



### U.S. strengthens health sector with donation of 14 vehicles

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# Eswatini charts bold path to digital transformation

By Kwanele Dhladhla

THE Kingdom of Eswatini has taken a major step toward reshaping its digital future with the announcement that the Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM), under the leadership of Chief Executive Mvilawemphi Dlamini, will embark on a comprehensive study of the communications sector.

This initiative forms part of the broader Eswatini Digitalisation Strategy (2024-2028), spearheaded by the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT). Guided by the theme “Government in Your Hand”, the national strategy aims to leverage digital technologies to spur economic growth, improve the efficiency of public service delivery, and foster greater social inclusion.

The communications sector, encompassing telecommunications, broadcasting, postal, and courier services, sits at the heart of this digitalisation drive. Despite notable progress, particularly in mobile broadband coverage, the sector continues to grapple with deep-rooted challenges.

According to the World Bank, Eswatini faces persistent hurdles, including high data costs, limited fixed broadband penetration, and weak digital skills among both consumers and enterprises. Meanwhile, the broadcasting, postal, and courier sub-sectors remain structurally underdeveloped, undermining their ability to support inclusive economic growth and efficient service delivery.

In response, ESCCOM disclosed in the Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by Eswatini Public Procurement Regulatory Agency (ESPPRA) that it would be preparing

to launch a wide-ranging state-of-the-sector market study. The goal was to establish a comprehensive baseline of the communications landscape, identify barriers to growth, and recommend policy and regulatory reforms that will unlock the sector’s full potential.

“The study will allow us to take stock of where we are, highlight what is working, and, most importantly, provide actionable insights to strengthen the competitiveness and inclusivity of our communications space,” ESCCOM explained.

**The study will cover three priority areas:**

- **Telecommunications:** mapping infrastructure such as backbone networks, towers, and data centres; analyzing competition and pricing structures; and assessing service affordability, quality, and consumer satisfaction.
- **Broadcasting:** evaluating the sector’s structure, performance, and capacity; identifying barriers to entry; and mapping both licensed and unlicensed service providers to ensure content diversity and fair competition.
- **Postal and courier services:** examining the sector’s regulatory environment, modernization prospects, and integration with emerging digital commerce platforms.

The consultancy leading the study will be tasked with designing and implementing data collection tools—including surveys, interviews, and questionnaires—and engaging a wide spectrum of stakeholders. These will range from government and industry opera-



▲ ESCCOM CEO Mvilawemphi Dlamini. ESCCOM aims to take stock of the sector to civil society and consumers.

Through this inclusive approach, ESCCOM intends not only to capture the technical and economic realities of the sector but also to give voice to ordinary citizens whose experiences as end-users are critical to shaping meaningful reforms.

The resulting report will provide a set of detailed findings, insights, and strategic recommendations that will guide regulatory, investment, and policy decisions in the coming years.

For Eswatini, the stakes are high. Digitalisation has increasingly been recognised as a key driver of sustainable development, with the potential to bridge social divides, empower entrepreneurs, and position the country competitively in the regional and global economy.

“Communications are no longer a luxury; they are the backbone of modern life. By strengthening this sector, Eswatini will ensure that every citizen, business, and institution has a fair opportunity to participate in and benefit from the digital economy,” Dlamini emphasised.

The ESCCOM market study is expected to be completed within the implementation window of the Eswatini Digitalisation Strategy (2024-2028). Once finalised, its findings will be shared with stakeholders and inform concrete reforms across the communications spectrum.

By embarking on this bold review of the communications sector, Eswatini is laying the foundation for a digital future that prioritises affordability, accessibility, and innovation. The outcome will not only reshape the country’s regulatory and policy frameworks but also pave the way for greater efficiency in public service delivery, stronger economic resilience, and improved quality of life for citizens.

In an increasingly interconnected world, Eswatini’s determination to place digitalisation at the centre of national development sends a clear message: the future is digital, and the Kingdom intends to embrace it fully.

## U.S. Govt strengthens health sector support with donation of 14 vehicles



▲ U.S. Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Marc Weinstock joined by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Khanyakwezwe Mabuza alongside representatives from the benefiting units during the handover ceremony.

By Thokozani Mazibuko

THE United States Government has reaffirmed its longstanding partnership with Eswatini’s health sector through a significant donation of 14 vehicles to various departments within the Ministry of Health.

The vehicles, funded by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), were officially handed over on Monday in Mbabane.

The handover ceremony was led by U.S.

Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Marc Weinstock, who presented the fleet to the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Khanyakwezwe Mabuza, alongside representatives from the benefiting units.

Speaking during the event, CDA Weinstock emphasized the United States’ continued commitment to supporting Eswatini in addressing public health challenges.

“PEPFAR and the U.S. Government remain committed to supporting countries in maintaining the response we have jointly built,” he said. “We look forward to continued collaboration under the United States’ new Global Health Strategy that was released at UNGA last week. These vehicles

that we hand over today represent resources provided by the United States.”

The donation comes at a crucial time as the Ministry of Health continues to strengthen service delivery and scale up responses to critical diseases, including HIV/AIDS, cancer, and tuberculosis. The 14 vehicles will be distributed across several programmes and departments to improve mobility, coordination, and outreach in communities across the country.

**The beneficiaries include:**

- Eswatini National AIDS Programme
- National Cancer Control Programme
- Health Promotion Unit
- Eswatini Health Laboratory Services

- Eswatini Health and Human Research Review Board
- National TB Control Programme
- Strategic Information Department

Receiving the donation, Principal Secretary Mabuza expressed gratitude on behalf of the Ministry and the Government of Eswatini, noting that the vehicles would greatly enhance the efficiency of health interventions.

“This generous contribution will make a tangible difference in our ability to deliver quality services to the people of Eswatini,” he said. “Reliable transportation is critical for timely outreach, monitoring, and delivery of health programmes. We are thankful to the United States Government and PEPFAR for their unwavering support.”

Over the years, PEPFAR has played a pivotal role in advancing Eswatini’s health sector, particularly in the fight against HIV/AIDS, where the country has made remarkable progress in reducing new infections and improving treatment outcomes. The newly released U.S. Global Health Strategy, which underpins this donation, prioritizes sustainability, equity, and stronger health systems areas that align with Eswatini’s own national health goals.

Ministry of Health Communication Officer Nsindiso Tsabedze pointed out in an interview with this publication that the vehicles had previously been utilised by other NGOs and hence the fact that they completed their designed programs, the US saw the Ministry’s need and handed over these vehicles.

It should be noted that the handover not only reinforces the U.S.-Eswatini partnership but also highlights the importance of international cooperation in building resilient health systems capable of responding to current and future challenges.

Stories by Delisa Magagula

# EGCSE/EPCSE, IGCSE Final Exams commence

THE Examination Council of Eswatini (ECESWA) has announced that the long-anticipated final examinations for the Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE), Eswatini Primary Certificate of Secondary Education (EPCSE), and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) will officially commence on Tuesday across the kingdom. Thousands of pupils in different schools will be sitting for the exams, which mark a critical milestone in their academic journeys.

Speaking to the press, ECESWA Communications Officer Hlengiwe Ndlovu confirmed that all examination centers are prepared to welcome candidates.

She also urged learners to approach the examinations with seriousness, dedication, and discipline. Ndlovu emphasized that malpractice in any form will not be tolerated.

“We wish to remind candidates that cheating, possession of unauthorized materials, or attempting to communicate with other candidates during the exams are serious offenses. Such actions not only compromise the credibility of the examinations but also put the futures of pupils at risk. We are calling upon all candidates to maintain honesty and integrity throughout the process,” Ndlovu said.

The EGCSE, EPCSE, and IGCSE examinations are standardized tests that assess pupils at different academic levels in Eswatini.

The EPCSE is written by primary school



▲ Thousands of pupils in different schools will be sitting for the exams, which mark a critical milestone in their academic journeys.

leavers, while the EGCSE is taken by secondary school students. The IGCSE, on the other hand, is internationally recognized and provides Eswatini students with opportunities for global academic advancement.

ECESWA has been administering these examinations for years to ensure uniformity, fairness, and credibility in the education system. The results from these exams often determine placement in higher education in-

stitutions or employment opportunities, underscoring their importance for both pupils and their families.

The council also revealed that measures have been put in place to ensure smooth administration of the exams, including the delivery of papers, security at exam centers, and the monitoring of procedures by invigilators. Ndlovu noted that malpractice has been a recurring challenge in past years,

with some candidates attempting to smuggle notes, electronic gadgets, or rely on impersonation. She warned that any pupil found guilty of malpractice risks cancellation of their results and possible disqualification from future examinations. Parents and teachers were also reminded to play their part in preparing and encouraging candidates, ensuring they arrive on time and in the right frame of mind for their tests.



## Watches and other items not allowed in Exam rooms

AS candidates gear up for the exams, ECESWA has released strict guidelines on items prohibited in examination rooms.

Among the banned items are wristwatches, which have been increasingly misused in recent years. According to Ndlovu, certain digital watches can store information or be used for communication, creating opportunities for malpractice.

“Candidates must not bring wristwatches of any kind into the examination rooms. This is part of international examination regulations, and invigilators will strictly enforce it,” Ndlovu stated.

Other items banned include mobile phones, smart devices, calculators (unless specifically allowed for a paper), notes, and any form of unauthorized reference materials. Bags, purses, and

pencil cases are also not permitted on desks during exams.

Instead, candidates are advised to only bring essential stationery in transparent bags or cases. Invigilators will conduct checks at entry points to ensure compliance. The council reiterated that these measures are not intended to inconvenience pupils but to preserve the integrity of the examinations.

Parents, teachers, and pupils are therefore urged to familiarize themselves with the rules to avoid unnecessary penalties or stress on examination days.

With final preparations underway, the spotlight is now on Eswatini’s pupils as they embark on one of the most important assessments of their academic lives.

The coming weeks will determine not only their academic standings but also future opportunities beyond the classroom.

## New Ngobojaneni suspension footbridge transforms life in Mpolonjeni

By Sipheshle Dlamini

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THE inauguration of the Ngobojaneni Suspension Footbridge in Mpolonjeni Inkhundla near Siteki marks a transformative moment for the local community, ending years of hardship caused by limited access to essential services and education.

This new infrastructure not only facilitates daily life but also embodies a broader vision of community empowerment and national development. Before the bridge’s construction, residents of Mpolonjeni faced significant challenges, especially during the rainy season when the river became impassable. Community Chairman Vusi Vilakati detailed the critical issues that the bridge now resolves.

Firstly, the education of children was severely disrupted as many missed school due to the dangerous crossing conditions. Secondly, the lack of reliable access hindered residents from reaching vital locations such as stores, hospitals, and workplaces, affecting their livelihoods and well-being. Lastly, emergency response and security were compromised because reporting crimes was difficult without a safe and quick way to reach the police station.

Despite its modest size, the Ngobojaneni Suspension Footbridge has a massive impact. Ana Jovanovic, Managing Director of Engineers



▲ New Ngobojaneni suspension footbridge.

in Action (EIA), expressed pride in delivering this project. Although it is the shortest bridge EIA has constructed, it is expected to serve the highest number of users annually, approximately 3,200 community members. Jovanovic highlighted that the bridge’s significance lies in its ability to create substantial positive change with relatively low investment, underscoring the efficiency and effectiveness of such community-focused infrastructure projects.

EIA’s core mission is to ensure that every liSwati has access to a safe crossing, and this bridge is a testament to that goal. Jovanovic also acknowledged the contribution of young Masons trained by EIA over recent years, who played a crucial role in the bridge’s construction, reflecting the organisation’s commitment to skills development and local empowerment.

The Ngobojaneni Footbridge represents a historic milestone for Mpolonjeni and Eswatini at large. It is the first “Tebe-tebe” style sus-

pension footbridge in the community, symbolising a new era of connectivity. Nationally, it is the 35th bridge built through the partnership between local communities and EIA, and notably the seventh completed this year alone, demonstrating the momentum and scale of this infrastructure initiative.

Sbusiso Mbingo, Director of the Microprojects Programme, praised the community’s dedication, with special recognition for the women whose consistent efforts have been vital to the project’s success. He also emphasised the importance of the partnership with EIA in realising these community-driven developments. Mbingo encouraged the Mpolonjeni community to remain actively involved in ongoing projects, such as road construction, to promote a sense of ownership and inspire younger generations.

These community-led projects align closely with the national ‘Nkwe’ directive under the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development.

# SBC delivers resilient results amid market pressures

## ... revenue rises to E231.4 mln

By Kwanele Dhladhla

SBC Limited has reported a resilient set of interim results for the six months ended 30 June 2025, demonstrating its ability to withstand sector headwinds in both Eswatini and Lesotho while continuing to invest strategically for long-term growth.

The socio-economic environment in both countries remained broadly stable during the reporting period. In Eswatini, headline inflation eased to 2.9 percent, with the prime lending rate steady at 10.25 percent. Lesotho's inflation hovered at 4.3 percent. Despite this stability, SBC faced subdued demand in Eswatini's payroll market, marked by intensified competition and more attractive loan terms from peers.

In Lesotho, elevated inbound settlements followed a Central Bank directive for traditional banks to assist in addressing over-indebtedness among government employees. This significantly inflated yields, though SBC cautioned that settlement-related benefits remain short-term in nature.

Notwithstanding these headwinds, SBC Group delivered above-inflation topline growth of 6.9 percent, with revenue rising to E231.4 million from E216.4 million in the prior comparative period. This performance was anchored by Select Limited in Eswatini and Lesana Lesotho, the group's principal

revenue drivers.

Stronger yields in Eswatini were driven by short-term product performance, while Lesotho's elevated settlement levels boosted returns. The gross loan book closed at E1.40 billion, consistent with the previous year, reflecting the Group's disciplined approach to preserving portfolio quality.

Direct expenses were tightly managed, increasing by only 2.31 percent. Bad debt provisions edged slightly higher, with impairments ending at 3.2 percent of the gross loan book compared to 3.0 percent in June 2024. Management, however, remained satisfied with overall collection rates across both markets.

The group reported a profit before tax of E18.6 million, a threefold increase on the prior year, underpinned by revenue growth, normalized interest income, and disciplined cost control. Operating expenses rose only 1.83 percent, well below the median inflation rate of 3.6 percent, highlighting management's strong focus on efficiency.

One factor weighing on profitability was the strategic investment in Ezabeni Property Holdings, concluded in late 2023. This involved converting an interest-bearing receivable into equity, resulting in the forfeiture of approximately E29 million in annual interest income. While reducing immediate profitability, the move secures land for the expansion of the group's innovative rent-to-own model and was expected to deliver fair value gains in the future.

Looking ahead, SBC stated that it would



▲ View of the Malkerns Square building.

advance its long-term property strategy. Plans are underway for the development of 400 to 500 residential units, including 150 affordable one-and two-bedroom units, with construction of the first 50 already underway in July 2025. These will be offered through straight sales, rental stock, and the pioneering Rent-to-Own scheme, which was set to expand home ownership to previously excluded market segments.

At the same time, SBC's property arm was pressing ahead with the second phase of Malkerns Park View retail centre, a 6,129 m<sup>2</sup>

high-end development expected to be completed by June 2026.

Management said these initiatives, alongside digital distribution channels for short-term products, would position the group to diversify revenue streams and counter payroll market pressures.

Overall, SBC Limited's half-year results reflect a balanced mix of financial discipline and forward-looking investment, ensuring resilience in the present while laying a foundation for sustainable growth in the years ahead

## Three constituencies gear up for UEDF recruitment races this week

By Kwanele Dhladhla

THE Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force (UEDF) recruitment exercise continues to gather momentum as three constituencies prepare to host the highly anticipated 3.2-kilometre qualifying races this week.

The events, which have attracted hundreds of aspiring recruits and spectators across the country, will provide another opportunity for young people to showcase their stamina, discipline, and determination in pursuit of a career in the nation's armed forces.

According to the official program, the first race will be held at Kukhanyeni Inkhundla on Monday, 30 September, starting at 08:00 a.m. Local youth are expected to turn out in large numbers, with supporters already mobilising to cheer on their communities' representatives.

On the same day, attention will shift to Nkomiyahlaba, where the afternoon race is scheduled for 30 September at 14:00 p.m. The double-header on Monday is expected to test the endurance of organisers and medical personnel, who will be on high alert to ensure safety and fair competition.

The recruitment marathon will then move to The Phondo Inkhundla, which will host its race on Wednesday, 02 October, at 08:00 a.m. Community leaders in The Phondo have reportedly encouraged youth to pre-



▲ The Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force (UEDF) recruitment exercise continues to gather momentum as three constituencies prepare to host the highly anticipated 3.2-kilometre qualifying races this week.

pare thoroughly, emphasising that discipline and commitment are key to success in the UEDF recruitment process.

The recruitment races form a critical part of the Defence Force's selection criteria. Successful candidates must not only demonstrate physical fitness through the timed run but also meet medical and academic requirements before progressing further in the enlistment process.

In recent weeks, the UEDF races have become more than just a recruitment tool; they have evolved into community spectacles. Families, friends, and residents from neighbouring constituencies have been flocking to witness the competition, creating a festive atmosphere around the disciplined environ-

ment of the military trials.

UEDF officials have stressed that the exercise is designed to be fair and transparent, giving every eligible youth an equal chance to compete for a spot in the Defence Force. The 3.2-kilometre run is seen as a test of not only speed but also endurance qualities that are vital for military service.

It should be noted that with youth unemployment still a pressing concern in the country, the races offer a ray of hope for many young Swazis eager to secure stable employment while serving the nation. As the countdown continues to this week's events in Kukhanyeni, Nkomiyahlaba, and The Phondo, anticipation is running high across the constituencies.



▲ EUDF General Sotja Dlamini who is the overseer of the ongoing army recruitment.

## Lessons in Governance:

Stories by Kwanele Dhladhla  
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ESWATINI Energy Regulatory Authority (ESERA) Chairman of the Board of Directors, Mbuso Simelane, has shared invaluable lessons drawn from nearly three decades of serving on corporate boards, emphasising the importance of confidentiality, integrity, and adaptability in effective governance.

Speaking in a wide-ranging interview, which was published by ESERA, Simelane reflected on his first boardroom experience dating back to 1997 and how the journey has shaped his perspective on governance.

“Over the years, I have learnt the importance of confidentiality as a very important principle,” he said. “The ability to draw lessons from what happens in other organisations without disclosing where you drew the lessons is vital. I have also learnt not to base decisions on hearsay, as it often affects one’s ability to make objective calls over an organisational situation.”

Simelane noted that beyond policies and codes, board service demands integrity, objectivity, and a deep commitment to corporate effectiveness. He highlighted that effectiveness and control remain central pillars—“doing the right thing and charting a controlled way of going forward.”

Recalling advice from experienced colleagues, Simelane explained that wisdom from seasoned board members often proved critical, even if it appeared impractical at first.

“I remember being advised by seasoned board members, which seemed out of context to me, only for it to turn out to have been a key solution to a problem,” he said.

He particularly reflected on lessons from global business magnate Natie Kirsh, who served on Eswatini boards during his active corporate years. “I remember one time as a board we had an organisational feud that we allowed to degenerate to the courts. Kirsh called us back to the boardroom and told us how courts could not provide solutions

# ESERA board chair shares insights from decades of experience

to our organisational problems, though they could be crucial to the decisions we could make. Our egos had become so high such that it almost cost the performance of the company. Kirsh challenged us to make a responsible decision for the benefit of the company.”

According to Simelane, Kirsh also urged board members to avoid over-reliance on governance frameworks such as the King’s Code, and instead apply practical, situational judgment. Simelane believes that while governance codes provide guidance, they cannot replace ethical commitment and responsible leadership.

“There are no straight-jacket formulas for effective corporate governance. Corporate governance principles remain principles as a guide for best practice, but will not curtail issues of corruption and non-performance,” he stressed.

“It is about your commitment and passion to selflessly serve and effectively adjust to the changing times and systems of governance,” he said.

As Chairman of ESERA, Simelane said these lessons continue to influence his leadership style. The authority’s mission—to ensure an inclusive, viable, and sustainable energy industry through impartial, effective, and transparent regulation—demands not only technical oversight but also strong governance values. Simelane summed up his philosophy with the words of a fellow corporate leader: “Corporate governance is not a prescription but a guide—it is up to leaders to apply themselves with objectivity and selflessness.”



▲ Mbuso Simelane, Chairman of the ESERA Board of Directors.

## AG raises alarm over poor collection of bed levies

**AUDITOR General Timothy Matsebula has sounded the alarm over weak revenue collection controls in the tourism sector, warning that the Eswatini Tourism Authority (ETA) is losing significant income due to poor compliance with the bed levy system.**

In his recently tabled audit compliance report, Matsebula revealed that only a fraction of the country’s tourism establishments was remitting the mandatory bed levies, with the majority either defaulting or being left unchecked by the Authority.

“I noted from the report to management that upon review of the list of establishments in the country, it was revealed that only 59 (31.2 per cent) out of 186 establishments paid levies to the Authority in the year 2024,” Matsebula wrote.

The Auditor General expressed concern that there was no evidence of routine follow-ups being made to ensure monthly remittances, nor proof that the levies received were accurate. Even more worrying, he said, was the absence of internal control systems to manage and enforce levy collection.

According to the audit report, note three of the authority’s financial statements showed that receivables on bed levies had climbed to E1,779,371.00 as at March 31, 2024. This represents an alarming 68.8 per cent rate of

uncollected revenue.

“I am concerned that the authority is struggling to collect bed levies from the establishments, and there are no controls that enforce compliance. I am also concerned that the Authority is losing revenue since the bed levies are not being collected from 68.8% of the establishments,” Matsebula stressed.

The AG advised management to urgently implement robust internal controls to enforce compliance across the tourism industry, warning that continued laxity would deprive the authority of critical resources needed to support its operations and national tourism growth.

He further requested that management provide a detailed breakdown of receivables, along with ledgers and supporting documents such as establishment registers, invoices, proof of payments, and statements of accounts.

“Management was advised to ensure that there are controls to enforce compliance by all establishments to maximize the collection of levies,” Matsebula stated.

In response to the findings, the controlling officer assured the AG that corrective action was being taken. The authority has since submitted a detailed breakdown of bed levy receivables, which includes invoices and records of payments received.

Management also provided the bed levy collection strategy, a document recently approved by the authority’s board, which outlines measures to improve compliance and reduce receivable amounts.

However, Matsebula cautioned that the strategy’s effectiveness must be proven through measurable outcomes.

“The effectiveness of the newly submitted Bed Levy Collection Strategy should be monitored through measurable outcomes, including an improved rate of compliance and a reduction in receivables amounts,” he advised.

The bed levy, a small fee charged per night of accommodation, remains one of the primary sources of revenue for the Eswatini Tourism Authority. It was designed to ensure that the tourism industry directly contributes to the promotion and development of the sector.

Failure to collect this levy consistently undermines the authority’s financial base and, by extension, its ability to market Eswatini as a competitive tourism destination regionally and globally.

Industry observers note that with the tourism sector being one of Eswatini’s key economic pillars, proper financial discipline and accountability are crucial. The AG’s report has therefore put pressure on the ETA to enforce compliance without delay.



▲ Auditor General Timothy Matsebula.

# I was testing my alcohol to check if it was not spiked – DD suspect

Stories by Thokozani Mazibuko

**“IT was not my intention to drink; I was just testing the alcohol in order to prove that it was not spiked.”**

These sentiments were shared by Senzo Mkhumbane when mitigating for a lenient sentence before Principal Magistrate Florence Msibi at the Manzini Magistrates Court on Monday after he was nabbed for drink-driving.

According to Mkhumbane, it was not his intention to commit the offence and therefore, he was apologetic. He pointed out that on the day in question; he was traveling with another man, who asked him to go and buy beer for him.

He stated that upon buying the bottle of beer, he opened it and went back with it to the man who had sent him to buy it.

He mentioned that after realising that the

bottle of alcohol had already been opened, the man then accused him of spiking the alcoholic beverage.

“Your worship, he then asked me to take a sip in order to prove that I had not spiked his drink and I did,” he said.

Mkhumbane mentioned that it was unfortunate that soon after that incident; they came across some police officers attached under the traffic department, who later arrested him for drink-driving.

He also mitigated for a lenient sentence on grounds that he had five children, who were dependent on him.

Mkhumbane was sentenced to five years in prison with an option of a fine of E5 000.

Meanwhile, Mkhumbane was charged with contravening the Road Traffic Act 6 of 2007.

He committed the offence on September 27, 2025. He was driving a Toyota Noah sedan registered JSD 427 DM, while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs with a reading of 0.76 milligrams per litre (mg/l) which was above the legal limit of 0.37 mg/l.



## Zim's Simba Bhora soccer fan arrested for DD

**A SOCCER fan who had allegedly visited the country to watch the soccer match between Simba Bhora and Nsingizini Hotspurs has been arrested for drink-driving.**

Frank Mapuvire (39) was charged with contravening the Road Traffic Act 6 of 2007. He committed the offence on September 29, 2025 near Skom area, along Dr Hynd public road in the Manzini District, while driving an Isuzu LDV motor vehicle registered KSS 279 MP.

This came after he unlawfully drove the aforesaid motor vehicle on the said public road, while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs with a reading of 0.76 milligrams per litre (mg/l), which was above the legal limit of 0.37 mg/l and thus contravening the said Act.

The particulars of his drink-driving were that he had a strong smell of alcohol emanating from his mouth and that he was too talkative.

He pleaded guilty to the offence and was found guilty as per his own plea.

He mitigated for a lenient sentence on grounds that it was not his intention to commit the offence.

He mentioned that he came to the country with the sole intention of watching soccer.

He pointed out that he did drink before the game and after watching the match, he then went to search for a place to sleep.

Mapuvire stated that he was under the impression that the alcohol had had taken was no longer in his system, since he had imbibed it about four hours prior to his arrest.

He also stated that he was unemployed, yet he had four children to support.

He was sentenced to four years in prison with an option of a fine of E5 000.

Meanwhile, during the soccer match, which Mapuvire had allegedly visited the country to watch, Nsingizini Hotspurs advanced to the next round of the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League after defeating Simba Bhora from Zimbabwe 4-2 during penalty shoot-out after a fiercely contested match played on Sunday afternoon at Somhlolo National Stadium.

## Woman gets suspended sentence for smashing boyfriend's car

**A 25-year-old woman was handed a suspended sentence after she accidentally smashed the windscreen of her abusive boyfriend's car while he was assaulting her.**

Thandiwe Thandeka Dlamini of Mliba area, who had been initially charged with Malignant Injury to Property, appeared on Monday before Principal Magistrate Florence Msibi at the Manzini Magistrates' Court.

She is said to have committed the offence in May 2025 at Mliba area in the Manzini District.

According to the charge sheet, Dlamini being a girlfriend to Sakhile Shiba, unlawfully abused Shiba by damaging a windscreen of his motor vehicle, a Toyota Corolla Sprinter registered BSD 269 AS valued at E3 500 and such conduct harmed or caused imminent harm to the safety, health and well-being of Shiba and did thereby contravened the said Act.

She pleaded guilty to the offence. When detailing the sequence of events leading to the commission of the offence, Dlamini stated that on the day the offence was committed; Shiba called her over the phone at night, but she did not respond to his calls.

Dlamini pointed out that thereafter, Shiba

unexpectedly pounced on her while she at her parental home at around 11pm and began to assault her.

“He assaulted me, while also questioning me why I was not responding to his calls,” she said.

She mentioned that after assaulting her, Shiba then forcefully dragged her to his place of abode, where he continued to assault her, having grabbed her cellphone from her.

Dlamini said while assaulting her, Shiba was demanding that she reveal to him the password of her cellphone and she refused to do so.

She highlighted that while Shiba was assaulting her, she accidentally fell on the windscreen of his car, which got damaged in the process, resulting in him opening a case against her at the police station.

She was found guilty as per her own plea and sentenced to one year in prison, with an option of a fine of E2 000.

However, the sentence was wholly suspended for a period of three years on grounds that she did not commit a similar offence during that period.

She was further warned to desist from committing a similar offence of domestic violence against the complainant.



BUSINESS BRIEFS

**FNB Eswatini injects E100k into Smallholder Sugarcane Competition**

THE Annual Smallholder Sugarcane Growers' Competition is set to take place on October 3, 2025, at the Phumulamcashi Community Training Centre, where top-performing growers for the 2024/25 season will be recognised. The competition, a flagship event in the sugar industry calendar, aims to reward excellence, innovation, and productivity among Eswatini's smallholder sugarcane farmers.

**Stocks rise, dollar dips, gold roars**

SYDNEY/LONDON — Global stocks rose on Monday, while the dollar retreated as investors prepared for a possible shutdown of the U.S. government, which could in turn delay publication of the September payrolls report and a raft of other key data. Gold roared to another high, powered by the dip in the dollar and by investor concerns about the possible ramifications of a U.S. government shutdown.

**Oil prices drop 2% on expected global supply growth**

LONDON — Oil prices fell by nearly 2 per cent on Monday as OPEC+ plans for another increase to oil output in November and the resumption of oil exports via Iraq's Kurdistan region via Turkey raised the global supply outlook. Brent crude futures dropped \$1.13, or 1.6 per cent, to \$69.00 a barrel by 1154 GMT after settling at their highest since July 31 on Friday. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was down \$1.22, or 1.9 per cent, at \$64.50.

# SACCOs record E2.34 billion in loans

By Delisa Magagula

SAVINGS and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) in Eswatini have registered notable growth in both loans and assets during the first quarter of 2025, according to the Financial Services Regulatory Authority's (FSRA) quarterly statistical report.

The report highlights that loans and advances for SACCOs rose by 2.95 per cent on a quarterly basis, moving from E2.28 billion to E2.34 billion.

On a year-on-year comparison, loans and advances grew by 10.72 per cent, rising from E2.11 billion in the same quarter of 2024.

SACCOs' total assets also showed steady growth. Assets increased by 4 per cent on a quarterly basis, reaching E3.13 billion from E3.01 billion. Year-on-year, the increase was more pronounced at 13.23 per cent, up from E2.77 billion recorded in the first quarter of 2024.

According to FSRA, this growth in assets was mainly driven by a significant rise in prepayments and sundry receivables. Further contributions came from a 41.1 per cent increase in cash and cash equivalents, a 14.36 per cent rise in financial investments, and a 10.78 per cent increase in net loans.

However, while financial investments and loans showed healthy increases, cash and cash equivalents declined sharply by 24.03 per cent during the quarter.

The report shows changes in loan quality across SACCOs. Watch classification loans rose by 19.6 per cent, while substandard loans increased by 13.8 per cent from the previous quarter. Performing loans saw a slight dip, decreasing by 0.72 percentage points.

Meanwhile, doubtful and renegotiated classifications decreased marginally by 0.1 per cent and 0.07 per cent points respectively.

Non-performing loans (NPLs) accounted for 5.29 per cent of the industry's total loans and advances, reflecting a 0.24 per cent increase from the previous quarter.

In contrast to the SACCOs' growth, credit institutions experienced a decline. Total loans and advances in the credit institutions sector fell by 2.98 per cent, dropping from E4.73 billion to E4.59 billion on a quarterly basis.

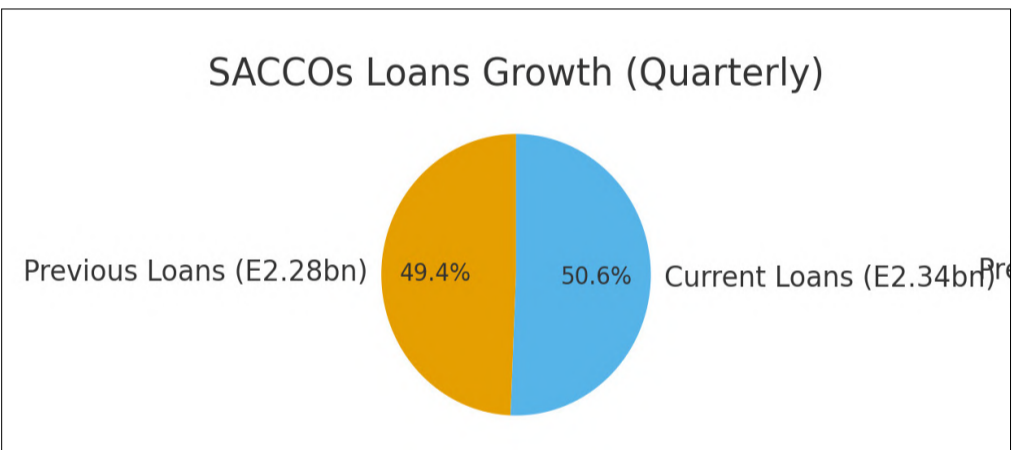
On an annual comparison, however, a marginal increase of 0.44 per cent was recorded, moving from E4.57 billion.

Retirement funds continued to grow steadily. Total assets in this sector increased by 1.16 per cent, rising from E52.25 billion to E52.86 billion in the quarter under review.

FSRA attributed this performance to increases in short-term investments, equities, and property. Local assets rose by 0.33 per cent from E25.6 billion to E25.68 billion, while deposits declined and long-term debt remained stable.

Eswatini's building societies recorded a mixed performance. Their assets stood at E3.67 billion at the end of the quarter, representing a 2.01 per cent quarterly decline.

Despite this, an annual increase of 4.91 per



cent was observed. The growth was primarily driven by a sharp 45.38 per cent increase in domestic investments, which rose from E389.45 million to E566.18 million.

However, the sector recorded a net loss of E15.54 million in the quarter. This marked a reversal from the net profit of E4.73 million after tax reported in the same quarter of 2024. FSRA attributed the loss to a drop in interest income, coupled with a rise in interest expenses.

The insurance industry showed strong growth in the first quarter of 2025.

Long-term insurers recorded a 25.47 per cent year-on-year increase in gross written premiums (GWP), rising from E235.64 million to E295.66 million. The growth was mainly driven by retirement funds and group life products, which grew by 145.8 per cent and 15.24 per cent respectively.

Together, they accounted for 45.78 per cent of the total GWP during the period. Meanwhile claims and policy benefits increased by 12 per cent year-on-year, pushing the sector's loss ratio to 53.7 per cent. Despite this, long-term insurers remained profitable, with underwriting results increasing by 52.22 per cent.

The report further states that, short-term insurers also recorded growth, with premiums increasing by 9.47 per cent compared to the same quarter last year.

Growth in the sector was largely driven by motor and property insurance, while health insurance also showed notable expansion.

The sector benefited from an improved claims experience, with a 5 per cent decline in claims leading to a loss ratio of 39.07 per cent. Net underwriting results improved by 19.84 per cent on an annual basis.

Total assets in the capital markets sector rose by 2.14 per cent, reaching E39.72 billion from E38.89 billion in the previous quarter. On a year-on-year basis, assets increased by 11.28 per cent from E35.7 billion.

FSRA attributed the growth to strong performance in the South African financial markets, particularly the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), which posted positive returns during the quarter.

Strengthening gold prices and the appreciation of the South African Rand against the US dollar also contributed to the positive outlook.

The report shows that retirement funds remained the dominant investors in capital markets, holding 73.43 per cent of the total assets. Local companies owned 10.7 per cent, collective investment schemes held 6.88 per cent, and retail investors accounted for 4.35 per cent.

The FSRA quarterly report underscores the resilience and growth of SACCOs, which continue to expand their asset base and lending portfolio despite challenges in loan classifications.

At the same time, other sectors such as insurance and retirement funds recorded strong performances, while credit institutions and building societies faced mild setbacks.

**EswatiniBank**

**FX RATES**

Notes/Cash	Buy	Sell
U.S. Dollar	17.0491	17.5171
G.B. Pound	22.7448	23.4354
EURO	19.9357	20.5419
Bank Rate (July 2023)	7.50%	
Prime Rate (July 2023)	11%	
Inflation (July 2023)	4.5%	
Petrol	E21.60/Litre	
Diesel	E22.90/Litre	
Paraffin	E17.25/Litre	

# FNB Eswatini injects E100k into Smallholder Sugarcane Competition

By Delisa Magagula

THE Annual Smallholder Sugarcane Growers' Competition is set to take place on October 3, 2025, at the Phumulamcashi Community Training Centre, where top-performing growers for the 2024/25 season will be recognised.

The competition, a flagship event in the sugar industry calendar, aims to reward excellence, innovation, and productivity among Eswatini's smallholder sugarcane farmers.

These growers are seen as crucial contributors to the sector's growth, employment creation, and economic sustainability.

FNB Eswatini has reaffirmed its commitment to the agricultural sector by sponsoring this year's competition with E100, 000, continuing its longstanding support for the initiative.

Chantell Littler, Executive Head of Commercial Banking at FNB, highlighted the bank's alignment with the needs of farmers.

"As a business, we understand the importance of agriculture, specifically sugarcane growing and production, in growing the economy and job creation. That is why we have focused on aligning our help with the specific needs of sugarcane growers across



▲ Smallholder sugarcane growers in Eswatini.

Eswatini."

Her remarks underscored FNB's strategy of promoting development and sustainability in the sector, ensuring that farmers are empowered to boost productivity while driving broader socio-economic benefits.

The competition has become a platform not only to recognise excellence but also to

encourage knowledge-sharing and best practices among smallholder growers.

It is regarded as a vital motivator for farmers to maintain high standards of production, efficiency, and sustainability in the industry.

With sponsorships such as that of FNB Eswatini, the competition continues to serve as a bridge between the financial sector and ag-

riculture, demonstrating how partnerships can advance both community and national development goals.

Meanwhile, the event is expected to attract farmers, industry stakeholders, and community representatives, celebrating the achievements of growers who play a significant role in maintaining Eswatini's status as a competitive sugar producer in the region.

## ERS, EPTC bring Govt services closer to citizens

By Delisa Magagula

THE Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) has partnered with the Eswatini Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (EPTC) to allow emaSwati to pay for government services at their local Post Office, a move expected to transform how citizens access revenue services.

The partnership, launched on Friday at ERS headquarters in Ezulwini, is part of Phase II of the Revenue Takeover Project, which centralises non-tax revenue collections under ERS.

Through this initiative, services that previously required travel to regional or central ERS offices will now be accessible at more than 30 post offices nationwide. The first 16 offices are scheduled to go live in October 2025, with the remainder to follow in phases.

Citizens will soon be able to settle payments for trading licences, company registrations, and other government fees at their nearest post office saving time, costs, and reducing the burden of travel.

"This is a proud moment for Eswatini Post. It embodies what we stand for: bringing essential services closer to the people and ensuring that no LiSwati is left behind. Whether you are a farmer in Lavumisa, a shopkeeper in Nhlanguano, or a student in Siteki, you will now have access to the same reliable services as those in urban centres," said EPTC Acting Managing Director, Lungile Nxumalo.

Eswatini Post has in recent years expand-

ed its portfolio beyond traditional postal services, demonstrating capacity to deliver third-party services.

The corporation has successfully partnered with banks for money transfers, with MTN for mobile money, and with utilities such as EEC and EWSC for electricity and water payments.

"Today, we add another important service to this list: the ability for emaSwati to pay for government services at their local post office," Nxumalo added.

For ERS, the collaboration reinforces its commitment to efficiency and customer care. Commissioner General Brightwell Nkambule assured that service standards would be upheld across all access points.

"We will extend the same systems of accountability to post offices as we do in our own service centres," Nkambule said.

The initiative also supports national strategies such as the Ministry of ICT's 'Government in Your Hand' programme and the government's decentralisation agenda.

By widening access to remote and rural areas, the project aims to reduce disparities in service delivery.

"This is not just about convenience. It is about equity and inclusion. It is about ensuring that every citizen enjoys the same access to services regardless of where they live Nxumalo emphasised."

Acting Minister of Finance, Apollo Maphalala, praised the partnership as an example of effective collaboration between state institutions.

"This partnership reflects the best of what we can achieve when government agencies work together," he said.



▲ ERS Commissioner General Brightwell Nkambule during the launch of the partnership.



▲ EPTC staff listen in during the proceedings.



# Stocks rise, dollar dips, gold roars



▲ German share price index DAX graph is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany.

By Wayne Cole and Amanda Cooper

SYDNEY/LONDON — Global stocks rose on Monday, while the dollar retreated as investors prepared for a possible shutdown of the U.S. government, which could in turn delay publication of the September payrolls report and a raft of other key data.

Gold roared to another high, powered by the dip in the dollar and by investor concerns about the possible ramifications of a U.S. government shutdown.

President Donald Trump will meet with the top Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress later on Monday to discuss extending government funding. Without a deal, a shutdown would begin from Wednesday, which is also when new U.S. tariffs on heavy trucks, patented drugs and other items go into effect.

A protracted closure could leave the Federal Reserve flying blind on the economy when it meets on October 29.

“If the shutdown lasts beyond the Fed meeting, the Fed will rely on private data for its policy decisions,” analysts at BofA wrote in a note. “On the margin, we think this may lower the likelihood of an October cut, but only marginally.”

The MSCI All-World index was up 0.16 per cent, while in Europe, the STOXX 600 rose 0.3 per cent, heading for a gain of 1.1 per cent in September, marking its third straight month of increases.

Meanwhile, markets imply a 90 per cent chance of a Fed cut in October, with around a 65 per cent probability of another in December.

The BofA analysts estimated a shutdown would subtract only a slight 0.1 percentage point from economic growth for every week it lasted, while noting the impact on financial markets had been minimal in the past.

They cautioned that should the

government use the closure to lay off workers permanently, then it could have a more meaningful impact on payrolls and consumer confidence.

There is also much uncertainty about what might happen at a meeting of U.S. generals and admirals in Quantico, Virginia, on Tuesday, called by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, which Trump will reportedly attend.

## Q4 usually good for stocks

Otherwise, analysts expected equities to be supported by buying for the new quarter, which historically tends to be a positive one for stocks. The S&P 500 has gained 74 per cent of the time in fourth quarters.

S&P 500 futures gained 0.6 per cent, while Nasdaq futures were up 0.67 per cent, having eased modestly last week.

In bond markets, 10-year Treasury yields dipped, falling 4.3 basis y to 4.145 per cent, having been pressured last week by a run of upbeat U.S. economic data that led investors to pare back expectations for how low Fed rates might ultimately go.

A host of central bank speakers are on the diary this week, with at least five from both the Fed and the European Central Bank appearing on Monday alone.

The dollar index slipped back 0.15 per cent to 97.99, having benefited last week from the batch of better economic news.

“Our forecast for the U.S. dollar to weaken further heading into year-end is built on the assumption the Fed will deliver two further 25-basis point cuts by the end of this year as the labour market remains weak,” MUFG strategist Lee Hardman said.

The euro rose 0.16 per cent to \$1.1718, but was still in the lower half of its recent \$1.1646 to \$1.1918 range.

The dollar fell 0.6 per cent to 148.68 yen, after rallying just over 1 per cent last week and away from the September low around 145.50. In commodity markets, gold shot up by as much 1.6 per cent as to a fresh all-time high at \$3,819.59 an ounce. (Reuters)

# Oil prices drop 2% on expected global supply growth

By Stephanie Kelly

LONDON — Oil prices fell by nearly 2 per cent on Monday as OPEC+ plans for another increase to oil output in November and the resumption of oil exports by Iraq’s Kurdistan region via Turkey raised the global supply outlook.

Brent crude futures dropped \$1.13, or 1.6 per cent, to \$69.00 a barrel by 1154 GMT after settling at their highest since July 31 on Friday. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was down \$1.22, or 1.9 per cent, at \$64.50.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, together known as OPEC+, is likely to approve another increase to crude oil production at its meeting on Sunday.

The group is expected to confirm an increase of at least 137,000 barrels per day for November as rising oil prices encourage efforts to regain market share, said three sources.

However, OPEC+ has been pumping almost 500,000 bpd less than its targets, defying market expectations of a supply glut.

Meanwhile, crude oil flowed through a pipeline from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq to Turkey



▲ A flame rises from a chimney of an oil field in Iraq’s Kurdistan region.

for the first time in 2-1/2 years on Saturday, Iraq’s oil ministry said.

After years of deadlock, an interim agreement between Iraq’s federal government, the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) and foreign oil producers operating in the region will allow 180,000 to 190,000 bpd of crude to flow to Turkey’s Ceyhan port, Iraqi oil minister told Kurdish broadcaster Rudaw on Friday.

The resumption is expected eventually to bring up to 230,000 bpd of crude back to international markets.

Monday’s price decline followed weekly gains of more than 4 per cent for both benchmarks last week after Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian energy infrastructure hit the country’s fuel exports. (Reuters)

# BP, Total deepen commitments to US with major projects

By Sheila Dang, Stephanie Kelly and America Hernandez

HOUSTON/LONDON — European oil and gas majors BP and TotalEnergies on Monday deepened their commitments to the United States, with BP approving a \$5 billion offshore oil field and TotalEnergies buying into an onshore gas field.

Higher investment in U.S. oil and gas production aligns with U.S. President Donald Trump’s goal to capitalise on the country’s hydrocarbon resources.

BP, which currently produces around 2.3 million barrels of oil equivalent per day, is becoming increasingly reliant on the United States to shore up its oil and gas business following a strategic revamp announced in February to shift spending from renewables to hydrocarbons.

## Increasing US exposure

BP has vowed to increase its U.S. production to just over 1 million boed by the end of the decade, or just under half of its global target of 2.3 million to 2.5 million boed in that timeframe.

Its \$5 billion Tiber-Guadalupe project in the Gulf of Mexico, expected to begin production in 2030, will include a floating 80,000 boed platform to tap into an estimated 350 million boe in recoverable resources, BP said.

BP is considering selling minority stakes in Tiber as well as another fully BP-owned Gulf of Mexico project, Kaskida, sources have told Reuters.

French rival TotalEnergies said on Monday it would buy a 49 per cent stake in Con-



▲ The logo of British multinational oil and gas company BP is displayed at their booth during the LNG 2023 energy trade show in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

tinental Resources’ onshore gas fields in the U.S. state of Oklahoma, for an undisclosed sum.

The assets will net it around 150 million standard cubic feet per day of gas by 2030, or about 26,000 boed, helping to secure access to low-cost upstream gas as the company signs deals to deliver the fuel via ship to mostly Asian clients.

TotalEnergies is the largest buyer of U.S. liquefied natural gas, purchasing 10 million metric tons per year, but its own output in the United States is much smaller.

Its U.S. upstream assets last year produced 93,000 boed, or about 3.8 per cent of Total’s global production, far behind its assets in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. This is set to change as Total seeks to balance its U.S. LNG purchases with increasing its own gas production in the country. (Reuters)

IT takes a lot of computing power to run an AI product — and as the tech industry races to tap the power of AI models, there's a parallel race underway to build the infrastructure that will power them.

On a recent earnings call, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang estimated that between \$3 trillion and \$4 trillion will be spent on AI infrastructure by the end of the decade — with much of that money coming from AI companies. Along the way, they're placing immense strain on power grids and pushing the industry's building capacity to its limit.

Below, we've laid out everything we know about the biggest AI infrastructure projects, including major spending from Meta, Oracle, Microsoft, Google, and OpenAI. We'll keep it updated as the boom continues and the numbers climb even higher.

### Microsoft's \$1 billion investment in OpenAI

This is arguably the deal that kicked off the whole contemporary AI boom: In 2019, Microsoft made a \$1 billion investment in a buzzy non-profit called OpenAI, known mostly for its association with Elon Musk. Crucially, the deal made Microsoft the exclusive cloud provider for OpenAI — and as the demands of model training became more intense, more of Microsoft's investment started to come in the form of Azure cloud credit rather than cash.

It was a great deal for both sides: Microsoft was able to claim more Azure sales, and OpenAI got more money for its biggest single expense. In the years that followed, Microsoft would build its investment up to nearly \$14 billion — a move that is set to pay off enormously when OpenAI converts into a for-profit company.

The partnership between the two companies has unwound more recently. In January, OpenAI announced it would no longer be using Microsoft's cloud exclusively, instead giving the company a right of first refusal on future infrastructure demands but pursuing others if Azure couldn't meet their needs. More recently, Microsoft began exploring other foundation models to power its AI products, establishing even more independence from the AI giant.

OpenAI's arrangement with Microsoft was so successful that it's become a common practice for AI services to sign on with a particular cloud provider. Anthropic has received \$8 billion in investment from Amazon, while making kernel-level modifications on the company's hardware to make it better suited for AI training. Google Cloud has also signed on smaller AI companies like Lovable and Windsurf as "primary computing partners," although those deals did not involve any investment. And even OpenAI has gone back to the well, receiving a \$100 billion investment from Nvidia in September, giving it capacity to buy even more of the company's GPUs.

### The rise of Oracle

On June 30, 2025, Oracle revealed in an SEC filing that it had signed a \$30 billion cloud services deal with an unnamed partner; this is more than the company's cloud revenues for all of the previous fiscal year. OpenAI was eventually

# The billion-dollar infrastructure deals powering the AI boom



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revealed as the partner, securing Oracle a spot alongside Google as one of OpenAI's string of post-Microsoft hosting partners. Unsurprisingly, the company's stock went shooting up.

A few months later, it happened again. On September 10, Oracle revealed a five-year, \$300 billion deal for compute

power, set to begin in 2027.

Oracle's stock climbed even higher, briefly making founder Larry Ellison the richest man in the world. The sheer scale of the deal is stunning: OpenAI does not have \$300 billion to spend, so the figure presumes immense growth for both companies, and more than a little faith.

But before a single dollar is spent, the deal has already cemented Oracle as one of the leading AI infrastructure providers — and a financial force to be reckoned with.

### Building tomorrow's hyperscale data centers

For companies like Meta that already have significant legacy infrastructure, the story is more complicated — although equally expensive. Mark Zuckerberg has said that Meta plans to spend \$600 billion on U.S. infrastructure through the end of 2028.

In just the first half of 2025, the company spent \$30 billion more than the previous year, driven largely by the company's growing AI ambitions. Some of that spending goes toward big ticket cloud contracts, like a recent \$10 billion deal with Google Cloud, but even more resources are being poured into two massive new data centers.

A new 2,250-acre site in Louisiana, dubbed Hyperion, will cost an estimated \$10 billion to build out and provide an estimated 5 gigawatts of compute power.

Notably, the site includes an arrangement with a local nuclear power plant to handle the increased energy load. A smaller site in Ohio, called Prometheus, is expected to come online in 2026, powered by natural gas.

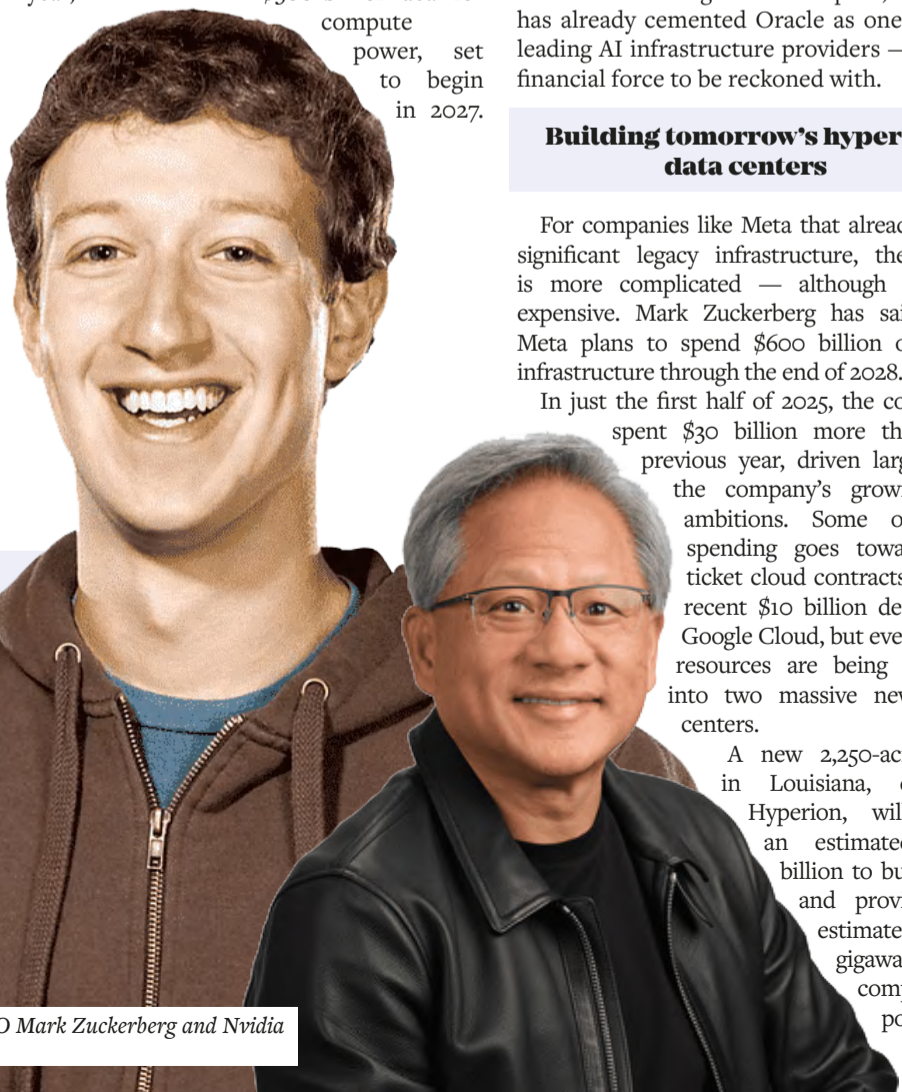
That kind of buildout comes with real environmental costs. Elon Musk's xAI built its own hybrid data center and power-generation plant in South Memphis, Tennessee. The plant has quickly become one of the county's largest emitters of smog-producing chemicals, thanks to a string of natural gas turbines that experts say violate the Clean Air Act.

### The Stargate moonshot

Just two days after his second inauguration, President Trump announced a joint venture between SoftBank, OpenAI, and Oracle, meant to spend \$500 billion building AI infrastructure in the United States. Named "Stargate" after the 1994 film, the project arrived with incredible amounts of hype, with Trump calling it "the largest AI infrastructure project in history. Sam Altman seemed to agree, saying, "I think this will be the most important project of this era."

In broad strokes, the plan was for SoftBank to provide the funding, with Oracle handling the buildout with input from OpenAI. Overseeing it all was Trump, who promised to clear away any regulatory hurdles that might slow down the build. But there were doubts from the beginning, including from Elon Musk, Altman's business rival, who claimed the project did not have the available funds.

As the hype has died down, the project has lost some momentum. In August, Bloomberg reported that the partners were failing to reach consensus. Nonetheless, the project has moved forward with the construction of eight data centers in Abilene, Texas, with construction on the final building set to be finished by the end of 2026. (TechCrunch)



▲ Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang.

# Guinea announces first post-coup presidential vote on December 28

GUINEA will on December 28 hold its first presidential election since a coup in 2021, according to a decree read on state television.

The announcement was made on Saturday, a day after the Supreme Court validated the results of a referendum approving a new constitution that could allow coup leader Mamady Doumbouya to run. Doumbouya has not said whether he plans to.

The coup in Guinea was one of eight that swept West and Central Africa between 2020 and 2023.

Guinea is of international financial significance as the home to the

world's largest reserves of bauxite.

It also has the world's richest untapped iron ore deposit at Simandou. Some countries that experienced coups, such as Chad and Gabon, have since held elections formally marking transitions to civilian rule, while others, including Mali and Niger, have approved lengthy transition periods without the need for a vote.

Doumbouya's government proposed a two-year transition to elections in 2022 after negotiating with regional bloc ECOWAS, but it missed that deadline.

The new constitution replaces the transitional framework that had

barred members of the junta from contesting elections, opening the door for Doumbouya's candidacy.

It also introduces institutional changes, such as longer presidential terms, from five years to seven, renewable once, and a new Senate.

It passed with 89% of the vote, according to results published late Friday by the Supreme Court that put turnout at 92%.

Opposition politicians have contested the turnout figure, saying it did not square with their observations at polling stations that indicated sparse voter participation.

(Reuters)

# Wildfires ravage a third of Namibia's flagship national park

WILDFIRES have destroyed about a third of Namibia's Etosha National Park, a roughly 20,000 square-kilometre (7,722 square-mile) tourist destination known for its wildlife, the presidency said.

The wildfires began a week ago in the southwestern part of the park and is thought to have been caused by suspected charcoal-production activity on bordering commercial farms, according to authorities.

The blazes have since spread rapidly due to strong winds and dry vegetation, threatening biodiversity, wildlife, and the livelihoods of local communities, the presidency said in a statement on Sunday.

"The fire has caused considerable damage to the grazing in the park and the surrounding communal areas amounting to hundreds of thousands of hectares of grazing land," it said.

"An unknown number of

wildlife has been killed, whilst, thankfully, no human casualties have been reported."

Etosha, classified as a national park in 1907 under German colonisation, is rich in wildlife including lions, elephants, leopards, giraffes and zebras, and draws thousands of tourists from around the world every year.

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism said on Saturday that at least nine antelope had been killed in fire-affected areas, while a pangolin had been rescued.

It said the ecological damage inside the park was extensive, with an estimated 34% of its area burned.

The fires have also extended beyond the park into communal areas in the Omusati and Oshana Regions, the ministry said.

The government has deployed more than 500 soldiers to help contain the blaze, the presidency said.

(Reuters)



▲ The coup in Guinea was one of eight that swept West and Central Africa between 2020 and 2023.



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# Seychelles presidential vote going to runoff, electoral commission says

THE Seychelles presidential election will go to a runoff between opposition leader Patrick Herminie and incumbent President Wavel Ramkalawan after no clear winner emerged in the first round of voting, the electoral commission said on Sunday.

Ramkalawan had been looking to block a comeback by the party that previously dominated politics for four decades in Africa's wealthiest country per capita.

The western Indian Ocean archipelago is a magnet for investment and security cooperation with China, Gulf nations and India.

Herminie, head of the United Seychelles (US) party, secured 48.8% of the vote, while Ramkalawan, of the Linyon Demokratik Seselwa (LDS), followed closely with 46.4%, the electoral commission said.

Neither candidate surpassed the 50%

threshold required for an outright victory in the first round.

The US party also made significant gains in the National Assembly, winning 15 constituency seats and an additional four seats through proportional representation, giving it a clear parliamentary majority.

LDS won 11 constituency seats and four proportional seats, leaving the ruling party behind its main rival in the legislative chamber.

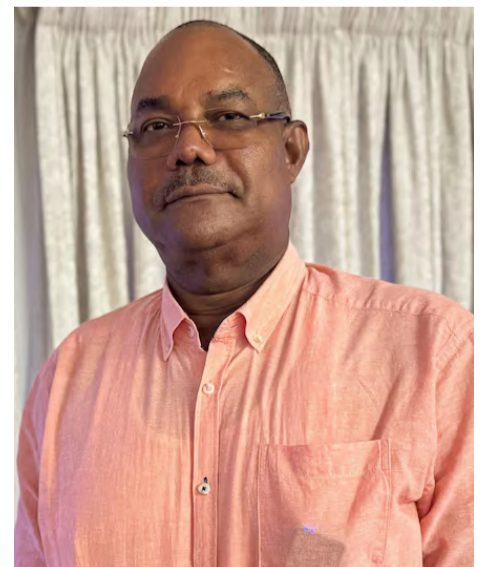
In the presidential race, the two front-runners will now face off in a decisive second round scheduled to be held from October 9 to 11.

The winner will be handed a five-year mandate.

Nearly 82% of registered voters participated in the first round, which was held from Thursday to Saturday, the electoral commission said. (Reuters)



▲ Seychelles' President Wavel Ramkalawan of the Linyon Demokratik Seselwa coalition.



▲ Seychelles opposition leader of the United Seychelles (US) party Patrick Herminie.

# US Democrats, Trump set to face off in budget battle that could trigger gov't shutdowns

WITH U.S. government funding due to expire at midnight on Tuesday, Republicans and Democrats in Congress are showing no signs they will agree to a temporary spending fix that would avert a shutdown.

President Donald Trump was to convene a meeting with congressional leaders at the White House on Monday in a last-ditch attempt to end the standoff. But Democrats have signaled they are not willing to simply sign off on the short-term funding plan Republicans support without some accommodations.

If Congress does not act, thousands of federal government workers could be furloughed, from NASA to the national parks, and a wide range of services would be disrupted. Federal courts might have to close and grants for small businesses could be delayed.

This is a fight over more than temporary funding, however. It is the continuation of a battle that has been brewing since Trump took office in January and refused to spend billions of dollars that Congress had already approved.

Democrats aim to use the threat of a shutdown to restore some of that funding and shore up healthcare subsidies due to expire at the end of the year.

At stake is \$1.7 trillion in "discretionary" spending that funds agency operations, which will lapse at the end of the fiscal year on Tues-



▲ President Donald Trump was to convene a meeting with congressional leaders at the White House on Monday in a last-ditch attempt to end the standoff.

day if Congress does not extend it.

That amounts to roughly one-quarter of the government's total \$7 trillion budget, with much of the remainder going to health and retirement programs and interest payments on the \$37.5 trillion debt.

The spotlight will be on Trump, a Republican who has blamed Democrats for the impasse, and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, who will have to keep his rank-and-file in line in order to attain his party's goals.

The Republican-controlled House of Representatives narrowly passed a bill on September 19 to keep government agencies funded through November 21. The Senate, where 60 votes were required to approve the measure, promptly defeated it.

There have been 14 partial government shutdowns since 1981, most lasting just a few days. The most recent was also the longest, lasting 35 days in 2018 and 2019 due to a dispute over immigration.

This time healthcare is at issue. Roughly 24 million Americans who get coverage through the Affordable Care Act will see their costs rise if Congress does not extend temporary tax breaks that were passed in 2021.

Schumer on Sunday said there will be "huge pressure" on Republicans to agree to talks to restore healthcare cuts, which he said threaten to close rural hospitals and dramatically hike insurance premiums.

"We don't want a shutdown," he said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "We hope that they sit down and have a serious negotiation with us." Senate Republican Leader John Thune has left the door open to eventually dealing with the healthcare problem, but says Congress must first pass a temporary spending bill to avert a shutdown.

"You can't do this by Tuesday, and you can't do it while you're holding the American people hostage with a government shutdown," he said on "Meet the Press."

Some Democratic aides in Congress have suggested lawmakers could back a short funding bill if Republicans agreed to hold votes within the next several weeks on the Affordable Care Act tax credit extension.

But House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries dismissed that idea on Friday, saying Republicans cannot be trusted. "Now, we're supposed to believe, with a wink and a nod, that Republican leaders are actually interested in dealing with the Affordable Care Act issue?" he said. (Reuters)



▲ A Palestinian man carries his belongings during an Israeli military operation, after residents were ordered to evacuate Gaza City.

## Israeli forces advance ahead of Trump-Netanyahu Gaza war talks

ISRAELI tanks thrust closer to the heart of Gaza City on Monday in the hours before Donald Trump was due to host Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, where the U.S. president has promised "something special" in his latest bid to end the war.

After nearly two years of failed diplomacy, Washington presented a 21-point plan to Arab and Muslim states last week that calls for a permanent ceasefire and the release of remaining hostages, and Trump said he believed a deal was close.

"We have a real chance for greatness in The Middle East," he wrote on social media on Sunday on the eve of his meeting with Netanyahu. "All are on board for something special, first time ever. we will get it done!!!"

Though Netanyahu praises Trump as Israel's closest ally, there are signs of Israeli

scepticism over the proposal, as well as some reservations among Arab states.

A source familiar with the discussions said Israeli officials had raised concerns with Washington over issues including the proposed involvement of Palestinian security forces in Gaza after the war, expelling Hamas officials from the enclave and assigning overall security responsibility.

Sources in Egypt, which has acted as a mediator in ceasefire talks, said Cairo was concerned that the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority not be sidelined from administering Gaza, and about guarantees Israel would abide by any agreement's terms once hostages are freed.

(Reuters)

## Ukraine's Zelenskiy proposes joint air shield with allies

UKRAINE has offered to build a joint air defence shield with its allies to protect against threats from Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday, after a series of airspace incursions that caused alarm on NATO's eastern flank.

NATO leaders have said that Russia has been testing the alliance's readiness and resolve with airspace incursions in Poland and the Baltic states, and Kyiv says its experience in dealing with aerial threats would be valuable.

"Ukraine proposes to Poland and all our partners to build a joint, fully reliable shield against Russian aerial threats," he said in an address to the Warsaw Security Forum delivered via video link.

"This is possible. Ukraine can counter all kinds of Russian drones and missiles and if we act together in the region we will have enough weapons and production capacity."

Ukraine has already said that its troops and engineers will train their Polish counterparts on countering drones.

Romania, meanwhile, aims to partner with Ukraine to build drones under a new European Union defence funding mechanism, but it will be at least seven years before the country has a multi-layered air defence system, a government source told Reuters on Friday.

Romanian Defence Minister Ionut Mosteanu told the Warsaw Security Forum that new drone fragments were found in the eastern Romanian county of Tulcea, neighbouring Ukraine, on Monday.

The topic of defence cooperation with Kyiv was high on the agenda as leaders gathered in Warsaw for the annual security forum.



▲ Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius told the conference that "Europe's and Ukraine's defence industry must work together more closely and effectively".

"The European Union must back this by providing a much more flexible regulatory framework for the defence industry in Europe."

Following the Russian incursions into NATO airspace, countries on the alliance's eastern flank have agreed on the need for a "drone wall" with advanced detection, tracking and interception capabilities.

(Reuters)

# Daliwonga to headline Spring Bash at IF's Lounge

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini  
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ESWATINI music enthusiasts have a reason to celebrate this October as the talented Amapiano sensation Daliwonga is confirmed to headline the much-anticipated Spring Bash.

Set to take place on October 25, 2025, at the iconic IF's Lounge, the event promises to be an electrifying day filled with vibrant music and unforgettable performances, starting at noon. The Spring Bash is set to feature a diverse lineup of artists that showcase the rich tapestry of the country's contemporary soundscape. Alongside Daliwonga, the phase 1 lineup boasts a stellar array of performers including ! Sooks, Zwile, Rina, Yamkela, Tairo, The Best Duo, and Acoustic Soul. This eclectic mix of talents guarantees a dynamic atmosphere catering to a wide range of musical tastes.

Ticket pricing has been structured to accommodate different preferences, with general pre-sale tickets available for E200, increasing slightly to E250 at the gate. For those seeking an elevated experience, VIP tickets are priced at E400, offering exclusive access and amenities. Attendees are encouraged to embrace the event's theme by dressing in spring colours, adding a vibrant visual element to the festivities.

Daliwonga, born Daliwonga Matiwane in Diepkloof, Soweto, has rapidly risen to prominence within the Amapiano genre. His journey began humbly as a backing vocalist, where he honed his craft and developed a distinctive poetic style paired with smooth, soulful vocals. His breakthrough came in 2020 with the release of his debut album Chameleon, which showcased his versatility and cemented his status as a solo artist to



▲ Daliwonga.

watch.

Operating under the influential BlaqBoy Music label, founded by DJ Maphorisa, Daliwonga has collaborated with some of the biggest names in the industry, including Kabza De Small and Sha Sha. These

partnerships have not only broadened his musical horizons but also contributed to the global rise of Amapiano as a genre, blending deep house, jazz, and lounge music elements into a uniquely South African sound.

## Nkhondlo Cho to enliven William Pitcher Dining Hall

AFTER a significant hiatus, the William Pitcher Poetry Society, in collaboration with Soul Therapy, is reigniting the poetic spirit with the much-anticipated Nkhondlo Cho event.

Scheduled for October 31, 2025, from 2 pm to 5 pm, this gathering promises to be a vibrant celebration of poetry, culture, and community at the William Pitcher Dining Hall. This event marks a powerful comeback for Soul Therapy, a collective known for its impactful contributions to the poetry scene over the years. The organiser, Caregiver, expressed a deep sense of renewal and excitement about the event.

In an exclusive interview, he revealed that the long break has fueled their determination to deliver a 'thrilling show' featuring a rich and diverse lineup of poets representing all four regions of the country. The Nkhondlo Cho lineup is a testament to the event's inclusive and dynamic nature.

Attendees will be treated to performances by M Age, Poetic General, Dede, Caregiver himself, Words, and Simamukele SJ. Complementing these poets are special acts including Imbongi Ecathuzayo, Mitamo LePoet, and UNESWA UPS. The event will be expertly hosted by MDZ The Poet, whose role as MC is expected to add a compelling

narrative flow to the afternoon.

Caregiver emphasised the event's mission to rekindle hope and reconnect with poetry lovers who may have felt disconnected during society's absence. "We want to put it out there to the people that Soul Therapy is back and ready to deliver just like it has been doing over the years. We also want to revive hope to those who had lost hope in us," he stated passionately.

### Power

The organiser also highlighted the emotional and transformative power of the performances lined up for the day. "People must be ready to be blown away by the different acts on the lineup as they're all articulating for the big event.

They must also be ready to receive comfort through poetry," Caregiver said, underscoring the event's dual role as both an artistic showcase and a source of solace.

Nkhondlo Cho is positioned as a must-attend event not only for seasoned poetry enthusiasts but also for newcomers.

Caregiver extended a warm invitation to all, assuring that even those who may not initially appreciate poetry will find themselves captivated by the experience.



▼ Nkhondlo Cho event organiser Caregiver.



▲ Actor Thembinkosi Mthethwa pictured with supporters at his birthday party.

## Thembinkosi Mthethwa celebrates his birthday in style

MBABANE'S social calendar was ablaze with excitement as Thembinkosi Mthethwa, a multifaceted talent in the entertainment industry, marked his birthday with the much-anticipated annual All Black Party.

Hosted at the stylish 23:28 Lounge, located in Checkers Business Park, the event was a spectacular showcase of glamour, music, and camaraderie, drawing a full house of guests from various spheres of influence. The atmosphere at 23:28 Lounge was electric, with the venue packed to capacity.

Known for his versatility as an actor on the popular series Ekhaya, a businessman, voiceover artist, producer, and a key figure at New Life Entertainment, Thembinkosi Mthethwa's celebration was a testament to his wide-reaching impact and popularity. The All Black Party has become a hallmark event in Mbabane's social scene, and this year's gathering lived up to its reputation.

The guest list read like a who's who of the local entertainment and business sectors. Among the notable attendees were Samkelo Dlamini, lead actor of Baka Ngwane, Siphosethu Sibandze, an award-winning film director known for Liphupho, and MC Nqaba Ginindza, whose presence added a dynamic flair to the festivities. The event also attracted prominent figures such as Thizalami Dube from InstaCash, brand influencer and entrepreneur Zinzi Thwala, Isidoro Pinto, Executive of the Makoti Festival, Nomathemba Xaba, and Mrs Party Fifi Mthethwa, among others.

### Dress code

The dress code, strictly all black, was embraced by most guests, with some opting for creative interpretations that enhanced the event's sophisticated and chic ambience. The elegant attire complemented the sleek décor of 23:28 Lounge, setting the tone for an unforgettable night.

Afro-pop vocalist and producer Flame Masco, born Sandile Maseko, headlined the event with a vibrant and captivating performance that energised the crowd. His blend of infectious rhythms and soulful melodies was a highlight, ensuring the party's momentum never waned.

Supporting acts included a diverse roster of local talent such as Young Zesh, M Nation SD, Zulu D MegaSound, and the ever-popular Welcome 'DJ Cup' Maseko. The musical journey continued with performances by Mbongeni 'Mbo' Sithungo, DJ Cybos, Thick B, Nkhosi, Tubuko 'Tibza' Nxumalo, and the dance group Kiizdance, each contributing to the night's rich tapestry of sound and movement.

# Sakhile Simelane, Alan Stewart to host Swazi Polo

Stories by Siphesihle Dlamini  
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FASHION lovers are in for a treat as Sakhile Simelane and Alan Stewart prepare to MC the highly awaited Swazi Polo event.

Scheduled for October 4, 2025, at Yellowstone, Swazi Lizkhar, this event is set to be a vibrant fusion of culture, sport, fashion, and community spirit from 11 am to 6 pm, making it a must-attend occasion for fun lovers and culture enthusiasts alike. The Swazi Polo event, themed “Polka Dot,” is set to transform Yellowstone into a dynamic hub where tradition meets contemporary flair.

The day will be packed with exhilarating polo matches, high-end fashion shows, and a rich offering of gourmet delicacies that highlight Eswatini’s culinary excellence. The event’s organisers have created a lineup that blends entertainment and elegance, ensuring a memorable experience for all attendees.

Headlining the entertainment are fashion icon Enhle Mbali and the popular music duo Jaziel Brothers. In an exclusive interview, Nduduzo Dankos, Public Relations Officer for Swazi Boy Entertainment, shed light on the inspiration behind the Swazi Polo event. He explained that the event draws deeply from Eswatini’s rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes. “The Swazi Polo event draws inspiration from Eswatini’s rich cultural heritage and breathtaking natural beauty. It merges the timeless elegance and thrill of polo, a sport steeped in tradition with a distinctly local flair, symbolised by our vibrant polka dot theme,” Dankos said. He emphasised how the imagery of galloping horses and lush green fields reflects the strength, grace, and



▲ Sakhile Simelane and Alan Stewart to host Swazi Polo.

vitality of the nation.

Dankos extended a warm invitation to the public, encouraging families and friends to come together and participate in the festivities.

## Celebration

“Swazi Polo is more than a sporting event; it’s a full-day celebration. Attendees can

look forward to exhilarating polo matches, gourmet food stalls, lively entertainment, and a festive atmosphere highlighted by the cheerful polka dot theme. I warmly invite everyone to mark their calendars for October 4, 2025. Bring your family, gather your friends, and join us for a memorable day in the heart of Eswatini,” he said.

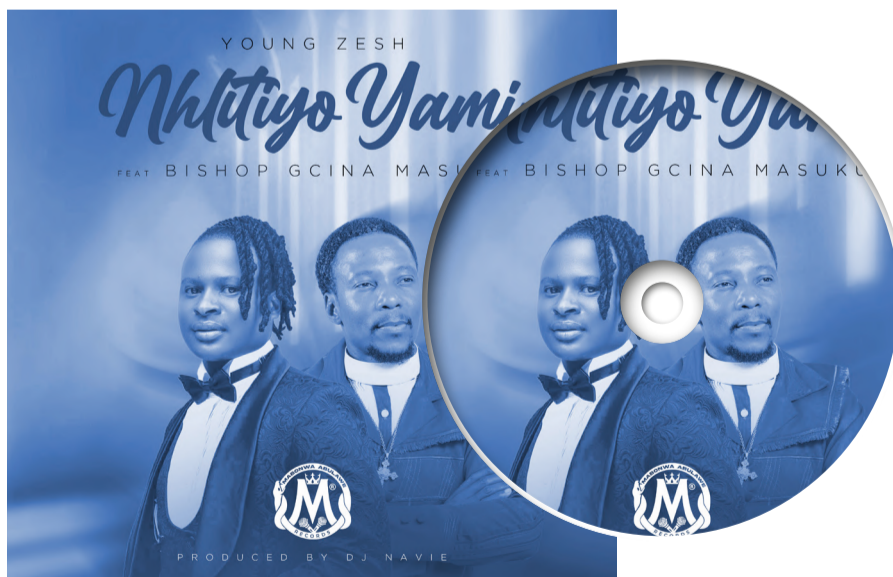
## ‘Nhlitiyo Yami’ soars to 50 000 YouTube views

TALENTED Eswatini music star Young Zesh has made waves in the local music scene with his latest single, “Nhlitiyo Yami,” which has garnered an impressive 50,000 views on YouTube within a month of its release.

The song also boasts an impressive 5,000 streams on Spotify. ‘Nhlitiyo Yami’ features a collaboration with the legendary gospel artist Bishop Gcina Masuku, adding a significant layer of depth and emotional weight to the track. Produced by the renowned DJ Navie and released under the label Mabonwa Abulawe Records, “Nhlitiyo Yami” delivers a powerful message wrapped in emotive melodies. The song has been expertly engineered by Sean Cast HQ and recorded at the Mabonwa Abulawe Studio in Mbabane, ensuring high-quality production that complements the heartfelt lyrics.

In an exclusive interview, Young Zesh described “Nhlitiyo Yami” as a deeply personal expression of his struggles with betrayal. He opened about the emotional turmoil he faced from those he once loved and trusted, stating, “This song is a personal cry from the heart. It reflects the deep pain of being betrayed by people who were close enough to touch your soul but chose to hurt you instead of protecting you.”

The lyrics of “Nhlitiyo Yami” delve into the complexities of human relationships, exploring themes of emotional scars and



disappointment. Young Zesh elaborated, “The song captures the experience of being let down when your heart was open, honest, and pure. It’s a reflection of the shock of realising that not everyone who claims to love you is loyal.” The significance of the heart (iNhlitiyo) is central to the song’s message. Young Zesh emphasised that it symbolises the inner pain that often goes unnoticed. “Betrayal leaves scars that are invisible to the eye but heavy on the soul,” he remarked.

The collaboration with Bishop Gcina

Masuku adds a layer of gravitas to the track. Masuku, a revered figure in Eswatini’s gospel music scene, is known for his powerful vocals and spiritual messages. His contribution to “Nhlitiyo Yami” is expected to enhance the song’s emotional resonance, bridging the gap between contemporary and traditional gospel music. Young Zesh is eager for fans to experience the song’s message and has urged listeners to support it by streaming it on all digital platforms once it drops. “We are taking umculo weSiSwati to another level,” he stated.



▲ South African rapper K.O.

## K.O. slated for Hipnotik

SOUTH African rapper K.O. has been revealed as the second act for the eagerly awaited Hipnotik Festival.

The event has also confirmed Mzansi rap sensations Tony Dayimane and Usimamane. Scheduled for October 4, 2025, the festival returns after a seven-year hiatus, promising to reignite the country’s creative spirit and youth culture with an electrifying lineup and a renewed mission. Tickets for the 2025 event are now available, with general admission at E400, VIP access at E800, and exclusive Golden Circle tickets priced at E1,500.

The festival’s revival transcends entertainment; it is a strategic initiative designed to rejuvenate Eswatini’s creative economy and empower young people nationwide. In an exclusive interview, festival director and founder Sakhile Nkambule shared his excitement and vision for Hipnotik’s return. “We’re incredibly excited. The return of Hipnotik isn’t just nostalgic, it’s strategic,” Nkambule said, emphasising the festival’s role as a critical platform for local creatives, entrepreneurs, and service providers. He described Hipnotik as “a proven youth-led economic vehicle” that extends far beyond music and entertainment.

## Haitus

The seven-year hiatus allowed the organisers to reflect on the evolving needs of the creative community and the broader market. Nkambule acknowledged the negative impact the festival’s absence had on Eswatini’s entertainment ecosystem. “We’ve seen what the absence of Hipnotik did to the local entertainment ecosystem. Now, we’re here to restore that pulse and take it further,” he explained. While the festival promises an immersive and fun experience, Nkambule stressed that empowerment remains the goal: “It’s business time now, fun is the by-product, but empowerment is the product.”

Hipnotik was founded on the belief that Eswatini’s youth possess immense talent and ambition but often lack the platforms, business skills, and networks necessary to thrive. “Talent alone is insufficient; it requires platforms, business knowledge, networks, and brand equity. Hipnotik is that convergence point,” Nkambule noted.

Looking ahead, Nkambule envisions Hipnotik as a premier youth development platform anchored in entertainment. He described it as a catalyst for job creation, small and medium enterprise (SME) development, digital storytelling, and brand partnerships. “This event is a catalyst for job creation, for SME development, for digital storytelling, for brand partnerships,” he said.

# Tebogo Thobejane rejects witness protection offer



▲ Sultry television actress and influencer Tebogo Thobejane.

SULTRY television actress and influencer Tebogo Thobejane says she has sneezed at the state's proposal to place her under a witness protection programme.

The former Muvhango thespian has alleged that this is because she is worried that she will possibly be guarded by the same cops alleged to be in cahoots with criminal syndicates implicated in her attempted murder and the murder of high-profile figures.

She also alleged that the witness protection programme comes with stringent conditions, which decree that she should be off social media and confined within the borders of South Africa.

Thobejane and her friend were shot in Sandton, Joburg, after they left Signature nightclub in 2022, where they were chilling with businessman Serge Cabonge.

Thobejane's ex-boyfriend and tender tycoon Vusimuzi "Cat" Matlala and his co-accused, Musa Kekana and Tiego Mabusela, were arrested and charged with the actress's attempted murder and money laundering, among others. Speaking to Sunday World, Thobejane said she rejected outright the proposal to place her under a witness protection programme after discovering that Matlala, Mabusela and Kekana were allegedly in collaboration with a criminal cartel to commit hideous crimes in Gauteng. Thobejane said that after the attempt on her life, she deposed

an affidavit narrating what had happened and the culprits she suspected – including Matlala and his wife, Tsakani Baloyi.

She alleged that out of her concern for her safety, the police offered to place her under a witness protection programme. However, after rumination, she rejected it.

"My concerns, which I raised with the police, were about how you guarantee my safety because the very same people who want to kill me are working with the police. I could be walking right into the trap and get killed," she said.

Thobejane said another anathema about the programme was that the witness is prohibited from engaging in social media activities.

"You are not allowed to post! I'm an influencer and content creator. I make a living off social media. I have a bond and other bills to pay. How am I supposed to make a living, because my acting career has been destroyed?"

Thobejane said another bugbear for her was that witnesses under the protection programme are not allowed to leave the country.

"You are expected to live within the confines of South African borders. I couldn't take that chance; that is why I left the country," she said. Thobejane also blasted the state for spending over R140-million on a commission of inquiry into policing and the judiciary, stemming from allegations of police complicity in crime.

"There is no single cent spent on the medical bills of the poor woman (Thobejane's friend) who sustained injuries to her spinal cord as a result of being shot. She is wheelchair bound. Her parents and I are paying her medical bills because we want her to get her life back, but the state spends so much money on the commission..."

(Sunday World)

## Tyla stops show for a fan, shuts down critics

SOUTH African star Tyla had a powerful moment of humanity during her set at the 2025 Global Citizen Festival in New York.

While performing her Grammy-winning hit "Water", she stopped mid-song after noticing a fan who had fainted in the crowd.

The 23-year-old asked production to pause as she called for staff to assist an audience member.

The music came to a halt, and silence filled Central Park's Great Lawn as the fan received attention. Tyla kept her focus on the situation, later checking in with concertgoers who were nearby to make sure everything was under control. When they signalled that all was well, she smiled warmly before asking the crowd whether she should continue where she left off or restart the song. The question led to the audience erupting in excitement, choosing the restart option.

The "popiano" star showed care for her fans in the middle of what was already a vibrant night of performances.

Later in the night, Tyla brought a different kind of energy when she performed "Mr Media", a song where she directly responds to her critics. The song is one of her sassiest, with lyrics that carry a sharp "none of your concern" message, shutting down outside noise.

At one point, she sings: "Remember when I used to fight with words? Really, I should be worse, I should be meaner... What I? None of your concern."

It's essentially a mic drop with Tyla reminding everyone that she can clap back, but often chooses not to.

That context made it all the more fitting when, mid-performance, she told the Global Citizen audience she is "not sorry".

The statement comes after Nigerian star Tiwa Savage weighed in on Tyla's ongoing "coloured" identity controversy during an interview on "The Breakfast Club", causing online outrage.

Savage said she understood why the term is offensive in America, but also expressed sympathy for Tyla. "I would get why that would be such a huge thing here, because of the history behind that name," she said. "I think I felt for her a little bit because she is young and I do not think she means to come across like that."

Savage went further by apologising on Tyla's behalf, saying, "So if that was not communicated, I would like to say on behalf of her, we apologise. We did not mean it, forgive us. I do not think it came from a bad place."

(IOL)

## Master KG collaborator Casswell P dies

WANITWA Mos Entertainment has confirmed the passing of its producer, Casswell Pontsho Ramothwala, known professionally as Casswell P.

He died on Saturday, September 27, after a brief illness.

The company said in a statement that his talent, dedication and warmth will be missed by everyone who worked with him and requested privacy for the family while funeral details are being arranged.

"It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of our beloved producer, Casswell Pontsho Ramothwala, known affectionately as Casswell P. He passed away on Saturday, 27 September 2025, following a short illness. Casswell was a valued member of the Wanitwamos Entertainment family and made an indelible mark through his talent, passion, and commitment to the industry."

"His presence, creativity, and warmth will be sorely missed by all who had the privilege of working with him. We kindly request privacy during this time of mourning as we come to terms with this heartbreaking loss. Details regarding funeral arrangements will be shared in due course," the statement

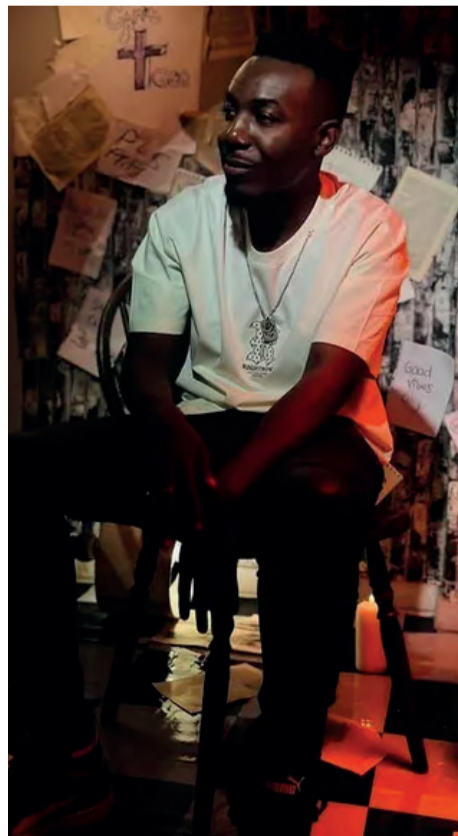
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▲ The late Casswell P.



**THE Trump administration said the FDA will begin notifying doctors about the possible link between autism and Tylenol during pregnancy.**

The FDA initiated a label change for Tylenol to include mention of the possible associated risks of acetaminophen use during pregnancy and autism and ADHD in children. The Tylenol-autism theory is based on a research review that determined an association, but most studies have found no causal link. Federal health officials are also expected to recommend leucovorin, a drug used to treat cancer and anemia, as a potential therapy for autistic people.

The Trump administration announced on Monday that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will begin notifying physicians that Tylenol use during pregnancy “can be associated with a very increased risk of autism.”

“They are strongly recommending that women limit Tylenol use during pregnancy unless medically necessary,” the president said. Following the announcement, the FDA initiated a label change for Tylenol to include mention of the possible risk associated with acetaminophen use during pregnancy and autism and ADHD in children. Federal health officials have also highlighted leucovorin as a potential therapy for autism. Leucovorin is a form of folate used in cancer and anemia treatments.

At a memorial service for conservative activist Charlie Kirk in Glendale, AZ, on Sunday, President Trump had teased the autism announcement and told reporters that Tylenol is “a very big factor” driving autism prevalence.

As part of an ongoing effort to address concerns over rising autism rates, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. had vowed to find the “cause” of autism by September. On Monday, the president thanked the Health Secretary for bringing the issue “to the forefront of American politics,” but did not claim that Tylenol is a definitive cause of autism. Kennedy has repeatedly criticized childhood vaccines as a cause of autism, a claim that clashes with a scientific consensus showing no such link. When the autism-vaccine link was widely debunked, Kennedy set his sights on a new suspected cause: Tylenol use during pregnancy. A recent research review suggested a link between prenatal Tylenol exposure and autism in children, igniting a safety debate over a longstanding medical recommendation. Following publication of the review, an exclusive in The Wall Street Journal revealed that the HHS, under Kennedy’s direction, would release a report detailing Tylenol as a cause of autism. As a consequence of the WSJ report, the stock for Kenvue, Tylenol’s manufacturer, fell by more than 9%. Still, the Tylenol-autism theory lacks sufficient high quality scientific evidence, and a majority of studies have found no causal link. In response to President Trump’s announcement, Tylenol issued a statement on its website asserting that over a decade of rigorous research confirms “there is no credible evidence linking acetaminophen to autism.”

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has also released a statement reaffirming the safety of acetaminophen use during pregnancy.

“Suggestions that acetaminophen use in pregnancy causes autism are not only highly concerning to clinicians but also irresponsible when considering the harmful and confusing message they send to pregnant patients, including those who may need to rely on this beneficial medicine



# Does Tylenol cause autism?

during pregnancy,” said ACOG president Steven J. Fleischman, MD, MBA, FACOG, in the organization’s statement. “Today’s announcement by HHS is not backed by the full body of scientific evidence and dangerously simplifies the many and complex causes of neurologic challenges in children. It is highly unsettling that our federal health agencies are willing to make an announcement that will affect the health and well-being of millions of people without the backing of reliable data,” Fleischman continued. Tylenol remains the only safe option for pain relief during pregnancy, and untreated fever carries heightened risks of neural tube defects. Here’s what you need to know.

## Tylenol and autism: Is there a link?

The Tylenol-autism link entered the spotlight after a research review published in mid-August in Environmental Health sounded an alarm over prenatal acetaminophen use and neurodevelopmental risks in offspring.

The Harvard-Mount Sinai review of 46 studies suggests a slightly higher risk of autism and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children with prenatal exposure to acetaminophen. However, the findings point to an association rather than causation, warranting further investigation.

The review cites a large cohort study of

2.5 million children conducted in Sweden, published in JAMA in 2024.

The researchers examined neurodevelopmental outcomes in 185,909 children exposed to acetaminophen in utero. Despite a modest increase in the full cohort, the associations became insignificant upon analyses of sibling control groups.

The Swedish study also notes that higher doses of acetaminophen during pregnancy showed no effects on neurodevelopmental outcomes when those doses were adequately controlled.

The authors of the review also noted a limitation in the Swedish study: There’s a confounding issue in that mothers who took Tylenol during pregnancy had higher rates of infections, chronic pain, psychiatric conditions, and existing neurological conditions like ADHD and autism.

Additionally, the senior author of the review served as an expert witness for plaintiffs in litigation surrounding acetaminophen, suggesting a possible conflict of interest.

“Studies like this are not proving anything other than an association,” said Danelle Fisher, MD, FAAP, board certified pediatrician at Providence Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, who wasn’t involved in the review. “The timeliness of taking acetaminophen while pregnant does not mean that every woman who takes it will have a child with autism,”

she told Healthline.

Christine Feigal, MD, board certified OB-GYN and vice chair of the OB-GYN Department at MemorialCare Long Beach Medical Center in Long Beach, CA, agreed that association doesn’t equate to causation. Feigal wasn’t involved in the review. “Studies looking for relationships between prenatal exposures and postnatal outcomes, particularly complex neurocognitive outcomes such as autism, must be interpreted cautiously, as these conditions are multifactorial in nature,” Feigal said. “Confounding variables, that is, factors that can impact the likelihood of both the exposure and the outcome, are common and difficult to erase in these studies,” she told Healthline.

Fisher further explained the concept: “Put another way, an association may be present between pregnant women who eat ice cream during pregnancy and have a child with autism. Does the eating of ice cream cause autism? No, but since it occurred during pregnancy, one could posit an association. There is no proof that acetaminophen causes autism, period,” Fisher said.

## Is folate a factor in autism?

Autism is a neurological condition affecting communication and behavior. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that autism currently





affects around 1 in 31 children 8 years of age.

Autism rates have increased significantly in recent years, but the causes of the developmental disorder are multifactorial.

“There is currently no clear-cut conclusion as to what causes autism, and we welcome any studies or research that help us come closer to identifying its underlying origin,” said Quatiba Davis, chief clinical officer at ABA Centers of America.

“For every potential cause that is found for autism, the converse usually has also been proven. For instance, a systematic review and meta-analysis of previous studies found that ‘evidence supported the association between fever during pregnancy and increased risk for [neurodevelopmental disorders] in offspring,’” Davis told Healthline. Additionally, rising autism rates are likely attributable to improved awareness and screening and broadened diagnostic criteria.

While the exact causes of autism aren’t fully understood, research has shown that genetic and environmental factors often play a role.

“Autism is a complex spectrum of disorders, which largely [has] a genetic basis,” Fisher said. “While the medical community is discovering more genetic links and parental factors, including parental age and even some environmental causes, there is no one cause of autism.”

Folate has also emerged as a potential factor in autism. Research has suggested that some people on the autism spectrum have metabolic anomalies, reducing the amount of folate that reaches the brain.

Leucovorin, a form of vitamin B9 (folate) also known as folinic acid, as a treatment for autism, could improve this metabolic anomaly. The drug, typically used in cancer and anemia treatment, is sometimes prescribed off-label as an autism therapy for this purpose.

While folate deficiency during pregnancy may raise the risk of neural tube defects, the link to autism is unclear.

As the Autism Science Foundation has stated on this link, “this science is still in very early stages, and more studies are necessary before a definitive conclusion can be reached.” Despite that, leucovorin shows promise as a therapy for autism spectrum disorder (ASD); however, it may be too soon before it’s recommended as a treatment for the broader population.

“Leucovorin has been studied on a small scale with some behavioral improvements in children with autism, but no large-scale studies have demonstrated a consistent finding. This may be an important area for future research, but the science is not yet well established,” Fisher noted.

And based on the current evidence, it’s unwise to recommend against acetaminophen during pregnancy. Experts agree that Tylenol is safe and there’s no link between acetaminophen, neural tube defects, and autism.

“Acetaminophen is one of the few safe pain and fever medications we have to offer patients in pregnancy, and avoiding treatment can have its own consequences,” Feigal said. “I will continue to recommend Tylenol for pain and fever in pregnancy.”

Fisher echoed this sentiment. “Every time the government disregards the scientific method and states untrue things about medical issues, they are playing on fear,” she said. “It is time to go back to the science... for vaccines, medical treatments, and recommendations.”

#### Healthline

### VITAMIN C is one of the safest and most effective nutrients.

Though it may not be the cure for the common cold, the benefits of vitamin C may include protection against immune system deficiencies, cardiovascular disease, prenatal health problems, eye disease, and even skin wrinkling. The tolerable upper intake level (or the maximum amount you can take in a day that likely won’t cause harm) is 2,000 milligrams (mg) a day for adults.

A study published in *Seminars in Preventive and Alternative Medicine* that looked at over 100 studies over 10 years revealed a growing list of possible benefits of vitamin C.

“Vitamin C has received a great deal of attention, and with good reason. Higher blood levels of vitamin C may be the ideal nutrition marker for overall health,” says study researcher Mark Moyad, MD, MPH, of the University of Michigan. “The more we study vitamin C, the better our understanding of how diverse it is in protecting our health, from cardiovascular, cancer, stroke, eye health [and] immunity to living longer.”

“But,” Moyad notes, “the ideal dosage may be higher than the recommended dietary allowance.”

#### How Much Vitamin C Is Enough?

“The safe upper limit for vitamin C is 2,000 milligrams a day, and there is a great track record with strong evidence that taking 500 milligrams daily is safe,” Moyad says.

But keep in mind that while many people may not always get the optimal level of vitamin C, having a vitamin C deficiency is very rare in the U.S. and many other countries. Vitamin C deficiency is mainly seen in malnourished adults. In extreme cases, it can lead to scurvy -- characterized by weakness, anemia, bruising, bleeding, and loose teeth.

Moyad says there is no real downside to taking a 500-milligram supplement, except that some types may irritate the stomach. That’s why he recommends taking a non-acidic, buffered form of the vitamin.

Food is the best way to get all your nutrients. Along with vitamin C, you’ll get other vitamins and minerals, as well as fiber if you’re eating fruits, vegetables, or other produce.

A cup of orange juice or a half-cup of red pepper would be enough to meet your recommended daily intake of vitamin C. To reach 500 milligrams (mg), you could turn to all of these foods and beverages):

- ▶ Cantaloupe, 1 cup (8 ounces): 59 mg
- ▶ Orange juice, 1 cup: 97 mg
- ▶ Broccoli, cooked, 1 cup: 74 mg
- ▶ Red cabbage, 1/2 cup: 40 mg
- ▶ Green pepper, 1/2 cup, 60 mg
- ▶ Red pepper, 1/2 cup, 95 mg
- ▶ Kiwi, 1 medium: 70 mg
- ▶ Tomato juice, 1 cup: 45 mg.

#### Vitamin C’s Role in the Body

Vitamin C, also known as ascorbic acid, is necessary for the growth, development and repair of all body tissues. It’s involved in many body functions, including formation of collagen, absorption of iron, the proper functioning of the immune system, wound healing, and the maintenance of cartilage, bones, and teeth.

Vitamin C is one of many antioxidants that can protect against damage caused by harmful molecules called free radicals, as

# The benefits of Vitamin C



well as toxic chemicals and pollutants like cigarette smoke. Free radicals can build up and contribute to the development of health conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and arthritis.

The body doesn’t store vitamin C, so overdose is not a concern. But it’s still important not to exceed the safe upper limit of 2,000 milligrams a day to avoid stomach upset and diarrhea.

Vitamin C is one of the “water-soluble” vitamins. Because your body doesn’t store them, you need to keep them in your diet all the time to maintain healthy levels. Eat vitamin-C-rich fruits and vegetables raw, or cook them with minimal water so you don’t lose some of the water-soluble vitamin in the cooking water.

Vitamin C is easily absorbed both in food and in pill form, and it can enhance the absorption of iron when the two are eaten together.

#### The Health Benefits of Vitamin C

No one vitamin can override serious health problems. They often work together – and other lifestyle habits – like getting enough sleep and exercise, and not smoking – are key. That said, research shows that vitamin C may offer health benefits in these areas:

**1. Stress.** A deficiency in vitamin C is associated with many stress related disease. It is the first nutrient to be depleted in people who drink too much alcohol, smoke, or have obesity. And because vitamin C is one of the nutrients sensitive to stress, Moyad says maintaining levels of vitamin C can be an ideal marker for overall health.

**2. Colds.** When it comes to the common cold, vitamin C is not a cure, but some studies show that it may help prevent more serious complications. “There is good evidence

taking vitamin C for colds and flu can reduce the risk of developing further complications, such as pneumonia and lung infections,” says Moyad.

**3. Stroke.** Although research has been conflicting, one study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that those with the highest concentrations of vitamin C in their blood were associated with 42% lower stroke risk than those with the lowest concentrations. The reasons for this are not completely clear. But what is clear is that people who eat plenty of fruits and vegetables have higher blood levels of vitamin C.

“People who consume more fruit and vegetables will not only have higher [blood] levels of vitamin C, but higher intake of other nutrients potentially beneficial to health, such as fiber and other vitamins and minerals,” study researcher Phyo K. Myint said in an email interview.

**4. Skin Aging.** Vitamin C affects cells on the inside and outside of the body and it’s antioxidant properties can be beneficial when it comes to aging. A study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* examined links between nutrient intakes and skin aging in 4,025 women aged 40-74. It found that higher vitamin C intakes were associated with a lower likelihood of a wrinkled appearance, dryness of the skin, and a better skin-aging appearance. In addition, topical treatments with Vitamin C have been shown in some studies to reduce wrinkles

Other studies have suggested that vitamin C may also play a role in:

- ▶ Improving macular degeneration.
- ▶ Reducing inflammation.
- ▶ Lowering the risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

#### WebMD

# Around the world in pictures



▲ Migrants waded through the sea in an attempt to board an inflatable dinghy leaving the coast of northern France to cross the English Channel to reach Britain, from the beach of Petit-Fort-Philippe in Gravelines, near Calais, France.



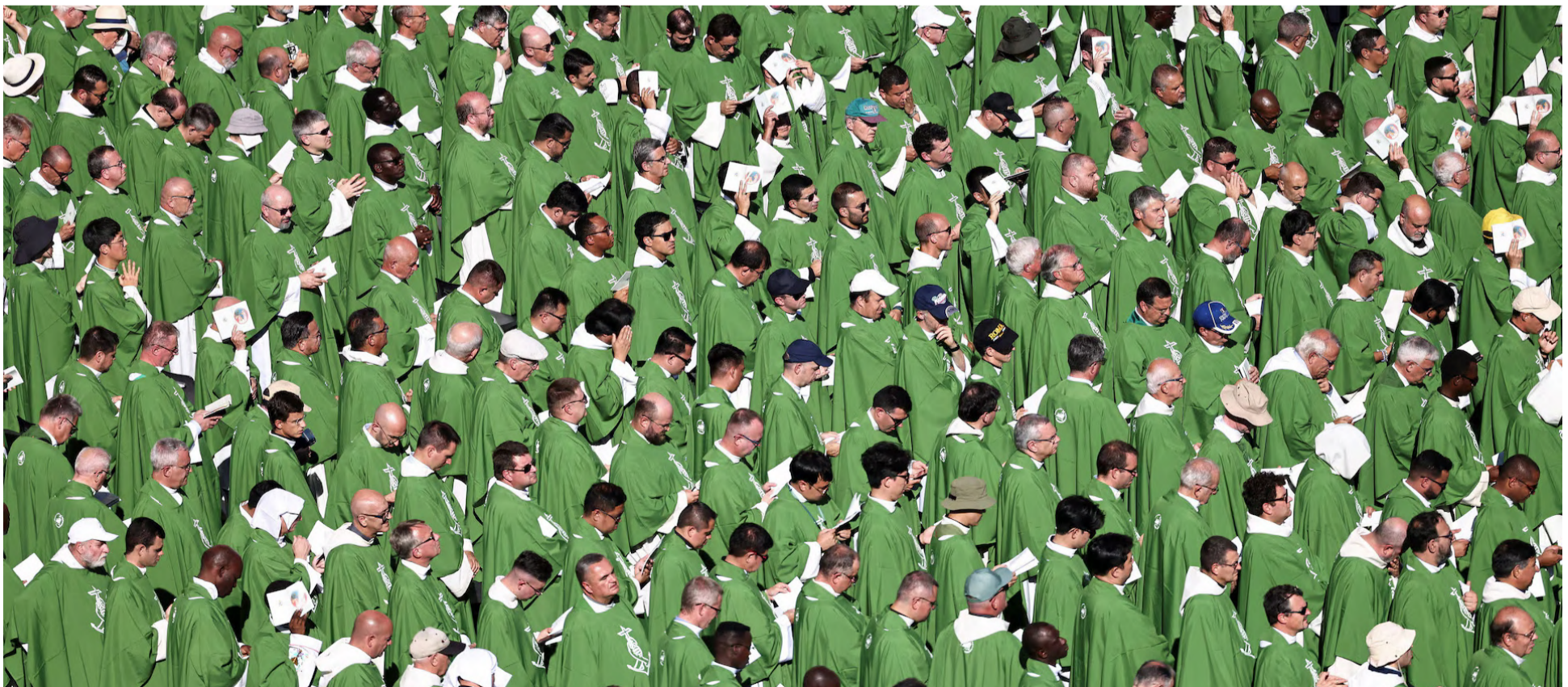
▲ Displaced Palestinians fleeing northern Gaza due to an Israeli military operation move southward, after Israeli forces ordered residents of Gaza City to evacuate to the south, in the central Gaza Strip.



▲ Explosions light up the sky over the city during Russian drone and missile strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine.



▲ A Federal Protective Service officer sprays a pepper spray at demonstrators, as protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) draw hundreds to the ICE headquarters in south Portland, Oregon.



▲ Members of clergy attend a Mass for the Jubilee of Catechists led by Pope Leo XIV in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

LUKE Donald survived what he called the most stressful 12 hours of his life to steer Europe to a rare away win at the Ryder Cup and their second straight title at Bethpage Black on Sunday, earning universal acclaim from fans and players.

The team in blue and gold led by a historic 11-1/2 to 4-1/2 margin through the first two days and held off a furious American fightback in the Sunday singles to win 15-13 on Long Island.

"He's the greatest captain I think that's ever lived," said Irishman Shane Lowry, who ensured Europe would retain the trophy by halving his match with American Russell Henley.

"He's the most amazing man in the world." The former world number one Donald, an Englishman, said continuity factored into their success, as he and all but one of the members from the winning 2023 team returned this year.

"I was just fortunate to have a team that knew me and trusted me. That's all I've ever tried to do, is just be the best prepared I can be," said Donald, the first European captain to win back-to-back since Tony Jacklin in 1985 and 1987.

Asked how he would feel about two more years at the helm, with the competition set for Adare, Ireland, in 2027, he responded: "I'm going to enjoy tonight first."

The tournament opened on Friday with the spotlight on U.S. President Donald Trump in a much-anticipated visit to Bethpage Black.

## Two more years? Fans, players applaud Europe's 'greatest captain' Luke Donald

But the headlines quickly steered to another Donald - Luke - as his team became the first to lead by more than 11 points heading into the final session since the Ryder Cup adopted the 28-point format in 1979.

"He's the best European Ryder Cup Captain of all time, Luke Donald," said U.S. captain Keegan Bradley.

Donald's tenure started inauspiciously, as he replaced Henrik Stenson for the 2023 competition after the Swede joined LIV Golf and was relieved of his duties.

But Europe's 16-1/2-11-1/2 win in Rome had players chanting "two more years" and Donald answered the call to what some considered a fool's errand, with Ryder Cup home teams historically enjoying a huge advantage.

The choice to keep him on for 2025 was met with broad approval, as he became the first repeat captain since Bernard Gallacher coached his third in a row in 1995.

"A big part of my captaincy is to create an environment where these guys are having the best weeks of their lives, honestly. We'll always remember this. We'll always go down in history," Donald said.

"Future generations will talk about this team tonight."

(Reuters)



▲ Team Europe captain Luke Donald celebrates with the trophy after winning the Ryder Cup.

## Alonso calls for focus as Real prepare for Champions League game in Almaty

REAL Madrid manager Xabi Alonso urged his side to shift focus to their Champions League campaign as they prepare to face debutants Kairat Almaty in Kazakhstan on Tuesday, days after a humbling 5-2 defeat by Atletico Madrid in LaLiga.

Alonso found himself fielding questions in what may be the most remote press conference in Champions League history on Monday in Almaty - 6,441 kilometres from Madrid and the easternmost city ever to host a game in the competition.

The Real Madrid coach faced a room packed with local media seizing the unique opportunity to host the record 15-times European Cup winners.

Saturday's loss at the Metropolitano was Real's first defeat to their city rivals since January 2024 and the first time they had conceded five goals to Atletico in 75 years.

Alonso called for lessons to be learned but stressed the importance of moving forward.

"I think that both in victory and defeat, the feeling should last 24 hours. Then comes the analysis," Alonso told reporters. "It wasn't just about attitude; it was also pace, tactics - things about the game. We've done the analysis and we're going to use it."

Real Madrid began their European campaign with a 2-1 home win over Olympique de Marseille two weeks ago.

Alonso emphasised the need to secure points on the road, regardless



▲ Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso.

of the opponent or location.

"The match is just another match, it's not an excuse," he said of the long journey to Kazakhstan. "It doesn't matter who the opponent is or where we're playing - we want to win."

The manager dismissed concerns about a lack of communication in the dressing room, describing his squad as a work in progress.

"Sometimes, to take a step

forward, you have to take two steps back," he said. "It hurts, but we're already in Champions League mode."

Alonso remains optimistic about his team's ability to bounce back.

"We weren't at our best. It's part of the learning process. It has hurt, but we're thinking about what to do tomorrow. We don't want to drop points," he said.

(Reuters)

## Raging Kevin De Bruyne in tantrum with Antonio Conte

ANTONIO Conte has issued a blunt warning to Kevin De Bruyne after the former Man City star expressed his frustration after being substituted in Napoli's 2-1 defeat by AC Milan on Sunday.

Milan had led 2-0 at the San Siro through Alexis Saelemaekers and Christian Pulisic's first-half goals, before Pervis Estupinan was sent off for pulling back Giovanni di Lorenzo with the goal gaping. De Bruyne converted the subsequent penalty on the hour mark to reduce the arrears, but was then withdrawn as part of a triple change by Conte as Napoli chased an equaliser.

The Belgian was replaced by Eljif Elmas in the 72nd minute, with Scott McTominay and Rasmus Hojlund also making way for

David Neres and Lorenzo Lucca.

After making his way off the pitch, De Bruyne appeared to motion in the direction of Conte as he expressed his frustration on his way to the bench.

Napoli were unable to find an equaliser in the closing stages, with the reigning champions suffering their first league defeat of the season. Conte was asked about De Bruyne's reaction in his post-match press conference, with the former Chelsea and Tottenham boss offering a blunt response to the Belgian as he explained his substitutions.

'I hope De Bruyne was upset about the substitution because of the result, because otherwise he's got the wrong guy,' Conte said, as per Gazzetta Dello Sport. (Daily Mail)



▲ The former Man City star was brought off in a triple change by Antonio Conte.

# South Africa stripped of World Cup qualifying points over ineligible player

SOUTH Africa have been stripped of three points in their World Cup qualifying campaign for fielding an ineligible player, denting their hopes of reaching next year's finals.

FIFA said on Monday that its disciplinary committee had found South Africa guilty of playing midfielder Teboho Mokoena in a 2-0 home win over Lesotho in March when he should have sat out the qualifier after two cautions in previous Group C games.

Lesotho have been awarded a 3-0 victory, with South Africa stripped of the points and fined 10,000 Swiss Francs (\$12,536.04), while Mokoena was given a warning.

Benin now top the standings on goal difference, level with South Africa on 14 points with two games left.

Nigeria, who were the group favourites, are three points behind along with Rwanda. Only the group winners qualify directly for the World Cup, though the runners-up have a chance to win a berth albeit through an arduous playoff process.

In the penultimate round of qualifiers on October 10, Benin visit Rwanda, Lesotho host Nigeria and South Africa take on Zimbabwe.

The final set of key games on October 14 see South Africa hosting Rwanda while Benin are at neighbouring Nigeria.

Losing the points is a major embarrassment for the South African Football Association, with coach Hugo Broos already admitting: "We did something bad, we did something



▲ South Africa have been stripped of three points in their World Cup qualifying campaign.

we shouldn't do."

But FIFA's handling of the matter has come in for criticism as it took world soccer's governing body almost seven months to settle a routine matter.

It had not held a disciplinary hearing before the last round of World Cup qualifiers, to the ire of the other countries.

"It is not normal that we don't know the

situation about the points on the log table before our games (last month)," said Benin coach Gernot Rohr.

FIFA did not respond to multiple enquiries from March onwards about possible sanctions for South Africa, leaving the matter hanging until earlier this month when the body announced it was opening an investigation.

FIFA's rules state: "If a person receives a caution in two separate matches of the same FIFA competition, they are automatically suspended from the next match in that competition.

"If a team fields a player who is not eligible to participate (due to suspension, registration issues, nationality, etc.), the match is automatically forfeited. (Reuters)

## Hamilton mourns death of his bulldog Roscoe

FERRARI Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton announced the death of his bulldog Roscoe on Monday in an emotional social media post paying tribute to a pet with a huge following of his own.

The seven-times world champion missed a Pirelli tyre test in Italy as well as an event at Milan Fashion Week last week after the 12-year-old dog caught pneumonia and was placed in a coma.

He said Roscoe was put to sleep on Sunday, in his arms.

"After four days on life support, fighting with every bit of strength he had, I had to make the hardest decision of my life and say goodbye to Roscoe,"

Hamilton told his 40.9 million followers on Instagram, where the bulldog had a following of 1.4 million.

"Bringing Roscoe into my life was the best decision I ever made, and I will forever cherish the memories we created together."

The pet accompanied his vegan owner through six title seasons with Mercedes -- attending races with his own paddock pass and travelling by private jet. Hamilton's other dog Coco died in 2020.

Hamilton races in Singapore this week, still chasing a first podium with Ferrari since joining the Italian team in January.

(Super Sport)



▲ Lewis Hamilton celebrates with his dog after winning the race and the world championship

## Alcaraz fights back in Tokyo to emulate Nadal with 10th final of season

CARLOS Alcaraz battled back to beat Casper Ruud 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Monday in Tokyo and reach his 10th final of a spectacular season, emulating fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

The world number one and US Open champion Alcaraz will face his Laver Cup conqueror Taylor Fritz in Tuesday's decider of the Japan Open.

No man since the legendary Nadal in 2017 has reached 10 finals in a season.

Alcaraz has wowed the crowds this week, but he was in danger of being outshone by world number 12 Ruud, who pulled off a series of spectacular winners to take the first set.

Alcaraz, who suffered an ankle injury on Thursday in his opener, regained control in the second set before closing out the match with another ferocious display of power-hitting.

His opponent in the final will be world number five Fritz, the American who beat the Spanish superstar in San Francisco two weeks ago.

"I'm feeling great. Obviously being able to play another final is always a pleasure," said Alcaraz, who made it ninth straight final going back to Monte Carlo in April.

"It's why we're working, trying to make the final in every tournament I'm playing. I'm really happy with the way that I'm feeling on court."

Alcaraz picked up from where he left off in his quarter-final win over



▲ World number one and US Open champion Carlos Alcaraz.

Brandon Nakashima, pounding Ruud with some huge forehands early in the match.

But the Norwegian had a few tricks up his sleeve as well, drawing applause from Alcaraz when he floated a winner to the baseline from a difficult angle.

Ruud fought off two break points in the seventh game and went on to

hold his serve with a swerving ace down the middle.

He broke Alcaraz in the next game and took the first set when the 22-year-old, beginning to show signs of frustration, hit a return long.

Alcaraz came back strongly, sending down nine aces in the second set alone to tie up the match.

(Reuters)

# It's on to the 2nd preliminary stage

## ... Insingizi Yezulu, Ingwe Mabalabala hoist Eswatini flag

By Chris Dlamini

WHAT a weekend of Confederation of African Football (CAF) for Eswatini! A rain of goals for Royal Leopard, then raindrops in the literal sense, before a stroke of luck and a magical home win for Nsingizini Hotspurs! On Friday, Leopard recorded a 5-0 win at Somhlolo National Stadium against TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup debutants, Young African from Namibia, completing a 7-0 aggregate win after winning 2-0 away a week ago.

Move on to Sunday, the country's soccer Mecca, back in the interclub competitions after six years due to a ban, hosted Nsingizini Hotspurs and Zimbabwe's Simba Bhora.

The latter had a 1-0 advantage having won in the first leg away in Botswana. However, it is 'Insingizi Yezulu' (Nsingizini), like Ingwe Mabalabala (Leopard) that prevailed in the end, winning 4-2 on penalties. This article highlights some of the big moments of both games, and the next stage.

### TotalEnergies CAF Champions League:

#### Nsingizini Hotspurs

##### 1. Teams' Arrivals:

- The team matched its rivals Simba Bhora off the field with its hired sleek wheels. Insingizi came on a coach bus, just like Simba Bhora came on their own branded coach.

##### 2. The Fans:

- At least slightly more or less 1 000 spectators watched the game, with Insingizi fans dominating the left-hand main stand with their drums in the green and white of the team.

##### 3. The Game:

1. Nsingizini needed to score twice and avoid conceding to simply qualify - a 2-0 win was all Insingizi needed to qualify with a 2-1 aggregate score.

2. Simba Bhora needed to score just once to stand a good chance to advance, having won 1-0 in the first leg.

3. Simba dominated the match, searching for that early goal that never came.

#### Penalty miss:

- It was such a big moment for Nsingizini Hotspurs and all EmaSwati when the referee gave a penalty, only for Insingizi to miss the opportunity. Mavela Dlamini had stepped up to take the penalty but shot well over the bar. It felt like all hope was dead and buried.

#### Late strike

- A 90th-minute strike rescued Nsingizini Hotspurs from the jaws of defeat and consequently an exit from the tournament. Bringing Insingizi back to life was senior national team defender Nkosingiphile Shongwe when he struck very late from a resultant corner kick. This goal took the match to the dreaded shootout.

#### The Shootout:

- With both the first and second legs finishing with 1-0 wins for either side, the aggregate score was 1-1, and penalties had to decide the winner to advance to the second preliminary stage.

- Nsingizini won the shootout 4-2 and went through to the second preliminary stage.

#### Next Rival

- The second preliminary stage will see Nsingizini Hotspurs take on Simba SC from Tanzania around October 19/20 in the first leg and October 27/28 in the second leg.

TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup:

#### Royal Leopard

##### Teams Arrivals:

- Both teams were at the stadium early on matchday on their buses. It was ordinary buses, nothing special.

##### 2. The Fans:

- 400 or so watched the game on Friday. It was mostly scholars from surrounding schools as well as from Ka-Boyce High School. It was free entry for scholars.

##### 3. The Game:

- A one-sided affair in which Ingwe Ma-



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs players during the penalty shootouts.



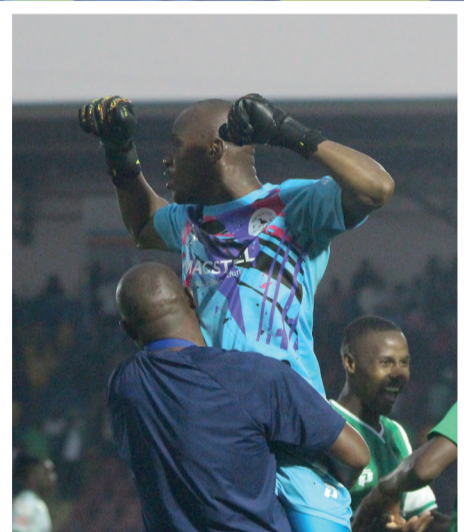
▲ Royal Leopard players celebrating their win over Young African.

balabala (Leopard) just proved too good for the youthful debutants from Namibia. It was already 2-0 at half-time, with three more goals added in the second half.

- Leopard deserved the 5-0 win, with Simanga Masangane netting a brace on the day. In the end, 7-0 was for Leopard on aggregate.

#### Next Rival:

- It is between Maniema Union from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Pamplemousses from Mauritius coming up next in the second preliminary stage.



▲ Nsingizini Hotspurs goalkeeper Khanykwezwe Shabalala celebrating their win over Simba Bhora in the CAF champions league.



▲ Nsingizini players posing before kickoff.



▲ Simba Bhora before kickoff.

# Gallant display for the netball national team in Botswana



▲ Eswatini male national team player Nduku Masangane in action against Botswana over the weekend in Gaborone.

By Sibusiso Masilela  
sibusisom@rubiconmedia.group

**THE netball team had a gallant display during the Botswana Invitation Cup.**

The males team won the series after beating the host country by 2-0 over the weekend in Gaborone.

The ladies' team had a tough outing after losing to the Botswana ladies' team 2-0.

The series was played over two days in the male and female categories, as the two neighbouring countries continue to prepare for the 2025 Africa Cup, slated for December.

Eswatini National Netball Association (ENNA) Nkabindze Shabalala said they are happy with the performance of the two

teams.

"We are proud of the two teams' performances and confident that the two teams will do well in the African Cup. We would like to thank Botswana Netball Association for the invitation, which contributes to the development of the sport in the region," he said.

Shabalala also thanked the Eswatini Sport and Recreation Council, the Eswatini Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association for their continued support.

"We are grateful for the support of our sponsor and the two national sports bodies, which have contributed to the development of the sport," he said.

The men's national team reached the finals of the 2024 African Cup, which were held in Namibia.



▲ Mandisa Sihlongonyane won 1000 pula (E 1 200) after he was named the player of the match award against Botswana males.



▲ Siphwiwo Dlamini won the player of the tournament and shooter of the tournament taking home 2500 pula (E 2 800).



▲ Fortunes Nerves won the defender of the tournament worth 1000 pula (E 1 200).



▲ Cebile Sibandze was the best mid court player.

## ... Male players dominate individual awards

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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**THE men's national team swept the boards in the 2025 Botswana Invitation Cup held over the weekend.**

The national side produced the men's category best player in Siphwiwo Dlamini, who won 1500 pula (E18 00).

Dlamini further won the shooter of the tournament award worth 1 000pula (E12 00) after inspiring the national side to a 2-0 win over Botswana.

Other outstanding local players include

Fortune Neves, who was named the best defender, taking home 1 000 pula (E1 200).

Mandisa Sihlongonyane won the player of the match award and won 1,000 pula during the first match on Saturday.

Female player Cebile Sibandze was the best mid player of the tournament, and she won herself 1000 (E1 200) pula for her effort.

Eswatini National Netball Association Secretary Nkabindze Shabalala congratulated the players for their efforts.

"We are extremely proud of our players for their gallant performances and urge them to continue working hard in their respective careers," he said.

By Sibusiso Masilela  
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**UBOMBO Sugar pair Sibusiso Mabundza and Sibusiso Nkabinde combined well to win the 2025 Autism Eswatini golf challenge.**

The joint winners scored 54 points to win the charity golf tournament played at Ubombo Golf Club on Saturday.

The champions were followed by the Umoba Pair Nigel Martin and Martin Wekhu from Umoba with 44points, while James Nhlengetfwa and Mfanzile Dlamini came third with 44 points.

The tournament was attended by players from the four regions of the country in a mission to raise funds for the construction of the Autism Eswatini One Stop Centre.

The facility will provide early intervention services, therapy, training, and support for children and adults living with autism.

The main guest, Fikile Lukhele, Principal Social Welfare Officer in the Lubombo Region, said the main purpose of the event is to improve society.

"This event is more than a sporting occasion; it is a demonstration of unity, compassion, and commitment to building an inclusive society. Autism is a condition that

touches many families in our nation and around the world. People with autism have extraordinary abilities, perspectives, and strengths, but too often they face barriers of misunderstanding and exclusion," she said.

Lukhele also thanked the various sponsors for their contributions to the event.

"I commend the organizers, sponsors, and participants for dedicating your time, resources, and talent to this noble cause. By turning a game of golf into a platform for advocacy, fundraising, and awareness, you have shown that sport," she said.

**The full list of winners:**

1. Sibusiso Mabundza & Sibusiso Nkabinde (Ubombo Sugar Limited) – 54points.
2. Nigel Martin & Martin Wekhu (Umoba) – 44points.
3. James Nhlengetfwa & Mfanzile Dlamini – 44points.
4. Sanele Myeni & Twice Vilane (Liberty) – 42points.
5. Mzwandile Msibi & Pat Ndzinisa (Ubombo Sugar Limited) – 42points.

# Ubombo Sugar pair wins Autism Eswatini Golf Challenge



▲ Golfers during the Autism Eswatini Golf competition held on Saturday.

By Chris Dlamini

HE is the club Chairman and a player officially.

That is South African businesswoman Shauwn 'MaMkhize' Mkhize's son Andile Mpisane. Despite his mother earlier saying she did not think he would want to play football again, Mpisane has defied that and has been part of the team's preseason training in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa (SA) in the past month.

"We saw our weaknesses in the 8Bet Trade Fair Cup and decided to go back to SA to build our team. We have some new players from local elite teams and foreigners as well.

"We have former Ezulwini United goalkeeper Innocent Adja from Ghana, Siboniso Shiba (Green Mamba), Ishmael from Celtics, Linda Nkambule (Madlenya), Sisekelo Maseko (goalkeeper from Royal Leopard), Siphiwe Cele and Vukani Ngcobo both from Royal AM among others," confirmed Highlanders' patron and acting Public Relations Officer (PRO) Charles 'Ace' Jele on Monday.

Jele said they were still looking at adding more quality from giant teams in the country before the first transfer window closes on October 10, following its extension from September 27. This publication has it in good authority that Highlanders is chasing three top names from two local rivals.

"We hope to have our foreigners ready for the league but I must admit we got their affirmations quite late and two of them have no passports yet we need them for work permits," explained Jele.

He would not want to commit himself to their availability or none thereof for the league opener against reigning champions Nsingizini Hotspurs should the league kick

# Andile Mpisane signs for 'Bull'



▲ Newly signed Highlanders AM player, Andile Mpisane.

off this weekend.

Meanwhile, Highlanders is now under the leadership of Mkhize and her son, Mpisane who will double up as a player in midfield. They have already changed a few things to accommodate their takeover, like the team's traditional black and white kit to black and gold, and added AM to

Mbabane Highlanders, making it Mbabane Highlanders AM FC. However, they are yet to get the name-change done after it was found they submitted their application late.

The Eswatini Football Association (EFA) is yet to confirm and announce if this wish is granted or they would have to wait until next season.

## Eswatini football has vastly improved – Luphahla

By Sibusiso Masilela

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SIMBA Bhora FC head coach Joel Luphahla has noted significant growth in local football over the years.

He said after witnessing his side's exit in the 2025 CAF Champions League by 4-2 on penalties to reigning MTN Premier League champions Nsingizini Hotspurs on Sunday at Somhlolo National Stadium.

Luphahla is a retired Zimbabwean international player with a couple of senior national team caps during his playing days.

He once had a stint with two defunct South African sides, Supersport United and Platinum Stars. "Eswatini football has vastly improved from what it was during our playing days, when Eswatini teams and the national team were whipping boys. This shows that the clubs and the Football Association are on the right track in terms of improving the sport in the country," he said. He further lamented his side's early exit in the prestigious CAF



▲ Simba Bhora FC coach Joel Luphahla with EFA Marketing and Communications Manager Muzi Radebe.

interclub competition.

"I am saddened by the defeat as we wanted to make our country by doing well in this competition. We must pick ourselves up and focus on the future by shifting our focus to our league back home so that we can return to CAF next season," he said.

Nsingizini Hotspurs and Royal Leopards both advanced to the next round of the Champions League and Confederation Cup,

respectively. Leopards pipped Namibian side Young African on Saturday at the country's football mecca. The Somhlolo National Stadium has been granted a provisional license to host international matches following the seven-year ban by CAF in 2018.

This has led to the investment of over E67 million towards the refurbishment of the national stadium by the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs.

## EFA gives thumbs up to 'Insingizi', 'Ingwe Mabalabala'

By Chris Dlamini

WELL done boys!

That is basically what the Eswatini Football Association (EFA) has said out loud to the country's Confederation of African (CAF) envoys Nsingizini Hotspurs and Royal Leopard. The EFA, via a statement shared on its Facebook page on Monday, congratulated both teams for their leap in the first preliminary stage of the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League and TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup. Insingizi Yezulu,

as Nsingizini is fondly known, edged out Zimbabwe's tough rivals Simba Bhora with a 4-2 aggregate margin following a penalty shootout at Somhlolo National Stadium in Lobamba on Sunday. Nsingizini had won the match 1-0 in regulation time when they had lost by the same score a week ago in the first leg in Botswana. This is in the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League. On the other hand, Ingwe Mabalabala (Leopard) had an easy one against Namibia's Young African, winning 2-0 away in the first leg and then 5-0 at home in the second leg, equalling a 7-0 aggregate margin. "Congratulations to Nsingizini Hotspurs and Royal Leopard for proceeding

to the next round of the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League and TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup, respectively," read the statement. Both sides are off to the second preliminary stage, which is two games away from the cash-spinning group stage for either side. Nsingizini will face Tanzania's Simba SC while Leopard will be heading to either the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Mauritius. The latter will be decided on October 3 when Maniema Union (DRC) and Pamplemousses (Mauritius) play the second leg at the latter's backyard.

Maniema Union won 2-1 in the first leg on Saturday.

## No Somhlolo for league kick-off

By Chris Dlamini

IT is official - the league will finally get underway this weekend, marking the start of the new season 2025/26.

However, just when fans thought the country's soccer Mecca, Somhlolo National Stadium was back in action for domestic games too, the fixture released by the Premier League of Eswatini (PLE) on Monday shows that the arena is not available to any of the opening fixtures of the MTN Premier League. The national stadia returned to international action over the weekend, hosting the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League and TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup preliminary round matches for Nsingizini Hotspurs and Royal Leopard on Sunday and Friday respectively.

In the absence of Somhlolo National Stadium, Mavuso Sports Centre in Manzini, will on Saturday be a hive of activity when defending champions Nsingizini kick off their title defence against Mbabane Highlanders at 3pm. This crunch match will precede the hub derby between Manzini Wanderers and Momeni Pirates at 5.30pm.

Meanwhile, last season's runners-up Royal Leopard have a derby opener against army side Young Buffaloes at Mkhuzweni Technical Centre in the Hhohho Region. Kick-off is at 3pm on Friday. Another Friday clash involves promoted teams Malanti Chiefs and Amawele facing off at KaLanga Technical Centre in the Lubombo Region at 3pm.

Embattled red and white capital city giants Mbabane Swallows are away to Green Mamba at KaLanga on Saturday at 3pm.

### MTN Premier League 2025-26 fixtures:

**Friday, October 3, 2025**  
**Mkhuzweni Technical Centre:**  
R. Leopard vs. Y. Buffaloes 3pm

**Saturday, October 4, 2025**  
**KaLanga Technical Centre:**  
M. Chiefs vs. Amawele 3pm

**Saturday, October 4, 2025**  
**KaLanga Technical Centre:**  
G. Mamba vs. M. Swallows 3pm

**Tambankulu Stadium:**  
Tambankulu Celtics vs. Sisonkhe 3pm

**Mayaluka Stadium:**  
Ubombo Sugar vs. Ez. United 3pm

**King Sobhuza Stadium:**  
Rangers vs. M. Sea Birds 3pm

**Mavuso Sports Centre:**  
M. Highlanders vs. Ns. Hotspurs 3pm  
M. Wanderers vs. M. Pirates 5.30pm



▲ EFA President Peter 'Samora' Simelane.

**South Africa stripped  
of World Cup  
qualifying points**

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# Sport



**IT'S A DONE DEAL...**

# Mpisane signs for 'Bull'

**... Mbabane Highlanders AM President Shauwn 'MaMkhize' Mkhize's son to play for Mbabane Highlanders AM FC this season.**

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