

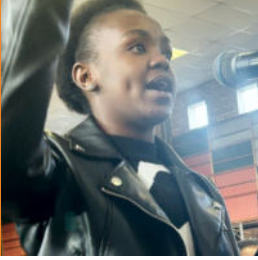
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25 199 young Mpumalanga voters register ahead of local government elections

● LUCAS SHONGWE

MBOMBELA – More than 25 000 young people under the age of 21 registered to vote in Mpumalanga during the Electoral Commission of South Africa's (IEC) voter registration weekend ahead of the 4 November 2026 Local Government Elections. The province recorded 212 281 voter registrations and registration updates over the weekend of 20 and 21 June, placing Mpumalanga sixth nationally. According to the Electoral Commission's statement issued on 22 June 2026, nearly three million South Africans registered or updated their details during the registration weekend, compared with 1.7 million in 2021. Of Mpumalanga's 40 722 first-time voters, 25 199 were under the age of 21. IEC Mpumalanga spokesperson Thanduxolo Chembeni said 2 680 registrants were under the age of 18, while 22 519 were between the ages of 18 and 21. A further 186 000 registrants were older than 21. Chembeni said the figures showed that young people were actively participating in the electoral process. "It is not an easy outcome to get. This is due to a lot of effort directed at voters to come out and register, especially the youth, so that they are ready to vote on 4 November," he said. He credited the IEC's Tertiary Institution Campaign, which ran from January to

March, with helping register students at colleges and universities across the province. "We managed to register a lot of youth at institutions of higher learning," he said. He added that political parties and civil society organisations also encouraged young people to register. While 40 722 people registered for the first time, 171 559 existing voters updated or confirmed their registration details, accounting for 81% of voter activity in the province. The IEC has encouraged voters who have moved because of study, work or other reasons to update their registration details before the elections. In local government elections, voters may only vote at the voting station where they are registered. To encourage more registrations, the IEC has made its Online Voter Registration Portal zero-rated, allowing voters to register or update their details without using mobile data. A second voter registration weekend will take place on 1 and 2 August 2026, while online registration will remain open until the end of that registration period. The national voters' roll now

stands at 28.5 million voters. Seventeen-year-old Simangaliso Sindane from Ward 23 in Mhluzi said registering for the first time gave him an opportunity to influence the future of his community. "I registered because I want to help

make the right decisions for the area I live in. Right now, things are not going the way they should, so I believe my vote will make a difference in choosing someone who can best represent my interests," he said.



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info@highveldchronicle.co.za

HIGHVELD CHRONICLE

Editor

Magnificent Mndebele

064 785 9746

Advertising

081 303 7023

info@highveldchronicle.co.za

Mulawu Mathye

072 452 9700

Nodicah Fundama

072 817 9329

Esther Mahlangu

082 050 6407

Journalist

Lucas Shongwe

071 499 8950

Rodney Hlatshwayo

076 691 6658

PUBLISHER,

Layout & Design

HIGHVELD CHRONICLE

info@highveldchronicle.co.za

Contact Numbers

081 303 7023

www.hconline.co.za

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"the path of the righteous winds upwards to flee from hell beneath us" Prov 15:24



When Logic Fails

By Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:20)

Human logic breaks down in crisis. The mystery is enormous, and it is the enormity of it all that calls for faith. I'm sorry if that sounds like an overused bromide. But if we could unravel it, why would we need faith? If that were true, all we'd really need is the answer in the back of the book and someone to point it out to us; we'd read it, and that's all there would be to it. But God's plan is that we walk by faith, not by sight. It is faith and patience that stretch us to the breaking point. Such things send doubt running.

When you find yourself dealing with doubt, let me give you three things to remember. First, God cannot lie. He can test, and He will. He can say no, and He sometimes will; He can say yes, and He will; He can say wait, and occasionally He will—but God cannot lie. He must keep His word. Doubt says, "You fool, you're stupid to believe in a God who

puts you through this." By faith, keep remembering that God cannot lie.

Here's the second piece of advice that helps me: We will not lose. Doubt says, "You lose if you trust God through this. You lose." If I read anything in this whole section of Hebrews 6, I read that in the mysterious manner of God's own timing, for some unexplainable and yet unchangeable purpose, those of us who trust Him ultimately win—because God ultimately wins.

There's a little chorus Christians love to sing. It is quiet and tender, yet tough and true:

In His time, in His time,
He makes all things beautiful
In His time.

Lord, please show me every day,
As You're teaching me Your way,
That You do just what You say,
In Your time. I

God cannot lie. We will not lose. Your mate has walked away from you, an unfair departure—you will not lose, child of God. Your baby has been born and for some reason, it has been chosen to be one of those special persons on this earth. You will not lose. You've waited and waited, and you were convinced things would improve, yet things have only gotten worse—keep remembering, you will not lose. God swears on it with an oath that cannot change. You will not lose. Third—and I guess it's the best of all—is that our Lord Jesus does not leave. To quote a verse from Scripture, He "sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). "Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever . . ." Hebrews 6:20. That means He is there at any time . . . and always.

God cannot lie. He will always keep His Word. You cannot lose. God is trustworthy. Our Lord Jesus does not leave. He is with you even now.

IEC acts after voter registration controversy in Victor Khanye

● RODNEY HLATSHWAYO

DELMAS – The Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) has taken disciplinary and legal action against an electoral official following a voter registration incident in Victor Khanye that sparked political controversy during the recent voter registration weekend.

The incident, which occurred at Okela Primary School in Ward 9 on 21 June 2026, gained widespread attention after a video circulated on social media showing an IEC official allegedly in possession of multiple identity documents.

EFF Victor Khanye Party Liaison Committee member Lebogang Mayisa told the Highveld Chronicle that he was monitoring voter registration activities when he noticed what he believed to be irregularities.

According to Mayisa, he saw an ANC member with the school's principal, who was serving as the IEC station supervisor, before entering the registration room, where he allegedly found an IEC registration official with several identity documents belonging to different people.

"I immediately questioned whether such conduct was allowed under electoral legislation," Mayisa said. He said he recorded the incident because he believed it warranted documentation and reported his concerns to the station supervisor. Mayisa alleged that the supervisor did not immediately investigate the complaint.

"The conduct was questionable because when a concern is reported, a supervisor should investigate and establish the facts," he alleged. He also claimed that an ANC member later described the incident as an "honest mistake".

The video was later shared on social media, prompting responses from both the EFF and the IEC.

Mayisa further alleged that election results recorded at the voting station during the 2021 Local Government Elections differed from figures he recalled as a party agent. However, he provided no documentary evidence to support the claim.

The allegations formed part of a complaint submitted by the EFF, which called for an investigation.

In response to questions from the publication, the IEC said voter registration procedures require each applicant to present their own identity document for verification and that the presence of multiple identity documents on a registration desk would not be consistent with standard procedures.

The Commission said it conducted an internal investigation and obtained statements from both the official involved and the station supervisor.

Following the investigation, the IEC opened a criminal case against the official, terminated her contract and barred her from future employment with the Commission.

The Highveld Chronicle also sought comment from the ANC Nkangala Region regarding Mayisa's allegations. However, no response had been received by the time of publication.

The IEC said no findings had been made regarding the broader allegations of electoral manipulation raised by Mayisa and that those matters remain under investigation.

The incident has renewed debate about electoral integrity and the importance of oversight during voter registration ahead of the 2026 Local Government Elections.



30 JUNE MARCH: Government, organisers agree on peaceful single provincial march

● LUCAS SHONGWE

MIDDELBURG – The planned provincial march against illegal immigration will go ahead in eMalahleni on 30 June after organisers and the Mpumalanga Provincial Government reached an agreement during a meeting held on 25 June 2026.

Mpumalanga Premier Mandla Ndlovu met organisers at the Nkangala District Municipality, accompanied by MEC for Community Safety, Security and Liaison Jackie Macie, Nkangala District Executive Mayor Thomas Ngwenya, senior government officials and law enforcement representatives.

According to the provincial government, the engagement was aimed at ensuring that the demonstration proceeds peacefully, safely and in accordance with the law while protecting the constitutional right to peaceful assembly.

The government said the meeting also sought to promote peace, stability and public safety while minimising disruption to communities, businesses and economic activity.

Speaking to the Highveld Chronicle, march organiser Dikgetse "Slash" Sepenyane said the parties agreed that a single provincial march would take place in eMalahleni, while regional marches would be held in Gert Sibande and Ehlanzeni.

"Yesterday, we had a meeting with the Premier of Mpumalanga, Comrade Mandla Ndlovu, the MEC for Safety and Security, Comrade Jackie Macie, in relation to the provincial march that is going to take place on the 30th. In that meeting there were heads of departments and the Provincial Commissioner, where we

resolved that there will be one big provincial march. It will be held in Emalahleni on the 30th, while Gert Sibande and Ehlanzeni will have regional marches," Sepenyane said. Sepenyane said organisers intended to hand over what they described as an instruction rather than a memorandum, calling on government to intensify action against illegal immigration.

"The Premier will receive an instruction, not a memorandum. We want the Premier to arrange buses, and where countries have citizens who are in South Africa illegally, they should bring buses and collect them. If they cannot do that, the government must arrange transport to take undocumented foreign nationals to the nearest border posts," Sepenyane said.

Sepenyane also claimed that, despite comments by Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni that government would assist undocumented foreign nationals who wished to leave South Africa, there was still no clear implementation plan.

"There are currently no identified collection points or transport arrangements explaining how people who want to leave the country will be assisted. Without involving local structures, the process is likely to fail," Sepenyane said.

Ahead of the provincial march, Sepenyane said organisers planned to distribute notices to undocumented foreign nationals in

the Victor Khanye Local Municipality.

"We are going to deliver notices informing people who are in the country illegally to leave. If they do not leave, they will be doing so at their own peril," Sepenyane said.

The Mpumalanga Provincial Government reiterated its commitment to continued engagement with all stakeholders to ensure that the march proceeds peacefully, lawfully and without compromising public safety or the wellbeing of residents across the province.

The 30 June march is being organised primarily by the March and March Movement, a South African civil organisation that has set 30 June 2026 as its deadline for undocumented immigrants to leave the country.

The movement says its objective is to pressure government to strengthen action against illegal immigration.

Following the announcement of a R600 million budget for security measures during the protest, the movement's leader, Jacinta Ngobese-Zuma, called on government to use the additional resources, including increased law enforcement personnel, to identify and remove undocumented foreign nationals.

March and March has publicly stated that it is not calling for violence during the marches. However, the organisation has also said it will not accept responsibility for any incidents that may occur during the protests, arguing that protecting the country remains government's responsibility.

This position has drawn criticism from government, with President Cyril Ramaphosa warning citizens not to take immigration enforcement into their own hands. Police have also announced extensive national security deployments ahead of the planned marches.



Thembisile Hani Municipality, NYDA boost youth-owned businesses

● EMMANUEL N. MTHIMUNYE

KWAGGAFONTEIN – Youth-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality have received funding and tools of trade through a partnership between the municipality and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) to help them start and grow their businesses.

The handover, held on 25 June 2026, aims to improve business operations, promote inclusive economic participation and strengthen local economic development.

Executive Mayor of Thembisile Hani Local Municipality Lesetja Dikgale said the initiative reflected the municipality's commitment to supporting young entrepreneurs.

"We are grateful for this outreach. We have managed to partner with the NYDA to assist the community. We have managed to hand over these tools of trade to five young people. We are grateful to see these young people receiving support. They will now be able to start their businesses," Dikgale said.

Dikgale further encouraged young people to take advantage of such opportunities, saying the programme had initially aimed to support 20 businesses. However, only five businesses benefited because of the low number of applications, resulting in the municipality returning a portion of the allocated funds.

During his State of the Municipality Address, Dikgale announced that the annual support of R5 million is set aside for SMMEs and cooperatives. NYDA representative Gladice Mahlangu said the agency's support extends beyond grant funding.

She said beneficiaries also receive business mentorship, skills development and ongoing support to help build sustainable businesses and

create employment opportunities in their communities.

"You don't need to come to the NYDA to access our services. That is why relationships with the municipality are important. If you can reach the municipality, it means you can also access the NYDA," she said.

Sonto Mthimunye, founder of Namzoro Funeral Parlour and a beneficiary of last year's programme, said the support had enabled the business to expand.

"Last year the NYDA and the municipality helped me grow my business with marketing tools and equipment. From that support I have managed to hire five people and my business is running smoothly," Mthimunye said.

Another beneficiary, Joyce Sibanyoni of Bundo Inn, who runs a catering business and lives with a disability, said the equipment she received would help expand her services.

"I'm really grateful for what the municipality and the NYDA have done for me. I received two jumping castles, two stretch tents, two tables and 40 chairs for catering. I will use this to grow my business," she said.

Packaging business owner Emmah Jiyane said the manufacturing equipment would help complete her product line.

"I received manufacturing equipment that I needed to complete my packaging business. It will help me grow my business," Jiyane said.

The municipality and the NYDA said the partnership aims to reduce youth unemployment by helping young entrepreneurs build sustainable businesses that contribute to the local economy.



Executive Mayor Lesetja Dikgale with the 2026 MSME beneficiaries who received tools of trade

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Portfolio Committee welcomes MTPA's Loskop Dam report, seeks clarity on key issues

● LUCAS SHONGWE

MIDDELBURG – The Portfolio Committee on Economic Development and Tourism has requested additional information from the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) after raising concerns over gaps in its report on Loskop Dam Nature Reserve.

During an oversight visit to the reserve on Thursday, 25 June 2026, committee members said the report lacked critical information needed to properly assess one of Mpumalanga's key tourism assets. The committee has given the Department of Economic Development and Tourism and the MTPA seven days to submit written responses and an updated report.

Committee member Trudie Grové-Morgan raised concerns over the reserve's unproclaimed land, warning that it could pose future legal challenges.

"This is the first thing that needs to be resolved. If the land is not proclaimed for the reserve, it can bring us problems at the end of the day," she said.

Committee Chairperson Lucky Mbuyane, supported by committee members Steven Sekoakoa and George Lukhele, questioned MTPA officials on several shortcomings in the report, including the absence of detailed marketing plans, tourism development strategies, expenditure reports and operational information.

MTPA Acting Chief Executive Officer Lemmy Mdluli acknowledged that budget constraints had affected marketing efforts but said the agency continued promoting the reserve through events such as the Loskop Marathon.

"We do participate and put resources into ensuring runners come and experience what we offer here," he said.

The committee also requested a monthly expenditure breakdown and details of the 25-year Memorandum of Agreement with WeWild Africa, formerly the Aspinall Foundation, signed in February 2024 to unlock R120 million in investment. Mdluli said the full agreement would be submitted to the committee.

Members further instructed the agency to conduct and submit a comprehensive game census detailing wildlife numbers

across the reserve.

Executive Manager for Biodiversity Conservation Nomcebo Kunene agreed that the census was essential for effective wildlife management.

The committee also raised concerns over strained relations between MTPA and the Mmamarumo, Dindela and Rampholodi Community Property Associations (CPAs), which have land claims covering about 23.98% of the reserve.

Mdluli said the agency had recently held a three-day workshop with the CPAs and was working to rebuild relationships with the communities and WeWild Africa.

Responding to concerns raised by committee member George Lukhele over the use of Afrikaans property names in the report, Kunene explained that the names originated from the original farm portions and existing land claims.

Beyond the report itself, committee members questioned MTPA on several operational challenges.

These included a 61.76% vacancy rate, deteriorating infrastructure at the main entrance, staff accommodation and other facilities, poor network coverage affecting visitor safety and the recent killing of two rhinos, ending eight years without a poaching incident.

Kunene said MTPA follows national dehorning protocols and confirmed that all 43 rhino horns are securely stored, microchipped and fully accounted for.

Mdluli added that the agency was already engaging service providers to improve network coverage across the reserve.

Committee members also criticised the absence of the Nkangala District Municipality and Steve Tshwete Local Municipality from the oversight visit despite the reserve falling within their jurisdiction.

Representatives of WeWild Africa told the committee that the organisation's R9.5 million investment was supporting

improved security, water management and wildlife protection within the reserve.

Despite these interventions, the committee maintained that further information was required before it could fully assess the reserve's operations.

"Loskop Dam is a strategic economic contributor. We cannot manage what we don't measure, and we cannot attract tourists with incomplete plans," committee members said.

Loskop Dam Nature Reserve, situated about 55km north of Middelburg in the Olifants River Valley, is the third-largest reserve managed by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency. Covering approximately 23 612 hectares, the reserve was established in 1942, four years after the completion of the Loskop Dam, which was built to support downstream irrigation. Today, it is one of Mpumalanga's leading nature-based tourism destinations, offering visitors game drives, boat cruises, hiking trails, 4x4 routes, birdwatching, watersports and renowned freshwater angling. The reserve is home to a rich diversity of wildlife, including giraffe, zebra, white rhino, wildebeest and numerous antelope species, while the annual Nashua Loskop Wild Challenge continues to attract thousands of athletes from across South Africa. The committee said strengthening governance, infrastructure and conservation at the reserve is essential to unlocking its full tourism and economic potential.



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Tucked away in Mpumalanga's Lowveld, Manyeleti Game Reserve offers a different kind of experience. Here, the soundtrack is birdsong at sunrise, the distant rumble of elephants moving through the bush and, if you're fortunate, the unmistakable roar of a lion echoing across the plains.

Covering more than 23 000 hectares of protected wilderness, Manyeleti remains one of the province's lesser-known safari destinations. Its greatest advantage lies in what visitors cannot see – the absence of a fence separating it from the iconic Kruger National Park. Wildlife moves freely between the two conservation areas, allowing visitors to experience nature as it was meant to be.

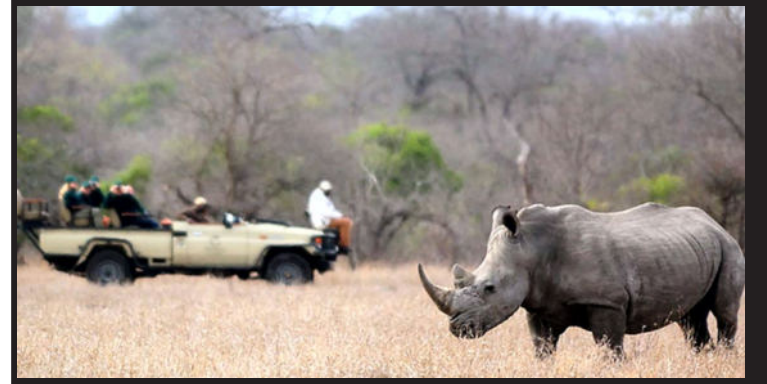
This year, Kruger National Park celebrates 100 years of conservation, a milestone that reflects a century of protecting one of Africa's most remarkable ecosystems. Manyeleti forms part of that greater wilderness, offering visitors the opportunity to experience the same untamed landscape from a quieter, more intimate setting.

The reserve is home to the Big Five, along with cheetahs, wild dogs, hippos, crocodiles and hundreds of bird species. Yet many visitors will tell you it is often the quieter moments that leave the deepest impression – watching a herd of elephants gather at a waterhole, hearing a fish eagle call across the river, or sitting around a campfire beneath a sky filled with stars.

Unlike busier destinations, Manyeleti offers space. With only a handful of lodges spread across the reserve, game drives often feel personal, giving visitors time to appreciate not only the wildlife but also the landscapes, the stories shared by experienced guides and the rhythm of the African bush.

Manyeleti is not simply about spotting wildlife. It is about slowing down, reconnecting with nature and experiencing one of Mpumalanga's greatest tourism treasures at its own pace.

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Residents use Pre-TLP hearing to voice service delivery concerns

● LUCAS SHONGWE

MIDDELBURG – A fall on an unpaved, poorly lit walkway has left 74-year-old Gogo Esther Mdluli with a permanent knee injury, a painful experience she says could have been prevented had long-standing service delivery concerns been addressed. The Mhluzi Extension 6 resident shared her story during the Mpumalanga Provincial Government's Pre-Taking the Legislature to the People (Pre-TLP) public hearing at Adelaide Tambo Community Hall on Friday, 26 June 2026. The hearing marked the conclusion of the two-day Pre-Taking the Legislature to the People (Pre-TLP) programme, held from 25 to 26 June in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. The programme gives residents an opportunity to raise service delivery concerns directly with Members of the Executive Council (MECs), provincial departments and municipal representatives. Mdluli said she fell and broke her knee while walking along an unpaved footpath between Tokologo and Extension 8 after tripping over a rock in complete darkness between the Tokologo four-way stop and Junction Lifestyle. "I can't even walk properly now. My knee is finished and has a green scar," Mdluli told officials. She said the injury was the result of

years of neglected infrastructure. "As residents of Extension 6, we are not taken seriously by Steve Tshwete Municipality. We've been begging for paved sidewalks and working streetlights for years. Nothing happens." "We are sitting in the dark as if we are living on the farms. Is this how gogos must live in 2026?" Her testimony left the hall in silence as other residents nodded in agreement. For many in Extension 6, her experience reflected broader frustrations over deteriorating service delivery. Mdluli was among dozens of residents from across Steve Tshwete Local Municipality who used the platform to raise concerns about service delivery. Among the issues raised were: Frequent water and electricity interruptions. Long waiting lists for RDP houses and delays in issuing title deeds. Youth unemployment. Drug and alcohol abuse. Local SMMEs being excluded from municipal projects. Underground water flooding graves in local cemeteries. Residents also identified Lesedi and Naledi as areas requiring urgent intervention. Health MEC Sasekani Manzini,

responding on behalf of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, assured residents that every concern raised had been recorded. "All issues raised by residents have been recorded, and the Executive Council will meet during the September Taking the Legislature to the People week to develop a full provincial response," she said. Manzini also announced immediate health interventions, including the deployment of two additional ambulances, further training for emergency personnel and a dedicated reporting number for ambulance delays. Residents were encouraged to report delayed ambulance services on 076 870 8769. Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature Sam Masango said all concerns raised during the hearings would be consolidated into a report through the Legislature's portfolio committees. "That report will be sent to the government for implementation," he said. Masango said the Legislature would continue monitoring progress and provide feedback to communities through portfolio committee processes, future Legislature engagements and the September Taking the Legislature to the People programme.



Hundreds of livestock vaccinated against foot-and-mouth disease

● RODNEY HLATSHWAYO

DELMAS – More than 350 livestock have been vaccinated against foot-and-mouth disease as part of an ongoing Veterinary Services campaign aimed at preventing outbreaks and protecting farmers' livelihoods. The vaccination programme, held at Mandela Kraal on 19 June 2026, also gave students enrolled in a livestock and crop farming learnership practical experience in animal health management. Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious viral infection that affects cloven-hoofed animals, including cattle, goats, sheep and pigs. The disease causes painful blisters in the mouth and on the feet, resulting in reduced milk production, weight loss and significant economic losses for farmers. Local livestock owner Simon Jonathan Kgomo said the programme had improved his understanding of the importance of vaccination and livestock care. "The programme was very important for my livestock because I now understand the role vaccination plays in livestock farming. Last week I saw two cows showing signs of foot-and-mouth disease. It also helped me see the bigger picture of farming and taught me that, as a young farmer, I need patience and genuine care for my livestock," he said. Tebog Sejang, Chief Animal Health

Technician in the Directorate of Animal Health under Veterinary Services, said farmer education remains a critical part of the department's work. She encouraged farmers to control internal and external parasites to prevent diseases such as gallsickness and to vaccinate cattle annually against diseases common in the area, including lumpy skin disease. Sejang also advised farmers to provide protein licks during winter to prevent nutritional deficiencies and to castrate young bulls to avoid inbreeding. She added that sheep and goats should be vaccinated against pulpy kidney, receive booster vaccinations after three weeks and be dewormed to improve productivity and reduce mortalities. She said 211 animals were vaccinated at Mandela Kraal

during the campaign, bringing the total number vaccinated across several kraals to more than 350 out of a target of 1,500 livestock. Learner farmer Tinyiko Vuma said vaccination remains one of the most effective ways to prevent outbreaks and protect the livestock industry. "Foot-and-mouth disease is highly contagious and has serious implications for livestock productivity and trade. South Africa risks losing export markets whenever outbreaks occur. Vaccination is therefore essential, particularly in disease management areas where wildlife can carry and spread the virus to domestic livestock," she said. Veterinary officials said continued vaccination programmes, disease surveillance and farmer education remain essential to protecting animal health, supporting rural livelihoods and safeguarding South Africa's agricultural economy.



Youth urged to seize opportunities at Victor Khanye empowerment programme

● NODICAH FUNDAMA

DELMAS – Young people from across the Victor Khanye Local Municipality (VKLM) were encouraged to take advantage of development opportunities and play an active role in their communities during a youth empowerment programme held at Sinethemba Hall. The programme, organised by the VKLM Youth Development Unit in partnership with the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), Highveld Chronicle and other stakeholders, aimed to equip young people with information, practical skills and opportunities to support their personal and professional development. Among the opportunities presented was the upcoming Nkangala Arts and Music Awards (NkAMA) 2026, an initiative by Highveld Chronicle in partnership with the Nkangala District Municipality that provides a platform for local artists, creatives and sports teams to showcase their talents and gain recognition. Officials from the Department of Social Development encouraged young people to establish and register Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), explaining that registered organisations can access development opportunities and government funding if they meet the required registration criteria. The department also encouraged young people to identify challenges within their communities and develop initiatives that promote community development, entrepreneurship and job creation.

In addition, officials highlighted life skills programmes offered by the department, including career guidance and CV-writing workshops designed to improve young people's employment prospects. The programme also formed part of activities marking the 30th anniversary of South Africa's Constitution. VKLM Speaker Henry Ngoma urged young people to understand the Constitution and participate in shaping the country's future. "We must ask ourselves how far we have come as a country and what still needs to be done to address unemployment, poverty and inequality," Ngoma said. Ngoma said understanding the Constitution enables citizens to protect their rights and contribute to building stronger communities. "It is important that we understand where we are going as a country so that we can work together and build vibrant communities that create opportunities for everyone," Ngoma said. The Government Communication and Information System also encouraged young people to register to vote and participate in elections, describing voting as an important way for citizens to influence the future of their communities and the country. The programme concluded with a call for young people to make use of available opportunities, become active citizens and contribute to the social and economic development of their communities.



Youth from across Victor Khanye Local Municipality attended the youth empowerment programme at Sinethemba Hall, where they received information on development opportunities, entrepreneurship, civic participation and the upcoming NkAMA 2026.



VKLM Speaker Henry Ngoma

ISIKO LETHU

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From security guard to community champion: Mandla Kunene uses poetry to inspire change

● RODNEY HLATSHWAYO

EMALAHLENI – Award-winning poet and community activist Mandlenkosi Benedict Nhlanhla Kunene, popularly known as Mandla Kunene Imbongi-87, has transformed his passion for poetry into a platform for social change, using his art to address gender-based violence (GBV), promote literacy and empower young people in eMalahleni.

The founder of the ImBongi-87 Foundation believes art can be a powerful tool for community development and raising awareness about social challenges.

Born and raised in Ophongolo Ward 1 in northern KwaZulu-Natal under the Mbongombongweni Traditional Authority, Kunene developed a deep appreciation for culture, storytelling and community values from an early age.

He completed Grades 1 to 9 at Dwarsrand Primary School, attended Grade 10 at Manzamhlophe High School and matriculated from Ngotshe Secondary School in 2005.

After relocating to Mpumalanga in 2008, Kunene began building a new life in eMalahleni. While working as a security officer, he discovered poetry as a way to express himself and connect with others.

"I spent many years working alone as a security officer. During those quiet moments, I would read and write poems. Over time, those poems became performances, and eventually I recorded my own poetry CD," he said.

"I believe God called me to do this work. I am involved in many areas of the arts, including music and acting, but poetry chose me first," he added.

His dedication was recognised in 2012 when he received his first award, motivating him to continue developing his craft.

Having lived in different provinces, Kunene said adapting to life in eMalahleni was not difficult.

"I have lived in different places and met people from different backgrounds. That helped me adapt quickly and allowed me to connect with

communities here in eMalahleni," he said.

Art with a purpose

For Kunene, success is not measured by awards but by the difference his work makes in people's lives.

"Talents come from God. When you are recognised for your gift, you must thank Him because our talents are not our own. We are here to change lives through our gifts and speak about issues that others are afraid to address," he said.

His work focuses largely on social challenges, including gender-based violence and femicide. Raised by his mother after his father died when he was just eight months old, Kunene said he was taught from an early age to respect women and protect vulnerable people.

"I do not have a specific date or moment when I decided to fight GBV. Respecting and protecting women and other vulnerable people is something I was taught from a young age," he said.

Kunene believes art can reach people in ways that traditional awareness campaigns sometimes cannot.

"People love art. Art brings large numbers of people together in a short period of time. When people are listening, watching and engaging, it becomes easier to share important messages and create awareness about issues such as GBV," he said.

His advocacy work has also seen him participate in men's sector structures, GBV coordination initiatives and parliamentary volunteer programmes.

"Art unites people, and community programmes unite people too. Those experiences helped me move between creative spaces and community leadership roles," he said.

Building a legacy through the ImBongi-87 Foundation

In 2022, Kunene founded the ImBongi-87 Foundation (NPC) to expand his community work beyond poetry performances.

As founder and president, he leads programmes focused on GBV awareness, arts and talent development, skills training, literacy promotion and youth empowerment.

The organisation works alongside Nal'ibali programmes to encourage reading and writing among young people. Through book donation drives and educational support projects, the foundation aims to improve access to learning resources in disadvantaged communities. The foundation also exposes learners to career opportunities through educational excursions and participation in events such as the Africa's Travel Indaba and Mining Indaba.

"Young people need exposure and opportunities. Many have talent and potential, but they need guidance and access to information that can help shape their future," Kunene said.

Despite the foundation's growth, funding remains one of its biggest challenges.

"There are many challenges facing the organisation because since we established it, we have never received funding. We rely mostly on our own pockets to run programmes and assist communities," he said.

Despite limited resources, Kunene and his team continue their work through volunteerism and personal commitment.

"We believe in the work that we do. Although resources are limited, we continue because we know our programmes are making a difference in people's lives," he said.

Investing in the next generation

Mentorship remains one of Kunene's biggest priorities.

Through talent searches, workshops and community programmes, he continues identifying and supporting

young creatives in eMalahleni and surrounding areas.

"There is incredible talent among young people. The challenge is that many do not receive enough support, guidance or opportunities to develop their gifts," he said.

He believes stronger collaboration between families, schools, businesses and government institutions can help unlock the potential of young artists and future leaders.

A calling that keeps him going

Kunene acknowledges that community activism can be emotionally and financially challenging, particularly when addressing issues such as GBV and youth development.

"This journey is very difficult, and there are times when I feel like giving up. But because of God's calling in my life, I continue. That calling keeps me grounded and reminds me why I started," he said.

Looking ahead, Kunene is preparing to host an Arts, Heritage and Exhibition Event in September, aimed at celebrating culture, showcasing local talent and creating opportunities for artists across the region.

For Kunene, the mission remains simple: to use art as a force for positive change.

"Art can build a nation or destroy it. My choice is to use it to build," he said.



Hlonipha Secondary receives classroom furniture boost

● EMMANUEL N. MTHIMUNYE

VEZUBUHLE – Hlonipha Secondary School has received 20 learner chairs from Phola Mall to improve classroom conditions and support teaching and learning.

The donation, made on 22 June 2026, formed part of the mall's community outreach programme and was coordinated with Ward 18 Councillor Nomvula Mtshweni, who attended the handover ceremony.

Phola Mall Centre Manager Dukes Masanabo said the mall has been supporting under-resourced schools since opening in 2017.

"It's all about supporting under-resourced schools and creating a better learning environment for learners. This kind of support also strengthens the relationship with the community," Masanabo said.

He explained that Hlonipha Secondary was selected after submitting a request through Phola Mall's community support programme.

"Our support is not based on different criteria. We welcome requests from community members, community leaders, schools and organisations. Every request is captured on our system and assessed fairly," Masanabo said.

Acting Principal Lukhele Mauris welcomed the donation, saying it came at the right time because many of the school's chairs were broken.

"The chairs we were using before were

not in good condition for learners. Some were broken. This donation will help us improve teaching and learning because learners will now have proper chairs," Mauris said.

Ward 18 Councillor Nomvula Mtshweni said the donation reflected the partnership between the mall and the community.

She said schools depend largely on government funding and often struggle to replace damaged furniture. "As we understand that our schools are depending on grants from the Department, they cannot afford to buy furniture for everyone, and our kids vandalise this furniture. They are really in need of furniture," she said.

Mtshweni encouraged learners to look after the new furniture so that future learners could also benefit.

"As a councillor, I have a passion for our kids and always support

education. I am saying to these young leaders to take care of this furniture and protect it for future learners at Hlonipha Secondary School over the coming 10 years," she said.

Masanabo said the donation would contribute to improved classroom discipline, learner dignity and a better learning environment.

He said Phola Mall would continue supporting education initiatives across Thembisile Hani Local Municipality through programmes such as its Back-to-School campaign and school shoe donation drives.

He also encouraged other businesses to partner with communities to help address needs that government resources alone could not meet.

"Government cannot transform the lives of our citizens alone; it takes a united effort from businesses, communities and individuals working together," Masanabo said.



High Court jails man for rape of 93-year-old woman

● RODNEY HLATSHWAYO

KWAMHLANGA – The Mpumalanga Division of the High Court has sentenced 23-year-old Samkelo Mahlangu to 10 years' direct imprisonment for raping his 93-year-old neighbour in Vezubuhle in September 2022.

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) welcomed the conviction, describing the outcome as a demonstration of the strength of forensic and circumstantial evidence in securing justice, even in cases where victims are no longer able to testify.

The court heard that on 17 September 2022, Mahlangu forced his way into the elderly woman's home, knowing she lived alone. He then raped her inside the residence.

A passer-by was alerted by the victim's screams and entered the house to investigate. The witness found the elderly woman lying on the floor, injured and bleeding. She told the witness that the attacker was still inside the house.

After searching the house, the witness found Mahlangu hiding beneath an overturned wardrobe in one of the rooms. He was restrained and the matter was immediately reported to police, leading to his arrest.

Although the victim died before the matter could be heard in court, State Prosecutor Bianca Harmse relied on DNA evidence, medical findings and witness testimony to prove the State's

case beyond reasonable doubt. During the trial, Mahlangu denied the allegations, claiming he had responded to the victim's screams and that she had opened the door for him. However, the court rejected his version as false and inconsistent with the evidence.

Mahlangu was found guilty of housebreaking with intent to rape and rape in terms of Section 51(2)(b) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 105 of 1997. He was sentenced to 10 years' direct imprisonment.

The court also declared him unfit to possess a firearm in terms of Section 103(1) of the Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000.

NPA Regional Spokesperson for Mpumalanga, Monica Nyuswa, said:

"The successful prosecution of this matter demonstrates that even where a victim is unable to testify due to death, the justice system can still deliver accountability through diligent investigation and strong forensic evidence. Crimes against vulnerable members of society will not go unpunished."

The NPA said the case reflects its continued commitment to ensuring accountability for sexual offences and protecting vulnerable members of society through effective prosecution and collaboration with law enforcement.



Bafana reach World Cup knockout stage for first time

● RODNEY HLATSHWAYO

MONTERREY, MEXICO – Bafana Bafana secured their first-ever place in the FIFA World Cup knockout stages after defeating South Korea 1-0 in their final Group A match on Thursday, thanks to Thapelo Maseko's second-half winner. Needing victory to keep their World Cup campaign alive, Hugo Broos' side produced a disciplined performance against a determined South Korean team. After creating several chances in the opening half, South Africa broke the deadlock in the 67th minute when Maseko calmly found the back of the net.

Bafana Bafana defended resolutely during the closing stages to secure one of the most significant victories in the country's football history. Speaking after the match, Broos praised his players for their commitment and tactical discipline. "I think we played a very good game, tactically. Everybody did their job. The difference compared to our previous match was that when we had the ball, we were very dangerous. We have very quick players and we used them

very well. We found the spaces at the right moments. We needed that goal, and I told the players at half-time to keep believing. I am very proud of the performance of my team."

The victory secured South Africa's first qualification for the FIFA World Cup knockout stages after previous group-stage exits in 1998, 2002 and 2010.

Supporters across South Africa celebrated the historic achievement as Bafana Bafana continued their impressive progress under Broos. South Africa will face Canada in the Round of 32 at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles on Sunday.

A victory would send Bafana Bafana into the Round of 16 and extend their remarkable World Cup campaign.



Mooihoek All Stars crowned U17 champions

● NODICAH FUNDAMA & SHARON CHILOANE

EMALAHLENI – Mooihoek All Stars defeated Mhluzi Aces 3-2 to win the Given Thabedi Foundation Under-17 Top 16 Tournament at Emalahleni Pumas Stadium on Saturday, 20 June 2026. The tournament, hosted by the Given Thabedi Foundation in partnership with the Emalahleni Local Football Association, Tumbo, Emalahleni Local Municipality and the Pucule Manirho Foundation, brought together some of Mpumalanga's most promising young footballers.

The final produced an entertaining contest filled with attacking football, determination and resilience before Mooihoek All Stars claimed the championship.

The champions received a full soccer kit, gold medals, a trophy and two soccer balls. Runners-up Mhluzi Aces received a soccer kit, silver medals and two soccer balls.

Individual performances were also recognised. Reabetswe Maimela was named Player of the Tournament, Makgeru Kgaogelo received the Goalkeeper of the Tournament award, while Kopano Mokofane finished as the tournament's Top Goal Scorer.

Given Thabedi Foundation coordinator Thomas Choma praised the quality of football displayed throughout the tournament.

"The overall performance of the teams was excellent. The games were highly competitive and we witnessed raw talent at its best. There was passion everywhere – from the players, coaches and supporters to the parents in the stands. This is exactly what we want to see in our football because these youngsters are the future of the game," Choma said.

Choma congratulated both finalists on reaching the championship match.

"Mhluzi Aces should hold their heads high. They played exceptionally well throughout the tournament and must continue working hard because their time will come. To Mooihoek All Stars, congratulations on a well-deserved victory," Choma said.

Mooihoek All Stars coach Makofana Emmanuel said winning the tournament was the reward for months of hard work

and discipline. "Winning the tournament feels amazing, but more than the trophy, I am proud of my players. We proved that discipline beats talent when talent does not work hard. This victory shows young people that consistency and teamwork pay off," Makofana said. Makofana said careful preparation played a key role in the team's success. "We trained four times a week, focusing on fitness and the basics.

We built our team around teamwork and not individual stars. Before every match, we set ourselves one simple goal – to win the first 10 minutes. That kept us focused and confident. We also studied our opponents and changed our formation when necessary, and that flexibility helped us win two difficult matches," Makofana said.

The Given Thabedi Foundation thanked its partners, participating teams, coaches, match officials and supporters for contributing to the success of the tournament and for providing a platform for young footballers to showcase their talent.





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