to others. Through music, we found a way to connect and find strength in our shared experiences.

Our song “Kuzodlula” was born out of a desire to uplift and inspire others who were also going through tough times. It was a cathartic and healing process, and we hope that our music will help others find the same strength and comfort that we found.

ESN - Who else have you worked with?

VS - We have collaborated with several talented emerging artists on our upcoming release, including Cnatra, Coolboi, Mzomuhle, Viwemusiq, Mr Onion, and Quekey. These artists bring a unique and diverse range of styles and perspectives to the project, and we are excited to share their work with the world. We believe that this collaboration will result in a fresh, innovative, and inspiring body of work that will help to promote and support the next generation of artists.

ESN - You are relatively new in the industry, but what advice would you give to DJ/

▲Virtuousouls.

producers who are just starting and would like to build a sustainable career in music?

VS - Stay true to your authentic self and be consistent with your sound. Also, be ready to work extra hard, the producing industry locally is still overlooked

ESN - What tracks do you have on repeat at the moment?

VS - Almost every song by Virtuousouls, but our favourite at the moment has to be Genes of the Vibe ft Sarnilo

ESN - Can you tell us what some of your highlights this year?

VS - It's still early in the year, and we're just getting started. We're excited to create some highlights and achievements in the coming months.

ESN - What can we expect from Virtuousouls?

VS - New music, more collaborations, new sounds and growth as a brand.

Virtuousouls presents Kuzondlula

VIRTUOUSOULS is a dynamic DJ/Producer duo that has been consistently pushing the boundaries of sound.

Comprising of two gifted individuals, Mayenzeke Zwane Aka MayeLeMuso and

Mfan'fikile Mhlanga Aka MafikzoGH, this remarkable alliance has taken the Amapiano music scene by storm, captivating audiences locally with their contagious beats.

Early Beginnings and Formation:

Virtuousouls was formed in late 2020. Recognizing their shared passion for music, the two artists decided to combine their respective talents to create a harmonious blend of deejaying and production.

Their unique styles seamlessly complemented each other, as they embarked on a journey that would redefine the electronic music landscape.

Virtuousouls brings a distinct flavour to their performances, drawing inspiration from various genres such as amapiano, deep house and afro house, and infusing them with their creative twist.

Their meticulously crafted sets are characterised by energetic beats, captivating melodies, and an undeniable presence that keeps dance floors electrified and audiences craving for more.

With their finely tuned ear for selection, Virtuousouls consistently delivers stunning performances that traverse the realms of amapiano. Since their inception, Virtuousouls has amassed an impressive list of achievements. Their talent has been recognised by some

of the industry's most reputable producers, earning them features and collaborations with renowned artists like Bluelle, and DJ Odycey.

They have taken their mesmerizing performances to local esteemed venues like Ekhayeni, Solanis, and Sundeck Manzini leaving an indelible mark on the electronic music landscape.

Looking ahead, the future is undeniably bright for Virtuousouls. With their unwavering commitment to musical excellence and an ever-evolving style, the duo continues to captivate listeners and push boundaries.

MayeLeMuso and MafikzoGh are determined to break new ground, experimenting with fresh sounds and collaborative projects that will undoubtedly leave an enduring impact on the industry.

In the vast and ever-evolving world of electronic music, Virtuousouls stands out as a testament to the power of collaboration. The synergy generated MafikzoGH and MayeLeMuso has resulted in a unique and captivating musical journey that continues to ignite dancefloors locally.

As they progress through their musical odyssey, there is no doubt that Virtuousouls will remain at the forefront of innovation, expanding the horizons of electronic music and thrilling audiences with their remarkable performances.

Artene Washington

LOS ANGELES - Civil rights icons Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X only met once, but their coming-of-age stories run parallel in family, community, loss and sacrifice as shown in National Geographic's anthology series “Genius: MLK/X.”

To kick off Black History Month, new weekly episodes on Disney+ and Hulu bring viewers into the homes of the two leaders from their childhood to fatherhood, glimpsing the lives that led up to the historical speeches for which they are known.

“It’s what happens before that and how do we connect and find our relatable parts of ourselves in that,” actor Kelvin Harrison Jr. told Reuters of the approach he took to his role as King and Aaron Pierre took to his as X.

“So it was a lot of internal work, investigating who we are as men currently, what age and coming of age has meant for us and how that relates to them coming of age as well.”

King and X met for a brief moment, almost 60 years ago on March 26, 1964, at the U.S. Capitol where they were attending a Senate debate on the Civil Rights Act.

Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X’s parallel lives explored in ‘Genius: MLK/X’

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King and Malcolm X never met again, as both were assassinated at age 39 - Malcolm X in 1965 and King in 1968.

Previous “Genius” anthology episodes have focused on Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein. This installment also highlights the impact of the leaders’ wives: Coretta Scott King played by Weruche Opia and Dr. Betty Shabazz played by Jayme Lawson.

“Too often they are not thought of as part of

it and really just the wives of, and they were so much more than that,” said Prince-Bythewood who produced the series with husband Reggie Rock Bythewood, Ron Howard and Brian Grazer.

“To be able to deep dive into their origin stories you really get to see them as women on their own.”

The show’s crew had a plethora of resources to tap including a dual biography about both men “The Sword and the Shield,” the 1987 play “The Meeting,” and scholars and consultants including Malcolm X’s daughter Ambassador Shabazz.

Bythewood was also inspired by a personal memory: seeing Winnie Mandela of South Africa run across the stage to meet Betty Shabazz for the first time where they hugged and cried “like they were long lost sisters.”

Pierre said the series gave him a deeper insight into family, friendships and love, noting that “they feel tangible,” and he hopes viewers will feel the same. (Reuters)



Welcome to some of:

Eswatini’s best
tourist attractions

By Siphesihle Dlamini
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Eswatini might be one of Africa’s smallest destinations, but it’s a country with a big heart.

This is a place where tourists can explore the country’s top hot spots and discover memorable wildlife encounters, adventure activities like rafting and mountain biking, and colourful local culture – all wrapped up in a surprisingly relaxed atmosphere.

Eswatini’s well-organised community tourism projects will give you a rare chance to experience Swati customs and hospitality. At the same time, the size of the Kingdom makes for easily accessible adventures into unspoiled bush landscapes. Eswatini’s diversity and the unique variety of tourist attractions will give you plenty to do and see during your stay.

For first-time travellers, the list of things to do in Eswatini is as diverse and unique as the country itself. From scenic drives around the countryside to exciting arts and crafts, as well as hiking, river rafting, and game drives, Eswatini will quickly capture your heart.

HILANE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

Hlane is Eswatini’s largest protected area and extends on either side of the MR3 – where you may spot wildlife along the verge. The camps are in the western sector. This area usually hosts the traditional Butimba or Royal Hunt.

Among a wealth of wildlife reintroduced to its former home are elephants, white rhinos, lions, and leopards. The rhinos and elephants often visit the waterhole at Ndlovu Camp, while lions – the emblem of royal Eswatini – occupy a separate fenced area, where they can be viewed on a guided game drive.

Leopards are more elusive, as are spotted hyenas, whose whooping calls blend with the roars of the lions at night. Giraffes, zebra, and hippos are among other large mammals, while antelopes include abundant impala, plus kudu, wildebeest and waterbuck.

Highlights among more than 300 species of bird include a large breeding colony of white-backed vultures.

Visitors can choose from a selection of game drives and Hlane’s wide network of game-viewing roads is ideal for a self-drive safari. You can stretch your legs at picnic sites and watch animals come to drink from the game-viewing hide at Mahlindza Dam.

Other activities include guided walks and a mountain bike trail, while overnight bush trails are run in the wild eastern Lusoti section. Accommodation is at Ndlovu Camp, where you can watch the rhinos come to drink, or at the secluded, self-catering Bhubesi Camp, where only the calls of bushbabies and nightjars disturb the night.

SWAZI CANDLES CENTRE

This popular tourist spot, the Swazi Candles Centre, consists of a cluster of handicraft outlets around the showroom and workshop of Swazi Candles, a successful local enterprise that today exports candles worldwide.

Inside the workshop, you can watch the candle-makers shaping and colouring their creations. Their technique, known as millefiori (‘thousand flowers’), was developed centuries ago by Venetian glass blowers and has transferred seamlessly to wax.

A hard veneer means that the lit candles melt only on the inside, creating a translucent stained-glass window effect for the luminous colours.

There are numerous products for sale including woven mohair garments, batiks, and hand-crafted bags, all produced by local women, plus jewellery, chilli sauces, clothing, soaps, African artefacts, and the varied works of contemporary Swati artists.

There are outlets of Tsandza Weaving, Baobab Batik, and Black Mamba Chilli, amongst others. Under the huge jacarandas, you will also find an open-air handicraft market including wood-carver stalls, a children’s playground, and the friendly Sambane Café, where you can enjoy excellent coffee and cake.

SIBEBE ROCK

Sibebe Rock is the second-largest exposed granite dome in the world (after Uluru in Australia). This immense, three-billion-year-old volcanic slab, which rises to 1,488m and covers some 16,500ha, is the world’s largest granite dome.

Only Australia’s Uluru pips it to the title of ‘world’s largest rock’. The best way to see it is to climb it. On top, you will find a wonderland of sculpted boulders, granite slopes and hidden forest cliffs, with trails leading to caves and waterfalls.

Orchids and other wildflowers carpet the grasslands from October to December, and you might spot such highveld birds as jackal buzzards, ground woodpeckers and – if you’re lucky – a rare blue swallow.



▲ Hlane Royal National Park.



▲ Mantenga Reserve, Cultural Village and Falls.



▲ Sibebe Rock.

After the rains, the rock glistens silver with countless streams running down its bare face. It’s a magical sight from afar, but slippery and dangerous, so take care and follow only the marked trails. Guides are available.

The road to Sibebe passes along the attractive Pine Valley, with the rock so close to the verge that in places you must crane upwards to see it. At the end lies the Sibebe Trails community project, from where a well-marked and manageable path leads to the top.

A few well-run and well-appointed guest houses in the area have truly amazing settings and quite wonderful scenic views across this beautiful part of the Highveld yet lie a surprisingly close hop to the centre of the country’s capital city.

MBULUZI GAME RESERVE

Mbuluzi Game Reserve is a small, privately owned reserve located close to both the Mozambique and South African borders. Known for being a picturesque stop-over for visitors exploring a combination of countries, Mbuluzi certainly holds its own as a wilderness destination.

Undulating landscapes comprising chiefly of acacia bushveld, open savanna grasslands and riparian vegetation provide a diverse habitat for wildlife. Although not a Big Five destination, the reserve does support notable

safari-bucket list species such as crocodiles, honey badgers, zebra, and hyenas.

Two rivers meander their way through the hilly terrain, surrounded by impressive forests of sky-scraping date palm and sycamore trees. Sweeping scenes of typical open savannah flowing down to lush, dense forest are not uncommon.

Flanked by the fascinating Lubombo Mountains, the Mbuluzi River has a series of breathtaking rapids worth exploring. The Mlawula River flows gently through the reserve and has several walking trails cutting across the landscape.

There’s plenty to do in the reserve for the avid adventure lover. Explore the well-marked hiking trails to discover rocky outcrops, dense forests, and marshy riverbanks, all home to abundant herds of antelope and over 300 bird species.

SHEWULA NATURE RESERVE

Shewula Nature Reserve covers 2 650 (hectares) ha of land put aside by the local community for conservation. It is part of the Lubombo Conservancy and is home to the very popular Shewula Mountain Camp, which enjoys a spectacular location on top of the Lubombo Mountains.

On a clear day, you can see down to the Indian Ocean to the east and across Eswatini to the mountains of Malolotja to the west. This

pioneering eco-tourism project has become one of the most successful of its kind in southern Africa.

The community own and manage the project and profits go towards local development projects, including orphan care and wind power. Activities include guided nature walks down to the Mbuluzi Gorge, through beautiful scenery in search of crocodiles, birds and other wildlife, and mountain bike (or donkey cart) rides around the plateau.

The highlight is probably the village walk, taking you around the community; a chance to meet local people, visit a school and share some stories over a local beer, and even visit the local sangoma (traditional healer).

These walks do not feel contrived; the village simply gets on with life while you join in with as much or as little as you like. The sunsets are spectacular, and after dark, you can enjoy the communal Swati meals and watch the ‘Sibhaca’ dance displays.

MANTENGA RESERVE, CULTURAL VILLAGE AND FALLS

Mantenga, centred upon the picturesque Mantenga Falls and incorporates a cultural village, is where Eswatini history, culture and tradition are brought alive for visitors. Set against the scenic backdrop of Nyonyane mountain, this replica mid-19th Century Swati village, constructed using authentic materials and techniques, is one of the country’s most popular attractions.

For a modest fee, visitors may wander the village at leisure. A guided tour will reveal much more, from how the huts are built and what each is used for, to the role played by the ‘sangoma’, or traditional healer. Among the huts, you will meet the villagers, including women preparing food, plaiting grass, and making traditional beadwork, all for sale. At a small showground behind the village, a dance troupe performs traditional ‘Sibhaca’ routines twice daily. It’s a lively show, comprising vigorous high-kicking, pulsating drumming, and some rousing singing.

After a couple of hours wandering around the village and watching the dancing, the drinks and refreshments at the Swazi River Café are very welcome. This small reserve protects a tract of woodland along the Lushushwane River.

As well as the Cultural Village at its entrance, the reserve’s prime attraction is Mantenga Falls, Eswatini’s largest waterfall by volume. The river tumbles over a rock shelf before cascading via a series of pools along the reserve’s southern boundary with Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary.

Visitors can explore a series of short trails that lead to a picnic spot at the falls. Wildlife in the area includes baboon, duiker, rock hyrax, porcupine, bushpig, nyala and klipspringer, although you are most likely to see the vervet monkeys that hang around the lodge, hoping for handouts.

Look out too for rare southern bald ibis, which often roost on the cliffs above the falls. The reserve and its cultural village and restaurant make for a perfect half-day trip. A cosy lodge within the reserve also caters to overnighters.

MKHAYA GAME RESERVE

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

Established in 1979 to protect the country’s last indigenous Nguni cattle, Mkhaya has evolved into a sanctuary for endangered species and a haven for diverse wildlife. Some of the animals you might encounter during your safari here include white rhinos, black rhinos, giraffes, zebras, hippos, warthogs, buffalos, roan, sable, tsessebe, wildebeest, kudu, impala and nyala.

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

A network of game-viewing roads allows visitors to explore the reserve and get up close to its natural wonders. Accommodation at Mkhaya is offered at Mkhaya Stone Camp, a comfortable bush camp set along a dry riverbed.

The camp features 12 semi-open stone and thatch cottages, each offering a unique perspective on the surrounding wilderness. With no electricity, the camp embraces the rhythms of nature, lit by paraffin lanterns and candles at night. Activities at Mkhaya Game Reserve include guided game drives, bush walks, birdwatching, and cultural experiences. Visitors can learn about the Swazi culture and traditions through visits to local communities.



Govt to expedite the merger
of Big 5 game parks

By Nokunceda Magagula
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NATURE lovers are set for a treat when visiting the beautiful Kingdom of Eswatini.

His Majesty King Mswati III has issued a clear instruction to the tourism bodies in the country, to expedite the merger of Lubombo’s Big 5 game parks.

The King announced this during the Speech from the Throne and said the tourism sector plays a pivotal role in Eswatini’s economic recovery and growth potential.

“The country recognizes that tourism contributes to our economic recovery and growth potential,” stated His Majesty during his speech.

Engagements amongst stakeholders are currently underway to understand the roles each plays in the entire system in order to streamline the needs and requirements.

“The government is engaging with stakeholders in order to fully appreciate their contributions to the tourist value chain, from tour operators to front-line workers,” added the King.

To enhance visitor numbers, increase tourism expenditure, and promote Eswatini as a preferred destination, a collaborative effort is essential. It is crucial to have a diverse range of attractions across different geographical locations to appeal to a wide array of travellers.

The industry is encouraged to offer visitors a royal experience in Eswatini. Additionally, there is an expectation that the government will expedite the merger of Lubombo’s Big 5 game parks, thereby expanding the offerings available to tourists in the country.

In 2023, it was reported that the government approved E60 million for a fencing project covering a 120km perimeter, encompassing an area of 80,000 hectares at the Big Five National Park.

Last year, during a site visit, Former Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Moses Vilakati, together with his former counterpart at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Thuli Dladla, led diplomats from various countries on a field visit to the Hlane Royal National Park and Mlawula Nature Reserve to obtain firsthand information about the Big Five project.

The Big Five animals, consisting of elephants, lions, buffalos, leopards, and rhinos, were the focus of the tour. The diplomats who participated in the tour included Earl Miller from the United States of America, Brahma Jagabattuni from India, Dessislava Choumelova from the European Union, Jeremy Liang from Taiwan, Carlos Lopes from Portugal, and Jeremiah Mendes from the International Organization for Migration.

The tour concluded with a three-kilometre hike to the Khabane Cave, located a short distance from the main road. According to the then Acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ENTG Thulani Methula, the fencing of the merged Mlawula Nature Reserve, Hlane Royal National Park, and Mbuluzi Game Reserve would commence soon. The Acting CEO mentioned that it would cost E10 million to fence a distance of 20km.

Project
“Government has already approved the budget to undertake the project. There is no foreseen relocation of families from the communities closer to this project,” said Methula. He further explained the project to the diplomats, emphasizing the engagement of nearby communities to educate them about the importance of nature conservation.

Vilakati stated that the project aligned with the King’s vision of promoting tourism and creating job opportunities for emaSwati. He highlighted the government’s vision to promote tourism and nature conservation as the driving force behind economic development. He also mentioned that the development of the Big Five National Park would lead to the construction of five-star accommodations for tourists.

Inviting diplomats to be part of the tour was a means of marketing the country’s tourism sector to their respective countries, according to Vilakati.

“We are so happy that the King’s vision of seeing emaSwati reaping positive results through tourism will be realized through this project. Here at Mlawula, we have about 350 species of birds and ironwood, a tree that is used to build a railway line, and there are several indigenous trees which we have to conserve for tourists and future generations of the country,” he explained.





Hamas proposes 135-day Gaza truce with complete Israeli withdrawal

Hamas proposed a ceasefire to quiet the guns in Gaza for four-and-a-half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops from the Gaza Strip and an agreement would be reached on an end to the war. Israel's government spokesman said Israel was studying the offer intently, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu due to hold a press conference later on Wednesday. **Page 20**

U.S. museum returns Ghana's first batch of looted gold regalia

ACCRA - A U.S. museum has returned a batch of royal regalia to Ghana that was looted by British colonial soldiers 150 years ago, marking the first major return of stolen artefacts to the West African nation.

The Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) said the items, all royal objects from the Asante kingdom, were purchased by an American collector and donated to the museum after his death.

ACCRA, Feb 9 (Reuters) - A U.S. museum has returned a batch of royal regalia to Ghana that was looted by British colonial soldiers 150 years ago, marking the first major return of stolen artefacts to the West African nation.

The Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) said the items, all royal objects from the Asante kingdom, were purchased by an American collector and donated to the museum after his death.

London's British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum said last month that they would loan 32 objects taken during the Anglo-Asante wars to the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi.

The items returned by the Fowler Museum include an elephant tail whisk, two royal stool ornaments, a royal necklace, two strands of beads and an ornamental chair.

Four of them were taken during the 1874 sacking of Kumasi, and three were part of an indemnity payment later made by the Asante kingdom to the British, the museum said.

"These are objects that connect the present to the past... the very essence of a civilization," Ivor Agyemang Duah, director of the Asante royal museum, told Reuters.

'EQUITABLE RIGHTS'

The Fowler Museum said the return was permanent and voluntary, as it shifts toward the idea of museums as custodians "with ethical responsibility towards the communities of origin."

A historian at the University of Ghana, Kwaku Darko Ankrah, said the return was important for Ghana but expressed hope that it would also trigger a conversation about how the Asantes came by the items.

"Looting was also one major trait of the Asantes at the height of their supremacy and there is historical evidence of things they looted from other tribes they fought (across Ghana)," he said.

Ankrah wants returned items to be identified and the original owners found.

"They (the original owners) also have equitable rights to those items. If they are not identifiable but the Asantes agree they are looted treasures, then the artefacts should become national treasures of Ghana," he said.

(Reuters)



▲ A U.S. museum has returned a batch of royal regalia to Ghana that was looted by British colonial soldiers 150 years ago, marking the first major return of stolen artefacts to the West African nation.



▲ Senegal's police used tear gas on Friday (Feb.09) to disperse opposition protesters demonstrating against the decision by President Macky Sall to postpone the country's Feb. 25 elections.

Student killed in Senegal protests over election delay

Senegal's police used tear gas on Friday (Feb.09) to disperse opposition protesters demonstrating against the decision by President Macky Sall to postpone the country's Feb. 25 elections. The constitution empowers the Constitutional Council to reschedule the vote in certain circumstances including "the death, permanent incapacity or withdrawal" of candidates.

"Macky (President Macky Sall), that's enough. Macky, that's enough. Nobody ever touched the constitution. Macky, why did you touch the constitution? Macky, for God's sake, leave our constitution. No one has ever touched it. For God's sake, give us back our mandate. Enough is enough. We want peace. We're sick and tired of this. We don't want violence. Leave our mandate," Abdullah said.

Senegalese marched in cities including Ziguinchor, in the south and Diourbel, in the country's centre.

One student died in the northern city of Saint-Louis.

Clashes in Dakar lead to the closing of main roads, and disrupted rail lines and main markets.

"We called for a peaceful protest and for that I think normally the state should not react in this way," Ibrahima.

Opposition leaders and candidates rejected the decision, calling it a "coup."

Several opposition lawmakers were blocked from voting on Monday as parliament rescheduled the election for December, prompt-



▲ Senegal President Macky Sall.

ing outrage and condemnation.

Earlier this week, more than a dozen opposition candidates filed an appeal with the supreme court to overturn the decree.

The Constitutional Council is expected to rule within approximately a week as to whether it agrees with the parliament's conclusion. However, when pressed, Sall wouldn't say whether he would accept the court's decision if it rejected the delay.

Sall's time in office had been set to end on April 2 but he will remain in charge until the Dec.15 election. (Africanews)

West Africa bloc urges Burkina, Niger, Mali not to withdraw

ABUJA - The West African regional bloc ECOWAS pushed junta-led Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali to reconsider their decision to quit the political and economic alliance, it said on Thursday, warning of the hardships the move would force on their citizens.

The three countries' self-appointed military leaders jointly announced on January 28 that they were abandoning the bloc after it pressured them to restore constitutional order following a string of coups.

Their departure threatens to further weaken ECOWAS, which has struggled to curtail a retreat of democracy in West Africa that started with a military takeover in Mali in 2020.

Its mediation and security council met in Nigeria's capital Abuja to discuss the issue and an electoral crisis in Senegal, where the unprecedented postponement of a presidential vote has sparked public outcry and international alarm.

Regarding the withdrawal, council chairman Yusuf Maitama Tuggar said the juntas' move "would bring more hardship and will do more harm to the common citizens of those three countries."

"And that is why we continue to urge those three countries to remain ... And ECOWAS is going to redouble its efforts towards diplomacy, towards dialogue, towards reconciliation," he said after the closed-door meeting.

Before talks, ECOWAS Commission President Omar Touray described the juntas' decision as hasty and said they had failed to abide by the rules for quitting the bloc.

Touray did not specify which withdrawal conditions had been ignored.

Member states wishing to withdraw must give a written one-year notice.

On Wednesday the juntas said they planned to leave "without delay" as they did not feel bound by treaty terms, increasing the chances of a messy disentanglement from the region's trade and services flows, worth nearly \$150 billion a year.

In separate statements, they said ECOWAS had violated its texts by imposing excessively punitive sanctions, including border closures, in the wake of the coups.

A swift departure also raises pressing questions for the millions of nationals from the three poor and landlocked nations who have settled in neighbouring states as the bloc al-



▲ The West African regional bloc ECOWAS pushed junta-led Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali to reconsider their decision to quit the political and economic alliance, it said on Thursday, warning of the hardships the move would force on their citizens.

lows visa-free travel and the right to work.

"These are all things that you cannot just undo overnight ... it takes more than pronouncements," ECOWAS' Tuggar said.

None of the officials commented on what they had discussed in private about Senegal's postponement of a Feb. 25 election to December, although Touray described the move as a threat to regional peace and stability. (Reuters)

“

And that is why we continue to urge those three countries to remain ... And ECOWAS is going to redouble its efforts towards diplomacy, towards dialogue, towards reconciliation”

”



▲ Before talks, ECOWAS Commission President Omar Touray described the juntas' decision as hasty and said they had failed to abide by the rules for quitting the bloc.

South Sudan's election officials undergo training ahead of Dec polls

South Sudan is heading towards its first elections at the end of this year.

The United Nations Mission in the nation and the UN Development Programme recently held an interactive workshop in the capital Juba.

Despite the magnitude of the task ahead, the Chair of South Sudan's electoral Commission believes free, fair, and credible elections can be held.

"Successful elections will come when we are very concerned about civic and political education, in the first place, and then voter registration. If we do [complete] these two issues before June, we will be saved, we will have successful elections," Abednego Akol Chol said.

South Sudan became independent in 2011. After a peace deal in 2018 ended a civil war, elections repeatedly postponed.

Darren Nance who leads the UN's Integrated Electoral Assistance Team, detailed the goal of the three-day exchange with key South Sudanese interlocutors.

"The main focus is to discuss the multitude of challenges to prepare for an election in 10 months' time. The National Elections Commission, along with other state agencies, namely the Political Parties Council, the National Constitutional Review Committee, the security forces, the Ministry of Justice, and the judiciary, the Ministry of Finance—the government at large—hold the challenge of organizing a national event where you're asking millions of people to do the same thing at the same time, in 10 months. That would be a challenge anywhere in the world. It will be a challenge for South Sudan as well." (Africanews)



▲ The UNMISS and the UNDP recently held a workshop in Juba, to familiarize members of the National Elections Commission and other stakeholders on the electoral process.

DOHA - Hamas proposed a ceasefire to quiet the guns in Gaza for four-and-a-half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops from the Gaza Strip and an agreement would be reached on an end to the war. Israel's government spokesman said Israel was studying the offer intently, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu due to hold a press conference later on Wednesday.

Israel's Channel 13 TV quoted an unidentified official as saying some aspects were not acceptable and officials were debating whether to reject the proposal or seek modifications.

The Hamas offer, the contents of which were first reported by Reuters, is a response to an earlier proposal drawn up by U.S. and Israeli spy chiefs and delivered to Hamas last week by Qatari and Egyptian mediators.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the offer with Netanyahu after arriving in Israel following talks with the leaders of Qatar and Egypt, the countries that have acted as mediators. Blinken later met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

Israel began its military offensive after militants from Hamas-ruled Gaza killed 1,200 people and took 253 hostages in southern Israel on Oct. 7. Gaza's health ministry says at least 27,585 Palestinians have been confirmed killed, with thousands more feared buried under rubble. There has been only one truce so far, lasting just a week at the end of November.

GAPS REMAIN

There remain major gaps between the two sides: Israel has previously said it would not pull its troops out of Gaza or end the war until Hamas was wiped out. But sources described Hamas as taking a new approach to its longstanding demand to end the war, now proposing this as an issue to be resolved in future talks rather than a condition for the truce.

A source close to the negotiations said the Hamas counter proposal did not require a guarantee of a permanent ceasefire at the outset, but that an end to the war would have to be agreed upon before final hostages were freed.

A second source said Hamas still wanted guarantees from Qatar, Egypt and other friendly states that the ceasefire would be upheld and not collapse as soon as hostages go free.

"They want the aggression to stop and not temporarily, not where (the Israelis) take the hostages and then the Palestinian people live in a grinder."

Israeli government spokesperson Avi Hyman told reporters: "We have received an update, we have received notification from the Qatari negotiators. We are looking at them. The Mossad is looking intently at what was presented to us."

Ezzat El-Reshiq, a member of the Hamas political bureau, said the group's aim was "to stop the aggression against our Palestinian people and secure a complete and lasting ceasefire as well as provide relief, aid, shelter and reconstruction."

HAMAS PROPOSES THREE-PHASE TRUCE

According to the offer document seen by Reuters and confirmed by sources, during the first 45-day phase all Israeli



▲ Every visit from Blinken, instead of calming things down, it just makes things worse, we get more strikes, we get more bombing

Hamas proposes 135-day Gaza truce with complete Israeli withdrawal

women hostages, males under 19 and the old and sick would be freed, in exchange for Palestinian women and children held in Israeli jails. Israel would withdraw troops from Gaza's populated areas.

Implementation of the second phase would not begin until the sides conclude "indirect talks over the requirements needed to end the mutual military operations and return to complete calm".

The second phase would include the release of remaining male hostages and full Israeli withdrawal from all of Gaza. The remains of the dead would be exchanged during the third phase.

"People are optimistic, at the same time they pray that this hope turns into a real agreement that will end the war," Yamen Hamad, a father-of-four sheltering in a U.N. school in Deir Al-Balah, in central Gaza, told Reuters via a messaging app.

BLINKEN VISIT 'MAKES THINGS WORSE'

In Rafah, on Gaza's southern edge where half of the enclave's 2.3 million people are penned against the border with Egypt, the bodies of 10 people killed by Israeli strikes overnight were laid out in a hospital morgue. At least two of the shrouded bundles were the size of small children. Relatives wept beside the dead.

Palestinian health officials say an Israeli air strike killed another three people in a house in Rafah on Wednesday. The officials added that a senior Palestinian police officer and Hamas member, Majdi Abdel-Al, was killed in an Israeli air strike on a car that was tasked to secure aid trucks in Rafah.

"Every visit from Blinken, instead of calming things down, it just makes things worse, we get more strikes, we get more bombing," said mourner Mohammad Abundi.

Washington has cast the hostage and truce deal as part of plans for a wider resolution of the Middle East conflict, ultimately leading to reconciliation between Israel and Arab neighbours and the creation of a Palestinian state. Netanyahu has rejected a Palestinian state, which Saudi Arabia says is a requirement for any deal to normalise relations with Israel.

The diplomacy comes as Israel is trying to capture the main city in Gaza's south, Khan Younis. Last week, Israel said it plans to storm Rafah, a move U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday would "exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences."

The Israeli military said it had killed dozens of militants in fighting over the past 24 hours. It has made similar claims throughout the fighting in Khan Younis, which could not be independently verified. (Reuters)



▲ There remain major gaps between the two sides: Israel has previously said it would not pull its troops out of Gaza or end the war until Hamas was wiped out.



▲ Israel began its military offensive after militants from Hamas-ruled Gaza killed 1,200 people and took 253 hostages in southern Israel on Oct. 7.

Hamas had command tunnel under U.N. Gaza headquarters – Israeli military says

GAZA - Israeli forces have discovered a tunnel network hundreds of metres (yards) long and running partly under UNRWA's Gaza headquarters, the military says, calling it new evidence of Hamas's exploitation of the main relief agency for Palestinians.

Army engineers took reporters for foreign news outlets through the passages at a time of crisis for UNRWA, which has launched an internal probe and seen a string of donor countries freeze funding over allegations last month by Israel that some of its staff doubled as Hamas operatives.

The Palestinians have accused Israel of falsifying information to tarnish UNRWA, which employs 13,000 people in the Gaza Strip and has been a lifeline for the aid-dependent population for years. The agency runs schools, primary healthcare clinics and other social services, and distributes aid, describing its activities as purely humanitarian.

UNRWA Headquarters is in Gaza City, among northern areas that Israeli troops and tanks overran early in the four-month-old war against the governing Islamist faction Hamas, sending hundreds of thousands of civilians fleeing southward.

Reporters on the closely escorted trip entered a shaft next to a school on the periphery of the U.N. compound, descending to the concrete-lined tunnel. Twenty minutes of walking through the stifling hot, narrow and occasionally winding passage brought them underneath UNRWA Headquarters, an army lieutenant-colonel leading the tour said.

The tunnel, which the military said was 700 metres long and 18 metres deep, was bifurcated at times, revealing side rooms. There was an office space, with steel safes that had been opened and emptied. There was a tiled toilet. One large chamber was packed with computer serv-

ers, another with industrial battery stacks. "Everything is conducted from here. All the energy for the tunnels, which you walked through are powered from here," said the lieutenant colonel, who gave only his first name, Ido.

"This is one of the central commands of the intelligence. This place is one of the Hamas intelligence units, where they commanded most of the combat."

But Ido said Hamas appeared to have evacuated in the face of the Israeli advance, preemptively cutting off communications cables that, in an above-ground part of the tour, he showed running through the floor of the UNRWA Headquarters' basement.

It appeared that heavy Israeli barrages and sustained winter rains may also have played a part in the departure: Several stretches of the tunnel were clogged with dislodged sand and knee-high water.

In a statement, UNRWA said it had vacated the headquarters on Oct. 12, five days after the war began, and was therefore "unable to confirm or otherwise comment" on the Israeli finding.

"UNRWA ... does not have the military and security expertise nor the capacity to undertake military inspections of what is or might be under its premises," the statement said.

"In the past, whenever (a) suspicious cavity was found close to or under UNRWA premises, protest letters were promptly filed to parties to the conflict, including both the de facto authorities in Gaza (Hamas) and the Israeli authorities."

UNRWA's supporters say it is the only agency with the means of aiding Palestinians in deepening humanitarian distress. Israel says the agency is "perforated by Hamas" and must be replaced. Hamas has denied operating in civilian facilities.

"We know that they (Hamas) have people working in UNRWA. We want every international organization to work in Gaza. That is not a problem. Our problem is the Hamas," Ido told reporters.

(Reuters)



▲ Israeli soldiers operate in what the military described as a Hamas command tunnel running partly under UNRWA headquarters, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in the Gaza Strip



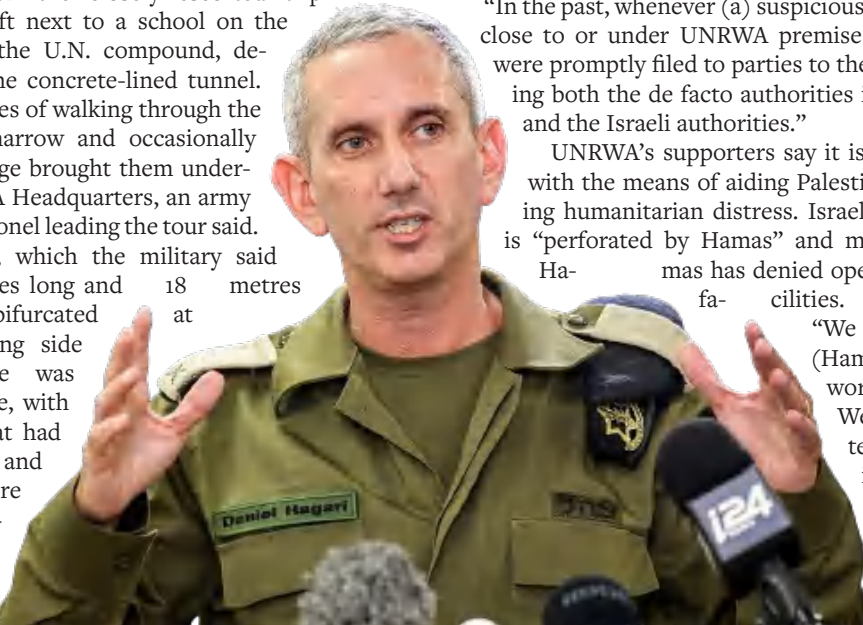
▲ Israeli soldiers operate next to the UNRWA headquarters, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in the Gaza Strip



▲ Israeli soldiers use a camera to inspect what the military described as a Hamas command tunnel running partly under UNRWA headquarters, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in the Gaza Strip



▲ Israeli soldiers operate next to the UNRWA headquarters, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in the Gaza Strip



▲ IDF Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari

Liverpool, Man City fire up title race

Liverpool earned a crucial 3-1 win against relegation-threatened Burnley on Saturday to return to the Premier League summit after being briefly unseated by champions Manchester City.

The Anfield side are hunting a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title in Jurgen Klopp's final season in charge but once again have relentless City for company at the top of the table.

Liverpool, beaten by title rivals Arsenal last week, were not at their fluent best but did enough to get over the line against Vincent Kompany's men, who remain seven points from safety.

City, who beat Everton 2-0 at home in the early kick-off, are two points behind Liverpool with a game in hand as they chase an unprecedented fourth consecutive English top-flight title.

The Reds were gifted the lead when Burnley goalkeeper James Trafford came for a Trent Alexander-Arnold corner but missed the ball and Diogo Jota headed into an empty net for his ninth Premier League goal of the season.

But they were pegged back minutes before half-time when Dara O'Shea's bullet header from a corner gave Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher no chance. Liverpool were a different proposition in the second half and Luis Diaz put them back in front in the 52nd minute with a header from close range.

David Datro Fofana squandered clear chances to equalise for the visitors -- Kelleher saved well from the forward minutes before Fofana curled wide of the post.

The home fans breathed a huge side of relief when Darwin Nunez headed in Harvey Elliott's fine cross in the 79th minute to open up a two-goal lead, which ultimately proved enough to secure the three points.

Guardiola's men have won their past 10 games in all competitions but the Spaniard might be a little concerned with the way they laboured against struggling Everton.

"In the first half our body language was not good," the City boss told the BBC. "You cannot play good football if you are not positive. You do your best when you are positive. When you start to complain and are sad it does not work."

"We talked at half time and I told them, 'what do you expect, to come here and win 5-0? Come on. Life is tough and football is tough.'"

The result leaves Sean Dyche's men in the relegation zone -- they have not won in the Premier League since mid-December and face a fight for survival.

Their plight has been made immeasurably tougher as a result of a 10-point deduction for breaches of financial sustainability rules.

Tottenham climbed back into the top four after Brennan Johnson fired into the roof of the net deep into stoppage time to complete an impressive comeback against Brighton.

Pascal Gross scored from the penalty spot in the 17th minute after Danny Welbeck was caught by Micky van

de Ven.

But Spurs were level just after the hour mark through Pape Matar Sarr, giving them the platform to chase the win.

Bottom side Sheffield United beat Luton 3-1 to record just their third league win of the season but remain seven points behind the home side, who are one place above the drop zone.

Brentford saw off Wolves 2-0 courtesy of Christian Norgaard's first-half header and a fine team goal late in the game finished off by Ivan Toney.

Rodrigo Muniz scored twice as Fulham beat Bournemouth 3-1. Third-placed Arsenal travel to West Ham on Sunday while high-flying Aston Villa host Manchester United. (France24)



▲ Erling Haaland scored his first goals since November as Manchester City beat Everton 2-0. Pep Guardiola's team were well below their best as they laboured to break down the stubborn visitors at a nervous Etihad Stadium but Haaland struck twice late in the second half.

Haaland double Earlier, Erling Haaland scored his first goals since November as Manchester City beat Everton 2-0.

Pep Guardiola's team were well below their best as they laboured to break down the stubborn visitors at a nervous Etihad Stadium but Haaland struck twice late in the second half.

They are his first strikes since returning from an absence of nearly two months due to a foot injury.

▲ Liverpool earned a crucial 3-1 win against relegation-threatened Burnley on Saturday to return to the Premier League summit after being briefly unseated by champions Manchester City



▲ PSG have not given up hope of keeping Kylian Mbappe and are preparing to offer the World Cup winner a huge two-year-deal.

PSG remain optimistic Kylian Mbappe will stay

... despite claims that he had 'agreed to join Real Madrid

PSG have not given up hope of keeping Kylian Mbappe and are preparing to offer the World Cup winner a huge two-year-deal, according to reports.

With his contract set to expire with the French club this summer, Le Parisien reported that Mbappe had 'decided to leave Ligue 1 at the end of the season and join the biggest club in the world [Real Madrid], which has always been waiting for him.'

There have subsequently been developments which suggested a deal was far from finalised, with the star striker holding out for three concessions from the LaLiga giants.

Le Parisien claim that the Paris club will offer Mbappe a two-year salary that will see him pocket almost £70million after tax. That would make him the highest-paid player in European football. In addition to his salary, he would also receive guaranteed bonuses and advertising contracts from Qatar.

He already has an option to extend his contract at PSG by another year, a deal that would see him earn £60million in the next 12 months.

The outlet goes on to say that it was



Mbappe's intention to announce his decision before the Champions League round of 16 clash against Real Sociedad on March 5. But now, Madrid are growing increasingly 'worried' by the delay.

On Friday, PSG chief Al-Khelaifi was asked for his take on the situation and only offered reporters a blunt, nine-word response.

On the sidelines of the UEFA Congress in Paris, according to GOAL, Al-Khelaifi said: 'When we have both decided, we will tell you.'

Previously, president Al-Khelaifi had openly stated that he wanted the forward to stay.

He told RMC: 'Look, I'm not hiding anything. For sure I want Mbappe to stay. For me he is the best in the world and for me the best club for Kylian is Paris.'

He has been free to negotiate with other clubs since January 1 after entering the final six months of his PSG contract.

Liverpool have also been linked with a move for the forward, with Le Parisien claiming that 'Mbappe would be open to joining the Merseyside club.'

(Daily Mail)

Floyd Mayweather reveals eye-watering eight-figure tax bill

Floyd Mayweather has publicly revealed that he has paid a whopping eight-figure sum in tax in the last year on social media.

Mayweather is known as one of the richest sportspeople in history with his stunning exploits in the ring earning him some enormous fight purses, the fighter coining the nickname 'Money'.

Although retired from the professional game, Mayweather has returned to the ring for a series of exhibition fights, as well as owning a number of businesses and multiple properties.

Reports in December suggested that an agreement had been made to rematch Manny Pacquiao in a 2024 exhibition clash, thought to be in Japan as the two reignite their rivalry later this year.

Mayweather, however, has spared no bones on social media by flaunting how much he has been earning by posting a picture of his tax cheque, accompanied by a typically brash and posturing caption.

'Just before I paid that light million and change for that little Super Bowl stuff, I had to pay the IRS aka Uncle Sam \$18,047,181 (£14.3million),' he wrote on Instagram.

'This is what I owed in taxes while I'm retired so just imagine what I was paying when I was activated.'

Mayweather had been busy on social media throughout Thursday, and earlier posted another bill - this time for his purchase of a suite to watch the Super Bowl in Las Vegas with 34 friends.

'I don't kiss a** and I never have to beg for nothing especially not to get a Super Bowl suite.'

'I don't mind accepting invites at times, but one things for sure...The person that's paying does all the saying.'

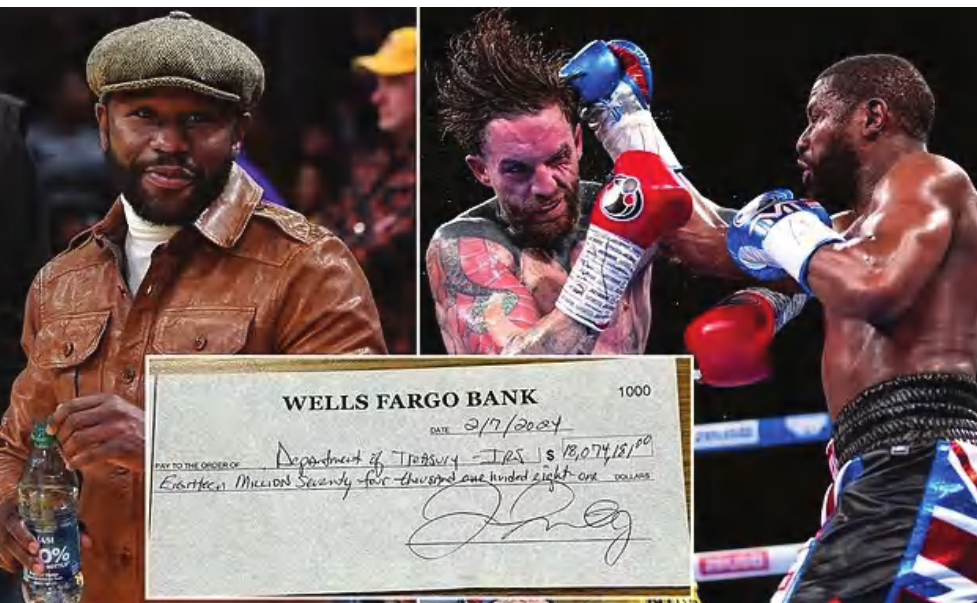
'Therefore I get My Own seats and suites so I can do what I want and invite who I want! I'm blessed to be taking 34 people to experience the 1st Super Bowl in Las Vegas!'

He was quick to add the price of the venture at the bottom, which was: '\$1,131,000.00 (£896,000).'

It is an eye-watering tax bill for a year in which Mayweather only managed to fight once throughout the whole of 2023.

The 50-0 Michigan-born fighter faced Aaron Chalmers in February in a non-scored bout of eight rounds. The showdown with the former MMA fighter was Mayweather's first ever bout in the UK - but the bout was overshadowed due to the significantly low number of fans in attendance. Despite the low attendance, the pair eventually went head-to-head - and went the full eight rounds.

(Daily Mail)



▲ Floyd Mayweather has publicly revealed that he has paid a whopping eight-figure sum in tax in the last year on social media.



▲ Arsenal's England forward Bukayo Saka is on track to be fit for the visit of West Ham United in the Premier League on Sunday, manager Mikel Arteta has said.

Bakayo Saka likely to be fit as cautious Arsenal visit West Ham

Arsenal's England forward Bukayo Saka is on track to be fit for the visit of West Ham United in the Premier League on Sunday, manager Mikel Arteta has said. Saka, who has made 22 league appearances this season and scored eight goals, injured his right leg during Sunday's 3-1 win over Liverpool where he scored the first goal.

'He's been recovering again this week and he looks okay,' Arteta told reporters on Friday. 'Tomorrow we have another training session and we are hoping we are going to have a few back,' the Spaniard said, adding that midfielder Thomas Partey was progressing well but did not have a date for returning.

Third-placed Arsenal have won their last three matches, but Arteta is wary of David Moyes's West Ham who beat them 2-0 at the Emirates in December.

'He's a really competitive manager who is really good at getting the edge in a game. He waits for the right moment and tries to punish

you. They are a really good side. We will have to be at our best to win the game,' Arteta said.

The Arsenal boss added that he did not agree with the criticism of his team for their celebrations after Sunday's 3-1 win over leaders Liverpool which rejuvenated their hopes in the title race as defending champions Manchester City close in.

'Managers and teams celebrate a lot. It's so tough to win in this league. It was a big match for us, you could tell from the stadium the atmosphere, it was a great day,' he said.

'I've seen managers at the Emirates on their knees, managers going across the pitch. I love it because it brings so much passion and emotion to the game.'

Arsenal are level on 49 points with second-placed Manchester City, who have a game in hand on their rivals, with the pair trailing Liverpool by two points. West Ham are seventh on 36.

(Reuters)

By Karabo Ngoepe
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FOOTBALL season is long and gruelling. Winning the title requires mental fortitude, stamina and consistency. Knockout competitions or cup tournaments on the other hand present a quick way to glory and riches. With the right mindset, attitude and approach to games, it might take just four wins and glory resides with you.

One of the greatest managers to have walked the planet, Sir Alex Ferguson, who spent 26 seasons with Manchester United, winning 13 English league titles along with 25 other domestic and international trophies, played a central role in the United organization, managing not just the first team but the entire club.

“Steve Jobs was Apple; Sir Alex Ferguson is Manchester United,” says the club’s former chief executive David Gill. Local side, Nsingizini Hotspurs has adopted this ethos and mentality in how ‘Nsingizini Yezulu’ is run.

The team has solidified itself as a cup specialist in the country. They successfully defended the MTN MoMo Cup and they are doing relatively okay in the league. But Club CEO, Banele Ngobe downplays this tag, saying they don’t prepare differently when it comes to knockout competitions and the league.

“From the club’s perspective, the approach is the same. Maybe in terms of the playing personnel, it’s a different motivation when it becomes a cup competition. But our approach in terms of preparations and the game, we always emphasize that we go out there to win football games. However, there is always that extra element when it comes to a cup game, which we have been able to defend back-to-back,” he said.

This is something that Ferguson managed to do with the Red Devils which then turned the team into a formidable machine. Something that Ngobe and Club President Derrick Shiba are trying to build with the Hluthi-based side.

According to a Havard Business Review study conducted on Ferguson, he revealed that upon his arrival at Manchester, in 1986, Ferguson set about creating a structure for the long term by modernizing United’s youth program.

Young talent

He established two “centres of excellence” for promising players as young as nine and recruited several scouts, urging them to bring him the top young talent.

The best-known of his early signings was David Beckham. The most important was probably Ryan Giggs, whom Ferguson noticed as a skinny 13-year-old in 1986 and who went on to become the most decorated British footballer of all time.

The longtime stars Paul Scholes and Gary Neville were also among Ferguson’s early youth program investments. Together with Giggs and Beckham, they formed the core of the great United teams of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which Ferguson credits with shaping the club’s modern identity.

It was a big bet on young talent, and at a time when the prevailing wisdom was, as one respected television commentator put it, “You can’t win anything with kids.”

Ferguson approached the process systematically. He talks about the difference between building a team, which is what most managers concentrate on and building a club.

“From the moment I got to Manchester United, I thought of only one thing: building a football club. I wanted to build right from the bottom. That was to create fluency and a continuity of supply to the first team. With this approach, the players all grow up together, producing a bond that, in turn, creates a spirit,” he said. Ferguson added that when he arrived, only one player on the first team was under 24. “Can you imagine that, for a club like Manchester United? I knew that a focus on youth would fit the club’s history, and my earlier coaching experience told me that winning with

Nsingizini finds formula to reach for the stars

young players could be done and that I was good at working with them. So I had the confidence and conviction that if United was going to mean anything again, rebuilding the youth structure was crucial. You could say it was brave, but fortune favours the brave.”

And bravery with the right support yields tangible results. Nsingizini Hotspurs is a prime example of such. The management of the team has turned its focus on running parallel programmes to make it a powerhouse. The first step was the professionalisation of the team, both on the field and administratively.

That was followed by collaborations and partnerships with different organisations, stakeholders and clubs internationally. That was then followed by investing in the youth.

Ferguson summed it up perfectly when he said “Winning a game is only a short-term gain—you can lose the next game. Building a club brings stability and consistency. You don’t ever want to take your eyes off the first team, but our youth development efforts ended up leading to our many successes in the 1990s and early 2000s. The young players became the spirit of the club.”

“What you are currently seeing just tells you about the quality of the team and the mentality of our players. If they say they are going to do it they do so,” he said.

At the top, we mentioned stamina, endurance and consistency which are needed to win the league.

Nsingizini Yezulu sits with a peculiar conundrum, they win some matches and then draw many others with losses here and there. Now the focus has turned to finding that sweet spot to ensure the honey drips consistently.

“We just want our cup successes and performances to be translated into the league. I think we have been right there, just that we have been drawing games we aren’t supposed to. Again, it’s one of those things we are working to overcome as a club. It’s a challenge but I’m happy that we are finding a solution,” he said.

In the same survey, Ferguson speaks passionately about wanting to instil values in his players.

More than giving them technical skills, he wanted to inspire them to strive to do better and to never give up—in other words, to make them winners.

Maintaining standards

“Everything we did was about maintaining the standards we had set as a football club—this applied to all my team building and all my team preparation, motivational talks, and tactical talks. For example, we never allowed a bad training session. What you see in training manifests itself on the game field. So every training session was about quality. We didn’t allow a lack of focus. It was about intensity, concentration, speed—a high level of performance. That, we hoped, made our players improve with each session,” Ferguson said.

“I had to lift players’ expectations. They should never give in. I said to them all the time: ‘If you give in once, you’ll give in twice.’ And the work ethic and energy I had seemed to spread throughout the club. I used to be the first to arrive in the morning. In my later years, a lot of my staff members would already be there when I got in at 7 AM. I think they understood why I came in early—they knew there was a job to be done. There was a feeling that ‘if he can do it, then I can do it.’”

Ngobe also speaks highly of the club’s Core Values and Vision, something he says goes beyond just the players but the kind of partnerships they get into.

That has been able to birth a formidable corporate brand that is currently sweeping the country. “We wanted to have a very strong partnership with our corporate brands and I think we are on the right track. It allows no room for complacency in decision-making. It also encourages you to always be there in terms of the standard because you are accountable to your part-



▲ The fast growing Nsingizini Hotspurs has provided kit replicas and emahiya specially designed for fans. (Right) Hotspurs President Derrick Shiba welcoming new signing Muzi Mkhonta.



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs players in prayer before a match.

ners who are providing you with financial support.

We also have a long-term view in terms of technical requirements and I believe we are in the right direction. We have a technical sponsorship for the next three years. It helps to maintain the club’s identity in terms of the standards and branding or replicas,” he said. In emulating Ferguson’s formula, Ngobe attributes

the mental strength, commitment and the club’s Core Values as having laid the perfect foundation for Nsingizini Hotspurs to become a dominant name both on and off the pitch. Granted, the club is yet to taste league glory but again, it took Ferguson four seasons to start seeing results from his experiment and gamble.

Currently, Nsingizini

has invested heavily in building a football village of excellence, high standards and first-world amenities, something associated with top clubs.

Look at Old Trafford Training Centre, Carrington Training Centre for Manchester City and Axam Melwood Facility used by Liverpool.

These are centres of high performance that have everything a player would need to develop.

From physical training to mental training and even recuperation amenities. Nsingizini has finished phase one of their mammoth task of the village which will in turn become an economic vehicle for the local community. Kudos to the Hluthi-based side and its management.





SMVAF Ingwenyama Cup Previews:

‘Bull’, Ezulwini Utd in grudge rematch

By Lwazi Dlamini
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SUNDAY:
Mbabane Highlanders vs Ezulwini United
Venue: Mavuso Sports Centre
Kickoff time: 4: pm

Revenge is a dish best served cold. Ezulwini United will be seeking revenge against Mbabane Highlanders in the gruelling quarterfinal battle of the Ingwenyama Cup at Mavuso Sports Centre.

This will be a double dose of action between the two sides as they will meet twice within seven days. Highlanders conquered the league meeting courtesy of Menzi Sithole's second-half strike.

The rematch will take place at the same venue when the clock strikes 4 pm. United have been dealt a blow as they will be without the services of experienced defender Mandla Palma from Highlanders who is cup-tied for the richest knockout tournament.

The 'Stingers', as United are fondly known, have also produced the tournament's current top goal scorer in former Highlanders winger Mphucuko 'Smoothies' Dlamini with five goals.

The pacy forward will be carrying the hopes of the Maphe Ngwenya-led side in this daunting task. The 'Black Bull' will be parading their star-studded midfield

comprising Banele 'Pupu' Sikhondze, Emmanuel Owunsu and Philani Mkhonto.

Fans will be eager to see the team that will conquer the remaining battle between the two sides which carries a E200 000 (US\$10 500) carrot for reaching the semifinals.

Players to watch

Menzi Sithole (Mbabane Highlanders)

The former Royal Leopard player has not disappointed in his fourth stint with the 'Black Bull'. He always delivers when under pressure which saw him score the elusive winner against the same opposition during the two teams' recent league meeting.

He is once again expected to inspire the crowd pullers to success against United with his creativity in the belly of the park.

Mphucuko 'Smoothies' Dlamini (Ezulwini United)

The pacy 'Stingers' captain will lead the team in their revenge mission against his former side.

'Smoothies' has displayed an excellent eye for goals which has seen him score five goals in the opening matches in the tournament. He is a strong contender for the top goal scorer award.

EZULWINI UNITED



▲ Ria Ledwaba

Ledwaba, Mohlabeng lose case against Jordaan's Presidency

THE Pretoria High Court dismissed former South African Football Association (SAFA) vice president Ria Ledwaba and Solly Mohlabeng's attempt to challenge the outcome of the 2002 SAFA's elective congress.

The court dismissed the application with costs on Friday.

The duo was challenging the validity of the SAFA presidential elections, where incumbent Danny Jordaan came out triumphant. He was elected president for his third term. They were seeking arbitration. And had approached the court for an order compelling SAFA to convene an arbitration tribunal.

NOT IN LINE WITH SAFA CONSTITUTION

Ledwaba and Mohlabeng were adamant that the elections were not held in terms of the SAFA constitution. They argued that the governance committee that was created in the new constitution amendments had not been properly appointed in terms of the constitution. They also wanted the outcome of the elections to be declared null and void.

At the time, SAFA, represented by legal SC Norman Arendse, argued that both Ledwaba and Mohlabeng are not members of SAFA. He said they had a dispute resolution process available to them, and they waived their rights.

APPLICATION DISMISSED WITH COSTS

Said SAFA's legal representative, Lesedi Mphahlele, after Friday's ruling: "This was the first issue that they wanted the court to decide. In the second issue, they wanted the court to order that the issues be referred to a SAFA arbitration. These issues are around the so-called unconstitutionality of the elections. They have lost both of them, and the court has dismissed their application with costs. They dismissed the application with costs. Including the costs of two advocates, one being a senior advocate."

ELECTIONS WERE TRANSPARENT

SAFA proclaims that the 2002 elections were held under the watchful eye of the world football governing body, Fifa. Also the Confederation of African Football, and that the congress was a huge success.

Jordaan received 186 votes to comfortably win the elective race.

His rivals, Ledwaba and Mohlabeng, received 27 votes and eight, respectively.

Sunday World

Birds in Rangers test

Mbabane Swallows vs PP Rangers
Venue: Mavuso Sports Centre
Kickoff time: 1 pm

IT'S a battle between David and Goliath!!

The tournament's most successful team Mbabane Swallows quest to clinch the title will have to go via First Division minnows Pigg's Peak Rangers in the quarter-finals on Sunday at 1 pm.

The 'Beautiful Birds' will have to avoid an upset against the northern Hhohho outfit that recently claimed the scalp of Moneni Pirates in the last 32.

Swallows head coach Caleb Ngwenya will rely on the experience of Ayanda Gadlela, Siyabonga Zwane and Sizolwethu 'Nunu' Shabalala with the seasoned duo of Felix 'Fela' Badenhost and Sandile Hlatshwako both ruled out for the encounter due to injuries.

Rangers have got experienced players in their camp as well such as Mathokoza Tfwala (ex-Royal Leopard), Lindokuhle 'Ntolo' Fakudze (formerly with Highlanders and Manzini Wanderers) and Mbuso Dladla (formerly with Malanti Chiefs and Nsingizini Hotspurs).

The ex-Premier League trio have been Rangers' vital cogs during the previous matches where they stunned Moneni Pirates and National first division compatriots Milling Hotspurs.

The Northern Hhohho outfit is already guaranteed over E100 000 (US\$5,253) for reaching the quarterfinals (E75 000 [US\$3,940] and the E30 000 [US\$1,576] for being the best

first division side).

Players to watch

Siyabonga Zwane (Mbabane Swallows)

The marauding pint-sized Mbabane Swallows winger will be carrying the hopes of the capital city giants in the quarterfinal battle.

The ex-Seven Dreams player has been on form throughout the season, and he usually rises to the occasion during big matches. He is expected to cause havoc to the National First Division side.

Lindokuhle 'Ntolo' Fakudze (Pigg's Peak Rangers)

The ex-Manzini Wanderers and Mbabane Highlanders veteran midfielder has been the mainstay for the minnow's good run in the tournament. Fakudze has inspired the Sihle Mavimbela-led charges during their last 32 upset against Moneni Pirates before outfoxing compatriots Milling Hotspurs.

He will once again command the Rangers midfield against the three-time winners.





Bafana secure Bronze medal

Green Mamba's 'Sikhali' pierces Nsingizini's hearts

...Maverick striker Sabelo Ndzinisa nets a winner in the 16th minute of the fiercely contested clash as holders, Green Mamba beat hard-fighting Nsingizini Hotspurs to storm into the semifinals in the sixth edition of the richest tournament in the land.

Buffaloes slay Madlenya