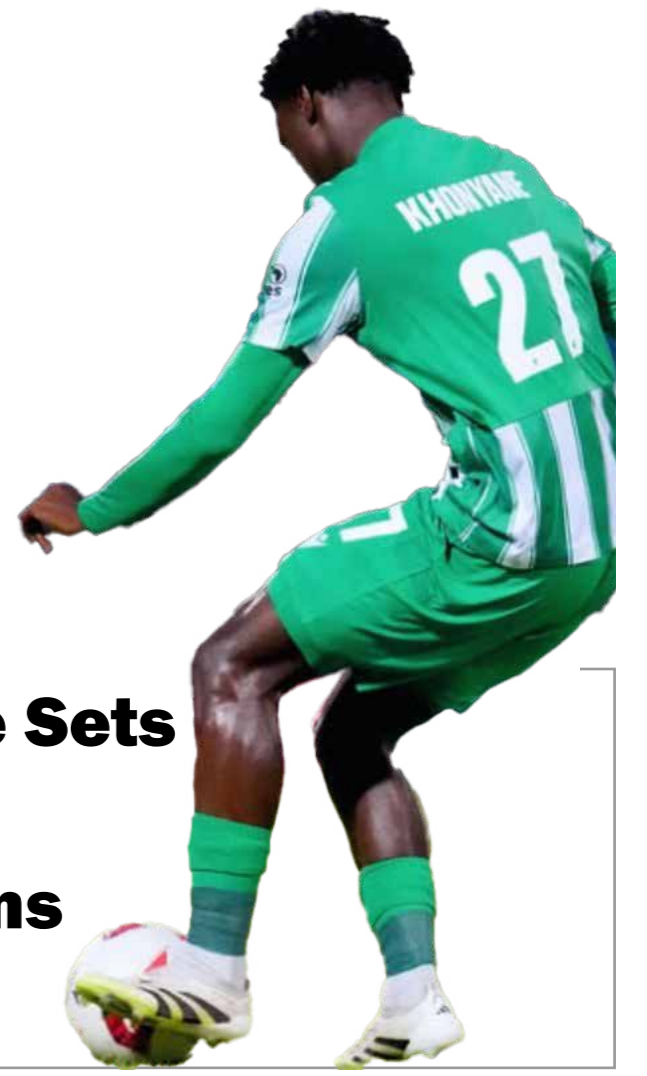


Journal NEWS

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ANC OUT TO WOO SUPPORTERS

Party set to use its 114th anniversary celebrations to win back lost votes



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ANC supporters. Picture: News24



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Power of Life

R42.5m Pension Arrears Cleared for GLR Staff



By: Matshidiso Selebeleng

Employees of Golden Leopard Resorts (SOC) Ltd (GLR) and Madikwe have finally received relief after pension fund contributions deducted from their salaries for more than three years were paid over to the relevant administrators.

The settlement follows intervention by the North West Department of Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism (DEDECT), together with the North West Parks and Tourism Board (NWPTB).

According to a departmental statement, pension contributions were deducted from employees' salaries but were not transferred to pension fund administrators, leaving workers without retirement security.

The department said previous funding allocations intended to address the arrears were never implemented, resulting in prolonged delays.

To resolve the matter, DEDECT allocated a total of R42.5 million, broken down as follows:

R12.5 million for outstanding pension fund contributions

R26 million to settle SARS obligations, including VAT and payroll taxes

R4 million for overdue salary increases covering a 19-month period from April 2024 to October 2025

"All payments have now been made in full, bringing pension contributions up to date for all affected employees," the department said.

The settlement benefits more than 300 employees at GLR and Madikwe.

MEC for Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism in the North West Province, Bitsa Lenkopane, welcomed the development, saying it reflects the provincial government's commitment to accountability and financial stability.

"The resolution of this matter demonstrates that the 7th Administration continues to place the interests of the people at the centre of its work, while addressing historical challenges and restoring confidence in public entities," said Lenkopane.

FS Police Commissioner Bids Farewell

Trailblazing police leader bows out after 35 years of service marked by historic firsts

Balanced

By: Abigail Visagie

After more than 35 years in policing, Free State SAPS Provincial Commissioner Lieutenant General Baile Motswenyane is preparing to retire at the end of January 2026, leaving behind a legacy of historic firsts, institutional reforms and debate over crime-fighting outcomes in the province.

Motswenyane made history as the first woman in South Africa to be appointed an area commander. She later led policing in the North West province and served in several critical operational and support roles. In the Free State, she oversaw policing operations across 112 police stations.

Her tenure not only shaped policing strategies in the province but also inspired many men and women in blue to serve their communities with dedication and commitment in pursuit of a safer Free State.

Under her leadership, National Police Commissioner General Fannie Masemola, together with various dignitaries, paid tribute and expressed condolences to the families of fallen constables Cebekhulu Linda, Keamogetswe Buys and Boipelo Senoge, who tragically lost their lives in a car crash at the Hennops River in 2025.

Motswenyane also ensured that acts of bravery did not go unnoticed. Constable Macdonald Motete, who risked his life to save his wife and four children during a house fire in August 2024, was handed a fully furnished home after losing his own in the blaze.

Among her many achievements, the commissioner presided over the opening of the Sonsyn Police Station — the first police station established in the province in decades. She also introduced a schools drilling competition, which attracted enthusiastic participation from learners and enhanced police visibility within the education sector.

Recently, Motswenyane unveiled a Wall of Remembrance for fallen heroes and heroines at the Parkweg Police Station. Expressing pride in the milestone, she said the wall was a reminder that those who died in service did not do so in vain.

"This wall must remind us that these fallen heroes lived and did not go in vain. Continue to fight crime



Lieutenant General Baile Motswenyane at the unveiling of the wall for fallen heroes and heroines. Picture: SAPS

and make South Africa safe," said Motswenyane.

However, her legacy has drawn mixed reactions from political leaders.

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Free State dep-

uty chairperson Thomas Macingwane criticised her tenure, citing continued police station robberies, theft of firearms, lack of discipline and instability within the force.

"Under her term of office, we saw a continuation of police station break-ins where guns were stolen and later used in crimes. There was also a lack of discipline among members and overall instability," said Macingwane.

He further criticised what he described as SAPS's silence on drug abuse in the province.

"In Bloemfontein, Virginia, Welkom, Hoopstad, Kutlwanong, Kroonstad and Steynsrus, drug dealers operate openly near school gates and are known to SAPS. Yet there are no visible SAPS-led campaigns to combat drug abuse," he said.

Macingwane alleged that requests by the EFF in Matjhabeng for police assistance in schools to address substance abuse were refused, raising concerns about policing priorities. He called for improved visibility, discipline and leadership stability within SAPS.

Democratic Alliance (DA) Free State leader Roy Jankielsohn, meanwhile, commended Motswenyane and her team for conducting successful roadblocks and operations during the 2025 festive season. However, he warned that crime remains under-reported due to weaknesses in the criminal justice system.

"Stock theft and cross-border crimes remain a crisis in rural communities but are under-reported because of low conviction rates. Rape and gender-based violence are also significantly under-reported due to an unsupportive system," said Jankielsohn.

He further noted the growing reliance on private security, arguing that it reflects an under-resourced SAPS rather than policing success.

"The spread of drugs in rural communities, particularly by foreign nationals, and the reluctance to enforce the law where sources are known, undermines the social fabric of the province and public trust in SAPS," he added.

Jankielsohn acknowledged that while many SAPS members perform their duties with integrity, corruption among some officers damages the reputation of the service.

He declined to comment on whether Deputy Provincial Commissioners Generals Solly Lesia and Arthur Peter Adams would be suitable successors. However, Macingwane argued that the post should be opened to other credible officers outside the current leadership.

Lieutenant General Baile Motswenyane will officially retire at the end of January 2026. Before her departure, the province will host National Police Day and the SAPS Excellence Awards, both to be presided over by Motswenyane.

Setai Takes Helm, Pledges Media Overhaul

New Chief Director commits to policy-driven media funding and improved provincial communications structures

By: Refilwe Mochoari

Newly appointed Free State Chief Director of Communications Matshedisio Setai has pledged a major shake-up of government media relations, placing community media at the centre of the province's communication strategy.

With a complete revamp on the cards, Setai takes the helm with a clear mandate, pledging to solidify a coherent community media approach.

She says that under her stewardship, 40% of the media budget will be spent on community media and 60% will go towards mainstream media, a policy directive set by the Government Communications and Information System (GCIS).

With her wealth of experience as a media and communications professional Setai says her top priorities are to create an impactful digital media content hub.

She says through a community media summit that took place early last year, the government managed to resuscitate the Free State community forum with an interim structure which will ensure that the sector is well coordinated and that the media speaks in one voice.

"The media is a crucial vehicle that is going to help us bring the government executive committee (Exco) closer to the people.

"It will help us to shape the narrative of the FSPG service delivery story within our communities and unmediated as compared to mainstream media.

"Governments' sole purpose when creating community media, was to have unmediated engagement with communities.

"So we will ensure that as part of the commitment made at the community media summit, 40% of the media budget will go towards community media because as a province, we are highly dependent on community media as compared to mainstream media.

"When the government created community media, through the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) this resolution was a policy directive that 40% of the media budget must be spent on community media.

"But that has not been realized to date and it is very few provinces that can do that, and as a government of the seventh administration we have committed to this and I am going to implement this.

"We need to support community media as a critical vehicle to deliver messages, especially because we are approaching local government elections this year.

Setai says she also aims to ensure that every district in the province has a community media outlet in both broadcast and print.

"As it stands right now, we only have four districts that have some form of media representation, and in Xhariep we totally do not have any community media footprint, and this is a conversation that we are going to have with ICASA as government on how we can help the district in the next round of applications.

Setai says another critical area that she will be focusing on during her tenure is the alignment of communications structures within the different departments.

"There is a guideline provided by GCIS that guides through the communications policy on how government should structure their communications within the different spheres of government both nationally and provincially.

"Currently there are many disparities within the different departments.

"It is expected that every department must have a head of communications at a director level, but at the moment you will find that the head of communications is at an assistant director level and others at a deputy director level.

"So if you are intentional about raising the bar, in terms of how you articulate government messaging it has to be pitched at that level.

"We also need to ensure that we have human capital within those departments that is adequate and fit for purpose to ensure that our government communications is effective.

"Human Capital in terms of skilled and competent communicators which is what we have right now as per our skills audit that was done.

"We will ensure that we solicit adequate budget allocations across all government departments to ensure that our government communications is effective.

"There is no point in having a Rolls-Royce communications strategy but we do not have both human capital and the financial resources to implement that strategy, she said.

Setai says her first 100 days in office, to enhance media relations she will ensure that the province has a provincial media sector forum that will consolidate all media role players consisting of all media platforms including digital media that have not yet been regulated by ICASA.

"To make sure that we engage on issues that are disturbing to the provincial government.

"This is also to ensure that some of these online media platforms that have made it their duty to tarnish the reputation of the leaders of the seventh administration are regulated.

"I am also engaging the South African National Editors' forum on having provincial chapters as opposed to only having a national office.

"I also want to look at the possibility of re-establishing a media press club in the province.

"Where it will allow the government to address the media

"Another factor is to continue with what I have already started, which is to engage national broadcast media through quarterly media networking sessions where the national media can engage communicators to understand how the media and the newsrooms work, and to understand how to put together a story that will be able to attract an editor.

Setai says these networking sessions have helped the communicators to write meaningful press releases that were published on different national and international media platforms.

When asked how she will build relationships with fellow communicators, following allegations of corruption and plagiarism in various media reports, Setai says it is not about the people but it is about the vision for the provincial government and how service delivery messages will be communicated to the members of the communities.

"I took on this role because I am a product of the Free State, and I need to plough back.

"With this role, I will leave a legacy of excellent communications.

Setai has over 20 years experience as a

communicator. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Communications Science from the University of Free State. She also holds a National Diploma in Public Administration from the Tshwane University of Technology.

Her work experience include being the Chief Director of Communications (Acted -Deputy Director General of Communications) at the National Department of Transport, Ministerial Advisory Task Team Member and Chair at the Department of Communications, Director of Marketing Events and Stakeholder relations in the Department of Public Enterprises as well as Head of Communications and Spokesperson for the Department of Finance and Economic Development.

Newly appointed Free State Chief Director of Communications Matshedisio Setai. Picture: Supplied

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ANC Out to Woo Supporters

Party set to use its 114th anniversary celebrations to win back lost votes

By: Refilwe Mochoari

The African National Congress (ANC) has embarked on a charm offensive in the North West province as it seeks to win back support ahead of this year's local government elections. Through mass rallies, community visits and door-to-door campaigns, the party is pushing a message of renewal and unity—despite growing criticism over deteriorating infrastructure, failing services and public frustration.

As thousands of supporters are expected to descend on Moruleng Stadium outside Rustenburg tomorrow for the ANC's biggest annual birthday celebration, the festivities unfold against a backdrop of mounting service delivery failures across the province.

Communities grappling with pothole-ridden roads, unreliable water supply and struggling municipalities are questioning whether the ruling party's renewed promises will translate into tangible change on the ground.

However, according to ANC North West provincial spokesperson Tumelo Maruping, the party's renewal project centres on restoring public trust through improved service delivery.

"We do accept as the ANC that we have serious challenges, and that we are unable to address all the issues confronting our communities at once. However, we are working hard to attend to service delivery challenges," Maruping said.

The celebrations began last week with a series of activities, including door-to-door campaigns, memorial lectures and community engagements. First on the programme was a visit by ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa to Kgosi Pilane of the Bakgatla ba Kgafela Royal Family in Moruleng Village.

The mass rally is expected to attract more than 50,000 ANC members. Ramaphosa is also expected to outline the party's priorities for the year ahead, with a focus on renewal, unity and tackling pressing socio-economic challenges.

Poor infrastructure development, unemployment and high crime levels remain among the most pressing



ANC North West provincial spokesperson Tumelo Maruping. Picture: Supplied

service delivery challenges facing the ANC, with the North West flagged as home to some of the country's worst-performing municipalities.

Last year, Journal News reported that 14 of the province's 19 municipalities were placed under intense scrutiny for allegedly violating residents' basic human rights following complaints from individuals, civic organisations and political parties.

A damning report by the South African Human Rights Commission found widespread failures in the provision of essential services, including water, electricity, sanitation,

refuse removal and road maintenance—shortcomings that collectively infringe on residents' constitutional rights.

Municipalities implicated include the City of Matlosana, JB Marks, Maquassi Hills, Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti District, Lekwa-Teemane, Ditsobotla, Moses Kotane, Madibeng, Moretele, Rustenburg and Mahikeng local municipalities.

The commission warned that the service delivery crisis in the North West is persistent and requires urgent intervention.

Premier Extends a Helping Hand



Free State Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae support homeless individuals in Mangaung. Picture: Supplied

By: Mogomotsi Selebi

In a continued effort to address hunger and food insecurity among vulnerable communities, Free State Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae has taken decisive action to support homeless individuals in Bloemfontein. While travelling to local stores, the Premier encountered a group of homeless citizens and immediately spearheaded the distribution of food parcels to assist those affected by ongoing economic and social challenges.

The food parcels were distributed at identified locations commonly frequented by homeless individuals, providing immediate relief to people who often struggle to access regular meals. This intervention forms part of the Premier's broader commitment to combating poverty and promoting dignified living conditions for all residents.

Premier Letsoha-Mathae has further directed the Department of Social Development to advocate for and coordinate similar initiatives in collaboration with civil society organisations and local stakeholders. These efforts will complement existing government programmes, including the distribution of food parcels through Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDs) and other feeding schemes that support disadvantaged individuals and families in both rural and urban areas.

During the distribution process, the Premier identified two individuals in need of urgent medical attention, one of whom was a pregnant woman. The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were immediately contacted and responded swiftly. Both individuals were transported to nearby healthcare facilities to receive the necessary medical care.

ANC at 114: Nthatsi draws a line on neglect



Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Gregory Nthatsi and Premier MaQueen Letsoha Mathae during the ANC's 114th anniversary memorial at Waaihoek Wesleyan Mission Church. PHOTO: MMM Facebook

By: Refilwe Mochoari

Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Gregory Nthatsi has drawn a firm line against municipal neglect, urging unity, accountability and civic responsibility as the ANC marked its 114th anniversary at the historic Waaihoek Wesleyan Mission Church in Bloemfontein.

Addressing the memorial held under the theme "Our Heritage, Our History," on Thursday, Nthatsi said democracy belongs to the people and can only be sustained through collective action, including paying rates and taxes, protecting public infrastructure and ensuring that undisciplined officials are held to account for poor performance.

He — accompanied by the Free State Premier, MaQueen Letsoha Mathae — hosted members of the

provincial religious community, bringing together leaders from faith-based organisations, traditional leadership and civil society.

"The people of Mangaung and ANC supporters must understand that this democracy belongs to them. They must join hands to ensure services are delivered. To sustain these services, it is essential that residents pay their rates and taxes. There must also be greater awareness that littering undermines cleanliness, and people should refrain from damaging municipal property," said Nthatsi.

"We are committed to improving this institution to better serve its people. We will not tolerate officials who are undisciplined and fail to perform their duties. The days of the municipality neglecting its residents are over." The ANC, the oldest liberation movement in Africa, was founded on 8 January 1912 in Bloemfontein by John Langalibalele Dube, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Solomon

Plaatjie and Walter Rubusana. The organisation was established to unite South Africans against colonialism and racial oppression, later leading the struggle against apartheid and governing the country since the advent of democracy in 1994.

He said the gathering in Waaihoek reaffirmed a fundamental truth: that democracy emerges from unity in diversity and can only be renewed in the same manner.

"Let us unite, gather and walk this liberation path together — not as separate entities, but as co-authors of a freedom that remains incomplete," Nthatsi said.

Speaking to Journal News, Nthatsi described the occasion as a celebration for all South Africans.

"Thanks to the leadership of the ANC, which convened in this area to establish an organisation that paved the way for the democratic society we enjoy today, this site has been declared a heritage site rich in history.

"Together with religious denominations, social organisations, civic structures and democratic formations, we have chosen to converge here to start the year by reminding ourselves where South Africa comes from.

"We are reflecting on our origins, the roots of our democracy, and how we can move forward united — holding each other's hands and celebrating our journey together," he said.

Nthatsi said the Waaihoek gathering served as a reminder of the ANC's historical role in shaping South Africa's democracy and the responsibility shared by government and citizens to safeguard it. He called on communities, faith-based organisations and civil society to work together in renewing the country's democratic foundations and advancing service delivery for all.

Restoring Hope, One Learner at a Time



Bernadine Osch, founder of Destiny Carriers, will be hosting their first back-to-school campaign. Picture: Supplied

By: Abigail Visagie

In South Africa, poverty often stands between vulnerable children and their education. Destiny Carriers has taken a bold step to bridge that gap, bringing hope and dignity to learners in need.

Founder Bernadine Osch was inspired by her school experiences. She recalls how daunting the back-to-school season was for some of her less fortunate friends, who often lacked basic school supplies, uniforms, and sanitary products—barriers that left many demotivated and struggling academically.

"This lack is still a current crisis due to high unemployment, insufficient funds, and extreme poverty. Destiny Carriers is honoured to assist learners in need and lighten the burdens of parents who cannot provide," said Osch.

The idea to give back emerged during one of the exam prayer sessions Osch had organized with fellow students. She chose January 24, 2026, as the date for her first community out-

reach.

The event will take place at the Norman Dubbell Hall in Heidedal, Bloemfontein—a central location accessible to surrounding communities. Osch will distribute sanitary essentials, school supplies, stationery, and uniforms, aiming to make a lasting impact on the lives of disadvantaged schoolchildren.

"Our vision is to assist all learners in need, regardless of their school, race, or gender. That's why we did not limit this initiative to specific schools," Osch explained.

Currently, the initiative is self-funded, with no assistance from the Free State Department of Education. However, Osch hopes that the program will eventually attract support and potential collaborations.

Those who wish to contribute can deposit funds using the following banking details:

Capitec Bank | Account Number: 2424058101 | Reference: Back2school

Alternatively, email Bernadine Osch at bernadineosch@gmail.com.

Lightning strike turns historic Mphebotho Festival deadly

By: Abigail Visagie

What began as a vibrant community celebration at the annual Mphebotho Troop Festival at Dertig Sports Ground near Mathibestad in the North West province turned tragic when a lightning strike injured several troopers and claimed two lives.

On 3 January 2026, the Mphebotho Troop Festival hosted its annual event, held in honour of Sesotho culture in South Africa, promoting unity, celebration and camaraderie between the two countries.

The festivities featured performances by local music groups and were attended by several dignitaries, including royalty.

During the event, while troopers were seated under a tent, two lightning strikes occurred. Peter Selemela, a survivor and trooper from Sun Rise who participated in the festivities, said a sudden downpour accompanied by lightning caught them off guard.

According to Selemela, the first strike was distant, but the second hit the tent directly, leaving people shocked and immobile.

"Seconds later, people were on the floor. I couldn't move as my left hand suddenly became numb. I noticed another trooper's legs had stopped functioning, so I crawled towards him and pulled him closer to the tent," he said.

Selemela added that emergency services eventually assisted them at the Mphebotho Library.

The North West Department of Health confirmed that 150 patients were taken to the Mathibestad Clinic. Thirteen were critically injured and transferred to Jubi-



Troopers participating in the annual Mphebotho Troop Festival that took place on the 3rd of January. Picture: Facebook

lee Hospital, while two patients were declared dead on arrival and awaited forensic services. Most patients sustained mild lightning-related burns, with 34 still awaiting medical assessment at the time of reporting. The remaining patients were treated and discharged.

North West Health MEC Sello Lehari said he was pleased that Mathibestad Community Health Centre was fully operational during the tragedy. He confirmed that both day and night staff were on duty.

"The health professionals on site included two doctors, four professional nurses and three enrolled nurses, bringing the total staff complement to nine," said Lehari. "EMS support was strengthened through the deployment of two North West EMS ambulances, two Gauteng EMS ambulances and Planned Patient Transport."

Speaking on behalf of Premier Lazarus Mokgosi, Social

Development MEC Sussana Dantjie conveyed condolences to the affected families and confirmed that the festival would continue next year.

"We expect all stakeholders to work together to ensure the smooth hosting of the next festival," she said.

Dantjie acknowledged concerns from some attendees who believe the fatalities could have been prevented with quicker emergency response, but noted that "death ultimately remains in the hands of God".

Moretele Local Municipality Mayor George Manyike visited the Mashishi family in Lefatsheng, who lost their daughter Kenoshi (35), a teacher at Tlhaloganyo Primary School and a mother to a 10-year-old son.

He also visited the Shekwambane family in Itso seng Section, Dertig, Ward 18, who lost their daughter Koketso (28).

Mbalula to Deployees: Shape Up or Ship Out

Warning to councillors and party deployees to deliver on promises or face consequences

By: JN Reporter

ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula has issued a blunt warning to party deployees, telling underperforming cadres to “shape up or ship out” as the governing party steps up efforts to woo voter support ahead of this year’s local government elections.

Mbalula on Tuesday led ANC volunteers on a door-to-door mobilisation drive in Ward 25 in the Bojanala region of the North West, as part of preparations for the party’s January 8 anniversary rally.

The ANC is marking 114 years since its establishment, with this year’s celebrations taking place in Rustenburg. Festivities will culminate in President Cyril Ramaphosa’s January 8 Statement at Moruleng Stadium outside Rustenburg on Saturday, where he is expected to outline the party’s priorities for the year ahead.

During his engagement with residents of Monakoto village, Mbalula assured the community that the ANC’s local government action plan would be implemented and that party deployees would be held accountable for addressing service delivery concerns.

“I am glad that the councillor and the mayor are here. When I come back, I don’t want to hear the repetition of the same problems. I want a report back,” said Mbalula. “Our local government action plan says we must fix problems in local areas. If things are not fixed, then we are going to fix you, the mayor.”

He stressed that councillors have a responsibility to ensure services are delivered consistently and effectively.

“They must be present in communities and deliver on what they promise — not speak big English, but be on the ground and resolve service delivery challenges,” Mbalula said. “We are here to listen to our communities and assess whether our deployees, especially councillors, are doing the work the ANC sent them to do. Leaders who are unknown to their communities and out of touch cannot be tolerated.”

Since the start of the week, ANC national and provincial leadership have been undertaking various outreach activities across the North West province as part of the



anniversary programme.

The annual January 8 Statement traditionally sets the tone for the ANC’s agenda for the year, reflecting on challenges facing the party and outlining planned interventions under a chosen theme.

ANC national spokesperson Mahlengi Bhengu said the party’s focus was on tangible service delivery rather than rhetoric.

“We have local service delivery intervention teams, local government teams and rapid response teams from Luthuli House on the ground — the entire Luthuli House is in the North West,” Bhengu said.

She added that service delivery interventions had already begun. “Where we see a pothole, we immediately call the councillor, who must then contact their principal, the mayor, on the spot.”

Under-the-Carpet Divorce Shocks Congregants



By: Abigail Visagie

On 20 December 2025, the notorious Rapport newspaper, known for its controversial yet compelling stories, nearly ruined Christmas for thousands of congregants when it announced the divorce of beloved Pastors At and Nyretta Boshoff, leaders of the Christian Revival Church (CRC) with its main branch in Bloemfontein.

The publication revealed that the pastors had been divorced for nearly a year, with court documents circulating on social media confirming that the divorce was finalised in October 2024.

The mystery that remains is why Pastor At has not disclosed this information to his congregants and even allowed the CRC London branch to celebrate their anniversary.

The church boasts over 12,000 members across 90 locations worldwide, yet the news came as a shock to many.

An anonymous Christian believer, who also has legal expertise, stated that it was Pastor At Boshoff’s duty to oppose the divorce rather than sign the papers.

“God says in Malachi 2:16, ‘For I, God, hate divorce. For whatever I have put together, let no man separate,’” the anonymous believer said. He further mentioned that in cases of abuse or marital issues, a couple may need to separate to regroup and address their problems.

The expert also pointed out that the pastor of an international ministry should have refused to sign the divorce papers, which would have led to an automatic default divorce.

“In the eyes of the Lord, he would have done the right thing by refusing to sign. How can someone who defies God preach His word?” asked the expert.

Various media outlets report that the church still refers to Pastor At as married to Nyretta, and his official Instagram bio states: “Married to @ngaretta_boshoff,” despite the fact that it has been nearly a year since their divorce.

“Pastor At can no longer preach to the masses; he should step down because he cannot even respect or follow the word of God that he preaches to his congregants,” concluded the Christian legal expert.

Court Upholds Legislative Integrity, Dismisses Lekalakala Challenge



Former North West Health Department head Dr. Andrew Lekalakala. Picture: Supplied

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Former North West Health Department head Dr. Andrew Lekalakala has lost his bid in court to declare the province’s Powers, Privileges and Immunities Act unconstitutional.

The challenge came after Lekalakala openly acknowledged allegations of corruption before the provincial legislature and immediately filed a motion claiming the legislature itself was unconstitutional—a move that escalated a routine corruption prosecution into a high-stakes legal battle over the province’s legislative framework.

The section under scrutiny criminalizes, as perjury, knowingly providing false information on a material matter before the legislature or its committees, once warned. It also outlines the powers, privileges, and immunities of the Provincial Legislature, including freedom of speech and debate, regulation of internal affairs, and oversight when acting as a court.

Lekalakala, facing fraud and corruption charges in the North West High Court, argued that being compelled to testify before the legislature violated his constitution-

al right against self-incrimination and his right to a fair trial.

The charges relate to a R180 million, three-year mobile primary healthcare contract with Gupta-linked company Mediosa, which the department terminated in 2018. Lekalakala was summoned to testify before a joint session of the North West Legislature following the contract’s cancellation.

In his affidavit, Lekalakala described the legislative committee’s conduct as “inhuman and unfair,” adding: “I experienced the process as being domineering and threatening. I was constantly threatened with remarks such as ‘the police must be called’ and that I could be locked up immediately.”

Afterward, a formal complaint was lodged, leading to his prosecution in the High Court for fraud, corruption, and contraventions of the Public Finance Management Act.

The state presented evidence from Dr. Kgosi Motlabane, the former deputy director-general of the department, which Lekalakala argued was privileged and should not be admissible in criminal proceedings.

In its judgment on December 19, the High Court em-

phasized that Section 22 of the Immunities Act protects the integrity, effectiveness, and credibility of legislative oversight.

“It compels witnesses to provide dependable and truthful testimony, deterring dishonesty and ensuring public confidence in the legislative process,” the court held.

The court clarified that Section 22 punishes only deliberate falsehoods, not silence, and cannot be interpreted to override rights such as protection against self-incrimination.

It underscored the subsidiarity principle, stating that constitutional issues should be decided only when necessary to resolve the case:

“Courts must decide no more than is required to dispose of the matter.”

Lekalakala’s case, while initially a corruption trial, has now become a landmark test of the province’s judicial integrity—balancing the fight against graft with the principles of constitutional order.

Its outcome is poised to influence not only this prosecution but the broader administration of justice in the North West.

Kgabi Blasts ANC Over Mahikeng Roads



Afrika Mayibuye Movement Regional Chairperson Lucky Kgabi. Picture: Supplied

By: Refilwe Mochoari

The newly formed Afrika Mayibuye Movement, founded by former EFF deputy president Floyd Shivambu, has come out swinging against ANC North West spokesperson Tumelo Maruping, accusing him of lies and political fraud.

Maruping, during an interview with the SABC, claimed there are no potholes in Mahikeng. The statement drew fierce criticism from the movement.

“Afrika Mayibuye Movement Regional Chairperson Lucky Kgabi says Maruping is insulting the intelligence and lived experience of residents on Zobo Road in Motlabeng, Unit 13, Montshiwa, and many other areas whose roads have collapsed into dangerous, disgraceful trenches,” the movement said.

“Either Tumelo Maruping has not set foot in these communities for years, or he has chosen to become a professional liar in defence of a failed ANC administration,” Kgabi said.

He also condemned the office of MEC for Economic Development, Butsa Lenkopane, for claiming that the ANC January 8 rally will “boost the local economy.”

“This is a lie told without shame. There is nothing ‘local’ about ANC leaders sleeping in Sun City and Royal Marang while poor communities re-

main unemployed, hungry, and excluded. Who owns these hotels? Certainly not the people of Moruleng, Tlhabane, or Phokeng. This money circulates among the rich while the poor are used as voting cattle and background scenery for ANC events,” Kgabi said.

“If the ANC were serious about the local economy, they would sleep in township guest houses, hire local taxis, eat from local vendors, and put real money in the hands of ordinary people. Instead, they arrive in convoys of expensive cars, isolate themselves in luxury, and then lie to the public about ‘economic benefits.’ This is not governance. This is elite parasitism.”

Kgabi further accused the ANC in the North West of degenerating into “a party of liars, tender looters, and political con artists who survive by insulting the suffering of the people and gaslighting communities into accepting collapse as progress.”

“Afrika Mayibuye Movement is not intimidated by ANC propaganda, nor by their access to microphones and state resources. We will expose Tumelo Maruping, Butsa Lenkopane, and the entire corrupt political machinery that they represent. The era of lying to our people without consequences is coming to an end. We call on the media to come and visit Mahikeng, the so-called capital city of the North West, to witness for themselves these ‘spotless roads,’” Kgabi said.

NC Lucky Winner Scoops Over R65m in Year-End Lotto Draw



One lucky Northern Cape resident is starting the new year as a multi-millionaire after winning more than R65 million in the National Lottery draw held on December 31.

Ithuba, the operator of the National Lottery, confirmed that the winning ticket was purchased in Colesberg using the Quick Pick selection method, with a wager of just R20.

The winning numbers were drawn in Lotto draw 2607, making it a spectacular close to the year for the fortunate ticket holder.

The jackpot win has sparked excitement in the area, with Ithuba encouraging all participants who

played Lotto in Colesberg and surrounding areas to check their tickets carefully and ensure that any winnings are claimed.

Ithuba Chief Executive Officer Charmaine Mabuza congratulated the winner, describing the timing of the win as especially meaningful.

"Winning over R65 million on the final draw of the year is truly a remarkable way to start the new year on a high note. We congratulate the lucky winner and wish them success, joy and endless possibilities as they begin this exciting new chapter. We urge them to come forward and claim their winnings promptly," said Mabuza. *The POST*

DBE reminds matric candidates: Second Chance Programme is free



The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has encouraged National Senior Certificate (NSC) candidates, who were unsuccessful in their initial attempt at the exams, to make use of the official Second Chance Programme.

The Second Chance Programme is provided free of charge to candidates.

Eligible individuals may register to rewrite or add subjects without any payment, in accordance with the department's policies for the May/June examination cycle.

The department stressed that it does not endorse any private or commercial services that require payment for participation in the Second Chance Programme.

"For authentic information, please contact the Department of Basic Education directly or visit the official website," the DBE said.

The aim of the Second Chance Matric Programme is to provide support to learners, who have not been able to meet the requirements of the NSC or the extended Senior Certificate.

The programme is part of meeting the goals of

the National Development Plan and the basic education sector, leading to increased learner retention. Learners are also exposed to bursary opportunities for further studies.

Candidates to be supported

- Senior Certificate Examination Candidates: Learners registered to write the Senior Certificate examinations in June.

- NSC Examinations Part-time candidates: Learners who attempted the NSC examinations post 2008, and will write the examinations in May/June and November.

Targeted subjects include Accounting, Agricultural Science, Business Studies, Economics, English First Additional Language, Geography, History, Mathematics, Mathematic Literacy, Physical Sciences and Life Sciences.

The DBE is set to release the 2025 Matric Results on 12 January 2026.

This year, over 900 000 candidates sat for the 2025 exams across 7 000 centres, supported by thousands of invigilators and more than 51 000 markers and moderators. *SANews*

Phera Pledges Clean-Up of Corrupt, Inept Officials



The newly appointed Free State Director-General Dr Molefinyana Phera has vowed to root out corruption and incompetence. Picture: Refilwe Mochoari

Stepping into office with a clear mandate to restore credibility and efficiency, the newly appointed Free State Director-General Dr Molefinyana Phera has vowed to root out corruption and incompetence across the provincial administration. *Journal News* Editor-in-Chief Refilwe Mochoari sat down with Phera to unpack his vision, priorities, the challenges ahead and how he plans to rebuild public trust in government services.

With more than 30 years' experience in governance and 22 years at senior and executive level, Phera — a lawyer and human resources professional — becomes the sixth Director-General of the Free State since 1994. Appointed on 12 December 2025, Phera has been tasked by Premier MaQueen Letsosa-Mathae to provide strategic leadership, strengthen governance coordination, improve audit outcomes, digitise administration and ensure effective policy implementation across all spheres of government. As the province continues to battle allegations of corruption, inefficiency and poor service delivery, questions remain over whether Phera can deliver on his bold promises.

Here is what he had to say...

Thank you for granting us the opportunity to sit down with you and congratulation for your appointment as you take over this important role. What are your top three priorities as the new Director-General, and how do you plan to achieve them?

My first priority is to improve coordination of governance, which is the core function of the Office of the Premier. In terms of Sections 3 and 7 of the Public Service Act, the Director-General's primary role is to coordinate government machinery.

I intend to intensify this coordination to ensure seamless, predictable administration across departments. For example, applying for a job at the Office of the Premier should follow the same process as applying at a hospital. Public administration must be uniform, predictable and guided by common standards.

People must know what to expect when they interact with government. This approach will also be extended to municipalities.

My second priority is to obtain clean audits. Clean audits are a reflection of clean governance and instil public confidence that public funds are managed lawfully and responsibly.

Audits today go beyond financial compliance; they also assess non-financial performance, including whether departments are achieving their annual performance plans. A clean audit therefore confirms that finances are properly managed and that performance targets are being met.

We want to start with the Office of the Premier, which has received qualified audits for the past five years. We are determined to change that trajectory. According to the Auditor-General, there has already been improvement: we achieved a clean audit on non-financial performance but were still qualified on financial performance. Our goal is to address this in the next audit cycle. As the Office of the Premier, we must lead by example.

The Office of the Premier has received qualified audits for five consecutive years, during which time you served as Deputy Director-General. How will you change this now that you are DG?

I am not here to say, "I found this here." I am here now, and I take responsibility. When I arrived in 2021, one of the major audit issues related to international bursaries and reconciliation with DIRCO. That matter has since been resolved, as reflected in the audit reports.

Those findings fell under my area of responsibility as Chief Director and later DDG for Corporate Reform. It is important to note that a DDG is accountable for a specific programme, not the entire department. In Programme Two, which I oversaw, there were no neg-

ative audit findings.

I am fully aware of the remaining challenges, particularly in supply chain management and proof of occurrence, and these are the areas we are addressing.

My third priority is the digitisation of administration and service delivery. This process is already under way. We have launched Free State Online, which offers improved access to government services, as well as an e-Recruitment platform to connect young people with employment opportunities. Bursaries for next year have also been advertised online.

In February, we will roll out the Virtual Private Network (VPN) infrastructure, which will enhance digital service delivery, improve telephony systems, reduce paper usage and allow residents to access services remotely, without standing in long queues.

As we digitise more services, we are also strengthening cybersecurity. These initiatives are not limited to the Office of the Premier; they are intended for the entire province. We also aim to extend the VPN to municipalities and enable access to government services through Wi-Fi at Thusong Centres.

There has been controversy around employees being removed from work, with some cases still on-going in court. Can you clarify this issue?

No one was removed; contracts simply came to an end. These were long-standing but non-compliant contracts. When they expired in September 2024, we allowed them to lapse in order to regularise the process. The matter was handled in an orderly manner, with unions involved. Those who challenged the process in court were unsuccessful. Some employees returned after meeting the required criteria. In certain cases, salaries were adjusted where individuals were earning senior-level pay without the requisite qualifications. We corrected those processes.

What are your plans regarding employment equity and managing a diverse workforce?

We operate within the framework of South Africa's laws, which promote unity in diversity. Employees, regardless of race or background, must be treated equally.

We have management structures and committees to ensure compliance, and I will continue to oversee these. In the Office of the Premier, we are doing well in terms of race and gender equity, with women forming the majority of staff.

However, we acknowledge shortcomings in the employment of persons with disabilities. Currently, representation in the OTP is around 2%, compared to about 5% in the Department of Social Development. That said, employees with disabilities are reasonably accommodated, whether through assistive personnel or physical support.

Corruption remains a major concern, particularly around tenders and incomplete projects. How do you plan to tackle this?

There is both a prevalence and a strong perception of corruption. While instances do occur, the actions of a few individuals often create the impression that the entire public service is corrupt. I believe the majority of public servants are honest.

The first step in fighting corruption is strengthening controls to reduce opportunities for wrongdoing. The second is enforcing consequence management. Where irregularities are identified, investigations must follow, disciplinary action must be taken, and criminal cases opened where necessary. The courts must determine guilt — we cannot be both referee and player. Whether an official is incompetent or corrupt, the consequences must be the same. My mantra is simple: remove incompetent and corrupt people from the system. We must report corruption to the relevant authorities and improve internal controls to prevent irregularities.

What do you anticipate will be your biggest challenge as DG?

Public dissatisfaction with service delivery, perceptions of corruption, loss of trust in government, youth unemployment and dysfunctional municipalities are realities we cannot ignore. My biggest challenge will be managing expectations. People want immediate results, yet leadership often requires delivering under difficult conditions.

Do you feel you have big shoes to fill?

Absolutely. I am following in the footsteps of highly respected leaders. And here I am — a boy from Masi-lyanya. Fortunately, I still have access to most of my predecessors, and whenever I need advice, I will reach out to them.

FACT FILE: DR MOLEFINYANA PHERA

- Matriculated: 1993
- First employment: Registry clerk in the office of the late Ouma Tsopo (1993)
- 1996–2000: NEHAWU Shop Steward
- Assistant Director: Labour Relations, Department of Treasury
- 2002: Director, Cooperative Services, Masi-lyanya Municipality
- Municipal Manager, Masi-lyanya Municipality (one year)
- 2009: Chief Director, Corporate Services, Northern Cape Treasury
- 2011–2021: Chief Operations Officer, Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism
- 2021: Deputy Director-General, Free State Provincial Government

Sekoboto's Contract Extension Sparks Controversy



CENTLEC CEO, Malefane Sekoboto. Picture: Supplied

By: Abigail Visagie

CENTLEC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Malefane Sekoboto's recent contract extension has come under scrutiny, with concerns raised about the decision-making process, transparency and compliance with procurement and governance regulations. The move has prompted renewed calls for accountability at the Mangaung Metro Municipality (MMM).

The controversy follows accusations by the Democratic Alliance (DA) in the Free State that the municipality undermined transparency and limited public access by using closed December council meetings to push through questionable decisions, including the extension of Sekoboto's contract until 31 March 2026.

Sekoboto's term was due to end on 31 December 2025. However, DA councillor Dirk Kotze said the contract was extended during a virtual meeting without adherence to the necessary legislative requirements, exposing the municipality to governance, audit and legal risks.

"The DA opted not to participate in the vote regarding a three-month extension of the CENTLEC CEO's contract," said Kotze. "We warned that this decision violates legal requirements and exposes the municipality to serious governance, audit and legal risks. We condemn the Executive Mayor, Gregory Nthatsi, and the Speaker, Lawrence Mathae, for missing closed council meetings to push questionable decisions, limit public access and undermine transparency."

Kotze further argued that the extension was unlawful. "According to the Municipal Systems Act, CEOs of municipal entities must be employed on fixed-term contracts. Once such a contract expires, the position must be declared vacant and an acting CEO legally appointed. Extending an expired contract circumvents safeguards designed to prevent the recycling of senior management contracts," he said.

In contrast, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) deputy chairperson in the Free State, Thomas Macingwane, dismissed the DA's claims and urged residents to question the party's credibility, accusing it of inconsistency and disowning its own decisions.

Macingwane said council had resolved to extend the contract by three months to allow the recruitment process to continue, adding that closed council meetings are standard practice for senior management appointments. He argued that such procedures protect councillors from pressure by disgruntled or unsuccessful candidates.

"On the issue of the extension, council resolved before recess that the CENTLEC board should advise council on the expiry of the CEO's five-year contract. The DA had no issue with that decision at the time, but because they are inconsistent and have their own preferences for who should be CEO, they launched a campaign against this CEO from the beginning of the financial year," said Macingwane.

Macingwane's claims were supported by Mangaung Metro acting spokesperson Nicolette Maysiels, who confirmed that council had approved the relevant reports, albeit with some amendments.

Maysiels told Journal News that council met on 15 December to correct the composition of the interim board and resolved to extend its term as an acting board for a period not exceeding three months.

"On 22 December 2025, the interim board then met to consider the position of the CEO and the related human resources processes," she said.

According to Maysiels, the meeting passed several resolutions, including the extension of the CEO's employment contract for a further three months, in line with clause 17.3 of Sekoboto's employment contract.

Ramaphosa appoints SIU boss Andy Mothibi as prosecutions head



Newly appointed NDPP Andy Mothibi. Picture: Supplied

President Cyril Ramaphosa has appointed Special Investigating Unit head Andy Mothibi as the prosecutions boss.

The Presidency announced on Tuesday night that Mothibi's tenure will begin next month.

An advisory panel chaired by justice minister Mmamoloko Kubayi shortlisted and interviewed candidates over two days in December. The other candidates interviewed were advocates Nicolette Bell, Hermione Cronje, Andrea Johnson, Xolisile Khanyile, Adrian Mopp and Menzi Simelane.

Presidential spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said none of them was found to be suitable for the position.

"The panel concluded its process and submitted its report to the president on December 12 2025. In its report, the panel advised the president that none of the interviewed candidates was suitable," said Magwenya.

"Accordingly, (the president) has ... decided to appoint advocate Jan Lekgoa Mothibi, with effect from February 1 2026, as the national director of public prosecutions (NDPP)."

Mothibi began his career as a public prosecutor in the Johannesburg and Soweto magistrates' and regional courts. He also served as a magistrate in the Johannesburg and Soweto magis-

trate's courts.

"Advocate Mothibi has previously served in various public and private sector roles managing legal, compliance and risk management operations, including at Sars as head of corporate legal services and head of governance," said the Presidency.

Ramaphosa appointed the panel to select a new NDPP in October.

At the time, Magwenya said the president chose this approach due to the importance of the position in the criminal justice system. The was to conduct an open and transparent selection process.

Current NPA head Shamila Batohi's term ends at the end of January.

Ramaphosa thanked for her service and contribution to the country's prosecutions agency and wished her well, according to Magwenya.

Ramaphosa has also appointed SIU chief operations officer Leonard Lekgetho to act in Mothibi's place.

Lekgetho has more than 22 years of forensic investigations experience, including serving as a forensic investigator at the then directorate of special operations, known as the Scorpions. *TimesLive*

The Boegoeberg Blues: A small Nama tribe holds the key to the Orange Oil Basin's future



A landmark 2003 ruling by the ConCourt in favour of the Richtersveld community has made the still-impoverished Nama people the gate-keepers of the government's ambitious plans to turn the Northern Cape into an energy and mining hub.

Investigation by John Grobler

The small Nama clan of the Richtersveld and their ownership of a critical swathe of the Namaqualand's northern-most coastline has become the single-biggest obstacle to the South African government's ambitions to tapping the off-shore Orange Basin oil and gas reserves in line with the BRICS agenda.

Specifically, it is their ownership of the Boegoeberg area and adjoining bay earmarked for a new R10 billion deep-water port that gives them the whipping hand over the ANC government's Integrated Resources Plan (IRP) to exploit the Northern Cape's mineral resources and transform the Northern Cape into a mining and mineral processing Mecca.

And with the off-shore exploration now picking up pace – Shell plans to sink 40 wells in their Northern Cape Ultra Deep block over the next five years, for example – the pressure is piling up on the government to come to the table.

"My personal opinion is that whoever wants to deal with us will have to do so on our terms," said Kaptein Gert Links in Kuboes, a small settlement of about 2,000 people about 60km inland and 20km south from the Orange River, and home to the Richtersveld traditional authority.

"I might be sitting here in the most remote part of the country, but we know what is going on," said the great-grandson of Kaptein Paul Links, the first officially acknowledged leader of the Richtersveld Nama whose grave lies on the southern slope of the Boegoeberg with 25 others.

Landmark ruling

That small graveyard was the single-most important piece of evidence that convinced the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court in a landmark 2003 ruling to recognise their 1998 land claim against state-owned diamond mining company Alexkor, he confirmed.

But after 18 years of official stone-walling and foot-dragging to implement the terms of the final Deed of Settlement signed on October 10 2007, the



Richtersveld people have run out of patience, he warned.

Crucially, South Africa's two apex courts found that this communal ownership was not limited to the surface of the land, but also encompassed all its natural resources, including the rich alluvial diamond deposits that would become the catalyst for the community's dispossession.

This clear break with the colonial-era legislation and practices to dispossess indigenous people of their customary ownership of mineral rights as integral to their land rights placed the Richtersveld in the position to lay claim also to the vast oil and gas resources of the off-shore Orange Basin, Links said.

However, with no knowledgeable experts in their own community to negotiate such technically complex agreements, the Richtersveld people were at a major disadvantage, as they had since learnt in their bitter experience of co-ownership of their Alexkor diamond mining joint venture with the government.

Industrial zone

As result, they were being sidelined and ignored by the government: TransNet, who is to develop Boegoe Bay into a major hub for servicing the off-shore oil fields and establish a massive new industrial zone on the gravel plains surrounding Boegoeberg, was simply ignoring them in laying out the power-line and pipeline corridors across their territory, he said.

In his last meeting with the TransNet officials, they told him that the state would simply expropriate what-

ever land they needed for Boegoe Bay, taking unfair advantage of their own lack of knowledge of the value of whatever lay underneath that land, he said.

This high-handed approach violated both the letter and spirit of the 2003 ConCourt ruling and left the community deeply suspicious of the government's agenda, Links said.

"There is not much goodwill left among the community in our negotiations with them," he said. "Whoever wants access to Boegoe Bay will have to give us iron-clad legal guarantees of recognising our land rights and access in perpetuity to the Boegoeberg grave site."

"We are not refugees on this land, we're the original inhabitants who cannot be legally ignored," he cautioned. "The community has not made any decision yet" about the state's plans for Boegoe Bay, he warned.

Was this why the proclamation and transfer of Alexander Bay into a local authority was still not finalised and why the pay-outs of individual compensation as final financial settlement of R190-million in damages awarded by the ConCourt was still being delayed?

Final verification of the about 4,500 beneficiaries' bank account details was completed in early July and the pay-out of about R30,000 each would hopefully commence soon, Links said.

Environmental damage

As for the rest, that happened before his election as traditional leader earlier this year and the trustees of the Common Property Association, a body created to

manage the Alexkor assets they inherited under the 2003 ruling, would have to answer for that, he indicated.

"The land speaks for itself," he said in reference to the enormous environmental damage that a century of diamond mining had left behind.

The landmark 2003 ruling as an act of restitutive justice had unintended if foreseeable economic consequences for everyone else in Namaqualand as it forced Alexkor to cease all mining operations and lay off about 1,800 workers with immediate effect.

This had a devastating impact on the other Namaqualand communities where diamond mining had been the lifeblood of the regional economy since the 1920s.

Diamond-mining towns like Hondeklipbaai, Koingnaas, Kleinsee and Kommagas became virtual ghost-towns as the Namaqualand diamond economy imploded overnight – and just never recovered.

excavators and other industrial equipment, and often within town limits, said Pieter Blackie, a conservation-minded property developer in Kleinsee.

Alexkor itself has been a culprit: in 2022, it was criminally charged by the Green Scorpions for building illegal coffer dams that have deeply damaged the local artisanal fishing industry.

Research indicates statutory public notifications in terms of the Environment Conservation Act (1998) of public meetings on mining licence applications and related developments are being done in a manner that may meet the bare letter of the law, but not its wider intent of ensuring public participation.

For example, 10km outside Port Nolloth on the Kleinsee road, an official EIA Notice for water usage was pinned to a farm fence – a common practice here. It notified the public that the Zebra Grid Connector Corridor, measuring 320m to 655m in width across 40km of eight farms, was to be created here for connecting the five solar production plants planned for Port Nolloth to the national grid.

EIA meetings

But in Port Nolloth in July 2025, no one was aware of this. Venues for public EIA meetings are often changed at the last moment to minimise local opposition to questionable mining licences issued by the Department of Mineral Resources, local residents said.

As for any objections, those have to be filed in writing and in the case of oil exploration rights, have to be accompanied by a R500 fee, according to one such notice posted on the Richtersveld Municipality's notice board on behalf of Tosaco, who holds the rights to one of the potentially most lucrative off-shore Orange Basin oil blocks.

Meanwhile, on the streets of the Namaqualand towns, there was a heavy police presence. Restaurants are checked weekly for any illegal abalone or crayfish, the only other Diamond Coast products that could earn the destitute local people any cash.

The over-all effect was chilling: a selective show of force in the debasing of the environment, while systematically undermining the local traditional authority's writ and the rule of law.

*This article was first published in *Oxpeckers Investigative Environmental Journalism*

Legal limbo

The uncertainty of this legal limbo has discouraged any other private investment to boost tourism and attract visitors to the incredibly rich and diverse Richtersveld and Namaqua National Parks, home to the unique and endemic succulent Karoo biome, members of the local business community said.

Unemployment among the youth is now about 95%, said former unionist Carisa Soudens, with many now resorting to poaching rare succulent Karoo plants from



NSFAS Records Over 609,000 Applications for 2026 Funding

Scheme confirms all funding applications processed before start of academic year as demand for student financial aid surges

By: Lerato Mutlanyane

In its continued mission to expand access to higher education and support South African students in achieving their academic aspirations, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has received a record number of applications for the 2026 academic year.

Acting NSFAS Board Chairperson, Dr Mugwena Maluleke, announced that more than 609,000 applications were submitted during the 2026 application window, highlighting the growing demand for financial assistance across the country.

"NSFAS is pleased to confirm that it has processed all 2026 funding applications prior to the start of the 2026 academic year, as committed to by 31 December 2025. All students can now view their funding status via the NSFAS portal," the scheme said.

Of the 609,403 applications received from prospective students, 609,403 were assessed, with 609,403 broken down as follows:

- Qualifying applications: 609,403
- Rejected applications: 49,538
- Incomplete applications: 218,043
- Withdrawn applications: 16,863

NSFAS noted that first-time entering students who meet the financial eligibility criteria may still require confirmation of valid admission from a registered institution of higher learning.

This government initiative provides financial assistance to students from underprivileged backgrounds who are unable to afford tuition and related costs at public universities and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

Provincial breakdown

KwaZulu-Natal recorded the highest number of ap-

plications with 109,026, followed by Gauteng (31,491) and Limpopo (21,234). Other provinces recorded the following figures: The Eastern Cape with 13,478; Mpumalanga 10,704; North West 6,098; Western Cape 6,051; Northern Cape with 849 applications rating the lowest and lastly Free State with a total of 6,314 applications.

Senior students and progression criteria

Out of 545,952 assessed senior students, 416,688 NSFAS-funded students met the academic progression criteria, while 129,264 did not qualify.

"For continuing students, this information currently reflects university students only, as TVET college results will be released on 13 January 2026," Maluleke said.

NSFAS further confirmed that the same process applies to students who have lodged appeals against funding decisions, ensuring fairness and equal oppor-

tunity for reconsideration.

"Upon receiving the outcome of their NSFAS application, students who wish to appeal are required to initiate the process promptly. The appeals window is open, and NSFAS will notify students of appeal outcomes on an ongoing basis," the scheme said.

Applicants are granted a strict 30-day window from the date of notification to submit the required documentation. Failure to comply within this period will result in the forfeiture of the appeal.

NSFAS encouraged students to submit all relevant documents early and adhere strictly to deadlines to avoid unnecessary delays.

"I am impressed with how the newly elected board chairperson is operating," shared Zac Nkosi.

Mop-up payments cleared

On mop-up payments, NSFAS reported that all outstanding claims from higher education institutions and

invoices from accommodation providers have been settled. "Where short payments remain, NSFAS is committed to working with accommodation providers to resolve these claims timeously and requests providers to lodge claims through the relevant NSFAS channels," the statement read.

Message to the matric class of 2025

With the Department of Basic Education set to release the 2025 matric results on Monday, 12 January, NSFAS extended its best wishes to all learners.

"As the 2025 matriculation class awaits the release of their results, NSFAS wishes to extend heartfelt encouragement and best wishes to every learner. This moment reflects years of hard work, dedication and perseverance," the scheme said.

"Regardless of the outcome, you have already demonstrated remarkable resilience. Your journey is only beginning, and many opportunities lie ahead."



Morolong Backs Learners as Schools Reopen



Reality star Inno Morolong. PHOTO: Facebook

Reality star Inno Morolong has announced the launch of a Back-to-School Stationery Drive to support underprivileged learners, as schools prepare to reopen and many families face rising education costs across South Africa.

Morolong explained that the initiative targets children who are most at risk of starting the school year without basic learning tools, including learners from child-headed households. Essential items to be distributed include exercise books, pens, pencils, rulers, crayons, school bags and other core stationery needed for classroom learning.

She says the drive comes at a time of sustained economic pressure on South African households. While some public schools provide stationery, shortages remain common, leaving many families unable to meet the full cost of uniforms and school supplies.

Announcing the initiative, Morolong highlighted the role education plays in shaping opportunity and restoring dignity.

"Many learners start the school year without the basic tools they need to succeed," she said. "This drive is about restoring dignity, confidence and hope, one school kit at a time."

The initiative forms part of Morolong's broader commitment to social responsibility, youth development and community upliftment, using her public platform to create tangible impact beyond the entertainment industry.

In 2025, she donated matric dance dresses to final-year learners, and says her focus for 2026 is to continue contributing wherever possible.

"A little goes a long way, and whatever I can do to help build better future leaders is important," she said.

Explaining what sparked her interest in doing the initiative she said, "I am a mother, and I know how expensive preparing for a child's future can be. Even small support can make a big difference. My hope is that we raise healthy, happy and responsible adults." *!OL*

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Opinion

By Edgar Legoale



Matome Chiloane Is the Best Education MEC South Africa Has Right Now

In a country where education shapes the future of millions, strong leadership at provincial level makes all the difference. As we kick off 2026, with the class of 2025 matric results just around the corner, it is clear to me that Gauteng's MEC for Education, Matome Chiloane, stands head and shoulders above the rest. Sure, other provinces have their wins, but Chiloane's hands-on approach, focus on real-world challenges, and steady improvements in a tough urban setting make him the top pick right now. He is not just managing schools—he is building a system that works for everyone, from township kids to city learners. Let me break it down why I think he is the best education MEC South Africa has at the moment.

Gauteng's Impressive Track Record Under Chiloane

Since taking the reins in 2022, Chiloane has steered Gauteng's education department through some rough waters, and the results speak for themselves. Look at the 2024 matric pass rate: Gauteng hit 88.4%, up from 85.4% the year before. That put the province in third place nationally, behind Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, but ahead of heavyweights like the Western Cape at 86.6%. And this is no fluke—Gauteng has climbed steadily, with more learners earning bachelor passes that open doors to university.

What sets Chiloane apart is how he celebrates the hard work behind these numbers. In December 2025, he praised the dedication of teachers and learners across the province, calling them "Team Gauteng." He even hosted the Gauteng leg of the National Teaching Awards in October 2025, honouring over 45 top educators from a pool of more than 100,000. These moves show he values the people on the ground, not just the stats. Plus, with a massive budget of R68 billion for the 2025/26 financial year, he has pushed funds into key areas like school infrastructure and learner support, ensuring



no child gets left behind in South Africa's economic hub.

Mastering the Chaos of Urban Education

Gauteng is not like other provinces—it is packed with over 2,000 schools, millions of learners, and unique headaches like rapid urban growth and diverse communities. Chiloane has tackled these head-on. Take school placements: every year, parents stress about getting their kids into Grade 1 or 8. In November 2025, he held a media briefing to update on progress for 2026 admissions, cutting down unplaced learners to a tiny number through an efficient online system. By late 2025, only a handful of spots were left unresolved, a far cry from past years' chaos.

He has also made schools safer, declaring them "safe havens" and rolling out measures to protect learners and staff. In a keynote speech in November 2025, Chiloane stressed how education builds responsible citizens, linking it to broader goals like reducing crime and boosting the economy. And let us not forget his push for township schools to shine—he promotes them as top performers to bust the myth that only former Model C schools

deliver quality. This has eased placement pressures and built pride in local communities. No other MEC handles such scale with this level of detail and care.

How He Stacks Up Against the Rest

Do not get me wrong—other MECs are doing solid work. Free State's Dr Julia Maboya deserves a nod for her province's top spot in 2024 with a 91% pass rate, especially as a rural area often seen as under-resourced. She has set a bold 95% target for 2025, focusing on literacy hubs and volunteer support. KwaZulu-Natal's team pushed to 89.5%, investing in rural schools and exam prep. The Western Cape hit its highest ever at 86.6%, with strong bachelor passes.

But here is the thing: these provinces face fewer urban pressures. Gauteng deals with high migration, budget cuts from national level, and the need to feed and transport thousands of learners daily. Despite scholar transport and nutrition programme reductions in 2025, Chiloane prioritised keeping teachers in classrooms and sustaining operations. He openly criticised those cuts while finding ways to make do. In contrast, some provinces struggle with audit issues or slower equity gains. Chiloane's abil-

ity to deliver consistent rises—Gauteng produced the national top matriculant in 2024 and claimed the number one district in Johannesburg West—shows real leadership in a complex setup.

Nationally, the 2024 pass rate hit a record 87.3%, with all provinces above 80% for the first time. KwaZulu-Natal led in bachelor passes at 10.8%, followed by the Western Cape and Gauteng. But Chiloane's Gauteng punched above its weight with 66,000 bachelor passes, proving his strategies work even in a bustling metropolis.

A Vision That Puts Learners First

What really makes Chiloane the best is his forward-thinking mindset. In October 2025, he signed the National Senior Certificate Pledge alongside learners, committing to integrity and hard work for the 2025 exams. As the countdown to results release builds excitement, he has wished families well for the holidays, reminding everyone that education is a team effort involving parents, guardians, and communities. He urges families to support schools, especially as the 2025 year wrapped up, and hosts events like the Johannesburg West District Summit to empower learner leaders. Looking ahead, with targets for even higher passes in 2025, Chiloane is positioning Gauteng to lead in innovation, like digital learning and skills for the job market. In a country still healing from apartheid's unequal education, his focus on equity—lifting township schools and ensuring every child has a fair shot—is what South Africa needs more of.

In my view, Matome Chiloane is not just the best MEC right now; he is a blueprint for what education leadership should look like. Other provinces have strong performers, but none match his blend of grit, vision, and results in such a demanding environment. As we await the 2025 matric outcomes, I am betting Gauteng will shine again under his watch. South Africa would be better off if more leaders followed his lead.

From saving her life to shaping her future: UFS medical graduate comes full circle



Dr Jana Campbell received her MBChB degree during the Faculty of Health Sciences' December graduation ceremony – a milestone she believes might never have been possible without Prof Stephen Brown and David Griesel, from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the UFS. Picture: Supplied

By: Andre Damons

More than 20 years after two doctors fought to save her life, Jana Campbell found herself sitting in their lecture halls – this time as a medical student.

The moment came full circle last month as she walked across the stage to graduate as a medical doctor from the University of the Free State (UFS).

Campbell received her MBChB degree during the Faculty of Health Sciences' December graduation ceremony – a milestone she believes might never have been possible without Prof Stephen Brown, Head of the Division of Paediatric Cardiology, and David Griesel, Associate Professor in Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the UFS.

Prof Brown, a paediatric heart specialist working at the Universitas Academic Hospital and the UFS, has been doing research into the Cyanotic Heart Disease amongst newborns.

From a premature baby fighting for breath to a young doctor ready to save lives, Campbell's story is proof that survival can become purpose, and beginnings can become destiny.

Meeting her heroes

"As a child, my parents always told me the story of how I got the mark on my chest," she recalls. "To later sit in a classroom and learn from the very doctors who saved my life was surreal. You grow up hearing about these incredible people who gave you a chance at life – and one day they are teaching you how to save others."

Born prematurely in January 2002 with severely underdeveloped lungs and heart, Dr Campbell's chances of survival were slim. After doctors in Vryburg, North West, could do no more, she was rushed to Universitas Academic Hospital in Bloemfontein – where Prof Brown, a long-time friend of her father, became the first specialist to intervene. She underwent emergency surgery and was placed in the ICU, where both Prof Brown and Prof Griesel, a Neurodevelopmental Subspecialist, remained by her side, refusing to give up on her fragile life.

Years later, she met her lifesavers not in an operating theatre, but in class.

"Prof Brown recognised me immediately because of his friendship with my father. With Prof Griesel, I introduced myself after a lecture and he remembered me at once," she told the story on how they met again. "It was emotional. These were the people who made my life possible, and now they were part of shaping the doctor I want to become."

Her calling

She believes those early days of survival planted a calling deep within her – to do for others what was once done for her. Says Dr Campbell: "What they showed me, was the power of showing up for people. Their actions didn't just change my life – they created my future. Medicine became my way of passing that gift forward," she concluded.

Adding another layer of joy to her graduation, Dr Campbell completed her journey side-by-side with four of her school friends from C&N Sekondêre Meisieskool Oranje – Drs Bea Louw, Carli Olivier, Ivanke van Jaarsveld and Katia Geustyn. Except for Dr Louw, who begins her internship at 2 Military Hospital in Cape Town, the group will continue their medical journey together at Pelonomi Hospital in Bloemfontein.

"This experience was incredible," Dr Campbell says. "Going through it with my friends made it magical. We carried each other, we grew together, and now we start our next chapter together."

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

The Need for Constant Improvement

Have you ever heard a world-class athlete say, 'You know what? I'm at the top. I'm a champion. I don't need to improve anymore.' Of course not.

No star athlete thinks that way.

So why is it that, in leadership, we get used to how we have always done things, and we do not engage with constant improvement?

The world is not static—it's dynamic. If you go into cruise control, what's going to happen is that people will pass you by.

This causes issues: now, you're going to try to control them—keep them down. You're going to try to lead them out of your own insecurity.

Here's a sentence to say to yourself in 2026 on a daily basis: 'What is it about me that will keep me from becoming the best me that God intended for me to be?'

The only person standing between you and your next level is you. It doesn't matter how good you are. You have to improve constantly. How? Start by not believing what they say.

The moment you start believing their praises and admiration—thinking you're all that and a bag of

chips—you'll stop improving.

Make a commitment to continually improve. Write out two or three things you can do to improve this week!

It might be reading, listening, going to conferences, writing, or simply stretching beyond your comfort zone. If you don't improve constantly, you'll hold your organization down.

Simply put, you can grow—should grow—must grow.

Growth is not accidental but intentional, if you are going to win in 2026 please focus on improving yourself.

Consider improvement on

the following:-

- * Spiritual
- * Mental
- * Physical
- * Financial
- * Intellectual
- * Social

One of the ways to improve quickly is setting goals and setting up systems that are going to help you achieve your goals.

Make this year your year by being disciplined and consistent. We look forward to seeing and meeting the improved you.

UDM EC Welcomes Progress on the FASSET Stipend Crisis and Calls for Ongoing Accountability



The United Democratic Movement (UDM) welcomes the commitments made by the Chief Executive Officer of Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (FASSET) to resolve the non-payment of stipends affecting hundreds of interns placed across the province, including in Gqeberha, Lusikisiki and Ngqobu, who have not received a single stipend since August 2025.

We commend the UDM Deputy President, Mr Nqabayomzi Kwankwa, MP, for raising this matter in Parliament and for swiftly securing commitments from FASSET to resolve the backlog and ensure timely future payments. His intervention has brought much-needed urgency, visibility and accountability to an issue that has had a devastating impact on young graduates and their families.

The UDM in the Eastern Cape notes the following commitments made by FASSET:

Finalisation of stipend payments for November and December, with arrangements underway to ensure that January payments are made on time; Convening of meetings with the South African Council for Graduates and relevant SETAs to resolve the backlog for August to October, verify

claims and secure funds for full payment to students.

This matter has caused severe financial hardship, emotional distress and a loss of dignity for young people who are attempting to build a future through education and work. These interns have been expected to fulfil work obligations without the basic guarantee of income an unacceptable situation in a society already burdened by unemployment, poverty and inequality.

The UDM the Eastern Cape will monitor this process closely, engage affected youth structures, and call for transparent, verifiable progress reports to ensure that all outstanding amounts are paid without delay.

We reiterate that youth development cannot be a slogan it must manifest in budget commitments, timely disbursements, institutional accountability, and consistent monitoring.

We further commit to working with our national leadership, community stakeholders and affected interns to ensure that no young person is pushed further into desperation due to bureaucratic failures. **By Bulelani Bobotyane, Provincial Secretary of the UDM**

Business

Markets and Indicators

Rand/Dollar	16.53	-0.51%	▼
Rand/Pound	22.21	-0.34%	▼
Rand/Euro	19.26	-0.28%	▼
Platinum	2 262.88	-1.45%	▼
Brent Crude	62.77	4.11%	▲
Gold	4 477.59	0.48%	▲
Etherium	3105.84	-1.27%	▼
Bitcoin	91 006.6	-0.02%	▼

'Give us stability to help us grow': North West business leaders look ahead to 2026

Call for 'predictable economic environment' to help firms invest



Amy House, director of Green Economy Picture: Green Economy

Businesses need stability in 2026 – that's the message from North West leaders as they head into the New Year. After a year of uncertainty and U-turns in Government policy, bosses say they want clarity and certainty so they can invest in growth and upskill their staff despite ongoing pressures of high costs.

Adrian Young, tax partner at accounting and business advisory firm HURST, said: "The business leaders with whom I speak are broadly united in their desire for the new year to bring stability. This matters more than ever after recent global shocks, domestic policy shifts and, in particular, uncertainty with regard to tax. I think businesses above all crave a predictable economic environment that allows them to invest and innovate with confidence."

Mr Young said firms wanted stability in tax policy. He said: "In my experience, businesses are not generally calling for lower taxes, rather they are asking for clarity and predictability. The debacle that surrounded the recent budget, where tax-raising policies were mooted only to be dropped and replaced with others, only caused anxiety for businesses."

"This was particularly the case for employers who, having been hit hard by the changes to national insurance contributions and national minimum and living wage levels earlier in 2025, feared another hit in November."

"Frequent and unexpected changes to the tax rules make long-term planning difficult, and to me that appears particularly so for larger employers."

Mr Young said firms also wanted stability and certainty around their tax burdens, adding: "Predictability in employment costs will help firms manage workforce planning while supporting fairer outcomes for employees."

And he added: "Another priority is certainty around incentives for investment and skills. Businesses want reassurance that reliefs such as research and development tax credits will remain available for genuine ground-breaking work." Steven Mason, an insolvency practitioner and senior manager at Radcliffe-based insolvency and corporate recovery practice Inquesta, agreed that businesses need stability.

He said: "So, what do small businesses need from policymakers in 2026? The priorities are clear: cost relief and better conditions from government (through a reduction in bureaucracy and burdensome regulations) in which to thrive."

"SMEs need a stable framework that allows them to plan, invest and grow with confidence. Access to finance is key. Despite relative stability in borrowing costs, uncertainty and an unwillingness to lend still hamper investment. Simplified lending processes and alternative financing options may well enable businesses to innovate and expand. Late payments remain a chronic challenge for smaller firms. Ensuring timely payments from larger clients can make the difference between survival and insolvency."

"Without relief from some or all of the above pressure points, ongoing burdens risk driving higher insolvency rates and job losses, which are already at a four-year high. The resilience of many UK SMEs should not be underestimated – but survival itself is no guarantee."

Firms to focus on training and skills

Paul Cherpeau, chief executive of Liverpool Chamber, said: "Training and skills will continue to be a subject of major focus for business owners throughout

2026. With labour costs rising and the advent of new employment rights legislation, finding the right people remains both difficult and expensive, especially if it doesn't work out. Acute skills shortages in sectors such as construction and engineering further exacerbate the challenge."

"Liverpool Chamber oversees the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and a growing thread of feedback from employers is the need for candidates entering the labour market with greater 'soft' employability skills, as well as digital literacy to maximise the future opportunities of AI and other technologies, and evidence of more real-world learning experience."

"We will be working increasingly with local employers over the next 12 months to understand their labour needs and translate those into meaningful recommendations for further education providers and policymakers."

Businesses still fear rising costs

David Lowe, investment director at Quilter Cheviot, said: "As the goalposts shift constantly for individuals and businesses, the demand for professional advice continues to increase across a range of needs, such as wills needing to be redrawn, or how to use allowances more effectively. "The decision in the Budget to raise taxes on dividends made SME owners wince and they will be feeling even more squeezed over the coming year. "Wage inflation is another real danger for businesses, as staff in sectors such as hospitality respond to the increase in the National Minimum Wage by demanding their own increases at higher pay levels. Businesses have little choice but to pay it, yet some are already close to the tipping point."

Victoria Johnson, HR commercial director franchise, at Privilege HR said: "As labour costs continue to rise, businesses will review workforce needs using planning models to consider profit and loss trajectory and the wider economic picture. This may result in less senior recruitment and more firms electing to upskill existing managers, with an eye on succession planning."

"Businesses are also becoming more creative in their approach to pay and benefits to foster a culture that makes good people want to stay and develop. Rather than a 'one size fits all' strategy, more firms now recognise that gym memberships may be less valuable to some employees than working compressed hours, or having more annual leave to spend with their family, so a more bespoke plan is needed."

Gavin Sherratt, founder at GoodShip* agency and fractional lead for creative, digital, start-up & scale-up at Liverpool Chamber, said: "In 2026, Liverpool Chamber will take a clear step into the future by supporting members and the wider city to understand and use AI in a practical way. Through the launch of the Chamber AI Academy, we will help organisations of all sizes build confidence with AI. Training will be shaped around real roles and sectors, so people can see how AI fits into their day-to-day work and decision-making."

"Alongside this, we will launch Navigate, a new community partnership designed to support Liverpool's creative, tech and entrepreneurial communities. Navigate will bring together what already exists in the city, while also connecting creatives and technologists with trusted professional services that help businesses grow on strong foundations."

Green energy needs public-private collaboration

Amy House, director of Green Economy in Manchester, said: "In 2026, the big hope is that the progress we've seen starts to translate into delivery on

the ground – with more investment flowing into clean energy, clearer incentives for businesses, and practical help to support the shift to net zero, all driven by stricter sustainability regulation."

"There's a genuine opportunity to build biodiversity and circular economy thinking into the way we design, build and run places, rather than bolting it on at the end."

"The challenge is making sure ambition doesn't run ahead of reality. Skills shortages, cost pressures and ongoing uncertainty could all slow progress if they're not tackled head-on. Looking ahead to 2026, continued closer collaboration between the public and private sectors will help to turn climate goals into real economic and environmental gains."

Government must tackle tribunal backlog

Charles Millett, employment law partner at Morecrofts Solicitors, said:

"The passing of the Employment Rights Bill into law brings with it multiple challenges for businesses. Despite widespread media coverage, many smaller businesses may still be unfamiliar with the finer detail of the legislation and it could easily become a trap for the unaware."

"Backlogs in the employment tribunal system will continue to cause major headaches for employers and employees alike. Claims submitted today may take on average three months to be processed and could wait until 2027 to be heard, which is a major disincentive for all involved. No support was mentioned in the Budget but the government must take steps to address the backlog in 2026, particularly given the likely increase in the number of claims once the measures under the Employment Rights Act take effect over the next 18 months."

In 2025, investor Foresight Group announced a £90m first close of its third North West fund.

Claire Alvarez, North West-based partner at Foresight said: "At Foresight, we see regionally based SMEs as the unsung heroes of the UK economy, yet they remain structurally under-served when it comes to growth capital. These businesses play a vital role in creating skilled jobs and driving long-term regional productivity. Many are founder-led businesses at a pivotal point, looking to scale while retaining control of the culture and values that made them successful."

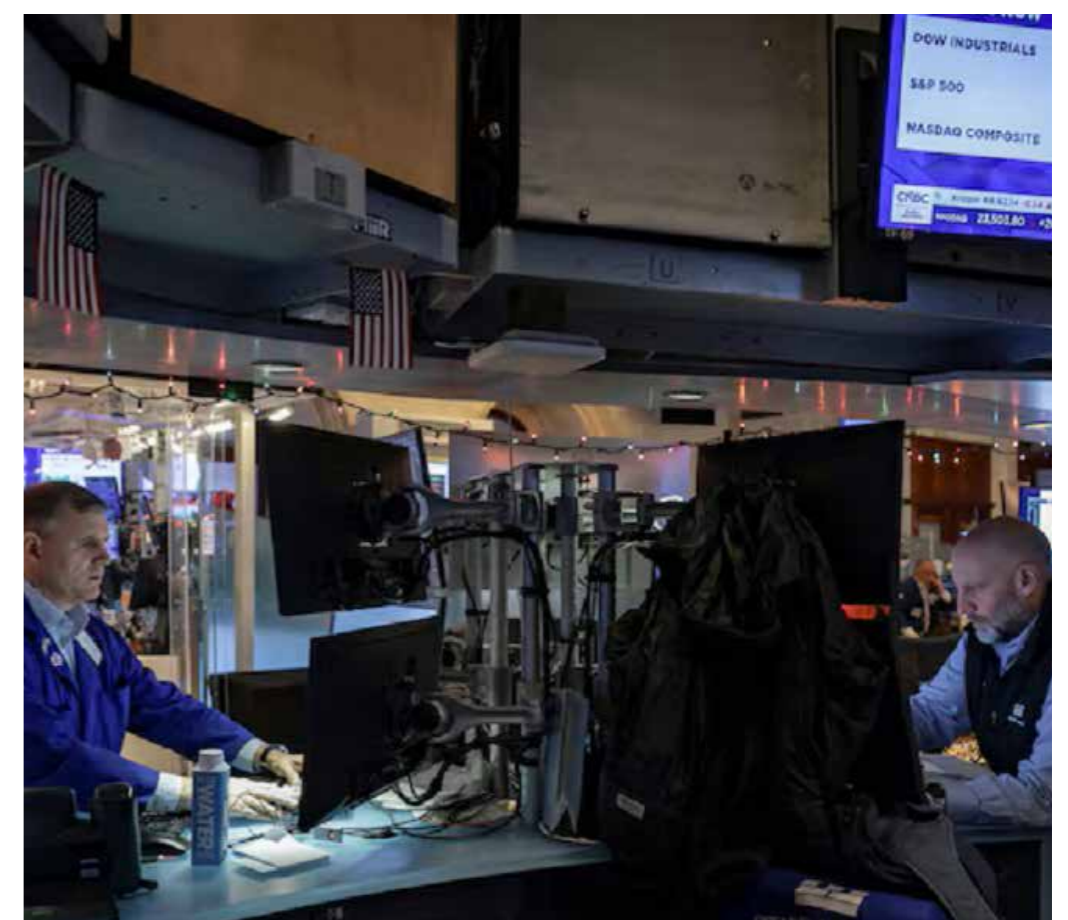
She added: "Looking ahead to 2026, we continue to see strong demand for place-based capital across a broad range of sectors including healthcare services, specialist engineering and software. With more than £500 million to deploy, we expect another active year, supporting ambitious management teams with both capital and hands-on expertise."

Barney Leaf, a corporate partner and M&S specialist at Primas Law, said: "With the interest rate now on a three-year low, PE/VC investment should pick up. Science and technology is a huge strategic priority for the North West and the sector should now be operating in a more encouraging fundraising environment. Tech and software-as-a-service has always been fairly robust and digital transformation, driven even harder by AI, offers exciting possibilities."

"Life science, on the other hand, has been starved of investment over the last few years, badly affected by high rates and people's attention being drawn towards AI. There was also a market correction after the spike in interest caused by the pandemic, but hopefully 2026 should see a much needed injection of support."

Business live

Stocks, Oil Gain; Investors Downplay Venezuela events



Major stock indexes jumped and oil prices gained on Monday, with energy shares climbing and investors reacting mostly calmly to potential market ramifications after a US military strike that captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average hit a record high early. The S&P 500 energy index jumped more than 2% with shares of Exxon Mobil also up more than 2% and Chevron up more than 5%. Financial .SPY shares also rose, while an S&P index of defense shares was up more than 1%.

After the dramatic events in Venezuela at the weekend, US President Donald Trump said he was putting the South American nation under temporary American control and that he could order another strike if Venezuela does not cooperate with US efforts to open up its oil industry and stop drug trafficking. He also threatened military action in Colombia and Mexico.

Oil prices were also higher as traders assessed the possible impact on crude flows from Venezuela, home of the biggest global oil reserve.

"It's a reasonable reaction from the markets to largely ignore the geopolitics around Venezuela, with the exception of a handful of oil companies, which are spiking," said Oliver Pursche, senior vice president, advisor for Wealthspire Advisors in Westport, Connecticut. "Venezuela's GDP has virtually no impact on global GDP... so the market should

ignore it," he said.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average .DJI rose 600.51 points, or 1.24%, to 48,982.9, the S&P 500 .SPX gained 45.32 points, or 0.66%, to 6 903.79 and the Nasdaq Composite .IXIC gained 203.37 points, or 0.88%, to 23,439.00.

European shares were up 0.9%.

Brent crude futures were up 87 cents, or 1.43%, at \$61.62 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude gained 90 cents, or 1.57%, to \$58.22.

US MILITARY ACTION SPURS SAFE-HAVEN DEMAND

Gold rose to a one-week high on bullion's safe-haven appeal.

Spot gold rose 2.7% to \$4,447.05 an ounce by 11:20 a.m. ET (1620 GMT), after earlier hitting its highest level since December 29. Gold hit an all time high of \$4,549.71 on December 26.

The dollar index was down slightly after hitting a near-four-week high on Monday against a range of currencies following a weak December, with traders focused on this week's raft of key economic data and largely struggling off events in Venezuela.

The US dollar, which measures the dollar strength against a basket of six currencies, was last down 0.2%.

The data rollout this week begins with ISM manufacturing figures on Monday and culminates with the monthly non-farm payrolls report on Friday.

US Treasury yields eased. **SABCNews**

Big petrol price win for SA

The new year is off to a great start thanks to a considerable reduction in the price of both petrol and diesel.

The Department of Petroleum and Mineral Resources has published the official fuel price adjustments that will take effect on Wednesday, 7 January 2026.

The lower prices are primarily due to the rand's stronger position at the end of 2025, resulting in an improved over-recovery for fuel prices.

At the same time, oil prices traded over a wider range of between \$58 and \$63 per barrel over the December holiday period with international prices ultimately decreasing during the period under review.

The rand appreciated against the US dollar between 4 December 2025 and 1 January 2026, trading at R16.84 per dollar compared to R17.23 per dollar over the previous period.

This led to a lower contribution to the Basic Fuel Price of petrol, diesel, and illuminating paraffin. Petrol costs decreased by 20.798c/l while diesel was reduced by 22.116c/l. Importantly, the differential between the 93 and

95 octanes of petrol will be adjusted on the first Wednesday of this quarter, in line with the Working Rules of the Basic Fuel Price.

The octane differential was changed during the previous quarter, which means the retail prices of petrol 93 and petrol 95 will vary in each fuel-pricing zone, starting this week.

What you're paying this January

The new fuel price adjustments will take effect later this week on Wednesday, 7 January 2026.

Petrol users will experience a decrease of between 62c and 66c per litre, while diesel users will benefit from a substantial reduction of between 137c and 150c per litre.

These are the official adjustments:

- Petrol 93 – Decrease of 62c per litre
- Petrol 95 – Decrease of 66c per litre
- Diesel 0.05% (wholesale) – Decrease of 137c per litre
- Diesel 0.005% (wholesale) – Decrease of 150c per litre

The table below indicates how the official fuel price adjustments for January will reflect at the pump: **TopAuto**



GET TO KNOW YOUR DJ

Pampierstad Gem TeboM
Soloing the Decks

Tebo Oreboleng Morongwa—better known as TeboM. Picture: Supplied

By: Lerato Mutlanyane

Commanding dancefloors in the vibrant town of Pampierstad, Northern Cape, 25-year-old Tebo Oreboleng Morongwa—better known as TeboM—aims to make her mark on the music scene every time she steps onto the DJ booth.

At first glance, the energy shifts. Her deep house sets take listeners on a carefully curated journey of rhythm and melody. Trained at the legendary Soul Candi Studios in Pretoria in 2023 under music maestro Nizhe de Soul, TeboM is now carving her own path, determined to become a role model for aspiring DJs and prove that decks have no gender.

“As female DJs, we are often underestimated. Many believe we lack skill, we are underrepresented in lineups, face unfair bookings, miss out on mentorship, and are often objectified rather than respected for our craft,” she shared.

“I always knew I wanted to be in the media space, so music—or rather deejaying—found me. Gigs and proper management have been a challenge, but I’ve always been a go-getter. That mentality is why giving up is never an option for me,” she added.

More than a selector, TeboM is a curator of moments. Follow her journey as she continues to redefine the Northern Cape soundscape, one unforgettable set at a time.

Lesedi FM SOTY sparks uproar

By: Abigail Visagie

Lesedi FM is under fire after naming Oufadafada’s “Ya Itshepelang Modimo” as its 2025 Song of the Year, a decision that has sparked confusion, criticism and urgent calls for transparency from cultural organisations in the Free State.

The South African Arts and Culture Youth Forum (SAACYF) in the Free State has expressed serious concern over the decision, calling for transparency and fairness in the selection process.

The organisation warned that the choice risks undermining the credibility of the province’s music industry.

“As a representative organisation for creative and cultural practitioners across all nine provinces, the South African Arts and Culture Youth Forum stands firmly in support of local artists and the 90% local content quota,” said SAACYF Free State spokesperson Linda Ngqotwane.

“We are committed to promoting and protecting the rights and interests of artists in the Free State and beyond.”

Renowned author and columnist Ace Moloi also weighed in on social media, arguing that until the Free State fully supports and celebrates its own



Oufadafada won Lesedi FM’s SOTY featuring Habakuk choir. Picture: Facebook

artists, outsiders will continue to dominate acco-

lades such as Song of the Year.

“All radio stations now choose SOTY based on local music and language. It’s a trend that has picked up and become the new standard,” Moloi said.

The former Lesedi FM presenter went on to question the province’s cultural identity and commitment to nurturing home-grown talent.

“Maybe the key question we should try to answer re le Basotho ba proud ke e reng: Motho wa Free State ke mang? Motho wa Basotho ke mang?”

If we don’t know the answer, what should follow is a commitment ya ho iketsetsa batho ba rona. All famous artists that listeners wished could have won SOTY were developed and supported by their local provinces from the grassroots. Are we doing that rona?” Moloi asked.

SAACYF and the Free State Music Association (FSMA) have since given Lesedi FM management 24 hours to issue a public response.

The South African Arts and Culture Youth Forum in the Free State is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and supporting the arts and culture sector in the province, providing a platform for artists and cultural practitioners to showcase their talents, share ideas and advocate for their rights.

Makhadzi finds healing in music following her car accident

Determined not to let her recent accident define her, South Africa’s queen of dance music, Makhadzi, is showcasing her hardworking spirit and perseverance as she recovers.

The singer, whose real name is Ndivhudzannyi Ralivhona, has penned an inspirational song reflecting on her healing journey while recuperating at home after being released from hospital.

Makhadzi took to TikTok and Instagram, to share her new song with fans and followers.

In a heartfelt video, she expressed her feelings: “My physio started attending to me yesterday. After the session, I was lonely, I decided to record myself this song. I got the beats from a guy I don’t know. I think he sent me this beat long time ago and I didn’t see it. I just found it on my search. But I am coming back. I am healing.”

In the song, Makhadzi reassures her fans that she is on the path to recovery.

She sings: “I’m on the way, I’m gonna heal. I was reducing, making better my operation. I can see, I can talk, but I was making my operation feel better.”

Although the song has not yet been formally released, it has already gained traction, trending on TikTok.

Fans have responded positively to the song.

@caroline.blessie commented: “A true reflection of positivity and strong belief in inner confidence. Be healed, our queen.”

@nomagheyagatsheni added: “Speedy recovery, Makhadzi... this song is a hit by the way therapeutic.”

@dakalo16 expressed surprise, saying: “I expected a song, yet I am surprised there’s already a song.”

@revonian6 encouraged her, stating: “I knew that nothing can stop you from singing. Speedy recovery, Makhadzi wa who rine.”



Makhadzi has promised to release the full version of the song in the upcoming week.

“People seem to love the song. I will finish it today and drop it next Friday. Please tell any producers to send me beats so I don’t get bored,” she said.

The artist was discharged from hospital follow-

ing a car accident on the morning of December 31, 2025, while travelling from Limpopo to Johannesburg. Earlier this week, she revealed that she would not be performing for 10 weeks as she focuses on her recovery.

“I’m now discharged from the hospital so that my family can take care of me until I get back to normal,” she shared in a social media post. **IOL**

Tebogo Thobejane expresses pride in her son’s role in IShowSpeed’s South African visit



Actress and socialite Tebogo Thobejane took to social media to express her pride in her son, Bothale Thobejane, after he participated in American streamer and YouTuber IShowSpeed’s South Africa tour.

Bothale was among the South Africans who took Speed around Johannesburg during his tour stop in the country. Born Darren Jason Watkins Jr, IShowSpeed is currently on the Speed Does Africa Tour, where he spent time in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Tebogo explained that because IShowSpeed is a young man, they knew that hosting him meant the creative direction had to come from a young mind, as well.

According to his Instagram, Bothale, who also goes by the name Hakim the dream, has aspirations of being the undisputed light flyweight champion in eight divisions. Despite a claim made during one of the streams, Bothale is not a rapper or one of Bob Marley’s children. **IOL**

Polished with Purpose: OWA Jewelers’ Mission Beyond Luxury



By: Lerato Mutlanyane

In the rarefied world of high-end, locally designed jewelry—where diamonds often speak only of price tags and provenance—Kabelo Makhetha, the visionary behind OWA Jewelers, is crafting a different story. At 25, the Bloemfontein-born jeweler isn’t just making heirlooms; he’s forging a manifesto.

His work exists at the intersection of two seemingly distant worlds: the uncompromising allure of luxury and the transformative power of social impact. This isn’t philanthropy on the side—it’s purpose, embedded in every facet.

Makhetha considers himself a storyteller who uses metals and gems to bridge luxury and social good.

“My journey is rooted in a desire to prove that business success and community upliftment are not mutually exclusive,” he says. “I see my role as an advocate for ‘conscious luxury.’ Beyond aesthetics, my work is about creating sustainable economic cycles and using design to solve real-world problems. Jewelry is simply the medium I use to express my

commitment to social change and innovation.”

All gems and metals are sourced locally, with precision in carat, clarity, colour, and cut.

“By keeping the supply chain close to home, we ensure that the wealth generated by South Africa’s mineral riches benefits the communities it comes from,” he explains.

Makhetha also pays homage to cultural heritage. “My work often incorporates motifs that reflect the resilience and artistry of our local communities. Whether it’s a specific pattern or a traditional technique reimagined for a modern setting, I want every piece to carry a sense of ‘home’ and historical pride,” he adds.

He advises fellow creatives to stay committed to purpose: “Start with the ‘Why.’ Don’t just make a product; solve a problem. When your craft serves a purpose greater than yourself, the community will naturally rally behind you. Authenticity is your greatest asset in social entrepreneurship.”

Makhetha has also turned social impact into innovation. His pendants embedded with QR codes help identify persons living with dementia and other cognitive impairments if they go missing.

“This project is very close to my heart. We developed sensory-focused jewelry designed to provide comfort and cognitive stimulation for those living with dementia.”

These pieces are not just decorative; they serve as functional tools to reduce anxiety and improve quality of life for patients and their families,” he says.

Kabelo Makhetha stands at the forefront of a quiet revolution, proving that ethical rigor can be the ultimate luxury. In his hands, gold is not just polished—it is purified by purpose.

He offers more than objects of desire; he offers a proposition: true beauty is that which gives back, making every piece not just a possession, but a partnership in progress.

Big Brother Mzansi gives former housemates a second chance



The new season of Big Brother Mzansi will feature a twist that allows former contestants to re-enter the house.

Season six will premiere on Sunday, 11 January, under the theme ‘Bazozwa House’.

Seven ex-housemates who had short runs in previous seasons have been selected for a chance to compete again.

The selected contestants are Dube, Mmeli, Fahima, Sipha Lee, Bravo B, Lerato Modise and Liema.

Their return depends on audience votes, with the four highest-voted housemates joining the new season.

Meet the former housemates competing for a second chance

Dube

Dube first appeared on Big Brother Mzansi Season 5: Umlilo. He did not initially gain entry into the house due to a twist in the season’s premiere episode. He has since pursued work in fashion and digital content creation.

Mmeli
Mmeli was a contestant on Big Brother Titans: Ziyakhala Wahala. He was the fifth housemate to be evicted. His early exit was linked to a pairing twist in the show.

Fahima
Fahima participated in Season 4: S’ya Mosha as one of the show’s “Disrupters”, a role intended for short-term appearances. She stayed in the house for 21 days and has since continued her career in music.

Sipha Lee
Sipha Lee competed in Season 5: Umlilo. He reached Day 28 and was part of a group labelled the Bandana Boys. He is now active as an actor and model.

Bravo B
Bravo B appeared on Season 4: S’ya Mosha but was disqualified in the first week for making offensive remarks. He has spoken publicly about the incident and its consequences, and is pursuing work in content creation and event hosting.

Lerato Modise
Lerato Modise took part in Season 4: S’ya Mosha and lasted until Day 50. She was evicted after a twist in the Fate Room. Since leaving the show, she has focused on philanthropy and entrepreneurial ventures through her Remlee Foundation.

Liema
Liema was a contestant in Season 4: S’ya Mosha. She left the house on Day 57 after choosing to take R250 000 rather than compete for the grand prize. She has since toured internationally as a music artist. **The Citizen**

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Sport



Siwelele Sets top 8 Ambitions

Players confident they can help team improve as they eye a top half finish this season

By: Mpho Sekharume

The Betway Premiership is set to resume with all 16 teams gearing to charge towards finishing the season as high as possible on the Premier Soccer League (PSL) table.

Despite being the current season's premiership minnows, Siwelele openly made their intentions to secure a top eight finish known, with some of their star players confidently disclosing their ambitions ahead of the league's second stanza.

As things stand currently at the midway point, Siwelele sits 11th on the log having secured 16 points from 15 league outings. The Bloemfontein outfit has only managed four wins this season, drawing four and losing a total of seven matches.

Although they are not boasting the best of forms as compared to some of the league's prominent clubs, Siwelele does have a realistic shot of climbing up into the top half of the log and finish in the top

eight - where they will get the opportunity to compete for potential silverware in the MTN 8 competition when the 2026/2027 commences later this year. Siwelele defender, Keabetswe Khonyana, who joined Siwelele from SuperSport United's DStv Diski Challenge (DDC) team, aims to play a crucial part in helping his club reach its objectives in the second half of the season.

"My goal for 2026 is to create better (scoring) opportunities for my teammates, so that our team can push towards finishing in the top eight or even the top five teams in the league," said the 21-year-old defender in a Siwelele FC social media video.

South African Under-20 international, Neo Rapoo, who also plays in defence for Siwelele, also voiced his intention to help the club improve as they charge towards the finish line.

He said: "Honestly, contributing as much as I can to the team and obviously finishing in the top eight

with Siwelele for the first season (sic)...that is my goal for the team

Pogiso Sanoka also echoed the same objective as his teammates. The experienced former TS Galaxy defender believes the team must just aim to start the second half of the season well, while insisting that the rest of their ambitions will subsequently fall into place.

"Obviously our target is to change our position first and the rest will just follow," said the 33-year-old defender.

"We just have to start well and finish the season very high," he added.

Siwelele capped off 2025 with a one-all home stalemate against reigning league champions Mamelodi Sundowns at the Dr Petrus Rantlhai Molemela Stadium home turf in Rocklands, Bloemfontein.

Holding a club of Sundowns' stature to a draw surely instils a strong belief of competence and con-

fidence in the players, and the Siwelele charges will be drawing inspiration from that result as they kick off the new year with tough fixture away to Richards Bay in KwaZulu-Natal on 23 January 2026.

The Natal Rich Boys are sitting ninth on the log having accumulated 17 points in 14 outings. The KZN outfit is leading Siwelele by a solitary point - although they have played one match less than their Bloemfontein counterparts.

A win for Siwelele in KZN will see them jump to 19 points and leap to the same ninth spot currently occupied by Richards Bay - while Golden Arrows linger on the 10th spot due to the postponement of their fixture against Stellenbosch FC.

Moving to ninth on the log will give Siwelele a realistic chance of realising their top eight ideal, with hopes that they sustain good form to remain within elite top half contingent until the season's mid-year conclusion

Broos opens door for Bafana overseas players



Bafana Bafana coach Hugo Broos has reiterated that the Premier Soccer League is not strong enough to produce players of genuine international quality who can compete at the highest level as the team returned to South Africa on Wednesday morning. Bafana exited the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations at the hands of Cameroon in the Round of 16 and, despite seeing plenty of the ball, struggled to break down an organised Indomitable Lions defence.

Cameroon had only four shots on goal all game but scored from two of them, and it is that clinical execution South Africa lacks, according to Broos, something that can mostly only be gained by playing in top leagues week in, week out.

"There are teams at the Cup of Nations with players who play in Europe. We mostly don't have them, and that is a disadvantage for South Africa," Broos said. "Cameroon is a brand-new team, and when you see where those players are playing, there's a guy, the striker Christian Kofane, he's playing for Bayer Leverkusen. He's 19 years old.

"So this is the opportunity our players need to have because they have to be challenged more. I said from the beginning that the level of the PSL compared with the level we had in the last weeks is very different, and you can only close that gap when you have players who are also playing in very difficult competitions.

"So let's hope that players in the future have more opportunities to go to Europe and play in those very difficult competitions and face those challenges, because that should help this team enormously."

Broos says finding top-quality opponents for Bafana Bafana is only a short-term fix in trying to expose players to better teams, and that in reality they need to be facing top-quality opponents at club level week in, week out.

"It's not because you play once against Argentina or once against Ghana that suddenly your level will go up. No, this is something else. But yeah, what can we do? We just hope they get the opportunity and make the step," he said.

Broos repeated his comments from the post-match press conference following the defeat to Cameroon, where he said he would not make an assessment of their campaign now but take time to evaluate and formulate a report with recommended changes ahead of the 2026 World Cup. *Flashscore*

Cameroon out to prolong Atlas Lions' AFCON title wait

Cameroon will face off with the hosts, Morocco, in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) quarterfinal match at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium, Rabat, on Friday.

Kick-off is at 9:00 pm CAT.

The Indomitable Lions advanced to the last eight after securing a 2-1 win over South Africa in a Round of 16 match on January 4, extending their unbeaten run to four matches across all competitions, including three victories.

The hard-fought victory over 1996 AFCON winners Bafana Bafana has boosted Cameroon's hopes of going all the way and clinching a sixth continental title, which would see them edge closer to Egypt's record (seven trophies).

Morocco, on the other hand, were made to sweat for a 1-0 victory over Tanzania in their Round of 16 showdown on January 4, as they extended their unbeaten run to 23 matches across all competitions, including a world record 19-game winning streak.

The Atlas Lions and Moroccans are dreaming of an AFCON title triumph on home soil, which would end the nation's long drought, having won their first and only continental trophy in 1976, and the fans could be key to the team's success campaign.

The winner between Cameroon and Morocco will face either Algeria or Nigeria in the semifinals on January 14 at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat, Morocco.



Cameroon have no suspension concerns, but they will be hoping that Darlin Yongwa is cleared to face Morocco as he picked up an injury during the game against South Africa, which led to his injury-enforced substitute.

Meanwhile, Moroccan midfielder Azzedine Ounahi has been ruled out for the remainder of the tournament due to a calf muscle tear, but the North Africans also do not have any suspension concerns.

Cameroon and Morocco have met 13 times across all competitions since their maiden meeting in November 1981. The Indomitable Lions have dominated this rivalry, winning six matches, compared to the Atlas Lions' two victories and five games ended in a draw. The last meeting between the two teams ended in a 4-0 win in favour of Morocco in the 2020 CHAN semifinal match played at the Limbe Stadium, in February 2021. *SuperSport*

West African giants collide: Mali v Senegal in AFCON 2025 quarterfinal showdown

The TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations Morocco 2025 serves up a heavyweight clash in the quarterfinals as Mali take on Senegal at the Grande Stade de Tanger on Friday, 9 January. Kick-off is set for 6PM CAT, live on SuperSport.

Senegal have made Tangier their home throughout the tournament, playing all four of their matches there. Mali, meanwhile, have been on the move - three games in Casablanca, one in Rabat, and now a trip north for this decisive showdown.

This is only the second time Mali and Senegal have met at the AFCON finals. Their first encounter came back in 2004, ending 1-1 in the group stage. Both sides advanced to the quarterfinals that year, with Mali topping the group and Senegal finishing second.

Overall, this will be the 41st meeting between the two West African rivals. Senegal hold the upper hand with 19 wins to Mali's 8, while 13 matches have ended in draws. The Lions of Teranga have also outscored Mali 61-38 across those encounters.

Senegal are unbeaten in their last 13 matches against Mali (six wins, seven draws). Mali's last victory came way back in 1997, a 2-1 friendly win in Dakar. Their most recent meeting was another friendly in 2019, when Sadio Mané struck twice late on to seal a 2-1 win for Senegal. *SuperSport*

