

# Journal NEWS

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# NET TIGHTENS ON MATLOSANA CFO

*Mercy Phetla's prospects are increasingly becoming bleak as her fight-back strategy and support wane*



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Facing Mounting Charges...City of Matlosana CFO, Mercy Phetla, is facing a legal tall order. Picture: Supplied

## FF Plus Rejects Black Votes

*Remarks trigger backlash and questions over the party's commitment to non-racialism*



FF Plus leader Corne Mulder. Picture: FF Plus

By: Refilwe Mochoari

The Freedom Front Plus (FF Plus) is facing backlash after statements widely interpreted as rejecting Black voter support, raising fresh questions about the party's commitment to non-racialism and South Africa's constitutional values ahead of the upcoming local government elections.

Speaking at a community meeting in Pretoria this week, FF Plus leader Corne Mulder said the party would not change its policies, strategy, or values to broaden its electoral appeal beyond its core support base.

Mulder emphasised that the FF Plus intends to remain firm in its mission and vision, regardless of popularity.

"Let me be clear: we are not going to change the principles, direction, or strategy of the party to be popular or to get votes that we do not need," he said.

"We are not going to be cheap by suddenly going into different communities simply for the sake of getting votes. We have a vision and a mission, and if you do not subscribe to that, then you are in the wrong place."

Journal News spoke to FF Plus provincial leaders in the North West and Northern Cape, who echoed Mulder's stance, albeit with differing approaches to campaigning.

North West provincial leader Michael Groenewald said while the party would campaign actively, it would prioritise areas where it has measurable support.

"During our strategic planning, we monitor voting stations and have seen that in some communities, the FF Plus receives little to no sup-

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Power of Life

## Girl (7) Found Dead in Neighbor's Home



By Matshidiso Selebeleng

The disappearance and tragic death of seven-year-old Naledi Ramaisa has shaken the township of Senekal in the Free State.

Naledi was last seen on the morning of 13 January by her guardian, Mamakalebu Msibi. She had asked a neighbor to accompany Naledi to fetch her school stationery, but the child never returned.

"When I came back from work, I expected all the children to be home, but Naledi was missing. I asked the others, and they said they hadn't seen her. We searched the neighborhood, but no one had seen her," Msibi said.

After notifying the police, a search was conducted, but it initially yielded no results. Naledi's body was discovered three days later, on 16 January, at another neighbor's house that had not been searched earlier.

According to Msibi, the suspect admitted to hitting Naledi with a stone while she was picking peaches, then smothering her with a pillow in his home. He later wrapped her in a blanket, placed her in an industrial plastic bag, and submerged it in a 1,000-liter water-filled container.

The family described Naledi as a joyful child who loved playing traditional games like diketo with her friends. She had recently passed to Grade 2 and was eagerly looking forward to the school year.

"She was the light of our family. Losing her has left a huge hole in our hearts," Msibi said. Naledi will be laid to rest in Senekal on Friday.

SAPS spokesperson Sergeant Mahlomola Kareli confirmed that a 16-year-old boy was arrested on 17 January. He is facing a murder investigation and is expected to appear in court on 6 March 2026.

# Net Tightens on Matlosana CFO

*Mercy Phetla's prospects are increasingly becoming bleak as her fight-back strategy and support wane*

By: Abigail Visagie

Dark clouds seem to be gathering swiftly around the former City of Matlosana Local Municipality Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Mercy Phetla, who is fighting tooth and nail to ward off several criminal charges she is currently facing.

Phetla, who is entangled in two distinct criminal cases comprising alleged corruption, fraud, and money laundering, has her back against the wall as she faces imminent dismissal from her municipal role, while the legal net is also slowly but surely closing in on her.

A council sitting that was convened yesterday, 22 January 2026, to deliberate on a scathing disciplinary report that recommended Phetla's immediate dismissal degenerated into political theatre.

The sitting failed to reach a quorum due to ANC council members staging walkouts, while the Democratic Alliance (DA) accused the City's Executive Mayor and Speaker, Stella Mondlane-Ngwenya, of deliberately withholding the original report from the council's agenda.

Mondlane-Ngwenya stated that the postponement was crucial as the Municipal Manager was not present, and a legal team had to be available to reveal the findings against Phetla. There is some speculation, however, that the walkouts were staged to "shield" Phetla from being held to account for the allegations she is facing.

This politically driven tactic came as a shock since the provincial chairperson of the party, Nono Maloyi, previously indicated that the ANC would act against councillors who fail to comply with the law - yet the exact opposite transpired in the council meeting.

Maloyi was quoted as warning that adherence to



Facing Mounting Charges...City of Matlosana CFO, Mercy Phetla, is facing a legal tall order. Picture: Supplied

the constitution and legislative framework remains the only legitimate basis for resolving municipal matters. He further stressed that any attempt to bypass or dilute these processes has the potential to weaken local government rather than strengthening it.

This stance originally pleased the opposition party, the DA, and for a rare moment, it seemed that the two parties were in accordance.

In another instance, the DA has already welcomed a significant decision taken at the Mahikeng High

Court in September last year, to dismiss an urgent application brought by Phetla to halt disciplinary action against her. It is believed Phetla attempted to stop the hearings, claiming they were a political method used to weaponise the law and discard her.

However, the disciplinary inquiry was finalised late last year, leading to the CFO being charged with gross misconduct, dishonesty, and dereliction of duty. Although Phetla pleaded not guilty to all five charges, she was found guilty on every count.

Among the findings, Phetla was held responsible for an unauthorised payment of R2.9 million to a company called Variegated (Pty) Ltd for electrical materials that were ultimately never delivered. She was further pertinently charged with going beyond her delegated authority.

While it is established that a municipal manager can only authorise up to R1.5 million, Phetla bypassed these regulations to authorise the R2.9 million payment.

The third charge involved wasteful expenditure amounting to R528 000, which caused significant financial turmoil and loss to the Matlosana Municipality.

Furthermore, Phetla was found to have received and accepted gratification in the form of a Volkswagen Amarok worth R1.4 million from a municipal service provider, GMHM Construction and Projects. This led to her being found guilty of bringing the municipality into disrepute.

Although Phetla claimed she purchased the vehicle herself, she failed dismally to back this unsolicited claim with evidence. To add more fuel to the fire, it was alleged that the CFO's bail was paid by the son of a director at GMHM.

Besides this gift, Phetla has been linked to various other luxurious assets, such as a Porsche, a Range Rover, and a Maserati, allegedly bought with municipal funds.

The Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU) has already attained preservation orders for these vehicles, yet the embattled CFO continues to deny she owns them.

AFU communications officer, Kelebogile Moleko, confirmed that the council has not yet sat to finalise the matter and could not comment further by the time of print.

## Contact US

No 09 Henri Van Rooijen Street  
New East End  
Bloemfontein  
9301

Tel:  
051 430 0129

Email:  
info@journalnews.co.za

Advertising:  
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### Letters to the Editor

Postal Address:  
No 09 Henri Van Rooijen Street  
New East End  
Bloemfontein  
9301

Editor-in-Chief  
Refilwe Mochoari  
E-mail: editor@journalnews.co.za  
Cell: 083 943 9879

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# McBride Grilled on O'Sullivan Links

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Former Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) head Robert McBride came under sustained pressure before Parliament's Ad Hoc Committee on Wednesday, with MPs accusing him of misleading the inquiry about the true nature of his relationship with private investigator Paul O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan's associate, Sarah-Jane Trent.

The line of questioning cut to the heart of whether McBride had been candid with Parliament about the extent of his contact with private individuals, and whether that relationship influenced sensitive investigations.

MPs put it to McBride that evidence before the committee suggested he was in constant communication with Trent and that he may have shared information with people outside the state.

He rejected those allegations and dismissed claims that O'Sullivan posed a national security threat, saying suggestions that O'Sullivan was an MI6 agent were baseless.

McBride denied sharing classified information, disputed the authenticity of text messages shown to him, rejected allegations of a romantic relationship with Trent, and denied ever asking her to access bank accounts.

He accused MPs of ambushing him with material he had never seen.

Tensions rose further during an exchange with ActionSA MP Dereleen James over whether IPID relied on private individuals for forensic assistance.

James challenged McBride over whether he improperly discussed citizens' credit details with private individuals instead of relying on the DPCI, accusing him of contradicting his earlier claims about SAPS' forensic capacity.

McBride denied lying, said he could not recall the specific exchange, and maintained that IPID ultimately worked through the DPCI rather than private individuals.

Earlier in the day, MKP MP Vusi Shongwe thanked McBride for his role in the liberation struggle and recalled that EFF leader Julius Malema had once publicly suggested that McBride replace Khehla Sitole as national police commissioner.

McBride said he was unaware of the tweet and added that he had never formally sought the post, remarking that, in hindsight, perhaps he should have, because then the committee would not be sitting where it was.



Former Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) head Robert McBride. Picture: EWN

Shongwe questioned McBride about a braai hosted by O'Sullivan on 6 December 2016, after earlier

testimony by Nkabinde that a female journalist attended and that plans were made there to remove

then deputy national commissioner Khomotso Phahlane.

McBride said no journalist was present, only a woman who had written a book about O'Sullivan, adding dryly that the meat wasn't good anyway.

On credibility, McBride said Shadrack Sibiya was credible, but described KwaZulu-Natal police commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi as "on the whole not credible", alleging he had interfered in IPID investigations.

He said Phahlane was also not credible and testified that Mkhwanazi had attempted to undermine IPID's investigation into Phahlane by secretly meeting the lead investigator and allegedly offering a promotion if something could be found against McBride.

He said this amounted to defeating the ends of justice and expressed uncertainty as to why the case was never prosecuted, suggesting it may be linked to the death of IPID investigator Mandla Mahlangu, noting that "no one has been convicted for his murder".

DA MP Glynnis Breytenbach questioned McBride on why the prosecution of O'Sullivan and Trent did not proceed.

McBride said he did not know what caused the delay and believed the prosecution acted prematurely.

He said then-NDPP Shaun Abrahams was insistent on pursuing the matter, adding that Abrahams was operating under the "madness of the time" and was seen as malleable and eager to please, which explained his promotion.

McBride also testified about alleged procurement irregularities involving Mkhwanazi and bulletproof vests, saying prices were inflated and that one facilitator had two companies tendering.

He said officials were taken to Paris and given luxury bags as inducements, remarking that one of the bags was now in IDAC custody.

On broader issues, McBride said Crime Intelligence was in disarray, called for an independent vetting body outside State Security, alleged that IPID had been infiltrated, and said all IPID emails until six months ago had been wiped.

He said Parliament ignored his warnings about ministerial interference, particularly involving former minister Nhleko, and described Mkhwanazi's July media briefing as a "military-style" show of force intended to intimidate "the constitutional order". *insidepolitic*



Cllr. Thanduxolo Khalipa  
Executive Mayor



## MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR

# STRENGTHENED GOVERNANCE, BETTER SERVICES

# MATJHABENG DIGS IN ON FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN

**Mayor Khalipa says the FRP is a court order, dismisses claims of non-compliance and vows lawful governance under Section 139 intervention**

By: Abigail Visagie

The 2026 Mayoral Leggotla, held on 13 January 2026, resulted in Matjhabeng Local Municipality taking a strategic stance aimed at strengthening administrative leadership and institutional performance.

Executive Mayor Thanduxolo Khalipa emphasised that the Leggotla was not a routine engagement, but a platform focused on improving institutional efficiency, sharpening execution, and accelerating the implementation of council-approved priorities.

Key issues discussed included the Special Economic Zone, the Welkom Cargo Airport, renewable energy projects, and other strategic initiatives. The Leggotla also centred on the municipality's Mandatory Financial Recovery Plan (FRP), which was sanctioned in terms of Section 139(5) of the Constitution following directives from the Free State Provincial Executive Council and the Free State High Court.

Acting Municipal Manager Thabo Panyani addressed allegations concerning the implementation of the Financial Recovery Plan, particularly claims that the municipality failed to cooperate with intervention structures or that procurement and expenditure decisions were taken outside the Recovery Plan framework.

"The municipality rejects these claims as misleading and lacking proper context, particularly given the seriousness of the recovery process and the importance of safeguarding confidence in governance, service delivery and financial stabilisation efforts,"



Matjhabeng Local Municipality Executive Mayor Thanduxolo Khalipa. Picture: Baagedi Sethhora

Panyani said.

This follows allegations by a news outlet that Matjhabeng constructed an illegal Expanded Public

Works Programme (EPWP) unit worth R14 million while allegedly blocking an intervention team.

Panyani further confirmed that while the municipi-

ality is under constitutional intervention in terms of Section 139(5)(a) and (c) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, the intervention serves as a critical mechanism to restore the municipality's financial stability.

He explained that the recovery plan is intended to enable the municipality to meet its obligations, including the delivery of basic services, while strengthening accountability and protecting the public interest.

"The municipality confirms that it is implementing the Financial Recovery Plan and remains fully committed to its continued execution in line with legislative prescripts," he said, adding that Section 146(1) of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) requires all revenue, expenditure and budget decisions to be taken within the framework of the approved recovery plan.

Mayor Khalipa sought to clarify the municipality's status, stating that while Matjhabeng is not under administration, it is subject to a Financial Recovery Plan, which carries the force of a court order.

"We want to put it on record that the municipality has no other option but to implement the FRP, as this is a court order that must be implemented by the municipality," Khalipa said.

"Any other narrative put out by some people is a tendency of counter-revolution."

He further confirmed that under his leadership, the municipal manager and all 72 councillors will not accept any instructions that are unlawful or inconsistent with the Financial Recovery Plan.

## Matjhabeng Hits Back at 'Baseless' Claims

**Municipality announces legal action, hall refurbishments and crackdown on ghost workers and vandalism**



Matjhabeng Municipality Acting Municipal Manager Thabo Panyani. Picture: Baagedi Sethhora

By: Abigail Visagie

Matjhabeng Local Municipality has, in recent times, faced repeated allegations of wasteful expenditure, unlawful procurement practices, misuse of resources and the existence of so-called "ghost workers".

The municipality has now moved to address these claims, stating that the allegations are baseless and misleading. According to the municipality, a disgruntled former mayor has been sourcing and circulating false information, creating confusion and casting serious aspersions against the institution.

As a result, the municipality has decided to pursue legal action against the individual.

At the same time, Matjhabeng has announced a renewed focus on service delivery, taking an executive decision to refurbish and upgrade municipal halls that have fallen into a state of disrepair.

"The municipality has also taken a decision to refurbish and upgrade municipal community halls that are in a poor state, with work already underway at Ferdi Meyer Hall. A detailed report on the scope of work, progress achieved and further planned upgrades will be released," Acting Municipal Manager Thabo Panyani said during a press briefing.

Panyani emphasised that the refurbishment programme forms part of efforts to restore public confidence and accelerate service delivery in line with the Municipal Financial Recovery Plan (MFRP), noting the urgency of the intervention.

"While the challenges are significant, the municipality is committed to responding with urgency, focus and coordinated action," he said.

He added that the municipality is also strengthening infrastructure capacity through the procurement of sewer combination trucks, while addressing vandalism and criminal activities that undermine service delivery.

Other measures include intensifying Operation Patala to improve revenue collection and billing accuracy, and continuing efforts to build a capable, ethical and disciplined institution.

"This includes the elimination of ghost workers, enforcement of performance agreements and the implementation of consequence management without fear or favour," Panyani said.

He further confirmed that a reputable, locally based security company has been appointed to curb vandalism and criminal activities.

"We assessed the company's track record in asset protection, its local footprint and its contribution to job creation. The company uses highly advanced technology and has already begun operations around pump stations to curb vandalism," Panyani confirmed.

## Panyani Dismisses Claims of Inflated Sewer Truck Costs

By: Abigail Visagie

The Matjhabeng Local Municipality has addressed concerns surrounding the procurement of jet vacuum trucks, which have sparked debate on social media amid claims that the municipality exceeded its allocated budget.

On 30 June 2025, the municipality procured two sewer combination trucks following a dual-authorised request from the fleet section. Merafe Holdings, a recognised service provider, was appointed through National Treasury under the RT57 transversal contract.

Acting Municipal Manager Thabo Panyani confirmed that the procurement process fully complied with all prescribed supply chain management requirements and that all relevant documentation was sub-

mitted, approved and duly signed.

"Claims circulating on social media suggest that the trucks should have cost the municipality R10.8 million but instead amounted to approximately R20 million," said Panyani.

"These claims are misleading and based on inaccurate quotations sourced from Werner Pumps."

Panyani further explained that the quotations being shared relate to a different and less advanced model than the one procured by the municipality.

"Allegations of inflated pricing are therefore unfounded."

The municipality will be instituting legal action against a former councillor who sourced and circulated misleading information, creating confusion and casting serious aspersions against the institution," he



said.

The municipality has also emphasised that the procurement of the sewer combination trucks is not only a form of recycling but an important step in strengthening infrastructure capacity.

"Matjhabeng Local Municipality calls on council, the administration, employees and communities to work together to build a municipality that is clean, safe, functional and people-centred," Panyani concluded.

# Mmoho - Together - Sisonke - Tesame

# FS Applauds Its Matric Stars

*MEC, Premier hail collective triumph in education*

By: Matshidiso Selebeleng

A group of 100 top achievers from the Free State's Class of 2025 received praise for their outstanding performance in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, as the province celebrated excellence in education.

The annual ceremony, attended by parents, teachers, and provincial government leaders, was held at the Central University of Technology's Boet Troskie Hall on Friday.

A total of 38,205 learners sat for the 2025 NSC exams, with 34,129 passing—a record 89.3%—despite the province dropping to second place nationally after six years at the top.

Of these, 16,728 achieved Bachelor passes (43.8%), 11,926 Diploma passes (31.2%), and 5,407 Higher Certificate passes, highlighting both strong performance and quality outcomes.

Free State MEC for Education, Dr Mamiki Maboya, congratulated the Class of 2025 for flying the Free State flag high, with special recognition for the top 100 achievers.

She noted that while more girls were registered for the exams, boys recorded a slightly higher overall pass rate (90.5% compared to 88.4%), whereas girls earned the highest proportion of Bachelor passes (44%).

Special recognition went to Bokang Vincent Mokubung of Bluegumbosch Secondary School, named Best Overall Achiever in Mathematics and Physical Sciences, and Johannes Deysel of Jim Fouché Secondary School, honoured as Overall Top Achiever for Mathematics.

Maboya emphasized that the learners' achievements came despite challenging socio-economic conditions.

"The Free State remains a province marked by structural inequalities, high unemployment (42.7%), and persistent poverty (affecting 4.1% of our population). These pressures were further compounded by systemic disruptions," she said.

She added that the Class of 2025 began high school in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted foundational learning.

"Their journey was marked by daily losses, social



Hoërskool Jim Fouché's Deysel Johannes Jacobus named the province's overall top performer. Picture: Facebook

dislocation, and institutional strain. Yet this cohort was defined not by circumstances, but by resilience and an unwavering commitment to succeed," Maboya said.

Highlighting the department's focus on early childhood development, she said initiatives aimed to ensure learners can thrive by age five.

Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae attributed the results to sustained provincial investment in education, describing the achievements as a "collective victory of resilience, passion, and belief in the power of education."

"Your foundational years were challenging, yet you rose above the obstacles. You persevered, you conquered, and today we salute you," the Premier said.

Speaking on behalf of CUT, Professor Pamela Dube said the province's 89.3% achievement reflects the dedication of learners, educators, and parents.

"Your achievements inspire hope, confidence, and pride in the future of our province and country. The Free State has consistently exceeded national education targets despite resource constraints, and we are honoured to be partners in this journey," she said.

# Inside the World of Bokang Mokubung

*... Q&A with Matric 2025 Best National Achiever in Mathematics*

**D**edication, hard work, and perseverance best describe 17-year-old Bokang Mokubung, following his outstanding performance in the 2025 National Senior Certificate examinations. Journal News recently caught up with Mokubung on the sidelines of the Free State Provincial Government's annual Matric Well-Done Function, hosted at the Central University of Technology (CUT), where the province honoured the top 100 achievers of the Class of 2025.

Below is a conversation between Mokubung and Journal News reporter Matshidiso Selebeleng.

By: Matshidiso Selebeleng

**C**ongratulations on your achievement. Apart from what we have been hearing, please tell us: who is Bokang Mokubung and how did your academic journey begin?

My name is Bokang Mokubung. I am 17 years old and I come from the dusty streets of Bluegumbosch in Qwaqwa. I started my academic journey at the age of five at Justice Lefuma Primary School, where I attended from Grade R to Grade 7, before transitioning to Bluegumbosch Secondary School.

**Let us start at the beginning. How was your primary school experience?**

My primary school days were fun. I had a lot of friends who made school enjoyable, and there was not much academic pressure because the workload was lighter. That is also where I developed a love for English, which became my favourite subject.

**Comparing that "fun" life with your secondary school experience, what changed and what caused that change?**

The transition from primary school to high school was tough. My marks dropped when I got to secondary school, and I had to dig deep to find my footing. Eventually, I adapted to the more serious and demanding academic environment. It was not a smooth journey, but I made the most of it and ensured that my schoolwork remained my top priority.

**Apart from the drop in marks and missing the fun, what were the biggest challenges you faced during high school?**

High school was never easy, but things became more difficult in Grade 12. I could not attend extra classes for Life Sciences and Geography like other learners until Grade 12 because they clashed with the extra classes I attended on weekends and during holidays at the Kutlwanong Centre for Maths, Science and Technology.

At the centre, I focused on Mathematics and Physical Sciences, which meant I had to teach myself Life Sciences and Geography. That was extremely challenging and required a lot of discipline.

We understand that you will be studying Actuarial Science at the University of Pretoria. Has that always been your dream?

Growing up, I wanted to study teaching and eventually become a teacher. However, as time went on and I was exposed to different opportunities, my plans changed. Studying Actuarial Science only became a dream in Grade 12, after conducting research and reviewing the South African economy.

I chose Actuarial Science because I am interested in business and plan to start several ventures in the future. I want my businesses to succeed, and I believe my strong mathematics skills, combined with this qualification, will help me achieve that.

**What is one high school moment that you will always carry with you?**

Being a Dux learner for two consecutive years is a memory I will always carry with me. It serves as a reminder of what I am capable of, especially during difficult times.

Grade 12 was a challenging year. I struggled with procrastination and had to sacrifice my social life to stay focused. I lost touch with many friends and had no time for social media. I also helped many learners at my school by teaching them during extra classes.

**You have spoken extensively about challenges and sacrifices. Did you ever feel so exhausted that you considered giving up?**

No, I never thought of giving up. Although I sometimes felt exhausted, it was never to the point of throwing in the towel. I constantly reminded myself of my goals, which motivated me to keep going.

When my energy was depleted, I pushed myself to study anyway — as we say in Sesotho, "ka nkane." Academics took up 100% of my time, and I lived entirely in my books. My greatest accomplishment and a realization of my dream was passing matriculation with eight distinctions.

# From Exam Halls to the Spotlight



2025 matric Free State Top Achiever Deysel Jacobus celebrate with his father. Picture: Matshidiso Selebeleng

*Hoërskool Jim Fouché's Deysel Johannes Jacobus named the province's overall top performer*

By: Matshidiso Selebeleng

**A**s the Class of 2025 sat for their final matric examinations, many hoped not only to pass, but to be counted among the province's Top 100 achievers. Some even dreamed of claiming the number one spot.

Those dreams came alive at the 2025 Matric Well Done function, hosted by the Free State Department of Education at the Central University of Technology (CUT). The province's Top 100 best-performing learners graced the stage as they were called up to receive gifts from sponsors in recognition of their hard work and dedication.

The celebration served as reassurance that the future of the province, and indeed the country, rests in capable hands.

Among the honourees was the Free State's overall top-performing learner, Deysel Johannes Jacobus from Hoërskool Jim Fouché in the Mangaung District, Bloemfontein. Jacobus was awarded a top achiever's trophy, a luggage bag, a laptop, a tablet and other prizes.

The gifts, provided by sponsors, were intended to ensure that the Class of 2025 begins their university journeys on the right footing.

The 18-year-old said that although Grade 12 was challenging, giving up was never an option.

"To be honest, I don't really know how I did this. All I know is that I gave it my all. With the Lord's help, a lot of prayers, many tears and late nights, here I am," he said.

"I am extremely grateful to everyone who supported me, especially my family and my teachers. Teaching is such a beautiful profession, and I truly commend it."

Jacobus also shared words of encouragement for the Class of 2026.

"My message is to stay calm. Many people have the intelligence, wisdom and tools needed to succeed in life. When you sit in the exam hall with all the stress, the 'what ifs', and your hopes and dreams, it can be easy to panic. Take deep breaths, say your prayers if you need to, stay calm and enjoy the journey," he added.

He said he intends to study actuarial science at the

University of Cape Town.

While the spotlight shines on learners during this period, the educators behind their achievements watch proudly as the product of their teaching leaves high school with distinction.

Thabo Moroane, one of the teachers who had the privilege of seeing his learners honoured by the province for their stellar performance, said he could not have been prouder.

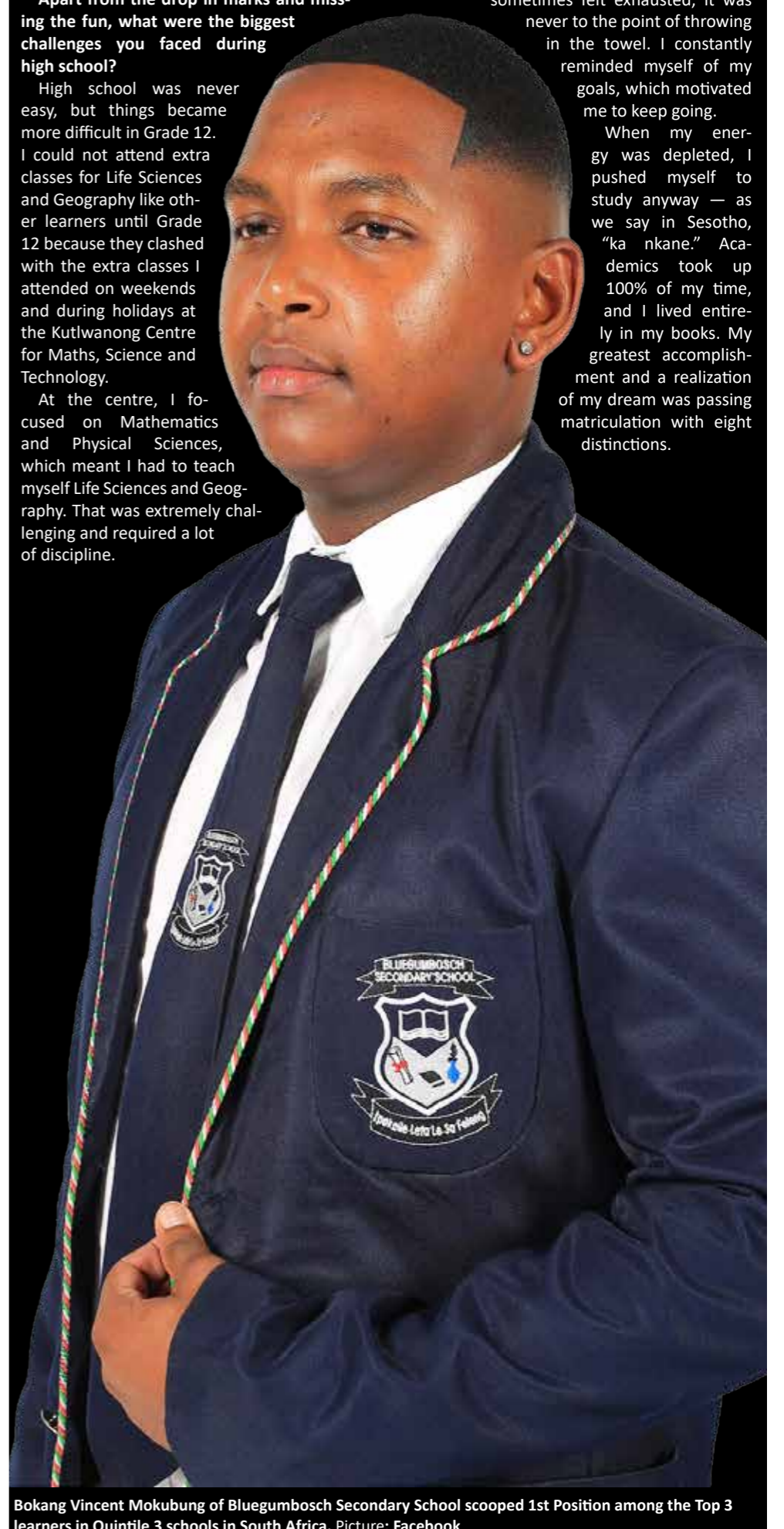
He urged the Class of 2026 to remain focused, emphasising that strong results require dedication, commitment and consistent engagement with their studies.

"Learners need to understand that the level of competency they are exposed to now, particularly in critical and scarce skills subjects, is much higher than before," Moroane said.

"Standards have been raised to align with global benchmarks, where learners will be expected to compete internationally."

He added that examination papers are no longer set at the same level as in previous years, which partly explains the national decline in mathematics results.

"As teachers, we must continuously adapt and refine our teaching methods to ensure that they meet the current standards," he said.



Bokang Vincent Mokubung of Bluegumbosch Secondary School scooped 1st Position among the Top 3 learners in Quintile 3 schools in South Africa. Picture: Facebook

## Malatji Slams Trump's 'White Genocide' Claims



ANCYL president Collen Malatji. Picture: Supplied

By Abigail Visagie

African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) president Collen Malatji has dismissed claims that white farmers are facing genocide in South Africa, addressing supporters at the ANC's 114th January 8 celebrations in Trompsburg, Free State, late last week.

Malatji called on President Cyril Ramaphosa and ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula to publicly reject what he described as a false narrative advanced by United States President Donald Trump, alleging that Afrikaners, particularly white farmers, are being systematically targeted.

"The sooner we speed up the issue of land and return it to its rightful owners, who are predominantly black, the better," Malatji said, adding that organisations such as AfriForum speak from a position of economic privilege.

He argued that poverty, crime, gender-based violence and broader socio-economic challenges in South Africa disproportionately affect black communities. "The people under attack are not Afrikaners who control farms, but black people living in poverty

in informal settlements," Malatji said.

Malatji further claimed that Afrikaners who have emigrated are largely those without economic security, while those who remain continue to control land and resources. He denied that Afrikaners are being targeted for killings.

His remarks align with findings from the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), which has stated that while farm attacks are a serious concern, they do not constitute genocide. In a policy brief titled Farm attacks in South Africa: setting the record straight, the ISS said farm attacks account for a small proportion of violent crime and are largely driven by criminal rather than political motives.

According to the ISS, 49 murders occurred on farms during the 2023-2024 financial year, out of a national total of 27,621 murders. Farm murders accounted for approximately 0.2% of all murders, and victims were not exclusively white.

Malatji concluded by urging the ANC Women's League and South Africans to mobilise for a mass march to Constitutional Hill to defend the Constitution against what he termed an imperialist agenda undermining the struggles of black South Africans.

## Premier: Professionalism and People-Centred Service a Must



Premier Maqen Letsoha Mathae Picture: Facebook

By Mogomotsi Selebi

Free State Premier Maqen Letsoha Mathae, kicked off the year with a morale-boosting session for officials in the Office of the Premier.

The meeting aimed to encourage staff and set a positive tone for the year.

The newly appointed senior managers were introduced, and the Premier emphasised the importance of applying Batho Pele principles in the workplace.

You are working for the highest office in the province and we must be exemplary to other departments," she remarked. Senior managers were encouraged to be respectful toward junior staff, recognising their vital role in the office's smooth operation.

The Premier also cautioned those on probation that performance expectations are high, and under-performance won't be tolerated. S

he spoke strongly about consequence management, emphasizing that this is neither non-negotiable nor optional.

"Misuse of public funds, government vehicles, and petrol cards," said the Premier, "will not be tolerated. There will be no place to hide for those who will be found guilty of misconduct." "Managers," she said, "let's build strong relationships with our staff and serve the people of Free State with pride."



# MBALULA COMMITS ANC TO CHANGE IN TROMPSBURG



African National Congress (ANC) Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula arrives at the Caleb Motshabi Stadium in Madikgetla, Trompsburg, accompanied by Free State ANC Chairperson Mxolisi Dukwana and Provincial Secretary Polediso Motsoeneng. Picture: Supplied

By Abigail Visagie

African National Congress (ANC) Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula has committed the ruling party to decisive intervention in failing municipalities, assuring residents that urgent steps are being taken to address long-standing service delivery challenges and restore public confidence in local leadership.

This follows the party's decision to place ailing local government at the centre of its programme for 2026.

Addressing a well-attended Free State January 8 celebration at Caleb Motshabi Stadium in Madikgetla, Trompsburg, Mbalula said fixing dysfunctional municipalities would be the party's top priority in the year ahead.

"The ANC has never shied away from acknowledging its challenges. We have declared this year as the

year to fix local government and the economy. Municipalities will be required to submit service delivery reports every three months to demonstrate that work is being done and that people are receiving services," Mbalula said.

He issued a stern warning against laziness and corruption within municipalities, urging provincial leadership to take decisive action against mayors who fail to carry out their responsibilities.

"People are complaining about the ANC. The problem is not the ANC but the people the organisation has deployed in municipalities. This year, we say that where there are challenges, they must be fixed. The Free State is leading when it comes to fixing local government and intervening on leadership issues. It is the first province to address ineptness in local government leadership," Mbalula said.

Last year, the provincial leadership announced the

removal of seven municipal mayors, speakers and chief whips, citing persistent audit disclaimers, weak leadership and poor governance, which undermined service delivery. Allegations of corruption were also cited.

Meanwhile, delivering the party's January 8 Statement at Moruleng Stadium outside Rustenburg last week, President Cyril Ramaphosa said that as the ANC heads towards local government elections, the party will refocus its efforts on strengthening its presence at the local level through improved service delivery.

"We cannot accept dysfunctional, apathetic and uncaring local government. We cannot accept an economy that only works for the few. We cannot bow our heads and accept defeat. Our forebears demonstrated bravery 114 years ago. We therefore declare 2026 as the year of decisive action to fix local government and transform the economy," Ramaphosa said.

# Military Vets Defend Mbeki's 'Counter-Revolution' Remarks

By Lerato Mutlanyane and Abigail Visagie

The newly elected leadership of the uMkhonto weSizwe Liberation War Veterans (MKLWV) has come out in defence of former president Thabo Mbeki's controversial remarks about a so-called "counter-revolution", dismissing criticism of his comments as coming from "expelled individuals or those facing disciplinary processes within the ANC".

Speaking at the inaugural MKLWV conference in Bloemfontein over the weekend, Mbeki told delegates that counter-revolutionaries had deliberately misrepresented former president Jacob Zuma's imprisonment and the July 2021 unrest as expressions of public anger. His remarks drew criticism from various quarters, with some accusing him of inflaming divisions in South African society.

"You have a mayhem that happened in 2021. It was said that people were angry with the ANC ... because the ANC had allowed the Constitutional Court to sentence Jacob Zuma, and he was going to go to jail ... that was a complete lie; it was the counter-revolutionary testing its strength to see if it could destabilise the country," Mbeki said, adding that the narrative was "a lie, a complete lie".

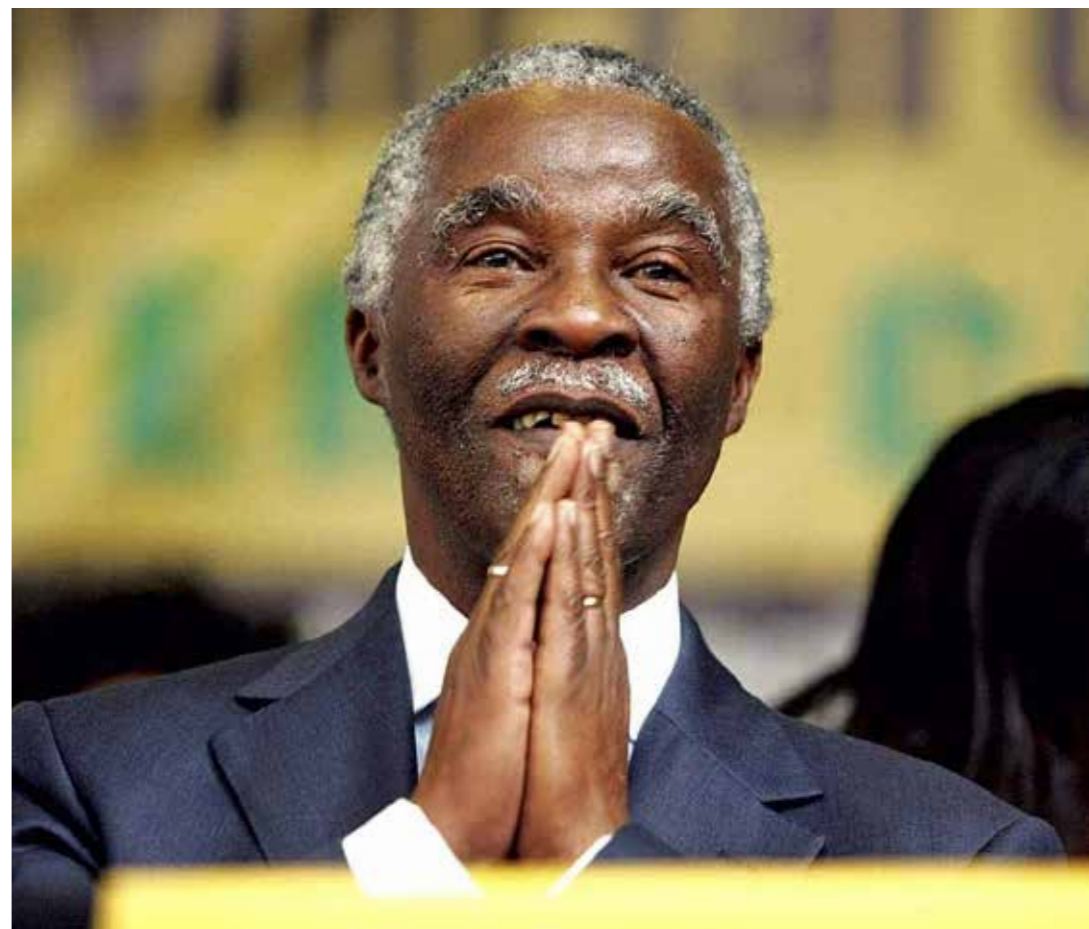
According to Mbeki, the unrest was a deliberate intervention by what he termed the "counter-revolution", aimed at testing its capacity to destabilise and paralyse South Africa.

In response, MK Party spokesperson Nhlamulo Ndhlela accused Mbeki of portraying MK Party support as illegitimate and externally engineered.

"This reckless language places lives at risk. The MK Party rejects, as politically reckless, socially dangerous and intellectually dishonest, the narrative advanced by former president Thabo Mbeki," Ndhlela said.

He called on Mbeki to withdraw the statements unconditionally and apologise to the people of KwaZulu-Natal, hostel communities and MK Party supporters.

Defending Mbeki's remarks in response to an enquiry from this publication, newly elected MKLWV chairperson Dan Hatto said the organisation fully concurred with the former president's analysis.



Former President Thabo Mbeki. Picture: Supplied

"Reflections by President Mbeki have drawn responses from a political formation whose leadership includes individuals expelled or facing disciplinary processes within the ANC for conduct that undermined the organisation. Some among them have been criminally charged and convicted for cash-in-transit-related offences during the democratic period, yet continue to occupy seats in Parliament," Hatto said.

He added that those who disputed Mbeki's views had recourse to the courts.

"The MKLWV will not expend further organisational time responding to individuals or formations that rely on provocation rather than political substance. This statement closes our engagement on the matter," Hatto said.

The Conference was also addressed by senior leadership of the African National Congress, including the Deputy President, Paul Mashatile, the Secretary General, Fikile Mbalula, and the National Chairperson, Gwede Mantashe, among others.

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# Mohono's Visible Leadership Fuels School Turnaround

**Legislature oversight visits boost morale, performance and accountability in Moses Kotane schools**

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Last Monday, North West Provincial Legislature Speaker Dr Desbo Mohono and her leadership team did more than simply walk school corridors — they embarked on a purposeful oversight mission. Armed not with criticism, but with curiosity and collaboration, the delegation spent four days, from 13 to 16 January 2026, engaging directly with schools in the Moses Kotane Local Municipality.

The outcome was more than a compliance report. It produced a practical roadmap for improvement, energising educators and boosting learner engagement across the visited schools.

In line with the Legislature's constitutional mandate, the oversight visits assessed schools' readiness for the 2026 academic year. The focus areas included learning conditions, learner welfare, infrastructure, governance, and overall academic performance in public schools across the North West province.

Several no-fee schools were visited, including Gabonewe Secondary School, Bogatsu Primary School, Mojabeng Primary School, Morare Secondary School, Shadrack Zibi Secondary School and Khayakhulu Primary School. Despite operating in rural and semi-rural settings, many schools demonstrated resilience and adaptability in the face of ongoing challenges.

Attendance levels among both educators and learners were reported to be encouraging. The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) continues to play a vital role, ensuring that learners receive nutritious meals that support wellbeing and academic concentration.

Academic performance across the schools remained stable, with notable improvements recorded:

- Gabonewe Secondary School reported only one learner failure in the previous academic year
- Mojabeng Primary School achieved an estimated 95% pass rate
- Morare Secondary School produced 84 matric



North West Provincial Legislature Speaker Dr Desbo Mohono. Picture: Baagedi Sethora

passes in 2025

- Shadrack Zibi Secondary School improved its matric pass rate from 79% in 2024 to 87.5% in 2025

However, the visits also highlighted persistent infrastructure and security challenges. These include ageing buildings, damaged ceilings, shortages of furniture, sanitation risks and the absence of permanent security personnel at some schools.

Pit toilets, vandalism, theft of infrastructure components and inadequate fencing continue to pose serious safety concerns.

Administrative delays and limited parental involvement in learner discipline were identified as recurring obstacles.

Learner welfare remains a priority, with schools maintaining close collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS), social workers and health authorities to

address issues such as teenage pregnancy, school violence and related social challenges.

Addressing learners directly, Dr Mohono urged them to remain focused, disciplined and committed to their education. She emphasised that success is built on perseverance, self-belief and consistent effort.

The Speaker reaffirmed the Legislature's commitment to sustained oversight and strengthened collaboration with the Department of Education, traditional leaders and local communities.

Dr Desbo Mohono's school oversight week underscored the power of visible, engaged leadership.

The insights gained are now driving a renewed collective effort to build safer, more supportive and dynamic learning environments across North West schools — marking not the conclusion of a report, but the beginning of a new chapter.

# MK Veterans Demand Decent Welfare



By Lerato Mutlanyane

The ANC's Umkhonto WeSizwe Liberation War Veterans (MKLWV) has made a clarion call to the government to urgently implement a comprehensive, integrated, and dignified welfare programme for all verified military veterans.

According to the MKLWV, this programme must be designed to cover essential needs including healthcare, housing, education, psychosocial support, and income security. This demand formed a core part of the resolutions adopted during the inaugural MKLWV national conference, where over 500 delegates from all provinces convened at the Imvelo Safari Lodge in Mangaung, Bloemfontein, last weekend.

The event saw a significant gathering of the ANC's top brass, including Deputy President Paul Mashatile, Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula, and National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe. Also in attendance were Member of Parliament and stalwart Dr Zweli Mkhize, as well as former President Thabo Mbeki.

As part of their resolutions, the war veterans stated that they require priority access to public healthcare, specifically through dedicated veterans' healthcare desks at both provincial and district facilities. Furthermore, they called for the accelerated provision of appropriate and dignified housing for all former combatants.

Regarding economic empowerment, the veterans demanded a shift in status from being passive beneficiaries to becoming active participants in the economy as entrepreneurs, workers, cooperators, and investors.

They are pushing for the implementation of preferential procurement frameworks specifically for veteran-owned enterprises. To support this, they tabled demands for adequate access to grants, funding, and concessional loans, alongside business incubation and mentorship programmes.

grammes.

These measures are intended to help veterans gain fair access to various markets and become strategic partners for government departments, state-owned enterprises, and private sector establishments.

On the critical issue of the renewal and rebuilding of the ANC, the veterans resolved that the historical relationship between the MK and the party remains fundamental, explaining that the MK is the armed wing of the ANC and that this relationship is both inseparable and non-negotiable.

The MKLWV was established in 2022 in the Eastern Cape following the disbandment of both the MK Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) and the MK Council.

During the conference, a new executive committee was elected to lead the unified body, with ANC veteran Don Hatto elected as the first chairperson. Xolani Dom was elected as deputy chairperson, while Mncedisi Mthethwa secured the position of secretary-general. Mandilakhe Dilima will serve as Mthethwa's deputy, with the role of commissar taken up by Thami Ntleni. Thandi Mashoala and Tosca Tybilika were elected as treasurer-general and Umzana respectively.

While at the podium, Dr Zweli Mkhize reflected on the past divisions between the MKMVA and the MK Council, stressing the vital importance of unity amongst the different bodies.

"This conference is about bringing ex-combatants together, resolving differences, and building a unified structure. This is why this conference has been convened, it is about bringing unity and working together," Mkhize declared.

The Mayor of Mangaung Metro, Gregory Nthatisi, who is an MK veteran himself, also welcomed the new leadership and gave his assurance that the city is working hard to ensure that military veterans are properly looked after and integrated into the community.

# Mooi River Sewage Crisis Hits Breaking Point

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Dysfunctional wastewater treatment plants and ongoing, uncontrolled sewage spillages continue to pollute water sources in JB Marks Local Municipality in the North West, posing severe health and environmental risks to local communities.

On Friday, 16 January 2026, Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation Sello Seitholo met with municipal officials to address the deteriorating sewage infrastructure in Ikageng Location and its devastating impact on water resources, particularly the Mooi River.

The Department of Water and Sanitation has warned that sewage spillages pose serious environmental and health hazards, contaminating water sources and leading to severe water pollution that threatens aquatic life and human health. Harmful pathogens from untreated sewage also affect the food chain, while soil contamination has contributed to delays in agricultural productivity.

Seitholo's office has received numerous complaints from residents regarding persistent spillages flowing into the Mooi River — the community's most reliable water source. Locals depend on the river for domestic use, farming, agricultural activities, and certain industrial purposes, making its protection an urgent environmental and socio-economic priority.

The municipality's challenges stem largely from ageing and poorly maintained sewage infrastructure, which has resulted in repeated spillages that endanger nearby communities and businesses. These conditions point to an urgent need for infrastructure refurbishment, upgrades and, where necessary, the construction of new sewerage systems.

While the municipality continues to unblock manholes as an interim measure, the absence of suitable machinery remains a critical concern. Without appropriate equipment, sewage spillages persist, allowing untreated sewage and wastewater to enter the Mooi River directly or via stormwater channels.

Between 2020 and 2023, the department conducted several inspections in Ikageng Location and issued a Notice of Intention to issue a Directive to JB Marks Local



Water and Sanitation Deputy Minister Sello Seitholo. Picture: Facebook

Municipality in terms of Section 19(3) of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998).

Although the municipality reportedly responded to these notices and directives, no immediate or effective measures were implemented to prevent ongoing pollution. This failure prompted civil society organisations to open a criminal case, which is currently being investigated by Environmental Management Inspectors from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. The Department of Water and Sanitation has confirmed its full support for the case.

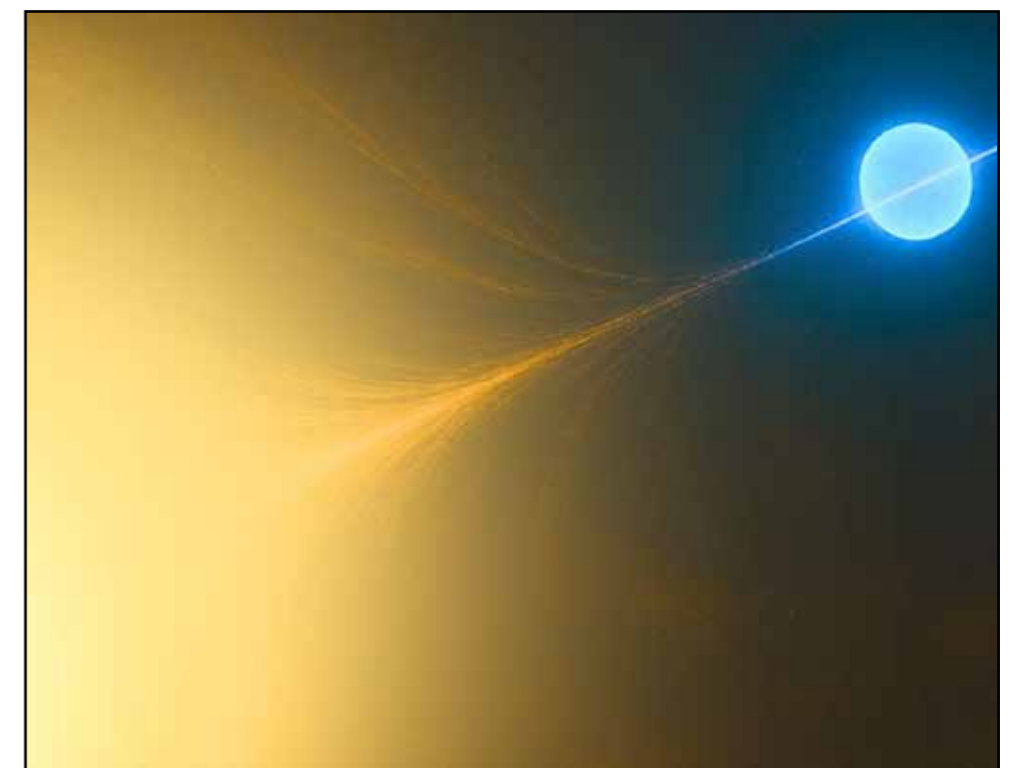
To rehabilitate and upgrade sewage infrastructure in Promosa and Mohadin, the department approved projects under the Water Services Infrastructure Grant. Despite these interventions, sewage spillages remain a ma-

major challenge. During site inspections in Extension 7 near Poortjies Dam, Deputy Minister Seitholo and his delegation identified two households that have been exposed to sewage spillages for more than a decade.

In his remarks, Seitholo stressed that while projects to address the crisis have been approved, the lack of adequate tools of trade continues to undermine progress.

"The municipality does not have the necessary equipment to respond swiftly and effectively to sewerage spillages, resulting in residents and businesses being forced to live and operate under unsanitary conditions for prolonged periods," he said. "These issues were raised with the Municipal Manager and the MMC, who was acting as mayor at the time. The current situation is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue."

# South African telescope resolves star twin mystery



Astronomers using the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT) have solved a scientific mystery involving a red supergiant star that has been misbehaving.

"In the last decade, the star's behaviour changed radically. It faded significantly, its pulsations suppressed," said the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) in a statement on Thursday.

In 2024, researchers had discovered that the red supergiant star named WOH G64 B had obtained a mysterious dust cloud in addition to its other strange behaviour.

Scientists turned to South Africa's SALT tel-

scope in Sutherland in the Northern Cape, to observe the star between November 2024 and December 2025. They discovered that WOH G64 B's strange behaviour can be explained by its star twin and its powerful gravity, causing the red supergiant to expand its atmosphere to transform it into a new phase.

"We are essentially witnessing a 'phoenix' rising from the ashes," explains Dr Jacco van Loon of Keele University in the UK who led the study. "The atmosphere of the red supergiant is being stretched out by the approach of the companion star, but it has not been stripped altogether. It persists." - SABC

# FF Plus Rejects Black Votes

Continues from Page 1

port. These are the areas where we will not waste resources," Groenewald said.

"We support our party's policies and values, and we do not have to campaign in districts where there is no support."

Interestingly, the sudden change of strategy by the right-wing FF Plus comes after the party's electoral support declined from 2.38% in 2019 to 1.36% in the 2024 general election.

These come after the party believed that it would

surpass its 2019 results by expanding its campaign work way beyond its traditional Afrikaans support base to all minority groups in the country.

Northern Cape provincial leader Armand Cloete adopted a broader view, saying every political party has the right to campaign in any community, adding that the FF Plus in the province would campaign across the region.

"We will be canvassing everywhere, but in places that are worthwhile for us," Cloete said.

According to its policy positions, the FF Plus argues that South Africa is facing an unprecedented economic

crisis as a result of government mismanagement and says its primary objective is to restore the economy.

The party's key policy positions include abolishing Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action, opposing the expropriation of property without compensation, and protecting language and cultural heritage communities.

The FF Plus further states that while its focus remains on safeguarding Afrikaner interests, it also seeks to promote the rights of all communities bound by shared language and cultural identity.

# Northern Cape Cabinet Shake-Up



*... As Premier appoints new MEC for Health*

Northern Cape Premier Dr Zamani Saul. Picture: Supplied

By Abigail Visagie

Northern Cape Premier Dr Zamani Saul has announced changes to his provincial cabinet, appointing a new Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for the embattled Department of Health amid mounting pressure to stabilise the province's healthcare system.

The department has been without a political head for nearly four months following the abrupt resignation of former Health MEC Maruping Lekwene in November last year.

MEC for Social Development, Youth, Women and People Living with Disabilities, Nontobeko Vilakazi, has now been appointed as the new MEC for Health. Meanwhile, MEC for Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform, Mase Manopole, has been moved to the Social Development portfolio.

Manopole's former position has been filled by the ANC's former John Taolo Gaetsewe regional secretary, Lebogang Motlaping.

Lekwene resigned on 5 November 2025 amid growing calls for the Department of Health to be placed

under administration.

His departure followed a damning Health Ombudsman's report that exposed systemic failures at Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital (RMSH) and Kimberley Mental Health Hospital (KMHH), failures that were linked to the deaths of three psychiatric patients.

An Auditor-General's report further deepened the crisis, revealing R15.5 billion in financial irregularities within the department.

Critics have since raised concerns about the stability of the province's healthcare system, questioning the timing of Lekwene's resignation and warning that the department was on the brink of collapse.

Lekwene had served as MEC for Health since June 2020 and was reappointed following the 2024 general elections.

His tenure was marred by controversy, including the department operating without a permanent head of department (HOD) for more than three years.

Reacting to the cabinet reshuffle, the Democratic Alliance (DA) questioned Premier Saul's intentions, arguing that the changes would not result in meaningful reform within the health sector.

"He is simply rearranging the cabinet to fill the gap

left by the resignation of former Health MEC Maruping Lekwene, without introducing the specialised, determined and ethical leadership required to restore integrity and turn the ailing health department around," said DA Northern Cape provincial leader Isak Fritz.

Fritz added that decisive leadership was crucial given the prolonged leadership vacuum caused by the ongoing HOD crisis, which has seen Dr Dion Theyes seconded to an alternative position while he faces a corruption conviction and additional charges.

The absence of a permanent accounting officer, he said, has resulted in the department being managed by a succession of acting appointees.

"The state of the health sector will ultimately reflect Premier Saul's legacy more than the performance of the many MECs who have held this portfolio during his tenure," Fritz said.

"At present, he risks being remembered for failing to address rampant corruption, deadly ambulance failures, crippling healthcare backlogs and the mental health hospital tragedy.

It is now up to him, together with Vilakazi, to change this."

# High Stakes for EFF as Malema Faces Possible Jail Time



Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) as the party's commander-in-chief, Julius Malema. Picture: Supplied

By Abigail Visagie

Anticipation is mounting within the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) as the party's commander-in-chief, Julius Malema, faces the possibility of imprisonment, with sentencing scheduled for today at the East London Magistrate's Court in the Eastern Cape.

Malema's sentencing follows his conviction for unlawfully possessing a firearm and ammunition and discharging a firearm in a public place during the EFF's fifth birthday celebrations at Sisa Dukashe Stadium in Mdantsane in 2018. The court found that his actions amounted to reckless endangerment, placing members of the public at risk.

Malema has maintained his innocence throughout the trial, insisting that the firearm in question was a toy. His co-accused, Adriaan Snyman, was acquitted due to insufficient evidence. Judgment in the matter was delivered nearly seven years after the incident, which the EFF has consistently described as part of the party's celebratory programme.

It is understood that Malema intends to appeal any sentence imposed, potentially escalating the matter to the highest courts in the country. He has previously characterised the case as a "political witch-hunt" against him.

Despite the high stakes, the EFF has remained tight-lipped ahead of sentencing. Journal News spoke exclusively to EFF communications officer Sinawo Thambo, who said the party and

its leadership would only comment after court proceedings conclude.

"We will not be engaging in any preview commentary with media houses ahead of today's sentencing," Thambo said.

The outcome of the case could have significant political consequences for the party. In terms of the Constitution, any Member of Parliament sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment without the option of a fine is disqualified from holding public office for a period of five years.

The firearm and ammunition charges were initially brought to light following a complaint by AfriForum, which argued that the matter had not received adequate legal attention and that Malema should face the same legal consequences as any other citizen.

Malema faces a potential sentence of up to 15 years' imprisonment following his conviction on five charges, including unlawful possession of a firearm and ammunition, discharging a firearm in a public space, reckless endangerment, and failure to take reasonable precautions.

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) has indicated that the case underscores the principle that no individual is above the law.

Earlier this week, the EFF confirmed that Malema would be absent from ad hoc committee work due to the court proceedings.

Deputy Secretary-General Leigh-Ann Mathys will represent the party in parliamentary committee engagements for the remainder of the week.

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# SAHRC Slams North West Scholar Transport Failures



By: Matshidiso Selebeleng

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) has released its final report on systemic challenges within the scholar transport programme in North West.

The report follows an investigation and inquiry launched by the commission last year into ongoing failures in the provision of scholar transport in the province.

In November 2025, a scholar transport vehicle certified to carry 15 passengers was found transporting 29 learners—almost double its legal capacity. The vehicle was impounded, leaving learners stranded until alternative transport was arranged to take them to their respective destinations.

While overcrowding was identified as a major concern, the commission noted several other persistent problems affecting the programme.

"The majority of scholar transport services are characterised by vehicle overloading, the use of vehicles that are not roadworthy or safe, frequent breakdowns, and the late collection and delivery of learners," the commission said in a statement.

It further noted that thousands of qualifying learners have been denied access to scholar transport, forcing many to walk long distances to school, arrive late for classes, or drop out altogether.

The commission also highlighted the failure to reasonably accommodate learners with disabilities, resulting in exclusion and, in some cases, unsafe transport conditions.

According to the SAHRC, these shortcomings violate learners' constitutional rights, including the rights to basic education, equality, dignity and safety, and amount to unfair discrimination on the grounds of poverty and disability.

As a result, the commission has issued a series of directives aimed at addressing the recurring challenges, particularly the continued problem of overloading despite existing regulatory measures.

The Department of Community Safety and Transport Management (COSATMA) and the North West Department of Education have been given 60 days to submit a comprehensive progress report on measures implemented since 25 November 2025, the date on which the commission last received updates from the two departments.

The report must include details on the number of previously excluded learners now receiving transport, additional learners newly identified and included in the programme, and those who remain without access to scholar transport.

"COSATMA and the North West Department of Education must develop a time-bound remedial plan to address fraudulent practices, including the use of untested vehicles, supervision of learners during transport where applicable, monitoring of unsubsidised scholar transport, and residual and emerging scholar transport challenges," the statement read.

In addition, the North West Provincial Treasury has been given 60 days to submit a report outlining steps taken to support the two departments in addressing the identified challenges, including funding constraints.

COSATMA and the Department of Education have also been instructed to establish a functional complaints centre within 90 days for parents, guardians, teachers and members of the public, with provisions for anonymity and whistleblower protection.

The directive further requires the eradication of outstanding payment backlogs.

Among its recommendations, the commission called on the National Department of Transport and the National Department of Basic Education to use the findings of the report to address policy gaps, strengthen coordination and accountability, and ensure a rights-based approach to scholar transport provision at a national level.

Opinion

By Buti Manamela  
Minister of Higher Education and Training



# The Real and Urgent Challenge Behind South Africa's Record Matric Results

The latest matric results deserve to be recognised and celebrated. In 2025, approximately 927,000 learners wrote the National Senior Certificate, the largest cohort in South Africa's history. Of these, over 82% passed, meaning that more than 760,000 young people successfully completed twelve years of schooling. This matters. It reflects a schooling system that is retaining more learners, stabilising after years of disruption, and producing improved outcomes, including in many no-fee schools where performance has historically lagged behind.

But from the perspective of post-school education and training, these same numbers also illuminate a growing pressure point that can no longer be managed quietly or deferred to the future.

This year, about 345,000 learners achieved bachelor's passes, making them eligible, in principle, for entry into degree studies. Yet South Africa's public university system can offer only about 230,000 first-time entering places in a given academic year, inclusive of first time diploma students into universities of technology. This means that well over 100,000 young people who formally qualify for university will not find a place, not because they failed, but because the system does not have the capacity to absorb them all at once. In fact the situation is more dire if one considers that about 209,000 learners achieved diploma passes that in principle will give them access to diploma programmes offered by some of our universities.

That gap between eligibility and opportunity is not a communications problem. It is structural. And unless we explain it honestly, it creates expectations that cannot be met and frustration that is often misdirected at institutions that are already operating at or near capacity.

This is why we need a much more explicit, joint conversation between basic education and higher education about how we speak about bachelor's, diploma and higher certificate passes. A bachelor's pass is an achievement, and it must be respected as such, but it is not a guarantee of admission to de-

gree study. Eligibility is not the same as availability, and conflating the two does a disservice to learners and families who understandably assume that a bachelor's pass automatically opens a university door.

These pressures are intensified by the broader social context. Youth unemployment remains among the highest in the world, and formal job creation has not kept pace with the number of young people entering adulthood each year. For many, post-school education is not simply about aspiration; it is about survival, dignity and the possibility of long-term inclusion. As a result, the post-school system must serve both those who complete matric successfully and those who leave the schooling system earlier or with weaker results.

At the same time, the pressure on public funding continues to grow. Government has been clear that as much as possible students should not be prevented from accessing further learning opportunities because they cannot afford them, and this commitment is reflected in the scale of financial aid now required. Each additional cohort entering post-school education increases the demand on a funding system that must balance access, sustainability and quality.

One of the most serious warning signals in the results remains the continued weakness in Mathematics and Physical Science. Although the absolute number of learners writing Mathematics increased slightly this year, only about 34% of matric candidates wrote Mathematics, with the majority opting for Mathematical Literacy. This is not a marginal issue. Mathematics remains a key gateway subject for many of the most competitive and economically strategic programmes in higher education.

Even more concerning is that Mathematics and Accounting pass rates declined, while Physical Science recorded only a slight improvement. When these numbers are unpacked further, the challenge becomes clearer. While more than 345,000 learners achieved bachelor's passes, the number who meet the specific subject and performance requirements

for programmes such as natural sciences, engineering, health sciences, actuarial sciences, data science and parts of commerce is significantly smaller. Demand for these programmes far exceeds supply, and the pool of suitably prepared applicants is narrower than headline pass rates suggest.

This is why we now need a far more detailed analysis of how many learners actually meet entry requirements for competitive programmes, compared to the number of places available. Without this clarity, we risk celebrating aggregate success while quietly narrowing access to the fields most critical for long-term economic development.

The renewed emphasis by basic education on early childhood development and foundational learning is therefore not only welcome but essential. Weak foundations in literacy and numeracy do not suddenly appear in matric; they accumulate over time. By the time learners reach Grade 12, the post-school system is already dealing with the consequences of learning gaps that emerged years earlier. Universities and colleges spend billions on extended programmes, academic development and remediation, all of which are necessary, but all of which would be more effective if foundational learning were stronger.

From the post-school side, we are actively working to expand and diversify opportunities. Public universities now enrol just over one million students, and we continue to invest in infrastructure and capacity expansion. At the same time, TVET colleges currently serve more than 500 000 students, with clear plans to grow this number substantially, recognising their central role in producing artisans, technicians and mid-level skills. Community Education and Training colleges, which provide second-chance and alternative pathways, remain critical for absorbing learners who do not move directly from matric into formal post-school programmes.

We are also examining more deliberately the role of bridging and foundational programmes, including higher certificates and preparatory routes that allow matriculants to strengthen their readiness be-

fore entering demanding qualifications. These pathways are not inferior options. In a system marked by inequality and uneven preparation, they are essential instruments of inclusion.

There is another reality we must state clearly. Our universities produce the teachers who serve the basic education system. If we are serious about improving outcomes in Mathematics, Science and Accounting, then teacher supply, training and deployment must be planned far more closely across departments. We need sufficient numbers of teachers, trained in the right subjects, placed where the system needs them most. This requires sustained coordination between basic and higher education, not annual reactions to results.

The matric results tell us something important about who we are becoming. More young people are staying in school. More are completing. Equity is improving in meaningful ways. But they also tell us that success at the school exit point shifts pressure forward into a post-school system that is already stretched, and into a labour market that cannot yet absorb everyone.

Our responsibility now is not to dampen hope, but to anchor it in honesty, planning and realistic options. Among the options we are actively considering are a clearer national conversation on post-matric pathways, expanded and better-funded bridging programmes, stronger alignment between school subject choices and post-school demand, closer planning with basic education around teacher supply, and continued expansion of TVET and community college opportunities alongside universities. And fundamental to all of this is inclusive growth of the economy, without which the demand and supply equations do not work.

This is not a crisis, but it is a moment that demands seriousness, realism and a quiet optimism. If we get this right, the gains we are seeing at school level can translate into genuine opportunity beyond matric for millions of South Africans. If we avoid the hard conversations, we risk turning success into frustration. That is a risk South Africa cannot afford.

## Unsafe scholar transport is betrayal to children's right to life and education



Refilwe Mochoari  
Editor-in-Chief

I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the 14 children who tragically lost their lives in the devastating Vanderbijlpark scholar transport accident on Monday morning.

Just last week my colleagues and I had a conversation about the state of scholar transport safety and how broken and unsafe the scholar transport system actually is.

Sadly this tragedy comes just a few days after we published the story "NW clamps down on overloaded scholar transport"

This accident weighs very heavily on my heart and I wish the parents, friends, families, and communities find comfort and strength.

Hi everyone, my name is Refilwe Mochoari, let's talk about scholar transport safety.

Thousands of children across the country rely on scholar transport, and for many it is not a choice but a necessity.

In November last year, traffic officers in the North West province impounded a 15-seater scholar transport vehicle that was carrying 29 learners, which is almost double its permitted capacity.

This is unacceptable, and the Vanderbijl Park tragedy is a painful reminder of the dangers that school children face daily on their way to school, and demonstrates a pressing need for reform in the school transport system.

The Vanderbijl Park 2026 tragedy is not the first of its kind because every year there is a discussion of lives lost too soon.

Most of us know many young children who have lost their lives in the same way. And now the question is how long is this going to go on for?

Schools often distance themselves from transport safety, and the Department of Education seldom takes action despite the hundreds of lives lost over the years because of the same thing.

When will the scholar transport operators learn that they are carrying precious lives?

If the vehicles are not overloaded, they are not roadworthy, but because all they want to make is money, they do not care about the lives of the children.

We welcome the Johannesburg Metro Police Department officers who seized over 60 scholar transport vehicles that failed basic safety checks.

We also welcome President Ramaphosa's aim to improve scholar transport safety.

The President says he is going to direct the Minister of Basic Education and the Department of Transport to look at how the lives of children can be saved.

Twenty two year old driver has been arrested and charged with 14 counts of murder, three counts of attempted murder, one count of driving without a valid Professional Driving Permit (PDP), and one count of driving an unlicensed motor vehicle.

It is believed that he was attempting to overtake on a narrow road when the minibus he was driving collided with a truck.

A Dashcam footage is making the rounds on social media platforms showing the minibus driving on the oncoming section of a narrow road, but it was struck by a heavy truck.

Children died, but he survived. This accident is not an isolated event, because just recently nine children were injured in Pinetown when the vehicle they were traveling in crashed into a tree. The children were traveling home from school.

These tragedies demand urgent action. Scholar transport safety must become a national priority.

Children deserve to travel to school in vehicles that are safe, roadworthy, and responsibly operated.

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

## In the Meantime



There's a space between seasons that I like to call "the meantime." In this space, you are not here and not there. You aren't where you used to be, but you also haven't stepped into the next season of your life. Many of us see the meantime as a place to sit and wait—to hope the next chapter starts as soon as possible. We try to forget what's behind us and look towards the future.

However, I'd like to encourage you to change your mindset about this in-between period. What is it about your mindset you have to change? Somebody once said, "The most important change is when you change your mind." The meantime is unique because it allows you to take inventory of where you are, rethink what is happening in your life, refocus your relationships, and consider what you'll be doing at the next juncture of your life. This is precious time to reflect on the old season and prepare for the new. It's not a passive phase; it's an active one.

You are here, you want to go there, and the distance between here and there is the meantime.

The meantime will grow you more than anything else. When you were there—the old season—you knew what it was; when you are there—the new season—you will know what it holds. But

for right now, you have to be in a place where you say, "I will grow in the meantime." Why? Because opportunities come to those who are prepared.

So, how will you use this in-between season? What will you reflect on? What will you improve in your own character? What resources will you soak in?

What preparations will you make for whatever the next season holds? What will you do with your meantime?

One way to use this in-between season is to get a coach! Not just a coach but someone who lives the life you desire to live and understand what to do in the meantime.

Here are characteristics you must look for in a coach

- Strong character
- Great reputation
- Successful in their field
- Passion to coach others
- Ability to live through different seasons

It is befitting to tell you that you are not going to die a pauper neither ordinary because of the tools you have to survive in between seasons.

Handle each season well however the most important is to handle yourself well when you're in between season.

## Trump 2.0: A Year of Chaos and Institutional Sabotage

January 20 marks one year since Donald Trump returned to the presidency of the United States.

His conduct over the past twelve months has been characterised by sustained incompetence, volatility, and institutional sabotage. This has been a presidency governed by impulse and ignorance, where policy has been improvised in public and consequences dismissed as inconveniences.

The office has been reshaped into a platform for grievance and vanity, wielded by a man manifestly unfit for the responsibilities it entails. This personalisation of power has inevitably translated into policy, with the Trump administration's limitations shaping not only the tone of governance but the substance of the US's engagement with the world.

From the onset of his second term, Trump has pursued the deliberate weakening of multilateral institutions. The United Nations has been marginalised through erratic engagement, public hostility, and the politicisation of funding. Senior officials have been intimidated – or, as in the case of Francesca Albanese, sanctioned – for diligently executing their duties.

UN resolutions that criticised US military conduct were dismissed, and the repeated hosting of Netanyahu demonstrated Trump's disrespect for the ICC arrest warrant against him. This behaviour has weakened collective diplomatic capacity and emboldened states that benefit from the collapse of cooperative norms.

The World Trade Organisation has been subjected to similar destruction. Trump reintroduced sweeping tariffs on strategic imports within months of taking office, targeting allies and rivals alike. These measures were imposed outside established dispute processes and justified through simplistic claims of domestic development prioritisation. Retaliatory tariffs followed, disrupting agricultural exports and manufacturing supply chains.

Despite warnings from trade economists and industry bodies, the administration continued to escalate protectionist measures, demonstrating a fundamental disregard for the structure of global trade.

International law has been treated with open contempt. Over the past year, US forces have conducted targeted killings of alleged criminal and militant figures without judicial oversight or transparent evidentiary standards.



Naval operations have intercepted vessels in international waters, with crews detained or killed under loosely defined security justifications. The deaths without formal charges or trials reinforce the perception that executive suspicion now substitutes for legal process.

More recently, Venezuela's President Maduro and his wife were abducted to face trumped-up charges of drug trafficking. This lawless exercise of force has not remained confined to individual targets but has expanded into a broader contempt for the territorial integrity of states.

Territorial sovereignty has been repeatedly violated. The Trump administration authorised cross-border military actions without host state consent, including operations in Latin America framed as anti-crime initiatives and in West Asia and Africa under the guise of national security. These incursions were conducted with minimal diplomatic engagement and accompanied by public threats of escalation.

Trump has revived an openly imperial worldview, treating states across multiple regions as instruments of US will rather than as sovereign equals. This posture has destabilised international relations far beyond the US's immediate neighbourhood, normalising foreign interventionism and reintroducing power politics that undermine global stability. *By Dr. Reneva Fourie*



# Business

## Markets and Indicators

Rand/Dollar	16.20	0.32%	▲
Rand/Pound	21.76	0.34%	▲
Rand/Euro	18.98	0.11%	▲
Platinum	2 503.70	0.82%	▲
Brent Crude	64.44	-1.17%	▼
Gold	4 822.91	-0.15%	▼
Etherium	2 961.09	-2.18%	▼
Bitcoin	89 301.2	-0.89%	▼

## SA's inflation nudges up to 3.6% in December: What it means for consumers



Consumer Price Index released by Stats SA on Wednesday indicated a slight increase from 3.5% in November to 3.6% in December 2025. Picture: BT

South Africa's inflation rate edged slightly higher in December, according to the latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures released by Statistics SA on Wednesday. Inflation rose to 3.6% in December 2025 from 3.5% in November.

Prices increased by 0.2% compared with November, meaning consumers paid slightly more for everyday goods and services during the month. Economists said the small rise was expected.

Frank Blackmore, the lead economist at KPMG South Africa, said December CPI numbers, which came in at 3.6% for December 2025, are slightly higher than the 3.5% recorded in November. "Core inflation also rose marginally to 3.3% from 3.2% last year. The main contributor to this inflation was housing and utilities, which added one-third or 1.2 percentage points of that 3.6%, and most notably there it was obviously both electricity price increases at 7.9% and water at 7% that did most of the increase there."

Blackmore added that given this December number for inflation of 3.6%, 2025 on average had an inflation rate of only 3.2% for the year. "Our view for inflation for 2026 will be slightly higher than this rate, and the reason is not because we see month-on-month change-

ing increasing that much but because of the base effects in calculating the inflationary numbers."

Tando Ngibe, a senior manager at Budget Insurance, said the CPI results announced on Wednesday mean that prices in South Africa are still rising, but at a relatively slow and manageable pace.

"Practically, for consumers, this means that your cost of living is not running away from you, but pressure hasn't disappeared either. Essentials like food, especially meat, housing costs, and transport continue to put strain on budgets more than the headline number suggests."

Ngibe added that while inflation looks calm on paper, many households still feel it in their monthly spend.

"The important takeaway is that interest rates are unlikely to drop sharply in the short term, but they also aren't under pressure to rise. So, borrowing costs should therefore remain relatively stable for now."

Hayley Parry, Money Coach and Facilitator at 1Life's Truth About Money, said we can see that inflation ticked slightly higher from 3.5% in November to 3.6% in December.

"What's most interesting is to look at this from a consumer perspective for 2025 as a whole. I think one

of the standout features is that the projected inflation rate of 3.2% for 2025 is the lowest in 21 years. This is down from 4.4% in 2024 and 6% in 2023."

Parry added that a practical tip going forward is to focus on controlling what you can.

"Focus on where the inflation is hitting your budget the hardest, like groceries, fuel, rent, and lock in savings where possible - whether it be through smart buying, switching service providers, or avoiding new debt while the rates remain high."

FNB senior economist Koketso Mano said that headline inflation is aligned with their and the market expectation.

"Updating our model with this print suggests that headline inflation will soften over much of this year, starting with a deceleration to below 3.5% y/y in January. This will be supported by the fall in fuel prices, while food and core inflation could be relatively stable."

Mano added that as the year progresses, projected growth in the oil market surplus and a supported rand should keep fuel prices contained while also extending to overall imported, transport, and food costs. "In addition, the current downward pull on cereal and vegetable prices presents downside risk to food inflation in the near term."

In line with this, we note the risk that goods inflation is softer than anticipated. Services inflation continues to normalise, but the pace could be softened by surveyed inflation expectations that have moderated - even those of price-setting agents."

Annabel Bishop, Investec's chief economist, said the fuel price saw a small 29c/litre lift, making a small 0.07% contribution to the m/m CPI outcome. "Housing and utilities made a small, not unusual, 0.1% seasonal contribution as well."

Bishop added that January's fuel price cut of -66c/litre will aid inflation lower by about -0.2% m/m, while February is building for a larger -77c/litre cut. "This will also help subdue some of the tendency of the start of the year's inflationary pressures from other sources. Food (and non-alcoholic beverages) price inflation remained at 4.4% y/y." **BusinessTech**

## Capitec fraud warning



Capitec has issued several warnings to its clients about a surge in increasingly sophisticated scams targeting South Africans at the start of 2026.

Over the past few months, the bank has sent alerts to customers warning them about scams at ATMs, as well as phone calls from fraudsters impersonating Capitec staff or members of the South African Police Service (SAPS).

According to the bank, criminals are using distraction tactics at ATMs to steal cards and PINs, often posing as helpful strangers.

Capitec has urged clients to stay vigilant by covering the keypad when entering their PIN, refusing assistance from strangers, and avoiding predictable PINs such as birth dates.

Customers are also advised never to store PINs on their phones and to immediately stop a card through the banking app if it is lost or stolen.

Phone-based scams remain a major concern. Capitec warned that fraudsters may call customers while pretending to be bank officials.

These criminals attempt to gain access to accounts under the guise of "verifying" information or addressing suspicious activity.

To counter this, the bank has reinforced its in-app call verification system, which displays a banner when a genuine Capitec agent is on the line.

A green banner confirms the call is legitimate, while a red banner indicates a scam. Clients have been cautioned not to rely on caller ID apps and to hang up immediately if told that the verification feature is not working.

Impersonation scams involving SAPS are also on the rise. In these cases, fraudsters often claim that there is a warrant for the victim's arrest and demand immediate payment to make the problem disappear.

Capitec stressed that SAPS will never ask for money, PINs, or banking details over the phone, nor will they instruct someone to sign into their banking app.

Anyone receiving such a call is advised to hang up and contact SAPS directly using an official number.

These warnings come amid growing evidence that fraud remains widespread in South Africa.

TransUnion's latest Consumer Pulse Study found that 59% of consumers were targeted by fraud attempts, while 12% ultimately fell victim.

Phishing, voice-based scams, and gift card fraud were among the most common tactics.

When notified of data breaches, only 16% signed up for identity monitoring services, while more than half of respondents said they felt confused about how to protect themselves online.

The scale of the problem is highlighted by figures from the South African Banking Risk Information Centre, which reported that R2.72 billion was lost to financial crime in 2024.

Digital banking fraud accounted for the bulk of this amount, with losses of R1.89 billion. Incidents of digital fraud surged by 86% year-on-year, while losses increased by 74%.

Banking app fraud was the single most significant contributor, responsible for more than 65% of digital fraud cases and losses exceeding R1.2 billion.

Financial Sector Conduct Authority commissioner Unathi Kamlana warned last year that unchecked digital fraud poses a serious threat to public trust in the financial system.

He emphasised that collaboration among banks, regulators, telecommunications providers, and law enforcement is essential, noting that criminals thrive on gaps and fragmentation within and across institutions, even across borders.

In response, the FSCA has launched its Digital Banking Fraud Project, working closely with the banking sector to identify vulnerabilities and reduce risk.

The initiative includes coordinated reporting, fraud mapping, real-time monitoring, disruption of criminal networks, and expanded consumer education.

The regulator has also made it clear that fraud is not merely an operational issue, but a governance and conduct risk that demands attention at the highest levels of financial institutions.

## Why your January career ambitions die in February

The year begins with energy and expectation to make your mark at work or change jobs, a resolution that won't last out the month.

The new year brings with it plans to take on new responsibilities, earn recognition, or sharpen skills. Plans are sketched, priorities set, and aspirations feel urgent and achievable.

By February, that energy often fades. Workloads pile up, routines take over, and the intentions that seemed so clear just weeks earlier quietly slip into the background. The drive to advance, once bright, is now competing with the reality of day-to-day demands.

Research shows this pattern is common. Around 80% of people abandon their New Year's resolutions within the first month.

Behavioural science also points to the "fresh start effect," where milestones such as New Year's Day provide a temporary boost to motivation simply because a new chapter seems to open. The problem is that boost rarely lasts.

Psychologists highlight why momentum falters: Temporal discounting makes immediate rewards feel more pressing than long-term gains.

All-or-nothing thinking turns a single missed step into a sense of total failure.

Motivation decay ensures early enthusiasm is short-lived, not a reliable engine for sustained action.

Phindile Mpithi, senior academic and programme co-ordinator at Regent Business School, unpacks why career plans so often stall.

"January arrives with promise, but February tells a different story. Career plans so often lose traction just weeks after they are made, and motivation alone is rarely enough to carry ambition forward," he said.

Mpithi frames career growth as a strategic, evidence-based exercise, not just a personal resolution.

"Career planning fails not because professionals lack commitment, but because it is treated as a personal resolution rather than a strategic exercise," Mpithi added.

"The reason January career plans fail is not because ambition disappears, but because structure never replaces intention," he said.



The takeaway is clear: aspiration alone does not create progress.

Professionals who succeed apply structure, analysis, and intentionality. They start by understanding their position in the market - evaluating their current value, in-demand skills, and areas of competitive advantage.

Gap analysis follows. Identify which capabilities are needed to move from current roles to desired objectives, explained Mpithi.

These gaps are often strategic - leadership, decision-making, or managing complexity - rather than simply technical, he noted.

"Professionals who stagnate often overestimate how visible their strengths are to the market, or underestimate how quickly roles evolve," Mpithi said.

Research shows that those who succeed have strate-

gic career objectives that are specific, measurable, and time-bound. Progress is tracked through milestones, which build accountability and momentum even amid heavy workloads.

When further study or training aligns with clear objectives, it becomes a capability accelerator, offering frameworks, perspective, and protected space to focus on long-term growth, said Mpithi.

For employers, the February fade matters. Without structured development paths, engagement drops, retention risks rise, and high-potential talent can stall.

"Encouraging a strategic approach to career development benefits both individuals and organisations," Mpithi added. According to Mpithi, the key distinction lies in treating career growth as a deliberate project rather than a fleeting resolution. **IOL BUSINESS**

## Zimele Injects R1.5m into 45 Northern Cape Businesses

Anglo American's Zimele programme and its partner Sigma have awarded R1.5 million in seed capital to 45 rural entrepreneurs in the Northern Cape, following a 12-week business development initiative that culminated in pitching sessions.

The programme saw 93 businesses from rural communities pitch to a panel of judges, with winners receiving prizes worth between R50,000 and R150,000 to help launch or grow their enterprises. Women make up 56% of the winners, and approximately 68% are youth, demonstrating the programme's commitment to inclusive economic development.

Participants received training in business model canvas methodology, design thinking and artificial intelligence tools. The University of KwaZulu-Natal partnered on the programme, providing quality assurance and academic rigour to ensure alignment with best practice in enterprise development.

"This demonstrates what's possible when we invest in people's potential and equip them with the right tools to succeed," says Larisha Naidoo, Vice President: Anglo American Zimele. "These entrepreneurs represent the future of economic participation in the Northern Cape - they're building sustainable businesses that will create jobs and strengthen their communities for years to come."

"This programme represents a new approach to

rural entrepreneurship," said Akash Singh, CEO of Sigma. "By combining practical business tools with emerging technologies like AI, we're giving entrepreneurs the skills they need to compete in modern markets while creating sustainable livelihoods in their communities."

The initiative forms part of Zimele's broader rural start-up programme around Kumba Iron Ore's operations in the Northern Cape, supporting the company's commitment to economic diversification beyond mining. Rather than traditional business plan writing, participants learned to create business model canvases - a practical, one-page tool that helps entrepreneurs understand their markets, competition and value proposition.

The timing of the programme aligned with ongoing discussions at the B20 and G20 forums about the role of small businesses in reducing unemployment and creating economic inclusivity. As official unemployment figures reach 32% (with real unemployment estimated at 45%), programmes that support entrepreneurship are increasingly recognised as critical instruments for economic participation.

Nine top winners received special recognition at the culmination event, with judges including representatives from Anglo American, Kumba Iron Ore and the University of KwaZulu-Natal assessing the viability and innovation of each business model. **Miningreview**

## GET TO KNOW YOUR DJ

Behind the Decks:  
Unmasking the Sound  
of Blacq Moov

By Lerato Mutlanyane

The air in the club is thick with anticipation. As the final synth of an amapiano house track lingers, DJ Blacq Moove doesn't gently slide into the next song — he jolts the room awake with a joyous, horn-heavy piano house edit you forgot you loved. The crowd erupts instantly. This signature switch, often dubbed the “house shock,” is more than a transition. It is a philosophy.

Josias “Blacq Moove” Mahloko (31) is a Central University of Technology (CUT) alumnus, where he studied Computer Science. His DJ journey began in 2013, far from flashing lights and packed dance floors, in the mineral-rich town of Welkom in the heart of the Free State.

“Music has always been more than just sound to me,” he says. “It’s a way to connect with people, tell stories, and create moments that stay long after the music stops.” Blacq Moove traces his early inspiration to Free State music sensation DJ Emerald, whose command of the crowd, passion and confidence planted the seed that would shape his own aspirations. In 2013, he was given an opportunity to manage studio equipment — a moment that proved pivotal. It allowed him to practice on professional DJ gear and sharpen his technical and creative skills. “Over time, I became a well-known DJ in the town and was trusted to manage entertainment at various local outlets,” he recalls.

One defining night would further cement his calling. While socialising, Blacq Moove found himself exposed to a larger entertainment scene. Driven by confidence, he approached the DJ booth and asked for a chance to play.

“He agreed and allowed me to perform later that evening. I went to fetch my CDs, and that night became one of the most memorable moments of my journey,” he says.

From there, his career steadily gained momentum. Social events in Gauteng and strategic networking opened doors, bringing new opportunities and wider audiences. A turning point came when he met Thabo the Violinist and the late DJ Botha. Their shared vision sparked an innovative fusion of live instrumentation and DJ performance. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, Blacq Moove spent time at Black Move Lifestyle, where collaboration and experimentation flourished.

“We shared a vision of elevating the entertainment scene by incorporating live instruments into DJ sets,” he explains. “Thabo is a professional violinist, and this was also the time when amapiano was rapidly gaining popularity.”

Together, they hosted live DJ performances featuring instruments, launching events and concepts at Black Move Lifestyle, including 057 Gay Pride. Each initiative was rooted in inclusivity and the delivery of high-quality entertainment experiences.

Entirely self-funded, Blacq Moove also co-founded an entertainment equipment company with Thabo and DJ Botha, further expanding his footprint in the industry. Most recently, the team launched Digital Creators Corner, a new concept designed to empower digital creators by offering them a physical space to connect with supporters beyond social media.

“The idea is to allow fans to engage directly with their favourite content creators, while creating opportunities for collaboration, growth and visibility,” he says. The inaugural Digital Creators Corner event is set to take place on 7 March 2026 at Black Move Lifestyle — Ha Mthunzi.

As Blacq Moove continues to evolve, his mission remains clear. “My goal is to keep creating meaningful experiences, pushing boundaries, and using music as a tool to unite people, tell stories, and bring hope and joy to every space I enter.” Behind the decks, Blacq Moove is not just mixing tracks — he is shaping moments.

Tyla Sparks  
Buzz With New  
Album Tease

The new year may come with new music from one of South Africa's most popular exported artists, Tyla.

The 23-year-old singer had a standout run with her 2024 self-titled debut album, which helped her build a global fan base and delivered some of her strongest visuals to date.

She followed that with a mixtape in July 2025, which also performed well on the charts, and later released her hit single “Chanel”, which continues her winning streak.

Now, the Grammy Award-winning musician is giving fans a glimpse of what to expect from her highly anticipated sophomore album.

According to Tyla, the project will lean more into fun with a touch of the feels, but “nothing too deep”, as she put it.

The “Shake Ah” singer shared a clip of herself getting ready to some local music, bumping Winnie Khumalo’s “Live My Life” in the background.

While doing her make-up, she revealed what her eagerly awaited next album has to offer.

“This album is gonna be very fun,” Tyla said. “It’s gonna be speaking about a lot of things that I have felt throughout the year. Not like deep.

“Some of it might be layered, but more so just me in my life, what I’ve been feeling, what I’ve been experiencing, and me just being a 23-year-old girl in this big world as a South African pop star from Africa,” she concluded in a video clip.

In another clip, she showed her recording equip-

ment in the room, sharing how excited she is and that she had a rough start; however, she’s back now.

Earlier, she also posted a cryptic message on her Instagram feed with the caption “#T2 OHHHH OHH”, which led fans to believe that more music is already waiting in the vault and that she is close to sharing it once final touches are complete.

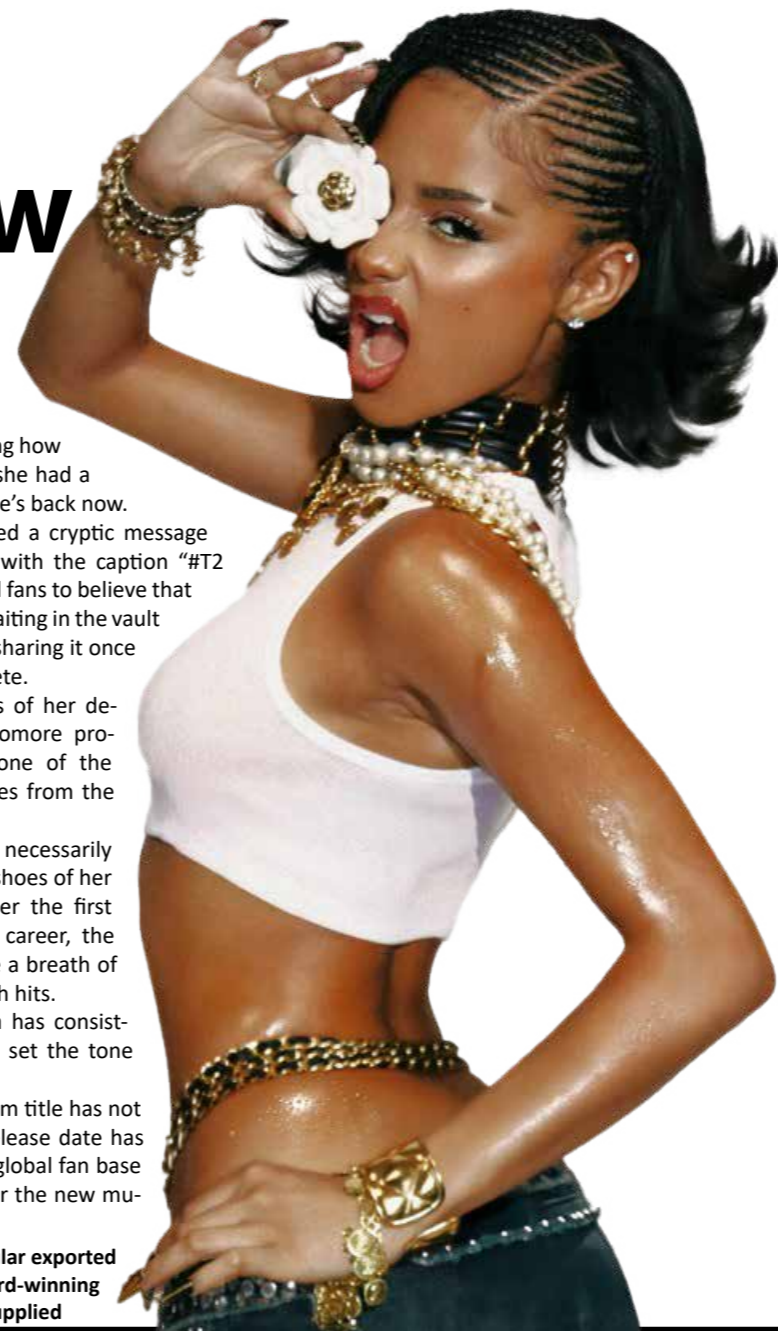
Following the success of her debut album, Tyla’s sophomore project, dubbed “T2”, is one of the most anticipated releases from the pop star.

While it does not necessarily have to fill the massive shoes of her debut, which earned her the first Grammy Award of her career, the album is expected to be a breath of fresh air and packed with hits.

This is one thing Tyla has consistently delivered and has set the tone with her music.

While the official album title has not been shared and the release date has not been revealed, her global fan base is waiting impatiently for the new music. **IOL News**

South Africa’s most popular exported artists and Grammy Award-winning musician, Tyla Picture: Supplied

Intimate Dance Video Triggers  
DBN Gogo and Blxckie Debate

By Lerato Mutlanyane

A heated debate has erupted on social media following the resurfacing of a viral dance video featuring DBN Gogo and Blxckie, with fans and critics divided over what many have described as an “uncomfortable” and “inappropriate” display.

Although the video was first streamed late last year, it continues to circulate widely, particularly on Twitter (X), where it has reignited discussions around boundaries, public personas and artistic expression.

The footage shows DBN Gogo initiating close physical contact during the dance, repeatedly touching Blxckie’s chest and holding onto him, while Blxckie appears more relaxed and reserved throughout the performance.

Much of the criticism stems from the perceived contrast between the artists’ publicly friendly relationship and the dance’s intimate, sensual tone. Some viewers questioned the artistic necessity of the choreography, suggesting it leaned more toward shock value than creative intent.

DBN Gogo and Blxckie have shared stages locally and internationally and have collaborated multiple



times in the past. However, fans noted that their previous interactions had never appeared this overt.

The video sparked further debate when users began criticising DBN Gogo for what they perceived as a lack of boundaries, particularly as Blxckie is known

to be in a relationship. Others shifted the focus to Blxckie, arguing that he should have set clearer limits during the performance.

Blxckie is reportedly in a public relationship with prominent YouTuber Hermosa, with whom he recently welcomed a child — a fact that intensified reactions from fans and fueled online commentary. Reactions across platforms such as TikTok and Facebook were mixed.

While some viewers dismissed the moment as harmless and reflective of a close friendship, others criticised both artists for blurring personal and professional lines.

One user, Tumelo Mnisi, commented, “Blxckie agreed too — it takes two to tango,” while Odwa Gwanya remarked, “He knows the trouble he’s going to get in when he gets home.”

Another user, Sensitive Gangster, added sarcastically, “Gogo is unfamiliar with Hermosa, I see.”

The controversy has since grown beyond a single dance routine, raising broader questions about the expectations placed on artists, the scrutiny of their private lives, and how social media amplifies moments that blur the line between performance and perception.

No-Show Drama: Malema Takes  
Aim at Daliwonga on Twitter

By Lerato Mutlanyane

Twitter erupted this weekend after Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema publicly called out amapiano star Daliwonga for failing to pitch up at a booked performance in Polokwane, Limpopo.

The drama unfolded after Daliwonga failed to appear at an event held at Slegeng Lounge in Seshego, a popular nightlife spot owned by Tshepo Malema, Julius Malema’s brother. The gig, which drew a sizeable crowd eager for vibes, groove and amapiano magic, was left without one of its advertised headline performers.

According to reports, Daliwonga had been booked, paid and was expected on stage, but never arrived. As attendees waited in confusion and disappointment, the artist’s absence quickly became the talk of the night.

Malema took to Twitter to vent his frustration, posting a blunt and fiery tweet:

“Don’t try me ba%\$ard.”

The post sent timelines into overdrive, with Malema questioning the singer’s professionalism and accountability. His sharp remarks reignited a broader conversation about artist responsibility in South Africa’s music industry, particularly when fans and promoters are left in the lurch.

Black Twitter wasted no time weighing in, with reactions split between those backing Malema’s stance and others cautioning against public call-outs.

Many pointed to Daliwonga’s silence as fuel for



the fire, arguing that the lack of an apology or explanation only worsened the situation.

As of press time, Daliwonga has remained silent on the matter, leaving fans and critics alike waiting for a response.

Whether the incident fades into social media gossip or sparks a deeper debate about professionalism in the entertainment industry, it highlights a new reality — where a missed gig can quickly escalate into a full-blown digital storm.

Lady Zamar Breaks  
Boundaries With  
‘Emperor Eclipse’

By Lerato Mutlanyane

When Yamikan “Lady Zamar” Banda first dropped Mamelodi featuring DJ Mshenga years ago, fans paused. The voice was unmistakable. The lyrical fingerprints were intact. But the shimmering melodies hinted at something different — a sound that stepped outside the familiar house music lane many had placed her in.

Now, Lady Zamar is doing it again — boldly. The acclaimed house music sensation is charting new creative territory with her upcoming project, Emperor Eclipse: Realm 1 – Awakening, igniting excitement across the music landscape.

Rather than a sudden genre switch, the project offers listeners a carefully considered glimpse into Zamar’s evolving artistic clarity and cultural intent. Emperor Eclipse: Realm 1 – Awakening is her first Afrobeats-enhanced body of work, positioning her as a distinctly Southern African voice entering the global Afrobeats conversation on her own terms.

This is not a conventional album rollout. Instead, the project unfolds as an immersive collection meant to be experienced progressively. Each track operates as part of a broader emotional and psychological arc, guiding listeners through shifting states of feeling and reflection.

Over the past few months, Zamar has been deliberately introducing audiences to the Emperor Eclipse universe through a series of intentional releases. Tracks such as Russian Roulette, Show Me featuring Fido, Come My Way, and the recently released Inini Newe featuring Zimbabwean music icon Jah Prayzah have offered a taste of what’s to come.

Afrobeats, often defined by rhythm and global influence, finds new texture here as Zamar weaves in unmistakable South African elements, layered with sensory depth and storytelling ambition. The aim is clear — not to replace her roots, but to expand them.

With Emperor Eclipse: Realm 1 – Awakening, Lady Zamar presents a work marked by authorship, cultural positioning and creative confidence. It is a morphing arrival — deliberate, assured and deeply intentional.

In an era dominated by algorithm-driven playlists and predictable formulas, Lady Zamar’s genre fusion stands as an act of artistic courage. It is a reminder that true creativity resists confinement. Whether one approaches the project as a house music purist or an Afrobeats enthusiast, one thing remains undeniable: witnessing an artist in rebirth is a powerful experience.

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## LEAGUE ACTION RESUMES AS AFCON CURTAIN FALLS

The continental spectacle delivered drama, but now the familiar fervor of domestic rivalry takes center stage.



## Excitement awaits as the Motsepe Foundation Championship kicks on



Emile Witbooi of Cape Town City during the match against Kruger United at Athlone Stadium. Picture: Soccerladuma

While Casric Stars and Midlands Wanderers hit the restart button in the Motsepe Foundation Championship earlier this week, the likes of Milford FC and Cape Town City will be under the spotlight in this weekend's list of action in South Africa's first division.

Prior to the lengthy international break, log leaders Milford suffered a 2-0 defeat against Midlands Wanderers on 6 December last year and will now take on the University of Pretoria at the Tuks Stadium on Saturday.

Second-placed Casric Stars, who jotted down a 0-0 draw with Midlands Wanderers this past Wednesday, thus missed the chance to topple Milford and remain one point behind the pace setters.

Elsewhere, Cape Town City will hope to pick up where they left off when they face Gomora United at the Dobsonville Stadium on Friday.

With promotion back to the Betway Premiership no doubt on their agenda, fourth-placed City are three points away from the Promotion playoff spot and last recorded three consecutive wins against Lerumo Lions, AmaTuks and Highbury respectively.

Elsewhere, Kruger United, who are in third position on 25 points, will target a winning start to the second-half of the campaign as they prepare to go toe-to-toe with Baroka at the Kanyamazane Stadium on Saturday.

Kruger suffered a 3-1 defeat against The Bees before the international break, a result that ended a five-match winning streak in the league.

### Motsepe Foundation Championship fixtures:

**Friday, 23 January**

Gomora United v Cape Town City

Highbury v Lerumo Lions

**Saturday, 24 January**

Kruger United v Baroka FC

University of Pretoria v Milford FC

Venda Football Academy v Upington City

**Sunday, 25 January**

Hungry Lions v Black Leopards

Leicesterster City v The Bees

-Supersport



Back in Action ... The Betway Premiership title race heats up as teams race towards the finish line. Picture: @KickOffMagazine

## Premiership Enters Final Stretch

*This weekend's results will indicate who is sprinting for glory and who is stumbling towards the finish line*

By: Mpho Sekharume

The Betway Premiership has officially shifted into high gear with the commencement of the second half of a highly competitive season this week.

With table toppers Mamelodi Sundowns and third-placed Kaizer Chiefs having set the tone at the upper end of the table with important midweek victories, the focus now turns to other critical league fixtures where teams will go on their respective quests to finish within the upper half top eight grouping at the end of the 2025/2026 campaign.

All eyes now turn to the Richards Bay Stadium this Friday, where ninth-placed local outfit Richards Bay hosts Sivelele FC as both teams are still looking to get one over the other by registering their first win ever against their counterparts.

The tone for this encounter was set by their cagey 0-0 draw in their first ever fixture back in August 2025. However, both sides arrive with fresh momentum following gritty midweek preparations for this clash.

Currently sitting 11th on the table with 16 points, Sivelele's mission would be to replicate the tactical discipline that saw them hold the Sundowns before the recently elapsed December break.

The 'Natal Rich Boys', just one point ahead in ninth, know that a home win is essential to main-

tain their mid-table position as the race toward the finish line intensifies.

The football action continues Saturday afternoon with a high-stakes relegation zone battle at Olympia Park as 14th placed Orbit College FC takes on Chippa United who lie flat at the bottom of the premiership log with only nine points to show after 15 league outings.

Orbit, on the other hand, enters this fixture reeling from a 2-0 midweek defeat at the hands of Mamelodi Sundowns - a result that also left them too close to the relegation drop zone with 13 points. They face a Chippa side that is desperate to ignite their season and attempt to climb up to a much safer spot to avoid probable prospects of sinking down into the second league come the end of the season.

Concurrently, a massive clash will also unfold at the New Peter Mokaba Stadium as fourth placed Sekhukhune United hosts title contenders, Orlando Pirates - who trail Sundowns by a single point with 28 points and lie second position on the log.

Sekhukhune are looking to bounce back from a disappointing 1-0 midweek loss to Stellenbosch FC, which stalled their climb to 25 points. Although they face a well-rested Pirates side, Sekhukhune has proven to be the latter's 'bogey team', especially after their 1-0 victory over the 'Buccaneers' in their previous league meeting.

Sunday's fixtures bring the curtain down on the

weekend with two intriguing matchups.

At the Moses Mabhida Stadium, sixth-placed AmaZulu FC welcomes a high-flying TS Galaxy side that is sitting fifth on the table.

Both teams are currently on 24 points, but Galaxy arrive in Durban with maximum confidence after a commanding 2-0 midweek win over Marumo Gallants - a result that propelled them into the top five with 24 points.

Galaxy is only ahead of AmaZulu on goal difference.

This encounter, therefore, serves as a direct battle for continental qualification spots, with Galaxy looking to repeat their 3-1 dominance from earlier this season.

To cap off the weekend Durban City FC faces off with Polokwane City at Chatsworth Stadium.

This impending nailbiter promises to be the most tightly contested duel this weekend given the similar runs both teams have endured in the current season.

City are eighth on the log with 22 points to show, while Polokwane sit seventh with 23 points.

Most importantly, City is looking to avenge a bruising 4-1 cup defeat at the hands of Polokwane, which will surely reduce this fixture into a thrilling affair, where margins for error will be very minimal.

As the points become more precious, this weekend's results will likely dictate who is sprinting for glory and who is stumbling towards the finish.

## PSL Log



		P	W	P
1	Mamelodi Sundowns	14	8	29
2	Orlando Pirates	12	9	28
3	Kaizer Chiefs	14	7	27
4	Sekhukhune United	14	7	25
5	TS Galaxy	15	7	24
6	AmaZulu FC	14	7	24
7	Polokwane City	14	6	23
8	Durban City	15	6	22
9	Richards Bay	14	4	17
10	Golden Arrows	15	5	16
11	Sivelele FC	15	4	16
12	Marumo Gallants	15	3	15
13	Stellenbosch FC	15	4	15
14	Orbit College FC	15	4	13
15	Magesi FC	14	2	11
16	Chippa United	15	1	9

## EPL Log



		P	W	P
1	Arsenal	22	15	50
2	Manchester City	22	13	43
3	Aston Villa	22	13	43
4	Liverpool	22	10	36
5	Manchester United	22	9	35
6	Chelsea	22	9	34
7	Brentford	22	10	33
8	Newcastle	22	9	33
9	Sunderland	22	8	33
10	Everton	22	9	32
11	Fulham	22	9	31
12	Brighton	22	7	30
13	Crystal Palace	22	7	28
14	Tottenham Hotspur	22	7	27
15	Bournemouth	22	6	27
16	Leeds United	22	6	25
17	Nottingham Forest	22	6	22
18	West Ham	22	5	17
19	Burnley	22	5	14
20	Wolves	22	1	8



## Griquas Celebrate SA Awards Nominees

By: Mpho Sekharume

Griquas Rugby is beaming with immense pride as two of its most dedicated stars take their rightful place in the national spotlight following a season of exceptional grit and skill.

George Whitehead and Gurswin Wehr were this week announced amongst the country's elite rugby talents by South African Rugby (SARU) who released their list of nominees for the SA Rugby Awards.

As a maestro at fly-half, the nomination of George Whitehead comes as no surprise to those who watched him marshal the Griquas backline this year. Whitehead acted as the calm and composed heartbeat of the team throughout a demanding campaign, where his tactical brilliance formed the foundation of the team's success.

Beyond the statistics, it was his inspirational leadership and ability to steer the side through high-pressure moments that truly set him apart as a standard-bearer for the squad.

Meanwhile, the sheer explosive brilliance of



Griquas' Dynamic Duo...George Whitehead and Gurswin Wehr have both been nominated for a top award after a great 2025 campaign. Picture: Griquasrugby

Gurswin Wehr on the wing cemented his reputation as one of the most electrifying attacking forces in the Carling Currie Cup competition.

Through his blistering speed, raw physicality and clinical finishing, Wehr became a constant source of excitement for the fans and a consistent 'headache' for the opposition. His high work rate and defensive grit proved that he is a well-rounded player, who can shift the momentum in his team's favour during critical matches.

Having both Whitehead and Wehr recognised on such a grand scale is a momentous occasion for the Griquas, highlighting a season defined by excellence and an unbreakable team spirit.

"Griquas Rugby is thrilled to celebrate two of its finest being recognised on the national stage at the 2025 SA Rugby Awards. George Whitehead and Gurswin Wehr were both nominated for the prestigious Carling Currie Cup Premier Division Player of the Year Award, underlining their outstanding contributions to our campaign this season," the franchise wrote on their website.

## Springbok Women To Face Usa In Historic 2-Test Series

The Springbok Women's rugby team will host their counterparts from the United States in a historic two-Test series in July in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

The women will open action when the Springboks kick off their Nations Championship campaign.

The two Tests, at Ellis Park on the 04th of July, and Loftus Versfeld a week later, will form part of double headers when the men host England and Scotland respectively.

The Bok Women and USA have never met in South Africa before.

Their last encounter was in March 2024, when the USA won 38-17 in London. *SABCSport*

