

UBUNTU

NEWSFLASH

Issue 653 | 6 February 2025

WEEKLY ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION

IT'S
YOUR VOICE
Internal Newsletter of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation
ubuntu diplomat

UBUNTU
MAGAZINE 

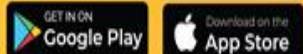
UBUNTU
RADIO 

If this newsletter doesn't load or images don't display, go to www.dirco.gov.za/ubuntu-newsflash.



Tel: +27 12 351-1000 (24-hours)
www.dirco.gov.za

Download the Travel Smart App now from the Apple App Store and Google Play.



Travel Smart with
DIRCO

#TravelSmartWithDIRCO

ALL EYES ON PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA

President Cyril Ramaphosa will tonight outline the roadmap for the country for the year ahead as he takes to the parliamentary podium to deliver the State of the Nation Address (SONA).

The President will deliver the first SONA of the seventh administration at 7pm tonight, under the theme *A nation that works for all*.

SONA 2025 takes place as South Africa recently took up the presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20)—a historical moment, as the country became the first African State to do so.

In a media briefing on Wednesday, 5 February 2025, presidential spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said the address is expected to touch on the past, the present, and the future of South Africa.

“The annual address gives us an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come as a nation and recommits us to working together to build the country we envisioned at the start of our democracy,” he said.

The address is also expected to touch on the Government of National Unity (GNU) and how it is setting about achieving its objectives.

In his Opening of Parliament Address last year, President Cyril Ramaphosa revealed that the GNU will dedicate the next five years to “actions that will advance” inclusive growth and job creation, reduce poverty, and tackle the high cost of living.

The seventh administration took office last year following the national general elections in which the South African people did not give a single clear majority to any political party.

“In the address, the President will outline the task of the GNU in implementing the three strategic priorities of the Medium-Term Development Plan, namely, driving inclusive growth and job creation, reducing poverty, and tackling the high cost of living and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state,” Magwenya said.

Parliamentary process

The SONA represents the official start of Parliament’s programme and is one of the rare occasions when the three arms of the state—the legislature, the judiciary, and the executive—gather under one roof.

During a media briefing yesterday, National Assembly Speaker Thoko Didiza described SONA as a “crucial event on our national calendar as this Parliament but also as a nation”.

“This occasion is the result of months of meticulous preparation and coordination, which underscores its significance in shaping the national discourse and setting the tone for the year ahead.

“SONA allows the President as the head of state to speak to the nation and reflect on a wide range of matters of national importance, as well as outline the progress on the commitments made by the state.

“As such, SONA signifies the highest level of the state’s accountability to the citizenry by providing updates on the government programmes, developments in legislation and policies, profiling targets, and a programme of action for the new financial year,” she said.

As the moment draws closer, leaders of the three arms of the state will form a procession and will enter the Assembly Chamber through the main entrance of the Cape Town City Hall.

The Speaker explained that SONA 2025 will “retain a full ceremonial format” including that procession.

“[This includes] a 21-gun salute, an aircraft flypast, a ceremonial guard, the singing of the national anthem, a full military band and procession involving provincial speakers and premiers, the judiciary, the Deputy President [Paul Mashatile] and the President,” Didiza said.

Youth involvement

Didiza told the media that although dignitaries from across the world will be in attendance, Parliament has also made special way for the youngest of South Africans to be involved in the day.

“As part of fostering civic awareness and public engagement, SONA will feature the Junior Guard of Honour, comprising a hundred learners from four Western Cape schools selected in collaboration with the Western Cape Department of Education.

“The involvement of these young learners is crucial in educating and exposing them to the workings, roles and functions of State institutions, helping to shape them as the leaders of tomorrow,” Didiza said.

During the media briefing, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, announced that this year’s praise singer, who will usher the President in—a staple of the SONA—will be 19-year-old Inako Mateza, who hails from the Eastern Cape.

“The proceedings of this SONA will once again include praise singing by Imbongi. This practice is managed through rotational language and provincial selection processes, which ensure inclusivity and the promotion of all our official languages.

STATE of the NATION
ADDRESS

A nation that works for all

THURSDAY | 6 FEBRUARY 2025 | 19:00

#SONA2025

stateofthenation.gov.za | presidency.gov.za | gov.za



“This custom not only adds cultural significance to the event but also provides a platform to showcase grassroots talent on the prominent national stage,” Mtsweni-Tsipane said.

Speaking to *SANews*, the award-winning Mateza described her selection as an honour.

“Being chosen as an Imbongi to welcome the President in Parliament tomorrow means a lot to me because firstly, I'm a young person who embraces culture and tradition at a time where young people are focused and celebrated for amapiano music. So, for me, being the Imbongi that will be welcoming President Cyril Ramaphosa makes me feel ecstatic.

“This opportunity will encourage me to continue the work I am doing. I've noticed that even people on social media enjoy the imbongi part of SONA. I thought I was doing this for my own enjoyment, but I see now that I have inspired others to walk this path too,” Mateza said.

The SONA will be broadcast live on television and on radio and will also be streamed live on the Presidency and Parliament YouTube channels. – Source: SANews.gov.za

FALLEN SANDF SOLDIERS ARE SOUTH AFRICAN AND AFRICAN HEROES



The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) soldiers, who were killed in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), are African heroes who laid their lives down in defence of those who are not able to defend themselves.

This is according to President Cyril Ramaphosa, who addressed the nation through his weekly newsletter on Monday, 3 February 2025.

The SANDF lost 14 members in the DRC after coming under deadly attack allegedly from M23 fighters.

South African soldiers are in the DRC as part of the Southern African Development Community Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) and the United Nations (UN) Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO).

“They were killed in violation of a ceasefire agreement between the DRC and Rwanda, facilitated by President João Lourenço of Angola. As a nation, we pay tribute to our fallen soldiers. They are South African and African heroes.

“They lost their lives in defence of the defenceless: the men, women, and children who are the victims of one of the world’s most protracted conflicts,” President Ramaphosa said.

The names of the soldiers—as released by the SANDF—are:

- Staff Sergeant William Eddie Cola
- Staff Sergeant Molahlehi Ishmael Molahlehi
- Staff Sergeant Shwahlane Theophilus Seepe
- Corporal Matome Justice Malesa
- Corporal Rinae Nemavhulani
- Lance Bombardier Itumeleng Macdonald Moreo
- Lance Corporal Tseke Moffat Molapo
- Lance Corporal Metse Stansly Raswiswi
- Rifleman Sebatane Richard Chokoe
- Rifleman Derrick Maluleke
- Rifleman Tshidiso Andries Mabele
- Rifleman Calvin Louis Moagi
- Rifleman Mokete Joseph Mobe
- Private Peter Jacobus Strydom.

President Ramaphosa has assured that SANDF participation in the DRC is “subject to the SAMIDRC mission” and will wind down “in accordance with the implementation of various confidence-building measures and when the ceasefire we have called for takes root”.

“As this happens, securing the safety of our troops remains paramount. The situation in the areas where our troops are stationed remains highly volatile. We are making every effort to ensure that our soldiers are well-equipped and sufficiently supported during the mission,” he said.

SAnews on Friday, 31 January 2025, reported on the Extraordinary Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit, which was held in Harare, Zimbabwe, on the situation in the DRC. President Ramaphosa and other leaders at the summit strongly condemned the ongoing violence in the DRC, where clashes have displaced thousands of civilians.

Silencing the guns

President Ramaphosa explained that South Africa has been a “troop-contributing country to MONUSCO since 1999, and we have lent our support to the SADC mission deployed to the region in 2023”—anchored in the commitment to “silencing the guns” on African soil.

“Supporting peacebuilding and the resolution of conflict in Africa has been a cornerstone of our country’s foreign policy since the advent of democracy, as we have sought to draw on our experience of political dialogue and national reconciliation.

“Since 1994, our country has contributed to UN peace operations in Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Nepal, and the UN-African Union (AU) Mission in Darfur. South Africa has been part of fostering peace in Lesotho, Burundi, and South Sudan. In 2022, we hosted negotiations that brokered a ceasefire between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.

“Last year marked the end of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which SANDF troops formed part of. The mission was deployed for three years to combat extremist groups in the Cabo Delgado province. The government of Mozambique has praised SAMIM for its efforts to restore stability to the region and for contributing to a vastly improved security situation,” he said.

In our best interests

According to the President, since the attack on the SANDF soldiers, questions were raised on South Africa’s DRC presence, with some saying, “we have no business being there”.

“Violence and conflict in Africa is the business of all Africans. The humanitarian, economic, and social effects of these conflicts are felt across borders and regions. Instability in any part of the continent affects the prospects for growth and development across the continent,” President Ramaphosa insisted.

He said for peace to be secured in the eastern DRC, “there must be an immediate end to hostilities and a ceasefire that must be respected by all”.

“A ceasefire is a necessary precondition for peace talks that must include all parties to the conflict, whether they are State or non-state actors, Congolese or non-Congolese.

“Diplomacy is the most sustainable pathway to achieving a lasting peace for the DRC and its people. We call on all parties to fully embrace the current diplomatic efforts that are aimed at finding a peaceful resolution, including honouring the Luanda Process.

“Strong political will and leadership will be required from all parties to the conflict, as well as respect for the territorial integrity of the DRC,” the President said.

Furthermore, for lasting peace and security to be achieved in the DRC, “the collective will of the community of nations” will be needed.

“As a country, we have a duty of support towards the nations of Africa, whose solidarity and material support helped secure our liberation.

“South Africa will not let up in its support to the people of the DRC so that they may have the peace and security they rightfully deserve,” President Ramaphosa concluded. – Source: SAnews.gov.za

.....

PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA LOOKS FORWARD TO ENGAGING WITH PRESIDENT TRUMP OVER ISSUES OF BILATERAL INTEREST AND CONCERN

South Africa is a constitutional democracy that is deeply rooted in the rule of law, justice, and equality. The South African government has not confiscated any land.



The recently adopted Expropriation Act is not a confiscation instrument, but a constitutionally mandated legal process that ensures public access to land in an equitable and just manner as guided by the constitution. South Africa, like the United States of America and other countries, has always had expropriation laws that balance the need for public usage of land and the protection of rights of property owners.

We look forward to engaging with the Trump administration over our land reform policy and issues of bilateral interest. We are certain that out of those engagements, we will share a better and common understanding over these matters.

The United States (US) remains a key strategic political and trade partner for South Africa. With the exception of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Aid, which constitutes 17% of South Africa's HIV and AIDS programme, there is no other significant funding that is provided by the US in South Africa. – Source: www.gov.za

PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA TO ADDRESS MINING INDABA

President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the keynote address at the Investing in African Mining Indaba in Cape Town on Monday, 3 February 2025.

The Indaba is the world's largest gathering of mining's most influential stakeholders and decision-makers vested in African mining.

The four-day Indaba was held from 3 to 6 February 2025 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. This year's event was held under the theme *Future-proofing African Mining, Today!*, which places the focus on sustainability and economic value for the African mining sector.

“The President's participation will highlight the contribution and continued commitment of the Indaba for stimulating interest in African mining for the sustainable economic development of South Africa and the rest of the African continent,” The Presidency said in a statement on Friday, 31 January 2025. – Source: SAnews.gov.za



SADC EXTRAORDINARY SUMMIT CONDEMNS ESCALATING VIOLENCE IN DRC, CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION

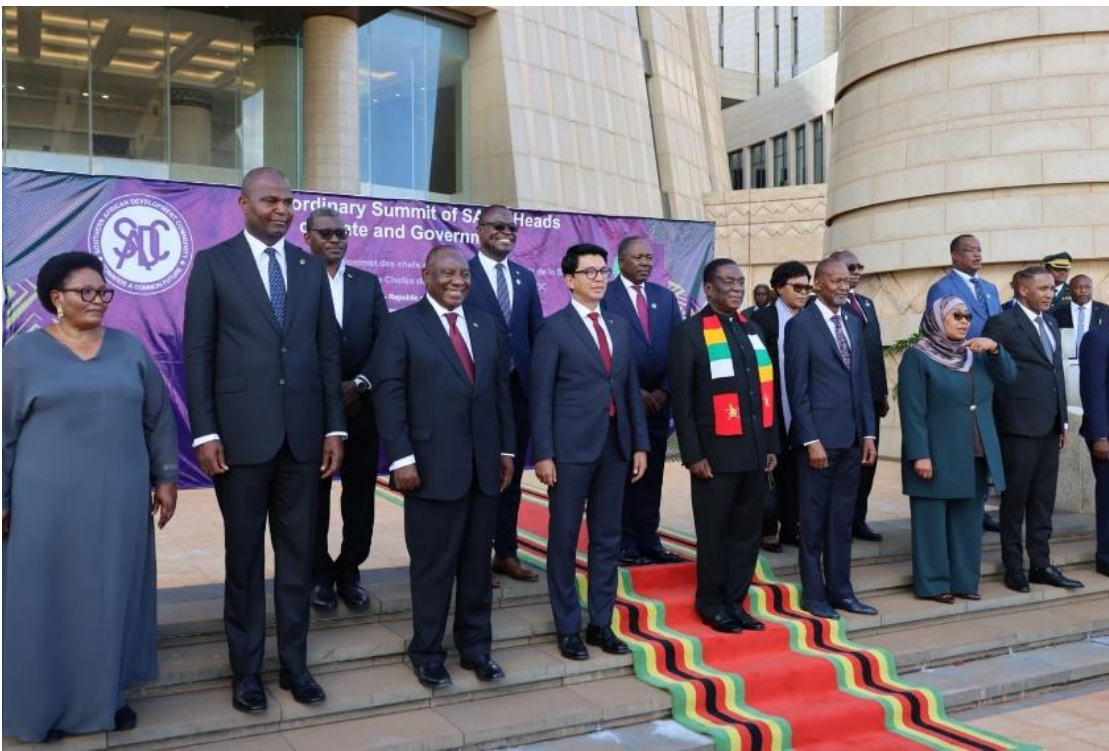
The Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders have strongly condemned the ongoing violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where recent clashes have left soldiers dead and displaced thousands of civilians.

The Heads of State and Government also reaffirmed their commitment to restoring peace and stability in the region.

The SADC leaders convened an Extraordinary Summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, on Friday, 31 January 2025, which was chaired by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chairperson of SADC, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa.

The summit brought together regional leaders, including President Cyril Ramaphosa and Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

The summit acknowledged that despite previous peacekeeping efforts, the security situation remains dire. SADC troops deployed under the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) have come under repeated attacks, undermining the 2024 Luanda ceasefire agreement.



“The summit expressed concern that the recent attacks continued to worsen the security and humanitarian situation in the DRC and called for the immediate restoration of essential utilities such as water, electricity, means of communication, and supply lines for food and other essential commodities.

“The summit condemned in the strongest terms the attacks on the SAMIDRC troops by the M23 operating in the Eastern DRC, as such actions violated the ceasefire that was brokered through the Luanda Process on 30 July 2024 and undermined peace and security of the DRC and the SADC region,” the leaders said in a joint communique issued at the conclusion of the summit.

The latest wave of violence has led to casualties among SADC peacekeepers, including 13 from the South African National Defence Force.

In a solemn moment, leaders paid tribute to the fallen soldiers from Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania, vowing to ensure their sacrifices would not be in vain.

With growing frustration over continued external involvement in the DRC conflict, SADC leaders signalled a shift towards stronger diplomatic and security measures. The summit also emphasised the need for urgent diplomatic engagement.

In a significant move, leaders called for an immediate joint summit between SADC and the East African Community (EAC) to develop a unified approach to ending the crisis.

The summit also mandated the SADC Organ Troika on Politics, Defence and Security to engage both State and non-State actors in renewed ceasefire negotiations.

The meeting reinforced SADC’s unwavering support for the DRC’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Leaders praised the resilience of SAMIDRC troops and welcomed Madagascar’s pledge to provide medical support to the wounded and displaced.

“The summit expressed solidarity with the DRC and extended its appreciation to the men and women deployed in the SAMIDRC for their dedication, resilience, and service to the preservation of peace and security in the region.”

The summit also welcomed Mozambique’s new President, Daniel Francisco Chapo, to the regional fold, while commending Tanzania’s President Samia Suluhu Hassan for her leadership in peace and security matters.

While diplomatic efforts will continue through the Luanda and Nairobi processes, SADC made it clear that regional security forces remain on high alert.

Ministers of defence and military chiefs from SADC countries will be dispatched to the DRC to assess the situation on the ground and ensure the safety of troops.

“The summit called for the immediate dispatch of ministers of defence, chiefs of defence, and troop-contributing countries to the DRC to ensure that the SAMIDRC troops are safe and facilitate the immediate repatriation of the deceased troops and those who are injured,” the communiqué said. – Source: SAnews.gov.za

.....

MINISTER LAMOLA TO HOST THE ANNUAL UBUNTU AWARDS IN CAPE TOWN

The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ronald Lamola, will host the annual Ubuntu Awards at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) on Saturday, 8 February 2025.

The event, which is held annually following the opening of Parliament, will bring together leaders from various sectors, including business, civil society representatives, cabinet members, and prominent figures, as well as heads of diplomatic missions accredited to South Africa.

As South Africa is serving as President of the Group of Twenty (G20), this year's event will be held under the theme, *Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability*.

The Ubuntu Awards ceremony was launched in 2015 to celebrate South African citizens who have made significant contributions to enhancing South Africa's image globally through dedicated service in their respective fields. – Source: www.dirco.gov.za



EXPROPRIATION LAW NOT UNIQUELY SOUTH AFRICAN

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola has urged United States (US) President Donald Trump's advisors to deepen their understanding of South Africa's constitutionally guided and democratic policies as they investigate the Expropriation Act.



This follows reports that the US President has moved to halt future funding to South Africa as his administration investigates allegations of "land confiscation", following President Ramaphosa's assent of the Expropriation Act.

US funding to South Africa is related to PEPFAR (U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) Aid and constitutes some 17% of the country's HIV and AIDS programme.

Minister Lamola on Monday, 3 February 2025, told SAnews that expropriation laws are not unique to South Africa.

"We trust President Trump's advisors will make use of the investigative period to attain a thorough understanding of South Africa's policies within the framework of a constitutional democracy. This approach will promote a well-informed viewpoint that values and recognises our nation's dedication to democratic ideals and governance.

"It may become clear that our Expropriation Act is not exceptional, as many countries have similar legislation, commonly referred to as eminent domain in the United States and governed by various acts in the United Kingdom," Minister Lamola said.

On Monday morning, President Cyril Ramaphosa, through a statement issued by The Presidency, said the South African government is "looking forward to engaging" with their US counterparts on the matter.

"South Africa, like the United States of America and other countries, has always had expropriation laws that balance the need for public usage of land and the protection of rights of property owners.

"We look forward to engaging with the Trump administration over our land reform policy and issues of bilateral interest. We are certain that out of those engagements, we will share a better and common understanding over these matters," the Presidency said.

Furthermore, The Presidency emphasised that the Act is "not a confiscation instrument, but a constitutionally mandated legal process that ensures public access to land in an equitable and just manner as guided by the Constitution".

The Expropriation Act states that property may not be expropriated arbitrarily or for a purpose other than a public purpose or in the public interest.

The Expropriation Act, which underwent a five-year public consultation process, was deliberated in Parliament and is in line with the South African Constitution.

The Act repeals the Expropriation Act of 1975 and allows for the State to expropriate land in the public interest—subject to just and equitable compensation. – Source: SAnews.gov.za

SOUTH AFRICA'S DEPUTY MINISTER ALVIN BOTES CALLS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION ON PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AT HIGH-LEVEL SUMMIT

In a stirring address on 31 January 2025 held in The Hague, at the High-Level Summit of Foreign Ministers convened by Progressive International, South Africa's Deputy Minister of International Relations, Alvin Botes, strongly condemned Israel's ongoing violations of international law and reiterated South Africa's firm commitment to securing justice for Palestinians.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Addressing a gathering of global leaders, including Her Excellency Minister of Justice Yvonne Dausub and representatives from Progressive International, Deputy Minister Botes expressed his gratitude to the organisers for convening the event, which he described as a pivotal step by nations from the Global South in collectively addressing Israel's actions against Palestine. The Deputy Minister emphasised that these efforts align with South Africa's broader vision for a more just and equitable world, governed by the rule of law.



Deputy Minister Botes stated that South Africa fully supports the declaration read out at the summit, but he also used his remarks to address key points related to the ongoing situation in Palestine. One of the most pressing issues, he noted, was the application South Africa had filed with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2023, accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. At the time, the violence in Gaza, which had left its 2.3 million residents in what many described as a "living hell," had sparked global outrage. The country sought to have the situation addressed by the ICJ, calling for the court to impose provisional measures to halt Israel's actions, which South Africa deemed genocidal.

Although the ICJ issued provisional orders compelling Israel to cease its violations, Israel refused to comply. Botes expressed disappointment that some states, particularly those with a history of settler colonialism, undermined the authority of the Court rather than holding Israel accountable for its actions.

A historic ruling by the ICJ in July 2024 affirmed the legality of South Africa's stance, declaring Israel's 57-year occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, unlawful. The Court found that Israel's practices amounted to breaches of international conventions, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Geneva Conventions. It also acknowledged the systemic nature of Israel's oppression, identifying patterns of apartheid, land annexation, and violations of Palestinian self-determination.

Deputy Minister Botes stated that despite this ruling, Israel continued its military offensive and efforts to forcibly depopulate Palestinian territories, actions which he described as ongoing violations of international law. On 18 September 2024, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of a resolution endorsing the ICJ's advisory opinion, demanding countermeasures for Israel's breaches.

Deputy Minister Botes also noted the disappointing position of countries that had once engaged in settler colonialism, many of which continued to support Israel's actions despite the clear violation of international law. He underscored the collective responsibility of the international community to uphold the legal decisions of the ICJ and other UN bodies, stressing that justice cannot be selective.

In his remarks, Deputy Minister Botes passionately argued against international law's manipulation to favour some nations while allowing others to escape accountability. He warned that permitting Israel to ignore rulings and resolutions without consequence would undermine the integrity of the international legal system and the institutions designed to foster peace and justice.

Deputy Minister Botes concluded that South Africa would continue its advocacy within global governance institutions to protect Palestinian rights, particularly the right to life, which he noted remains under severe threat due to Israeli military actions, blockades, and a humanitarian crisis in

Gaza. Drawing inspiration from South Africa's own liberation struggle, he reiterated Nelson Mandela's iconic statement: "Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." He called on all nations to join in this journey towards Palestinian freedom and justice.

In closing, the Deputy Minister made a passionate appeal to the international community to walk alongside South Africa in securing the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and to end the ongoing atrocities of apartheid and genocide. – Source: www.dirco.gov.za

AFRICA MUST ASSERT MINERALS ADVANTAGE

Africa must “assert its advantage” in order to benefit from the booming demand for industrially valuable minerals in which the continent is abundantly rich.

Africa must “assert its advantage” in order to benefit from the booming demand for industrially valuable minerals in which the continent is abundantly rich.

This, according to Mineral and Petroleum Resources Minister Gwede Mantashe, who delivered the keynote address at the 31st Investing in Africa Mining Indaba, which took place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.

“[There] is evidence that the African continent hosts significant reserves of industrially important minerals, such as manganese, copper, coal, nickel, cobalt, titanium, vanadium, lithium, and rare earth minerals.

“With the growing demand for these minerals, Africa needs to assert its advantage and take charge of the growing demand,” Minister Mantashe said.

He insisted that with all the mineral endowments that Africa possesses, it should take the opportunity to grow to become one of the most developed continents.

“The truth of the matter is that Africa is the world's richest mining jurisdiction, possessing at least 90% of the world's chromium and platinum, 40% of the world's gold, and the largest reserves of the world's cobalt, vanadium, manganese, and uranium.

“Despite having these abundant mineral resources, Africa remains poor, and this must change.

“There is no other point in time that will be more opportune for Africa to take control of its development, while still pursuing our strategic partnerships with the rest of the world,” Minister Mantashe said.

Local perspective

Turning to South Africa, Minister Mantashe noted that while the country holds 37% of the world's manganese ore reserves, only 2% is processed locally.

This, he added, is being looked into by government.

“In [recognition] of this reality and the fact that a lot of value is derived in the processing of these resources, we will this year intensify our engagements with the manganese producers and investors to invest in local beneficiation and thereby add value to these minerals.

“We are mindful that for local beneficiation to succeed, we need to guarantee consistent, reliable, and affordable electricity supply. Despite the recent setback, I can assure you that now that we have reached over nine months with no electricity interruptions, government is working on measures to reduce administered prices and in so doing, reduce the cost of doing business in South Africa,” he said.

Minister Mantashe outlined government's plans to turn South Africa into an exploration hub.

“We are alive to the fact that there can be no mining or beneficiation without exploration; hence, our steadfastness to reignite exploration investment and, in so doing, turn South Africa into an exploration site.

“Our efforts in this regard are beginning to take shape, as evidenced by progress made since we launched the country's exploration fund during the last mining indaba.

“We are buoyed by the fact that of the eight beneficiaries to receive funding from the first funding call, at least three of the projects are 100% black-female-owned, whereas all other beneficiaries are more than 50% black-owned,” he said.

Furthermore, some 20 projects are expected to receive funding to the tune of R67 million as part of government's artisanal and small-scale mining fund.



Mining licensing

The Minister assured investors and mining companies that South Africa's commitment to putting in place a new mining licensing system is well underway.

"The department and the PMG Consortium are currently finalising the design and configuration phase, which is at the heart of the new system. This phase covers all aspects of the mining regulations value chain, including, inter alia, the client management functionality, rights application submission and processing, and the rights application tracking functionality

"This phase of the project is anticipated to be completed in the next few weeks, and will, thereafter, be followed by the testing and deployment of the new system into the department's ICT system," he said.

While that work is underway, the backlog in prospecting and mining applications is also being attended to, with at least 114 mining rights, 982 prospecting rights, and 385 mining permits and ancillaries processed and finalised.

On the international stage, with South Africa being the first African country to hold the Group of 20 (G20) presidency, Minister Mantashe had this to say to African countries: "With this being the very first time that an African economy leads the G20 for a full one-year term, let us leverage on this opportunity to shape a new era of the African mining industry that meaningfully contributes to the socioeconomic development of our continent, and in building the Africa we want." – Source: SAnews.gov.za

SOUTH AFRICA'S APPLES REGAIN MARKET ACCESS TO THAILAND



South Africa is set to resume the exportation of fresh apples to the Kingdom of Thailand, marking a significant achievement for the agricultural sector.

Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen announced the reopening of the market on Tuesday, 4 February 2025, following its closure for almost 16 years.

The closure of the market, which started in January 2008 and ended in December 2024, was due to the changes in Thailand's import requirements.

"Apples are one of the most important deciduous fruits grown in South Africa, taking into consideration its foreign exchange earnings and employment creation. The South African apple industry is export orientated with approximately half of the apples produced being absorbed by the export market," Minister Steenhuisen said.

According to Hortgro, South African apple exports have surged by 40% over the past decade, which was largely driven by exports to the Far East and Asia and currently account for about 35% of all South African apple exports.

Hortgro is an industry body representing the fruit production and export sector in South Africa, specifically focused on tree fruit production.

The industry serves as a platform for producers of apples, pears, and stone fruit, and it works to support the interests of these growers, particularly in terms of market access, export opportunities, and industry development.

Steenhuisen highlighted that in 2023, a total of 32 397 workers were employed on the farms, with 129 590 dependents benefiting.

"Increased production to meet export demand can lead to more jobs, especially in labour-intensive sectors like fruit and vegetables, as well as provide for more opportunities in agro-processing, packaging and logistics," Minister Steenhuisen said.

Requirements for apples exported to Thailand

In line with the newly agreed-upon import conditions, all apples exported from South Africa to Thailand must meet specific phytosanitary standards, guaranteeing that the fruit is free from quarantine pests of concern to the Thai authorities.

Commercial orchards, packhouses, or export establishments wishing to export apples to the Kingdom of Thailand must be registered, and approved by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD).

In addition to registration, the registered orchards must implement stringent agricultural practices. These include effective integrated pest management (IPM) systems and strict orchard sanitation measures.

These protocols are designed to maintain the health of the fruit and ensure that it is free from pests and diseases that could affect both the local and international markets. – Source: SAnews.gov.za

PRET A MANGER TO OPEN ITS FIRST STORE IN AFRICA AT MELROSE ARCH

Fresh food and coffee chain, Pret A Manger, last year announced that it was coming to South Africa, and now it has been announced that its first store will launch in South Africa on 14 February 2025 at Melrose Arch in Johannesburg.

Pret A Manger, better known as Pret, opened its first shop in 1986 in the United Kingdom (UK). Its mission was to serve freshly made food and good organic coffee.

This is the brand's first foray on the African continent. It currently operates around 650 shops in 18 countries. The move marks the food-to-go brand's entry into its 20th international market outside of the UK.

In 2024, the Millat Group signed a landmark development agreement with Pret A Manger, giving Millat the exclusive license to operate Pret shops in Southern Africa.



It's been reported that Pret will offer the brand's food and drink options, including sandwiches, salads, wraps and breakfast options, with some having a uniquely South African flavour. Example products include the Soutvleis Sandwich and the BraaiBroodjie Toastie.

"This opening is an important step in Pret's global journey," says Pano Christou, CEO of Pret A Manger.

"South Africa's dynamic food culture and vibrant community made Johannesburg the perfect location for our first shop on the continent. We're thrilled to bring a touch of Pret to this incredible city while incorporating South African flavours into our menu."

The menu is expected to include a variety of freshly handmade sandwiches, salads, wraps, and breakfast options, as well as Pret's classic barista-prepared organic coffees and beverages, organic juices, energising health shots, teas, smoothies, and iced drinks.

International expansion and new franchise partnerships have driven Pret's recent sales growth, with £1 in every £4 said to be spent by Pret customers outside of the UK. The company also reported worldwide system sales of £1.1bn (US\$1.37 billion) in 2023, up 22% compared with 2022. – Source: www.bizcommunity.com

MONKEYLAND'S VISIONARY CONSERVATION MODEL GAINS GLOBAL MOMENTUM

Monkeyland, located in the lush Garden Route of Plettenberg Bay, continues to gain global recognition months after winning the prestigious SKÅL International Land and Marine Biodiversity Award.

This accolade celebrates Monkeyland's groundbreaking "Buy a Square Meter of Forest for the Monkeys" campaign, a unique initiative redefining wildlife conservation by empowering primates to "own" their habitat.

A pioneering achievement in conservation



In October 2024, the South African Animal Sanctuary Alliance (SAASA) received the SKÅL International Award in Izmir, Türkiye. This recognition validated Monkeyland's innovative approach to conservation and amplified its global impact. The "Buy a Square Meter" campaign enables individuals to secure plots of land for the exclusive benefit of wildlife, addressing a critical vulnerability faced by sanctuaries: the risk of habitat loss.

Since its launch, the initiative has secured over 200,000 square meters of forest, providing long-term protection for Monkeyland's 22-hectare sanctuary. The campaign has also inspired conservationists worldwide by introducing a new model that links land security directly to biodiversity preservation.

Progress since the award

The SKÅL Award has sparked increased global interest and support for Monkeyland. Contributions have surged, and the campaign is nearing the goal of safeguarding the entire sanctuary. Additionally, partnerships with environmental organisations and educational institutions have expanded its reach, encouraging similar conservation efforts elsewhere.

Monkeyland's model focuses on empowering wildlife through land ownership, ensuring that ecosystems remain protected from urbanisation and deforestation. By addressing the root causes of habitat vulnerability, the sanctuary safeguards not only primates but countless other species, from insects to birds, that share the ecosystem.

A global shift in conservation thinking

Monkeyland's success challenges traditional conservation frameworks where human priorities often dictate wildlife outcomes. The campaign's innovative approach prompts a critical question: what if animals could hold legal title to their homes? This vision has inspired discussions about replicating the model globally, with SAASA's leadership viewing it as a blueprint for sustainable conservation.

"This isn't just about securing land for animals," says SAASA co-founder Lara Mostert. "It's about redefining the way we approach conservation, prioritising ecosystems and wildlife as equal stakeholders in the planet's future."

Looking ahead

Despite its success, the campaign faces challenges, including raising sufficient funds to secure the remaining hectares and scaling the model to other sanctuaries. However, SAASA remains optimistic, driven by the belief that collaborative efforts can overcome these hurdles. Educational outreach programmes are also in development, aiming to inspire future generations to support conservation.

An invitation to act

Monkeyland invites individuals and organisations to join its mission by purchasing square meters of forest. Each contribution supports biodiversity protection and secures a legacy of ecological resilience.

As Monkeyland continues to lead the charge in innovative conservation, it stands as a powerful example of how bold, collaborative efforts can redefine humanity's relationship with nature and create a world where wildlife thrives. – Source: thenewspaper.co.za

BIGGEST HINDU TEMPLE IN SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE OPENS IN JOHANNESBURG

Johannesburg has welcomed a new cultural and spiritual landmark with the opening of the BAPS Mandir and Cultural Complex.

As the largest Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere, this awe-inspiring structure in Northriding, Johannesburg, is set to become a hub for faith, education, and community service.

Phase one of the temple and cultural complex opened to the public on Sunday, 1 February 2025.

Developed by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, a global spiritual and humanitarian organisation, the complex spans over 37 000 square meters. It features a 2 500-square-metre temple intricately crafted with traditional Indian architecture. This is alongside a vast cultural centre dedicated to learning and social upliftment.

Sustainability has been a key focus at the complex. Eco-friendly construction practices have prioritised water efficiency, solar readiness, and environmental conservation.

Promoting Hindu principles

Speaking at the opening, BAPS spokesperson Hemang Desai emphasised the temple's broader purpose. Open to people of all backgrounds, BAPS is dedicated to improving society by fostering the Hindu values of faith, service, and global harmony.

"The BAPS Hindu Mandir and Cultural Complex in Johannesburg will be more than a spiritual space," Desai said.

"It will be a hub for cultural enrichment, humanitarian service, and interreligious dialogue."

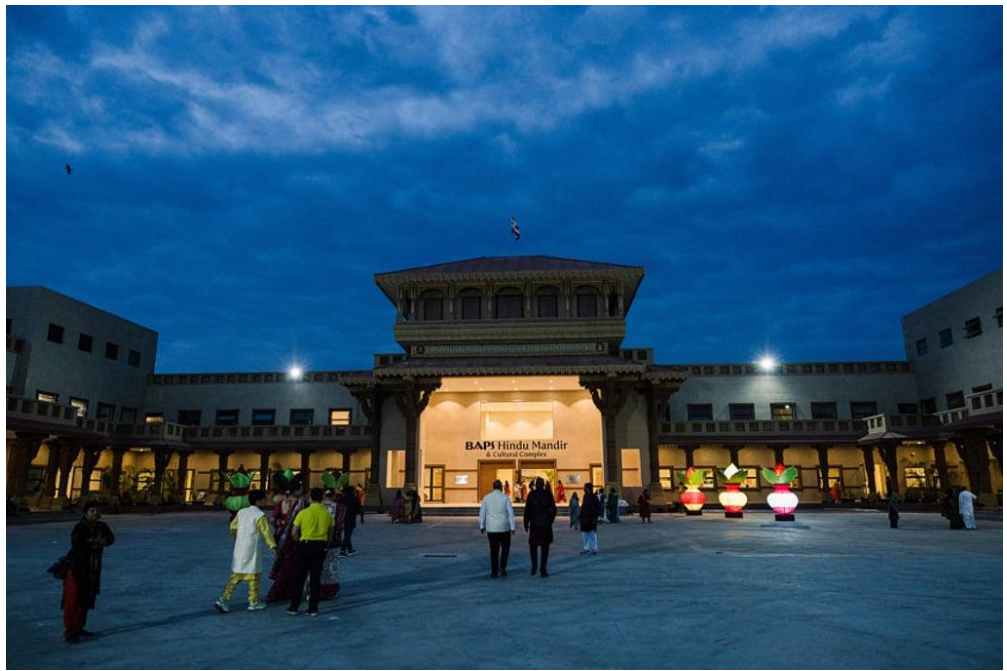
Beyond its religious significance, the complex also pays tribute to the resilience and contributions of the Indian South African community.

"It reflects their enduring contributions to South Africa and their confidence in its future as a home for generations to come," Desai added.

This week's grand opening was attended by dignitaries from across sectors, including South African government leaders and His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the global spiritual leader of BAPS.

"This event is more than just the inauguration of an architectural marvel," said Deputy President Paul Mashatile at the opening.

"It is a powerful symbol of our shared commitment to building a South Africa rooted in diversity, inclusivity, and mutual respect." – Source: www.thesouthafrican.com



INTERNATIONAL TOURISM BACK ON TRACK

International tourism has shown a recovery of 99% of the 2019 pre-pandemic levels, according to United Nations (UN) Tourism.



An estimated 1.4 billion tourists travelled internationally in 2024, indicating a recovery of 99% of the 2019 pre-pandemic levels, according to the latest World Tourism Barometer from UN Tourism.

A year of recovery and growth for tourism

International tourism showed significant recovery during 2024. Just four years after the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry has rebounded impressively. The 1.4 billion international tourists recorded in 2024 represent an 11% increase over 2023, adding 140 million more travellers to the global count. This surge in travel has pushed the industry to 99% of pre-pandemic (2019) levels, with many destinations even surpassing their 2019 figures.

SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

The Middle East shows significant increase

Several factors contributed to this impressive recovery. Strong post-pandemic demand, robust performance from major tourism source markets, and the ongoing recovery of destinations in Asia and the Pacific have all played crucial roles.

The Middle East has emerged as a particularly strong performer, with international arrivals soaring 32% above pre-pandemic levels. Europe saw a 1% increase compared to 2019. The Americas have nearly recovered, reaching 97% of pre-pandemic arrivals, while Asia and the Pacific are at 87% and continuing to gain ground.

Africa saw a 7% increase in arrivals compared to 2019 and 12% more than in 2023.

International tourist arrivals are expected to grow 3% to 5% in 2025 compared to 2024, according to preliminary estimates.

Cape Town Airport exceeds 10 million passengers in 2024

Cape Town International Airport has achieved a significant milestone, surpassing 10 million passengers in 2024, welcoming a total of 10.4 million travellers. The airport saw a record-breaking 3 million international passengers, a 10% increase from 2023.

In a social media post, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth and Tourism, James Vos, highlighted the achievement. He thanked the team at the airport.

“A big thank you to the team at Cape Town International Airport for their continued hard work in ensuring our airport remains a world-class gateway for travellers.”

Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth and Tourism, James Vos.

The achievement clearly emphasises the city’s increasing appeal to both domestic and international visitors. The surge in international passenger numbers is particularly noteworthy, reflecting the growing demand for travel to Cape Town. – Source: www.thesouthafrican.com

CAPE TOWN RANKS AS ONE OF THE BEST CITIES FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

Following Cape Town’s crowning as the Best City in the World per Time Out’s 2025 rankings, the Mother City is enjoying yet another top-tier spot amid the best-of-the-best—this time as one of the best cities for digital nomads.

Perhaps the biggest shift in work culture worldwide since computers became mainstream, remote working has completely flipped the script on how people do their jobs and where.

With the freedom of fully remote work comes many benefits, including the opportunity to travel while still clocking in for the day. As such, many people have taken the “work from anywhere” opportunity to explore the world—something that was unfathomable for most employees just a few years ago. Those who work and travel in this way are known as digital nomads, a tribe that’s expected to continue growing and influencing how we think about office culture and work-life balance.



Big 7 Travel has put together a list that ranks the best cities for digital nomads, and Cape Town has ranked in the top 10 per their 25 Best Cities for Digital Nomads List, coming in at sixth place.

The rankings considered multiple silos that influenced which cities made the list, including:

- Internet speed
- Safety index
- Availability and quality of co-working spaces
- The cost of living (including rent)
- Digital nomad communities, events and meet-ups
- Access to digital nomad visas, as well as the costs, requirements and acceptance rates of such
- Tourist visa lengths for shorter-term stays.

According to the team, Cape Town earned its spot thanks to its blend of city life and natural treasures, a newly introduced three-year digital nomad visa, quick Wi-Fi, and a thriving co-working scene. – Source: www.goodthingsguy.com

BRITS CROWN CAPE TOWN THE WORLD'S BEST LONG-HAUL CITY BREAK

With 2025 barely underway, Cape Town continues to lead the globe with yet another accolade. This time being named the Best Long-Haul City Break in the World for Brits.



In a *Which?* survey of over 1 500 members, British travellers ranked their experiences in cities outside Europe over the past year—and Cape Town took the crown. Almost 2 500 destinations were rated across seven measures: food and drink, accommodation, cultural and tourist attractions, shopping, ease of getting around, lack of crowds, and value for money.

Cape Town's unbeatable mix of adventure, culture, and affordability outshone all the others, including hotspots like Tokyo, Sydney, Dubai, and Los Angeles.

Rory Boland, editor of *Which?* Travel summed it up: "Some cities are one-trick ponies, but the standout destinations in this year's survey have it all—each offering unique cultural sights, top-class food and drink, and even sublime scenery." And Cape Town, with its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant city life, proved it's got the whole package.

This latest win follows its recent title as *Time Out's* Best City in the World, reaffirming that South Africa's Cape Town isn't just a top destination—it's the place to be in 2025.

Why Cape Town?

According to the ranking, Cape Town stands out for its stunning natural beauty, top-tier food and wine, and incredible value for money. Whether you're sipping sundowners on Signal Hill, enjoying the freshest fish and chips in Hout Bay, or diving into the thriving nightlife, Cape Town delivers world-class experiences without the hefty price tag of other top global spots.

One British traveller shared, "Cape Town is probably the world holiday destination where your pound will go furthest."

Having fun while boosting the economy and creating jobs

James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth, emphasised how Cape Town's recognition as a global leader in travel isn't just about tourism—it's a vital driver for economic and job growth.

"What makes Cape Town so special is that it's not just a place to visit—it's a place to experience. One minute, you're hiking up Lion's Head; the next, you're sipping award-winning wine in Durbanville; and by evening, you're enjoying fresh seafood with an ocean view. The best part? It contributes directly to our local economy, creating thousands of jobs and stimulating growth. You can do it all and still have room in your pocket for more!" Vos said.

With back-to-back global wins and glowing reviews from international visitors, Cape Town isn't just a must-visit destination—it's the city everyone is talking about. – Source: www.thesouthafrican.com

SOUTH AFRICA CELEBRATES FIRST BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMAN CROWNED MRS WORLD

Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Sindisiwe Chikunga, has congratulated Tshego Gaelae for making history as the first black woman to be crowned Mrs World.

WATCH THE VIDEO

The 33-year-old admitted attorney from Centurion, in Tshwane, was crowned the 40th Mrs World at the prestigious Mrs World 2025 pageant held last week in Las Vegas, USA.

“As South Africa celebrates 30 years of democracy, Gaelae’s victory is a powerful symbol of resilience, excellence, and global recognition of South African women. Her crowning moment at the 40th anniversary of the Mrs World competition is not just a personal achievement but a moment of national pride that resonates with millions of women across the country and the African continent,” Minister Chikunga said in a statement on Sunday, 2 February 2025.

Minister Chikunga has commended Gaelae for using her platform to inspire, uplift, and advocate for women’s empowerment globally.

“Tshego Gaelae has shattered barriers and redefined what it means to be a queen. Her journey speaks to the power of perseverance, grace, and purpose. She carries with her the dreams of many women who dare to break boundaries and claim their space on the global stage,” Minister Chikunga said.

The Minister acknowledged the importance of representation and visibility for black women in global leadership and beauty spaces, highlighting that “Gaelae’s win is a win for every young girl who dares to dream beyond societal limitations”.

“This moment is a powerful reminder that South African women are unstoppable. Tshego Gaelae’s journey is an inspiration, and we know she will continue to use her reign to drive meaningful change,” Minister Chikunga said.

She noted that Gaelae’s triumph comes at a time when South Africa continues to champion gender equality and women’s leadership in all sectors.

She emphasised the department remains committed to ensuring that women and young girls, especially those from historically marginalised communities, have access to opportunities that allow them to rise, lead, and inspire.

“South Africa looks forward to welcoming Mrs World 2025, Tshego Gaelae, back home and celebrating her historic victory. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, encourages all South Africans to join in celebrating this monumental achievement, and to continue supporting women who break barriers and pave the way for future generations,” the Minister said. – Source: SAnews.gov.za



WOUTER KELLERMAN ADDS ANOTHER GRAMMY TO HIS TALLY

South Africa’s Wouter Kellerman has added another Grammy to his tally after wowing the Recording Academy with the album, “Triveni”. This marks the artist’s third Grammy victory.

WATCH THE VIDEO

The golden moment at the 67th Grammys saw the Johannesburg-born Kellerman nab the Grammy in the category “Best New Age, Ambient, or Chant Album” for the album *Triveni*. The album is credited to Kellerman, Chandrika Krishamoorthy Tandon, and Eru Matsumoto, who all relished in their Grammy moment together.

Triveni aimed to unite musicians from diverse backgrounds, which was achieved with great success. Described as a “healing musical experience”, the album aspired to build cultural bridges while offering a therapeutic and peaceful sound journey.



Aptly, in his acceptance speech, Kellerman shared:

“This is testament to the fact that music has the power to unite and to heal.”

Sporting local excellence, Kellerman received his award dressed in Gert-Johan Coetzee.

To the pride of South Africa, this marks Kellerman's third Grammy victory following his win at the 65th Annual Grammy Awards alongside Nomcebo Zikode and Zakes Batwini for the proudly South African song *Bayethe* as well as at the 57th Grammys for his album *Winds of Samsara*.

In addition to these exceptional moments, Kellerman also boasts five Grammy nominations and multiple SAMA wins.

An acclaimed flautist, composer and producer, Kellerman's recent Grammy offer yet another dose of inspiration for artists with a dream back home. – Source: www.goodthingsguy.com

PROTEAS EDGE ENGLAND'S ROSES IN NATIONS CUP THRILLER

England's Roses wilted under the relentless pressure of the Proteas, who secured a 61-59 win during a thrilling Netball Nations Cup clash at Nottingham's Motorpoint Arena on Sunday, 2 February 2025.



The Proteas top the standings in the four-team tournament after their convincing opening 70-45 win over Uganda. England had begun their campaign with a 62-36 win against Malawi but found the African champions a far more difficult prospect.

The Proteas started well, but England was determined to cut off the passing lanes, forcing the Proteas back at times. Nonetheless, the Proteas took an early 6-3 lead thanks to another strong shooting display by goal shooter Elmere van den Berg.

Their fast-paced, energetic game clicked into gear, displaying the mid-court hustle and transitions that have become a feature of their play under coach Jenny van Dyk. Star goal attack Kamogelo Maseko turned from provider to finisher as the Proteas' lead stretched to 8-3.

Meanwhile, ferocious goalkeeper Sanmarie Visser's partnership with goal defence Jamie van Wyk had been key to the Proteas' early defensive effort.

England did briefly pull ahead in the second quarter, but the Proteas kept in touch. Van der Berg's partnership with Maseko, which she described as "natural chemistry" in the match against Uganda, continued to blossom, while the goal attack was also clinical in the shooting circle.

Skipper Khanyisa Chawane, meanwhile, was working hard at wing attack, while centre Refiloe Nketsa also had to put in a shift, leading the feeds into the attacking circle for the Proteas.

The teams could not be separated at halftime, with the score 30-30.

In the third quarter, the Roses again came back at the Proteas in a riveting, end-to-end contest, with Van der Berg metronomic and the England defence struggling to cope with Maseko's late circle entries. She made them pay almost every time she had a shot at goal.

The Proteas continued to force the Roses into mistakes with great defensive hustle led by the lightning-quick Visser, who was named Player of the Match, and the next few plays would mark a turning point in the match as South Africa put the squeeze on the Roses.

A Chawane intercept and lightning transition set Van der Berg up under the goal as the South African lead blew out to eight points (57-49), a lead they would hold onto for the rest of the match, despite a late resurgence from England

“This is a great bunch of girls, and we’ve been working so hard. I’m just so proud at this moment,” coach Van Dyk said after the match to Sky Sport.

“There’s still a lot that we need to do, you know. I think key moments went better for us but a few where I felt that we couldn’t quite keep it together. But they’re building and really just improving at such an accelerated pace. I’m just so proud of them.” – Source: www.iol.co.za

ICE-BOKS MAKE WAVES AT WORLD CHAMPS IN ITALY WITH 24 MEDALS

The South African ice swimming team, the Ice-Boks, moved into the world Top 10 after their heroics at the sixth Ice Swimming World Championship in Molveno, Italy.

The nine team members returned home with an impressive 24 medals and five world records in their respective age groups, adding to South Africa’s growing reputation in a sport dominated by “cold countries”.

Over 750 athletes from 42 countries competed in the world championships held from 13 to 19 January, with water temperatures plunging to 1.1°C.

Among the stars at the championships was Reino von Weilligh, one of South Africa’s most decorated athletes in ice swimming. Competing in the elite overall races, Reino won silver in the 500m freestyle, bronze in the 1000m freestyle (the most challenging races at around 1°C), and bronze in the 250 freestyle.



He also won four additional gold and silver medals in the 30-34 age group, including a world record of 2:45.0 for the 250m freestyle.

Marcelle Stiemans triumphed in the 55-59 age group, claiming four gold medals in the 50m backstroke, 50m butterfly, 50m freestyle and 200m individual medley. Stiemans broke four world records for her age group for the 50m backstroke (38.82 sec), 50m butterfly (36.42 sec), 50m freestyle (33.06 sec) and the 200 individual medley (3min.12 sec).

In the junior division, 15-year-old Luc-François Bonnici captured the Under-18 50m backstroke gold medal in his first world championships.

The International Ice Swimming Association (IISA) founder and president Ram Barkai, the Ice-Boks captain, claimed a silver medal in the VIP relay.

With 24 medals in total, South Africa ranked 10th, with the top 10 countries otherwise being dominated by northern hemisphere countries, led by France, Germany, and the United States.

“The sixth Ice Swimming World Championship showcased both the physical and mental resilience of athletes from around the world, testing their limits in one of the most challenging aquatic environments. It was also a celebration of camaraderie and the unique joy of ice swimming,” said Barkai. – Source: www.iol.co.za

SOUTH AFRICA HOPES REST ON WOMEN’S INDOOR HOCKEY TEAM AT WORLD CUP IN CROATIA

The South African women’s indoor hockey team is poised for a formidable challenge as they embark on their journey in the FIH Indoor Hockey World Cup 2025, set to unfold in Croatia.



The team, which achieved a remarkable fourth-place finish on home turf last year, faces a high-stakes group round that could lead to an extra African slot in the next tournament—an incentive that adds further intensity to their quest for glory.

The 2023 semi-finalists started their campaign on Monday, 3 February 2025, with a tough tie against Thailand at the Zatika Sports Centre in Poreč. The other teams in the group are Poland and Austria.

“Our pool is really, really difficult,” said South African coach AJ Spieringshoek.

“We’ve got Thailand, the Asian champions, and we’ve got Austria and Poland. Both of them finished third and second at the last Euro Champs, have lots of experience, lots of indoor hockey knowledge, and players that specialise in the game, so we’ve got our work cut out.

“We’re not thinking about quarter-finals or anything like that because there’s a reality that one of the teams in our pool, or one of the top teams that could potentially make the semi-final, potentially doesn’t make it out of the group just because of the strength of our pool.

“There are a lot of unknowns, but you know what you can expect from the likes of Germany, Austria, and Poland. How you execute against them is the key part, so we’re quite excited to see how we do against those teams, and we’re hoping that we can out on a show for South Africa. I think everyone’s raring to go.”

The South African team rode a wave of passionate home support to the semis in Pretoria at the last World Cup. They lost out on the bronze to the Czech Republic. The recently appointed coach is not ruling out another surprise run in Croatia.

“It was obviously a really, really special World Cup for us, coming fourth. We genuinely thought we could get a medal there, but unfortunately we didn’t,” he said.

“Finishing fourth was a massive achievement for the team and I think there’s a strong belief that we can match it and go better than that, but it’s going to require a lot of hard work.”

Spieringshoek expects some of the sport’s traditional powerhouses to again mount a strong challenge. The Netherlands are the defending champions, after they beat Austria in the final in Pretoria.

The South African men’s team is also fired up for their opening match against the hosts on Monday. They are in a tough pool that also features defending champions Austria and Poland. – Source: www.iol.co.za

.....

SOUTH AFRICA TRIUMPHS OVER NIGERIA IN TENSE DAVIS CUP WORLD GROUP II PLAY-OFF

The South African Davis Cup team had to dig deep before securing a 3-1 win over Nigeria in their World Group II play-off at Groenkloof Tennis Stadium in Pretoria on Sunday, 3 February 2025.

The South African team, captained by Pietie Norval, went into day two tied at one-all with their West African visitors, who defied the chasm in ranking places between the teams on Saturday’s opening day.

Philip Henning, the South African team’s top-ranked player, dominated his singles match against Nigeria’s No.2 David Ekpenyong, coasting to a convincing 6-1, 6-1 victory. But Nigeria’s No.1 seed Christopher Bulus, stunned the home crowd with a 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) win over South Africa’s Kris van Wyk in the second singles rubber.

That set up a nervy second day for the South Africans despite skipper Norval’s confidence in his team’s ability in the doubles.

Perhaps an indication of the home team’s jitters was the decision to partner Alec Beckley with Henning in Sunday’s doubles rubber against the Nigerian pair of Abua Canice and Michael Emmanuel, instead of 18-year-old Leo Matthyssen.

The plan seemed to work to perfection as the more experienced South Africans made light work of their rivals first up, winning 6-0 6-3.

But it seemed like a huge gamble when Henning again took to the court a short while later to face Bulus in the reverse singles. It looked like skipper Norval was taking no chances and wanted his star player to settle the tie without going to the final singles match.

It did not look like Bulus had read the script, however, as he took a tight first set in the tiebreak with a solid service game backed up by strong defensive and counter-attacking ability from the baseline. He was also able to change pace, throwing in the odd drop shot to keep Henning on his toes.

Veteran Norval's gamble was in danger of backfiring, but the top-ranked South African showed great fighting spirit to win the second set 6-4. He was finding his range with his powerful ground strokes as he moved his rival around in the sapping Pretoria heat, driving him deeper into the court.



It was Bulus' turn to look like tired, serving with the scores tied at 2-2 in the third set and Henning looking re-energised. The Nigerian managed to stave off a break point but sent his next shot wide to surrender the game.

When Henning held serve to love to take a 4-2 lead, Bulus looked like he was running on fumes. Yet he refused to go down without a fight. Henning had to work for the win in the end. He took the final set 6-4.

Norval was a relieved captain, reserving special praise for Bulus. He said the plucky Nigerian played more like a top-200 or top-300 player, not one ranked outside the top 1000.

“No one expected him to beat Kris 7-6 in the third set but he did (on Saturday),” he said in his post-match interview. “Halfway through the second set, Philip and I didn’t know what to do, to be quite honest. And thank goodness, the fighter that he was, he found a way.

He admitted that with the tie hanging in the balance, and Bulus refusing to lie down, Van Wyk began warming up in anticipation of a nerve-racking decider.

“I think Philip played as good as he could but Bulus brought it, so well played to him, but thank goodness we didn’t have to go into that last one.”

South Africa will now play in World Group II, with a chance to advance to World Group I, which boasts some top tennis-playing nations. – Source: www.iol.co.za



For back issues of Ubuntu NewsFlash, visit: www.dirco.gov.za/ubuntu-newsflash