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18 February, 2024

Eswatini Sunday

Buganu Festival: A cultural and economical extravaganza

By Bahle Gama and
Ncaba Ntshakala

THE Buganu Festival plays a critical role in the cultural and economic landscape of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Thousands of people attend the event, including tourists from across the globe. Locals in turn get to sell their merchandise and make a profit in the process.

His Majesty King Mswati III says the Buganu

Ceremony plays an important role in bringing emaSwati together with love and laughter.

The King was speaking on the second day of the festival held at Buhleni Royal Residence on Saturday night where he said this ceremony keeps the Swati culture alive.

The Buganu ceremony is a celebration of the harvest of the first fruit which usually begins each year in mid-February and continues until May. The festival is increasing in popularity and swiftly becoming one of the country's most exciting traditional ceremonies.

EmaSwati are united in song and dance

during this festival, particularly the women who are the brewers of the marula beer. It is all about dancing and celebrating the provision of the fruit that is not only used for the beer but also for different purposes such as skin care products.

His Majesty said such events also present an opportunity to compose new songs. The King said these are not just songs but prayers and words of encouragement to the country to unite and tackle all problems and challenges together as one.

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▲ Princess Sikhanyiso dances during the Buganu Ceremony on Saturday at Buhleni Royal Residence.



Lutsango's musical mastery delights King

By Siphesihle Dlamini

HIS Majesty King Mswati III lauded Lutsango's creativity in coming up with relevant songs for the Buganu Festival.

The King praised Lutsango's ability to craft songs that not only entertain but also carry important messages that resonate with the nation and tackle societal issues.

"I am happy with the creativity of Lutsango," he said. These annual songs, according to His Majesty, play a vital role in strengthening the country and fostering collaboration among its citizens.

It was musical hymns and songs galore at the first leg of the Buganu Festival as emaSwati sang and danced 'Kutsamba' jubilantly and proudly in front of their Majesties at Buhleni Royal Residence. Dressed in exquisite traditional regalia, Lutsango mesmerized their Majesties with songs like 'Njiloni', a melody that had even the King singing along in celebration.

The fire services representatives took the stage with a powerful rendition of 'Lamula Mbangazitha Sizwe Siyalwa', urging the King to intervene in times of turmoil. Following suit, Balukatana delivered a moving performance of 'Ngeke Ngikubeke Sandla', highlighting the importance of using words instead of violence in addressing conflicts.

Balondolozzi graced the podium with songs like 'Umusu', expressing gratitude for God's grace upon the nation, and 'Cina Enkhosini', encouraging emaSwati to remain strong and faithful for a prosperous future.

They also sang 'Nginelitsemba', which can be translated to 'I have hope.' The song implied that emaSwati are all-smiley for they have belief in His Majesty King Mswati III. The song further extended to a prayer to God, asking Him to bless and guide the nation.

Bantfwabenhkhosi, led by HRH Sikhanyiso, rounded up the podium with 'Bayethe', a song that praised the King's leadership and greatness. The song was complimented by praise singing.

Eswatini delegation in Ethiopia for AU assembly

By Ncaba Ntshakala

A DELEGATION led by Prime Minister Russell Dlamini is in Ethiopia to participate in the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments of the African Union (AU).

The Prime Minister is representing His Majesty King Mswati III at the event. Dlamini expressed his satisfaction with the smooth arrival and shared his excitement for the upcoming engagements.

"We were cordially received by the Minister for Labour and Skills Hon. Muferihat Kemil Ahmed and we had an opportunity to also meet with Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the Minister in the Presidency for Youth, Women and Persons with Disability in the Republic of South Africa," the Premier stated.

The Prime Minister highlighted his optimism for fruitful discussions during the summit, stating, "We look forward to further fruitful engagements during the course of the Summit."

The Kingdom of Eswatini's participation in the AU Assembly is very crucial and signifies the nation's commitment to collaborating with other African countries on critical issues affecting the continent. The summit provides a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and



▲ (From left to right) Ethiopia Minister for Labour and Skills Muferihat Kemil, Eswatini Prime Minister Russell Dlamini, South Africa Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities Dr Nkosazana Dlamini - Zuma and Eswatini Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Pholile Shakantu.

the advancement of shared goals for the well-being and prosperity of Africa.

Prime Minister commends Ethiopian Airlines as an inspiration for Africa

ON his visit to Ethiopia representing King Mswati III at the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments of the African Union (AU), Prime Minister Russell Dlamini visited the headquarters of Ethiopian Airlines and expressed his admiration for the airline, calling it an inspiration for the entire continent.

The Prime Minister, along with an Eswatini delegation, was warmly received by Ethiopian Airlines CEO, Mesfin Tasew Bekele, at the airline's headquarters in Addis Ababa. During the visit, they gained valuable insights into the operations and structure of this successful African enterprise.

"We were pleased to learn about Ethiopian Airlines, a proudly African organization wholly owned by the Ethiopian government," shared Prime Minister. "Their impressive scale, with over 100 aircraft, 17,000 employees,

and billions of dollars in revenue, is truly inspiring."

Beyond its core airline operations, Ethiopian Airlines' diverse portfolio further impressed the Prime Minister. He highlighted their ownership of one of Africa's largest hotels, boasting over 1,100 rooms, and their state-of-the-art aviation university.

"Ethiopian Airlines' success story serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration not just for Eswatini but for all of Africa," concluded the Prime Minister. "Their commitment

to excellence and growth demonstrates the immense potential that lies within our continent."

Ethiopian Airlines, established in 1945, is the flag carrier of Ethiopia and one of the largest airlines in Africa. It boasts a proud history as the continent's first and oldest aviation company, continuously striving for excellence and innovation.

The airline operates the largest network in Africa, connecting passengers to over 120 destinations across five continents. This vast network makes it a preferred choice for travellers seeking seamless connections across the globe. It also maintains a modern and fuel-efficient fleet, consistently investing in the latest aircraft technology.

This commitment to modernization ensures a comfortable and safe flying experience for passengers. The airline's membership in the Star Alliance network provides passengers with seamless travel experiences and access to over 1,300 destinations worldwide.

Ethiopian Airlines has consistently been recognized for its exceptional service and has received numerous awards, including being named "Africa's Airline of the Year" multiple times.

The airline plays a significant role in the Ethiopian economy, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. It also serves as a vital link for trade and investment between Africa and the rest of the world.

**ESWATINI
MEATS
INDUSTRIES**

**PROMOTION VALID UNTIL FEBRUARY
18, 2024 IN ALL OUR STORES.**

EMBIVENI WISHES YOU A
Meaty Valentines
DAY



AVAILABLE WHILE STOCKS LAST

**OUR STORES: Manzini Meat Market, Down Town Butchery,
Embiveni Meat Plaza & Embiveni Meat Market (Nhlangano)**

Making Meal
Times Special



Lutsango brave scorching sun, in high spirits at Buhleni

By Bahle Gama

As early as 9 a.m. the tiny streets of Buhleni were abuzz, smoke coming from different cooking areas at Buhleni Royal residence, and women draped in traditional gear were everywhere, from the main road into the residence.

The sun was up and felt like 100 degrees, yet the women were in high spirits and seen singing as they prepared for the evening where they would showcase their dance skills before Their Majesties.

The ceremony began on Friday, February 16 to Sunday, February 18 where lutsango also referred to as libutfo from different parts of the country and organizations presented an array of unique gifts and Buganu brew to Her Majesty, Indlovukazi.

On Saturday, which marked the “dance day of the ceremony, the event proceeded with lutsango in high spirit despite the scorching sun which seemed to only fuel the women who came to Buhleni all ready to meet and dance before Their Majesties.

As always, “Inkhosi Iphekile” was the major highlight of the women’s morning as His Majesty had prepared food for lutsango to carry on the day in preparation for the evening.

Food was not the only thing served to lutsango as the regiments received a variety of traditional gifts such as marula soap and oil, cherished for their significance in Eswatini culture.

They were also presented with lihiya that enabled uniformity as well as unity amongst the Swati women.

They patiently queued towards the dishing area and adhered to the instructions being given by deployed Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS) and His Majesty’s Correctional Services (HMCS) officers on the ground.

As soon as they were wearing the lihiya given to them that had the umganu tree, they were all identical and oozing with confidence.

Some expressed their excitement as they stated they were eager to dance before Their Majesties and ‘show off’ the lihiya in appreciation.

At around 5 p.m., the women began dancing their way into the arena and in the process



▲Lutsango came in numbers to receive gifts from Their Majesties.

paraded before Their Majesties in vibrant songs.

The first group was led by Emakhosikati to His Majesty, later on, another consisting of seven tourists followed, and towards the end of the parade was a vibrant libutfo led by Prince Sikhanyiso.

At 6:47 p.m., His Majesty welcomed delegates of different portfolios who went to greet Their Majesties at the sitting area, whilst

lutsango continued to sing.

Amongst these was the EU Head of Delegation in Eswatini Dessislava Choumelova, UNDP Resident Representative George Wachira, Ambassador of Taiwan Jeremy Li Yang, SA High Commissioner Thokozile Majokweni, Alberto Chipande from Mozambique, WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo, Ghana Representative Kobla Quashie, as well as the delegation from kaTembe.

At 6:56 p.m. libutfo continued to dance in a song led by the Indvuna. This was part of the preparation for kutsamba which is a dance usually performed by individuals and different groups, from members of the Royal family to representatives from the four regions of the country.

At 7:39 p.m. the main song titled Njiloni was sung which required everyone including those in the sitting area as well as Their Majesties to

join and dance.

At 8 p.m. libutfo began the singular dance moves (kutsamba) which was the major highlight of the night and event as a whole.

Locals excited by ceremony

THE Buganu ceremony goes beyond drinking alcoholic beverages made from emaganu but emaSwati coming together to celebrate their culture as well as the first fruit of the year.

Residents at Buhleni seem to have an understanding of this event as many expressed their joy over the arrival of the day and the first stage of the ceremony being in their area.

Some stated that they were thrilled by the idea of having to see His Majesty King Mswati III and Her Majesty the Indlovukazi. Along the road and streets, men and women were in full traditional gear, a clear indication of where the main event was held.

This was confirmation that the people of Buhleni were embracing the arrival of the Buganu festival kicking off in their area.

The excitement was visible on the locals’ faces, some visibly intoxicated from imbibing on Buganu, possibly from the day before and openly giving praise to His Majesty for celebrating the first fruit.

Locals irked by ‘ridiculous’ chicken dust prices

EVERYONE knows that when in a different town or area from the one they reside in, they tend to want to try out things that the area is known for.

One of those was the braided meat commonly known as chicken dust which was the main thing sold in the streets of Buhleni.

With the scorching sun assisting the vendors in quickening the braiding process, locals were also excited to buy from the vendors, except they were hoping it would be at cheaper prices, or the very least, the usual price.

At Buhleni, the minimum price of chicken dust was E40. This was not warmly welcomed by locals who openly complained and advised the vendors to at least stick to the usual price of E30 instead of ‘robing’ emaSwati.

It also seemed that the prices also seemed to range according to appearance, as some of the approached vendors when asked how much their food was, they would ask that the customer come closer and whisper “Ayikaduli kakhulu, E45 kuphela”.

This is translated as the food is not that expensive, just E45 only.

Despite the ‘hiked’ prices, many were not disempowered as they were seen buying and supporting these small businesses.

Supermarkets on the other hand were flocking with libutfo as many were making means to get cold beverages like juices and cold drinks to fight the scorching sun from trying to melt their spirit away.

Buganu Festival: A cultural and economical extravaganza

► Continued from Page 1

The King also applauded the growth in the number of women who attended compared to last year, which he said was a sign of how much love they have for their culture.

“Imba phansi beseyivele ibophele umsebenti lomuhle,” His Majesty said.

The King further applauded the success of the ceremony despite the weather challenges that were threatening the event’s calendar.

However, God and the ancestors were willing, the nation was able to meet and celebrate without any hindrances.

His Majesty continued to highlight the beauty of the marula tree which he said does not only provide shade on a sunny day but also provides life through its fruit that can be ingested and further used for cosmetics products.

The King applauded lutsango for the products they produce through emaganu and further encouraged the women not to feel intimidated by other national events and to take pride in the Buganu Ceremony which is mainly about them.

His Majesty also extended appreciation for the gifts presented by lutsango and urged that it becomes a culture that is instilled and continues to live on to the next generation, adding that such good work will be recognised and applauded by God and the ancestors.

“Siyabonga Nkulunkulu uyawusibusisa sonkhe lutsango,” His Majesty concluded, lutsango resounded with joyous cries of “Bayethe wena Waphakathi”.

Beyond tradition, a catalyst for empowerment and economic growth

THE annual Buganu Ceremony, spearheaded by Their Majesties, transcends its cultural significance to serve as a powerful platform for women’s empowerment, knowledge sharing, and economic development.

This three-day extravaganza, pulsating with vibrant dances and traditional wisdom, fosters a unique space where diverse stakeholders converge for collective progress.

At the heart of Buganu lies the unwavering spirit of Eswatini’s women. The ceremony provides a stage for them to gather, share expertise, and participate in empowering programs. This fosters a sense of community, collaboration, and collective agency, enabling women to contribute meaningfully to the nation’s social fabric.

However, Buganu’s significance extends far beyond the realm of tradition. It has strategically evolved into a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration. Corporates and State-Owned Enterprises actively participate by setting up stalls, creating a dynamic space for interaction and knowledge sharing.

This not only empowers the women with



▲Some of the vendors with their products on display at Buganu Festival.

valuable expertise but also fosters partnerships that drive sustainable development. The economic impact of Buganu is undeniable. The ceremony has significantly shaped the landscape of Buhleni, transforming it from an unofficial town into a thriving economic hub.

The influx of participants has spurred the establishment of plazas, filling stations, furniture shops, retail outlets, and even banks, catering to the growing demand.

Furthermore, the ceremony has necessitated infrastructural development, with improved roads and a rehabilitated police station, enhancing the overall well-being of Buhleni and surrounding communities of Nyakatfo, Mpofu, Msahweni, Mayiwane to name a few.

This ripple effect, triggered by the Buganu ceremony, has demonstrated the cultural event’s potential to be a powerful catalyst for economic

growth and social progress. Fast forward ten years, and the Buganu Ceremony is poised to become an even more significant event, radiating its impact far beyond the cultural sphere. Its unwavering commitment to women’s empowerment and its potential as an economic driver are expected to propel it onto a global stage.

Imagine a Buganu even grander in scale, attracting not just national participation but more international delegates eager to witness this unique celebration of empowerment and cultural heritage.

The ceremony’s focus on knowledge sharing and collaboration is envisioned to blossom into a platform for international partnerships, fostering cross-cultural exchange and driving innovative solutions to shared challenges.

The economic impact of Buganu is projected to reach new heights. Buhleni, once a rural settlement

has grown immensely over the years and is expected to continue transforming into a bustling economic centre, drawing in investments and establishing itself as a hub for cultural tourism.

The ceremony’s potential to empower local businesses and entrepreneurs is anticipated to flourish, creating a vibrant marketplace showcasing Swati ingenuity and craftsmanship.

Moreover, Buganu transcends its cultural roots to serve as a multifaceted platform for women’s empowerment, knowledge sharing, and economic development. It fosters a spirit of unity, collaboration, and progress, paving the way for a brighter future for Eswatini and its people.

By harnessing the potential of this unique cultural event, the nation can continue to strive towards achieving His Majesty King Mswati III’s vision and also empower women, foster knowledge exchange, and drive sustainable economic growth for all.

Indlovukazi notes under-utilisation of Mpaka factory

By Bahle Gama

HER Majesty Indlovukazi has urged women in Eswatini to utilise the Mpaka factory to produce more emaganu products for the country.

Her Majesty said this when applauding the attendance of lutsango at the first session of the Buganu ceremony held at Buhleni Royal Residence on Saturday night.

Indlovukazi introduced the Swazi Secrets project where the marula fruit is used to make cosmetic products in its factory at Mpaka. Indlovukazi noted that the factory was underutilised, referencing last year’s production, which she said was not satisfactory.

“The factory is ours and meant to be used by all women from all the regions of the country. It is our duty to keep it alive and growing,” Her Majesty said.

The Queen Mother reiterated the roles emaganu have apart from making beer which is the production of oils and soaps. She said that these provide job opportunities for women and encouraged emaSwati to refrain from laziness for this is employment.

“Noma siyeva bomake bakhala kutsi tinganu tigcoba tandla, asichubeke embili impela, phezu kwemkhono,” Her Majesty said.

On another note, despite the change in numbers later into the night on Saturday, Her Majesty reported to His Majesty the huge numbers that arrived at the Royal residence on Friday when lutsango presented gifts.

Indlovukazi stated that they barely slept on Friday night because buses had to offload and return to transport more women to Buhleni, who upon arrival

also delivered more gifts before Her Majesty.

“They delivered Buganu and all kinds of food there. This is a sign that emaSwati worked hard because it was visible through the fruits presented here, ngaloko sitsi phezukomkhono,” she said.

Her Majesty stated that she noted the damage that was caused by the storms recently to property and mostly crops, but the women still worked hard and revived that which remained and still managed to kutfula.

This according to Her Majesty meant emaSwati are hard workers and are not discouraged by anything, even the weather itself.

She further encouraged emaSwati to utilise land available in the country for crop and livestock farming to curb poverty, adding that everyone ought to work hard and ensure there is food in their homes.

“We have ample land as emaSwati. In some countries, people buy land yet in Eswatini a person just needs to khonta from Umphakatsi and acquire land to plough and keep livestock. We must not undermine and utilise this opportunity presented to us,” Her Majesty said.

The Queen Mother further applauded chiefs and husbands for permitting the women to partake in the ceremony away from their families and communities to celebrate with Their Majesties and applauded everyone that was in attendance for heeding His Majesty’s call and coming all out.

“Without a waste of time, I applaud all these women for their hard work and encourage you not to be deterred in any way. Keep working hard and your spirits high. Phezukomkhono,” Her Majesty concluded.

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DAY

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WAS €250⁰⁰

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2KG SMI
WORS



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NOW €150⁰⁰

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WORS



WAS €85⁰⁰

NOW €70⁰⁰

AVAILABLE WHILE STOCK LASTS

Making Meal
Times Special





Maloma mine spreads love

By Eswatini Sunday Reporter

LOVE is a remarkable thing. It has the potential to uplift one's spirit, motivate or demoralise.

Maloma Colliery Mine put a smile on the faces of its employees on Valentine's Day when they received red roses.

The move set a positive tone for the day ahead and also sparked conversations about the significance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of women in the workplace, prompting reflection on how we can further support and uplift each other as colleagues and peers.

“Celebrating Valentine’s Day was our way of strengthening relationships among the team, appreciating our ladies to help boost morale, enhance team cohesion, and create a more positive and supportive workplace culture more so in our male-dominated industry. We are supporting women in mining,” People & Culture Manager Nomvula Ginindza said.

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Celebrating Valentine's Day was our way of strengthening relationships among the team, appreciating our ladies to help boost morale, enhance team cohesion, and create a more positive and supportive workplace culture more so in our male-dominated industry.



NEW TENDERS		
PROCURING ENTITY	TENDER TITLE	SUBMISSION DEADLINE
ESWATINI DEVELOPMENT AND SAVINGS BANK	PROVISION OF SECURITY SERVICES	08/03/2024 10:00 AM
ESWATINI DEVELOPMENT AND SAVINGS BANK	OFFICE CLEANING SERVICES	08/03/2024 10:00 AM
ESWATINI POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION (EPTC)	THE PROVISION OF SECURITY SERVICES	08/03/2024 14:00 PM
ESWATINI POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION (EPTC)	THE PROVISION OF HYGIENE AND SANITATION SERVICES	08/03/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION (EPTC)	PROVISION OF GROUND MAINTENANCE SERVICES FOR ALL EPTC SITES	08/03/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION (EPTC)	PROVISION OF CLEANING SERVICES FOR ALL EPTC SITES	08/03/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	SUPPLY OF SPRING TESTING MACHINE	11/03/2024 09:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	SUPPLY OF OPERATIONAL VEHICLES	06/03/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	SUPPLY OF A 4-IN-1 LIFTING JACKS	11/03/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI TOURISM AUTHORITY (ETA)	CONSTRUCTION OF EXHIBITION STANDS FOR WTM AFRICA AND AFRICA TRAVEL INDABA TOURISM SHOWS	01/03/2024 14:15 PM
NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY	SUPPLY OF TENTS AND TARPAULINS	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
PROCURING ENTITY	TENDER TITLE	SUBMISSION DEADLINE
ESWATINI AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND	ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE CONSULTANCY SERVICES	15/02/2024 14:30 PM
ESWATINI AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND	COMPUTER NETWORKING CONSULTANCY SERVICES	12/02/2024 10:00 AM
ESWATINI AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND	LOGO DESIGNING, SOFT STATIONERY, AND BRANDING CONSULTANCY SERVICES	12/02/2024 16:00 PM
ESWATINI AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND	SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF MOTOR VEHICLES	14/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (ESWACAA)	SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF COMPUTER HARDWARE AND ACCESSORIES	26/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI ELECTRICITY COMPANY (EEC)	ENERGY TRADING PLATFORM	22/02/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI ELECTRICITY COMPANY (EEC)	FERREIRA CANAL EXPANSION	19/02/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES FOR 2024 -2025 FINANCIAL YEARS	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL	SUPPLY OF IT HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE MATERIALS	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL	SUPPLY OF PROMOTIONAL AND BRANDED MATERIALS DOCUMENT PRINTING, SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF COUNCIL'S PRINTED MATERIALS AND DOCUMENTS	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL	ESTATE SECURITY SERVICES	29/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI HOUSING BOARD	SUPPLIERS OF COMMONLY USED ITEMS	16/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI HOUSING BOARD	ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY & CONDITION ON THE ESWATINI RAILWAY BUILDINGS IN MATSAPHA & MBABANE	27/02/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISION FOR THE KA-DAKE TRUCK STOP	15/02/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISION FOR THE KA-DAKE TRUCK STOP	15/02/2024 11:00 AM
ESWATINI RAILWAYS (ESR)	SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, AND TESTING OF FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS FOR EWADE SIPOHANENI SERVER ROOM	27/02/2024 10:00 AM
ESWATINI WATER SERVICES CORPORATION (EWSC)	SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF LABORATORY EQUIPMENT FOR NHLANGANO WWTP	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI WATER SERVICES CORPORATION (EWSC)	SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF OFFICE FURNITURE FOR NHLANGANO WWTP	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
ESWATINI WATER SERVICES CORPORATION (EWSC)	PRE-QUALIFICATION FOR SOURCES OF SUPPLY	01/03/2024 12:00 PM
EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL OF ESWATINI (ECOS)	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES	15/02/2024 12:04 PM
MANKAYANE TOWN BOARD	CONSTRUCTION OF THE EXTENSION OF TITANDINI ROAD PHASE II AND A LOW-LEVEL CROSSING ON D2 ROAD, IN MANKAYANE TOWN	13/03/2024 10:00 AM
MICRO PROJECTS	DESIGN, FABRICATE INSTALL AND OPERATE A PACKAGE SEWERAGE TREATMENT PLANT FOR JOHNSON WORKWEAR FACTORY SHELL AT NHLANGANO	23/02/2024 11:00 AM
MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF MANZINI	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES	21/02/2024 12:00 PM
MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF MBABANE	RANGER SERVICES	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD (NAMBOARD)	DESIGN SUPPLY AND CONSTRUCTION OF STEEL STRUCTURE AT NAMBOARD LAVUMISA	18/02/2024 10:00 AM
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD (NAMBOARD)	CONSTRUCTION OF STAFF HOUSES AT MSAHWENI	29/02/2024 10:00 AM
NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY	DEVELOPMENT OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION COMMUNICATION MESSAGES FOR MANAGING RISKS AND CREATING AWARENESS	23/02/2024 12:00 PM
PIGGS PEAK HOTEL AND CASINO	PROVISION OF AUDITING SERVICES	20/02/2024 11:00 AM
PUBLIC SERVICE PENSION FUND (PSPF)	FACILITIES MANAGEMENT SERVICES	01/03/2024 12:00 PM
SEBENTA NATIONAL INSTITUTE (SEBENTA)	PROVISION OF CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT 2024-2029	01/03/2024 12:00 PM
SITEKI GOOD SHEPHERD HOSPITAL	SELECTION OF CONSULTING SERVICES FOR: PROVISION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES	04/03/2024 12:00 PM
SITEKI TOWN COUNCIL	CONSTRUCTION OF PEDESTRIAN WALKWAYS AND ASPHALTS SPEED HUMPS ON CEMETERY ROAD	28/02/2024 12:00 PM
YOUTH ENTERPRISE REVOLVING FUND	PROVISION OF RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES (TRAINING)	15/02/2024 12:00 PM

The Eswatini Public Procurement Regulatory Agency (ESPRA) hereby invites suitably qualified and registered suppliers, eligible to participate in public procurement to submit tenders to the above listed government departments, local governments, and state-owned enterprises. Visit <https://esppra.co.sz> to view or download latest tenders.







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▲ THE ongoing funding and corruption allegations over the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) may cast doubts over a smooth start to the 2024 academic year. In addition, other raging controversies over educational institutions facing challenges continue to hog the headlines

With a clean audit and meeting 100% of its goals, CHIETA has a great story to tell

By Edwin Naidu

THE ongoing funding and corruption allegations over the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) may cast doubts over a smooth start to the 2024 academic year. In addition, other raging controversies over educational institutions facing challenges continue to hog the headlines.

In recent times, reports have emerged over the spat between Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, and the University of South Africa (Unisa), governance challenges at the University of Cape Town, and flashpoints at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Durban University of Technology over funding.

While one would not like to claim the tainted Sector Education Training Authority, Tintswalo narrative in the education sector, there are bright spots in the country's education sector that seem to have been missed in the hullabaloo of news. While one does not wish to be dismissive of Tintswalo, which may be a figment of the imagination of the presidential speech writers or an Artificial intelligence creation, there are real stories of youth benefiting from initiatives on the ground that will have the desired impact on society.

The Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) has bucked the trend by operating out of the box. You would have thought they would have limited themselves to the chemical sector. Still, their mandate is skills development, so it is refreshing that they've gone beyond the narrow confines of the industry to launch Smart Skills Centres in Saldanha Bay, Gqeberha and Babanango. More than 6,000 youth from the communities have used the centres.

While the centres come in different sizes depending on the communities they serve, they all feature several pods in which virtual reality and augmented reality technologies can be used, with other pods providing laptops for surfing the internet, doing training or even job interviews. Connectivity and data are also provided.

Getting people, especially women and girls, familiar with and confident in using technology is part of making them work-ready. At these centres, rural youth are taught digital skills, and they can keep up-to-date with

artificial intelligence developments and get the latest in robotics and artificial intelligence.

The following smart centre will be launched in the Highveld Industrial Park in Mpumalanga, on the former Highveld Steel and Vanadium factory site.

The CHIETA wants to establish similar centres in all nine provinces.

Although their research shows that data analysis is the number one skill petroleum companies seek, CHIETA remains duty-bound to do what it can to deepen the pool of data analytics talent for the benefit of its stakeholders. But it is also broadening how it interprets its remit, ensuring that it can positively impact the country's high youth unemployment challenge.

Another project that stands out is the AlgoAtWork Robotics Academy in Richard's Bay, in which children are taught essential skills for an AI-driven workplace in the future. Numerous bursaries flow into learning support and programmes for retrenched employees, with 96 individuals on the programme, some beneficiaries successfully starting their businesses.

One of their groundbreaking initiatives is What About the Boys, a Gender Violence initiative in partnership with Primestars and several corporations, teaching 20,000 young boys about dealing with masculinity and learning about entrepreneurship.

What stands out about the work of CHIETA is that they have a good story to tell with actual beneficiaries.

"We've got a good story to tell," remarked Yershen Pillay, the chief executive officer of CHIETA, which received a clean audit, met 100% of its targets and grew levy income year-on-year from R592 million to R621 million.

With a mission of "innovating for impact", Pillay presented the CHIETA 2022/2023 Integrated Annual Report at its Annual General Meeting on 1 December in Sandton, saying that CHIETA was determined to continue making a difference and continue working on the hydrogen economy for which it has gained a growing reputation as a leader in the green economy.

"That we have performed so well is due to the highly motivated team at CHIETA, led by outstanding executives and guided by an engaged and committed board and its various committees," said Pillay, adding that the country's chemical sector contributes massively to the economy," Pillay said.

During International Day of Women and Girls in Sci-

ence at the weekend, CHIETA could take comfort from the fact that they're putting resources behind dozens of young girls – at least 217 last year – with positive results to boot. The Eastern Cape Department of Education recognised hard-working matriculant Liyabona Ncanywa as one of the province's top achievers in the National Senior Certificate Examinations. CHIETA assisted her with tuition and school fees through its Science, technology, engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fund, which supports 1,000 learners nationwide.

Through its various programmes, including the upcoming Discretionary Grant Funding Windows and working with corporations. CHIETA provides potential opportunities for 615 internships, 1085 leadership, 1 395 skills programs, and 1285 TVET students for Work Integrated Learning.

Such investment in skills development is vindicated when learners like Liyabona show evidence that investment in our youth bears fruit. It certainly encourages others to do more to ensure that the goals of the United Nations become a reality for women and girls worldwide. In 2016, the UN declared the 11th of February International Day of Women and Girls in Science to encourage more girls and women to take jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM subjects). But can they take their place without support?

A report entitled Secondary Education in Africa: Preparing Youth for the Future of Work – A Gender Brief, sponsored by the Mastercard Foundation in 2020, looked at young people's preparedness for work, specifically girls and young women, and was aimed at forward-looking solutions that meaningfully contribute to the acceleration of the continent's economic transformation. The report focuses on what needs to be done for more African girls and young women to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to be engaged, productive, and employed citizens.

While secondary education is needed to give young women and girls the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in work and entrepreneurship, this cannot be over-emphasised. Women comprise more than 50% of the continent's 1.3 billion inhabitants. African women should, therefore, contribute to the global workforce equally.

South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation and the National Research Foundation (NRF) have done much to create opportunities for women in science. But



▲ Yershen Pillay, chief executive of CHIETA.

this comes against a backdrop of heavy funding cuts. However, they have made sure that previously disadvantaged groups – black South Africans, particularly those from low-income households benefit through bursaries and fellowships. About 86% of all postgraduate funding goes to black South Africans, at least 55% for women. Eventually, these efforts will bear fruit as women and

girls are already beginning to lead in the STEM fields.

Future days to observe the International Day of Women and Girls in Science will spotlight authentic stories, like that of Eastern Cape top achiever Liyabona Ncanywa.

Edwin Naidu is a communications professional and an education editor. – The African

Macmillan Publishers champions women and girls in Science, advocates for country to break barriers

By Ncaba Ntshakala

IN celebration of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Macmillan Publishers Eswatini took a stand to empower and celebrate the achievements of female scientists, urging the nation to break stereotypes and inspire future generations.

This year's theme, "Women and Girls in Science Leadership: A New Era for Sustainability," served as a clarion call for recognizing the critical role women play in driving scientific progress and tackling global challenges.

This is in line with His Majesty King Mswati III's Speech from the Throne where the King called for the country to invest in technology (ICT) so that it can grow and reach its vision of becoming a first-world country.

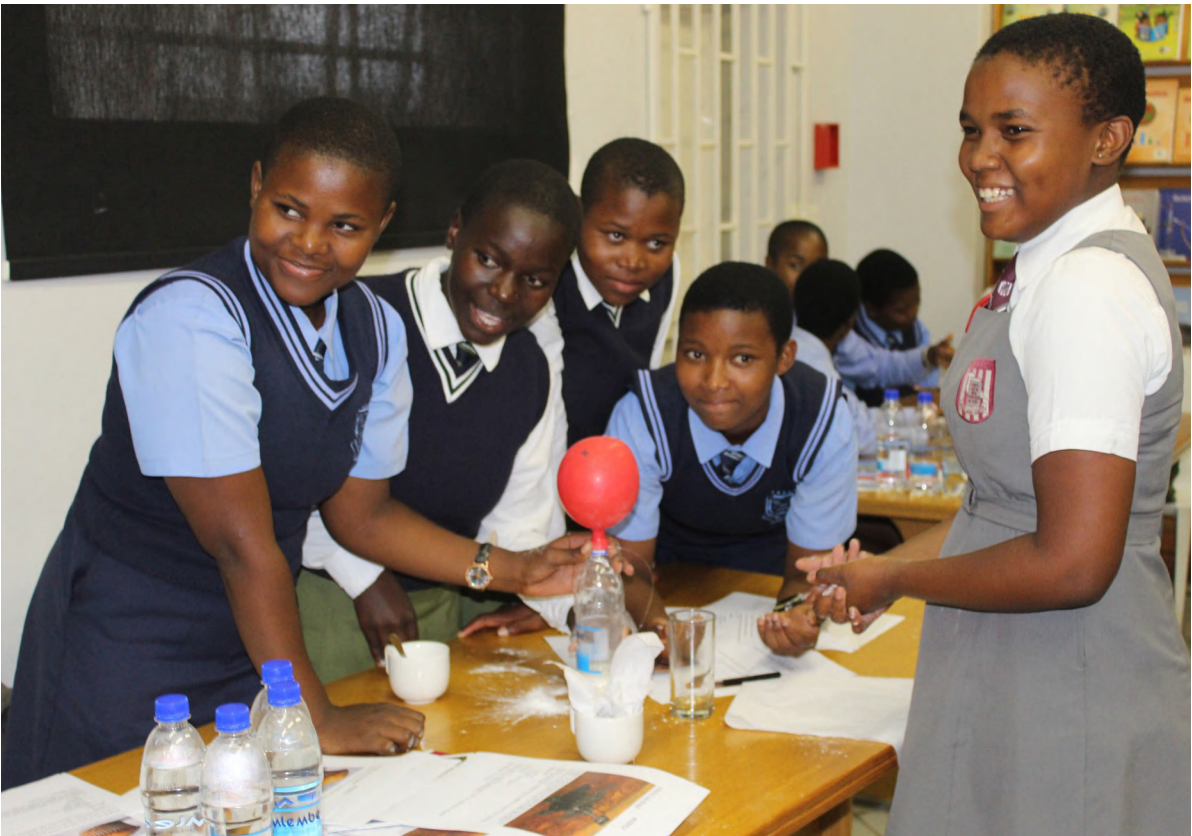
At the heart of the initiative lies STEM education, an acronym encompassing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. These fields unlock doors to innovation, problem-solving, and groundbreaking discoveries, shaping the future of our world.

Unfortunately, women and girls remain underrepresented in STEM fields globally, often due to societal biases and limited access to opportunities.

Macmillan recognizes the significance of empowering women and girls to pursue STEM careers. They advocate for initiatives that promote awareness and role models.

This highlights the achievements of female scientists and innovators and empowers girls to see themselves reflected in scientific leadership roles. Macmillan further shared that it also challenges stereotypes that discourage girls from pursuing STEM education and careers, and such is crucial to dismantling barriers and creating a more inclusive environment.

The company has also said that women and girls must have equal access to quality STEM education, including



▲ Young girls from different school conducting an experiment during the commemoration hosted by Macmillan.

resources, mentorship, and scholarships, which is essential to level the playing field.

According to the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA), STEM encompasses Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, and isn't just about equations and formulas; it's about curiosity, problem-solving, and creating solutions for a changing world. NSTA asserts that from understanding climate change to developing life-saving medical technologies,

STEM skills are increasingly crucial in navigating our complex world.

Yet, girls remain underrepresented in these fields, often due to societal biases and limited access to opportunities which Macmillan has condemned. NSTA explains that this is a loss for both individuals and society as a whole. "When we deprive girls of STEM education, we limit their potential to contribute to scientific advancements and innovative solutions." States NSTA.



▲ Waterford Kamhlaba CAS Coordinator, Fanele Chester-Fakudze during the International Day of Women and Girls in Science

NSTA explains why teaching STEM to children, including girls, is so important:

1. Cultivating Critical Thinkers: STEM subjects encourage curiosity, questioning, and a deep understanding of how things work. This fosters critical thinking skills, a valuable asset in any field and essential for tackling tomorrow's challenges.
2. Building Problem-Solving Prowess: From conducting experiments to designing robots, STEM activities teach children to approach problems creatively and systematically. This equips them with the tools to navigate complex situations and find innovative solutions.
3. Sparking Innovation and Progress: A diverse pool of minds is critical for driving innovation. When girls participate in STEM fields, they bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, leading to breakthroughs we might not have otherwise achieved.
4. Empowering Individuals: Knowing and understanding STEM concepts empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their lives and the world around them. This is especially important for girls, as it promotes confidence and fosters a sense of belonging in traditionally male-dominated fields.
5. Shaping a Brighter Future: By ensuring girls have equal access to STEM education, we are investing in the future. These young minds hold the potential to solve global challenges, develop sustainable solutions, and create a more equitable and prosperous world for all.



Construction Associates continues to reshape Eswatini's landscape



▲ The construction of Matsapha Lifestyle Centre provided employment opportunities for over 500 individuals, and the completed centre, spanning 25,000 square meters, houses over 30 shops and offices, creating further avenues for job creation for emaSwati.

Stories by Ncaba Ntshakala

ESWATINI is continuously evolving as new buildings pierce the skyline changing the aesthetics of the areas. A local brand has been leading the development and beautification of the different regions of the Kingdom. Construction Associates, a member of the Inyatsi Group Holdings, has unveiled its latest project, the Matsapha Lifestyle Centre, marking another significant contribution to His Majesty King Mswati III's vision of achieving first-world status for Eswatini.

This state-of-the-art shopping centre joins the ranks of The Corporate Place in Mbabane and Woodlands Shopping Complex, showcasing Construction Associates' commitment to creating exceptional retail experiences.

Under the leadership of Executive Chairman Michelo Shakantu, the company has not only enriched Eswatini's architectural landscape but also played a vital role in bolstering the economy.

The construction of Matsapha Lifestyle Centre provided employment opportunities for over 500 individuals, and the completed centre, spanning 25,000 square meters, houses over 30 shops and offices, creating further avenues for job creation for emaSwati.

What truly sets Matsapha Lifestyle Centre apart is its unique location. Half of the shopping centre is ingeniously built on top of the majestic Lusushwana River, resulting in a breathtaking and one-of-a-kind structure that enhances the surrounding area's allure.

"We are immensely proud to have played a pivotal role in bringing this exceptional project to life," shared Construction Associates MD Merica Vilakati. "Located at the heart of Eswatini's economic hub, Matsapha, this centre exemplifies our unwavering dedication to delivering excellence in construction and development. We remain committed to pushing the boundaries of innovation and quality, and Matsapha Lifestyle Centre stands as a testament to this commitment."

For over 45 years, Construction Associates has maintained a vision to be Eswatini's top building contractor. This vision is supported by the impeccable reputation that the company has built since its establishment in 1977.

The company asserts that it takes immense pride in the building projects which they have successfully delivered across the Kingdom of Eswatini, including the aforementioned Swazi Plaza Corporate Place, which was an E136 million project, Woodlands Commercial Centre, an E57 million project and Mbabane Government Hospital Maternity Ward, which was a E28 million project.



▲ Half of the shopping centre is ingeniously built on top of the majestic Lusushwana River, resulting in a breathtaking and one-of-a-kind structure that enhances the surrounding area's allure.

Ministry of Health safeguards emaSwati during Buganu Festival at Buhleni Royal Residence

THE Ministry of Health ensured the health and safety of emaSwati participating in the ongoing Buganu Ceremony at the Buhleni Royal Residence. Phetsile Dlamini, a senior health professional, stated that the ministry set up several health stalls catering to the diverse needs of attendees. Recognizing the current heat wave, they provided pain relievers, blood pressure testing and remedies, blood glucose checks, cancer screenings, and educational materials on health promotion and sanitation.

The Buganu Ceremony, known for its extravagant, vibrant display of culture and female empowerment, attracts large crowds, particularly women known as "Lutsango." The Ministry of Health's proactive measures ensured a safe and healthy environment for all participants.

Dlamini emphasized the ministry's commitment to safeguarding the well-being of emaSwati during cultural events. She added that their presence at the Buganu Festival exemplifies their dedication to public health and preventive measures.

The Kingdom of Eswatini celebrates the start of the Marula season with the annual Buganu festival. The festival is increasing in popularity and swiftly becoming one of the country's most exciting traditional ceremonies. Each year King Mswati III and Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, the Queen Mother, make their way to various regions of the Kingdom to celebrate the beginning of the Marula Season.

The largest of these festivals is held at the Royal residence at Ebuhleni where the royal family joins the nation in song and dance. Although the Marula Fruit is found widely throughout Africa, it is most popular



in Eswatini. Seen by the emaSwati as much more than a food source, the Marula is rather regarded as a magical healing ingredient, with huge fertility properties.

The King and Queen Mother are presented with Marula gifts and some Marula beer from each household. Because of its many uses, the marula fruit is no longer just used to brew beer in Eswatini. It has been further developed into beauty products as part of Her Majesty, The Indlovukazi's job creation and poverty alleviation initiatives for rural women in Eswatini. Several families in Eswatini have benefited from this initiative.

The marula products are produced under a company called Swati Secrets. A well-fitting name for the secret of the marula fruit. The fruit has been developed into many different beauty products. These products also come in hotel packages and gift packages.

- About Marula Fruits (Emaganu)**
- Marula fruit contains four times more valuable vitamin C than oranges.
 - Marula edible seed oil is rich in nutritious proteins and minerals and contains active anti-oxidants.
 - Marula essential oils are an effective skin conditioner. Its cosmetic and anti-oxidant properties soften, soothe, and rehydrate the skin while fighting free radicals.
 - Marula legends abound – from its use as a food source, and magical qualities as a healing ingredient, to its virility and fertility properties, as well as the many uses of its bark, leaves, fruit, nut, and kernels.



▲ Health Professionals in one of the health service points at Buganu Ceremony at Buhleni Royal Residence.

Buganu Festival @ Buhleni Royal Residence



▲ His Majesty King Mswati III and Her Majesty Indlovukazi during the second day of the Buganu Festival at Buhleni royal Residence.

▲ His Majesty addressing the attendees.

Buganu Festival enchants tourists

Stories By Silindzelwe Nxumalo

THOUSANDS of Lutsango braved the heat as they gathered to celebrate the first leg of the Buganu Festival at Buhleni Royal Residents.

Dressed in their different colourful traditional

regalia, the Lutsango from different regions of the country got ready to showcase their dancing skills.

The event started with the women waking up from their tents and getting ready for the day, members of the public making their way to the event.

The event was attended by all the different

members of the nation, Emabutfo, Ingatja, and Imbali, who were all gathered to celebrate the Buganu Ceremony.

The ceremony also attracted tourists from different countries, including Australia, England, Lesotho, Botswana, and South Africa. One of the tourists from Australia who preferred not to say his name, said he has trav-

elled around the world and has never met a country with such rich culture.

He shared that it was his second time attending this cultural event and he always has a great time there.

"I am always impressed with the culture of Eswatini, and the people are always welcom-

ing," he said.

One of the residents from Buhleni, a Lutsango member, Jane Dlamini said this was one cultural event that they fully celebrate as women.

"Once they announce this event, we already know they are calling us boBhejane," she said. She stated that she always looks forward to

celebrating this even with fellow women and just to be around them and also get to meet their majesties.

The day proceeded with the Lutsango getting into the arena and dancing in front of their majesties, dignitaries, and the members of the nation.

The women showcased their different dancing talents and were joined by members of the royal family, including Emazinyane and Emakhosikati.

Ice block, frozen water sell out

ICE block and Frozen water were selling like hotcakes at the Buganu Festival as the temperatures kept on rising.

One of the vendors Siphwe Sifundza from Herefords said she started selling the ice block as early as 6 am as it was already hot.

She stated that every year she makes sure that she prepares the ice block and breakfast hampers to sell for the women there, and she would always make a good profit.

Products

"I live close to the Royal Residence so during this event I always make sure ice block is part of my products to sell. Ice block always sells out, and Buhleni is always hot," she said.

Sifundza stated that as of 4 pm, she had already sold 8 cooler boxes with 60 ice blocks each and sold the ice blocks for E2 each.

"I have already made over E900 with just ice block alone," she shared.

Meanwhile, Fati Mazitha from Mbabane Gobholo had her stall full of traditional accessories and essential traditional regalia for women said she always looks forward to selling her products at this event.

"There is always someone to buy something here, the tourists and the women always support me," she said.

Mazitha said that she has been coming to sell her work at this event since 2013 and she always makes a profit.



▲ These two ladies pose for the camera after selling all the ice block they had on offer.



▲ Fati Mazitha displaying some of her wares that were for sale.



▲ A tourist from Australia with friends from Eswatini.



▲ Members of Lutsango dancing in unison.

Botswana prohibits Starlink, imposes penalties for lawbreakers

THE Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) has warned the public against the importation, use and resale of SpaceX's satellite Internet service Starlink's devices in the country and has warned that those who ignore the ruling will be penalized. Elon Musk's Starlink does not have a license in the country after its application was turned down on February 2, 2024.

At the time, the regulator said contrary to media reports, BOCRA has not rejected any satellite licensing applications.

"BOCRA informs the public that in line with good corporate governance practice coupled with the principle of confidentiality espoused in the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA Act, 2012), the Authority is not at liberty to discuss details of a license application with anyone else other than the applicant," Broadcasting and Corporate Communications Director Aaron Nyelesi said in a statement at the time.

BOCRA said there were issues regarding missing requirements with the application, which were identified and pointed out to SpaceX.



▲ Starlink has been facing obstacles to expansion, especially in some Southern African countries.

Furthermore, BOCRA said the satellite Internet service has not authorized any entity to import or resell the Starlink Internet kits in Botswana.

"Anyone doing so without authorization from Starlink would be committing an offence against Starlink," the regulator said.

However, it is not clear what penalties will be imposed on those who violate the regulator's directive. According to Starlink's terms of use, importation into and reselling in a country where the service is yet to be launched is not allowed.

Tech Cabal is reporting that some owners of Starlink devices, who claim to be using them for personal use, were being barred from entering Botswana at the Zambian border.

Starlink facing African pitfalls

Starlink has been facing obstacles to expansion, especially in some Southern African countries. Recently it cut off hundreds of South African users over alleged trademark and copyright violations.

Despite guidelines by Starlink prohibiting unlicensed import and resale in countries where its service has not yet launched, re-

sellers like Starsat Africa allow users to buy Starlink roaming packages available in licensed countries.

Last month, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), warned that those distributing and advertising equipment to access Starlink Internet services would face jail time.

In December 2023, Ghana's National Communications Authority (NCA) warned against the operation of Starlink, in the West African country.

In November 2023, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) cautioned companies against importing and selling Starlink satellite Internet terminals in South Africa, calling the practice illegal and warning that fines could be imposed.

In August 2023 Senegal banned the sale of Starlink kits and five people were arrested for this offense, facing up to five years in jail and a US\$100,000 fine.

Even with expansion difficulties, Starlink has entered several African countries including Benin, Nigeria, Rwanda, Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia. The article first appeared on Connecting Africa

MINISTERS PHOLILE SHAKANTU, MANQOBA KHUMALO IN ETHIOPIA



▲ Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperations Pholile Shakantu meeting with H.E. Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie, Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs to discuss bilateral issues. Minister Shakantu was accompanied by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade Manqoba Khumalo. They are part of the country's delegation attending the African Union Summit underway in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The pair is looking to strengthening diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries. (Picture credit: Ethiopia Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Starlink cuts off users in South Africa

SpaceX's satellite Internet service, Starlink, has cut off hundreds of South African users over alleged trademark and copyright violations. According to MyBroadband, several Starlink users who use StarSat Africa to manage their accounts complained that they were offline.

Furthermore, it reported that Starlink said resellers are violating its terms of use, and its copyrights by using the Starlink logo for their marketing and ordered them to cease all unauthorized resales immediately.

StarSat Africa sent out communication through its Facebook page promising a full statement soon but said less than 10% of its clients have been affected.

Even though Starlink is not licensed in South Africa, its roaming services still work in the country. Customers use the service via resellers like StarSat that buy Starlink roaming packages available in licensed countries. The reseller then registers the services in those countries and manages subscriptions for users in South Africa.

Starlink is not allowed in South Africa: Starlink's services are technically illegal

in South Africa because it does not have a license to operate in the country.

In November 2023, The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) cautioned companies against importing and selling Starlink satellite Internet terminals in South Africa, calling the practice illegal and warned that fines could be imposed.

ICASA said that any person who provides a service without a license "is guilty of an offence" and liable to a fine of up to R5 million (US\$263,100) or 10% of the person or licensee's annual turnover for every day or part thereof during which the offence continued.

Starlink faces backlash in Africa South Africa is not the only country that has clamped down on the use of Starlink on the continent.

In December 2023, Ghana's National Communications Authority (NCA) warned against the operation of Starlink in the West African country.

Just last month, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), warned that those distributing and advertising equipment to access Starlink

Internet services would face jail time.

In April 2023, South African Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies Mondli Gungubele denied claims that the government was blocking the operation of Starlink, which is the brainchild of South African-born Elon Musk.

However, there have been other countries on the continent that have opposed SpaceX's Starlink. In August 2023, Senegal banned the sale of Starlink kits and five people were arrested for this offence, facing up to five years in jail and a US\$100,000 fine.

Starlink's expanding African footprint: Even though there has been some opposition to Starlink's operations, there are other African countries that have already launched Starlink's satellite Internet service. In November Benin became the seventh country in Africa to go live with Starlink services.

Benin's launch followed launches in Nigeria, Rwanda, Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia.

Starlink's connectivity map shows plans for launches in many African countries in 2024. - Connecting Africa

TOKYO - Japan successfully launched its new H3 flagship rocket on Saturday, putting its space programme back on track after multiple setbacks including the failure of the rocket's inaugural flight last year.

The launch also marks a second straight win for the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) after its lunar lander, SLIM, achieved a "pinpoint" touchdown last month and made Japan only the fifth country to put a spacecraft on the moon.

A relatively small player in space by number of launches, Japan is seeking to revitalise its programme as it partners with ally the United States to counter China.

The H3 lifted off at 9:22 a.m. local time (0022 GMT) and after it successfully released a small satellite, jubilant scientists at the Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan clapped, yelled and hugged each other.

The rocket also released a microsatellite and a dummy satellite during its flight of nearly two hours.

"The newborn H3 has just made its first cry", JAXA project manager Masashi Okada, who has led the decade-long development of the new rocket, told a news conference.

"And we need to start preparing for the third H3 launch as soon as tomorrow."

The H3 is due to replace the two-decade-old H-IIA, which is retiring after two more launches. Another failed flight would have seen Japan face the prospect of losing independent access to space.

he first launch in March ended up with ground control destroying the rocket 14 minutes after liftoff when the second-stage engine failed to ignite. JAXA listed three possible electrical faults in a review released in October but could not identify the direct cause.

Five months earlier, JAXA's small rocket Epsilon had also failed to launch.

"So happy to see this incredible accomplishment in the space sector that follows on from the success of the SLIM moon landing," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in a post on X.

The 63 m (207 ft) H3 is designed to carry a 6.5 metric ton payload and over the long-term, the agency wants to reduce per-launch cost to as low as five billion yen (\$33 million) - half of what an H-IIA launch costs - by adopting simpler structures and automotive-grade electronics.

JAXA and primary contractor Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (7011.T), opens new tab. The agency wants to reduce per-launch cost to as low as five billion yen (\$33 million) - half of what an H-IIA launch costs - by adopting simpler structures and automotive-grade electronics.

"It's taken some time for the program to get to this point but with this launch, they will be fielding inquiries from around the world," said Ko Ogasawara, a professor at the Tokyo University of Science.

The Japanese government plans to launch about 20 satellites and probes with H3 rockets by 2030 for domestic use. The H3 is scheduled to deliver a lunar explorer for the joint Japan-India LUPEX project in 2025 as well as cargo spacecraft for the U.S.-led Artemis moon exploration program in the future.

Satellite launch demands have skyrocketed thanks to the rise of affordable commercial vehicles such as SpaceX's reusable Falcon 9 and a number of new rockets



▲ An aerial view shows a second test model of H3 rocket lift off from the launching pad at Tanegashima Space Center on the southwestern island of Tanegashima, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan.

are being tested this year.

Last month marked the successful inaugural flight of the United Launch Alliance's Vulcan rocket, a joint venture between Boeing (BA.N), opens new tab

and Lockheed Martin (LMT.N), opens new tab. The European Space Agency also plans to launch its lower-cost Ariane 6 for the first time this year.

Masayuki Eguchi, the head of Mitsubishi Heavy's

defence and space business, said the company has a long-term target of launching eight to ten rockets a year, which would boost its 50 billion yen space business sales by 20-30%.

That would require additional production capacity, he added, noting the company's factories can currently only produce five to six H3 rockets a year. (Reuters)

By Ncaba Ntshakala

GIVE an Hour for Earth! The Kingdom of Eswatini has joined the global movement for environmental action by launching the 2024 Earth Hour initiative.

The launch ceremony, held at Sibane Sami Hotel in Ezulwini, was spearheaded by Minister of Natural Resources and Energy, Prince Lonkhokhela.

Earth Hour, a worldwide event observed across nations and communities, encourages individuals and organizations to switch off their lights for one hour as a symbolic gesture towards energy conservation and environmental protection.

This year's theme, "Give an Hour for Earth," underscores the significance of collective action in addressing climate change and achieving net-zero emissions – a crucial target in mitigating the detrimental impacts of global warming.

Speaking at the launch, Prince Lonkhokhela applauded Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC) and other Earth Hour partners for the initiative.

"I extend my heartfelt appreciation to EEC and all esteemed Earth Hour partners gathered here today for your unwavering dedication to this initiative, which serves as a beacon of hope in our quest for a sustainable future," said Minister Prince Lonkhokhela. "We urge more partners to join us in this vital endeavour, to protect nature, our life support system, which is in danger."

The Minister also highlighted that the recent storms around the country which caused property damage; are a big indicator that nations are very vulnerable to climate change.

"These events followed the windstorms in August 2023," stated the Minister. "The wind storms are an uncommon phenomenon. This experience is a lesson to all of us that it is important to protect the environment as well as to mitigate the effects of climate change."

The Minister of Natural Resources expressed that he is certain that a formidable team can implement changes to rejuvenate the planet. The Minister said, "I am certain that together, we can implement small yet impactful changes to rejuvenate our planet. The theme of this year's event focuses on assessing our progress towards achieving net-zero emissions, a crucial step in combating climate change."

During the launch, it was shared that a recent global climate action assessment showed that current global energy production con-

tributes significantly to carbon emissions and global warming. The current trends show that the temperature is far above the target of keeping the global temperature increase at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to mitigate severe climate risks.

The Minister also said that Eswatini's pledge at COP28 highlighted the country's commitment to increasing renewable energy and improving energy efficiency. of note is that the local power generation is 100% renewable. Eswatini participated in the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference which convened last year in December in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"We must promote cross-sector collaboration and

embrace stewardship in our national climate action agenda. every individual, household, policymaker,

and business have a role to play in combating climate change," further remarked the Minister as he officially launched the Earth Hour initiative.

The Minister urged eSwatini to join EEC and its partners during Earth Hour which will be on March 23, 2024. "Let us demonstrate our commitment by turning off non-essential lights and appliances. Remember, our dedication to the environment extends beyond the hour it is a lifelong commitment," said the Minister.

Eswatini joins global fight for climate change with Earth Hour launch



Tech companies pledge to combat deceptive use of AI in 2024 elections

By Karabo Ngoepe

LEADING technology companies have pledged to safeguard the 2024 election year from the use of deceptive Artificial Intelligence to ensure processes are free and fair.

On Friday at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), leading technology companies pledged to help prevent deceptive AI content from interfering with this year's global elections in which more than four billion people in over 40 countries will vote.

The 20 leading technology companies that have made the commitment include Adobe, Amazon, Google, IBM, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI, TikTok, and X.

They pledged to work together to detect and counter harmful AI content. The "Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections" is a set of commitments to deploy technology countering harmful AI-generated content meant to deceive voters.

Signatories pledged to work collaboratively on tools to detect and address the online distribution of such AI content, drive educational campaigns, and provide transparency, among other concrete steps.

It also includes a broad set of principles, including the importance of tracking the origin of deceptive election-related content and the need to raise public awareness about the problem. The accord is one important step to safeguard online communities against harmful AI content and builds on individual companies' ongoing work.

Digital content addressed by the accord consists of AI-generated audio, video, and images that deceptively fake or alter the appearance, voice, or actions of political candidates, election officials, and other key stakeholders in a democratic election, or that provide false information to voters about when, where, and how they can vote.

Participating companies agreed to eight specific commitments:

- Developing and implementing technology to mitigate risks related to Deceptive AI Election content, including open-source tools where appropriate
- Assessing models in scope of this accord to understand the risks they may present regarding Deceptive AI Election Content
- Seeking to detect the distribution of this content on their platforms
- Seeking to appropriately address this content detected on their platforms
- Fostering cross-industry resilience to deceptive AI election content
- Providing transparency to the public regarding how the company addresses it
- Continuing to engage with a diverse set of global civil society organizations, academics
- Supporting efforts to foster public awareness, media literacy, and all-of-society resilience

"Elections are the beating heart of democracies. The Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 elections is a crucial step in advancing election integrity, increasing societal resilience, and creating trustworthy tech practices," said Ambassador Dr. Christoph Heusgen, Munich Security Conference Chairman.

"MSC is proud to offer a platform for technology companies to take steps toward reining in threats emanating from AI while employing it for democratic good at the same time."

Dana Rao, General Counsel and Chief Trust Officer at Adobe said transparency builds trust.

"That's why we're excited to see this effort to build the infrastructure we need to provide context for the content consumers are seeing online. With elections happening around the world this year, we need to invest in media literacy campaigns to ensure people know they can't trust everything they see and hear online, and that there are tools out there to help them understand what's true."

David Zapolsky, Senior Vice President of Global Public Policy and General Counsel at Amazon said this is a pivotal election year for more than 4 billion voters globally and security and trust are essential to the success of elections and campaigns around the world.

"Amazon is committed to upholding democracy and the Munich Accord complements our existing efforts to build and deploy new AI technologies that are reliable, secure, and safe. We believe this accord is an important part of our collective work to advance safeguards against deceptive activity and protect the integrity of elections," he said.

Linda Yaccarino, CEO of X said, "In democratic processes around the world, every citizen and company has a responsibility to safeguard free and fair elections, that's why we must understand the risks AI content could have on the process. X is dedicated to playing its part, collaborating with peers to combat AI threats while also protecting free speech and maximizing transparency."

Glen Mpani from the International Political Campaigns Expo which recently hosted an event that looked at the role of technology in elections in Cape Town said he was pleased by the commitment.

Mpani added that their collective effort aims to combat the abuse of AI in the upcoming 60 elections scheduled to be held over the next 48 months.

"This milestone marks a significant stride in protecting the integrity of political campaigns worldwide. Recognizing the impracticality of solely relying on laws or policies to address the abuse of these technologies, the International Political Campaigns Expo emphasizes the significance of this accord as an interim solution. It is essential for election management bodies and political parties in respective countries where elections will be held to adopt similar protocols and codes of conduct to regulate disinformation and safeguard the quality of elections," he said.

Mpani added that the signing of this accord coincides with the release of the Political Campaign Expo report, which brought together stakeholders from 26 countries across 56 cities.

The report aimed to foster discussions on the role of AI and big data in political campaigns, further underscoring the urgency to address the impact of AI on the electoral process.

EU, ITC, and Ministry of Commerce empower rural women's cooperatives

By Ncaba Ntshakala

AN astonishing collaboration between the European Union in Eswatini, the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Trade has empowered a rural women's cooperative in KaNdinda, under Ntondzi constituency in the Manzini region to improve their lives and turn the tide.

"Indzaba Yami" meaning "my story" in siSwati, was founded in June 2021 by fifteen determined women seeking to create sustainable livelihoods and job opportunities through the production of artisan goods.

The cooperative has since grown to include 20 members, encompassing two men and four young individuals, demonstrating its commitment to inclusivity and community upliftment. Officially registered in November 2023, Indzaba Yami has already made significant strides thanks to the support of the aforementioned organizations.

Indzaba Yami is part of the EU-funded "Eswatini: Promoting growth through competitive alliances" program, implemented by the ITC's Alliances for Action initiative.

This program aims to support job creation for small-scale farmers, entrepreneurs, and artisans while fostering export-led growth through the effective utilization of the South-

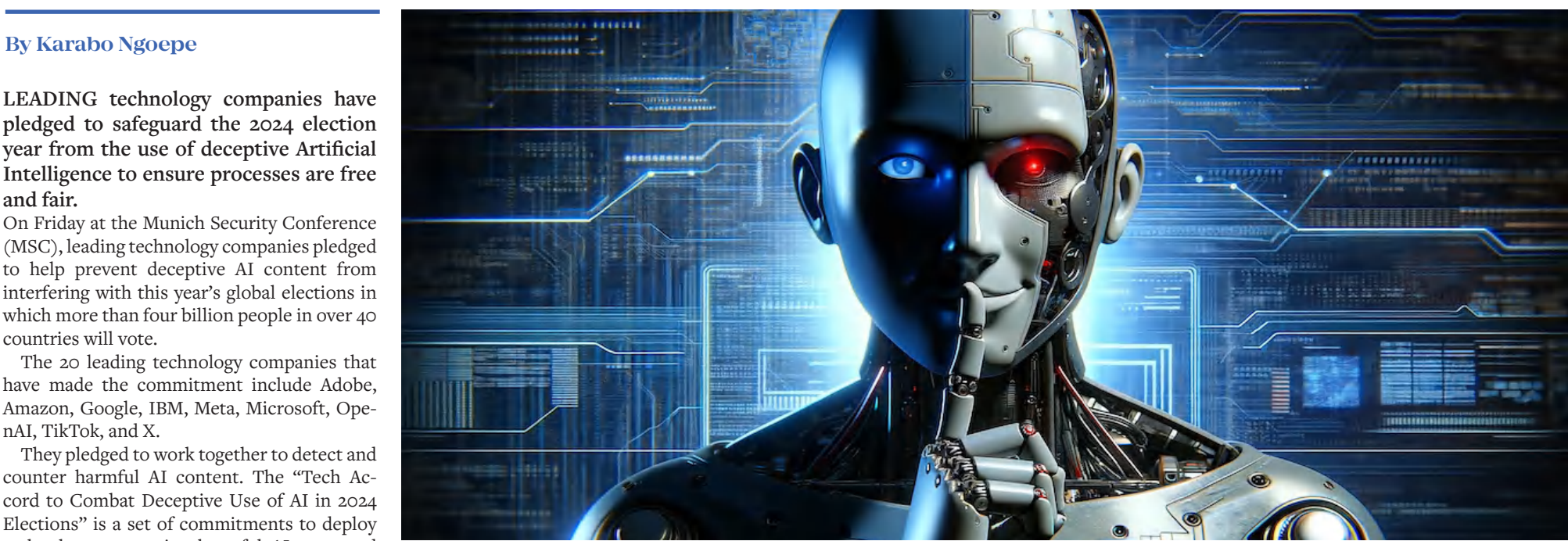
ern African Development Community-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement (SADC-EU EPA).

The collaboration provides Indzaba Yami with crucial resources and expertise, including Training in business management, product development, marketing, and financial literacy. It also assists in connecting with local and regional markets, potentially expanding to international markets through the SADC-EU EPA.

Further, it enhances accessibility to grants and loans to invest in equipment, raw materials, and marketing efforts. The European Union and the Kingdom of Eswatini have a long-standing and cordial partnership dating back more than 50 years now which was established in the 1960s.

The partnership has been beneficial and developmental in the Kingdom yielding impeccable results towards the growth of eSwatini. The partnership further focuses on poverty reduction and the promotion of sustainable and inclusive growth and development. In pursuit of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, the EU also supports the democratization process within the country.

This is done through regular political dialogues and direct engagements with the country's authorities including the His Majesty King Mswati III. The relationship has assisted Eswatini and the European Union enjoy the benefits of their mutual relations.



▲ On Friday at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), leading technology companies pledged to help prevent deceptive AI content from interfering with this year's global elections in which more than four billion people in over 40 countries will vote.



▲ Indzaba Yami, meaning "my story" in siSwati, was founded in June 2021 by fifteen determined women seeking to create sustainable livelihoods and job opportunities through the production of artisan goods.



By Abbey Makoe

WHERE would we be without national judicial systems and international humanitarian law in particular? Dead, very dead, I suspect.

Take for instance the hugely unpopular support by Western leaders for Israel's genocidal military onslaught across the Gaza Strip and the greater land of Palestine.

Every week, tens of thousands of concerned citizens with hearts across various European and Western capitals take to the streets to protest against the arrogance of their leaders' endorsement and material support for Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

And, whereas Western leaders are the self-proclaimed champions and architects of democracy and democratization itself, the will of their citizens falls on deaf ears when it comes to the plight of hordes of civilians in the form of innocent Palestinian men, women and children.

As the UN and various other humanitarian agencies have previously pointed out, "Anything that moves in Palestine is a legitimate target of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)"

The electorate across the West will have to wait for the next round of elections to oust their arrogant leaders who have lost touch with reality on the ground.

I have been inspired to pen this peace on the very essence of judicial systems and international humanitarian law following the damning ruling against the Dutch government by a court in the Netherlands. The Dutch judges ruled that the government must stop supplying Israel with the F-35 fighter jet parts over concerns that they were being used to violate International Humanitarian Law in Gaza.

Embarrassed

The ruling is effective within a space of seven days, but the embarrassed Dutch government says it is appealing the judgement. The judges argued that in line with the recent findings of the International Criminal Court (ICJ) that Israel was plausibly carrying out acts of genocide against the Palestinians, it is plausible, therefore, that the Dutch-assembled and exported F-35 fighter jet parts sold to Israel could be enabling the Netanyahu regime to annihilate a Palestinian population faced with certain extinction.

The law-suit ruling has been hailed across many parts of Europe and the international community. It was brought against the Dutch government by rights groups that included the Dutch arm of Oxfam.

In a statement the Dutch court was categorical, saying: "It is undeniable that there is a clear risk the exported F-35 parts are used in

serious violations of international humanitarian law."

In a morally bankrupt attempt to defend the abominable exports, the Dutch Trade Minister, Geoffrey van Leeuwen, said the fighter jet parts were "crucial for Israel's security".

See, the implication of the Dutch minister's statement means that there is no cause to be moved by the killing of more than 28,000 Palestinians since October 7, coupled with the wanton destruction of infrastructure that includes UN schools, refugee camps, schools, hospitals, blockade of aid from entering Gaza, detention without trial of scores of Palestinian parents and children, orphaned minors, bombed ambulances, every day's artillery and shelling of displaced Palestinians, the list is too long.

The Netherlands is itself a once upon a time in history a colonial power better-known particularly in South Africa through the notorious Dutch East Indian Company of Jan van Riebeeck that enslaved indigenous black people after their ship landed in the Cape in 1652.

It is perhaps this diabolical history of the Dutch that makes their current government insensitive to the illegal occupation of the Palestinian land by apartheid Israel. After all, the Dutch were masters of apartheid in South Africa. The Israelites have only perfected that art of racial discrimination, characterised by the permanently mean streak of Israeli settlers who are a law unto themselves and derive daily pleasure from turning Palestine into a living hell for its rightful citizens.

The Netherlands is home to one of several regional warehouses that stores the US-owned F-35 parts that are sold from there to keen buyers. Since October 7, at least one shipment of the lethal parts was exported to Israel to help the Jewish State bomb every square inch of occupied Palestine.

Despite the mounting evidence, Tel Aviv flatly denies that it is breaking international humanitarian law, arguing that every care is given to the safety of Palestinians. In an increasingly unipolar world order, it is heartening to notice that there are millions of people across the Western capitals who remain determined and committed to fighting for a cease-fire in Gaza.

Bullies

Rights groups including Oxfam also deserve a mention for successfully taking on the Dutch government. However, methinks that the South African government will go down in history books as having stood on the side of the weak and vulnerable against the global bullies by taking Israel to the ICJ, also successfully.

As Israel has continued to defy the ICJ court order to ensure that there were no acts of genocide being carried out by the IDF and that humanitarian aid needs to be let in the besieged Gaza, the opposite is the reality.



▲Judges argued that in line with the recent findings of the International Criminal Court (ICJ) that Israel was plausibly carrying out acts of genocide against the Palestinians, it is plausible, therefore, that the Dutch-assembled and exported F-35 fighter jet parts sold to Israel could be enabling the Netanyahu regime to annihilate a Palestinian population faced with certain extinction.

To this end, the SA government has recently returned to the Hague-based ICJ in the wake of Israel's chilling plans to launch a military ground operation against the multiple-times displaced nearly 1,5 million Palestinians in Rafah next to the border with Egypt.

All sensible observers have their heads in their hands as they picture the looming worst mass slaughter of innocent civilians in modern history. But the Dutch government and the owners of the F-35 fighter jet parts for whom they store and export – the US – are barely moved.

So too are the allies of the US – the UK,

Germany, France, Italy and Canada, among others. With their colonial past, it is perhaps no wonder that they remain unmoved by the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians by a state that they arm to the teeth – Israel.

Articles

Since October 7, rafters of articles have been written on the wrongs and rights of the Israeli military havoc in Gaza. The Jewish State has long crossed the redline for self-defence according to international law, and what continues to transpire is nothing short of sheer, unadulterated criminality.

As members of the global community that

still believes in the UN Charter that espouses multilateralism and global cooperation, we should be grateful for the practice of national judicial systems in functioning societies.

Additionally, the utilization of international institutions such as the ICJ by countries such as South Africa must encourage all and sundry to make use of such available facilities and expose the double standards of the powerful nations against the weak, as in the case of Palestine so eloquently teaches us.

As we wait with bated breath for the outcome of South Africa's latest round in the ICJ, we need to commend the existence of inter-

national humanitarian law and related institutions.

Irrespective of the eventual outcome of SA's cases against Israel and its Western backers, South Africa has made the developing world hugely proud by taking a lead in the David v/s Goliath battle.

While the powerful can shoot the weak with ease in Palestine and elsewhere, at least before the national judicial systems and international law they can be held to account. It is a powerful balancing act for which we must all be grateful.

Tricky tertiary time in newly minted journey of the class of 2024

By Tswelopele Makoe

TYPICALLY, as February proceeds, tertiary institutions across South Africa are well underway with the commencement of the 2024 academic year.

This year has started on a high note, following the proliferation of the National Senior Certificate results for 2023 to an 82.9% pass rate. And, this month is also the ingress of tertiary institution students across the nation. What a time! It is a time of great angst and trepidation, anxiety and excitement alike.

The transition from high school to college or university has the potential to be extremely overwhelming and daunting. It is not merely the transition from a high school environment to a formal tertiary institution setting, no, it is also a dramatic transition into a new, demanding form of education in a highly vigorous environment.

This is compounded by the independence that is awarded to newly arriving students, a first-time experience in their lives. For new students, it is nearly impossible not to feel a rollercoaster of emotions.

Exhilarating

Preparing for this new chapter of life as a student is a highly exhilarating time that requires proper preparation. Organisation and self-discipline are integral to one's success in tertiary institutions.

From libraries to writing centres to career services - tertiary institutions are filled with resources that ensure that students are academically supported. Students should take advantage of the array of knowledge and extra skills that are provided in these spaces. It is a piece of advice worth heeding.

In addition to this new and tricky form of living, students must prioritise attendance of lectures and assignment deadlines. I am reminded of Stephen Hawking who once famously said: "Showing up is half the battle." Being consistent in one's approach to coursework is vital to success in tertiary education.

It is also pertinent that students are forthcoming and open with lecturers, tutors, and academic advisors to receive the best guidance possible. To be too embarrassed to ask ques-



▲The transition from high school to college or university has the potential to be extremely overwhelming and daunting. It is not merely the transition from a high school environment to a formal tertiary institution setting, no, it is also a dramatic transition into a new, demanding form of education in a highly vigorous environment.

tions is a sign of weakness. As they say, there is never a thing such as a stupid question.

This is a tricky time when students will be completely independent.

They must be arduous, not only in taking proper care of themselves, but also in getting to know one's surroundings, and taking diligent care of one's health.

This is also a time for students to learn about themselves, their passions, and their interests. They should be open to exploring new clubs and societies. It is also a time when self-reflection and one's academic interests are especially highlighted.

Therefore, students should not refrain from speaking to academic advisors, particularly

when it comes to mapping out their courses or changing curriculums completely.

In higher education institutions, plagiarism is an extreme offence that is punishable by suspension, expulsion, and permanent damage to one's academic record. Countless students enter college or university with no knowledge whatsoever of plagiarism.

They must be committed to the practices of proper referencing. Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications have also been rife in scholarly work. In South Africa, many educational institutions are working to combat this, but policy development to address this has been strenuous.

Nonetheless, students are still flagged for

using AI works, and submitting it as their own. This is detrimental not only to their marks but also to their retention of the knowledge that they need to pass effectively. Although we are in a technologically advanced world, students must use technology to enhance their learning practices, rather than to neglect them altogether.

No student is ever truly ready for the immense changes that come with tertiary education life. It is, however, vital that they remain open to new people and new experiences. Countless members of our society will never receive the opportunity to attend a tertiary educational institution, and it should be regarded with the value that it inherently holds.

Satisfied

Our nation remains deeply stratified and economically unequal. Education is pertinent to the empowerment and enhancement of one's quality of life. A qualification such as higher education, once obtained, can never be taken away from you. Education is only increasing in cost, and it is vital that those who are given the opportunity grab it with both hands.

Hordes of people go to college or university, and an alarming amount leaves these institutions with nothing to show for it. Students must be open and honest about their challenges and lean on their various pillars of strength for support.

For many, this is also their first time away from their homes and families. Feeling homesick is normal, and valid.

Keeping a healthy work-life balance is crucial in ensuring that one's mental and physical health is protected.

Educating oneself is essential to the betterment of their life, their family, and their society. As eloquently put by the founding father of democratic South Africa, former President Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

(Tswelopele Makoe is a Gender Activist and also an Andrew W. Mellon scholar, pursuing an MA in Ethics at UWC, and affiliated with the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice. The views expressed are her own.)

Human interest



Democrats bungle Biden age concerns, some critics say
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Joe Biden's advisers knew in 2020 that his age was an issue for Americans but they successfully painted him as a competent leader who would restore normalcy to the White House after Donald Trump's chaotic presidency.

FOCUS ON PUTIN’S CRITIC ALEXEI NAVALNY MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN PRISON:

Putin’s foe Alexei Navalny dies in jail, West holds Russia responsible

MOSCOW - Alexei Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable domestic opponent, fell unconscious and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony where he was serving a three-decade sentence, authorities said. The death of Navalny, a 47-year-old former lawyer, robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most prominent leader as Putin prepares for an election which will keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030.

U.S. President Joe Biden said he was outraged and joined other Western leaders in criticising Russia over Navalny's death, blaming it on "something that Putin and his thugs did."

Navalny rose to prominence more than a decade ago by documenting and speaking publicly about what he said was the vast corruption and opulence among the "crooks and thieves" running Putin's Russia.

There are no other opposition leaders in Russia of Navalny's stature. For some young urban Russians, Navalny had offered hope of an alternative future to Putin, who has served as Russia's paramount leader longer than anyone since Josef Stalin.

The Federal Penitentiary Service of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District said in a statement that Navalny felt unwell after a walk at the IK-3 penal colony in Kharp, about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow.

He lost consciousness almost immediately and died shortly afterwards, it said, adding that resuscitation attempts failed.

Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said there was "almost no hope" that he was alive.

Navalny's wife, Yulia, told the Munich Security Conference she could not be sure her husband was dead because "Putin and his government... lie incessantly".

"But if this is true, I want Putin, his entire entourage, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family, to my husband," she said.

The Kremlin said Putin had been informed of Navalny's death. The 71-year-old former KGB spy was shown meeting workers at a factory in Chelyabinsk, in the Ural mountains. He said nothing in public about Navalny.

Western leaders paid tribute to Navalny's courage as a fighter for freedom. Some, without citing evidence, accused the Kremlin of murder and said Putin should be held accountable.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the reaction of Western leaders to the death was unacceptable and "absolutely rabid".

"We don't know exactly what happened, but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did," Biden said at the White House.

"Russian authorities are going to tell their own story," Biden said. "But make no mistake. Make no mistake: Putin is responsible for Navalny's death."

Navalny's movement is outlawed and most of his senior allies now live in exile in Europe.

"If this (news of Navalny's death) is true, then it's not 'Navalny died', but 'Putin killed Navalny'," Leonid Volkov, Navalny's chief of staff, said. The Kremlin did not respond to the accusation.

Yarmysh, Navalny's spokeswoman, said his movement and aims would live on.

"We are convinced that we will be victorious in the end," she said. "Russia is our country, it belongs to us and we need to return it us."

Navalny's lawyer was on his way to the tough penal colony where Navalny was serving sentences that would have kept him in prison beyond the age of 70.

Navalny earned admiration from Russia's opposition for voluntarily returning to Russia in 2021 from Germany, where he had been treated for what Western laboratory tests showed was an attempt to poison him with a nerve agent.

Navalny said at the time that he was poisoned in Siberia in August 2020. The Kremlin denied trying to kill him and said there was no evidence he was poisoned with a nerve agent.

Grigory Yavlinsky, a veteran liberal, said Navalny's death showed the need for reform and echoed many opposition figures in saying he feared for the health of other activists in jail.

In Moscow, at a memorial to the victims of Soviet political repression in the shadow of the former KGB headquarters, some people laid roses and carnations. Police looked on.

One note read: "Alexei Navalny - we remember you."

Russian prosecutors warned people not to take part in any mass meetings in Moscow. Supporters arranged meetings to honour Navalny in London, Paris, Oslo, Rome, Brussels, Berlin, Geneva, Prague, Yerevan, Tbilisi and Vilnius.

RUSSIA'S FUTURE

Navalny had forecast Russia could face political turmoil because he said Putin built a brittle system of personal rule reliant on corruption. The Kremlin dismissed his accusations about vast corruption and about Putin's personal wealth.

Russian officials cast Navalny as an extremist who was a puppet of the CIA, which they say is intent on sowing chaos and turning Russia into a client state of the West.

A day before his death, Navalny peered through a barred window, laughing and cracking jokes about his depleting funds and the judge's salary.

"Your Honour, I will send you my personal account number so that you can use your huge salary as a federal judge to 'warm up' my personal account, because I am running out of money," he said via video link.

When demonstrations against Putin flared in December 2011, after an election tainted by fraud accusations, he was one of the first protest leaders arrested.

In an interview in Moscow in 2011, Navalny was asked by Reuters if he was afraid of challenging Putin's system. "That's the difference between me and you: you are afraid and I am not afraid," he said. "I realize there is danger, but why should I be afraid?"

(Reuters)



▲ Alexei Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable domestic opponent, fell unconscious and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony where he was serving a three-decade sentence.

Navalny’s death leaves despair and apathy in Moscow

MOSCOW - The hundreds of flowers and candles laid in Moscow on Friday to honour the memory of Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition leader, were taken away overnight in black bags.

Russia's prison service said that Navalny, 47, fell unconscious and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony. Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh on Saturday confirmed his death, citing an official notice given to his mother, Lyudmila.

In central Moscow, several dozen roses and carnations remained in the softening snow on Saturday at the monument to the victims of Soviet repression, which sits in the shadow of the former KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Square.

Vladimir Nikitin, 36, was alone laying a carnation at the Solovetsky Stone, which hails from the islands with the same name in the White Sea where one of the first "Gulag" forced labour camps was founded in 1923 by the Bolsheviks.

Policemen looked on.

When asked for an interview by Reuters, Nikitin asked to speak in the underpass which threads beneath Lubyanka Square, citing the fear of detention.

"Navalny's death is terrible: hopes have been smashed," Nikitin said.

"Navalny was a very serious man, a brave man and now he is no longer with us. He spoke the truth - and that was very dangerous because some people didn't like the truth."

At the "Wall of Sorrow" memorial on the avenue named after Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, some Russians laid flowers beside pictures of Navalny. One message read: "We will not forget, nor shall we forgive."

"I came because I have grief," said Arkady, who declined to give his second name. "He was a man who I respected. I had hopes that he was someone who could do something in

the future."

The West, including U.S. President Joe Biden, blamed President Vladimir Putin for the death. Western leaders did not cite evidence.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the reaction of Western leaders to the death was unacceptable and "absolutely rabid".

Russian authorities viewed Navalny and his supporters as extremists with links to the CIA intelligence agency who are seeking to destabilise Russia. They have outlawed his movement, forcing many of his followers to flee abroad.

The death of Navalny, a former lawyer, robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most charismatic and courageous leader as Putin prepares for an election that will keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030.

DEATH IN PRISON

The OVD-Info protest-monitoring group said more than 110 people had been arrested across Russia at meetings and memorials to Navalny, including 64 in Russia's former imperial capital, St Petersburg.

Navalny rose to prominence more than a decade ago by documenting and poking fun at what he said was the vast corruption and opulence of the "crooks and thieves" running Putin's Russia.

At the time of his death he was serving prison sentences totalling more than 30 years on a host of charges of extremism and fraud, which he denied and said were politically motivated.

His mother was travelling to the IK-3 penal colony in the Yamalo-Nenets region, about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow, where he died, Russian media reported.

Navalny's supporters - including in the West - cast him as a Russian version of South Africa's Nelson Mandela, who would one day walk free to lead the country.

His wife, Yulia, told the Munich Security Conference that Putin bore responsibility for her husband's death and that the world should come together to defeat the "horrific regime"



▲ The hundreds of flowers and candles laid in Moscow on Friday to honour the memory of Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition leader, were taken away overnight in black bags.

in Moscow and reclaim Russia.

Some Russians, though, dismissed such a view as a classic case of wishful thinking, and pointed to an opinion poll showing that most Russians disapproved of him and that Putin was vastly more popular.

"Navalny's death is very beneficial to Putin's opponents," said Sergei Markov, a former Kremlin adviser.

"They will use it to undermine the legitimacy of the presidential election in Russia, use it to not recognise Putin as the legitimate president. They are trying to present Putin not as the president of a hostile country, but as a criminal with whom no one should have to deal."

News of Navalny's death came just hours before Ukraine withdrew from the south of the city of Avdiivka, paving the way for Russia's biggest advance in the country since May 2023.

At "Patriki", or Patriarch's Ponds, the cen-

supporters demand Russia hand over body to the family

KHARP - Alexei Navalny's spokeswoman on Saturday confirmed that Russia's most prominent opposition leader was dead and demanded that the Russian authorities hand over the body to his family immediately.

Navalny, a 47-year-old former lawyer, fell unconscious and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony in Kharp, about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow, where he was serving a three-decade sentence, the prison service said.

Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said that an official death notice had been given to Navalny's mother, Lyudmila. The time of death, she said, was 2:17 p.m. local time (0917 GMT) on Feb. 16, according to the notice.

"We demand that Alexei Navalny's body be given to his family immediately," Yarmysh said.

Until now, the prison service statement on Friday had been the only official word on the death of Navalny, a fierce critic of President Vladimir Putin who had been serving a long prison sentence.

Yarmysh, writing on social media platform X, said an employee of the prison had said that Navalny's body had been taken to Salekhard, the town near the prison complex, by Russian investigators, who were conducting "research".

But an employee at the only morgue in Salekhard told Reuters that Navalny's body had not arrived.

"The investigative committee has a million options," the employee, who did not give their name, said, listing other cities in



the region - Labytnangi, Nadym and Uren-goy - where Navalny's body could have been sent to.

"In Salekhard, we have the only morgue," he said. "I have not received anyone, no bodies...no papers."

Asked whether a body could have arrived before he started his shift at 8 a.m., the employee said: "No one handed me anything. I think if such a body had been delivered to us, I would have been told immediately."

Lyudmila Navalnaya travelled on Saturday to the prison where her son had been held, accompanied by Navalny's lawyer, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

The IK-3 penal colony in Kharp is situated in the Arctic Circle, around a one-hour drive from Salekhard, the administrative capital of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District.

(Reuters)

WASHINGTON - Joe Biden's advisers knew in 2020 that his age was an issue for Americans but they successfully painted him as a competent leader who would restore normalcy to the White House after Donald Trump's chaotic presidency.

Now that Biden is 81, opinion polls show age is even more of a concern for voters ahead of November's election. In office, Biden's gait has stiffened, he is slower on his feet and he regularly makes verbal mix-ups during speeches, at times confusing the names of world leaders.

He has presided over a growing economy and some foreign leaders have said after meeting him that he is sharp and focused in private meetings, but the age issue is still a drag on his poll numbers.

When a special counsel last week released a report declining to charge Biden of mishandling classified information but criticizing his memory, Republicans in the House of Representatives were quick to call the president, a Democrat, "certainly unfit for the Oval Office."

In contrast, some political experts say, the White House did not address the accusations quickly or directly enough, or mount a coordinated pushback, at least at first.

"What we've seen from this White House is in a lot of ways attempting to do business as usual, to overcome adversity and bad narratives by ignoring them," said Samuel Woolley, director of the University of Texas at Austin's propaganda research lab.

A new Reuters/Ipsos poll shows that 78% of respondents - including 71% of Democrats - think Biden is too old to work in government.

While the White House has struggled in its response to those concerns, a wave of online memes, some based on manipulated images, present the image of the president as a doddering, frail old man.

Mocking Biden's age, speech patterns and missteps has become a global phenomenon during his three years in office.

Sky News Australia has a series on its four-million subscriber YouTube channel called "Biden vs. teleprompter," and a Hindustan Times video of Biden's verbal stumbles in a 2022 speech, opens new tab has 2.4 million views. Doctored videos that appear to show Biden getting distracted by an ice cream truck and wandering off, or talking to an invisible crowd are viral hits on Facebook, TikTok and X, formerly known as Twitter.

James Clyburn, a prominent Democratic member of Congress, told Reuters that a "MAGA wall" of Republican social media accounts, conservative media outlets and allies of Trump mean Democrats struggle to explain Biden's successes.

Democrats bungle Biden age concerns, some critics say

The White House and campaign aides say they will handle concerns about Biden's age in 2024 by highlighting his accomplishments in office, including strong jobs growth and ambitious infrastructure spending programs.

"We're going to continue to focus on what this president has been able to get done," White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday when asked what the White House strategy was to change voters' perception of Biden as too old.

That strategy, so far, has not quelled criticism or concerns about the president's age.

"What's crazy is thinking that we are the ones as voters who must silence concerns and criticisms," Jon Stewart, comedian and political commentator, said on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" on Monday. "It is the candidates' job to assuage concerns — not the voters job not to mention them."

Neurologists warn that a few public moments are not an accurate way to determine any individual's cognitive ability and that any such diagnosis should be made by a doctor.

LINGERING DOUBTS

Many hours after the special counsel's report was released last Thursday, Biden held a late-night, angry, emotional back-and-forth with reporters about his memory, which he said was "fine." During those remarks he appeared to confuse the presidents of Mexico and Egypt. Biden made the decision to make the public remarks, the White House said.

The next day, Vice President Kamala Harris, White House spokesperson Ian Sams, who works with the White House counsel's office, and others denounced the report as wrong and politically motivated.

"One could argue they should have signaled they wanted proactive aggressive pushback on the mental pieces from the beginning," said one Democrat with ties to the White House. "Initially I think people were shocked by the report ... And that time lapse created space for hand-wringing by nervous Democrats."

Some in the president's party have lingering misgivings about the wisdom of him running for a second term, and the report may have only exacerbated those worries.

"The most damning thing that can happen to you in politics is if you confirm an existing suspicion," Democratic strategist James Carville said after the report's release. "This is a problem that cannot get any better."

Biden's campaign plans to highlight what it sees as Trump's threat to democracy and extremist agenda and the restrictions Republicans have put on abortion. Since Biden declared last April he would run again, his party has mostly circled its wagons around the president, with the exception of Representative Dean Phillips, his long-shot challenger.

Donors are on board - Biden has outraised likely challenger Trump, as his campaign pitches the 2024 race as a decision for or against preserving American democracy.

A top Biden fundraiser said that his support for Biden was unaffected by the special counsel's report, but that the campaign seems confounded by the issue and that the last several days may have only reinforced concerns about Biden's age.

The age issue is "tough" for Democrats, he said. "People read the polls. It's kind of a circular thing where people talk about age, media writes about age, people talk more about age."

Biden is being unfairly targeted over the issue in the media, some political analysts say, compared to Trump who at 77 has suffered his own verbal stumbles and mix-ups while presenting a menu of radical or quixotic policy ideas like building new "freedom cities" in the wilderness, with flying cars.

"We have to ask why the questions aren't being raised about Trump's mental faculties as well," said Republican political strategist Mary Anna Mancuso. "If you have two candidates that beat their wife and people are actually only asking one campaign how they're handling the fact that their candidate was beating their wife ... it's kind of a disservice to the public."

Giving the U.S. public more exposure to Biden could clear up any questions, others suggest.

"If Joe Biden is fine in the way they say he is, we should see more of Joe Biden being incredibly active and incredibly engaged with the press," Woolley said. "That would be quite a bit more sensible than constantly acting indignant." (Reuters)



▲ Joe Biden's advisers knew in 2020 that his age was an issue for Americans but they successfully painted him as a competent leader who would restore normalcy to the White House after Donald Trump's chaotic presidency.

US markets grapple with mysterious contradictions

LONDON, - Something is amiss in American financial markets. U.S. stocks hit new highs last week, propelled in part by the belief the country will vanquish inflation and avoid a recession.

At the same time, though, derivatives traders are betting that the Federal Reserve will slash interest rates. That will not happen unless the central bank is seriously worried about growth. One of the two camps is destined to be wrong. The S&P 500 Index (.SPX), opens new tab has started 2024 with a bang, notching up new records and closing above the symbolic 5,000 mark for the first time last week.

The U.S. equity benchmark's 5.4% advance since New Year's Day means it has already surpassed the year-end forecasts by strategists at banks such as Morgan Stanley (MS.N), opens new tab, JPMorgan (JPM.N), opens new tab and Société Générale (SOGN.PA), opens new tab. And this comes after U.S. stocks crushed most other asset classes in 2023, with total returns of more than 26%. Sceptics may grumble that this stunning ascent has been largely down to just seven technology giants - Meta Platforms, opens new tab, Amazon.com, opens new tab, Apple, opens new tab, Alphabet, opens new tab, Microsoft, opens new tab, Tesla, opens new tab and Nvidia, opens new tab.

The "Magnificent Seven" last year returned 76% as investors bet that they would be the main beneficiaries of a boom in artificial intelligence.

The other 493 members of the S&P 500 returned just 14%, according to Goldman Sachs analysts. So far this year, the

seven are up 8%, versus 3% for the rest. But that's all right for investors in the index funds that dominate U.S. equities. Besides, the S&P 500 now collectively trades at around 20 times its components' expected earnings for 2024.

That compares to an average multiple of around 16 over the past decade. The question is whether economic fundamentals, developments in monetary policy and companies' future earnings justify such a rally. And here's where different markets have widely diverging views. Investors betting on interest rates have a bleaker view of the economic trajectory.

They think the Fed will cut borrowing costs aggressively by the end of the year. Derivatives prices collected by LSEG imply an 80% probability that the Fed will lower rates four times by December, and a near-50% chance it will cut five times. Looking

further out, derivatives markets are pricing in nearly 175 basis points of rate cuts between May this year and June 2025. Since 1955, a monetary policy easing of that magnitude has only ever occurred because of a recession, according to Jim Reid at Deutsche Bank.

The exception came in 1984-1985 when Fed Chair Paul Volcker reversed previous steep rate hikes as inflation eased. This gloomy outlook is entirely missing from equity markets. In fact, Wall Street analysts forecast that earnings per share at S&P 500 companies will grow 10% this year and 13% in 2025. Economic data also point to a "soft landing", with inflation abating and the economy avoiding a contraction. GDP is on track to rise at an annual rate of 3.4% in the first quarter of the year, according, opens new tab to the Atlanta Fed, while unemployment has been below 4% for two years - the longest such stretch in more than half a

US large-cap stocks are hitting new records

— S&P 500 Index



Note: Data as of Feb. 9, 2024

Source: S&P Global | F. Guerrero | Breakingviews | Feb. 12, 2024

century.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell will not be easing monetary policy so quickly if the economy remains resilient, not least because every Fed decision until November's U.S. presidential election will come under heavy scrutiny from both Democrats and Republicans. Powell recently stressed the Fed would be "prudent" in lowering rates even though inflation is converging towards its 2% target.

How to explain the discrepancy? One possibility is a glitch in the Fed funds futures market, which anticipate the central bank's moves. The contracts, traded on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, are used by banks and companies to hedge interest rate risk and by speculators to bet on rate movements. As such, they are an expression of

market participants' views, not a perfect crystal ball.

Torsten Slok, chief economist at Apollo Global Management (APO.N), opens new tab, has noted, opens new tab that derivatives tend to overestimate the central bank's willingness to cut when rates are high, and vice-versa. And a 2002 study by the Atlanta Fed found, opens new tab that, before interest rates came down in 1990-1991, these markets had expected much deeper cuts than actually happened.

Even so, other asset classes also seem to be pricing in higher borrowing costs.

Yields on 2-year U.S. Treasury bonds have risen from 4.19% on Feb. 1 to 4.49% on Feb. 12, as strong data and Powell's cautious words convinced traders that rates would remain high.

That matters for the equity market because bonds compete with shares for investors' affections. High stock valuations and rising yields have pushed the equity risk premium - the excess return that stock market investors expect over risk-free U.S. government debt - to its lowest level since at least 2006, according to Michael Hunstad, deputy chief investment officer at Northern Trust Asset Management.

History suggests that slow rate cuts as inflation glides back to target are better for equity investors than fast monetary easing caused by a looming recession. In cycles where the Fed has cut rates less than five times in

12 months, the S&P 500 has risen on average 24% in the first year, according to Ned Davis Research.

By contrast, stocks only rose by an average of 5% in the first year of quick cuts. During the last two big recessions, in 2001 and 2007, the S&P 500 ended up losing 14% and 21%, respectively, within a year of the first rate cut.

The wild card this time is Big Tech. The seven giants make up nearly 30% of the S&P 500's total market capitalisation and 22% of its members' total expected net income for 2024. Continued strong performance would keep pushing up the whole market. Recent signs are positive. Five of the six that have already reported earnings for last quarter of 2023 beat Wall Street's earnings estimates. David Kostin of Goldman Sachs reckons that if Nvidia meets consensus forecasts when it reports later this month, the Magnificent Seven will deliver a 14% year-on-year increase in revenues, way better than the 2% managed by the other S&P 500 stocks to have reported so far.

Of course, the Magnificent Seven wouldn't be immune to a sharp economic downturn. Investors cannot be right about both the direction of U.S. interest rates and the future of U.S. stocks. If traders need a reason to be cheerful, they may have to turn away from Washington and look in the direction of Silicon Valley. (Reuters)



▲ Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell speaks during a press conference following a closed two-day meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee on interest rate policy at the Federal Reserve in Washington, U.S.

MONTEVIDEO - Uruguay's main port received two cargo scanners sixteen years ago to detect drugs and other suspicious loads. Unfortunately, during delivery one of them fell into the sea.

Since then, cocaine shipments to Europe have surged through the port of Montevideo, which handled a record 1.1 million containers last year, fueling a rise in gang violence and undermining Uruguay's reputation as a beacon of stability in turbulent South America.

Uruguay, a small, affluent nation sandwiched between Brazil and Argentina, is desperate for help. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) shuttered its Montevideo office in 2019 after years of strained ties with local law enforcement, four former DEA officials said. The details of the DEA's exit are previously unreported.

Uruguay's current centre-right government, which took office the following year, has repeatedly asked the DEA to return but U.S. officials say there are no imminent plans to do so.

Three former DEA officials told Reuters that - with Washington focused on fentanyl flooding its borders from Mexico and little of the cocaine that transits through Uruguay heading to the United States - there's a scant appetite for seeking congressional approval to re-open a Montevideo office.

"Everything's fentanyl now," said former DEA official Larry Reicher, who oversaw Uruguay as the DEA's assistant regional director for southern South America from 2015 to 2019. "They couldn't give a rat's ass about cocaine."

The DEA declined to comment. European nations, which receive the bulk of the cocaine passing through Uruguay, also have a limited counter-narcotics presence here. Spain is the only European country with a permanent police attache in Montevideo.

Reuters spoke with over two dozen current and former U.S., European and Uruguayan cops, as well as local officials, lawmakers and foreign diplomats. They said Uruguay is in a precarious position, fighting a lonely battle against cocaine smuggling gangs that have expanded into every corner of Latin America over the last decade, turning once-tranquil nations like Ecuador into cartel badlands.

Uruguay, home to 3.4 million people, suffered a record 426 murders in 2018. Violence has remained high ever since with grisly turf battles between small drug-dealing clans shocking a country largely unaccustomed to gang violence.

With 382 people killed last year, President Luis Lacalle Pou is struggling to defend his government's security record ahead of a general election in October, while some far-right lawmakers are calling for troops on the streets.

"We have a problem," said Mario Layera, Uruguay's police chief from 2016-20, who led the force when the DEA left. "Cocaine is a problem."

Nicolás Martinelli, Uruguay's interior minister, told Reuters that Lacalle Pou's government had repeatedly asked the DEA to return but has yet to get a positive response. He said he was pleased Argentina-based DEA agents are now visiting Montevideo twice a week, up from once every two weeks.

A DEA office is no panacea. Several Latin American nations have a deadly drug problem despite a strong DEA presence. Still, Martinelli said his country is desperate for U.S. equipment and expertise; he lamented that Uruguay's status as a high-income nation excludes it from U.S. counter-narcotics donations.

"Uruguay remains a valued DEA partner," a DEA spokesperson said. "We continue to actively explore new opportunities to expand our efforts to dismantle transnational criminal organizations operating worldwide."

DENIAL

Nelson Vargas, who ran the DEA's Montevideo office from 2013-2017, said "it was kind of cloak and dagger" when he arrived, with local cops wary of working with the DEA.

Politics played a part. Leftist governments ruled Uruguay from 2005-2020, and their negative view of U.S. policy towards Latin America - including support for the country's 1973-85 dictatorship - hindered counter-narcotics collaboration, Layera, Martinelli and U.S. sources said.

Uruguay's proud reputation as a regional role model bred complacency, two current and four former U.S. officials said. Authorities were in denial about the scale of cocaine moving through their country, they said.

Uruguay seized over 2 metric tonnes of cocaine in 2021, according to United Nations data, up over 1,300% compared with the 144 kgs apprehended in 2017.

In 2019, when Germany seized a record 1 billion euro haul of cocaine in a soybean shipment from Montevideo, the Uruguayans didn't believe the drugs originated in their country, initially claiming they were loaded in Brazil, two ex-DEA agents said.

"For Uruguay, I think it was their heads in the sand, you know: 'This is not happening,'" said a former Montevideo DEA chief, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss his past work. "But the reality was that it was happening, and I think it had been going on for a while."

Layera, the police



Surging cocaine violence has Uruguay clamouring for DEA help



▲ Uruguay's main port received two cargo scanners sixteen years ago to detect drugs and other suspicious loads. Unfortunately, during delivery one of them fell into the sea..

chief under the former leftist administration, said investigators ultimately confirmed the cocaine originated in Montevideo. A Uruguayan businessman called Martin Mutio last year received a 15-year sentence for trafficking the load. His lawyers didn't respond to requests for comment.

Martinelli described the previous government as "naive" on public security. He said Montevideo's port remains ill-equipped to inspect the container flow.

Three more cargo scanners, bought by the current government, will arrive in April to supplement the X-ray machine donated by China in 2008, Martinelli said. That should allow for inspection of 80% of all merchandise, he said.

Layera acknowledged that gangs like Brazil's First Capital Command, or PCC, were a growing threat, and that powerful Mexican and Italian capos had exploited weaknesses in the country's legal system. But he defended counter-narcotics work during the previous administration, citing their respect for police independence and operations with foreign counterparts.

'THIS PLACE IS WIDE OPEN'

The DEA's exit from Uruguay capped years of worsening counter-narcotics ties that turned even run-of-the-mill operations into a headache, five former U.S. agents said.

The former Montevideo DEA boss said it was an open secret that 'El Perro Que Fuma,' a seedy bar near Montevideo's port, was frequented by drug traffickers. Its owner, Amir Alial González, aka "El Turco," had long been suspected of coke trafficking, U.S. and Uruguayan sources said.

Eager to take down a seemingly easy target, the ex-agent flew in a Colombian informant in 2018 to visit the bar as a fake buyer looking for a load. González, who also had a fishing business that gave him access to the port, was surprisingly open with the Colombian, outlining his whole operation, the ex-agent said. The informant was shocked.

"He came back and he's like, 'Dude, this place is wide open,'" the ex-agent said.

When DEA officials shared González's information, Uruguayan police appeared to get cold feet. They didn't like the informant "ordering up a load," the ex-agent said, saying it was "entrapment." They asked the



informant to leave Uruguay immediately.

Yet around a week later, in September 2018, the Uruguayans told the DEA they'd arrested González for trying to traffic 417 kilos of coke in a shipment of wool bound for Antwerp. González, who received a seven-year sentence in 2018, declined to comment.

The ex-DEA agent said they were frustrated not to get a heads-up about the arrest, given it was their intel. The Uruguayans also refused to share information on González that scuppered a parallel DEA probe in Paraguay, he added.

In late 2019, the DEA pulled out its four-man team from Montevideo,

with the González incident among the final straws.

Carlos Mitchem, the DEA's former top official for the southern cone, made the call, which was supported by his bosses.

"The cops wouldn't share information," he said. We "had to close the office," he added. "Wasn't working well." Two other ex-DEA officials confirmed the account of González's arrest. Interior Minister Martinelli heard a similar story from the DEA.

(Reuters)

Germany's chamber of commerce warns of heaviest slump in 20 years

Germany's DIHK chambers of industry and commerce warned on Thursday that Europe's biggest economy will shrink by 0.5% this year, in a second year of recession and its worst downturn in two decades.

A DIHK poll of more than 27,000 companies showed that of those surveyed, 35% expect business to deteriorate in the next 12 months with only 14% expecting an improvement, as high energy prices, bureaucracy, a skilled workers shortage and weak domestic demand weigh on economic output. "The bad mood among companies is becoming more entrenched," said the DIHK in Berlin on Thursday, adding that it would be only the second time in Germany's post-war history where the economy contracted for two years in row.

The first case was in 2002 and 2003 when two consecutive recessions pushed the Social Democrats-Greens government of the time to introduce aggressive labour market and welfare reforms that were credited with elevating Germany to an internationally envied level of competitiveness. "The is a clear alarm signal that Germany and Europe must take seriously," DIHK head Martin Wansleben said in a statement.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz blamed the sluggish global economy for Germany's weak economic performance, adding that Germany was still an attractive location for new large-scale projects following the recent announcement of new batteries, chips, cars and pharmaceuticals plants that will be built in Germany.

The European Commission on Thursday said Germany will be the biggest drag on euro zone growth this year and next, with growth of only 0.3% in 2024 rather than 0.8% expected in November and 1.2% in 2025, after a 0.3% recession last year.

The government next week will publish its economic growth fore-

cast for this year. A source with knowledge of the matter said Berlin will slash its growth forecast to just 0.2%, although still a much more optimistic forecast than the DIHK's. Finance Minister Christian Lindner said on Wednesday growth projections were "embarrassing and dangerous from a social perspective", as Germans' dissatisfaction with their economic situation has prompted a series of strikes across the country.

"If we do nothing, our country will fall behind ... Then Germany will become poorer," he said at an event in Potsdam.

Nearly three out of five companies see Germany's economic policies as a business risk, the survey showed, adding that 33% of firms plan to reduce investments in the country in the next 12 months, while 24% said they planned expansion.

The ruling coalition of Chancellor Olaf Scholz wants to present proposals to strengthen Germany as a business location by spring. Analysts say this could include tax reform and cutting bureaucracy.

Economist Clemens Fuest, head of the Munich-based Ifo institute, said the high level of uncertainty about the future course of economic and climate policy had contributed to Germany's weak growth.

"A central problem is that the federal government does not have a convincing medium-term growth strategy," Fuest said in an interview with Rheinische Post newspaper published on Thursday.

DIHK's Wansleben said legislation that obliges German companies to scrutinise human rights and environmental issues in supply chains globally must be suspended as it places an onerous burden on larger companies. A sharp rise in interest rates to fight inflation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine had also slowed the economy, he said.

(Reuters)



▲ Germany's DIHK chambers of industry and commerce warned on Thursday that Europe's biggest economy will shrink by 0.5% this year, in a second year of recession and its worst downturn in two decades..

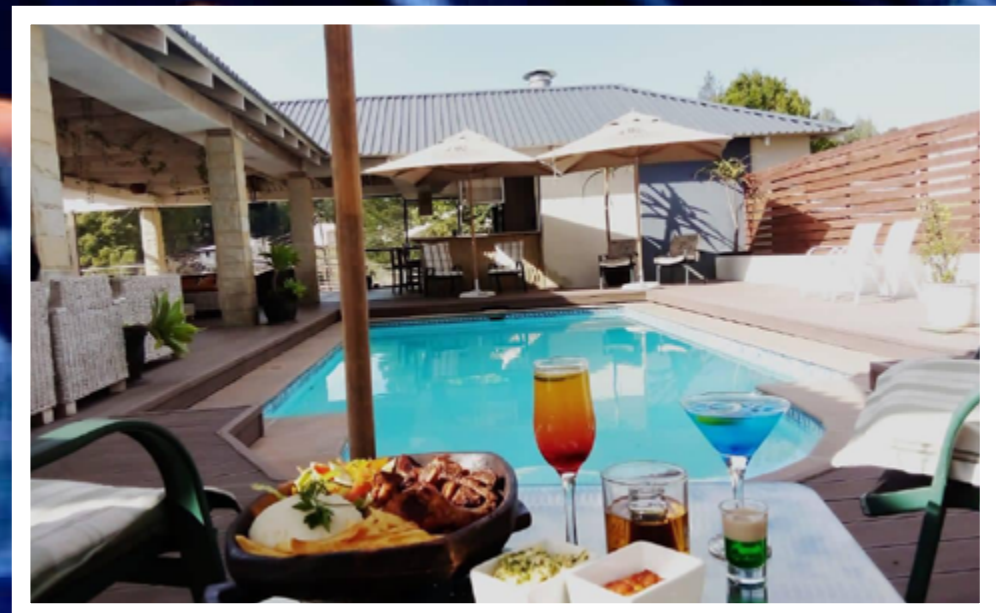
Lifestyle

THE COMEDY TRAILBLAZERS: RONNIE & KING MORA

inside



Preserving cultural
heritages in Africa



Love nests across
Eswatini

Siphesihle Dlamini

“A DOSE of laughter keeps the doctor away.” In a world filled with chaos and uncertainty, there is one powerful weapon that can bring solace and healing to the human spirit: comedy.

Laughter, they say, is the best medicine, and it seems that this age-old adage rings volumes, even in the most trying of times. From the stages of stand-up clubs to the screens of our devices, comedy has become a lifeline for many, offering a much-needed respite from the burdens of everyday life.

Comedy not only tickles our funny bones but also helps us maintain our sanity and nurture our overall well-being. In Eswatini, recently emerged a talented comedy duo, Ronnie, and King Mora. The pair has risen to greater heights.

They boast a good following of over 23,000 Facebook followers. They have two recent videos that are gunning for 200,000 views on Facebook. We caught up with the duo to understand what makes them tick.

Eswatini Sunday (ESN): Who is Ronnie and King Mora?
Ronnie Sikhondze (RS): Ronnie & King Mora are two young passionate rising comedic duo hailing from Mpolonjeni in Siteki. Ronnie whose full name is Thembelihle Ronnie Sikhondze, is a 24-year-old intellectually gifted guy.

He ventured into comedy through public speaking at school where he first represented his high school in numerous public speaking competitions and eventually used his on-stage ability to also venture into comedy with his humorous jokes. King Mora on the other hand, whose real name is Zamokuhle Dlamini is a 26-year-old funny and talented guy who also has a natural ability to make people laugh mostly with his funny expressions that catch almost everyone's eye.

ESN: How did you meet King Mora?
RS: Our meeting was what we call a divine appointment made in heaven. We were fresh from passing the secondary level of education in our respective schools. King Mora was schooling at St Joseph's High School while I did mine at Ndangu Lutheran High (Mpolonjeni).

So, upon passing Form 3, he then had to relocate back to Mpolonjeni since he was residing in Manzini because of his education. Initially he was supposed to finish his High School at Siteki Nazarene High School but unfortunately for him and fortunately for us, he was rejected and failed to secure a place in Form 4 at that school for some reasons.

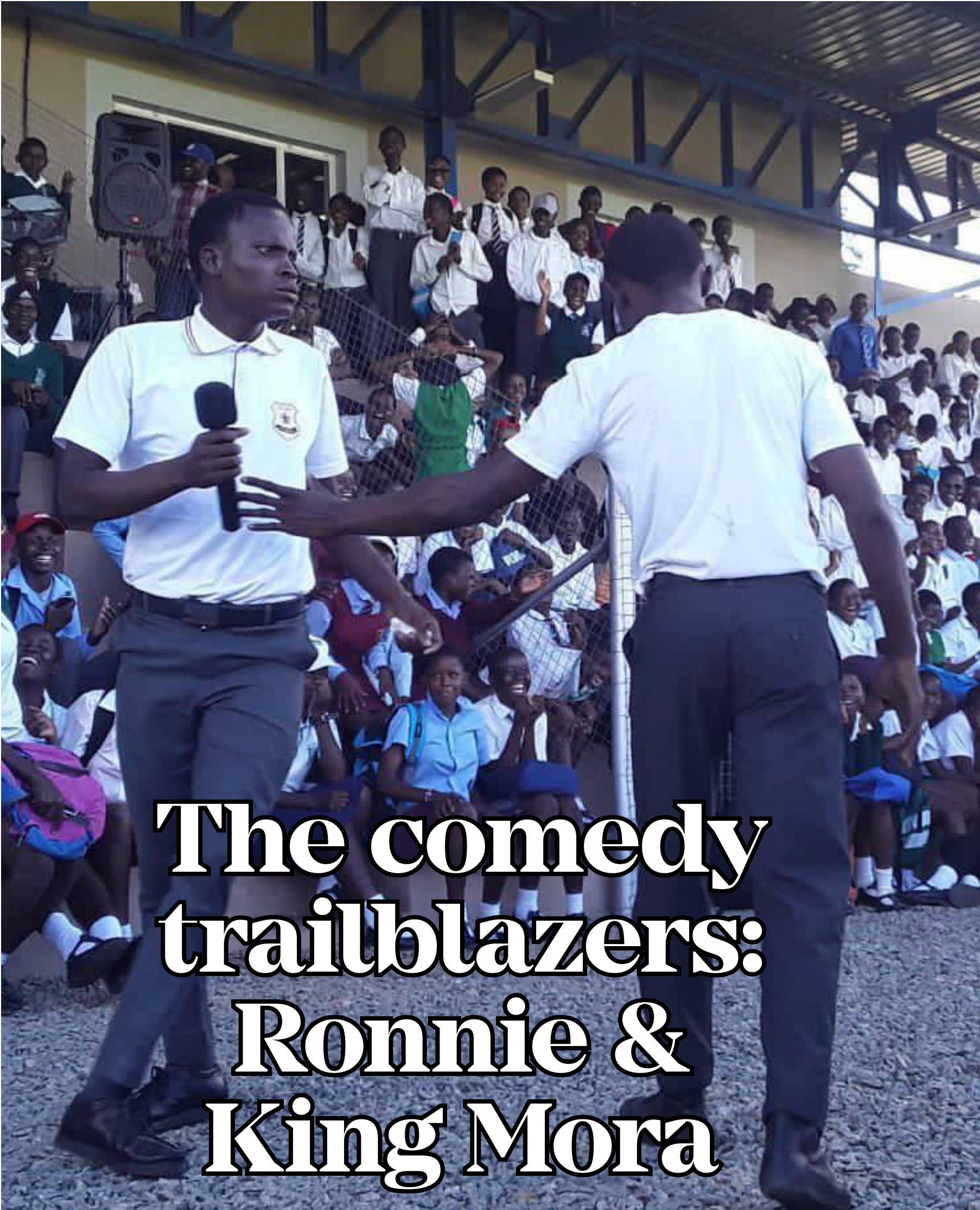
He then applied for a place at my school. When he came to my school, he found a place and was registered in Form 4 but at that time I was not present. I had plans to finish high school at Sinceni High School. We met each other, discovered each other's potential, and decided to give it a try.

We formed a partnership then and there. We first asked our teacher to give us some time at the School's Assembly in the morning to try whatever we had planned together and to our surprise, we did exceptionally well, and everybody loved us. We decided to push even more to where we are now.

ESN: Please tell us about your journey.
RS: We started doing this back in High School during our last years at that level. We would be frequently given some time by our schoolteachers to entertain them. The students believed in us, and we excelled.

Our performances at school then convinced our then Sports Teacher (Mr Dlamini) to advise us to try and perform at the school athletics competition that was held at Simunye Stadium where about five schools were present. At first, we had stage fright, but as the day of the competition drew closer, we told ourselves that we had to be strong and face the challenge before us.

We started believing in ourselves and the exposure I got through public speaking helped me overcome my fears and convince Mora that we could do this. The day came and it was time for us to entertain the whole crowd which packed the stadium to full capacity. The



▲Ronnie and King Mora performing for students in 2020.

MC called us on stage, and we responded.

Note that when we came on stage, we were hardly known and that was evident in the low number of people who welcomed us on stage with a round of applause. Nonetheless, we got on stage and did our thing. We found our rhythm and the crowd started to explode and burst into endless laughter such that even our performance earned us a standing ovation. From there, we gained popularity.

ESN: How has your journey so far?
RS: It has been an amazing journey; I would not lie. This is the fourth year we have been together, and we have grown bigger and better. We have bagged two nominations at the Eswatini Creators Awards. One back in 2021 when I, (Ronnie) was nominated at the then Social Media Awards under the category of Best Comedian Award. Most recently, we bagged another nomination together this time around at the Eswatini Creators Awards under

the same category of Best Comedian.

Despite failing to win the coveted award on both occasions, we remain optimistic and determined towards greater success and strongly believe that our day is coming when we will scoop the award. Everything happens in God's time so by his grace we will win it.

ESN: Who do you both look up to?
RS: The funny part about this is that we don't necessarily

have a role model, especially in the country. However, we do look and hope to follow in the footsteps of some country's finest comic talents like Mdura, Smallz and Gogo. And possibly, by God's grace, achieve and reach much greater heights.

Having a role model would mean imitating that person. We aim to improve ourselves and reach heights that have never been reached before, as we are big dreamers.

ESN: Tell us about your comedy style and how you come up with your material.
RS: Our comedy is a clean one. We do clean jokes that can fit any environment. Whether you are young or old, our jokes are so clean that even almost anyone can find joy and laughter in them. We create jokes from everything we come across in our daily lives, whether it's socially or economically.

However, we try to refrain from cracking jokes based on religion and politics to avoid any misconceptions or controversy. We don't believe in the creation of jokes that might lead to conflicts.

ESN: How is stand-up comedy different from skits?
RS: Stand-up comedy is very different from normal skits. Stand-up comedy is more difficult as you must come up with really funny jokes that will entertain your crowd. The last thing you want as a performer is to fail to impress your audience.

Also, stage fright is real as sometimes you are required to face a big audience live. If you are weak, you might not be able to pull off a great performance. An advantage of stand-up comedy is that it pays money unlike the skits, which barely pay. Stand-up comedy is where we get paid; the ticket sales and bookings are what put food on the table, unlike the videos.

In our country, we are unfortunate that Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok views don't pay royalties as it does in other countries. So, the skits we do are normally to generate hype and market ourselves so that we can get bookings from companies and other promoters.

Skits also enable us to market ourselves so that by the time we get a big following, the possibility of hosting successful shows becomes higher.

ESN: Who is the funniest between the two of you, and who comes up with brilliant jokes?
RS: We are both funny but King Mora is funnier, especially in the skits we do. He is normally the one who delivers the jokes and as I have said, he is naturally gifted in portraying funny expressions which is also evident in our videos. On the other hand, I am the one with the brains.

I normally come up with jokes and scripts and let King Mora best portray them. I am the most intellectually gifted in stage performances. Mora can create intellectual jokes that can even appease all sectors of society and classes, thanks to his premium quality English. Mora has also developed a skill to create jokes as he sometimes shoots content alone, which then goes viral.

ESN: How has your growth been?
RS: We have witnessed massive growth. It has been phenomenal. Three years ago, we had about 4 000 followers but right now we have grown so much that we are currently at 23 000 plus followers. The audience is now growing at a rapid rate.

We plan to grow our brand through marketing. We are also planning to venture into YouTube to create an account and build a good following there. We want to push our content on all our social media platforms to reach more and more people.

ESN: Who would you like to collaborate with in future?
RS: We would love to collaborate with our comedy elders including Gogo & Slwane, as well as Mdura. They are more established comedians in the country and better experienced than us. Collaborating with them would also give us that much-needed experience moving forward.

ESN: Any advice for upcoming artists?
RS: Be consistent in your work. Accept criticism as it is normal but don't let it block in your way. Also, never fear challenges. They come to strengthen you. Building a good image is not always easy, one must be strong, and consistent to keep the dream alive.

Paul McCartney's stolen Beatles bass guitar found after 51 years

LONDON — A stolen Hofner bass guitar belonging to Paul McCartney and used to record The Beatles' first two albums has been found and returned after 51 years following a global hunt.

The guitar, dubbed the "most iconic lost musical instrument of all time" by the team behind the search, The Lost Bass Project, was used in Beatles singles including 1963 hits "She Loves You" and "All My Loving."

"It's the bass that started Beatlemania," Nick Wass, one of the founders of the search team, told Reuters.

"That's why it's important, it's the one that got it going."

A public appeal by the project last year was shared around the world.

"As a result of the publicity someone living in a terraced house in Hastings on the south coast of England contacted Paul McCartney's company and then returned the bass to them," the Lost Bass Project said. The instrument was returned last year, but this was only announced on Thursday.

The instrument was stolen from a van in the Notting Hill area of London in October 1972, the search team said, citing information received during their investigation.

"The guitar has been authenticated by Höfner and Paul is incredibly grateful to all those involved," a spokesperson on McCartney's website said.

Wass told Reuters the bass guitar was "somewhat damaged" with a crack in the neck, a damaged bridge



▲Musician Paul McCartney.

that would need replacing and pickups that did not work anymore.

"But they can be sorted out, the neck can be repaired and we can make it playable again," Wass said.

In 2015, a guitar stolen from the late John Lennon in the 1960s sold for \$2.41 million at an auction in Beverly Hills, California. The person in possession of it said he originally bought it without knowing its connection to Lennon. (Reuters)

BAFTA Film Awards: Will lead nominee 'Oppenheimer' be the big winner?

LONDON — The historical drama "Oppenheimer" leads nominations for the BAFTA Film Awards in London this weekend, but will the movie about the making of the atomic bomb during World War Two, which has already picked up prizes elsewhere, be the winner on the night?

Directed by Briton Christopher Nolan, "Oppenheimer", one of last year's highest-earning movies, has 13 nods at Britain's top movie honours, followed by sex-charged gothic comedy "Poor Things" starring Emma Stone, with 11.

"The Zone of Interest", about a family living next to Auschwitz, has nine nominations, and like "Poor Things", it is in the running for outstanding British film.

"Because it is the BAFTAs, you do get this local love. So you might see a bit more wins for 'The Zone Of Interest,'" Digital Spy movies editor Ian Sandwell told Reuters.

"...But I just feel 'Oppenheimer' is so strong in all the categories that it's going to end up with most of the wins."

"Oppenheimer" dominated the Golden Globes with five wins and leads nominations for next month's Academy Awards.

At the BAFTAs, it will compete for the best film alongside "Poor Things", "Killers of the Flower Moon", about the murders of members of the Osage Nation in the 1920s, courtroom drama "Anatomy of a Fall" and "The Holdovers", a comedy set in a boys' boarding school.

"I think 'Oppenheimer' certainly for best film," Tim Richards, founder and CEO of cinema operator Vue International, told Reuters.

"Chris Nolan is...a Brit and...with the BAFTAs, he's certainly one of the most highly respected and much-loved directors in the business and I think he's got to be



▲Christopher Nolan, Emma Thomas, Cillian Murphy, Emily Blunt, Robert Downey Jr., Florence Pugh and Matt Damon attend a photo call for "Oppenheimer" in London, Britain.

in there for best director as well."

Based on the 2005 biography "American Prometheus" by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, "Oppenheimer" features Cillian Murphy as the American theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Murphy and Stone currently lead betting odds to win the leading acting categories. Da'Vine Joy Randolph has already picked up several awards for her supporting actress role in "The Holdovers" and is widely expected to win again at the BAFTAs. But will Murphy's "Oppenheimer" cast mate and fellow Golden Globe winner Robert Downey Jr. also triumph for supporting

actor?

"I think (supporting actor) is the one where it's most likely we'll get a bit of a surprise, and I think it'll be Paul Mescal (for 'All of Us Strangers')," Sandwell said.

"Barbie", the highest-grossing film of 2023, has five nominations overall, but the omission of Greta Gerwig from the director category raised some eyebrows.

"Barbie" was...the clear one that seems to have been passed over both by the Academy (Awards) and by BAFTA members and it's a mystery why," Richards said. The BAFTAs will be held on Sunday at London's Royal Festival Hall. (Reuters)

Spotlight on the importance of preserving cultural heritages in Africa

The African continent, just like all continents, carries with it heritages and cultures that are always under threat of extinction or destruction by modern innovations.

Think of a piece of clothing or item in your childhood, which you wish you had not discarded. But as you grew older, you adopted new lifestyles and trends that rendered those items “unfashionable” or “irrelevant”. That was until you realise, decades later, that it was in fact an important part of your heritage that should have been kept and preserved.

Cultural heritage in the spotlight

This preserving of cultural heritage was revived during a four-day event held at the Radisson Hotel in Rosebank, Johannesburg this week.

“When we look at the manner in which our heritage is being cared for in many countries across Africa, we are losing important historical material,” said Charlotte Ashamu.

She has held significant roles at institutions such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank. Ashamu is now director of international programmes at Yale institute for the preservation of cultural heritage. She is a well-known expert in the creative economy.

Madiba's items were up for auction

Ashamu mentioned that just last week, Madiba's personal belongings were on standby for an auction, which was then suspended. South Africans watched in disbelief as news of the impending auctioning of the late Nelson Mandela's personal items broke.

The prospect of having part of his legacy disappear into oblivion left a bitter taste in many mouths. This is especially because he is not just another African leader. He is a footnote in African history.

An icon whose name is set to live forever. It's still perplexing, if not heartbreaking, to note that the country will soon “lose” his personal

items to the highest bidder. His identity document and hearing aids were some of the items that were to be auctioned. In reality, those items belong in a museum of African history, preserved for future generations.

Cultural institutions

“The question we are asking ourselves is ‘Where are the cultural institutions that can protect and preserve these items, collections which should be cared for and serve the people?’” She added.

She was in charge of the four-day inaugural physical gathering. The Radisson Red Hotel event was aimed at supporting museums and cultural enterprises across Africa.

The Yale Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH) hosted the gathering.

The Yale Directors Forum, IPCH's premier international programme, is a global fellowship for museum and cultural institution leaders.

Partnerships with global stakeholders

This unique project will create a dynamic network of senior executives, educational initiatives and strategic partnerships with universities and global organisations.

The first day had a conference room at the Radisson Red Hotel filled on Tuesday with artist and leaders from across the world. They each brought an object that they valued. Each shared a story on why they would preserve that. Whether it was a story attached to culture, a childhood experience or a person.

Ashamu told Sunday World that each individual determines the value of an item in their possession. This is before some else can give their approval or add a price thereon.

Over the four days, the programme hosted speakers such as Mae-ling Lokko. Mae-ling

Lokko is and architectural scientist, designer and professor at Yale University's School of Architecture. Veteran South African lawyer and human rights activist Albie Sachs, and Brent Leggs. Leggs is the founding executive director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund.

Coaching services on preservation and care of collections

The institution has an 18-month programme that offers a participant-centred learning journey. This features interactions with leading experts at Yale and across the globe. It also features personalised executive coaching and advisory services. These are centred on the preservation and care of collections.

It is understood that in its first batch, IPCH has chosen 17 fellows from 12 African nations. Prominent figures in this varied group include Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, a multidisciplinary artist and cultural activist from Ghana. Wanjiru Koinange, an award-winning writer and library restorer from Kenya. Makhosi Mahlangu, a renowned chef, food entrepreneur, and expert in native foods from Zimbabwe.

MaXhosa designer brand on board

Award-winning designer and founder of MaXhosa Africa, Laduma Ngxokolo, has worked hand in hand with Ashamu to preserve some of his items.

Ashamu said their engagement with MaXhosa has to do with the fact that he had to spend time in research and learn about his heritage. He started that journey by looking at museum collections. This he did in order to build a global fashion brand

“We want to engage with Ngxokolo because we want to look at ways the the collections at museums can serve young people. Especially those youngsters with bright ideas who want to innovate. Who want to create businesses, learn and enrich their own understanding of who they are,” said Ashamu.

Guest speaker

Ngxokolo was a guest speaker on Tuesday. Alongside him was Nonstikelelo Mutiti, who is director of graduate studies for graphic design at Yale school of art. Jennifer Harrison Newman, associate artistic director at the Schwarzman center, Yale university, was also guest speaker. (Sunday World)



▲Charlotte Ashamu , director of international programs Yale institute for the preservation of cultural heritage, is spearheading the preservation of African cultural heritages.

Tobago's tourism, fishing hit as oil slick spreads across Caribbean



▲Workers of Oil Mop Environmental Services (OMES) suction oil from a spill at Magdalena Grand Resort, in Tobago Island, Trinidad and Tobago.



▲Heavy machinery removes sand from a shore impacted by an oil spill at Magdalena Grand Resort, in Tobago Island, Trinidad and Tobago.



Curtis Williams

SCARBOROUGH — Nine days after a slick was first spotted by Trinidad and Tobago's Coast Guard, an oil leak from a capsized barge remains unplugged, according to first responders and authorities, prompting nations across the Caribbean to coordinate a response.

The spill has spread miles from Tobago's shore, the area first hit by the incident. Trinidad this week alerted neighbours Venezuela and Grenada on possible impact to their coasts.

The Caribbean Disaster Management Agency, dependent on regional group Caricom, has activated a contingency plan, the head of Tobago's Emergency Management Agency (TEMA), Allan Stewart, said on Friday.

A barge pulled by a tugboat caused the spill, but details of the incident remain unclear, including the type of petroleum leaking, the ship's intended destination, the owner and if any members of the crew were lost.

By Thursday, the slick had reached about 144

km (89 miles) into the Caribbean Sea and was moving at a rate of 14 km (9 miles) per hour, authorities said.

“This looks like it will continue for a few weeks. I cannot simply sit down and do nothing,” said Edwin Ramkisson, who makes a living fishing for snapper and salmon in Lowlands, on Tobago's Atlantic shore. “I need help cleaning my boat before moving to another port on the Caribbean side.”

The barge is believed to have carried as much as 35,000 barrels of fuel oil, Tobago's officials have said. The spill has blackened the island's beaches, affecting wildlife and tourism.

Several beach and golf resorts in Tobago that typically receive foreign tourists have been forced to close access to the ocean. The nearby Scarborough cruise ship port is being protected from the spill by containment booms.

Priority

Trinidad is considering declaring a Tier 3 emergency that would allow it to obtain foreign assistance to deal with the spill, Prime Minister Keith Rowley told Parliament on Friday.

First responders and volunteers in Tobago have so far collected about 2,000 barrels of oil, but the island is short of protective equipment for volunteers and crews, TEMA said.

The Trinitarian government's next task is to empty the vessel in a controlled operation. “The vessel is, as of now, still stuck on the reef at Cove and continues to pose a major threat as it continues to foul the coastline and surrounding seas,” Rowley said.

The twin-island nation's government said the ship's origin was Panama and it was bound for Guyana. However, monitoring service TankerTrackers.com has said the barge-tugboat combo was seen in satellite photos near Venezuela's Puerto La Cruz refinery in late January, and it was headed to St. Vincent and Grenadines days before the spill.

Venezuela's oil minister Pedro Tellechea told reporters on Friday the vessel “has nothing to do” with state oil company PDVSA or Venezuela, but the country is collaborating with Trinidad's investigation including the oil's type.

Brazil also has offered help, Trinidad's government said. Grenada did not reply to a request for comment. (Reuters)

By Siphesihle Dlamini
siphesihled@rubiconmedia.group

It has been a beautiful Valentine’s week, where love and enchantment intertwined.

As ‘Valentine’s Week’ comes to an end, echoes of affectionate whispers still linger in the air, a question arises - where can one find the perfect haven to conclude this amorous journey?

Fear not, for we have uncovered a range of sanctuaries, where warmth and tranquillity embrace, where love finds its final refuge.

The White Orchid Day Spa

Situated within Ramblas Restaurant premises, stepping inside The White Orchid Day Spa, a wave of tranquillity showers you. Soothing music, soft lighting and the gentle scent of essential oils create a haven of relaxation. Plush robes and comfy slippers pamper your senses further. From classic massages, manicures, pedicures, and facials to invigorating body scrubs and exotic wraps, the menu caters to diverse needs. Trained therapists personalise treatments based on your preferences and pressure points. The White Orchid Spa has friendly and professional staff members who greet you with warm smiles and ensure your comfort throughout. They readily answer questions and explain treatments clearly. This Valentine’s season, a visit to a body spa can be a delightful escape from the daily grind. Whether seeking deep relaxation, targeted muscle relief, or simply some pampering ‘me-time,’ a well-chosen spa can offer a rejuvenating experience.

Sibebe Resort

Located in Pine Valley, Sibebe Resort is a leisure site placed atop a behemoth granite rock. Upon arrival, guests are greeted by breathtaking vistas of the iconic Sibebe Rock, rising majestically against the azure sky. Lush gardens meander through the resort, creating a sense of tranquillity and inviting exploration. Spacious, elegantly appointed suites provide havens of relaxation, adorned with handcrafted Swati décor and boasting privacy and unveiling a captivating panorama. Unwind by the sparkling infinity pool, indulge in rejuvenating spa treatments, or savour delectable meals prepared with fresh, local ingredients at the onsite restaurants. Every detail at Sibebe exudes an air of understated luxury, ensuring an unforgettable escape. Sibebe Resort goes beyond providing breathtaking landscapes and thrilling activities; it serves as a bridge to the rich cultural heritage of Eswatini. Immerse yourself in the vibrant tapestry of Swati traditions through authentic dance performances and guided visits to local villages. This Valentine’s season, visit the resort that offers activities such as quad biking, ziplining, and hiking. Visitors may also take a cool dip in the infinity pool or tap into their playful side by utilising the pool slides. Sibebe provides a platform for genuine cultural exchange, fostering understanding and appreciation for the Swati way of life.

Mphangele Lodge

Mphangele, the smallest of Mbuluzi’s lodges, is a cosy family-style lodge on the banks of the perennial Mlawula River. With its splendid, ancient leadwood trees, lush green lawn, palm trees, and wooden deck over the river, it is an extremely pleasant place to relax in the bushveld of the game reserve. The lodge has an open-plan kitchen and sitting area, and from the adjacent outdoor thatched verandah, visitors often see nyala and kudu browsing past. The lodge is fully equipped for self-catering, and the central rooms and all bedrooms are air-conditioned. The lodge’s two double rooms and one single room are decorated in bushveld style and are inside the central lodge area.

To access Mphangele Lodge, guests cross a low-level bridge over the Mlawula River, where kingfishers, legavaans (water monitor lizards) and crocodiles abound- it is an excellent spot to enjoy the nature of the Lowveld.

Vovovo Lodge

Vovovo Lodge is named after the lovely big examples of the Schotia brachypetala trees that impose over the site. The setting along the beautiful Mlawula River, the large trees and the great view make it a perfect place to relax and enjoy our lowveld bush. The lodge is made up of 4 large and comfortable ensuite rooms with a bath and shower. Each is fully equipped for a good night’s sleep and has air conditioning, a bar fridge, as well as a coffee and tea station. Several different combinations of Twin and Double bed options can be made up (two rooms as King and two can be either King or twin as needed). The impressive main lodge area has a fully equipped open-plan kitchen leading into a comfortable lounging area set above a large outside entertainment space. The covered terrace includes an indoor braai area looking onto the large pool and sunbathing deck. Adjacent to the main building, overlooking the river and under a huge Vovovo tree is a spacious campfire arena with another braai facility that is perfect for sitting around and soaking up the bush atmosphere. Visitors are encouraged to bring their bicycles and walking shoes to go on rides, runs, walks, and hikes. The reserve boasts kilometres of beautiful trails, with some incredible sightings along the way.



▲ BK Lodge and Conference Centre offers so much tranquillity.



▲ Interior at Vovovo Lodge.

The perfect haven

... where warmth and tranquillity embrace, where love finds its final refuge.



▲ Brookside Lodge poolside. (Inset) Mabuda Guest Farm.

● If you are looking for peace and tranquillity to refresh your senses, this is the place to be. You can make it a special time to bond with your family. You can also unwind on the 9-hole miniature golf course or take a dip in the swimming pool.

Mabuda Guest Farm

Settled atop the majestic Lubombo Mountains in Eswatini, Mabuda Guest Farm is not just an accommodation; it is an experience. Nicknamed “Place of Dreams”, this working farm offers a tranquil escape amidst breathtaking scenery, rich farm life and genuine Swazi hospitality. It is renowned as the place where time stands still. A brush of nature where the wind whispers tales of bygone days and the dust clouds drift like shadows behind the old Ford tractors. The beauty and tranquillity of the surrounding farm life are two of Mabuda’s best features. It is recognised for its variety of indigenous bush, birdlife, insects, and frogs. All of which can be enjoyed on any of the farm walks or horse rides. Breathe in the crisp mountain air and soak in panoramic views of rolling valleys and distant peaks. Explore diverse terrains and discover indigenous flora and vibrant birdlife. Horseback riding adventures weave through fields and forests, offering a unique perspective of the farm’s beauty. Choose from various accommodations, each

imbued with rustic charm and character. Rondavels, traditional African huts, provide a cosy experience close to nature. Chalets boast modern amenities and private verandas with stunning vistas. Camp beneath a starry sky, enjoying the simple pleasures of the outdoors. Savour delicious meals prepared with fresh, homegrown ingredients. Start your day with a DIY breakfast overlooking the valley and indulge in farm-to-table lunches served at the “Green Shed” Coffee Shop. Do not miss the chance to try their renowned coffee, grown and roasted right on the farm. Whether you seek adventure or relaxation, Mabuda caters to diverse interests. Take a dip in the refreshing swimming pool, unwind with a nature walk, go horse riding, or join a coffee tour to learn about the bean-to-brew process. Explore nearby historical sites and cultural wonders, immersing yourself in the rich heritage of Eswatini. Mabuda has two marked self-guided nature trails which start at The Green Shed. One is 5km (Blue) and the other 15km (Red).

Asante Guest House

Asante Guest House is your home away

from home. Situated close to Manzini City Centre, this charming Cape-Dutch building with ten well-appointed rooms makes it the choice of residence for both travellers and locals alike. Asante Guest House offers quality service and comfort, within a friendly and homely atmosphere. The staff are friendly, gracious, and trained to pamper guests’ every need. Fresh home-cooked breakfasts can be enjoyed as part of your stay. The guest house also boasts its restaurant, Marimba, which offers a broad menu and specialises in cuisine from the African Continent. Guests can enjoy lunch and dinner or sample cool refreshments from the bar.

In addition to being a Guest House that offers quality accommodation, Asante also offers services such as:

- Car wash (nominal fee charged).
- Conference facilities for up to 40 people in the conference centre, and up to 15 in the meeting room.
- Shopping trips into our cities.
- Guided tours, both internally and outside our borders.
- Overnight ‘Cultural experiences’ into the village to get a feel of the real ‘Swazi

Experience’.

- Enjoy a massage in the privacy of your room.
- Taste some of our African cuisine Restaurant Marimba.

BK Lodge and Conference Centre

BK Lodge is situated in the bountiful mountains of Nkoyoyo in Mbabane covered in greenery and picturesque forestry. The lodge includes a restaurant, bar, private restaurant, and pool. Offerings include free Wi-Fi, breakfast inclusive, high security and turnover service and free parking. BK Lodge also offers a free shuttle service to the main capital. BK Lodge also caters for weddings, baby showers, kitchen parties, birthday parties, picnics, and family gatherings. BK Lodge offers al le carte, set menu, outside catering and buffet options. The restaurant is open daily from 8 am to 9 pm and provides international cuisine and local cuisine including traditional food. The lodge offers 3 bars, a pool bar, a main bar, and a private bar. BK Lodge has two conference rooms, one large room which can accommodate 25 people and a smaller room which can accommodate 15 people. Both rooms come with all the amenities.

Brookside Lodge

Under Eswatini skies of the picturesque Malkerns Valley lies the tranquil Brookside Lodge close to the Phondo Royal Residence. Attendees can experience an indulgent time away at Brookside Lodge and connect with nature in their self-catering and bed and breakfast accommodation for a relaxing holiday. Brookside Lodge offers visitors a taste of Eswatini’s warm hospitality in the comfortable fully serviced luxury self-catering accommodation.

It is only a stone’s throw away from major tourist attractions, the Mlilwane game sanctuary, craft shops, entertainment centres, House on Fire, golf courses, casinos, and the international airport. Enjoy the beautiful gardens, breathtaking views of the sunset, mountains, and lots of birdlife. Come and check out the mini farmyard, rabbits, poultry, sheep, and resident pet dogs, ‘Boss and Spot’ roaming the grounds. If you are looking for peace and tranquillity to refresh your senses, this is the place to be. You can make it a special time to bond with your family. You can also unwind on the 9-hole miniature golf course or take a dip in the swimming pool. Towels are provided from reception. There is also a kiddies’ swimming pool and play area for them. Fishing is also possible on a catch-and-release basis in the rainy season. Guests can do their cooking or have a meal in our restaurant on-site. The units are serviced daily and have satellite TV, aircon, fans, room safes, en suite bathrooms and their own private patio and braai facilities. Ask at reception if you need a hairdryer or iron and ironing board. A laundry service is offered at a nominal charge.

By Rachel Savage

JOHANNESBURG - Africa’s economic growth fell to 3.2% last year from 4.1% in 2022, the African Development Bank said on Friday, but it projected higher growth this year for all regions except central Africa.

The AfDB said political instability and China’s economic slowdown were compounding the shocks of COVID-19 and Russia’s war in Ukraine.

The final figure for 2023 was below the 3.4% growth the AfDB had forecast in November. It also cut its regional growth estimates for central and north Africa, amid a recession in oil producer Equatorial Guinea and the aftermath of devastating flooding in Libya.

“The shocks buffeting African economies since 2020 have damaged growth, with long-term implications,” the bank said in a report.

Despite the shocks buffeting the region, 15 African countries posted economic growth of more than 5% last year, the AfDB said, including Ethiopia, which is restructuring its external debt, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius and Rwanda.

Growth

The bank forecast faster growth in all regions except for central Africa in 2024, with southern Africa seen as remaining the laggard at 2.2% compared with 5.7% in east Africa.

Southern Africa’s “sluggish performance reflects the continued economic stagnation in South Africa,” the bank said, with the region’s largest economy, which holds national elections this year, predicted to grow 1.1% in 2024, up from 0.8% last year.

“This underwhelming economic situation has aggravated the country’s persistently high unemployment, poverty, and inequality and prevented it from reaping democratic dividends in the 30 years since the end of White minority rule,” AfDB said.

Nigeria, West Africa’s largest economy, is set to grow 2.9% in 2024, up 0.4 percentage points from last year as a sharply devalued currency pushes up inflation, exacerbating a cost of living crisis.

In Egypt, high inflation and foreign exchange shortages are forecast to drag growth down to 3.7% this year, versus 4% in 2023.

(Reuters)



▲ The AfDB said political instability and China’s economic slowdown were compounding the shocks of COVID-19 and Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Egypt aborts controversial pyramid renovation plan

CAIRO - Egypt has scuttled a controversial plan to reinstall ancient granite cladding on the pyramid of Menkaure, the smallest of the three great pyramids of Giza, a committee formed by the country’s tourism minister said in a statement.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, announced the plan last month, declaring it would be “the project of the century”.

But news that the ancient monument might be altered quickly drew an international outcry, prompting Egypt’s antiquities authority to review the project. The pyramids are the only one of the seven wonders of the ancient world that still remain.

Alone among the pyramids, Menkaure was designed to be clad in granite rather than limestone. Only 16 to 18 layers of granite were installed before construction was halted, apparently because of Menkaure’s death in about 2503 B.C.

Over the centuries, pilfering, weathering and collapse caused many layers to disappear, leaving only seven layers in modern times, although numerous fallen granite blocks remain strewn around the pyramid’s base.

Waziri said the project to replace the granite would proceed only after a year of scanning and documentation.

“The Menkaure Pyramid Review Committee has unanimously objected to the reinstatement of the granite casing blocks, scattered around the base of the pyramid since thousands of years ago,” the committee said in a statement on Thursday.

Zahi Hawass, a former minister of antiquities who headed the committee, said it would be impossible to determine where each block had originally been. Replacing them would also require cement, which would ruin the pyramid.

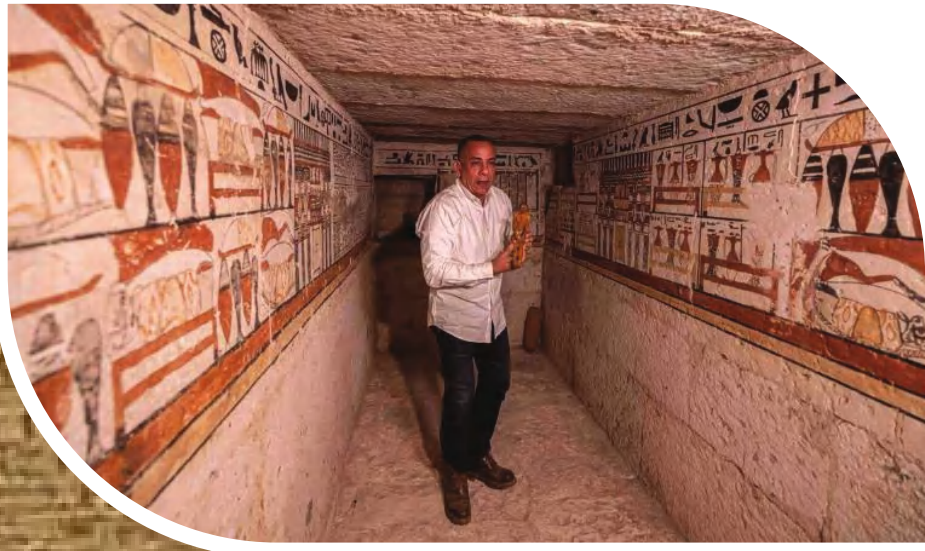
“What I want to say is don’t worry, the pyramids of Giza are safe, and nothing will happen to them,” Hawass told Reuters.

“People everywhere are calling me, writing letters, emails. They are worried. Don’t be worried at all, the pyramids are safe, and no one can touch the pyramid of Menkaure.”

The seven-member committee gave initial consent to excavate Menkaure pyramid’s boat pits, akin to the Pharaonic bark pits found alongside Khufu’s pyramid adjacent to Men-

kaure’s, but only after a “clear and detailed scientific study”.

“In archaeology, don’t be in a hurry. If you are in a hurry, you will ruin the site,” Hawass said. “It is important for any kind of work to be done at the site of the pyramids, is to make a study and to tell us what to do.” (Reuters)



▲ Mostafa Waziri (Inset), secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, announced the plan to reinstall ancient granite cladding on the pyramid of Menkaure last month, declaring it would be “the project of the century”.

Blinken sees ‘extraordinary’ opportunity for Israel to normalise ties with neighbours

By Humeyra Pamuk

MUNICH - There is “an extraordinary opportunity” in the coming months for Israel to normalise ties with its Arab neighbours, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Saturday, while also emphasizing the need for the creation of a Palestinian state. The top U.S. diplomat said there were genuine efforts led by Arab countries to revitalize the Palestinian Authority so it can be more effective in representing the Palestinians.

“Virtually every Arab country now genuinely wants to integrate Israel into the region to normalize relations... to provide security commitments and assurances so that Israel can feel more safe,” Blinken said during a panel discussion at the annual Munich Security Conference.

“And there’s also, I think the imperative, that’s more urgent than ever, to proceed to a Palestinian state that also ensures the security of Israel,” he added.

The Biden administration has been working to secure a mega-deal that will see ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel normalize. The Kingdom and other Arab countries are seeking the creation of a Palestinian state as part of the deal.

Washington is also working to achieve a deal to secure the release of Israeli hostages kidnapped by Hamas on Oct. 7 when the group crossed the border into Israel and mounted one of the deadliest attacks on the country in decades.

The hostage deal and the humanitarian pause are seen as instrumental in helping advance

conversations on a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which had been frozen in the immediate aftermath of the attack but have resumed in recent months.

Talks on the structure of Gaza when the war ends, and how the Palestinian Authority - which exercises limited self-rule in some areas of the occupied West Bank - needs to be reformed to potentially rule the densely populated enclave and identify a pathway for a Palestinian state are all variables in the same equation, according to U.S. officials.

(Reuters)



▲ U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. The top U.S. diplomat said there were genuine efforts led by Arab countries to revitalize the Palestinian Authority so it can be more effective in representing the Palestinians.

European Commission outlines upcoming defence strategy proposal

MUNICH - The European Commission will present a defence industrial strategy proposal in three weeks, commission president Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday, and will also open a defence innovation office in Ukraine.

“Europe has to step up its industrial base ... I’m a convinced transatlanticist and at the same time we have to build a strong Europe and that goes hand in hand,” von der Leyen told a panel at the Munich Security Conference.

She said the proposal aimed to increase defence spending, “spend better” with joint procurement and agreements to provide predictability to industry and better interoperability between Europe’s armed forces, and focus spending in Europe to keep “good jobs” for taxpayers footing the bill.

She added that Ukraine must be integrated into Europe’s defence programmes as Russia was “outmassing Ukraine” with soldiers and by “throwing quick and dirty weapons produced in North Korea and Iran”.

On the financial aid side, von der Leyen said it was in the U.S. interest to pass a bill - currently stalled in Congress - to provide more aid to Ukraine as the measure was symbolic of democracies standing up to autocrats.

“It is not only about Russia’s war in Ukraine and Putin’s attempts to destabilise democracies but all the other autocratic adversaries that we are watching very closely ... whether the democracies stand united, are determined, show resolve.”

She also said that if re-elected as head of the European Union executive, she would create the new post of defence commissioner.

In February, the EU agreed to provide a fresh aid package to Ukraine of 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) over the next four years on top of the 88 billion euros already spent since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

“It is a question of will democracies globally prevail?” von der Leyen said.

(Reuters)



▲ European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Stop whining about Trump and focus on Europe’s interests, Dutch PM says

MUNICH - Outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the frontrunner to be the next secretary-general of NATO, said on Saturday that Europe should stop whining about Donald Trump and focus instead on what it could do for Ukraine.

Former U.S. President Trump has sparked outrage in Europe, saying that if re-elected in November he would not defend NATO allies who fail to spend enough on defence. “We should stop moaning and whining and nagging about Trump,” Rutte told the Munich Security Conference.

He added: “It’s up to the Americans. I’m not an American, I cannot vote in the U.S. We have to work with whoever is on the dance floor.”

He said Europe should in any case be spending more on defence and ramping up ammunitions production, not just because Trump might come back.

He said Europe needed to increase its support for Ukraine because it was in its interests.

Rutte, who unexpectedly announced his departure from Dutch politics in July, has said he does not know if he is being considered a front-runner to lead NATO and would not start a personal campaign. “And all that whining and moaning about Trump. I hear that constantly over the last couple of days. Let’s stop doing that,” Rutte said, adding that after talking with U.S. politicians in Munich he was “cautiously optimistic” that a U.S. military aid package that has stalled would eventually pass.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has been in post since 2014 and is due to step down in October 2024.

His term was extended in July for a fourth time, as the alliance’s 31 members opted to stick with an experienced leader rather than try to agree on a successor with Russia’s war in Ukraine raging on NATO’s doorstep. Before NATO decided to stick with Stoltenberg, diplomats said Rutte would have been a strong candidate to succeed him, but the Dutchman had insisted he was not available at that time. (Reuters)



▲ Outgoing Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.



▲ In February, the EU agreed to provide a fresh aid package to Ukraine of 50 billion euros (\$54 billion) over the next four years on top of the 88 billion euros already spent since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Man City stumble in Premier League title race

MANCHESTER - Rodri's late goal salvaged a 1-1 Premier League draw for Manchester City against Chelsea on Saturday as the below-par champions narrowly avoided their first home loss in 15 months.

Pep Guardiola's team, unbeaten in their last nine league games, remained third in the table on 53 points, four behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but with a game in hand.

"We weren't great in the first half," Rodri told Sky Sports. "We conceded another easy goal. We knew about their counter-attacks and fast players, but we have to defend the counter-attack better. From there, it's always more difficult to come back," he added.

"We (defended better) in the second half... more spirit, we wanted the ball and wanted to take risks. You have to be brave."

City's decision to park in Chelsea's half proved costly as Nicolas Jackson's deft flick

... As late Rodri goal salvages point for the league champions

began a counter-attack in the 42nd minute. He sent a perfect pass behind the defence to Raheem Sterling, who rounded City defender Kyle Walker and curled the ball past keeper Ederson to score against his former team.

"We countered them well so I think it is a fair result in the end," Chelsea midfielder Conor Gallagher told Sky. "(The second half was) really hard. The lads were brilliant and defensively we were very focused. We were very tired but we saw it through and we are happy with the performance."

After numerous near-misses that had the City fans holding their heads in frustration, Rodri equalised in the 83rd minute after Walker's shot was blocked with a thunderous shot that deflected off Trevoh Chalobah into the net. Victory would have given City the chance

to go top of the table when they host Brentford on Tuesday but the draw with Chelsea means they can climb no higher than second.

City tested Chelsea's back line with 31 shots to the visitors' nine, but only five were on target.

Prolific striker Erling Haaland, who leads the league with 16 goals, was frustrated by numerous near-misses including an unmarked late close-range header the Norwegian sent over the bar before covering his face in disbelief.

Chelsea had their chances including Jackson's one-on-one with Ederson and the City keeper saved a point-black shot by Sterling early in the second half. City have not lost at the Etihad since a defeat by Brentford in November, 2022. (Reuters)



▲ Rodri's late goal salvaged a 1-1 Premier League draw for Manchester City against Chelsea on Saturday as the below-par champions narrowly avoided their first home loss in 15 months.

Klopp endorses Alonso as a new generation 'standout' coach

Xabi Alonso is an incredible talent from the new generation of managers given his impressive run at Bayer Leverkusen, soon to depart Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.

The former Liverpool and Real Madrid midfielder has been linked to the upcoming opening at Anfield after Klopp announced last month that he will step down at the end of season.

Alonso guided Leverkusen from near the bottom of the Bundesliga to a five-point lead at the top within 16 months. The 42-year-old coach secured a spot at the German Cup semifinals and notably defeated serial champions Bayern Munich 3-0 last weekend.

"Xabi is doing an incredible job," Klopp said on Friday.

"If you would have asked me eight weeks ago about Xabi Alonso, I would have gone 'Oh my God!' Always what I said, the dinosaurs if you want, Ancelotti (Carlo), Mourinho (Jose), Guardiola (Pep), maybe me, we will not do it - okay, maybe Mourinho - but all the rest will not do it for the next 20 years.

"The next generation is already there and I would say Xabi is a standout in that department... Former world-class player, from a coaching family as well which helps a little, he was like a coach already when he was playing. The football he is playing, the teams he sets up, the transfers he did, it is absolutely exceptional."

Klopp added that he is not involved in the search for his successor as that is to be decided by the owners of the Merseyside club.

The 56-year-old, who has had his fair share of achievements in the German league from his time at Borussia Dortmund, praised Alonso's immediate but potent implementation of strategies despite only taking on the role in October 2022.

"How quick his team is that well tuned, for the time it's taken, he's put his proper stamp on it," Klopp added.

(Reuters)



▲ Xabi Alonso is an incredible talent from the new generation of managers given his impressive run at Bayer Leverkusen, soon to depart Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.



Jordan Spieth takes responsibility for Genesis Invitational disqualification

Jordan Spieth admitted to signing for the wrong score at The Genesis Invitational at Riviera on Friday as the former U.S. Open champion was disqualified for the first time in his career.

The PGA Tour said that the former world number one had signed at the end of the second round for a three on the par-three fourth hole when he had made a four.

Spieth's disqualification was his first in 263 tournaments played on the PGA Tour.

"Today, I signed for an incorrect scorecard and stepped out of the scoring area, after thinking I went through all procedures to make sure it was correct," the 30-year-old wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"Rules are rules, and I take full responsibility.

"I love this tournament and golf course as much as any on the PGA Tour so it hurts to not have a run at the weekend."

Tiger Woods will also be missing from the final two rounds of the tournament after the 15-times major champion withdrew on Friday due to illness.

(Reuters)



▲ Jordan Spieth admitted to signing for the wrong score at The Genesis Invitational at Riviera on Friday as the former U.S. Open champion was disqualified for the first time in his career.

Holder Daniil Medvedev withdraws from Qatar Open

Daniil Medvedev said he will not defend his Qatar Open title next week as he has not returned to full fitness after the former world number one pulled out of the ongoing event in Rotterdam citing a foot injury and fatigue.

The Russian has not played since losing to Jannik Sinner in the Australian Open final last month.

"Unfortunately, I am not able to defend my title in Doha this year. I am still not 100% ready to compete," the 2021 U.S. Open champion said on Instagram.

"I am very sorry for the tournament, the fans, and the sponsors of the event who have always treated me so well when I was in Doha. I love playing in Doha and look forward to coming back in the future."

Medvedev beat Andy Murray in last year's final.

Spaniard Rafa Nadal also pulled out of the ATP 250 tournament, which will be held in Doha from Feb. 19-24, as the 22-times Grand Slam champion continues to struggle with injury.

(Reuters)

Goal-happy Arsenal stay hot on Liverpool's heels

LONDON - Arsenal's goal rush continued unabated as they thrashed Burnley 5-0 to stay right in the slipstream of Premier League leaders Liverpool who thumped Brentford on Saturday.

Liverpool took advantage of their early kickoff to stretch their lead to five points with Mohamed Salah scoring on his return from injury in a 4-1 victory in west London.

But Arsenal were undaunted and followed up their 6-0 win at West Ham United last weekend with a 5-0 victory at Turf Moor.

Liverpool have 57 points from 25 games with Arsenal on 55 and champions Manchester City, who were kicking off later at home to Chelsea, in third place on 52 from 23.

Aston Villa climbed back into fourth place courtesy of a 2-1 victory at Fulham and Tottenham Hotspur's 2-1 home defeat against Wolverhampton Wanderers.

After a dip in form at the end of last year, Arsenal have now won five league games in a row and scored 21 goals in that sequence, conceding only two.

They were far too good for a Burnley side hurtling towards relegation and once Martin Odegaard opened the scoring in the fourth minute the result was a formality.

Bukayo Saka made it 2-0 from the penalty spot in the 41st after a foul on Leandro Trossard and Saka struck again just after the break for his 12th league goal of the campaign.

Trossard made it 4-0 and Kai Havertz added a fifth as Arsenal sent out another big title statement.

"At the moment all we can do is win our games and after our big two wins away from home we have a tough one in the Champions League at Porto," manager Mikel Arteta said.

"I hope we can do it (win the title) because we are there but it is about consistency and you see the standards of the other teams. We want it, that's for sure."

Liverpool were equally impressive at Brentford as they welcomed back talisman Salah who marked his return after a six-week absence due to a hamstring injury sustained while with Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations. Darwin Nunez opened the scoring with an exquisite chip, and goals after the break from Alexis Mac Allister and Salah effectively ended the contest.

Ivan Toney pulled one back for Brentford, but Cody Gakpo grabbed Liverpool's fourth to wrap up a comfortable win.

"We played an exceptional game," man-



▲ Arsenal's goal rush continued unabated as they thrashed Burnley 5-0 to stay right in the slipstream of Premier League leaders Liverpool who thumped Brentford on Saturday.

ager Jurgen Klopp said, although he will be anxiously assessing more injuries after Curtis Jones and Diogo Jota were taken off in the first half and Nunez failed to emerge after halftime.

"We have problems, probably we don't know exactly how big they are, but we have them. But as long as we have 11 players, we will go for it," added Klopp, whose title-chasing side face Luton Town in midweek.

Villa edged back in front in the battle for fourth as Ollie Watkins underlined his England credentials with both goals in the 2-1 victory at Craven Cottage.

Unai Emery's side had to dig deep after Rodrigo Muniz pulled a goal back but held on to leapfrog Tottenham back into the Champions League qualifying berths.

Villa have 49 points from 25 games with Tottenham slipping down to fifth with 47 points after their five-game unbeaten run was ended by an impressive Wolves.

Brazilian Joao Gomes scored both goals for Wolves, the second after a super counter-attack, with Dejan Kulusevski equalising for a disappointing Spurs.

Nottingham Forest secured three vital points in their fight to avoid relegation as they beat West Ham United 2-0 to pile more pressure on Hammers boss David Moyes.

Taiwo Awoniyi struck early for Forest and Callum Hudson-Odoi sealed the victory late on. Forest moved up to 15th place with 24 points, five ahead of third-bottom Everton who face 16th-placed Crystal Palace on Monday.

West Ham, now winless in six matches, had Kalvin Phillips send off midway through the second half.

Seventh-placed Newcastle United twice came from a goal down to draw 2-2 at home to Bournemouth.

(Reuters)

Ancelotti unfazed by latest reports Mbappe to join Real

MADRID - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti on Saturday breezily dismissed reports of French forward Kylian Mbappe joining the LaLiga giants when his contract at Paris St Germain ends after this season, insisting he was more focused on his next opponents.

A source at PSG told Reuters on Friday that Mbappe would leave PSG in July although the terms of the agreement had not been decided and it might be months before any official announcement.

"I understand it's the topic of the day for you, but for us it's tomorrow's game (against Rayo Vallecano)," Ancelotti told a press conference on Saturday.

"We have to do well. That's what is on my mind."

Mbappe, 25, was heavily linked with a move to Real in 2022 but then announced a contract extension with PSG.

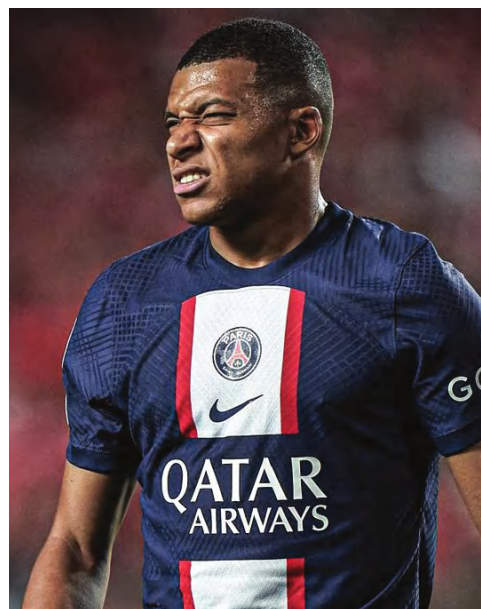
Peppered with questions about whether he would like to have the French striker in his team and whether he was talked about in the Real dressing room, Ancelotti ducked and dived in his usual easygoing way.

"We talked about the match. We know it's a vital match for this season," he said.

"People can talk, I understand that. I would like to finish this season well, to win titles. There is plenty of time to think about next season."

Real, on top of LaLiga on 61 points, dealt a massive blow to Girona's title hopes last Saturday with a 4-0 thrashing.

Girona, second on 56 points, have another tough challenge on Monday away at in-form Athletic Bilbao, who have not dropped a point



▲ Kylian Mbappe is set to leave PSG this summer with a potential move to Real Madrid.

at home since October.

Ancelotti's Real, fresh from beating RB Leipzig 1-0 in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday, will look to take another step towards reclaiming the title when they play at lowly Rayo on Sunday.

And their manager seems to accept that Mbappe's shadow will loom over Real's daily routine and his own regular contact with the media until the player's future is clear.

"Do you see me affected (by the questions about Mbappe) now? No, no... I know press conferences will be like that from now on," he said with a smile.

(Reuters)



▲ Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti on Saturday breezily dismissed reports of French forward Kylian Mbappe joining the LaLiga giants when his contract at Paris St Germain ends after this season, insisting he was more focused on his next opponents.

World silver medallist Katir banned two years

MONACO - Spanish runner Mohamed Katir has admitted to an anti-doping violation for three whereabouts failures and has been banned for two years, meaning he will miss this year's Paris Olympics and the 2025 world championships in Tokyo.

The 25-year-old is the world record-holder in the indoor 3,000 metres and the European record-holder in the outdoor 5,000m. He won silver in the 5,000m at the world athletics championships last year in Budapest, and bronze in the 1,500m at the worlds in Eugene, Oregon a year earlier.

Katir announced his provisional suspension in a Feb. 7 statement, saying

then that he would appeal the ban, however, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said on Friday that he had signed an admission of violation and acceptance of consequences form this week.

Katir admitted to three whereabouts failures in 2023, on Feb. 28, April 3 and Oct. 10. His two-year period of ineligibility will run until Feb. 6, 2026.

"Without accurate Whereabouts information, anti-doping organisations cannot properly execute no-notice, Out-of-Competition testing that is the key to catching anyone who is doping and trying to gain an unfair advantage," AIU head Brett Clothier said in a statement. (Reuters)



▲ Spanish runner Mohamed Katir

Buccaneers raid Brazilians for a point

MAMELODI Sundowns dropped points for the third time in four games after they were held to a 1-1 draw by 10-man Orlando Pirates at Loftus Versfeld on Saturday.

Having seen SuperSport United and Cape Town City fail to win their respective matches in the last 24 hours, Rulani Mokwena's side weren't able to capitalise as the gap to their closest two rivals remained at nine points.

The Buccaneers are now winless in their last three outings and find themselves one point behind Stellenbosch (4th) and two ahead of arch-rivals Kaizer Chiefs (6th) in fifth place.

Sundowns came into the encounter with the intent of keeping their unbeaten start to the season intact, while Pirates were looking to arrest a two-match losing streak which had left them 13 points adrift of the league summit.

The visitors made a bright start in Pretoria and carved out the first chance of the game after just three minutes when Makhehlene Makhaula advanced towards goal from deep before firing straight at Ronwen Williams.

Evidence Makgopa also drew a routine save out of Williams with a curler from out on the left in the 15th minute and the Bafana Bafana striker threatened again six minutes later with a shot from a tight angle that was well saved by his international teammate following good link-up play with Deon Hotto.

Header

Williams had to be alert to deny Tapelo Xoki from a free-kick in the 28th minute before Masandawana finally fashioned their first chance on the half-hour mark as Peter Shalulile steered a header just wide of the goal from Marcelo Allende's cross.

It remained all square at the break and Bucs were quickly out of the blocks in the second half as Makgopa flicked a header straight into the clutches of Williams on 48 minutes.

But they suffered a setback six minutes later when Miguel Timm received his marching orders for a second yellow card, having already been booked early in the first half.

Sundowns would make their numerical advantage count 22 minutes later as Lucas Ribeiro won the ball back just outside the opposition box and Marcelo Allende tucked his shot into the bottom left corner of the net.

Their lead lasted a mere four minutes though, after the referee pointed to the spot for a foul on Tapelo Xoki inside the area and the defender took the penalty himself, blasting the ball down the middle with Williams committed to one side.

Shalulile had the best chance to win it soon afterwards when he got on the end of Gaston Sirino's cross, but the Namibian striker couldn't keep his header down as it sailed over the crossbar.

The Brazilians are next in action against TS Galaxy at the Mbombela Stadium on Wednesday, 6 March, while Pirates head to the Peter Mokaba Stadium for a clash with Polokwane City on Saturday, March 2.

PSL.co.za



▲ The champions' launch of their 2024 challenger, the RB20, on Thursday.

Red Bull's new car may have moved the goalposts again

LONDON - Formula One teams will go testing with some trepidation in Bahrain next week amid fears Red Bull may have again stolen a march with an aggressive evolution of the most dominant car of all time.

The champions' launch of their 2024 challenger, the RB20, on Thursday will not have provided much comfort for rivals still playing catch up from last season when Red Bull won 21 of 22 races.

"I think there will be a few other teams' technical departments going 'holy shit', where do we go from here?" commented former Jordan, Stewart and Jaguar designer Gary Anderson on www.the-race.com

Red Bull's triple world champion Max Verstappen said his reaction on seeing the first drawings at the end of last season was "Wow, that's quite different".

The main focus concerned the new-look Red Bull side pods, now with tall and slim vertical radiator inlets that looked similar to those attempted and abandoned by former champions Mercedes last season.

Team principal Christian Horner said the car was an evolution of the RB19 but acknowledged it was not conservative and contained real innovation.

He said the changes were driven by performance based on simulation tools. "You can see they've been quite aggressive in certain areas and still pushing the boundaries, conscious that our opponents are still going



to be pushing very hard," he said at the presentation. "Some of the detail on the car is absolutely exquisite."

Star designer Adrian Newey said the

team had made improvements to all areas -- mechanical, vehicle dynamics and aerodynamics. "Is that enough? Who knows. That's the

thing about Formula One," he said. "We know roughly what we've done from the

shakedown at Silverstone, from what we can tell it's behaved as we expect it to but that's no guarantee of anything. It could be that some other team has made a bigger jump than us.

"Last year's car really was a total surprise in terms of its dominance."

The fear is that Red Bull may have moved to another level of development while rivals, some of whom have said openly that they consider the champions to be beatable, launched cars clearly influenced by the RB19.

"I believe we've made some good steps in the right direction so it should be another great season for the team," said Red Bull's Mexican Sergio Perez.

Teams have three days of testing in Bahrain from Feb 21-23 before the opening race on March 2.

"It's a bit like waiting for Christmas. It is exciting," said Mercedes technical director James Allison of the pre-season 'phoney war' period and the uneasy mix of anticipation and trepidation.

"You want it to arrive, and you want the days to fly by. You also know that the Christmas Day opening of those presents might not bring you all the good fortune you wish for.

"It's not a relaxing time of year, but it is very exhilarating." (Reuters)



▲ Former South Africa all-rounder Mike Procter.

Former SA player, coach Mike Procter dies aged 77

FORMER South Africa all-rounder Mike Procter, the country's first coach of the post-isolation era and a stalwart with English county Gloucestershire died aged 77 on Saturday, his family announced.

"He suffered a complication during surgery and while in ICU went into cardiac arrest. He became unconscious and unfortunately never woke up," his wife Maryna told South African website News24.

Procter was a fierce fast bowler and hard-hitting batter who played seven test matches, his international career stunted by South Africa's isolation due to apartheid.

But upon their return in 1991, he led the side as coach, taking them to the semi-finals of the World Cup in Australia the following year.

He was later also appointed to the International Cricket Council's panel of match referees and also served as South Africa's convener of selectors.

Procter played 401 first-class games, scoring 21,936 runs at an average of 36.01 with 48 hundreds and 109 fifties. He also took 1,417 wickets at an average of 19.53. (Reuters)



Which 'Bird' will rule the roost?



... As Nsingizini Hotspurs host Mbabane Swallows in the pick of the week 17 fixtures at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium on Sunday (today)

By Lwazi Dlamini
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SUNDAY:
Nsingizini Hotspurs vs Mbabane Swallows
Venue: King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium
Kickoff time: 2:30 pm

IT'S the battle of the 'Birds' at King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium on Sunday!

How ironic that the two sides met on the same date and same venue last year where Swallows emerged 2-0 winners! Second-placed Mbabane Swallows will face off with the host, Nsingizini Hotspurs currently languishing in the seventh spot after a record-breaking nine draws in 16 matches.

While Mbabane Swallows are on cloud nine after annihilating National First Division side, Pigg's Peak Rangers 4-0 to book a place in the semi-finals of the Ingwenyama Cup, Nsingizini Hotspurs are still smarting from the crunch 1-0 loss to Green Mamba in last Saturday's fiercely contested clash of the Ingwenyama Cup quarter-final.

The Shiselweni-based side, buoyed by a fervent crowd at Mayaluka Stadium beautifully clad in their unmistakably green and white team replicas and emahiya, were left crest-fallen and would be hoping to use this A-Category clash at home to ease the enduring pain of being booted out of the richly sponsored tournament.

As club President Derrick Shiba ran half the length of the pitch at Mayaluka Stadium to join his players in applauding the travelling fans on the far eastern part of the stadium, he would know quite well that victory at home could revive their flagging league fortunes.

Defeat or a tenth draw in 17 matches

would leave a bitter taste in the mouth once again. Swallows, chasing the first league trophy in six years, are in a fierce battle for the league honours with all three security forces teams and know victory on Sunday is non-negotiable if Caleb Ngwenya is to win the second league trophy of his career. At the moment their camp resembles a casualty ward with Felix Badenhorst's long-term injury, Sandile Hlatshwako, and Kwakhe Thwala also doubtful for Sunday's crunch clash.

Coach Caleb Ngwenya will be hoping Hlatshwako, Kwakhe Thwala and Sifiso Mabila can all be available against 'Insingi Yezulu' who are a hard nut to crack at home. Swallows have won two of the three meetings between the two sides with Nsingizini's only victory coming on December 4, 2022, just a week after winning the first MoMo Cup.

Swallows got their revenge in the second round, beating the Shiselweni-based outfit 2-0 at home on February 19, 2023, the same date and venue they will meet again this time around. Swallows also won the first-round encounter 1-0 on October 25, 2023, but you can expect fireworks when the two sides meet on Sunday. It is a clash not for the faint-hearted.

LAST SEASON'S RESULTS:

1st round:

4-12-2022:

Mavuso Sports Centre:

Mbabane Swallows 1 (Bashir Mutanda 16th)
Nsingizini Hotspurs 2 (Mayibongwe Mabuza 45+2, Mancooba Vilakati 84th)

2nd round:

19-02-2023:

King Sobhuza II Memorial Stadium:

Nsingizini Hotspurs 0 Mbabane Swallows 2 (Kingsley Kwayiki 5th, Felix Badenhorst 21st)

2023-24 season:

First round results:

25-10-2023:

Swallows 1 Nsingizini Hotspurs 0

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

► Thubelihle Mavuso (Nsingizini Hotspurs)

When Lionel Messi, God's gift to football, first shone brightly for Spain's FC Barcelona, he was a twinkling youngster wearing jersey number 19 for the Catalans.

Thubelihle Mavuso may not be a Lionel Messi, far from it, but his educated left foot is a joy to watch when it has the pig's skin attached to it for jersey number 19 of 'Insingizi Yezulu'. He has been a revelation for the green and white outfit, scoring some crucial goals this season. He was overshadowed by the experience of Njabulo 'D4D' Ndlovu in the Ingwenyama Cup quarter-final clash and will be hoping to come to the party against Swallows on Sunday.

► Ayanda Gadleta (Swallows)

He is probably the best signing for Swallows in the past two seasons. He has asserted himself in a Swallows side undergoing a transition under the tutelage of experienced gaffer Cale Ngwenya.

He has an eye for goal and his off-the-ball runs have helped shred many defences to shreds, opening space for his fellow strikers to come in and score crucial goals. If Nsingizini Hotspurs are to come out of the 90 minutes with a point or three then this is the man they need to keep under lock and key.





Played on Saturday:

Moneni Pirates	2-3	Young Buffaloes
M. Highlanders	1-1	Royal Leopard
Madlenya FC	0-0	Manzini Wanderers
Rangers FC	1-1	Manzini Sea Birds
Denver Sundowns	0-4	Green Mamba
Illovo FC	0-0	Ezulwini United