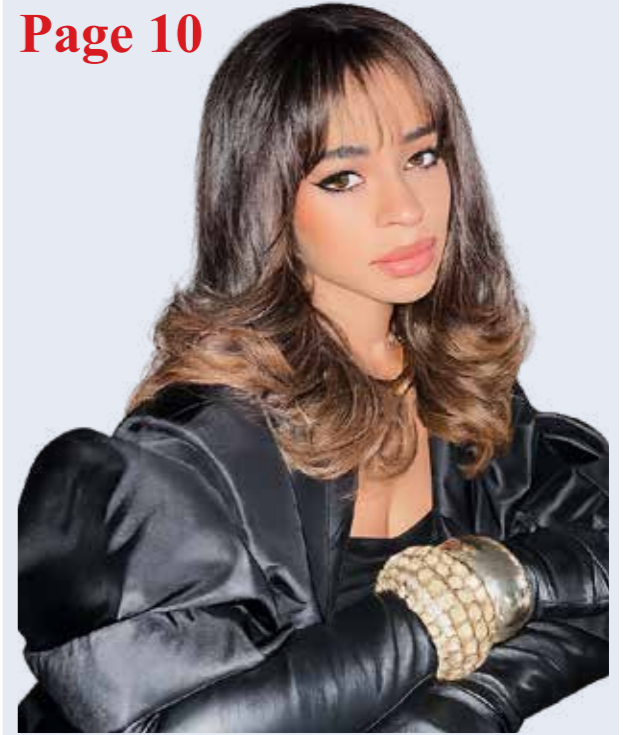


Journal NEWS

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Soweto Derby: Who Got the Picks Right?



Grammy-Winning R&B Star Set for Sun City and Cape Town



Mokgosi Pledges Crackdown on Failing Local Governments

Exclusive:

INSIDE BLOEM'S ABANDONED BUILDINGS

*...Shelter for the Homeless,
...Headache for Authorities*

Page 2



Dilapidated old Post Bank building in Bloemfontein Central. Picture: Thabo Ketele

SHOULD A FRAUD CONVICT RUN A HOSPITAL?

Suspended CEO's appointment reignites debate over rehabilitation, accountability, and public trust in healthcare leadership

By Bernell Simons

The suspension of Zongezile Adam Zumane, CEO of Sinorita Nhlabathi Hospital, has ignited a nationwide debate over fairness, rehabilitation, and whether individuals with criminal convictions should occupy senior positions in public institutions.

Zumane, appointed to lead the Ladybrand-based hospital in July 2025 despite a prior fraud conviction,

now faces scrutiny amid allegations of political patronage and governance concerns. His appointment has sharply divided public opinion and placed the Free State Department of Health under renewed examination.

Critics argue that entrusting a convicted fraud offender with the leadership of a public healthcare facility — responsible for man-



aging taxpayer funds and delivering essential services — undermines public confidence in government institutions. For many, the issue is not only about legality, but about ethics and optics in a sector already grappling with systemic challenges.

Supporters, however, contend that the matter raises broader constitutional and moral questions: if rehabilitation is a cornerstone of South Africa's justice system, should individuals who have served their sentences be permanently barred from positions of responsibility? Corrections and rehabilitation specialist Singabakho Nxumalo cautioned against blanket

disqualification based solely on past convictions.

"Our correctional and rehabilitation systems are designed to reintegrate individuals into society. Denying employment or leadership roles indefinitely can defeat the purpose of rehabilitation and perpetuate cycles of marginalisation," he said.

Nxumalo emphasised, however, that context is critical.

"Healthcare leadership carries immense responsibility and requires public trust. Authorities are justified in weighing past convictions against the demands of the position and ensuring safeguards and oversight are in place."

Legal analyst Advocate Nthabiseng Dubazana echoed the need for balance.

"It is possible to integrate rehabilitated individuals into leadership roles, **Continues on Page 2**



Dear All,

On behalf of Chuffplek Lounge, we're writing to formally apologize for the postponement of the Toast Bottles event, which was scheduled for the 28 February 2026 at Arthur Pitso Stadium in Ladybrand.

Due to unforeseen circumstances like Police Clearance delays and unfavourable weather forecast that will pose significant risks to the safety of all attendees and participants. The event has been rescheduled to the 5th of April 2026, taking into consideration that Journal News is hosting an Easter Soccer Tournament on the 3rd to 4th of April.

Our primary concern is to ensure a secure and enjoyable experience for everyone involved. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience caused and appreciate your understanding.

Thank you for your continued support and for your understanding.

Kind regards,
Management

Should a Fraud Convict Run a Hospital?

Continues from Page 1

provided robust monitoring, accountability mechanisms, and demonstrated competence exist. Society must reconcile its fear of past wrongdoing with evidence of rehabilitation."

Public sentiment remains deeply divided. Some community members express discomfort at the idea of a former fraud convict overseeing hospital operations and finances. Others argue that once a sentence has been served and rehabilitation demonstrated, continued exclusion contradicts the purpose of the correctional system.

Free State Premier Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae has firmly rejected suggestions that she should bear responsibility for the appointment, arguing that Zumane's employment within the provincial health department predates her tenure.

Letsoha-Mathae noted that Zumane had been working at Winburg Clinic following his release from prison and was already part of the provincial health system before she assumed office. She described it as misleading to attribute his appointment solely to her administration.

"Why do you now see that Zumane has been appointed to the position?" she asked, questioning why the issue had not been raised under previous administrations.

While stating that she does not wish to clash with the media, the premier expressed frustration at what she perceives as selective scrutiny. She maintains that Zumane's presence within the provincial health department must be understood within the broader context of decisions taken before her leadership.

As investigations continue, the controversy has evolved beyond a single appointment. It now serves as a litmus test for how South Africa balances the principle of second chances with the ethical and governance standards expected of public office-bearers.

At its core lies a difficult question: can a person with a criminal past lead a public institution with integrity — and what safeguards are necessary to ensure that public trust is not compromised?

The outcome may shape not only the future of one hospital, but the broader national conversation on accountability, rehabilitation, and the boundaries of redemption in public life.

Inside Bloem's Abandoned Buildings

• Shelter for the Homeless,
• Headache for Authorities



Dilapidated old Post Bank building in Bloemfontein Central. Pictures: Thabo Ketele

By Matshidiso Sebeleng

Behind crumbling walls, rusted gates, and broken entrances, a hidden city is quietly growing. In buildings long forgotten by their owners and written off by officials, homeless people — and in some cases suspected criminals — have carved out makeshift homes, dividing rooms with cardboard and turning abandoned offices into fragile shelters.

For the homeless, these structures offer protection from the streets, crime, and harsh weather. For government and law enforcement, they are ticking time bombs — hubs of illegal electricity connections, fire hazards, overcrowding, and alleged criminal activity.

Inside these decaying buildings — deep in the heart of the Free State's capital, Bloemfontein — lies a stark reflection of a city grappling with urban decay and a worsening homelessness crisis.

The Journal News team this week visited the old Post Bank building on the corner of Oos Burger and Selborne Ave in the CBD.

What met us was overwhelming. A suffocating, putrid smell clung to the air long before we stepped fully inside. Shattered windows gaped open like broken teeth. Paint peeled from the walls in long, tired strips, resembling old scars. Trash lay scattered across the floors, and a heavy silence hung in the corridors — unwelcoming, unsettling, and deeply disturbing.

With no running water, electricity or functioning sewer system, about 20 homeless people and drug users have formed a makeshift community inside the building — co-existing in a world they have designed to suit their survival, even though it is far from habitable.

For 32-year-old Thabiso Mokhethi from Botshabelo Section E, the building has been home for him and his girlfriend since last year. After years of living on the streets due to addiction, he says this is the closest thing to stability he has known.

"It is not easy living here, but it's better than being on the streets and sleeping anywhere you can hide your head. In here, at least I can wake up, fetch water and bathe, or start a fire to cook because we don't have electricity," he said.

Mokhethi admits he can return home whenever he chooses, but for now, he has accepted this life and its hardships. Crime within the building, he says, is rare among residents.

"We trust each other. Problems only start when outsiders come in and steal from us."

He survives by washing cars and assisting with parking in the CBD.

When the old Post Bank building shut its doors years ago, no one imagined it would be stripped of its dignity — reduced from a symbol of economic activi-

ty to a shell of its former self.

Duda Ntemi has lived in the building for two years, after dropping out of school in Grade 11. He says residents feel unfairly targeted.

"We are always the first suspects when something happens around here. When police come, they are aggressive and don't give us the benefit of the doubt," he said.

"Winter is cold here, but we make it work. We just hope the municipality redevelops this place. In a way, we are the ones preventing it from falling apart."

For nearby businesses, however, the building represents more than neglect — it represents loss.

"Our businesses suffer because customers are scared to come here. Some get robbed. The smell is unbearable, especially during windy or rainy days. It's a nightmare, but we are here for our bread and butter," said Boniswa, a local businesswoman.

However, for law enforcement, the challenges created by unoccupied buildings are huge and complex.

According to Free State police spokesperson Sergeant Mahlomola Kareli, the number of vacant buildings — particularly in the CBD — is rising steadily, cre-

ating growing challenges for law enforcement.

"The number of vacant buildings, especially in the CBD, is increasing by the day. In many instances, owners only realise something is wrong when they discover their buildings have been broken into and then open cases of theft," Kareli said.

He added that one of the major concerns is the unofficial occupation of these properties.

"You often find that buildings are being occupied without the owner's knowledge. In some cases, the owner is completely unaware that people are living inside," he said.

Last week, the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality hosted a Safer City Indaba to address service delivery challenges. During the event, Free State Premier Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae raised concerns about abandoned buildings in the city.

She called on the municipality to fast-track the allocation of residential land, repurpose unused properties and partner with investors to unlock economic activity and create jobs.

Something is haunting about these abandoned buildings.

They carry the city's layered history — reminders of a time when the CBD thrived. Today, they stand as monuments to neglect, symbols of a service delivery crisis that continues to reshape the face of Bloemfontein.



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3,600 Arrested in Relentless Crime Crackdown

By Bernell Simons

Communities across the Free State, Northern Cape and North West are still reeling after a sweeping wave of police action saw more than 3,600 suspects arrested in a matter of days as #OperationShanela II tore through identified crime hotspots. The nationwide blitz, spearheaded by the South African Police Service (SAPS), targeted violent offenders, drug syndicates and illegal liquor traders — a muscular show of force amid mounting public pressure over spiralling crime.

In the Free State alone, 1,709 suspects were apprehended during high-intensity operations focusing on trio crimes, aggravated robberies and violent offences. Among those arrested were 149 suspects for assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, 31 for rape, 16 for attempted murder and four for murder. Police also detained 41 suspects for drug dealing, 58 for possession, and 38 motorists for driving under the influence — a crime officials described as a "silent killer" on provincial roads.

Free State police spokesperson Brigadier Motantsi Makhele said the operation was "aimed at restoring the authority of the state and ensuring that communities feel safe in areas long plagued by violent crime." She confirmed that SAPS would maintain intelligence-led operations and high-visibility patrols in targeted areas.

Professor Robert Peacock, Head of Criminology at the University of the Free State, cautioned that impact will depend on what follows. "High arrest numbers generate reassurance, but the long-term effect hinges on thorough investigations, efficient courts and successful prosecutions. Without this, operations risk being symbolic rather than transformative," he said.

In the Northern Cape, 263 offenders were arrested during week-long high-density operations from 16 to 22 February. Nearly 6,000 individuals and 2,779 vehicles were stopped and searched as police flooded identified hotspots. Kimberley resident

Stacey Jacobs described the experience as both startling and necessary. "It's overwhelming but necessary. Seeing police everywhere makes you feel safer, but we hope it's not just a one-week show," she said.

North West witnessed dramatic night-time raids led by Acting Provincial Commissioner Major General (Dr) Ryno Naidoo, targeting Wolmaransstad, Brits, Hartbeespoortdam, Hebron and Lethlabile. Several suspects were arrested for possession of crystal meth, khat and mandrax, as well as illegal firearms and liquor-related offences. "There will be no safe haven in this province," Naidoo warned, underscoring what authorities described as a zero-tolerance approach.

Political analysts argue that Operation Shanela II carries as much symbolic weight as practical impact. Governance expert Dr Lindiwe Mkhize noted, "High-profile crackdowns reassure citizens, but they also expose systemic weaknesses — under-resourced courts, police understaffing and corruption. Without structural reform, these operations provide temporary relief rather than lasting solutions."

Local councillors echoed the call for sustained intervention. Logan Kruger said residents welcome the visible policing and arrests, but warned that long-term safety depends on consistent police presence, strengthened social programmes and meaningful youth engagement.

Opposition parties were quick to use the operation to criticise government performance, arguing that episodic crackdowns expose deeper failings in crime prevention and resource allocation. The African National Congress (ANC) provincial leadership defended the initiative, framing it as part of a broader long-term strategy to restore law and order.

As blue lights fade and crime statistics continue to mount, SAPS insists Operation Shanela II sends a clear message: law enforcement will be relentless. Yet for residents and experts alike, the true test will not be the scale of arrests — but whether the crackdown delivers sustained safety beyond the headlines.

Vrede Court Delivers Powerful Blow Against GBV Offender

By Bernell Simons

In a decisive stand against gender-based violence, the Vrede Regional Court has sentenced 38-year-old Bongizwe Nduna Mbonane to 35 years' direct imprisonment for rape and attempted murder — reinforcing the justice system's commitment to protecting women and holding perpetrators accountable.

The conviction, secured through the work of the Vrede Family, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Unit and the National Prosecuting Authority, is being hailed as a significant victory in the ongoing fight against GBV in the Free State.

The court heard that on 11 November 2023, a 33-year-old woman from Zamani Township near Meme was attacked while walking home from a tavern in the early hours of the morning. After assaulting her companion and forcing him to flee, the accused dragged the woman to a secluded area near a river, where he raped her and later left her in the water, believing she was dead.

In an extraordinary act of resilience, the survivor managed to escape and seek help despite her injuries — a critical step that ultimately led to the successful prosecution of her attacker.

On Wednesday, 25 February 2026, the Vrede Re-

gional Court handed down 25 years for rape and 10 years for attempted murder, ordering the sentences to run consecutively, resulting in an effective 35-year prison term.

GBV activists say the sentence sends a powerful message: violence against women will not go unpunished. In a country grappling with persistently high rates of sexual and domestic violence, such judgments serve both as a deterrent and a reaffirmation of survivors' rights to justice and dignity.

Law enforcement authorities welcomed the outcome, noting that the accused was denied bail and remained in custody throughout the trial — a move often praised by advocacy groups who argue that keeping violent offenders behind bars during proceedings enhances community safety and shields survivors from further trauma.

While no sentence can undo the physical and emotional scars endured by the victim, the ruling delivers accountability and affirms a crucial principle — that survivors who come forward will be heard, supported, and protected.

As South Africa continues to confront the scourge of gender-based violence, this case stands as a stark reminder that coordinated investigation, strong prosecution, and firm judicial resolve can deliver justice — and restore a measure of hope to communities demanding change.



Ageing Grid Blamed as Transformer Blast Disrupts City

Centlec probes insulation failure, oil breakdown and overloading as possible causes of the blast

By Bernell Simons

A transformer explosion at the Bayswater Distribution Centre in Bloemfontein has reignited concerns over ageing electricity infrastructure after large parts of the city's northern suburbs were left in darkness this week.

The blast occurred on Monday (23 February) when an 80 MVA transformer exploded, sparking a fire and triggering widespread outages that disrupted households and businesses. Electricity was fully restored by Wednesday following intensive repair work by Centlec technicians.

Addressing the media, Centlec CEO Malefane Sekoboto confirmed that a full technical investigation is un-



Centlec technicians worked around the clock to restore power following the transformer blast. Picture: Facebook

der way, with several possible causes being examined. "The transformer that exploded — there are a number of possible causes which we are going to test and compile into a full report," Sekoboto said.

A primary concern is insulation failure linked to age-

ing infrastructure. Over time, insulating paper and oil inside transformers deteriorate due to prolonged exposure to heat and moisture. This oxidation process weakens the system's ability to prevent internal electrical discharge.

"When insulation paper and oil degrade, it can result in what we call partial discharge. That discharge generates heat and can ultimately cause an explosion," he explained.

Mechanical faults may also have contributed. Sekoboto noted that oil contamination or oil breakdown can increase internal temperatures and produce combustible gases.

"If the oil becomes contaminated or breaks down, it can create excessive heat. That heat can lead to combustion gas and, under certain conditions, an explosion," he said.

Overloading was another factor under scrutiny. While transformers are typically operated at around 70% of capacity, abnormal network conditions can place added strain on equipment. Sekoboto revealed that another transformer had tripped on Saturday, increasing pressure on the system.

"The ageing infrastructure does not only affect the transformer itself. We have associated equipment like breakers. One 33 kVA breaker at Bayswater had a problem, which influenced how we managed the load before Monday evening," he said.

Despite the scale of the disruption, Centlec avoided what Sekoboto described as a potential worst-case scenario of 72-hour outages. The utility committed to restoring power within 24 hours — a target achieved through continuous technical intervention and network reconfiguration.

Sekoboto also commended the Mangaung Fire and Rescue Department for swiftly containing the blaze, preventing further damage to critical infrastructure.

The incident has amplified calls for urgent modernisation of Mangaung's electricity network. Centlec has begun replacing ageing components at key facilities, including Bayswater, as part of a broader infrastructure renewal programme.

The utility is also exploring the integration of the Westdene network through Navalsig to create an alternative supply route into Bayswater. The interconnection would allow electricity to be rerouted during emergencies, reducing the risk of prolonged outages.

While power has stabilised, the message from Centlec's leadership was unmistakable: without sustained investment and upgrades, similar incidents remain a looming threat to the city's energy security.

Five Presumed Dead as Flood Exposes Cracks in Kimberley's Diamond Heart

By Bernell Simons

The water came just before 1am — fast, violent and unforgiving. Within minutes, five men working nearly 900 metres below ground were swallowed by a torrent of mud and rock. Now they are presumed dead, and Kimberley is left grappling not only with grief, but with a question that cuts to the core of its 158-year diamond legacy: was this disaster preventable?

Kimberley's mining heritage has been shaken to its foundation following the catastrophic underground flood at the historic Du Toitspan Joint Shaft on February 17. At approximately 00:55, a sudden surge of water, mud and debris ripped through the 890-metre level — the deepest operational section of the mine. Newly developed workings were rapidly inundated.

Life-support drilling and camera inspections later confirmed there were no survivable conditions. Five miners remain trapped underground and are now presumed dead.

As families mourn and colleagues reel from the loss, scrutiny is intensifying over how such a devastating flood could occur in a modern deep-level mining operation. Industry research underscores that operations extending to depths approaching 900 metres demand rigorous hydrogeological monitoring, reinforced tunnel support systems and advanced early-warning detection mechanisms. At such depths, the margin for error narrows dramatically.

The central question emerging is whether existing infrastructure was adequately maintained and upgraded to manage the escalating risks associated with deeper excavation.

In a media statement issued on Wednesday, Ekapa Minerals described the event as sudden and devastating. Rescue teams have pumped approximately 18,000 cubic metres of water from the affected section, with additional dewatering systems installed in an effort to stabilise the shaft.

The disaster struck at the very level earmarked for the company's recovery strategy, internally known as Project 2026. The initiative was intended to offset steep declines in global diamond prices, reportedly down more than 50 percent since late 2025. Financial strain across the natural rough diamond market has intensified pressure on producers worldwide — raising uncomfortable questions about whether capital upgrades or preventative reinforcement work may have been delayed.

Hours after confirming the five miners were presumed dead, Ekapa Minerals announced it had applied for liquidation, citing an inability to meet financial obligations. Restoring access to the 890-metre level is estimated to require between 10 and 18 months of work and significant capital investment — resources the company says it no longer has.

The fallout was immediate. Salaries were halted. Workers were instructed to collect personal belongings as preparations began to wind down operations. Approximately 1,050 direct employees — and thousands of dependants — now face an uncertain future.

The timing has intensified scrutiny. Regulators and labour unions are expected to probe water management systems, infrastructure resilience and underground risk mitigation protocols. Inspection records, maintenance cycles and any prior warning indicators will likely come under the spotlight.

Beyond the human toll lies a broader economic shock. Contractors claim they are owed millions. Small engineering firms and transport operators fear collapse. Retailers brace for reduced consumer spending in a city long anchored by mining.

Deep-level mining is inherently capital-intensive. Sustained pumping systems, structural reinforcement and real-time geological monitoring are non-negotiable safeguards at advanced depths. When commodity prices plunge and liquidity tightens, maintenance schedules and infrastructure upgrades can slip — sometimes gradually, sometimes critically. Deferred investment in ageing shafts and support systems can compound underlying geological risks over time.

At nearly 900 metres below surface, even minor lapses can have amplified consequences.

As investigations unfold, attention will move beyond the immediate trigger of the flood to the broader governance framework — maintenance budgets, regulatory compliance and executive accountability.

For Kimberley, this is more than a mining accident. It is a reckoning.

For five families, the cost is immeasurable.

And for a city built on diamonds, the silence beneath the earth may echo for years to come.



SUSPECTED FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) CASE ON FARM

BASIC SYMPTOMS: EXCESSIVE DROOLING, LAMENESS, BLISTERS ON TONGUE AND FEET



Immediate standstill
Stop all animals, vehicle and person movement. Close your gates

Notify authorities
Call local state & Private Vets immediately. Failure to report is a criminal offense

Neighbour alert
Notify neighbours within 10km

Quarantine the group
Isolate suspect animals & handlers. Do not move through main herd.

Sample Collection
State Vet will take samples for PCR testing (results in 48 - 72 hours).

Disinfection "Wash - Down"
Establish disinfection station at exit for Vet & essential personnel

Awaiting Area
Do not "Panic Sell" or move animals. If positive, farm under Quarantine Movements will take place under a red-cross permit.



Disclaimer: general guide. Always follow the state veterinarian's specific instructions. Share with farm staff & neighbouring farmers.



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A FREE STATE THAT WORKS ALL



STATE of the PROVINCE ADDRESS

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FREE STATE PROVINCE

MATHAE SETS SIGHTS ON 34 414 JOBS

AS FREE STATE DOUBLES DOWN ON GROWTH, FOOD SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE



By Lerato Mutlanyane

Free State Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae has raised the bar in her 2026 State of the Province Address, setting a bold target of 34 414 job opportunities for the year ahead and positioning employment creation as the defining priority of her administration.

Speaking at the Old Grey Sports Grounds in Bloemfontein, Mathae acknowledged fragile gains in the labour market while signalling a more aggressive push to curb unemployment and poverty.

According to the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey, unemployment in the province dropped from 38.5% in the second quarter of 2025 to 36.2% in the third quarter — before edging up to 37.2% in the fourth quarter.

“Unemployment is gradually decreasing, but we are not complacent,” she said. “This year, we aim to create 34 414 work opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme.”

She confirmed that last year’s target of 30 115 EPWP jobs had been exceeded, describing the effort as part of a broader campaign to “turn the tide” against joblessness.

The Premier projected economic growth of 1.85% this year, buoyed by lower inflation and improved energy stability.

INVESTMENT, SEZ GROWTH AND RENEWABLE MOMENTUM



Mathae positioned the Free State as an emerging investment hub, citing its renewable energy pipeline, strategic transport links and water security anchored by the Gariep Dam.

At the Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone (MAP-SEZ), two refurbished factories will soon house NNTA Rabbit Abattoir and Rovno Sauce Company. The upgrades included road improvements and infrastructure maintenance aimed at repositioning the zone as a competitive industrial node.

“We are determined to significantly increase jobs from the current 1 527 in the MAP-SEZ. The appoint-

ment of a CEO is at an advanced stage to place the SEZ firmly on a path of growth,” she said.

AGRICULTURE: YOUTH, WOMEN AND FOOD SECURITY



The address drew strong reactions as Mathae turned to agriculture — a sector she described as central to economic diversification and resilience.

Financial support to women farmers now accounts for 34% of the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme allocation, while youth support has surged from 5% to 31%.

“Our support will reach 50% for women and 40% for youth in the 2026/27 financial year,” she said. “I am optimistic about young, determined men and women who are seizing government opportunities.”

She highlighted success stories including:

- Lydia Nkhoke of Ladybrand, supplying Spar with fresh produce
- The Mphatlalatsane Sheltered Employment project in Viljoenskroon, supplying Pick n Pay
- Bokang Lehloanya of Welkom, founder of Wa Rona Motoho Wa Sebele, who received R1.2 million for processing equipment

“Food security is a national priority. Growing food is about ending poverty, creating opportunity and strengthening communities. We are revitalising backyard and community gardens, supporting school and ECD food gardens, and linking projects to formal and informal markets,” she said.

The province is currently in the third phase of the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme, with 3 140 beneficiaries enrolled. In addition, 2 218 farmers received extension support in 2025/26, and 31 youth-owned agricultural projects were funded.

“Environmental sustainability and agriculture must remain key economic drivers,” she added.

POVERTY, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Facing mounting pressure over the rising cost of living, Mathae framed poverty as both a moral and economic crisis.

“Poverty strips people of dignity and limits access to opportunity. High living costs erode purchasing power and trap families in hardship,” she said.

She noted that 1 440 006 of the province’s three million residents receive social grants, including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

“Our priority is to care for the most vulnerable while linking those who can participate in the economy to job opportunities,” she said.

The province funds 50 Community Nutrition Development Centres across all districts, providing cooked meals to 9 067 vulnerable residents at a cost of R12.6 million.

“These centres are anchors of hope and stability in our communities,” she said.

EDUCATION: FROM FOUNDATION PHASE TO MATRIC EXCELLENCE



Mathae celebrated the province’s 89.33% Grade 12 pass rate for the Class of 2025, placing the Free State among the top-performing provinces nationally.

“Our education results are outstanding,” she said.

The bursary programme has been expanded from 200 to 300 beneficiaries for the 2026 academic year.

Beyond matric results, the province is strengthening Early Childhood Development following its migration to the Department of Education. Of 62 ECD centres earmarked for refurbishment, 13 have been completed, with intensified work planned for 2026.

“We are laying a solid foundation for early learning, literacy and numeracy,” she said.

R1.4BN FOR ROADS AND COMMUTER SUPPORT

Infrastructure investment remains a key pillar of the growth strategy.

More than 24 000 daily commuters benefit from provincial subsidies to Interstate Bus Lines in Mangaung and Maluti Bus Services in Thabo Mofutsanyana, improving access to jobs and education.

“We will not rest until our roads are safe,” Mathae said, pledging stronger law enforcement and urging motorists to take responsibility.

Capital projects in 2025/26 created 1 013 jobs, exceeding the 826 target. Eight Township Revitalisation projects generated 130 jobs across multiple towns. Reseal and fog spray projects were completed on key routes including:

- Kroonstad – Bothaville
- Dealesville – Bloemfontein
- Jagersfontein – Bloemfontein
- Hoopstad – Bultfontein
- Zaaron – Wepener
- Sasolburg – Deneysville

For 2026/27, R1.4 billion has been allocated to complete existing projects, prioritising rural roads, small-town connectivity and pothole eradication. Ten new construction and maintenance projects will

be procured later in the financial year.

“Investment in roads is not optional — it is essential for inclusive growth. Our road networks are a vital link for inclusive growth prospects. So, ambitious investment plans in our road infrastructure, and rural roads, continue. Ten new road construction and maintenance projects will be procured towards the end of the 2026/27 financial year,” she said.

OLDER PERSONS, HEALTHCARE REFORM AND THE FIGHT AGAINST GBVF



Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae also turned the spotlight on the safety of older persons, healthcare reform and the province’s intensified response to Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF), framing all three as urgent social priorities. Following the Older Persons Dialogue held in October 2025, the province expanded its protection and care interventions for senior citizens.

“We have partnered with 36 NPOs to provide 24-hour residential care to 800 older persons. A further 153 NPOs deliver community-based support to 4 464 older persons,” she said.

The Premier stressed that protecting the elderly requires coordinated social and community-based systems that safeguard dignity while ensuring access to care. In a bid to bolster the public health system, the province has appointed additional medical personnel across facilities and enrolled 203 nursing students for academic training.

Digital reform is also underway. The e-Impilo Electronic Patient Record system has been rolled out to 30 clinics, while the Hospital Management System 2 (HMS2) is now operational in 18 hospitals.

“In November, we joined the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, to launch the Six Multi-Month Dispensing strategy in the Free State. This marks the beginning of a new model to streamline pharmaceutical supply and improve patient management,” Mathae said. The strategy is designed to reduce queues, ease pressure on facilities and optimise limited healthcare resources.

Describing GBVF as a “national disaster”, Mathae delivered one of the most impassioned sections of her address. “This scourge must end. We must dismantle the cultural, institutional and societal practices that trap women in abusive relationships. Our women and children must know they are protected,” she said. The province will intensify prevention programmes, expand victim support services and strengthen collaboration with the criminal justice system under the #ItStartsWithMe 365 Days GBVF Campaign.

A mobile application will be developed to allow victims to send real-time alerts and access immediate assistance. Partnerships with traditional leaders, faith-based organisations and the taxi industry are also being strengthened to widen the prevention net.

“We reaffirm our commitment to prudent financial management, optimal use of personnel and responsive service delivery — directing resources where they are needed most,” she said.

As the address concluded, the message was unmistakable: jobs, food security, education and infrastructure will define the year ahead.

Whether the ambitious targets translate into measurable impact will become clear over the next 12 months.

FS SOPA 2026 IN A NUTSHELL

- 2 736 health professionals and support personnel appointed in the past year to strengthen public healthcare services.
- R1.4 billion allocated to rural roads, small-town connectivity, and pothole eradication to boost agricultural growth, enable trade, reduce poverty, and improve access to essential services.
- 24 000 daily commuters benefiting from subsidised transport through Interstate Bus Lines and Maluti Bus Service.
- 3 140 agricultural beneficiaries supported through the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme.
- Women beneficiaries increased to 34% and youth farmers to 31% (up from 5%) in agricultural financial support programmes.
- 56 spaza shops received financial backing through the Spaza Shop Support Fund.
- 46 118 work opportunities created in partnership with other spheres of government, surpassing last year’s target of 30 115.
- Young entrepreneurs in Mangaung and Fezile Dabi were supported with equipment worth R15 000 each through the Informal Micro Enterprises Development Programme.
- 19 500 serviced sites set for completion this year to support wastewater treatment capacity.
- R949 million allocated through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) for municipal infrastructure development.
- Three major water infrastructure upgrades completed in Qwaqwa, Brandfort, and Mangaung.
- Bursaries increased from 200 learners in 2025 to 300 learners in 2026.
- Seven municipalities were placed under Section 139 intervention to address governance challenges.
- R642.1 million allocated to support 1 642 registered Early Childhood Development centres in the upcoming financial year.
- Over R100 billion committed to 29 renewable energy projects in partnership with the DTIC and the private sector.
- Development underway for a mobile app to combat Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF).
- 448 Quintile 1–3 primary schools to benefit from a R105 million Operation Tharollo Programme aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes.
- 30 young people trained through the Cellphone Repair Programme.
- 18 of 33 hospitals equipped with Hospital Management System 2 (HMS2), while the e-Impilo electronic Patient Record system is now operational in 30 clinics across the province.



Transmission or Collapse: Saul Draws a Line on Energy Future

Premier Zamani Saul warns that without urgent transmission upgrades, the province's green economy ambitions could stall.

By Bernell Simons

Northern Cape Premier Zamani Saul has committed his administration to an aggressive transmission infrastructure overhaul, warning that without urgent upgrades the province risks losing billions in renewable energy investment.

Delivering his 2026 State of the Province Address, Saul acknowledged that while the Northern Cape has cemented its position as South Africa's renewable energy powerhouse, inadequate grid capacity has emerged as the single biggest obstacle to further growth.

"We are producing clean energy at scale, but our ability to transmit that power to the rest of the country is constrained," Saul said. "Generation without adequate transmission infrastructure is like building a dam without pipelines."

The province hosts some of the country's largest solar photovoltaic and wind projects under the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). Yet much of its transmission network was originally designed to serve sparsely populated rural communities — not to evacuate massive volumes of electricity generated by utility-scale renewable plants.

Why the Grid Is Constrained

Saul said the transmission backlog stems from decades of underinvestment in high-voltage infrastructure, combined with the rapid expansion of renewable projects in recent years.

"The grid was not built for the scale of renewable energy we are now attracting," he said. "We have reached a point where new projects cannot connect because the transmission lines are full."

Bureaucratic delays, environmental approval processes and funding limitations have compounded the challenge. As a result, several renewable energy projects have faced connection delays, slowing job creation and dampening private sector momentum.

The constraints carry broader economic risks. Investors require certainty that once generation capacity is built, it can be connected to the national grid without delay.

"If we do not resolve transmission bottlenecks, we risk undermining investor confidence. That is not a position we can afford to be in," Saul warned.

Strategic Partnership with Eskom

Central to the province's response is a strengthened partnership with Eskom, which manages South Africa's transmission network. Saul confirmed that Eskom has committed to expanding and modernising key transmission corridors across the Northern Cape.

"We are working closely with Eskom to accelerate the rollout of new transmission lines and substations," he said. "This includes strengthening the backbone network to integrate future renewable projects."

Government will align provincial planning with Eskom's Transmission Development Plan to ensure infrastructure is built ahead of demand rather than in re-



Northern Cape Premier, Zamani Saul. Picture: NCLegislature/facebook

action to crisis. Saul also signalled support for reforms that could enable greater private sector participation in transmission investment.

In previous addresses, Saul repeatedly positioned the Northern Cape as the country's "renewable energy frontier." In 2024, he described grid expansion as "non-negotiable" if the province was to maintain its competitive edge. Last year, he linked unlocking transmission capacity to industrialisation opportunities tied to green hydrogen, battery storage and renewable manufacturing.

This year, that focus sharpened, with transmission upgrades framed as both an economic imperative and a service delivery priority.

"Reliable electricity is not just about megawatts; it is about dignity, opportunity and stability," Saul said. "A strengthened grid supports households, enables business growth and anchors our green economy ambitions."

Accountability and Execution

To fast-track delivery, a dedicated intergovernmental task team will coordinate between provincial departments, Eskom and independent power producers. The team will monitor progress, remove administrative

bottlenecks and accelerate approvals where possible.

"We cannot allow red tape to delay infrastructure that is vital to our future," Saul said. "Timelines must be met, and there will be accountability where commitments are not honoured."

Transmission projects are capital-intensive and often take years to complete — a reality Saul acknowledged. However, he insisted that failing to act would be more costly in the long run.

"The cost of not investing is far greater than the cost of building," he said.

"If we act decisively now, the Northern Cape will remain at the forefront of South Africa's energy transition."

As implementation begins, residents and investors alike will be watching to see whether the province can convert its renewable energy advantage into sustained economic growth, improved service delivery and long-term energy stability.

For Saul, the message was unequivocal: the Northern Cape's green economy ambitions hinge not only on abundant sunlight and wind — but on steel towers and transmission lines capable of carrying that power to the nation.

SA Arms Itself Against Foot-and-Mouth Crisis



Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen personally oversaw the arrival of the shipment this week. Picture: Supplied

By Lerato Mutlanyane

After months of devastation, mounting losses and growing fears over food security, South Africa's battle against Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) has reached a turning point. On Saturday, 21 February 2026, the long-awaited emergency vaccine finally touched down at OR Tambo International Airport — marking what government officials call the beginning of a national recovery drive.

For farmers across the country, FMD has been nothing short of a death sentence for cattle, costing the livestock sector millions and threatening supply chains. Now, with one million high-potency vaccine doses arriving in the first consignment, authorities say the tide may finally begin to turn.

Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen personally oversaw the arrival of the shipment, signalling the urgency of the crisis and government's commitment to contain it.

The vaccines were sourced from Biogenesis Bago in Argentina, with additional batches expected from suppliers in Botswana and Turkey. According to the department, more than five million doses from three international suppliers are set to enter the country in the coming month — a significant boost to vaccination efforts that have already begun in affected areas but have been slowed by limited supply.

"Vaccination has already begun in affected areas, but supply has limited the speed and coverage," Steenhuisen said. "With this arrival, we can now accelerate protection across priority provinces and stabilise the livestock sector."

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) has also stepped in to strengthen domestic capacity, committing to producing 20,000 vaccines weekly, with plans to scale up to 200,000 doses per week by 2027.

Authorities say the additional doses will allow for a shift from targeted outbreak response to broader suppression of viral circulation in high-risk zones.

Despite the breakthrough, the outbreak remains widespread. The Free State alone has recorded 370 cases across 15 local municipalities.

A risk-based vaccination strategy will prioritise epicentres in KwaZulu-Natal, parts of Gauteng, the Free

State and North West. High-risk provinces will follow structured vaccination programmes combining inoculation with strengthened diagnostics, animal traceability and strict movement controls — all aimed at restoring South Africa's internationally recognised disease-free status.

Provincial allocations reflect the urgency: KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State will each receive 200,000 doses; the Eastern Cape 150,000; Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo 100,000 each; Gauteng 70,000; Northern Cape 50,000; and the Western Cape 30,000.

Government has also issued a stern warning to non-compliant livestock owners.

"Quarantine rules, movement permits and biosecurity measures exist to protect every farmer in the country," Steenhuisen said.

"Those who deliberately move animals illegally, conceal infections or ignore restrictions threaten the recovery of the entire sector. Where there is wilful non-compliance, we will work with law enforcement authorities and the full hand of the law will be applied."

On 27 February, the minister confirmed he would travel to Mooi River in KwaZulu-Natal to vaccinate dairy cattle alongside veterinarians and farmers, acknowledging the severe blow the outbreak has dealt to the dairy industry.

"The dairy sector has been among the hardest hit, with significant production losses, disrupted markets and immense strain on farming families. Each vaccinated herd means stability returning to a business, wages returning to workers and milk returning to shelves," he said.

Steenhuisen described the vaccine rollout as a shift "from crisis management to control."

"Vaccines are arriving, the system is scaling up and compliance will be enforced. Working together, we will stabilise the sector and rebuild confidence in South Africa's animal-health system."

For a livestock industry battered by uncertainty, the arrival of the emergency vaccine signals more than just a shipment — it represents a decisive step toward recovery, market stability and the long road back to global credibility.

Mokgosi Pledges Crackdown on Failing Local Governments



North West Premier, Lazarus Mokgosi. Picture: Baagadi Sethloda

By Bernell Simons

North West Premier Lazarus Mokgosi has declared 2026 the "Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy," unveiling an aggressive turnaround strategy aimed at restoring collapsing municipalities and improving service delivery across the province.

Opening the provincial legislative year on 26 Feb-

ruary 2026, Mokgosi committed to ensuring stable, functional municipalities ahead of the upcoming Local Government Elections, while pledging full support to the Electoral Commission to deliver free and fair polls.

"Municipalities are the closest sphere of government to our people. They affect daily lives directly and serve as the practical base for economic activity," Mokgosi said, referencing Section 153 of the Constitution, which mandates municipalities to promote social

and economic development.

He stressed that fixing local government means restoring administrative functionality to meet basic community needs and create an environment conducive to business growth and job creation.

"We must improve water provision, electricity supply, refuse removal and road maintenance," he said.

The Premier highlighted improvements in provincial governance, noting that nine of eleven departments received unqualified and clean audit outcomes in the last audit cycle. All senior managers have complied with financial disclosure requirements, a move aimed at strengthening ethical leadership and preventing conflicts of interest.

Performance agreements have been signed by Executive Council members, with political consequence management promised for non-performance. Several cases involving government and municipal officials are under investigation, while others are before the courts.

On finances, Mokgosi reported that the province spent 98% of its allocation from National Treasury and

expects no funds to be returned to the national fiscus this financial year. A province-wide Smart-Gov Monitoring and Evaluation Dashboard will be launched at the start of the 2026/27 financial year, integrating all departments into a single real-time oversight platform to track expenditure, performance and service delivery outcomes.

Encouragingly, municipalities such as Moses Kotane, Taung and JB Marks improved from qualified to unqualified audit opinions. Disclaimer audit outcomes have dropped dramatically from nine municipalities in 2020/21 to just one — Ditsobotla — in 2024/25.

However, Mokgosi admitted that instability has devastated some municipalities. He described Ditsobotla as a "textbook example" of how poor governance destroys local economies, erodes revenue and worsens unemployment.

To strengthen struggling municipalities, the province will invoke Section 154 of the Constitution to enhance capacity in waste management and road maintenance. Ditsobotla and Matlosana are priority areas, with support from SANRAL and farmers' organisations.

Remedial action plans are underway, alongside Section 106 investigations into alleged maladministration at Matlosana, Madibeng and Tswaing. Eskom will assist municipalities battling load reduction through energy efficiency and demand management grants.

Through the "Adopt a Municipality" initiative, Ramotshere Moiloa has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Infrastructure South Africa. Over the next 24 months, the partnership aims to fast-track infrastructure development, boost revenue collection and address maintenance backlogs.

Water and sanitation remain a major priority. The province has allocated R300 million for water and sanitation projects, alongside R1.9 billion for bulk water supply initiatives in Madibeng, Ratlou, Mahikeng and Ramotshere Moiloa.

Mokgosi apologised to residents affected by delays, citing vandalism and criminality as contributing factors. Cases have been reported to the South African Police Service for investigation.

"The people of North West must see change," he said. "We will not only listen — we will deliver."

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MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

TURNAROUND STRATEGY: FISCAL HEALTH, WASTEWATER, AND REVENUE COLLECTION



KHALIPHA BETS ON FISCAL DISCIPLINE

By Bernell Simons

The Financial Recovery Plan at Matjhabeng Local Municipality has become the backbone of an ambitious effort to pull the municipality back from years of fiscal instability and service delivery collapse.

Executive Mayor Cllr Thanduxolo Khalipha says the turnaround is not cosmetic or temporary — it is a structural reset. Speaking to the media this week, he made it clear that without financial stability, service delivery cannot recover.

"This is about restoring credibility, discipline and accountability," Khalipha said. "Financial stability is directly linked to service delivery."

At the centre of the reform drive is strict compliance with the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA). Reporting systems are now subject to over-

sight by National Treasury and provincial authorities, in line with constitutional requirements.

The municipality has prioritised tighter expenditure controls, strengthened supply chain management and improved revenue monitoring to rebuild audit integrity.

Revenue collection has emerged as a critical pressure point. To address mounting arrears, the municipality has implemented auxiliary deductions on prepaid electricity purchases for accounts more than 30 days overdue, in accordance with its Credit Control and Debt Recovery Policy.

A portion of prepaid purchases is automatically allocated toward outstanding municipal debt, including service arrears and penalties.

While acknowledging the measure may be unpopular, municipal leadership argues it is essential to reverse declining revenue and fund basic services.

Residents are notified in advance and those experi-

encing hardship are encouraged to enter payment arrangements.

The financial reset is already being linked to infrastructure gains.

Matjhabeng operates 11 wastewater treatment works, though only two are currently fully operational. Two major plants are more than 90% complete and awaiting final power stabilisation before coming online — a development expected to significantly curb persistent sewer spillages and improve environmental compliance.

Under the national Sanitation Ministerial Intervention Programme, drainage upgrades are under way in Welkom, with sewer pipeline replacements progressing in Thabong. Of the municipality's 57 sewer pump stations, 23 have been completed and several are fully functional.

The acquisition of two high-pressure jetting trucks and the deployment of trailer pumps in hotspot areas

are intended to improve response times and operational efficiency.

Khalipha conceded that pipeline replacements and system upgrades may cause temporary disruptions.

However, he framed them as necessary steps in rebuilding critical infrastructure long left to deteriorate.

Challenges remain — from ageing infrastructure to historic debt burdens and public frustration — but municipal leadership insists the trajectory is shifting. Strengthened governance compliance, firmer revenue controls, stabilised pump stations and near-complete sanitation projects are cited as early indicators of progress.

For a municipality long associated with financial distress, the Financial Recovery Plan is both a test of political will and an opportunity to restore trust.

Rebuilding, Khalipha maintains, will not happen overnight — but it is deliberate, disciplined and un-

derway.

Flushing Out Failure:

Matjhabeng's Wastewater Turnaround Gains Ground

By Bernell Simons

After years of raw sewage flooding streets, collapsing pipelines and crippled treatment works, the Matjhabeng Local Municipality says it is finally gaining the upper hand in a battle that has scarred neighbourhoods and threatened public health.

At a media briefing on Sunday, 22 February 2026, Executive Mayor Cllr Thanduxolo Khalipha outlined significant progress under the municipality's Financial Recovery Plan, placing wastewater rehabilitation at the centre of Matjhabeng's broader infrastructure revival.

"We are turning the tide on an infrastructure failure that has affected so many of our residents," Khalipha said, describing sanitation reform as a cornerstone of restoring dignity, environmental safety and investor confidence.

From National Headlines to Near Completion

For residents of Welkom and surrounding towns, sewer spillages have become an all-too-familiar reality. In late 2025, raw sewage running through Mashele Street in Oppenheimer Park made national headlines, with residents reporting unbearable stench and daily exposure to contaminated water near homes, schools and clinics.

The crisis stemmed from ageing infrastructure, malfunctioning pump stations, broken pipelines and persistent power instability — compounded by years of deferred maintenance and financial strain.

Matjhabeng operates 11 wastewater treatment

works. Until recently, only two were fully functional. Two of the largest plants had been offline for extended periods due to severe electrical and mechanical failures. This week, Khalipha confirmed that both major plants are now more than 90% complete and awaiting final power stabilisation before full commissioning. Once operational, they are expected to significantly reduce untreated effluent discharge — a major contributor to recurring spillages.

Pump Stations and Pipelines: Rebuilding the Backbone

A key focus of the rehabilitation drive has been pump station upgrades. Of the municipality's 57 sewer pump stations, 23 have now been completed, with several already fully operational. Historically, pump failures caused wastewater to back up into streets when flow to treatment plants was disrupted.

Khalipha credited the national Sanitation Ministerial Intervention Programme for accelerating targeted interventions. Drainage upgrades in Welkom and sewer pipeline replacements in Thabong form part of a coordinated effort to strengthen ageing networks.

"These are not cosmetic fixes," he stressed. "These upgrades are strategic interventions designed to ensure long-term functionality and prevent recurring overflows."

To bolster response capacity, the municipality has deployed two newly procured high-pressure jetting trucks to clear blockages and inspect underground systems. Trailer-mounted pumps have also been installed in identified hotspots to manage wastewater flow while perma-

nent repairs continue.

Cautious Optimism from Communities

Community activists and civil society groups have welcomed the reported progress but remain watchful.

"Infrastructure deterioration has happened over decades," a local civic leader noted. "Planned upgrades are welcome, but residents want to see zero spillages — not just promises."

Between 2023 and 2024, parliamentary committees and local media repeatedly highlighted the environmental and health risks posed by raw sewage, particularly near schools and informal settlements. Those investigations also pointed to financial mismanagement and insufficient maintenance funding as key obstacles.

Municipal officials concede that while momentum is building, full restoration will require sustained discipline.

Khalipha reiterated that credible revenue collection and strict expenditure control under the Financial Recovery Plan are essential to ensuring that today's upgrades do not become tomorrow's failures.

For residents long forced to navigate flooded streets and foul odours, progress will not be measured in percentages or project reports. It will be measured in dry pavements, functioning drains and wastewater systems that protect — rather than endanger — homes, children and livelihoods.

Power, Payment and Principle: Matjhabeng Draws a Hard Line on Service Cut-Offs

By Bernell Simons

Residents and essential service providers in Matjhabeng are under mounting pressure as the municipality tightens credit control measures in a bid to stabilise its finances. With unrest flaring in neighbouring municipalities over aggressive revenue collection, Matjhabeng's leadership insists its approach is firm — but fair.

At a media briefing on Sunday, 22 February 2026, Executive Mayor Cllr Thanduxolo Khalipha defended the municipality's stance, saying revenue recovery is critical to preventing a total service collapse.

"We are mindful that access to water and electricity is a basic necessity and a matter of human dignity," Khalipha said.

"Cut-offs are only implemented after exhaustive engagement and when all reasonable alternatives have been explored."

He explained that all disconnections are guided by the municipality's Credit Control and Debt Recovery Policy, which is currently under review to ensure it remains fair and responsive to prevailing socio-economic realities.

Verified indigent households are receiving special consideration, including structured payment plans and targeted support.

"No resident should feel that recovery efforts come at the expense of their basic rights," Khalipha added. "We must be firm but compassionate."

Hospital Power Cut Sparks Debate

The municipality's uncompromising enforcement came sharply into focus following a recent electricity disconnection at Bongani Hospital, one of the region's key healthcare facilities. The move briefly disrupted operations and ignited public debate.

Khalipha did not mince his words.

"It's simple — we cut their power. Yet now they have generators, so they clearly have resources. It's simple: pay your account and we will reconnect you."

He stressed that the hospital was not treated differently from any other debtor.

"All major service providers — including police stations, traffic offices, hospitals and businesses — have experienced disconnections when accounts were overdue," he said. "Our policy is consistent: service restoration is linked to account settlement or structured payment arrangements."

Walking the Tightrope Between Compliance and Compassion

Acknowledging growing anxiety among residents, particularly low-income households, Khalipha said the municipality faces the difficult task of protecting vulnerable communities while ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

"Cut-offs are only applied after all reasonable alternatives have been explored," he reiterated. "Our goal is to ensure the municipality remains financially viable so that everyone — including the most vulnerable — continues to receive essential services."

Municipal officials confirmed that additional safeguards are in place for indigent and vulnerable house-

holds to prevent undue hardship.

Revenue Recovery as a Lifeline

According to Khalipha, structured revenue collection is not punitive — it is essential.

Funds collected are being channelled into maintaining electricity and water infrastructure, investing in wastewater systems, and stabilising service delivery.

"Paying your account is not about punishment — it is about keeping services running for everyone," he said.

He added that rebuilding public trust requires open communication and shared responsibility.

"We cannot build stable service delivery in isolation. Residents must be partners in recovery, not bystanders," Khalipha said, urging those struggling financially to engage the municipality and seek assistance before accounts fall into arrears.

As Matjhabeng continues its financial recovery programme, the Bongani Hospital incident has become a defining example of the municipality's resolve.

The message from City Hall is clear: compliance is non-negotiable — but engagement remains open.

The challenge now lies in maintaining that delicate balance between fiscal discipline and the constitutional obligation to ensure reliable access to water and electricity for all.



Matjhabeng Local Municipality Executive Mayor Thanduxolo Khalipha. Picture: Baagedi Sethora

Mmoho - Together - Sisonke - Tesame

Suspended Ekurhuleni HR Boss Denies Protecting Metro Police Deputy



Suspended Head of Human Resources for the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Linda Gxasheka. Picture: Facebook

By Lerato Mutlanyane

After being accused of being part of the circle that allegedly shielded Deputy Metro Police Chief Julius Mkhwanazi from corruption charges, suspended Head of Human Resources for the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Linda Gxasheka has strongly denied the claims.

Testifying before the Madlanga Commission of Inquiry, Gxasheka insisted she barely knew Mkhwanazi and revealed that she feared him after hearing rumours that he was a “dangerous man”.

Gxasheka faced allegations that, in her role as HR Head, she failed to implement disciplinary action against Mkhwanazi despite a formal report by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) implicating him in fraud and corruption.

She rejected suggestions of inaction, telling the commission that shortly after the IPID report was

released, she met with the Chief of Police and other senior officials to discuss the way forward.

“A day or two later, the Chief, Isaac Mapiyeye, kept calling me saying, ‘Action HOD, you have to sign the suspension.’ I have a professional duty to sign, whether I am safe or not safe. I want it to be recorded here that ultimately I did sign the intention to suspend,” she testified.

Gxasheka highlighted what she described as the irony of the situation, claiming that even those equipped to protect themselves felt intimidated.

“Despite the Chief of Police, who has guns and firearms that we don’t have, telling us how scared he was of this person, because of my judicial duty, I did sign that suspension letter,” she said.

Following her decision to sign the suspension, Gxasheka requested a risk threat analysis to safeguard herself and her family. She told the commission that the security assessment was never carried out.

NEHAWU Members Revolt over GEMS Hike as Medical Aid Costs Outpace Salaries

Unions say back-to-back contribution hikes are swallowing modest wage increases and deepening financial strain on public servants.



Members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) in the Northern Cape's Klerksdorp Hospital picket on Tuesday. Picture: Baagedi Sethora

By Lerato Mutlanyane

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) in the Northern Cape has called on the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) to reconsider its latest contribution increases, warning that the hikes are pushing public servants deeper into financial strain.

The medical aid scheme reportedly increased contributions by 13.4% in 2025. A further proposed increase of 9.8% is set to take effect in January, followed by another 9.5% adjustment from 1 April.

NEHAWU members at Klerksdorp Hospital joined a nationwide picket on Tuesday, staging a lunchtime protest outside the facility in solidarity with workers across the country opposing the increases.

Employees say the scheme was initially introduced

as an affordable medical aid option for government workers, but claim it has since become one of the most expensive.

“Recently, it’s become one of the most expensive medical aids. As the union, we are tired of GEMS’ operations and we are calling on board members, including management, to think of the employees because some of them are not earning that much,” said Tshupo Zwem, chairperson of NEHAWU’s Klerksdorp branch.

Zwem added that demonstrations will continue until GEMS management agrees to engage with unions and reconsider the proposed increases, arguing that many workers simply cannot afford the higher contributions. According to reports, GEMS was established as a social solidarity medical scheme through PSCBC Resolution 1 of 2006 and was never intended to operate as a commercial enterprise.

Other unions, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), Public Servants Association (PSA), and South African Onderwysers Unie (Saou), have also expressed dissatisfaction, describing the increases as “unjustifiable.”

The unions argue that the contribution hikes come at a time when public servants are already grappling with rising living costs, mounting household debt, and stagnant real wage growth.

Public servants received a 5.5% salary increase for the 2025/2026 financial year and are set to receive a further 4% increase for the 2026/2027 financial year, effective April 2026 — adjustments unions say are being swallowed up by escalating medical aid costs.

“We are here to say we don’t want the proposed increment; we want them to give us affordable GEMS medical aid,” Zwem said.

Paul O’Sullivan abandons testimony, walks out of ad hoc committee



Forensic analyst Paul O’Sullivan appears before Parliament’s ad hoc committee probing police. Picture: Citizen

Proceedings at Parliament’s ad hoc committee erupted into chaos on Thursday when forensic expert Paul O’Sullivan abruptly left during his testimony.

O’Sullivan had returned to complete his evidence as part of the committee’s inquiry investigating allegations of corruption, criminal infiltration and political interference within South Africa’s justice system. The tension peaked as O’Sullivan, originally expected to testify until 1pm, faced further accusations suggesting he might be a spy or foreign agent.

As the scheduled end time approached, O’Sullivan said he needed to leave for a flight to Johannesburg.

“I have reached a point chairman, where I have to go,” he told MPs. EFF leader Julius Malema immediately intervened, warning that

O’Sullivan could not simply walk out on Parliament.

“He is not going to leave until [the chairperson] releases him,” Malema said. MK party MP David Skosana drew parallels to a high-profile incident in December 2025, when former National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) Shamila Batohi walked out of the Nkabinde inquiry into Gauteng Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Andrew Chauke’s fitness to hold office.

“It cannot be allowed. He is doing the same thing as Batohi. ‘You can’t leave here, you are appearing before us. We don’t care about your flight,’ Skosana said.

Despite the pressure, O’Sullivan insisted that he came voluntarily and would leave of his own accord.

“I’m leaving on my own free will.” Committee chairperson Soviet Legkanyane called on the parliamentary legal team for guidance on handling the unprecedented walkout, while ANC MP Xola Nqola stressed the seriousness of the matter.

The EFF has since slammed O’Sullivan, accusing him of running away from questioning “like a criminal with something to hide”.

The party stated that his actions amount to contempt of Parliament.

“The EFF will be pursuing through Parliament, the office of the speaker and additionally explore our own legal options to compel O’Sullivan to appear before Parliament and account for allegations made against him.

“O’Sullivan must be considered as a fugitive, and a dangerous one who, through his own admissions, has an aircraft, multiple passports and can flee South Africa in order to avoid justice and accountability,” the EFF’s statement read. **Citizen**

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PUBLIC NOTICE

MPAC PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MEETINGS ON MANGAUNG ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 has in terms of section 79(1) enjoined the Municipal Council to establish Municipal Public Accounts Committee to perform an oversight role on the executive and administration of the Municipality.

The Municipal Public Accounts Committee (MPAC) of the Mangaung Metro Municipality invites all residents and stakeholders to public participation meetings regarding the 2024/2025 Annual Report and Audit Report 2024/2025. The purpose of these meetings is to give members of the community an opportunity to make comments on the City’s performance for the 2024/2025 financial year.

Public meetings are scheduled as follows:

DATE	REGION	VENUE	TIME
Tuesday 3 March 2026	Vanstadensrus	Vanstadensrus Hall	09H00 AM
	Wepener	Qibing Hall	12H00 AM
	Dewetsdorp	Morojaneng Hall	15H00 PM
Wednesday 4 March 2026	Bloemfontein	Kagisanong/ Rocklands Hall	11H00 AM
		Kopanong Secondary School	15H00 PM
Thursday 5 March 2026	Bloemfontein	Paradise Hall	11H00 AM
		Clive Solomon	15H00 PM
Wednesday 11 March 2026	Bloemfontein	Bram Fischer Building	11H00 AM

For more information contact Mr. Moses Sekakanyo on 051 405 8462 or email: moses.sekakanyo@mangaung.co.za

CITY MANAGER - SELLO MORE

Opinion

Dr Ashwill Ramon Phillips

Senior Lecturer in the Department of
Criminology, University of the Free State

Deploying the SANDF: Tactical relief rather than strategic and sustainable solutions'

During the 2026 State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) would be deployed to assist in addressing gang-related crime and violence in the Western Cape, and to combat illegal mining operations in Gauteng. It was later confirmed that the deployment would include the Eastern Cape. The announcement reflects the urgency, desperation and public outcry to address South Africa's evolving organised crime crisis, which is increasingly regarded as one of the most immediate threats to our democratic stability, social cohesion and sustainable economic development. The President's framing of organised crime as a national security concern rather than merely a policing issue, signals a significant shift in how crime is conceptualised and responded to at the highest levels of government.

Gang violence, extortion and contract killings have become prevalent across the country, with particularly devastating consequences in Cape Town and Gauteng. These crimes destabilise communities, undermine the authority of the state, erode public trust, and entrench citizens in persistent cycles of fear, trauma and social fragmentation. Similar to criminal gangs, illegal mining syndicates, commonly referred to as zama zamas, have evolved into sophisticated criminal enterprises characterised by territorial conflict, extreme violence, money laundering, and the exploitation of vulnerable migrant labour. Their operations compromise public safety, damage infrastructure, degrade the environment, and generate illicit financial flows that potentially sustain broader networks of organised crime.

While the scale and severity of organised criminal activity is indisputable, military deployment as a potential reduction measure raises crucial concerns. On one hand, this may temporarily succeed in stabilising volatile environments, disrupt criminal operations, and provide visible reassurance to affected communities. On the other, the deployment of the



defence force would most likely offer only tactical relief, rather than strategic and sustainable solutions to the problem. Gangs and other organised criminal groups are fluid and adaptable, a key reason for their continued growth and evolution. When confronted by force and intensified enforcement, these groups are likely to respond with violence, relocate, reorganise, and re-emerge or spread into other areas thus displacing the problem as opposed to eliminating it. While a military response may aid in suppressing overt manifestations of organised criminal activity, it is unlikely to address the underlying socio-economic, systemic and structural drivers that cause and sustain it.

Understanding gang culture and the limitations of military deployment

Gangs and organised criminal networks are deeply entrenched within local communities and economies, family units, formal and informal power structures, and illicit markets. These groups are highly organised, well-connected, extremely violent and complex criminal enterprises that are sustained through shared identity, loyalty, fear, economic dependence and social belonging. Gang operations

are underpinned by sophisticated systems of recruitment, territorial governance, financial management, and violent enforcement. Any measure of successful intervention would thus require sustained intelligence gathering, forensic investigation, asset seizure, witness protection, prosecutorial efficacy and institutional integrity. Likewise, our management strategies need to be proactive as opposed to being reactive, and facilitate the treatment of the root causes instead of merely responding to the aftermath. Equally important is the recognition that organised crime flourishes in environments characterised by inequality, deprivation, unemployment, social exclusion, corruption, and institutional fragility. In many gang-affected communities, chronic poverty, school dropout, overcrowding, family disintegration, and limited economic opportunities create a fertile breeding ground for gang recruitment. Gangs offer false stability by providing a source of income, identity, belonging, and protection where formal social and economic institutions fail. Similarly, illegal mining operations thrive among populations facing extreme economic marginalisation, labour displacement, and migration insecurity.

Against this backdrop, military deployment, while potentially disruptive, is unlikely to produce sustainable reductions in organised crime. Continued military presence in crime hotspots will not be financially nor operationally sustainable, given existing strains experienced by the SANDF which include, budgetary constraints, logistical limitations, ageing infrastructure and limited resources. Although soldiers can assist the South African Police Service (SAPS) in a supportive capacity, they are not essentially designed nor are they mandated to perform long-term domestic law enforcement functions, and lack investigative authority, prosecutorial coordination, and the community engagement capacity required to more permanently dismantle criminal networks. Prolonged military presence would potentially also desensitise communities to armed presence, foster dependency rather than empowerment, and possibly beget more violence within affected areas. Moreover, it may further erode confidence and trust in local policing structures, creating the impression that SAPS is incapable of fulfilling its core mandate.

Identifying organised crime as a fundamental threat to South Africa's democratic stability and socio-economic development is both accurate and necessary. However, the solution extends far beyond military deployment.

Without comprehensive structural reform, military intervention will remain reactive, costly, unsustainable, and ultimately ineffective. Soldiers may temporarily stabilise volatile spaces, but lasting security requires deeper transformation. Sustainable crime prevention demands long-term investment in institutional capacity, economic inclusion, social development, education, urban renewal, and community empowerment. Only through an integrated, multi-sectoral approach can South Africa disrupt the cycles of violence, marginalisation, and criminality that continue to undermine social order and democratic governance.

FS Government
Working Hard To
Change the Lives
of the People

It took Nelson Mandela to cease existing for his oppressors to finally acknowledge the contribution he made to the world.

As one of them bleated shortly after Madiba took his last breath on 05 December 2013, "He (Mandela) was a human, human man" he said. Yes he was. Everybody with a functional brain knew that. It was only our oppressors who chose to believe that a man, who constantly advocated for peace, was a violent, deranged terrorist. The irony of a violent regime seeing our leaders as nothing more than vicious killers is laughable.

Thirteen years after we laid our beloved Madiba to rest, his spirit remains with us. He has indeed multiplied. But so have some of those who previously oppressed and dehumanized us. They have replaced the loathed army and police uniform with suits. The guns, well at least away from the public glare, have been replaced by gadgets to wage a relentless war against this government. Sadly, some of our people have joined in and chosen the side of our former oppressors. They have cuddled up to Madiba's jailors and formed a united force to cripple our government.

Nothing, it would appear, could ever please them. Except, of course, the collapse of government. Despite our best efforts to improve the quality of the lives of the people of this province, they continue to look for faults. That became apparent during the State of the Province Address in Bloemfontein on Friday, 20th February 2026. They even go as far as to ridicule our efforts to give our people a better life.



When this government handed Nkgono Lucy Nkosana of EziBELeni, in Zastron the keys to her own house, all the right-thinking people of the Free State province were happy for her.

It was the same when Ntate Letsiki Tello of Backenpark in Bethlehem and Mme Mamokete Emily Motloung of Bohlokong also received keys to their newly built houses. We cheered. We were all happy for them. Finally, what we envisioned when the Congress of the People sat and drafted the Freedom Charter was coming to life. Or at least that is what we thought. Instead, our efforts have been met with ridicule, scorn and insults.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the people who have perfected the art of promising heaven on earth to our people, would at least acknowledge, if not support, our efforts. But no. Not them. Instead of applauding this government for providing shelter for Mme Nkosana, they would rather criticize.

Bokang Mokubung has received a bursary from the Free State Provincial Government, but opponents of progression are so blinded by their dislike for this government that jeers for Bokang have been muted by their constant rumblings. His namesake Bokang Lehloenyha has received over R1 million worth of processing equipment and his product, Motoho, is sold in big retail stores. Yet our 'friends' who constantly talk about the emancipation of our people, cannot even acknowledge the tireless efforts of government.

Perhaps there is something I am missing. Maybe it is not that they cannot see the good that we have done. Maybe, just maybe, they cannot stomach the fact that this government is led by the people whom they once oppressed. Maybe the thought of seeing the people who used to shiver at their mere sight makes them sick to their very core.

Their partners on the other hand are perhaps sickened by the fact that, despite their efforts and disruptive ways, the people of the province have seen right through them and chosen leaders with a proven track record of governing. Maybe?

Our province has just emerged from a difficult period and with the little resources we have, we are slowly beginning to rebuild. We are restoring the dignity of our people. We do not expect to be congratulated, not least by our opponents, but the least they can do is to acknowledge the progress we have made.

To the people of our province, we thank you for your continued support and we promise to work hard to build the province we can all happily call home.

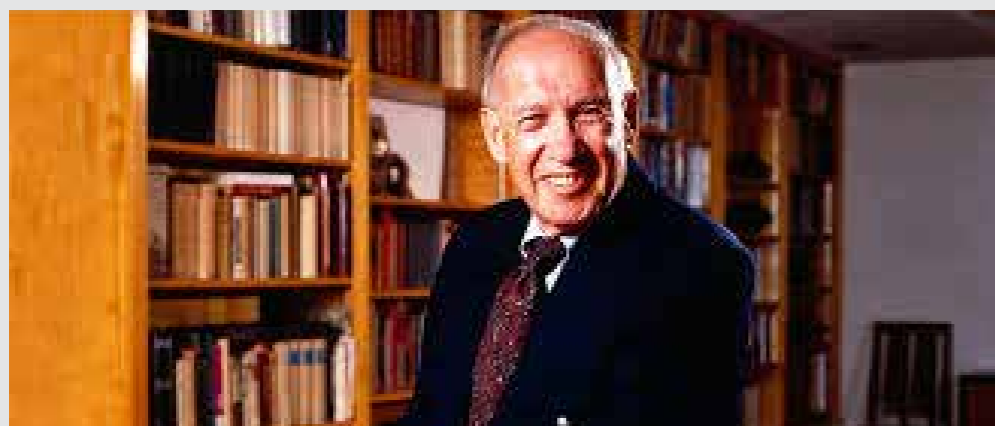
**MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae is the Premier of the Free State province.*

Letter to the Editor

The editor reserves the right to edit and reject letters and all correspondence must include your full names, address and phone numbers. Write to: editor@journalnews.co.za

Pastor Motsamai Kareli
Empowerment Ministries International
Part Three

Ten Lessons I Learned from Peter Drucker



4. Find your one big distinctive impact

When a mentor of mine became the chancellor of a university in South Africa, she posed a question: "How will I know I've done a great job?" I pondered what Drucker would say, and then answered: "Identify one big thing that would most contribute to the future of the university and orchestrate getting it done. If you make one distinctive contribution—a key decision that would not have happened without your leadership (even if no one ever credits you for your catalytic role)—then you will have rendered a great service."

5. Stop what you would not start

The presence of an ever expanding to do list without a robust stop doing list is a lack of discipline. To focus on priorities means clearing away the clutter. Sometimes the best way to deal with a platter piled high with problems is to simply toss the entire pile into the trash, wash the platter, and start anew. Above all, we must not starve our biggest opportunities because we're so busy throwing ourselves at our biggest problems and dwelling on past mistakes. Pivot from past to future, create forward, always ask, "What's next?" Yet how to do this, when past problems clamor for our attention, when we live with the accumulated legacy of what came before? Drucker gives an answer in the form of a question, one of the most impactful in his arsenal: If it were a decision today to start something you are already in (to enter a business, to hire a person, to institute a policy, to launch a project, etc.), would you? If not, then why do you persist?

6. Run lean

One of Drucker's most important insights is that an organization is like a biological organism in one key way: internal mass grows at a faster rate than external surface; thus, as the organization grows, an increasing proportion of energy diverts to managing the internal mass rather than contributing to the outside world. Combine this with another Druckerian truth: The accomplishments of a single right person in a key seat dwarf the com-

bined accomplishment of dividing the seat among multiple B-players. Get better people, give them really big things to do, enlarge their responsibilities, and let them work. Resist the temptation to redesign seats on the bus to specific personalities (except for the exceptionally rare genius), as this will inevitably create seats you don't need. "The fewer people, the smaller, the less activity inside," writes Drucker, "the more nearly perfect is the organization."

Be useful

Peter Drucker had dedicated himself to one huge question: How can we make society both more productive and more humane? In his conversation with one of his mentees, "Mr. Brown, asked Peter which of his twenty-six books he was most proud of, to which Drucker, then 86 year old, replied: "The next one!" He wrote ten more.

At the end of the conversation, Peter hit Mr Brown with a challenge. "It seems to me you spend a lot of time worrying how you will survive," said Peter. Mr Brown agreed and told him that he will like to survive and succeed in his new career. "You will probably survive said Peter" He continued, "And you seem to spend a lot of energy on the question of how to be successful. But that is the wrong question." He paused, then like the Zen master thwacking the table with a bamboo stick: "The question is: how to be useful!"

We are all given only one short life, composed of the same 168 hours a week as everyone else. What will it add up to?

How will other people's lives be changed? What difference will it make? Peter Drucker—one man with no organization, a modest house, and a wicker chair—models how much one highly-effective person can contribute, and that we should never confuse scale of impact with scale of organization.

He was, in the end, the highest level of what a teacher can be: a role model of the very ideas he taught, a walking testament to his teachings in the tremendous lasting effect of his own life.

Time for the Paradigm Shift is Now!!!

I was, perhaps lucky, to be invited to the Mangaung Investment Summit 2025 and of course without any doubt in my mind, it was well organized, relevant and appropriate points of discussions were meticulously selected. The identification and selection of speakers and panellists was top-class and they were all very proficient in their various fields of expertise. It was a golden opportunity for attendees and participants to get familiar with some of the economical, industrial and technological developments in the province. A wide range of inventions and immersing ventures were interrogated and the horizon of hope and optimism just widened as we could all foresee wide trends of work creation and employment opportunities immersing from both existing, small and medium entrepreneurs as well as new industrial innovations. One of the lime lights of the event was relative to the abundance of new innovative skills and expertise that the youth of the province have acquired from various institutions of higher learning both locally and abroad. It was indeed amazing and out of that came out an immense sense of aspirations, pride and patriotism.

Huge sums of money were spent on catering. There was Morning Tea Break sand witches and muffins of all varieties, as well as lunch for the couple of hundred attendees. The standard was relatively high in this regard!!! During the intervals we enjoyed the opportune moment to brush shoulders with top guns in various fields, such as Academia, Business Gurus, Experts and Industrialists. Everyone who ascended the podium was given the due respect and attentiveness until the end of his or her presentation.

Then came the anticipated crunch-time!!! The whole show became extensively electrifying and lively when the MEC's, Directors and HODs had to address the questions from the audience. Most of the concerns and questions were related to practical and doable mechanisms which only needed, follow-through, application and implementation. Common and perpetual issues such as conditions of roads, potholes, lack of job opportunities, unemployment rate, the decaying Mangaung CBD, crime and lack of service delivery in general, took the centre stage. Some of the deliberate heart-breaking shortfalls with regard to Mangaung, were around the state of our Heritage Sites such Parks, Cemeteries, Swimming Pools, Taxi Ranks and lack of Sporting Facilities. This precipitated the usual monotonous and rhetoric renditions by the role players. Promises and fire-fighting tactics took the central stage.

Without taking anything away or disparaging the efforts of the city council, I still harbour critical questions about the implementation of some of the promises that were made at that very high profile and inclusive platform. Do we have any measuring devices that can be presented to the communities to prove beyond any nature of doubt that some of the undertakings and promises are executed or are in the implantation stage? I truly

doubt this!! Through the eye of a lay person and a loyal citizen of this country, I have not seen any improvements except for the sickening deterioration of the state of affairs. The Taxi Rank, which cost the tax payers millions of Rands some donkey years ago, is still very central to the safety of the communities and it is becoming worse by day as it manifests itself as a haven of crime, a safety hazard and the ideal point for all evil activities in the city. "The Big White Elephant!!!!!"

Then again on 18-19 February, there was another gathering termed Safer City Indaba. I once more availed myself although I felt very despondent and decided not to attend on the second day. Speaker after speaker and the panellists were very vocal and addressing very high technical devices planned to be installed in the city. SAPS, Road and Traffic, SANDF Departments were well represented by high-ranking officials. Accademia from the local Higher Education Institutions were also partaking. The Premier, The Executive Mayor and Road and Traffic MEC and the others honoured the event. People from Thaba-Nchu and Botshabelo were also in attendance and were quite vocal when expressing their frustrations relative to safety in their respective areas. Very conspicuous in their regalia was the CPF's, and the community Neighbourhood Watch Organisations. They were all pleading for support, synergy and co-operation with the Law Enforcement Agencies in the Metro in order to play a more effective, efficient and meaningful role in the efforts to curb crime.

The Paradigm Shift

My point is, if our leaders and the powers that be, were honest and determined to completely eradicate crime in our cities, towns and rural areas, efforts could be focused on concerted family-building initiatives. We have all sorts of community-based initiatives and organisations amongst our communities, men and women who sacrifice their time, their safety and that of their families in order to assist the Law Enforcements Agencies in the fight against all wrong doing and the rampant crime.

Our hope and endeavours against crime are logically doomed if we are going to extravagantly focus on high and sophisticated technical resources, staff increasing means, costly Conferences, indabas and Summits which address the symptoms and not the root causes. The Law Enforcement Agencies and the Powers-that-be should come together, earnestly sit down with the community members in order to establish and sustain the synergy amongst all role players. High profile Officials should refrain from attending all community Forums, if they do, listen, take notes, make promises and then disappear thereafter.

The time has come to review and carry out serious postmortem of all what has been done so far by different government sectors in their endeavours to bring about some change which is continuously eluding them.

By Modise Rantsieng

Business

Markets and Indicators

Rand/Dollar	15.92	-0.44%	▣
Rand/Pound	21.56	-0.33%	▣
Rand/Euro	18.80	-0.46%	▣
Platinum	2 250.50	-1.47%	▣
Brent Crude	70.49	-0.45%	▣
Gold	5 163.08	-0.04%	▣
Ethereum	2 049.32	-2.36%	▣
Bitcoin	67 658.11	-1.89%	▣

2026 Budget Speech a 'Turning Point' - Godongwana

The country's financial future was on the agenda on Wednesday when Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana delivered the 2026 Budget Speech in Parliament.

Godongwana noted that this year's Budget Speech comes at a critical juncture for the public purse.

"We have reached an important turning point in the management of our public finances. Five years ago, the outlook was stark. State Capture had hollowed out critical institutions and weakened state owned entities. South Africa had been downgraded to junk status by the last of the three major credit rating agencies in 2020. "The devastation of the Coronavirus pandemic coupled with the Russia-Ukraine conflict had dealt a blow to global growth. And in 2023, the Financial Action Task Force had placed South Africa on its grey list.

"The warning lights were flashing. Public finances were under severe strain and growth had stalled. Faced with this crisis, we chose not to be defined by it. Instead, we turned it into a catalyst for change," he said.

Reforms

As a result of a long-standing commitment to change through a clear reform agenda and a disciplined fiscal strategy, South Africa's public debt is expected to stabilise this financial year - growth is on the cards with a decline forecasted in the medium term.

"Today, that commitment has delivered tangible results. For the first time in 17 years, debt will stabilise and it will continue to fall in the coming years. The budget deficit has narrowed significantly, and debt-service costs are also falling.

"The world has taken notice: South Africa has been removed from the FATF [Financial Action Task Force] grey list; we secured our first credit rating upgrade in 16 years; and borrowing costs have eased, creating space for growth and development.

"These are signals of restored credibility. Of renewed resilience. And of a nation regaining its footing. The lesson is a simple but powerful one: steady structural reform and responsible public finances are the bedrock

of a prosperous and more inclusive South Africa," the Minister noted.

Strong outcomes

The numbers crunched by National Treasury in the 2026 Budget Review concur with Godongwana's optimism.

The review reports that the main budget deficit comes in R12.4 billion lower than forecasted in last year's budget because of "strong fiscal outcomes for the first 10 months of 2025/26".

Since the 2021/22 financial year, the main budget deficit has narrowed from 5.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to a projected 4.5% in 2025/26.

It is further projected to decline to 2.9% in 2028/29. "In 2023/24, the primary balance swung from deficit to surplus for the first time since the 2008 global financial crisis. It will grow to 2.3% of GDP in 2028/29.

"As a result, debt as a share of GDP will decline over the next three years and the cost of servicing that debt will reduce from 21.3% of revenue in 2025/26 to 20.2% in 2028/29.

"These developments reflect a determined approach to repair the public finances while creating a foundation for stronger and sustainable economic growth," said Treasury.

The consolidated budget deficit also continues to decline over the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) period. It is expected to narrow from 4.5% of GDP in 2025/26 to 3.1% in 2028/29.

"Gross loan debt stabilises this year at 78.9% of GDP. Debt-service costs continue to rise in nominal terms, from R420.6 billion in 2025/26 to R469.3 billion in 2028/29, but as a percentage of revenue they also peak in the current financial year and then decline," Treasury noted.

Reflecting on the progress made, National Treasury stated that government is "delivering on its pledge to rebuild the health of the public finances".

"After a long stretch of rising debt that began in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, government debt peaks as a share of economic output in the cur-



rent fiscal year.

"Government is working to ensure a steady decline in debt as a share of GDP for the rest of the decade, reducing the cost of servicing debt and creating a more supportive environment for private investment.

"For the first time this decade, government is tabling a fiscal framework in which debt service costs grow more slowly than overall expenditure. Over the next three years, principal and interest payments are expected to be R21 billion lower than estimated in the 2025 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS)," the Budget Review said.

Strategy

The shift towards improvement has been anchored on three principles: stabilise debt, invest in infrastructure and spend better.

"The benefits of this strategy have started to become evident. Enhancing monetary policy certainty and consistent delivery on the fiscal strategy have prompted a virtuous cycle, especially in the period following the tabling of the 2025 MTBPS.

"South Africa received its first sovereign credit rating upgrade by one of the major agencies since 2009. Lower inflation and stronger public finances have boosted confidence and reduced risk, leading to lower borrowing costs and stronger investment conditions.

"Much work is needed to improve the delivery of public goods, but the recent removal of South Africa from the Financial Action Task Force grey list illustrates the depth of capacity that can be assembled. Government will build on this success in other areas," National Treasury said. — [SAnews.gov.za](#)

BHP bets \$500,000 on Orion's NC copper exploration



The Northern Cape could be sitting pretty on a potential critical mineral powerhouse as untapped copper reserves garner growing attention from international investors.

On Monday, BHP, the world's largest listed miner, announced it would form a joint venture with Orion Minerals to advance the group's copper and zinc exploration programme in the province — part of a larger partnership with early-stage explorers around the world.

Orion, which is already developing two copper and zinc assets in the Northern Cape, will enjoy a \$500,000 cash injection to fund further exploration, opening the door to more investment in the region. It is the first South African operation to be included in BHP's cohort.

BHP chief exploration officer Tim O'Connor said the project is still in "very early days", but Orion's leadership and approach to exploring new reserves in a well-established mining area had caught the group's eye.

"There's been a significant deficit in large discoveries, particularly over the past 15 years," O'Connor told Business Day.

"The industry is not finding sufficient resource of grade and quality to underpin the longer-term demand that many of us see."

Demand for copper is expected to increase by 40% by 2040, spurred by industrialisation and growing demand from data centres and electric vehicles, while the fear that US President Donald Trump will impose tariffs on the metal is also weighing on prices.

Surging demand for the metal means mega miners are scrambling to secure their supplies, with few new mine discoveries.

"This is really an opportunity to take a step back and think about the big picture — what potential concepts might we be missing here?"

"At the end of it, if the project continues to hold up and has the scale that is relevant to a company like ours, we will progress it with a more traditional exploration earn-in. Those tend to be worth

around \$10m-\$20m, and we would fund the work programme directly thereafter.

"To be clear, we don't know if that would work here. But [Orion] is taking a well-known area but looking at it through a new lens with new ideas, which is exciting to us."

BHP's investment comes as the group tries to bolster its exposure to copper, a mission that resulted in the mining giant launching three hostile attempts to take over Anglo American in 2024 and 2025.

It also marks a rare investment in South Africa for the Australian company. Part of the reason that BHP's Anglo bids fell flat was the group's strained relationship with the country, which resulted in it pledging to invest in South Africa's economy as part of its buyout offer in mid-2024.

In May 2024, BHP made a series of commitments to invest in South Africa and support charitable projects as part of its takeover of Anglo, while arguing that the resultant spin-off of Valterra Platinum and Kumba Iron Ore would benefit the local economy.

The behemoth's joint venture with Orion comes as the latter has reported widening losses in recent years while pouring cash into its costly Prieska Copper Zinc Mine (PCZM) and Okiep Copper projects. These projects, which already have development plans in place, are excluded from the venture.

By bringing PCZM and Okiep to first production in the coming years, Orion expects to sell its first copper in late 2026 and aims to grow production to more than 50,000 tonnes a year by the decade's end. In previous decades, Okiep consistently produced 30,000-40,000 tonnes of copper a year under the ownership of Newmont and Gold Fields.

In November, the group signed a nonbinding term sheet with Glencore for up to \$250m in financing and concentrate offtake, marking a major step in its transition from a pure exploration company to a developer and operating copper miner.

"This is a significant milestone for Orion and a strong endorsement of the potential of our Northern Cape exploration portfolio," said Orion MD Tony Lennox. [Businessday](#)

Good news about salaries in 2026 – with tax relief on the cards

The Paynet Net Salary Index rose in January, with Payinc optimistic about real wage increases for workers in South Africa.

The index tracks the nominal net salaries of an estimated 2.1 million salary earners in South Africa.

"The average nominal salary was R21,506 in January 2026, representing a 2.2% growth from last year's level," said Shergaran Naidoo, Head of Stakeholder Engagements at Payinc.

Although still early in the year, Payinc said that the data indicate that the upward trend in net salaries since 2024 has continued into 2026.

The increase in salaries stems from the gradual improvement in economic activity and the economy's resilience despite several challenges.

Given the moderate increase in consumer inflation, the Payinc Net Salary Index declined by 1.4% year on year in real terms, but remained flat month on month in January at R20,644.

"With average consumer inflation forecast to remain moderate at 3.5% in 2026, following the 21-year low of 3.2% in 2025, even a modest salary adjustment could see a real increase in remuneration in 2026," said economist Elize Kruger.

Salary earners will now be turning their attention to see if there are any tax reliefs ahead of the 2026 National Budget, which will be delivered by Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana tomorrow.

Over the last two fiscal years, tax brackets were not adjusted for inflation, which resulted in salary earners receiving an increase being pushed into a higher tax category. This effectively results in many paying a higher tax rate and forfeiting part of their increase to the taxman. SARS said that not changing the tax brackets could add R15.5 billion in additional tax revenue in FY26. South Africa's fiscal situation has improved over the last year, with record-high commodity prices fuelling corporate tax receipts.

The stronger rand and lower government bond yields have also meaningfully reduced the cost of debt. National Treasury is thus expected to beat its FY25/26 budget deficit target as seen in the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement.

With fiscal consolidation moving faster than expect-



ed, the National Treasury is expected to scrap some of the additional tax measures reflected in the medium-term estimates.

Kruger said that this includes the R16.5 billion to be earned from bracket creep in FY27.

The main focus of the 2026 Budget will thus be on the estimated size of the commodity windfall and the government's plan to spend this.

"With SA's debt at elevated levels, and trending sideways around 77%-78% of GDP, a prudent strategy should be in place to reduce the level of government debt, which will have the added benefit of also reducing the cost of debt," said Kruger.

"The latter has already benefited from a stronger rand exchange rate, which reduces the value of South Africa's foreign debt, as well as a notable drop in government bond yields."

She noted that the government is likely to take a hybrid approach, reducing the funding requirement somewhat.

This will see some of the commodity windfall spent on pressing expenditure priorities, thereby softening pressure for tax hikes.

Higher precious metal prices and stronger terms of trade should positively influence the near-term fiscal outlook.

There should be a smaller budget deficit in FY26/27, a larger primary surplus, and sustained fiscal consolidation over the forecast horizon.

FY27 is expected to be the third straight year where South Africa records a primary surplus, where tax revenue exceeds the country's non-interest expenditure, reducing the shortfall to be borrowed.

"A continuing trend of primary surpluses should bode well for ratings agencies' perception about fiscal management in South Africa," said Kruger.

"With the number of positive economic developments building, a budget reflecting prudent fiscal management will bode well for confidence levels in South Africa," ends Kruger. [BusinessTech](#)

North West farmers call for action against illegal mining



Farming communities in the North West say more needs to be done to fight illegal mining activities.

In the State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the deployment of the army to hotspots to support police.

A local farmer who has opted to remain anonymous for fear of intimidation says the line between legitimate and illegitimate mining has become blurred.

"It's a regular thing to hear at night, gunshots, also in our area, as they call it, hot chrome. So this truck has been hijacked with chrome. It's being dumped in our area. The chrome lies around for quite a while, and when they see everything settles, they come back and pick it up. This is not a random guy using just his bakkie and something. These are

people who know how to do it and where to take and where to sell it, of course. Because why would you mine all these things if you don't have an offset for it?"

Agri North West's Naude Pienaar says the impact of illegal mining on farming could be irreversible.

"We are very concerned about the illegal and uncontrolled mining taking place in our province. This includes the large number of illegal and non-compliant chrome wash plants. These activities are destroying natural vegetation. They are polluting and misusing our scarce water resources. Their trucks are destroying our roads. Most are not employing local labour, but it does from the activities are settling on trees and crops, killing the plants and making the spraying of herbicides and nutrients ineffective." [SABCNews](#)

GET TO KNOW YOUR DJ

DR Phil RSA's Global Sound, Local Roots



By Lerato Mutlanyane

Philimon "DR Phil RSA" Thulo (40), affectionately known as the "Music Doctor", is a dynamic Afrohouse producer, DJ, curator and event host from near Kroonstad in the Free State, South Africa. His passion for music began at a very young age and has since blossomed into a respected and influential career in the dance music scene.

Thulo launched his own broadcast project, the Prescription Mix Podcast on Podomatic — a platform that showcases his deep knowledge of house music and his ability to guide listeners through rhythmic journeys that resonate with both body and soul.

His audio craft — particularly in mixing and mastering — is refined and emotive, creating immersive soundscapes that connect with audiences on a deep level. Thulo's work draws inspiration from and aligns with the standards set by major industry figures like Black Coffee.

DR Phil RSA commands the stage at thriving venues such as The Other Venue, IZA Bloemfontein and more. His radio and event presence includes collaborations with international outlets such as Amalgam Radio in the UK and CUT FM in Bloemfontein, reinforcing his reach both locally and abroad.

In recent years, he has expanded his creative footprint through record label partnerships, including releases on UK-based imprints and South African imprints such as Deep In Your Soul Records — with tracks like "All My Children" featuring Nuzu Deep — and others that highlight his versatility as an Afrohouse artist.

His EP TruNorth (2021) showcased a range of Afrohouse styles and has helped elevate his profile internationally, garnering tens of thousands of streams across digital platforms.

Phil continues to collaborate with a roster of international talents, including Native P. (UK), DJ Fresh (SA), Nuzu Deep, Afrodisiac (Nigeria) and LaBass (UK), among others — a testament to his growing influence in the global house music community.

His singles "Amazulu" (with Blaqhope) and "Promises" have received significant audience support and airplay, further solidifying his relevance and impact in dance music circles.

With over two decades of musical experience — both behind the decks and in the studio — DR Phil RSA brings energy, precision and soul to every performance. Those who have witnessed him live attest to his ability to animate the dancefloor and uplift spirits through sound.

Despite the challenges of building a career from the Free State — a region where many emerging artists feel overlooked — he continues to innovate and elevate his craft with determination and passion.

Catch DR Phil RSA live this weekend at IZA Bloemfontein, MK Rooftop and The Zone for an authentic dose of his signature sound.

Grammy-Winning R& BStar Set for Sun City and CT

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Award-winning British R&B sensation Ella Mai is heading to South Africa this April — and fans are already buzzing with excitement. The 'Boo'd Up' hitmaker will deliver two highly anticipated performances in Sun City and Cape Town, promising unforgettable nights of smooth vocals and soulful energy.

Ella Mai will light up the stage at the Sun City Super-

bowl on 25 April 2026, before heading to the Mother City for a second show at the GrandWest Arena on Sunday, 26 April.

The R&B powerhouse will headline the Konka Kulture Weekend, a three-day lifestyle and music showcase hosted in partnership with Konka and Vertex Events, in association with Sun City.

Both cities are set to come alive with dazzling lights and electrifying sound as they welcome one of the biggest voices in contemporary R&B.

Ella Mai shot to global fame with chart-topping hits "Boo'd Up" and "Trip", cementing her place among the genre's elite. Her latest studio album, Do You Still Love Me, highlights her artistic growth, featuring standout tracks such as "Little Things" and "Tell Her."

Over the years, she has collaborated with industry heavyweights including Babyface, Chris Brown, Usher, H.E.R., Nicki Minaj, Quavo and Ed Sheeran.

Nombuso Buthelezi, Sun City Convention Centre Manager, said the resort is proud to host another world-class music experience.

"Music has a unique power to unite people, creating moments of connection that transcend the ordinary," she said, adding that guests can expect memories that linger long after the final note.

Vertex Events' Head of Events, Zizile Mshali, echoed the excitement, promising a once-in-a-lifetime live music experience for local R&B lovers.

With only two shows announced, fans will need to act fast. Tickets are already selling rapidly — and this is one R&B spectacle Mzansi simply cannot afford to miss.

Nadia Nakai fires back at Prince Kaybee over Toss relationship comments



Rapper, Nadai Nakai. Picture: Supplied

South African rapper, Nadai Nakai and music producer Prince Kaybee sparked a buzz on social media after their heated exchange over Nakai's alleged relationship with Amapiano star Pholoso Ramajoe (popularly known as Toss). Nakai posted a series of pictures on Instagram, and Kaybee made a remark by asking: "Are you being 'tossed' around?"

The "Bragga" rapper clapped back by replying: "Nope, just like YOU weren't filming."

Nakai's response alluded to Kaybee's previous and leaked intimate video scandal, an incident that went viral on all social media platforms.

However, their exchange simply did not end there because Kaybee responded to Nakai's clapback by referencing Toss' hit song "Umlando".

"You are being Umlando'd then," he wrote. Which Nakai once again replied to, with another jab by sharing that the pictures that they previously shared for their music were consensual.

"Our music video was consensual. I understand your confusion," she replied.

This was a hint and a jab that it is unlike his leaked intimate video, which was leaked without his consent; the pictures were shared online because both Toss and Nakai agreed to it.

Early in February, Nakai and Toss sent fans into a frenzy after sharing steamy photos on social media for Valentine's Day.

The post had tongues wagging about the two being in a possible relationship due to how intimate and comfortable they both looked.

Nakai wore a one-piece leopard print swimsuit with a chunky gold chain, and, true to his nature, Toss was shirtless, sporting just his caramel pants



Music producer Prince Kaybee. Picture: Supplied

Zingah introduces a new era of South African hip hop with 'Yonda Way Vol. 1'

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Hip hop artist Zingah has never been shy about where he stands when it comes to South African hip hop. With "Yonda Way Vol. 1", he has built a movement.

The three-track project brings together new voices from Kane Keid, Fistola Inecut, Horid The Messiah, Andy Maveric, Leo Brown, Buzzi Lee, ThatPrettyGirlYongz and Lezy Lindokuhle, a group of emerging artists moving with intention under Zingah's creative direction, alongside senior producer Tweezy. In an interview with "Independent Media Lifestyle", he shared that this isn't just a collection of songs but a deliberate effort to shine a spotlight on new voices and to remind the country what collaboration in hip hop can look like.

What started as a platform to spotlight talent turned into something bigger. Explaining how the movement came to life, he shared that it started as a show called "Who Do I".

"It was really about getting the new bright faces of SA hip hop to come in and show off their talent," he said. "That then turned into a conversation of, let's make a project out of this."

The original idea was to put together a mixtape, but the music had other plans. "The music kind of came out so good that it turned into an album," he added. To further bring the project to life, Zingah and Tweezy hosted a three-day studio camp, which ended up becoming the foundation of "Yonda Way Vol. 1". The selection of artists was never just about hype. "I've always kept my ear to the ground as far as SA hip hop goes. I'm deeply entrenched. It was new talent I saw bubbling up, and I felt like if we put these new voices in the right rooms, with the right people, we could get something that a bigger audience could actually consume," he said.

Beyond the music, the project also reflects how Zingah sees his role in the culture at this point in his career. Having witnessed different eras of hip hop rise and fall, he believes the genre lost something along the way.

"The biggest thing right now is promoting collaboration. That's something we've lost in SA hip hop, and I feel like that played a role in how people stopped consuming it the same way."

For the seasoned rapper, hip hop thrived when movements mattered more than ego.

"Hip hop was way cooler when people were coming together, blending sounds, blending brands. That spirit of togetherness is why I created "Yonda Way," he said.

One of the more intentional choices behind the project was the involvement of a youth-led Sound Council. Rather than relying only on industry instincts, Zingah explained why he wanted real-time feedback from young listeners.

"It was a temperature check. A pulse check to see if we're actually moving in the right direction, not just what we think is right."

He also touched on the ongoing debates around the state of hip hop, especially between OGs and younger artists. "First and foremost, beef is corny. It's entertaining for a week or two and then people move on."

He believes many artists are still chasing the adrenaline of global rap rivalries that do not translate locally. "People are still gassed by the Drake and Kendrick thing, but that's between two of the biggest artists in the world. That impact isn't a reality for most people here."

Recently, Amapiano DJ and music producer, DJ Maphorisa, called for unity. When asked for his opinion on the matter, Zingah agreed, pointing to lessons from outside hip hop. He added that DJ Maphorisa has already proven what collaboration can do. "He came into Amapiano when it was still a seed. Putting five or six producers in a room, multiple vocalists on one song. That's why piano works the way it does. Collaboration works better than competition," he explained.

As "Yonda Way Vol. 1" has rolled out, Zingah hopes listeners reconnect with the idea of music being made for people, not just for moments. **IOL NEWS**

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ATTORNEYS, CONVEYANCERS & ESTATE ADMINISTRATORS
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Notice is hereby given in terms of regulation 68 of the Deeds Registries Act, 1937, of the intention to apply for the issue of a certified copy of Deed of Transfer T10818/2003 passed by Wakhene Simon Charlie, Identity Number 5604045556085, Unmarried, in favour of, Moleboheng Lisanyane, Identity Number 9110140887082, Unmarried, in respect of Erf 5478 Seloshesha Extension 4 (Bultfontein 1) District Thaba Nchu, Province Free State In extent: 377 (Three seven seven) square metres

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Dated at Bloemfontein this 25 February 2026

CONVEYANCER
NICOLAAS ALRBETUS STRAMPE (LPCM 57743)
STRAMPE DU PLESSIS ATTORNEYS
58C KELLNER STREET
WESTDENNE
BLOEMFONTEIN
Email: admin@sdtatt.co.za
Telephone no: 051 430 0841

STRAMPE DU PLESSIS INC.
ATTORNEYS, CONVEYANCERS & ESTATE ADMINISTRATORS
REGISTRATION NUMBER 2019/58764/21

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SIGNED at BLOEMFONTEIN on this 13th DAY OF FEBRUARY 2026.

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STRAMPE DU PLESSIS INC.
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GIGGuide

Friday 27 February 2026
NOSTAIGIC Saturday
F'NT Food 'n Things
2nd Ave Bloemfontein

Saturday 28 February 2026
Vibes on Main
Sandys Bar and Restaurant
Old Greys Bloemfontein

Saturday 28 February 2026
The Glenstar
The Eatery
Naval Hill Bloemfontein

Sunday 01 March 2026
Extended Soul
Sechaba Lounge
Bloemfontein

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Turning Passion Into Power: How Selaocwe Chwi Built Kinny's At Home Therapy



The owner of Kinny's At Home Therapy, Selaocwe Chwi. Picture: Supplied

By Matshidiso Selebeleng

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down plans and stalled dreams, Selaocwe Chwi refused to let hers fade. Instead of waiting for normalcy to return, she built her own opportunity — transforming a passion for beauty into a growing brand rooted in resilience, confidence, and legacy.

For Chwi, beauty has never been superficial. It is personal. It is about refusing to feel ordinary and choosing to show up fully, flaws and all.

She had initially planned to enrol at a business college in Gauteng to learn how to run her own company. But when the pandemic hit, those ambitions were abruptly put on hold. Rather than see the setback as a defeat, she saw it as a redirection.

At the height of lockdown — when job losses and uncertainty defined the moment — Chwi began practising lash installations and offering massages to willing clients. What started as a survival strategy quickly became the foundation of her business.

"It began as a way to make a living," she said, "but it was also me choosing not to let the pandemic silence my passion."

As restrictions eased, she officially launched Kinny's At Home Therapy in Bloemfontein. The name carries deep emotional weight — it honours her late mother.

"Anyone who comes across my business will come across

my mother," she said. "She's the one person I want to carry with me forever."

Her determination was shaped long before entrepreneurship. A self-described sports enthusiast growing up, Chwi says competition instilled discipline and a drive for excellence.

"Sport teaches you that you must always give your best," she explained. "I had insecurities like everyone else, but I understood that no one was coming to rescue me from my own thoughts. I had to build myself."

Starting small, she gradually attracted more clients as her technique improved. Word-of-mouth referrals and loyal customers began to grow her footprint.

"There's something powerful about earning from the beauty your own hands create," she said. "The loyalty and support I receive keep me going, even during slow seasons." Now, she is thinking bigger.

Within the next five years, Chwi plans to expand beyond Bloemfontein, train and employ her own staff, and position Kinny's At Home Therapy as a recognised brand across provinces. She also hopes to collaborate with larger beauty brands, moving beyond her current partnerships with local salons and small businesses.

"My vision is to have the resources to branch out and serve people across South Africa," she said. "I want Kinny's to be a brand people recognise and trust."

What began in the uncertainty of a global crisis has grown into something far more powerful — proof that resilience, purpose, and passion can turn disruption into opportunity.

How Reah Turned Braids into a Thriving Business

By Matshidiso Selebeleng

Just Braids With Reah is more than a name — it is a nine-year-old brand rooted in love, creativity, and a passion for braiding across all hair textures in Bloemfontein and beyond.

Reabetsoe Basetsana Mabote began her braiding journey at just 15 while still in high school. What started as a simple desire to do her sisters' hair — instead of spending hours waiting at salons — soon became a business.

"I only have sisters at home, and we always had to go to someone else to do our hair. One day, I decided to buy fibre — the Darling Yaki braid to be specific — and watched a tutorial on Facebook. I practised on my older sister's hair and, to my surprise, I got it right on the first attempt," she said.

That moment sparked something bigger. Mabote continued practising, refining her technique, and eventually began braiding for paying clients after realising she could turn her talent into income.

Operating from home, Just Braids With Reah now serves dozens of clients each month. Her combination of affordable pricing and quality workmanship keeps customers coming back, satisfied not only with their hairstyles but with the overall experience.

As the braiding industry evolves, the young entrepreneur is determined to evolve with it. She plans to expand her skill set to accommodate a wider range of styles and preferences.

"My short-term goal is to learn more hairstyles so that I can cater to different tastes and not be limited to just a few options. Every client has their own preference," she explained.

Looking ahead, Mabote dreams of opening her own salon — a space where she can fully express her passion and help clients feel confident and renewed.

"I believe the best kind of therapy is a new hairstyle," she said.

Confident in her craft, Mabote prides herself on understanding different hair textures and



Braids With Reah founder, Reabetsoe Basetsana Mabote. Picture: Supplied

dedicating time to perfecting every style. She believes that consistency, care, and skill are what allow her to dream beyond Bloemfontein and the Free State.

What sets Just Braids With Reah apart is its personalised approach. For Mabote, braiding is not just about styling hair — it is about creating meaningful experiences.

"I create personalised and unforgettable experiences. I take time to listen and understand each client's needs and preferences before starting

any style," she added. Like any business, the journey comes with challenges. Late arrivals, no-shows, and last-minute cancellations can disrupt operations.

However, Mabote has learned to manage these hurdles by setting firm boundaries, implementing clear policies, and maintaining open communication.

Nine years after that first braid, Just Braids With Reah continues to grow — one head, one style, and one satisfied client at a time.

HEALTH

Hormone Disrupting Chemicals Found in Pads and Pantyliners



Research by the University of the Free State (UFS) has discovered traces of toxic chemicals in sanitary pads, along with other menstrual products that disrupt hormones in the female body.

Sanitary pads and pantyliners are multilayer absorbent hygiene products used by menstruating individuals for several days each month. The UFS research team, consisting of doctors and professors from the department of chemistry, analysed 16 brands of sanitary pads and seven pantyliner brands.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the presence and profiles of the chemicals in sanitary pads and pantyliners sold in South Africa, where it was uncovered that even 'chemical-free' products contain harmful chemicals.

It found: 50% of phthalates were detected in all pantyliners and in pads

Bisphenols were found in all sanitary pads and 75% of pantyliners

Parabens were discovered in over 81% of pads and in 75% pantyliners tested

These chemicals are also known as "female endocrine disruptors" and are widely used in many consumer products, including personal care products.

After every sanitary pad and pantyliner was tested, at least two endocrine-disrupting chemicals (ECDs) were discovered in menstrual hygiene products.

"The findings showed widespread contamination across all products tested."

Old solutions for modern problems -The use of plasticisers

Phthalates, parabens, and bisphenols are groups of chemicals that share the basic structural characteristics mainly used in plastics.

These plasticisers are chemical additives

used to improve the flexibility, durability, and transparency of plastics such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), while also providing products with a longer lifespan.

Ultimately, sanitary products should not be made using any harmful chemicals, especially in an age where advanced technological solutions could be applied to improve the overall state of menstrual hygiene products and way of life for menstruating South Africans.

Considering the eco-friendly and health-conscious lifestyle that some have adopted in society, brands have created 'organic solutions' without the benefits.

False advertising is a violation of consumer rights in South Africa, and it is disheartening to read the amount of chemicals females are exposed to daily, despite products being advertised as "chemical-free".

Other studies conducted in the United States, during 2024, have also shown "tampons as a source of exposure to metal(oid)s" during vaginal insertion, where unsafe levels of exposure to toxic metals were discovered in tampons.

Reproductive Health Risks According to the UFS researchers, the frequent use of chemically-infused products over longer periods of time can lead to the growth of breast cancer cells.

Increased exposure to phthalates has also been linked to fertility issues amongst females and males, premature puberty, endometriosis, and ovulation disorders.

Prolonged exposure to these chemicals can cause serious damage, including chronic poisoning, which is of concern and harm to the reproductive system and liver.

Potential health risks also include cases of contact dermatitis, thyroid hormone-disrupting behaviour, and increased sex steroid hormone levels. **Citizen**



Recipes

Stuffed cheesy twice baked potatoes with bacon jam



Recipe by #TheLazyMakoti

Stuffed potatoes make a wonderful side dish for everything from roast chicken to meatloaf to steak. They're also hearty enough to serve as an appetizer while watching the game or as a meal alongside a big bowl of soup or salad. The landslide of melted cheese, crisp bacon bits, a cool drizzle of sour cream, and a pop of fresh, vibrant chives. It's a self-contained feast, a customizable carb-loaded treasure chest where every single bite is a perfect, golden ratio of crispy skin, creamy interior, and decadent toppings. It's not just a side dish; it's the main event.



Ingredients:

- 5-6 large whole potatoes, washed
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 100g butter
- 1/3 cup cream
- 200g Cheddar Cheese, grated
- 1 cup Bacon jam
- 1 cup Sour cream to serve
- 4 tablespoon Chives, finely chopped

Method

- Preheat oven to 200 degrees
- Use a fork to prick each potato a few times then rub with oil and season with salt.
- Wrap each potato in foil and place on baking tray to bake in oven for an hour or until cooked soft
- In a small bowl, melt butter in the microwave. Once melted combine with the cream stirring well
- Once potatoes are cooked and soft, cut each potato lengthwise to scoop out the potato flesh
- Place the potato flesh in a large bowl and mash while hot
- Add to this, the butter and cream mixture, 1/2 cup bacon jam, cheese and 2 tablespoon chives
- Now fill the hollowed potatoes with the mashed potato mixture then top with remaining cheese
- Lower heat to 180 degrees and bake again for 20 minutes until cheese is melted
- Garnish with a tablespoon of sour cream, bacon jam and a sprinkle of the remaining chives

FASHION

Embrace Florals, Paisley and Checks in 2026

If someone had told me granny print would be trending in fashion this year, I probably would've laughed... and then immediately Googled "how do I get that look?"

Because, believe it or not, "your ouma's favourite outfit" aesthetic is officially a vibe now.

We're talking full on fashion trend status, with runway designers, streetwear lovers and even celebrities embracing patterns that look like they stepped out of grandma's best Sunday outfit ... and making it cool.

So what exactly is granny print? Think bold florals, paisleys, checks, ditsy patterns and vintage style motifs, fabrics that feel nostalgic, cosy, and charmingly old school.

They're the prints that used to be reserved for tea dresses and doilies, but thanks to fashion's cycle of "old is new", they've been resurrected with swagger and intention. And trust me, they're showing up everywhere.

Designers have been tapping into grandma's closet for inspiration, remixing vintage prints with modern silhouettes, oversized tailoring, and unexpected colour combinations. Pieces that feel comfortably familiar but distinctly now.

Think floral midi skirts with edgy boots, checked blazers over crisp tees, and even paisley trousers paired with sleek sneakers, it's comfort meeting cool with a wink.

And it's not just fashion insiders sniffing around this trend. Celebrities have also been spotted rocking granny prints like they were born to wear them, turning up in bold check patterns on red carpets and night outs. This trend is crossing style borders, and I'm here for it. It's giving "Ugly Betty" vibes.

What's really interesting about granny print is how it taps into nostalgia without feeling dated. It doesn't force you to dress like your actual grandmother (unless that's your thing, in which case, slay!), but it borrows the vibe, which is warm, expressive, a little quirky, and totally distinctive.

It's the kind of print that makes people stop and say, "Okay, I want to know where you got that!"

Style lovers are mixing these prints with modern basics to keep things balanced. A floral blouse looks chic with jeans and heels.

A vintage style skirt looks sharp with a fitted crop top. Even accessories, printed scarves, patterned handbags, quirky socks, are getting in on the granny print game.

It's refreshing to see a trend that's not about minimalism or safe neutrals for once. So yes, loving granny print doesn't make you old fashioned. It makes you fashion forward with character.

Go ahead - raid the vintage shops, play with pattern clashes, and treat prints like the statement they were always meant to be. Your ouma will definitely approve. **IOL**



Sport



Young Stars Shine at Nala Mahlala Charity Cup 2026



By Bernell Simons

Emerging football talent dominated the spotlight at the 2026 Nala Mahlala Charity Cup, with young players delivering standout performances in a tournament defined by pace, precision and promise. The event not only crowned champions but also revealed a pipeline of future stars poised to make their mark.

Hosted by Soccer Dream Bloemfontein — who were humbled 3–1 by Mangaung Metro FA in the final — the tournament unfolded under the theme “Developing The Future.” Sixteen teams competed in a high-energy showcase, with matches running simultaneously across four fields from early Saturday morning.

Adding star power to the spectacle were familiar faces from South Africa’s golden football generation. Former professionals Fabian McCarthy, Stanton Fredericks, Derrick Spencer and Josta Dladla made special appearances during the Professional Curtain Raiser, inspiring young players with their presence.

Mangaung Metro FA — crowned 2026 champions — stamped their authority throughout the tournament. They edged Dikonyela 1–0 in the quarterfinals and narrowly defeated El Futuro 1–0 in the semifinals, before delivering a commanding 3–1 victory over hosts Soccer Dream to lift the trophy.

Head coach Poloko Tladi praised his squad’s focus and execution after a tournament campaign that saw them score 16 goals and concede just once.

“I feel very proud and impressed with the way the boys played throughout the whole tournament. They applied everything we did in training, and as a coach that makes you proud. Their discipline, teamwork and commitment truly stood out,” he said.

Tladi emphasised that success was built not only on skill, but on mental strength and belief.

“The boys have developed a very strong mentality — they believe in winning and in themselves. This is the third tournament they have won together in less than six months, which speaks volumes about their growth and consistency,” Tladi said.

Reflecting on the presence of former professionals, he added: “Seeing players we look up to on the same field reminded us of what is possible with hard work and dedication. This achievement reflects not only their talent, but also their dedication and unity as a team.”

With three tournament victories in six months, Mangaung Metro FA’s young stars have firmly established themselves as a rising powerhouse in youth football. The 2026 Nala Mahlala Charity Cup was a celebration of dreams realised, lessons learned and memories that will long inspire the next generation.

Soweto Derby: Favoritism or Tactics?

Will Team Selections Prove Decisive in the Meeting Between the Two Soweto Giants?



Bruce Bvuma of Kaizer Chiefs saves from Relebohile Mofokeng of Orlando Pirates during the DStv Premiership 2023/24 football match between Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs at Soccer City in Johannesburg, South Africa. Picture: Sbnnews

Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates, both experiencing a recent dip in form, have come under mounting criticism from fans in recent weeks over contentious squad selections.

Chiefs co-coach Khalil Ben Youssef cut a frustrated figure when pressed about the continued absence of promising youngsters Asanele Velebani and Luke Baartman.

Across town, Pirates mentor Abdeslam Ouaddou has also come under scrutiny for his faith in Yanela Mbuthuma and Kamohelo Sebelebele, as well as the inclusion of captain Nkosinathi Sibisi, who missed a crucial penalty in the Buccaneers’ Nedbank Cup defeat to Casric Stars.

Amakhosi’s recent dip in form has intensified the

debate as the team endured successive defeats to Stellenbosch FC — first in the Nedbank Cup and then in the Betway Premiership.

Frustrated supporters have questioned both selections and substitutions, highlighting the delayed debut of Ethan Chislett, who made his first appearance seven months after his arrival, and the continued absence of left-back Nkanyiso Shinga, who is yet to feature since joining at the start of the season.

Accusations of favouritism have circulated among sections of the fanbase, but Pirates legend and Hollywoodbets ambassador Jerry Skhosana believes such criticism misses the bigger picture.

“Fans will say anything,” Skhosana explained. “When key players such as Mbatha miss matches,

supporters react without knowing the reasons — whether it’s tactical preference, injury, or something else behind the scenes. Those are factors that usually lead to the coach being blamed.

“For me, it’s not fair to accuse coaches of unfair selection. That oversimplifies the situation. Teams naturally go through inconsistent patches, especially when players are unavailable, or confidence takes a knock after disappointing results.”

Skhosana added that coaches are often the most visible figures at a club and, therefore, the easiest targets when performances dip. However, he stressed that underlying factors — including injuries, tactical tweaks and squad balance — often play a bigger role than the public realises. *Sbnnews*

PSL		2025/2026		
	CLUBS	P	W	PTS
1	Mamelodi Sundowns	17	11	38
2	Orlando Pirates	17	12	38
3	Sekhukhune United	18	9	32
4	Kaizer Chiefs	16	8	30
5	AmaZulu FC	18	9	30
6	Durban City	18	8	28
7	Polokwane City	17	6	25
8	TS Galaxy	18	7	24
9	Golden Arrows	17	6	20
10	Richards Bay	17	4	19
11	Stellenbosch FC	17	5	19
12	Siwelele FC	18	4	18
13	Chippa United	16	4	18
14	Marumo Gallants	18	3	15
15	Orbit College FC	18	4	14
16	Magesi FC	17	2	12

Premier League		2025/2026		
	TEAMS	P	W	PTS
1	Arsenal	28	18	61
2	Man City	27	17	56
3	Aston Villa	27	18	51
4	Man Utd	27	13	48
5	Chelsea	27	12	45
6	Liverpool	27	13	45
7	Brentford	27	12	40
8	Bournemouth	27	9	38
9	Everton	27	10	37
10	Fulham	27	11	37
11	Newcastle	27	10	36
12	Sunderland	27	9	36
13	C Palace	27	9	35
14	Brighton	27	8	34
15	Leeds	26	7	31
16	Tottenham	26	7	29

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