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NQOSA Mahao

## ABC, DC announce coalition deal

... as beleaguered Thabane appeals to army, police to save his govt.

Story page 2



## Mapesela, Sello fired

Story on page 4



# ABC, DC announce coalition deal

Marafaele Mohloboli

**T**HE All Basotho Convention (ABC) and the Democratic Congress (DC) have finally announced a new deal to establish a new governing coalition.

The announcement was made by the ABC's deputy leader Professor Nqosa Mahao and his DC counterpart Motlalentoa Letsosa in Maseru on Friday.

The announcement confirms a report in the *Sunday Express's* sister publication, the *Lesotho Times*, last Thursday, which accurately detailed the surreptitious discussions between the ABC and the DC to forge a new coalition and replace embattled Prime Minister Thomas Thabane.

Prof Mahao said the ABC-DC deal was also supported by several other parties though he did not immediately name them. The exact nature of the planned coalition would be finalised once parliament re-opens after its recently contested prorogation by Prime Minister Thomas Thabane, he said.

Dr Thabane prorogued Parliament on 20 March until 19 June 2020.

The prorogation is now in court after Dr Thabane's once staunch coalition ally, the Basotho National Party (BNP), and his party's national executive committee (NEC) accused him of effecting it without King Letsie's authority.

Although Prof Mahao did not reveal the finer details of the coalition agreement, authoritative sources say Finance Minister Moeletsisi Majoro will become Prime Minister with DC leader Mathibeli Mokhothu as his deputy. The new deal is spearheaded by the ABC's NEC and it does not have Dr Thabane's blessings.

The deal is certain to create more disharmony in the fractious ABC which has been divided into two camps backing Prof Mahao and party leader Dr Thabane in a protracted power struggle.

Dr Thabane and Prof Mahao have not seen eye to eye ever since the premier and his supporters rejected Prof Mahao's election as the party's deputy leader at its February 2019 elective conference.

The sources say at least 35 members of parliament (MPs) from the ABC's total tally of 52 have shown their support by signing a pledge endorsing the new proposed coalition. The 35 together with the DC's 26 MPs will guarantee the 61-majority required to form government. If the BNP comes on board with its five seats and more ABC parliamentarians emerge to support it, the deal will become unassailable. It will automatically end Dr Thabane's rule even sooner before he officially retires end of July as he had promised.

It is not clear whether the 35 ABC MPs backing the deal will all remain with their support if Dr Majoro, an ally of Dr Thabane and unpopular First Lady 'Maesaiah Thabane, refuses to step in to keep his loyalty to the embattled premier, and to align himself with Dr Thabane's own machinations for a new coalition. A majority of ABC MPs have



MOTLALENTOA Letsosa.

nonetheless already endorsed Dr Majoro as Dr Thabane's successor suggesting he commands a lot of respect within his own party in the National Assembly. In light of that fact, the finance minister's chances of becoming PM would therefore appear much better if he aligns himself to a deal involving the main opposition which has 26 seats.

Prof Mahao announced the ABC/DC deal at a press conference at the offices of the Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) in Maseru. However, the briefing was hastily concluded due to fears by the two parties that security forces would disrupt the event. No questions from the media were allowed. The fact that the leadership of the ABC's NEC and the DC attended the event attests to its seriousness.

In his brief announcement, Prof Mahao said "there is a signed agreement between the ABC and DC and there are other parties which are willing to support this coalition once it's operational pending the outcome of the (ABC and others' application) in the courts to nullify the prorogation (of parliament - **See story on page 6**)".

He added: "It is only when parliament opens that it shall be known how the arrange-



NQOSA Mahao.

ment is going to work".

Prof Mahao was flanked by ABC secretary general Lebohang Hlaele, spokesperson Montoeli Masoetsa and party member Amin Mphethe.

The DC was represented by its leader, Mathibeli Mokhothu, his deputy Mr Letsosa, spokesperson Serialong Qoo, Chairperson Mr Tšitso Cheba and treasurer Matšaba Matšaba.

Mr Letsosa said, "We have agreed in principle that the coalition is going to be between the ABC and DC".

"Friends of both parties are welcome to come on board and each of the main parties shall allocate seats proportionally. The smaller parties shall be given a stake by their main friend in government. The fact that *Ntate* Thabane has announced that we be called to order speaks volumes that he is not part of this agreement and his successor is," said Mr Letsosa.

Since June 2017, the ABC has been in a four-party coalition with Deputy Prime Minister Monyane Moleleki's Alliance of Democrats (AD), Communications, Science and Technology Minister Thesele 'Maseribane's Basotho National Party (BNP) and Labour and

Employment Minister Keketso Rantšo's Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL).

However, that coalition is now hanging by a thread after the BNP took Dr Thabane to court.

There is no room for the AD in the latest ABC/DC coalition. Mr Hlaele said the ABC would bring in the BNP and RCL into the new government while the DC would rope in fellow opposition parties, the Popular Front for Democracy (PFD) and Movement for Economic Change (MEC).

If that happens as planned and all ABC MPs supporting the deal maintain that support, it would give the proposed coalition at least 74 seats, thereby ensuring its stability.

"Whenever there are arising issues that need to be urgently dealt with, the key players shall be the two main parties (ABC and DC). The other parties will be consulted but they will not have the final say," said Mr Hlaele.

BNP spokesperson 'Masetota Leshota subsequently confirmed to the *Sunday Express* that they would join the proposed new coalition.

"We have definitely agreed to be a part of this (coalition) arrangement since the Prime Minister (Thabane) did not mince his words that he wanted to exclude us in the one that he was forging," Ms Leshota said in reference to Dr Thabane's recent moves to forge his own coalition pact with former Deputy Prime Minister Mothetjoa Metsing's Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and former Communications Minister Selibe Mochoborane's MEC.

Dr Thabane has been pursuing his own fresh coalition talks with the LCD after falling out with the BNP. However, the numbers seem to favour the proposed ABC/DC deal.

Disputed RCL leader Keketso Rantšo's mobile phone rang unanswered when this publication called her for comment.

On his part, PFD leader Advocate Lekhetso Rakuoane said he was willing to join the proposed coalition.

"We have been told that there is an invitation clause in the (ABC-DC) agreement and we don't have a problem if we are called (to join)," Adv Rakuoane said.

However, ABC deputy chairperson and self-confessed Thabane loyalist, Chalane Phori, described the proposed coalition as a "hoax" saying there was no way the ABC would enter into a deal which excludes Dr Thabane.

"It's a lie that the ABC and DC have forged a new coalition. This is the same DC which is an enemy to our leader and doesn't even want him to be a part of that agreement.

"How on earth do they (ABC's NEC) manage to divorce our leader from the rest of the NEC and party? There is simply no way that a new coalition can come into play when the four-party coalition is still in existence.

"This whole new arrangement is horrible. The four-party government stands and it shall do so until 2022 with *Ntate* Thabane and *Ntate* Moleleki still holding hands," said Mr Phori who is also the Small Business, Marketing and Cooperatives Minister.

Pascalinah Kabi

**B**ELEAGUERED Prime Minister Thomas Thabane has called on the security agencies to deal with his All Basotho Convention (ABC) party rivals and the opposition for plotting his ouster.

Dr Thabane has been in power since June 2017 but his four-party regime faces collapse after his own party's national executive committee (NEC) inked a deal with the opposition Democratic Congress (DC) and other smaller parties to form a new government.

This despite the 80-year-old leader's announcement in January this year that he would step down at the end of July 2020. The veteran leader said he was retiring due to old age after more than 50 years in active politics, though his opponents insist it is all because he is under pressure after he was charged with the murder of his ex-wife Lipolelo.

Dr Thabane had even said he would retire earlier if his party nominated a successor.

But the premier's revelations that he had engaged former deputy

## ... as beleaguered Thabane pleads with army, police to save his govt

prime minister and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) leader Mothetjoa Metsing in talks to forge a new government appears to have convinced his party rivals led by his estranged deputy Professor Nqosa Mahao that he intends to stay on beyond July.

Even his party's choice of Dr Majoro to succeed him a fortnight ago does not appear to have moved Dr Thabane to fulfil his pledge to leave as soon as his party identifies a successor.

The ABC's NEC announced on Friday that it had agreed a deal with the DC to form a new government which excludes Dr Thabane. (**See story on page 4**).

On the same day the ABC-DC deal was announced Dr Thabane made a televised address to the nation and appealed to the security agencies to investigate and deal with what he called subversive actions by his own party and others aimed at unlawfully bringing down his government.

He said it was shocking and dispiriting that a time when everyone was supposed to be observing the nationwide lockdown aimed at preventing the spread of the deadly Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19), some members of his own party were plotting to topple his government.

"My fellow citizens, during this fight against COVID-19, it is dispiriting and shameful to realise that there are people who are planning to topple the government illegally," said Dr Thabane.

"When people are expected to be at home with their families for safety, these men and women are traversing villages and constituencies going up and down in the constituencies encouraging people to unlawfully topple the government. Most embarrassingly, some of these people leading the campaign to topple my government are legislators from the party that I am leading.

Continues on page 4...



THOMAS Thabane.



## ABRIDGED AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF LESOTHO LIMITED

(Published in accordance with section 40(3)(a) of the Financial Institutions Act 2012)



how can we help you?

M'000	31 December 2019	31 December 2018
Interest and similar income	248 407	202 108
Interest expense and similar charges	(80 638)	(58 257)
<b>Net interest income before impairment of advances</b>	<b>167 769</b>	143 851
Impairment of advances	(10 244)	(40 283)
<b>Net interest income after impairments of advances</b>	<b>157 525</b>	103 568
Non-interest revenue	140 341	151 452
<b>Income from operations</b>	<b>297 866</b>	255 020
Operating expenses	(258 033)	(244 972)
<b>Profit before income tax</b>	<b>39 833</b>	10 048
Income tax expense	(10 928)	(3 858)
<b>Profit and total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>28 905</b>	6 190

M' 000	31 December 2019	31 December 2018
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	397 137	264 534
Investments securities and other investments	1 137 646	423 668
Advances	751 661	806 510
Accounts receivable	10 667	14 584
Current tax asset	1 065	7 003
Amounts due by holding company and fellow subsidiary companies	321 749	635 346
Property and equipment	46 322	39 773
Deferred income tax asset	23 442	24 951
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>2 689 689</b>	2 216 369
<b>EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Creditors, accruals and provisions	50 296	47 838
Current tax liability	-	-
Deposits	2 366 773	1 890 298
Employee liabilities	8 575	8 984
Lease liabilities	11 579	-
Amounts due to holding company and fellow subsidiary companies	68 744	114 048
Tier 2 liabilities	20 034	20 598
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>2 526 001</b>	2 081 766
<b>Equity</b>		
Ordinary shares	39 124	39 124
Share premium	9 109	9 109
Reserves	115 455	86 370
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>163 688</b>	134 603
<b>Total equity and liabilities</b>	<b>2 689 689</b>	2 216 369

**Financial Performance**

The past two financial years (2018 and 2019) have seen a turnaround in the bank's profitability as the bank reported a profit of M10m in 2018 and M40m in 2019 which represents a 296% growth in profits for 2019. This recovery is as a result of more robust focus on its credit and recoveries strategies.

**Channel Footprint**

FNBL pioneered the partner banking channel model named *Cash Plus Lai Lai*, which enables the bank to partner with cash centric enterprises; (FNBL Business Clients exclusively); in providing banking solutions to its customers. Cash Plus Lai Lai creates shared benefit between the bank, the agent and the customers. As at 31 December 2019, the bank had grown its footprint of Cash Plus Lai Lai agents to 54 with a wide distribution throughout Lesotho.

Cash Plus Lai Lai offers easier accessibility to our customers at lower pricing. For the agents, the model offers innovative, tried and tested, and cost-effective cash management solutions. This has ensured that we now have points of presence in every district in the Kingdom.

**Product offerings**

In addition, the bank offers flexi fixed investment products that are targeted at individuals' needs to save and invest while enjoying the flexibility of withdrawing without charges.

The bank went live with Forex Product House in 2019 and continues to scale this solution to offer greater client convenience around forex transactions. In line with our digitization strategy, we are in the process of rolling out a fully digitized forex offering to all segments, allowing our clients and customers the convenience of transacting on a global scale anywhere and any time of day.

The bank continues to innovate and maintain its position as market leader around digital solutions across its array of customers in Retail, Business, Corporate and Small and Medium Enterprises.

**Covid-19 Pandemic Statement**

We are fully aware of the role that we play in providing essential services to the Kingdom of Lesotho during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are taking all measures necessary in order to protect the health of our customers and employees. Working in unison with stakeholders, National Government made a prudent decision to invoke a 21-day national lockdown. As part of this decision, Government assured the country that essential banking services will remain available and this was reiterated by the Bankers' Association of Lesotho.

The bank continues to work with BAL, in engaging with the Central Bank of Lesotho and government on a variety of solutions aimed at supporting both consumers and businesses through these difficult times. FNBL believes that all customers are vital to the country's economic growth prospects. It is the collective responsibility of both the government and private sector to continue working together to identify immediate and long-term initiatives that will provide relief. We will continue to be a good corporate citizen and live the FNB Values of helpfulness at a time when it is critical for us to unite as a nation.

To all staff members, stakeholders and customers.

Rea leboha.

  
I. Leyenaar  
Chairman

  
B. Roper  
Chief Executive Officer



# Thabane fires Mapesela, Sello

Pascalinah Kabi

**P**RIME Minister Thomas Thabane has fired Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation Minister Tefo Mapesela and his Transport counterpart, Keketso Sello.

Dr Thabane's senior private secretary, Thabo Thakalekoala, yesterday told the *Sunday Express* that Messrs Mapesela and Sello were relieved of their duties with effect from 3 April 2020.

"The Prime Minister relieved Honourables Mapesela and Sello of their ministerial duties in line with the premier's constitutional right," Mr Thakalekoala said.

"As you know the prime minister cannot disclose reasons for relieving those two of their ministerial duties because it is his prerogative."

Mr Thakalekoala also said Dr Thabane had appointed Ministers Litsoane Litsoane and Prince Maliehe to act in place of Messrs Mapesela and Sello respectively until substantive ministers were appointed.

Although Dr Thabane did not disclose the reasons for the sacking of the duo, it is widely believed that they were sacked for supporting the ruling All Basotho Convention (ABC) national executive committee (NEC)'s decision to form a new coalition government with the opposition Democratic Congress (DC).

While some sources have said Finance Minister Moeketsi Majoro will head the proposed new government with DC leader Mathibeli Mokhothu as his deputy, Mr Mapesela yesterday told this publication that they had proposed Dr Thabane to lead the new coalition with Mr Mokhothu as his deputy.

The ABC-DC deal, announced by both parties on Friday, has probably put paid to Dr Thabane's own plans to forge a new coalition with the Mothetjoa Metsing-led Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and fellow opposition leader Selibe Mochoboroane's Movement for Economic Change (MEC). Deputy Prime Minister Moleleki's Alliance of Democrats (AD) would remain in Dr Thabane's new proposed coalition while current partners, the Basotho National Party and the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL) would be dumped by the premier. (See story on page 2).

But with the majority of the ABC legislators backing the ABC-DC deal, it is unlikely that Dr Thabane's deal with the AD, LCD and MEC will materialise.

Asked if the two ministers had been fired to open space for new ministers in the hope of creating vacancies for LCD and MEC members in the event of a deal with the two parties, Mr Thakalekoala insisted there were no plans to form a new coalition with those parties.

"As far as the prime minister is concerned, there is no new coal-

ition government in Lesotho. The four-party government remains in place," Mr Thakalekoala said.

Early this month, Dr Thabane revealed that he had engaged the LCD and MEC to join his current coalition. This would help the premier master the numbers to remain in office even without the backing of ABC members of parliament loyal to ABC deputy leader Professor Ngqosa Mahao.

The largely anti-Thabane ABC NEC moved swiftly to counter Dr Thabane by negotiating their own deal with the DC and other smaller parties to form a new government. They said on Friday that the new government would be formed in parliament as soon the house re-opens after it was prorogued by Dr Thabane from 20 March 2020 until 19 June 2020.

The ABC and BNP have since filed an urgent Constitutional Court application to have parliament reopened with immediate effect. They argue that Dr Thabane acted unconstitutionally by proroguing parliament without the consent of King Letsie III and without consulting his coalition partners. (See page 6).

Meanwhile, Mr Mapesela who has openly revealed his support for the ABC-DC deal and who has been the only serving cabinet minister to openly lambast First Lady 'Maesiah Thabane over the latter's toxic role in government affairs, says he is unfazed by his sacking. He told this publication it was the premier's prerogative to fire any minister without explanation and that he bore no grudges against Dr Thabane.

"I said it yesterday that a minister gets a two-line letter informing him of the decision to dismiss him. I was not born a minister. I am a member of parliament for Mokhotlong constituency," Mr Mapesela said yesterday.

"I am well relaxed at my home. They told us to stay home and I have obliged," he said in reference to the 21-day nationwide lockdown which was announced as part of measures to combat the deadly Coronavirus. (See story on page 5).

Mr Mapesela, however, said Dr Thabane should desist from referring to ABC legislators as terrorists for negotiating a deal for a new coalition with the DC. (See story on page 2).

He said the MPs had merely acted in the country's best interests by agreeing a deal with the country's main opposition party. He said they have never hidden their intentions to form an ABC-DC coalition, government whose prime minister would have been Dr Thabane himself under normal circumstances, deputised by DC leader Mr Mokhothu.

"The choice of remaining a prime minister or leaving is his. We have always maintained that he remains



TEFO Mapesela.

a prime minister while Mokhothu would become deputy prime minister when parliament re-opens," Mr Mapesela said.

"We are not toppling his (Dr Thabane)'s government. We are forming a coalition government beneficial to him and protecting his own political legacy which has been tainted by a clique of *Mantlharunye* and others. If he doesn't want, it is his business," Mr Mapesela said.

*Mantlharunye* is a derogatory term often used to denote a worthless woman. Mr Mapesela has used the epithet to describe First Lady 'Maesiah Thabane who he has accused of conniving with water Minister Samonyane Ntsekele and Mr Moleleki to influence Dr Thabane into making decisions to his own detriment.

Mr Mapesela said there was nothing amiss about negotiating to form new governments, saying they had engaged in lawful political actions in talking to the DC and not terrorism as alleged by Dr Thabane on Friday.

He instead accused Dr Thabane of being one of the terrorists who had secretly attempted to form a government of national unity (GNU) with the LCD and MEC.

"Are we saying parliamentarians are terrorists when they do their jobs properly in daylight and they (Dr Thabane and supporters) threaten us with soldiers and po-

lice? Tell him (Dr Thabane) we are not children. He cannot threaten us with soldiers and police.

"They (Dr Thabane, LCD and MEC) are hiding it (their talks to forge a new GNU) and that is what we call terrorism. Ours (ABC-DC deal) is out in the public. It's not terrorism.

"I don't know his (Dr Thabane)'s understanding of terrorism but my definition of terrorism is the use of firearms in attempts to unlawfully overthrow a government. We have not declared a new government in place of an existing one.

"We have only announced the signing of a coalition agreement with the DC and we are waiting for parliament to open so that we can formalise our deal. As a person who has lived long in Lesotho, he (Thabane) can explain what his own understanding of terrorism is."

He claimed that Dr Thabane was afraid to announce his new coalition government because he was probably aware that his secret negotiations with the LCD and MEC were "the real acts of terrorism", particularly in light of the premier's threat to use the army and police to thwart his opponents.

"It is now clear that whatever they were doing was not in the best interests of Basotho. The choice is his (Thabane). He either agrees to be part of the new coalition or he goes home or he forms a new party

and becomes the opposition.

"He (Dr Thabane) has lots of options. We may think we have majority only to find out later in parliament that majority no longer supports us but *Ntate* Thabane and his new party.

"So, he has a variety of options. We only have this one option (to form a new coalition with the DC) but he has many options," said Mr Mapesela.

## Matter of Fact

In September 2019, the *Sunday Express*' sister *Lesotho Times* newspaper carried a story headlined **Mapesela fights to reverse child support order. The story referred to one Tholang Moreki as the former wife of Mokhotlong legislator**

— Tefo Mapesela.

**Mr Mapesela has since brought it to our attention that he was never married to Ms Moreki and that this reference to her as his former wife has caused "great harm" to his personal life. We therefore apologise to Mr Mapesela and his family for the harm this has caused him.**

— Editor

## ... as beleaguered Thabane pleads with army, police to save his govt

... From page 2

"They are doing this even though I have attested to the nation, SADC and the whole world on two occasions that although my tenure in office ends in 2022, I have made a decision to leave office in July or before."

Dr Thabane then appealed to the heads of the security agencies — Lieutenant General Mojalefa Letsoela (army), Commissioner Holomo Molibeli (police), Director General Pheello Ralenkoane (intelligence) and Commissioner Thabang Mothepu (correctional services) — to investigate "subversive acts" against his government and ensure that legal action is taken against those found to be on the wrong side of the law.

"I therefore order the security chiefs to investigate these subversive acts and ensure that legal action is taken against those leading

this campaign.

"The army boss, commissioner of police, director of national security service and your colleagues in the correctional service, be loyal and prove your allegiance by protecting this country, government and the nation against any enemy from within and outside the country."

Dr Thabane said it was worrying that his opponents were hell-bent on toppling his government despite that he had already told the world that he was retiring at the end of July.

He said he was leaving office out of his own volition and the decision was not influenced by anyone. He pleaded with his rivals to understand that there was time for everything in life including the formation of a new government.

He said the country and the whole world

was seized with fighting COVID-19 and this was not the time to be strategising to overthrow the government.

"My fellow countrymen and women, don't allow yourselves to operate outside the legal means of changing governments. Doing anything (to change a government) other than what is stipulated in law constitutes acts of subversion.

"We are in the middle of a crisis and we need to work together. The government, opposition and the entire nation need to temporarily put aside political differences and speak with one voice in fighting this (COVID-19) disease.

"My fellow countrymen and women who are power-hungry, there is a season and a place for everything. Be patient. I, Motsoahae Thabane, am leaving office soon. I have already announced that I am leaving office

and that was my own personal decision, no one forced or influenced me to make that decision."

He warned ABC members against allowing "the enemy" to divide them, saying even in biblical times, the mighty often fell by the wayside after allowing their enemies to divide them.

"To you ABC members of parliament, you should know that the mighty have fallen by allowing the enemy to divide them. If you doubt this, I refer you to look back to the biblical times.

"The ABC is mighty and the opposition would only defeat it when it is divided. They will pretend and agree with you on certain issues but the reality is that they hate you. They have to divide you in order to defeat you. Those with ears let them hear," Dr Thabane said.



# PM apologises over army, police brutality

Pascalinah Kabi

**P**RIME Minister Thomas Thabane (pictured) has apologised to the nation after unruly and overzealous soldiers and police assaulted civilians for allegedly violating rules of the national lockdown requiring them to stay at home.

He said those who had engaged in acts of brutality were hell bent on tarnishing the image of his government. He added he had ordered the relevant authorities to investigate acts of brutality by security agents and take action against those found to have unlawfully behaved in discharging their duties.

Dr Thabane also issued an impassioned plea to the nation to stay at home and minimise chances of getting infected with the deadly Coronavirus.

Lesotho imposed a nationwide lockdown beginning Monday 30 March 2020 to 21 April 2020. In terms of the lockdown regulations, the entire nation is expected to stay at home and businesses will remain closed except for those classified as essential services.

Since the lockdown began there have been reports of people in various locations including Maseru who have been assaulted by overzealous police officers and soldiers for leaving their homes in apparent contravention of the regulations. Some of the people assaulted had left their homes to shop for groceries, something allowed in terms of the lockdown rules.

Dr Thabane made the apology and plea in a

## ... pleads with the nation to observe lockdown rules

televised address to the nation on Friday. He spoke on a day when the virus (also known as COVID-19) was reported to have infected more than a million people worldwide and caused 53 000 deaths.

Unlike many other countries including neighbouring South Africa, Lesotho has not reported any COVID-19 cases thus far. But unlike other countries it has also not conducted extensive tests due to lack of testing equipment. Dr Thabane said the security forces had been deployed to enforce the rules of the lockdown and thanked those who had properly executed their mandate thus far. He apologised for the beatings of some civilians by the police and soldiers.

He said he had ordered the relevant authorities to investigate the acts of brutality by security agents and sanction those found to have unlawfully discharged their duties.

In recent years, the police and army have achieved notoriety for gross human rights violations. Several members of the security forces including former army commander Lieutenant General Tlali Kamoli and fugitive former Police Commissioner Molahlehi Letsoepa have been charged with various crimes

including murder. In addition, several lawsuits have been filed in the courts against security agencies.

Dr Thabane also said the country's zero infections status should not be misinterpreted to mean that Lesotho is immune to COVID-19.

He therefore urged the nation to voluntarily observe all the regulations of the lockdown including staying at home as this was for their own protection.

"My fellow Basotho, let us be wary of this disease and learn from countries already affected by this virus," Dr Thabane said.

"Countries whose health systems are well developed are drowning. Many of their citizens have died and are continuing to die. I wish to inform you that to date, there are no reported cases of coronavirus in Lesotho. That does not mean we should relax and think that we are immune to this disease.

"The truth of the matter is that our ability to test our people is not easy at all to determine because we don't have the necessary equipment to test our people."

He said thus far the country had benefited from its good working relationship with South Africa which ran laboratory tests of



suspected cases on behalf of Lesotho.

Chinese businessman and philanthropist Jack Ma recently donated 20 089 test kits to Lesotho. Health Minister Nkaku Kabi said the government had ordered equipment compatible with the test kits to enable the country to begin testing in its own laboratories. He however did not say what equipment had been ordered for that purpose.

Despite the lack of local testing equipment, Dr Thabane urged the nation to continue reporting to healthcare facilities whenever they suspected any infections. He said this was necessary to ensure all precautions were taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

# Coronavirus: Officials warn Africa is at 'break the glass' moment

**A**FRICA has reached a "break the glass moment", an emergency in which international actors need to take drastic action if the world's poorest continent is to avoid a human and economic catastrophe, Ken Ofori-Atta, Ghana's finance minister, told the *Financial Times*. Mr Ofori-Atta, who is also chairman of the joint World Bank-IMF Development Committee, said the two institutions had acted swiftly, but would need to do much more.

They should provide governments with liquidity support as well as money to fight the virus and debt relief, he said, adding that the coronavirus threatened to overwhelm Africa's inadequate health systems. Last month, Bill Gates warned that the pandemic could kill 10m Africans if it were allowed to rip through the continent and Imperial College London published a study saying that, if governments failed to act, the virus could claim 40m lives worldwide. Mr Ofori-Atta said the pandemic would also cause economic havoc. It could wipe out 5-10 per cent of Africa's gross domestic product at a stroke, he said, as commodity prices sank and receipts from tourism, trade and remittances shrivelled.

Moody's on the weekend cut South Africa's debt rating to junk, ending the investment-credit rating it had had for 25 years. Tito Mboweni, South Africa's finance minister, said: "To say we are not concerned and trembling in our boots about what might be in the coming weeks and months is an understatement." Abebe Selassie, director of IMF's Africa department, said the continent faced its deepest economic challenge in several generations. Bilateral lenders should consider immediate debt relief, he said, while the IMF would waive debt payments for the poorest countries. African governments must temporarily abandon fiscal austerity, Mr Abebe added. "Even with constrained fiscal space, the right thing to do is to expand fiscal deficits to counter the immediate impact of the shock." Mr Ofori-Atta last week co-chaired a meeting in which African finance ministers called for a \$100bn stimulus package. The IMF said it was making \$50bn available for emerging countries, with \$10bn for low-in-

come countries. Mr Ofori-Atta said the poorest countries would be eligible to receive up to 50 per cent of their IMF quota — a formula that determines voting rights — but that this needed to quadruple to 200 per cent. "The Fund and World Bank are moving quickly, the sentiments I hear from G20 finance ministers are in the right direction," he said. "But we need to increase the pace and increase the amounts." By the time of the World Bank-IMF spring meetings in mid-April he expected "we should be able to have an even more comprehensive and aggressive posture".

Charles Robertson, chief economist at Renaissance Capital, said African economies would suffer a double hit: a collapse in revenue and a need to ramp up spending both on emergency health measures and to counter the economic impact of lockdown measures. Ethiopia's prime minister Abiy Ahmed told the *Financial Times* last week that if coronavirus were not controlled in Africa it would quickly bounce back to the rest of the world.

Mr Ofori-Atta said that trying to contain coronavirus through lockdowns in a continent where most people were under 30 and many lived from hand to mouth threatened mass unrest. Social distancing was almost impossible when millions depended on going out each day to earn a living and bought food from crowded markets.

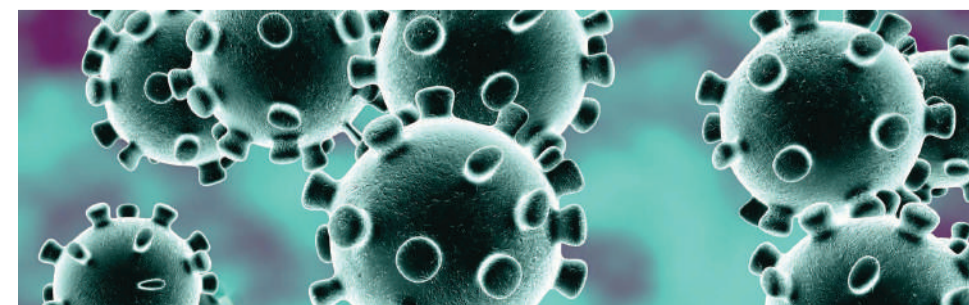
Ghana has nevertheless imposed a lockdown on its two main regions, including Accra, the capital, from Monday. South Africa's police have resorted to tear gas to disperse crowds since a lockdown there on Friday.

In Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, there were reports of police beating people with canes as they tried to get on crowded buses. Several countries, including Kenya, have imposed a curfew.

Mr Ofori-Atta said Ghana, considered one of Africa's most stable and best-run economies, would need to spend 0.5-1 per cent of GDP to bolster a health service that had proportionately one-tenth the number of hospital staff as Britain. It would also have to consider direct cash transfers — via electronic payments to mobile phones — to protect people from destitution. Ghana was relatively lucky

because it had a \$900m stabilisation fund from oil revenues and had in January managed to issue a \$3bn Eurobond. "Without it, we would have been in tatters completely," he said, noting that markets had now slammed shut to African issuers. The African Develop-

ment Bank on Friday said it had placed a \$3bn three-year "Fight Covid-19" social bond carrying a 0.75 per cent coupon. That showed there was a way back to the debt markets for African sovereigns, Mr Ofori-Atta said. — <https://www.ft.com/>



## PROTECT YOURSELF & OTHERS

## AGAINST

# CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

- DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE**
- AVOID CLOSE, PERSONAL CONTACT WITH ANYONE**
- WHEN COUGHING & SNEEZING, COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WITH A FLEXED ELBOW OR TISSUE & DISCARD TISSUE IMMEDIATELY & WASH YOUR HANDS**
- WASH YOUR HANDS WITH SOAP & RUNNING WATER FOR 20 SECONDS**



Mohalenyane Phakela

# Thabane accuses 'Maseribane, Rantšo of betrayal

● "I'm not obliged to consult you," PM tells coalition partners

PRIME Minister Thomas Thabane has accused coalition partners Thesele 'Maseribane and Keketso Rantšo of betraying him by working with the national executive committee (NEC) of his own All Basotho Convention (ABC) and the opposition Democratic Congress (DC) to undermine his government.

Dr Thabane also denied Chief 'Maseribane's claims that he did not consult the Basotho National Party (BNP) leader and his Reformed Congress for Lesotho (RCL) counterpart, Keketso Rantšo, before advising King Letsie III to prorogue parliament on 20 March 2020.

Dr Thabane said although he was not obliged to consult the duo, he nevertheless consulted them "out of courtesy" over the prorogation.

The premier said this in his answering affidavit filed in response to a 22 March 2020 Constitutional Court application filed by the ABC, the BNP and eight others for the nullification of his decision to prorogue parliament from 20 March to 19 June 2020.

The ABC, the BNP, the BNP's Nthabiseng Makoae, ABC legislators, 'Matšepo Ramakoa, 'Matebatso Doti, Lepota Sekola and ABC senator Kemiso Mosenene, DC deputy leader Motlalentsoa Letsosa, DC MP Lethusang Kompfi and the DC are first to 10<sup>th</sup> applicants respectively.

Dr Thabane prorogued parliament on the grounds that the country had to ban large gatherings as part of efforts to prevent the spread of the deadly Coronavirus.

However, his own ABC's NEC, the BNP and others challenged the decision in court on the grounds that they were not consulted before it was made by the premier.

BNP leader Chief Thesele 'Maseribane said his court papers that he and Ms Rantšo were not consulted and only found out about the moves to prorogue parliament at a meeting they held with King, Dr Thabane and Deputy Prime Minister Monyane Moleleki on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.

Dr Thabane denied Chief 'Maseribane's claims and instead Chief 'Maseribane and Ms Rantšo of conspiring with the ABC and DC's NECs to undermine his rule.

"I can confirm that I consulted



FROM left: Keketso Rantšo, Thomas Thabane and Thesele 'Maseribane.

with the coalition partners and that is the reason why I did not leave them behind when I approached His Majesty to proffer my advice," Dr Thabane states in his answering affidavit.

"It is unfortunate that they are now alleging collusion between the Deputy Prime Minister (Dr Moleleki) and me, when in fact they appear to be in collusion with the national executive committees of political parties to undermine the cabinet decision and the exercise of constitutional powers conferred

upon the prime minister.

"I had done quite enough by consulting the coalition partners out of courtesy and good administration. I had no obligation to take them along with me to His Majesty. I consulted the coalition partners but two of them (Chief 'Maseribane and Ms Rantšo) have betrayed me in preference to cooperate with members of some political parties. I did not have to solicit their consent.

"The Honourable Ministers 'Maseribane and Rantšo know very well the principle of collective re-

sponsibility and what they ought to do where they are not satisfied.

"They should have done exactly what collective responsibility requires of a minister in case of disagreement rather than break their office of secrecy concerning matters that pass between His Majesty and his government.

"It is patently clear that Honouables 'Maseribane and Rantšo are in cahoots with certain factions of the first applicant (ABC) in their internecine struggles. It is for this reason that they appear to feed national

executive committees of the first and second respondents (BNP) with information relating to cabinet as well and confidential meetings with His Majesty," Dr Thabane states.

Dr Thabane's ABC is in a four-party coalition with the BNP, RCL and Deputy Prime Minister Monyane Moleleki's Alliance of Democrats (AD). However, the coalition appears headed for a collapse after the ABC's NEC and that of the DC on Friday announced a deal to form a new government. (See story on page 2).

Dr Thabane also argues that he only prorogued parliament after the cabinet had resolved that not more than 50 people should be allowed to congregate to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. He said parliament to be prorogued as there were 120 legislators in the national assembly.

"Cabinet took a decision not to allow gatherings of more than 50 persons and Ministers 'Maseribane and Rantšo were part of that decision...I regret that ministers 'Maseribane and Rantšo appear to have misunderstood the nature of the resolutions that we had passed and they are also not being candid in concealing the consultations I had with them on this issue.

"The stubborn fact which the applicants have to contend with is that the world is facing a pandemic and social and physical distancing have been recommended by the World Health Organisation as the best methods in countering the pandemic. It would have been irresponsible of me as prime minister if I had ignored this threat to the nation because of political expediency."

The application is before Justices Sakoane Sakoane, Moroke Mokhesi and Polo Banyane. It was heard on Friday and will continue tomorrow.

## Prorogation of parly "irresponsible": lawyers



Mohalenyane Phakela

PRIME Minister Thomas Thabane has been branded as "irresponsible" for proroguing parliament without consulting his coalition partners and the parliament which he reports to.

This according to lawyers representing Dr Thabane's own All Basotho Convention (ABC) and others in their Constitutional Court petition challenging Dr Thabane's decision to prorogue parliament. (See story above).

The matter was heard on Friday and continues tomorrow. In his submissions to the court on Friday, one of the applicants' lawyers, Monaheng Rasekoai, said Dr Thabane had acted irresponsibly through his failure to observe the requirements of section 91(3) of the constitution. The section requires the premier to inform parliament and the King of his intention to act on his own if the King has not acted on his advice by a certain date.

"The Prime Minister should have followed all mandatory requirements of section 91(3) of the constitution," argued Attorney Rasekoai.

"Therefore he (Dr Thabane) was in utter breach of the same clause which he relies on to prorogue parliament. Section 91(3) of the constitution requires him to inform His Majesty that he (Dr Thabane) intends to do the act after the expiration of the time he had given His Majesty lapses. The Prime Minister never informed the King that he intends to act on his own and he also failed to report to the parlia-

ment which he is accountable to.

"As the first minister to His Majesty, you cannot give your boss a two-hour ultimatum on an issue of such pivotal importance. The King should be accorded time. It sounds unorthodox for the prime minister to give the King an ultimatum. His Majesty was undermined.

"Scholarly, the prime minister acted irresponsibly as he never consulted the parliament on the prorogation. It is a self-serving prorogation as even the cabinet never resolved to prorogue parliament. The constitutional requirement of reporting to parliament was not met," argued Attorney Rasekoai.

Section 91(3) of the constitution states that: "Where the King is required by the constitution to do any act in accordance with the advice of any person or authority other than the Council of State, and the Prime Minister is satisfied that the King has not done that act, the Prime Minister may inform the King that it is the intention of the Prime Minister to do that act himself after the expiration of that period to be specified by the Prime Minister, and if at the expiration of that period the King has not done that act, the Prime Minister may do that act himself and shall, at the earliest opportunity thereafter, report the matter to parliament; and any act so done by the Prime Minister shall be deemed to have been done by the King and to be his act".

Another lawyer representing the applicants, Advocates Christopher Lephuthing, said the prorogation process was

flawed from the onset because Deputy Prime Monyane Moleleki advised the King to prorogue parliament whereas the constitution requires that this be done by the prime minister.

"Dr Thabane never committed himself to prorogue parliament but Honourable Moleleki did. Hence the latter was the one who advised His Majesty to prorogue parliament. It is illegal for Honourable Moleleki to advise the King as the constitution states that only the prime minister enjoys that benefit of advising the King.

"The King's office has been undermined by politicians who have the courage to give their boss a two hours ultimatum. The Prime Minister acted irrationally," Adv Lephuthing further stated.

The matter continues tomorrow. In terms of final reliefs, the applicants want the Constitutional Court to declare that "the collusion of first and second respondents (Drs Thabane and Moleleki) leading up to the advice to prorogue parliament and the actual publication of the decision...without the unanimous consent of the other coalition partners (Thesele 'Maseribane and Keketso Rantšo) is unconstitutional and unlawful".

They want the court to declare that Dr Thabane and Moleleki "have put the office of His Majesty the King into disrepute and lowered its esteem".

They also want the court to declare that Dr Thabane is no longer fit to remain in office and that King Letsie III should dismiss him and appoint a new prime minister.

MONAHENG Rasekoai.



# Three more Basotho test negative for Covid-19

Limpho Sello

**T**HE three samples that were recently sent to South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) for Coronavirus (Covid-19) testing have all tested negative.

Ministry of Health director general health services Nyane Letsie told the *Sunday Express* that they received the samples of the three suspected Coronavirus cases on Friday.

The samples include that of a deceased patient who died last week before the tests were conducted. Social media has been abuzz with many suspecting the deceased could have died of Coronavirus. The deceased woman was admitted at Mamohau Hospital in Leribe.

"The three samples were taken to NICD in South Africa for testing on 1 April 2020 and all the samples tested negative for COVID-19," Dr Letsie said.

Dr Letsie said all the three suspects were kept in isolation where they symptoms were being managed.

She also appealed to the public to remain calm

and ensure that they maintain preventative measures to protect themselves from Coronavirus.

"The Ministry of Health pleads with the public to calm down, be vigilant and maintain safety protocol to minimise spread of the virus, that is; wash hands with soap and running water. Observe coughing and sneezing etiquette, follow quarantine measures and adhere to the set terms for the lock down and reduce possible spread of the disease," Dr Letsie said.

She added that port health authorities would continue to vigilantly implement screening procedures at all designated ports of entry while the observation of those in home quarantine would also continue.

The latest results mean that Lesotho is only one of four other African countries that are yet to record any cases along with the Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe and South Sudan.

However, authorities remain on high alert as neighbouring South Africa, also Lesotho's biggest trading partner, has now exceeded 1500 cases and now has nine deaths.



'NYANE Letsie.

# LDF admits human rights violations, apologises



Ntseben Motsoeli

**T**HE Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) has admitted that some of its officers deployed to the country's streets to enforce the national lockdown assaulted civilians on Monday.

LDF Head of Public Relations Brigadier Ntele Ntoi (pictured) yesterday admitted that some civilians had been assaulted in an interview with a local radio station. Brig Ntoi attributed the human rights violations to the soldiers' limited understanding of the laws governing the 21-day lockdown. The lockdown began on 30 March 2020 and ends on 21 April 2020. It was declared by the government as part of efforts to prevent the possible spread of the deadly Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Over the last few days since the lockdown began, there have been video clips on various social media platforms showing uniformed members of the LDF assaulting civilians who were walking the streets in contravention of regulations requiring them to stay at home.

In one of the videos, a female soldier is seen whipping a male civilian on his backside. The victim is heard screaming and begging, "please forgive me" and he is eventually allowed to go after receiving a few more lashes.

Several people have also shared their pictures after being bruised and bloodied by soldiers and police officers.

Brig Ntoi said it was regrettable that

the soldiers had assaulted civilians. He said the soldiers mistakenly believed that they were supposed to enforce a total lockdown where civilians were completely not allowed to leave their homes when it was a partial lockdown where they were allowed to shop for groceries and seek other essential services.

He also said the soldiers' regrettable conduct was partly "due to the fact that this is the first massive operation that the LDF has ever been engaged in".

"There was a communication breakdown and our members got the impression that we were in a total lockdown. But we only realised at the end of day on Monday that the lockdown was partial because there was a relaxation in the regulations allowing civilians to go out to shop for groceries. That is why there were incidents of friction with some civilians," Brigadier Ntoi said.

Brigadier Ntoi said the army would investigate the cases of brutality and take the appropriate disciplinary action.

"We will conduct investigations and determine the course of action while still ensuring that the cases do not taint our main objective to ensure that Basotho are not infected (with the virus)."

Brigadier Ntoi said the fight against COVID-19 was a war and the nation should brace for tougher restrictions if the war was to be won. He said just like other wars, the army was executing its mandate using "war principles".

"We came into the operation with a clear intelligence. This is a different kind of war and we have employed some war principles.

"In the first phase we learned about the aim of the war and the operation (enforcing the lockdown) is the second phase. I don't wish that we move into the third phase because it might bring about tougher restrictions," Brigadier Ntoi said without elaborating.

He said it was disheartening that some people did not seem to understand the seriousness of the lockdown and took advantage of the relaxed conditions to leave their homes to run unnecessary errands.

"If people continue to the way they are going on, we might get to a point where people are allowed to shop only for the basics not what we are currently seeing where they go out to buy snacks and drinks to satisfy their cravings."

Police Commissioner Holomo Molibeli has also appealed to the police and army to observe human rights and refrain from acts of brutality against citizens during the nationwide lockdown.

"I would like to plead with the police and army personnel to execute their mandate with respect and kindness."

"We would not like to hear any reports of gross human violations on our people as we are there to help them where they seek our guidance," Commissioner Molibeli said in a statement.

Limpho Sello

# Health professionals down tools

**A**CRISIS is looming after Lesotho's professionals on Friday said they would down tools tomorrow to push the government to immediately respond to their grievances among them the provision of protective gear.

This after doctors, nurses and other health workers on 27 March 2020 gave the government until Friday to pay them risk allowances and give them protective clothing for their work against the deadly coronavirus, failing which they could go on strike.

The ultimatum came just two days after Dr Thabane announced a nationwide lockdown as part of efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19.

The doctors and nurses were joined by anaesthetists, laboratory scientists, pharmacists and technicians and nursing assistants in issuing the demands to Deputy Health

minister 'Manthabiseng Phohleli.

The health workers have styled themselves the Coalition of Health Professionals in Lesotho.

Last week, secretary of the coalition 'Mamonica Mokhesi Makhozonke told the *Sunday Express* that "if we are not protected as we deliver health care services, we shall be forced to protect ourselves" if the government did not respond by Friday.

Ms Makhozonke said as front liners in the provision of healthcare, health professionals were at risk of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19 as they spent 24 hours a day with patients. The professionals want a risk allowance calculated at 30 percent of their gross salaries. They argue that they should be given the allowance and protective

gear because they work around the clock with patients and therefore have higher chances of contracting the deadly virus also known COVID-19.

The health professionals want to be capacitated with trainings and equipment while they also want the sick leave to law be reviewed to ensure that all health professionals who contract coronavirus while on duty be paid in full until they recover.

The government however, did not respond within the stipulated time and Ms Makhozonke says they will now down tools indefinitely starting tomorrow.

This, they say is meant to protect their members and the public from the risk of contracting the virus.

"Because of the urgency of this

matter and the potential risks involved, the coalition of health care professionals requested an urgent intervention of above requests not later than 3 April 2020. However, to date, there has not been any feedback from the ministry," Ms Makhozonke said.

"It is against this background that the Coalition of Health Care Professionals inform Basotho that our members will therefore protect themselves and the community by implementing the following:

- Only emergencies shall be attended by our members across the country starting from 6th April 2020 until the requests made above are met.

- Our members will not attend all suspected cases of Covid-19 until they have appropriate pro-

tection clothing and have received training on how to deal with clients with Covid-19."

Ms Makhozonke said while they regret the inconvenience to be suffered by the public, the move was inspired by the need to protect the public and the members.

"We highly regret the inconvenience that will be caused by this action. However, this is meant to protect the public because in the frontline health professionals are put into danger and become sick, it will exacerbate the crisis in Lesotho, much like we have seen it happening in China, the United Kingdom, United States and Italy," Ms Makhozonke said.

Repeated efforts to get a comment from Health minister Nkaku Kabi and Ms Phohleli were unsuccessful at the time of going to print as their phones rang unanswered.

The strike action is coming in the midst of a 21-day national lockdown which ends on 21 April 2020.



## Comment

### No excuse for brutality against civilians during lockdown

**W**E condemn in the strongest terms possible the acts of brutality against civilians by members of the security agencies during the first week of the nationwide lockdown. We understand and accept the need for the security forces to enforce compliance with the lockdown as this will prevent the spread of the deadly Coronavirus which has infected more than a million people worldwide. We understand that the security forces have to execute their mandate which involves ensuring that people remain at home except in exceptional circumstances where they either work in the sectors classified as essential services or where they have to purchase essential groceries and seek medical attention. We accept that some people wilfully violate regulations but this is no excuse of the wanton disregard of human rights.

The security forces have other options available to them and these include arresting those who would have been found to be of the wrong side of the rules. However, our soldiers and police officers seem to think that the only way of enforcing compliance is by bludgeoning civilians to within an inch of their lives. Ancient philosophers speak of people who learn nothing from their previous mistakes and end up repeating the same mistakes with negative consequences to themselves and the rest of the nation. The army and the police certainly fall into this category. Their recent history is littered with gross human rights violations which stink up to the high heavens.

The courts of law have a huge backlog of criminal cases and lawsuits which have been filed against members of the security agencies. We would have imagined that the pending murder cases against former army commander Lieutenant General Tlali Kamoli and former Police Commissioner Molahlehi Letsoepa would serve as a warning that human rights violations will never be tolerated no matter the cause. We also believed that after receiving training on civilian-military relations over a year from the SADC forces who were stationed in Lesotho from 2017 to 2018, the army and the police would better handle civilians without resorting to barbaric methods to enforce compliance with the law.

How wrong we were. If anything, some of the soldiers and police officers appear determined to go back on their travels. They are hell bent on travelling their well-trodden path of abusing civilians. They should however, know that there will be consequences. They will face the full wrath of the law in their individual capacities even if they were on official duty when committing the human rights violations.

He who has ears, let them hear.

On another note, the first week of the lockdown has come and gone. Lesotho still has not recorded a single infection but we must understand that there is always a risk that some of the infections might have gone undetected because of our porous borders which allow ease of illegal movements and the fact that we still lack the capacity to test for the virus on our won.

We cannot afford any complacency. The fact of being hemmed on all sides by South Africa, which has escalating infections, and in light of our own lack of testing resources to take stock of our own infections' levels, we remain severely exposed. All Basotho and everyone else resident in this kingdom must therefore heed the lockdown order and stay at home.

While staying at home can be difficult as evidenced by reports that some people are violating the lockdown rules without just cause, we need to know that the measures are a necessary evil. The anxiety, psychological pain and hopelessness resulting from the lockdown is understandable but there is no other way. We just have to follow the rules in the same manner we take bitter pills knowing it is for our own good. Difficult as it may seem, we all have to play our part by staying at home. As some have been saying, the virus doesn't travel but people do. And it can only be spread around the world by those who travel. It is therefore necessary that movement be suspended until it is known for certain that the virus has been defeated.

If we all follow the rules of the lockdown and observe all the health precautions highlighted by experts, we will eventually defeat this scourge.

# Sunday Express

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### Tackling climate change with Covid-19 urgency

**T**HE Covid-19 threat has shown that governments can act swiftly and resolutely in a crisis, and that people are ready to change their behaviour for the good of humanity. The world must now urgently adopt the same approach to the existential challenge of climate change.

In recent weeks, the world has been focused on urgently battling the fast-evolving Covid-19 pandemic. The World Health Organisation, governments, and central banks have acted rapidly to mitigate the virus's impact, while scientists, policymakers, and public-health experts are sharing vital data via sophisticated tracking tools.

And the large number of people who have recovered from the virus attests to the efficacy of the response to date.

But in addition to the novel and immediate Covid-19 threat, the world also faces an unprecedented climate and environmental emergency. Governments and businesses must now start addressing climate change with the same resolve and urgency that they are showing in fighting the pandemic.

Consider air pollution, which kills an estimated seven million people worldwide each year. Unlike Covid-19, this threat is not new, stems from multiple sources, and is closely linked to how we heat and light our homes, move around, and deal with waste — daily habits that are deeply embedded in our lifestyles and economic systems.

Tackling such a complex challenge thus requires action on many fronts to reduce the risk of even more premature deaths.

Indeed, while the Covid-19 response has demonstrated the power of open, collaborative science and swift action in dealing with emerging threats, it also has highlighted deep-seated issues that limit our ability to respond to challenges like global environmental change.

In particular, the world is waking up to the possibility that the pandemic — and the strict measures introduced to contain it — could result in an even deeper economic downturn than the one triggered by the 2008 global financial crisis.

The systemic nature of such risks may also explain why climate action to date has been insufficient. The science is clear: Global carbon dioxide emissions must decline by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by mid-century if the world is to have a chance of preventing catastrophic global warming.

But although the need for urgent and decisive government action in this area has never been greater, political leaders have so far failed to rise to the challenge.

In fact, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres's warning at the December 2019 COP25 climate conference that "we are knowingly destroying the very support systems keeping us alive" might be the most alarming words ever

**Mary Robinson and Daya Reddy**

uttered by a UN leader. As matters stand, countries' nationally determined contributions under the 2015 Paris agreement would have to be five times more ambitious in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2050.

Likewise, although a growing number of companies are pledging to become carbon neutral, this share needs to increase significantly. Too many multinational corporations and investors resist adopting climate-friendly policies and exert heavy pressure on governments, which in turn are unwilling to take the bold and potentially unpopular steps that are needed.

Yet, a relatively small number of fossil-fuel companies are responsible for a significant proportion of global CO2 emissions. By putting a real price on carbon, governments can set in motion a controlled shift away from fossil-fuel dependence.

Digital platforms can play their part, too. After all, *Google* and *Facebook* have removed false information about Covid-19, along with offers that try to profit from it. They should also consider limiting the visibility of people who spread false information about climate change, or of companies that depend on climate-endangering activities.

This year marks a critical juncture for global climate action, and not only because it falls halfway between the 2010 baseline for CO2 emissions and the 2030 deadline for significant cuts.

It also is a bumper year for environmental negotiations, with new global biodiversity goals expected later in 2020 (October's meeting has now been postponed, owing to Covid-19), and COP26 now scheduled to take place in 2021.

With countries' climate pledges up for review, COP26 will be a make-or-break moment that tells us whether we can avert a global climate disaster.

Any global climate action must start by considering our common humanity, and the need for solutions that are just and equitable for everyone.

Because the climate-change burden falls most heavily on the countries least responsible for causing it, those that are most responsible — the rich and developed countries — must lead the way in cutting emissions.

In many respects, the last 12 months have been encouraging, with creative responses to climate change and indications of behavioural shifts such as new no-fly trends.

Hundreds of thousands of schoolchil-

dren around the world have protested against climate inaction, spurred on by the indomitable Greta Thunberg, while grassroots climate mobilisation has reached unprecedented levels.

But climate policies that disadvantage certain groups can lead to a backlash, such as the "Yellow Vest" protests that exploded in France in response to a planned fuel-tax increase. Such unrest highlights the need to put social justice at the heart of our climate response.

In 2020, the world is at a social tipping point. Scientists and civil society must jointly raise their voices and make every effort to ensure that we emerge on the right side of it.

Young people have urged political leaders to listen to the scientists. And, as in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the scientific community stands ready to work side by side with governments and businesses to put humanity on a sustainable climate path while managing the development trade-offs responsibly.

The Covid-19 threat has shown that governments can act swiftly and resolutely in a crisis, and that people are ready to change their behaviour for the good of humanity.

The world must now urgently adopt the same approach to the existential challenge of climate change. — DM

• **Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is Chair of The Elders and a patron of the International Science Council. Daya Reddy is President of the International Science Council.**

### Words of Wisdom



*THERE'S a natural mystic blowing through the air. If you listen carefully now, you will hear. — Bob Marley*



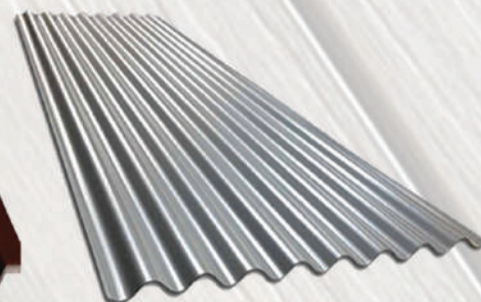
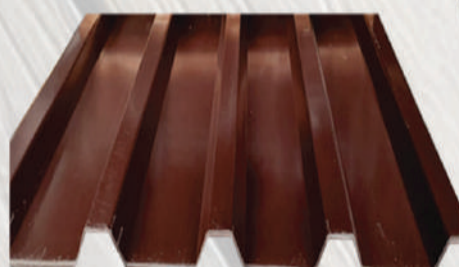
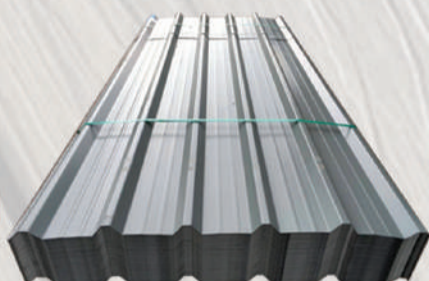


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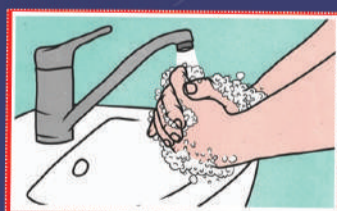
# COVID-19 AWARENESS

## #YOUARETHECHANGE

### WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

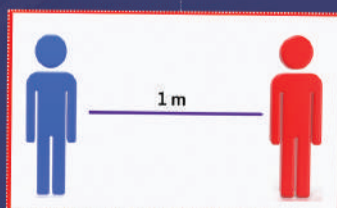
**Why?** Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.



### MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

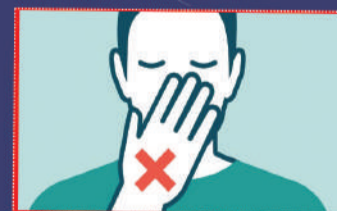
Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.

**Why?** When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease



### AVOID TOUCHING EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH

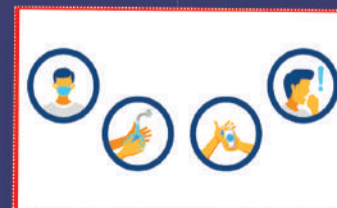
**Why?** Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.



### PRACTICE RESPIRATORY HYGIENE

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

**Why?** Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19





# Standard Lesotho Bank appoints new CEO

Staff Writer

**S**TANDARD Lesotho Bank has appointed Kenrick Cockerill as its new chief executive officer.

Mr Cockerill's appointment is with effect from 1 April 2020.

He replaces Mpho Vumbukani, who resigned last August after eight years of service having become the first Mosotho in that position since January 2011.

"The board of directors of Standard Lesotho Bank is pleased to announce the appointment of Mr Cockerill as chief executive of Standard Lesotho Bank effective 1 April 2020," a statement from the bank reads.

The bank said Mr Cockerill has a successful 32-year career history with the Standard Bank Group. He fulfilled several key leadership and specialist roles in South Africa, Botswana, DRC, Nigeria, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique and most recently in Tanzania. We look forward to fully tapping his leadership skills to enhance our customer experiences.

"The board also extends its sincere appreciation to Mr Thabiso Tsenki, who has been the acting chief executive for Standard Lesotho Bank, while the recruitment process for a substantive chief executive was underway; to our staff for their dedication and commitment; and most importantly, to our customers and other stakeholders for their unwavering support during this transition period," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the banking sector recently donated M2 million to help the country fight the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Although Lesotho is yet to record any cases, Lesotho is especially at risk as neighbouring South Africa has now recorded 1500 cases and nine deaths.

The country is currently on a three-week lockdown that ends on 21 April 2020.

And the local banks namely, the Central Bank of Lesotho, FNB Lesotho, Lesotho Post-Bank, Nedbank Lesotho and Standard Lesotho Bank have collectively donated M2 million towards the fight against the outbreak of COVID-19 in Lesotho.

The contribution will be used primarily to support advocacy and educational mes-

sages to ensure that Basotho are aware and empowered to take precautionary measures to limit the spread of this deadly virus, which has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"Public education has been considered critical at this stage because prevention is one of the best ways to manage the pandemic; hence the country's dire need to mobilise Basotho to be aware of the virus and to encourage them to take preventative measures against its spread," a statement from the banks said.

The banks said the support was in response to a clarion call by the government for all stakeholders to join efforts in preventing or combating the spread of this pandemic, which can otherwise become a national crisis affecting the lives of all the citizens.

"The banking fraternity also applauds the government for taking the lead by declaring a national lockdown as announced by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, which is necessary intervention to control the spread of COVID-19 in the country. The sector also continues to reaffirm its commitment to join the world in combating COVID-19 and to cooperate with the Ministry of Health and other interest groups to arrest this pandemic."

The banks said they were committed to remaining open during the lockdown as they are one of the essential services that were identified by the government. Banks are opening at 9am to 3pm starting on Wednesday.

"However, all clients are strongly advised to minimise branch visits and use all electronic banking channels for their banking as much as possible. These include internet banking, mobile banking, and app services. The use of these channels will limit their visits to branches to reduce exposure.

"Furthermore, clients are encouraged to use banks' call centres for other services like enquiries, queries, etc. Branches and ATMs are being regularly sanitised to ensure a safe environment for clients whilst visiting branches. As advised by WHO, the banking fraternity also emphasises on the message for all residents in Lesotho to stay at home, stay safe and wash hands with soap and water or sanitiser regularly in order to curb the spread of COVID-19," the banks said.



KENRICK Cockerill.

## SA's confirmed Covid-19 infections now at 1 505, death toll at 7



A HEALTH worker tests a woman for Covid-19 in Alexandra in Gauteng this week.

The minister has this week confirmed coronavirus cases in at least five townships around the country. The cases were in Khayelitsha (Cape Town), Alexandra (Johannesburg) and three Durban townships, uMlazi, KwaMashu and eMaoti. In uMlazi, a 46-year-old teacher became the first death in a township. The minister said the teacher had underlying history of asthma and hypertension.

"I still want to caution that, until we have a clear sense of what is happening in our densely populated areas, in particular townships, we should not be lulled into complacency but continue to venture forth in full combat by proactively conducting wall to wall testing and finding all Covid-19 affected people in the country," said Mkhize.

Mkhize also announced this week that government would be increasing mass screening and testing efforts after 67 equipped mobile minivans were unveiled in Johannesburg. The minivans would be sent to all parts of the country where they would strengthen government's efforts to curb the spread of the virus and isolating those who were found to be positive.

Meanwhile, Cooperative Governance Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma announced amended regulations to the state of disaster. She said government — at the request of the Health Department — would now be using cellphone number tracking technology to determine potential coronavirus contacts for people who had tested positive for the virus.

Communications Minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams said the government would not be using the information to spy on citizens, but only to assist the health department in tracing coronavirus contacts. Justice Minister Ronald Lamola said a retired judge would be appointed to ensure that the data was only used for Covid-10 purposes and that the government did not infringe on the individual rights to privacy of citizens. —IOL

**J**OHANNESBURG — Health Minister Zweli Mkhize has announced that the confirmed coronavirus Covid-19 cases in South Africa have increased to 1505, an increase of 43 from 1 462 on Thursday.

The confirmed death tally now sits at seven deaths, after two people in their 80s died in KwaZulu-Natal, the minister announced during a press briefing at the Khayelitsha Hospital in Cape Town.

"We would like to convey our condolences to the families and friends of these individuals. We would also like to thank the health workers who are working tirelessly every day," he said.



April 5 - 11 2020

# Radio drama fights gender-based violence



ACTORS record the play.

Nthatuoa Koeshe

**M**OHLAKA Media is currently broadcasting a radio drama to fight gender-based violence.

Titled *Seho se lile*, the drama is being broadcast on *Radio Lesotho* from Monday to Friday.

The drama is sponsored by Partners for Prevention (PFP) and explores violence against women and girls. It highlights the impact of all forms of violence on society especially when it is perpetuated by social norms.

So far, 45 episodes of the first season have been recorded.

Head writer, Moliehi Molupe, recently told the *Xpress People* that the drama is their way of trying to stop gender-based violence especially during the ongoing Coronavirus induced national lockdown when couples spend unusually more time together.

The drama will educate women and girls about what to do when faced with gender-based violence while also advising men, the usual perpetrators, to stop.

"The drama aims to stop gender-based violence while also educating women and girls about what to do when they experience violence in their homes," Moliehi said.

She said the drama was a behaviour changing tool aided by characters who go through different experiences that make the story relatable.

"In the story, there are four leading characters with different storylines which are interlinked and interrelated because they are within one community."

The four characters are 'Makatiso, a recently widowed woman with uncles who want to take away her inheritance; Nka-reng/Mamothibe, a young girl, who is forced into early marriage by her abductee, an abusive older man who recently separated from

his wife.

"The actors present a discourse that challenges societal norms particularly when one of the characters returns to her abusive marriage after being rescued by the police," Moliehi said.

Another character is Nongabomoshe, a police officer who is determined to ensure that domestic violence victims report violations and also get the protection they need.

"Nongabomoshe carries the message of change within the institutions that help the victims when they report abuse."

The last of the protagonists is Khototle, an abusive man who represents the working class; the cluster of men who disrespect women.

Moliehi said the characterisation was influenced by the need to change cultural norms. She said the characters also prove how disruptive gender-based violence is to families.

Msl Relo  
appointed  
new Scorpio  
Knight  
manager

Page 12



# Msl Relo appointed new Scorpio Knight manager

SEKONYELA Matamane.

Nthatuoa Koeshe

**S**EKONYELA Matamane, the founder and chief executive officer of events company, Scorpio Knight, has appointed Relebohile Mosola aka Msl Relo the new operations manager.

Sekonyela recently told the *Xpress People* that he reached the decision on the realisation that Msl Relo was best placed to grow the business.

He said the appointment was effected after a lengthy testing period.

"I tested him for several months without his knowledge and I saw him step up to all the tasks given to him," Sekonyela said adding that he also has good interpersonal skills which are critical for the industry.

He however, said that the move does not mean that he is discarding the brand as he would retain an oversight role.

"I'm merely empowering my company's new boss to run things and give him decision making powers," he said.

He said the main objective is to ensure that the business affords all clients better turnaround times, improves quality of service and that the business' research and development wing employs a more focused approach.

Msl Relo told the *Xpress People* that he was both excited and nervous as he has big shoes to fill.

He said his vast experience in communications and events management will give him a soft landing in the post.

He said he wants to take Scorpio Knight to dizzy heights.

"A year from now, I would love to see Scorpio Knight do more in photography and graphics designing," Msl Relo said.

# Sho Madjozi teaches WWE wrestlers how to dance in new advert

SHO Madjozi.

**S**HO Madjozi continues to do the most and keep South Africa's flag flying high with her hit track *John Cena*.

The track has now been used in a WWE advert.

The *Huku* hitmaker shared advert with Mzansi on *Instagram*.

In the advert, Sho Madjozi can be seen sitting in the lounge with what appears to be her onscreen family.

While she shits, her grandmother changes the channels on the television until she gets to *WWE*.

Suddenly the walls start shaking and to Sho Madjozi and her family's surprise real-life wrestlers break into the house as they tear it down, scaring the living daylights out

of them. One wrestler breaks the door down while another breaks through the roof.

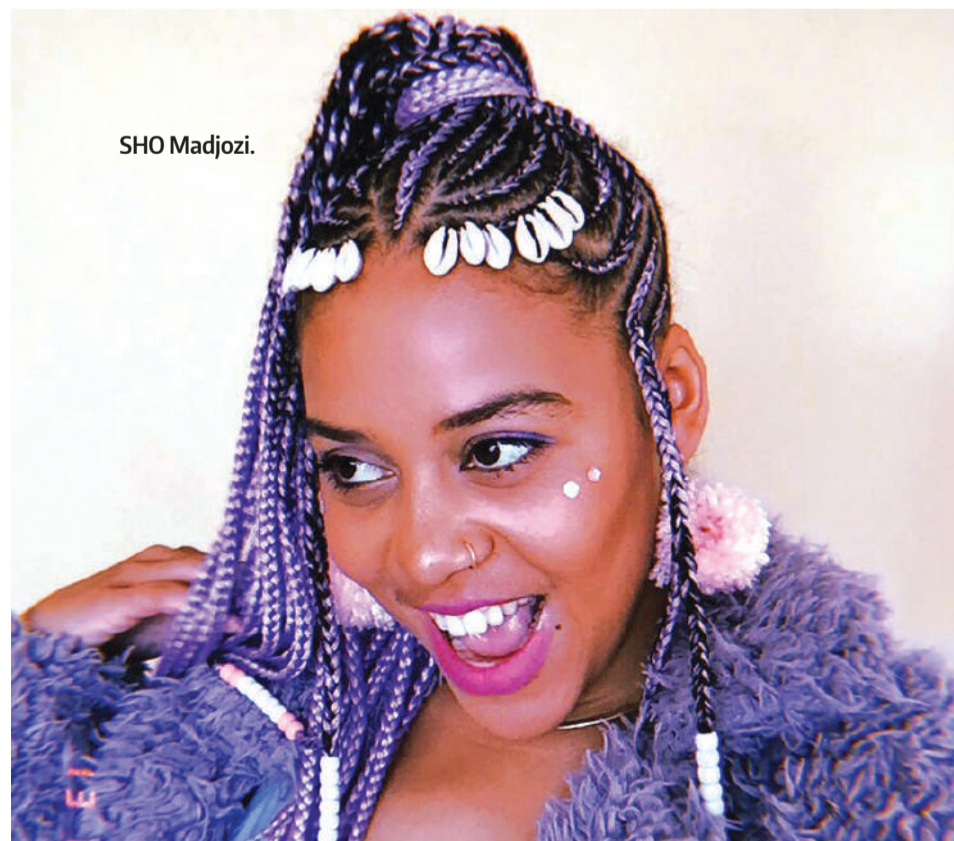
As if they were in a wrestling ring, Sho Madjozi and her family are then transported to the WWE arena where they get a front-row seat to watch the wrestlers battle it out.

However, before the wrestlers could start fighting, she screams "*Haibo*", stopping them immediately as she breaks into her John Cena track.

She says to them: "This is how we do things around here".

The *Wakanda Forever* rapper breaks into dance and is joined by her family and the WWE wrestlers who all do the famous dance moves to her hit song.

— IOL





# Nasty C blows America away

**N**ASTY C's international trajectory could not be stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the eve of the national lockdown — triggered by the coronavirus outbreak — last Thursday, the *Hell Naw* hit-maker inked a lucrative deal with iconic US record label *Def Jam Recordings*.

Just like that he found himself in a pool of the cutting-edge hip-hop stable's past and current artists that include Rihanna, Drake, Frank Ocean, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Nas, 2 Chainz and Teyana Taylor.

"Nasty C is a unique and forward-thinking artist who is at the forefront of a new generation of rappers emerging from Africa," says Jeff Harleston, interim chairman and CEO at Def Jam.

You name them and Def Jam, in its 36-year history, has given them the Midas touch and now it's Nasty C's turn.

The 23-year-old says this is the moment that he has envisioned and dreamt of all his life.

"Yeah, it sucks that I can't do shows and perform for my fans," Nasty C said, voicing his frustrations over the Covid-19 restrictions.

"But the reaction (to Def Jam signing me) has been amazing. My country is very proud of me.

"It means new heights, new levels and a bigger brand altogether. It makes me feel proud.

"We had a couple of talks (with Def Jam) and took some time to feel each other out and see what we've got to work with then we started coming up with ideas as to how we can introduce Nasty C to the American market. Now we're here."

It's hard to imagine that it took a lot of convincing for Def Jam to sign him.

Nasty C has made great strides in the past five years — more than his local rap counterparts wish to achieve in a lifetime.

Much like Tsonga firecracker Sho Madjozi, the international market has piqued a great interest to Nasty C's unique rap flow.

In 2016, American actor and musician Omari Hardwick — renowned for his lead role in *Power* — told *Sowetan* that he was blown away by the then 19-year-old rapper during his SA visit.

"This kid is incredibly gifted. I was put onto him last night and I was blown away," Hardwick gushed to *Sowetan*.

A couple of days later, the duo were in studio recording music together and the song *A Star is Born* was birthed.

In January, Nasty C rubbed shoulders with music sensation and fellow Def Jam artist Justin Bieber in Hollywood. On the same trip, Nasty C was pictured with hot American rapper DaBaby.

But Nasty C says a turning point in his career was linking up with his icon T.I last year. The two are rumoured to have a collaboration on Nasty C's upcoming music offering.

"(A pivotal moment for my career has been) getting a coding from my idol T.I and having him reach out and do a song with me," he said.

Nasty C's new record deal means new music for fans, but on an international scale. Straight off the bat after his signing, Nasty C made his US debut with new single *There They Go* that premiered on *Apple Music Beats1*.

"How you hating on a tuck tuck?... You ain't got no vision,"

he raps in the catchy hook.

A music video for the party jam filmed in his hometown of Durban immediately followed. It was filmed by Los Angeles-based filmmaker Andrew Sandler, who has helmed projects for Chris Brown, Mary J. Blige and Diddy.

The song is a first taste of Nasty C's new music from his third album *Zulu Man With Some Power*.

"It's hard to explain in words so I'd rather let the music speak for itself. All I can say is that it's a special and true work of art," he said.

"It's very different from anything I've done before. It's the beginning of the global takeover. I'm very amped to let everybody hear the music I've been working on."

For the past four consecutive years, Nasty C has been the No 1 most-streamed South African artist on *Apple Music*. His first two albums *Bad Hair* (2016) as well as *Strings and Bling* (2018) have yielded hits such as *Juice Back*, *SMA* and *Hell Naw*.

He has won countless awards such as an SA Music Award, Metro FM Award and SA Hip-Hop Awards.

Nasty C has been nominated for international awards, including the BET Awards.

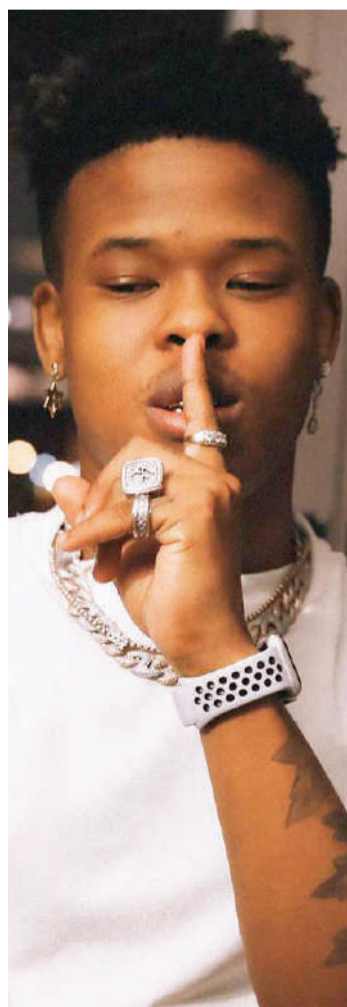
"My music journey has been worth living twice. It's been bittersweet. It has its bad effects, but for the most part it's fun. I enjoy it," he said.

Real name Nsikayesizwe Ngcobo, he was born and raised by his father in Illovo, KwaZulu-Natal. His mother died in a car crash when he was 11 months old.

He released his first mix tape *One Kid, a Thousand Coffins* at 15 years old in 2013. Before long, he had earned the title of the "coolest kid in Africa".

"(In school) academically, I was very average and personally wise I was quiet unless I was with my friends, but I was a cool kid because I could draw, rap and I was very popular."

— *Sowetanlive*



NASTYC.



**Weekend Girl**

**NOMALOMBAZO** "Percy" Komeng (20) resides in Moshoeshoe II in Maseru. She is a third year International Business student at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. Her motto is: "bring the best of your authentic self in every opportunity".



## Yourstars

### Aries - March 21 - April 20

Secret affairs will only lead to heartache. Use your inventiveness to find solutions. Stay calm and focus on things that will help you understand the situation better. You will be your usual charming self and the partners you attract may be the adventurous type. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

### Taurus - April 21 - May 20

Sudden disruptions will cause upset and a change of routine in your home environment. You can expect sorrow to evolve from the information you discover. Look into some personal changes. Unexpected bills may set you back. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

### Gemini - May 21 - June 21

Your high energy and discipline will enable you to complete any seemingly insurmountable tasks. Make sure that you have all the pertinent facts before taking action. Double-check before you go out. If you can mix business with pleasure much can be accomplished. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

### Cancer - June 22 - July 22

Empty promises will cause confusion. It's time to reconnect with some of the people you used to know. You must follow your desires and dreams. Tempers will mount if you're too pushy at work or at home. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

### Leo - July 23 - August 22

You'll find it easy to deal with government agencies or large institutions. Look into any educational activities involving the whole family. Empty promises could be likely where work is concerned. You may find yourself in a heated dispute with a friend if you try to change your mind. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

### Virgo - August 23 - September 22

You may want to take another look at the investment you are about to make. Pursue outdoor activities or any physical exertion. You can get good solid advice from relatives or close friends you trust. You should be trying to clear up legal contracts that have been pending. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

### Libra - September 23 - October 22

Your intellectual wit will bring greater popularity with your peers. Sign up for courses that will bring you more skills. Go after your goals and don't be afraid to ask for assistance. Channel your energy into passionate interludes with your lover. Your lucky day this week will be Tuesday.

### Scorpio - October 23 - November 21

You might have a problem juggling your time. Tone down and put some of that hard-earned cash into a safe, long-term investment. You may want to take a look at your direction in life. Try not to overspend on friends or family. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

### Sagittarius - November 22 - December 20

Your emotional state could leave you vulnerable and confused. Don't let your jealous imagination play games with you. Don't push your luck with your boss. You should put a little extra effort in at work. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

### Capricorn - December 21 - January 19

Don't settle for less than the best. You may find that your mate is well aware of the circumstances. You could come into extra cash. If you have to deal with large institutions, be careful not to make waves. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

### Aquarius - January 20 - February 18

Concentrate on home improvement. Small details will make a difference. Travel opportunities look positive, but be cautious while driving. Don't beat around the bush; state your case in plain and simple terms. Think twice before you volunteer information. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

### Pisces - February 19 - March 20

Self-deception about relationships is a problem. There's lots to be done and if you meet your deadline you'll be in your boss's good books. You will do best to entertain those you wish to close deals with. Use your charm, but don't sign or agree to anything. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

# Inside Poveglia Island's history of death and madness



A PHOTOGRAPH showing the only standing buildings on Poveglia Island.

## Genevieve Carlton

**I**N the Venetian lagoon sits Poveglia Island, a small, unpopulated landmass cut down the middle by a canal. For all its unassuming appearance, however, it has a dark history and is said to be one of the most haunted places in Europe, a continent saturated with ghosts from its 3 000 years of recorded history.

Many of those ghosts came courtesy of the Black Death, which swept through Europe in the 14th century, killing off millions of people and cutting the entire population of some cities in half in a matter of months or even weeks. And the bubonic plague didn't stop after the famous outbreak of 1348. Instead, it reappeared again and again for centuries.

In Venice, Europe's dominant trading port during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, officials took advantage of the Venetian lagoon's islands to isolate and manage its plague outbreaks. For centuries, Poveglia Island was Venice's solution to the plague: An isolated quarantine site where victims of the plague were sent after infection with few ever leaving the island again.

The small island, just 17 acres, housed over 160,000 plague victims through the centuries and officials did more than just quarantine the sick and soon to die. They burned the corpses to stop the spread of the disease and it is said that human ash from these cremations make up more than 50 percent of the island's soil, even centuries later. It sounds like Hell, just in Northern Italy.

### The history of Poveglia Island

The picturesque Venetian Lagoon houses 166 islands, including a small island directly south of the Piazza San Marco. Known as Poveglia Island, the small dot of land has housed people since at least the fifth century when Romans escaped Goth and Hun invasions by fleeing to more defensible islands in the lagoon.

As Venice grew into a major power, Poveglia became an important defensive location. In the 14th century, the Venetians built a fort on the island, establishing an outpost that could destroy enemy ships that tried to reach the city of Venice.

But when bubonic plague ravaged Europe, Poveglia Island became the quickest and eventually permanent solution to the outbreak: it became an important quarantine site for plague victims as early as the 16th century.

In addition to quarantining plague victims on Poveglia, the island also became a gigantic mass grave for the corpses of the dead. Barges from Venice hauled the dead to the island, while smaller ships brought exiles from the city who showed even the mildest symptoms of plague.

On Poveglia Island, plague victims

## Stranger than Fiction

spent forty days waiting to see if they would die or recover. Most died. The Venetians cremated untold thousands of bodies on Poveglia, leaving the ashy remains of plague victims to fall where they may.

### Containing the plague through quarantines

When the deadliest outbreak of bubonic plague, Black Death, struck Europe in 1348, Venice created the first modern quarantine system. The republic detained ships and travellers suspected of carrying the plague for a period of forty days — the word quarantine itself comes from the Italian *quaranta*, or forty.

Although plague quarantines were largely ineffective, the desperate need to stop the spread of disease drove other areas to adopt the practice. During a re-appearance of the bubonic plague in 1374, the Duke of Milan exiled all plague sufferers to a field outside the city. On the Dalmatian coast, Ragusa created a quarantine station to isolate people from plague-ravaged areas.

Marseilles created a maritime quarantine in the early 16th century, while 17th-century Frankfurt banned anyone living in a plague-afflicted house from attending public gatherings. In colonial New York, the city council set up a quarantine station on the island that now houses the Statue of Liberty.

### Venice's Lazaretti system of plague quarantine stations

The Black Death devastated Venice's population in 1348, killing half of its citizens. As Venice was a hub for international trade, it welcomed ships from around the known world, making the island especially susceptible to the spread of disease.

As bubonic plague ravaged Europe for centuries, Venice responded by creating a network of *lazaretti*, or plague quarantine stations, on the islands of the lagoon. Poveglia Island became the most important of these inspection ports by the 18th century.

In 1485, Venice's ruler, Giovanni Mocenigo, died from another outbreak

of the plague which spurred the city to create several quarantine colonies on isolated islands. "When plague struck the town, everybody sick or showing any suspect symptoms were restricted on the island until they recovered or died," explains anthropologist Luisa Gambaro.

On Lazzaretto Vecchio, an island northeast of Poveglia Island, the number of corpses soon overwhelmed the city's capacity to bury them. Archaeologist Vincenzo Gobbo said: "About 500 people a day used to die in Lazzaretto Vecchio. [Corpse carriers] simply had no time to take care of the burials."

"It looked like hell," wrote 16th-century chronicler Rocco Benedetti. "The sick lay three or four in a bed."

When plague victims died, they were thrown into mass graves. "Workers collected the dead and threw them in the graves all day without a break," Benedetti recorded. "Often the dying ones and the ones too sick to move or talk were taken for dead and thrown on the piled corpses."

From the 16th century on, Poveglia Island housed plague victims and many breathed their last and were cremated or buried in mass graves. But the island became even more important in Venice's epidemic prevention plans in the 18th century.

In 1777, Venice's Magistrate of Health turned Poveglia Island into its primary plague checkpoint. Any ship sailing to Venice had to stop at Poveglia first for an inspection. If any sailor showed signs of plague, Venice quarantined them on Poveglia Island.

**The Poveglia Island mental hospital**  
Poveglia Island remained an important plague quarantine site until 1814 and owing to its haunting legacy as the city's go-to quarantine station for the plague, Venetians began calling Poveglia Island the "Island of Ghosts."

Adding to the Poveglia's dark history, in 1922, Venetians transformed the island by building a mental hospital there. Naturally, rumors soon spread that a doctor at the hospital carried out morbid experiments on his patients, only to reportedly die after falling from a bell tower on the island.

The hospital closed its doors in 1968, leaving Poveglia Island once again abandoned. Not surprisingly, stories of plague victims and now abused psychiatric patients haunting Poveglia Island continue to this day.

In 2014, Venice unsuccessfully tried to auction off the island but the deal fell through and the island's status remains in limbo. Today, the "Island of Ghosts" is completely off-limits to visitors. Why anyone would want to visit such a place is anyone's guess. — ati





PATIENTS gather outside the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Maseru awaiting to be treated on Friday. The gathering disregarded the social distancing that is being promoted by the World Health Organisation (WHO).



COMMUTERS wait for transport at Maseru taxi rank.



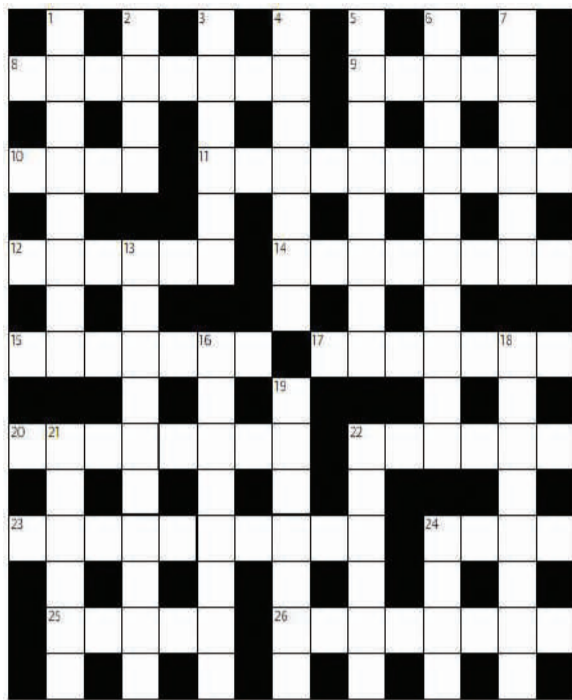
STRANDED commuters walk to their homes in Maseru yesterday after failing to secure transport due to the ongoing Coronavirus-induced national lockdown.



RESIDENTS gather outside the Maseru District Administrator's office to apply for movement permits on Friday.



# Crossword Puzzle



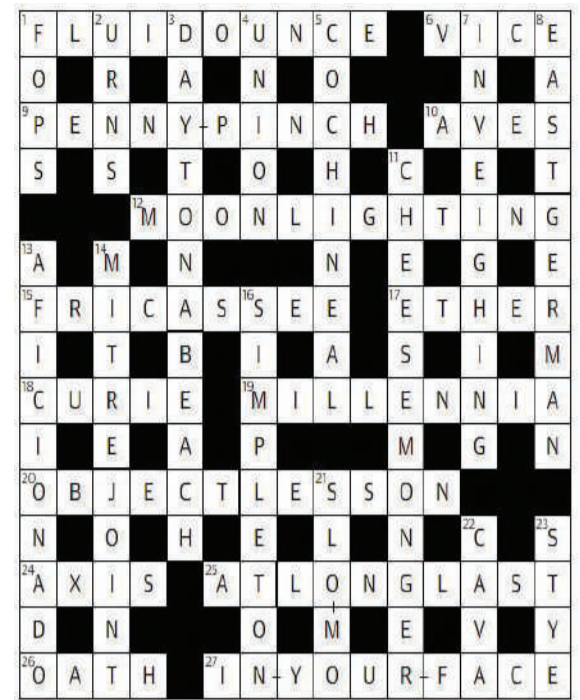
**Across**

- 8 Arrogant male turning us on (8)
- 9 Ring through snout for end of rope, maybe (5)
- 10 Boring person with new style, in retrospect (4)
- 11 Ooh! I love purchasing, initially getting cash out (10)
- 12 One under empty bar drinking single to pass out (6)
- 14 Son packed and went off (8)
- 15 Hearing Italian on vacation before adventure (7)
- 17 Accessory with evening dress: one must get into function (7)
- 20 Side on pitch try, tired at end of game (4,4)
- 22 Stick plug in this space (6)
- 23 See one pulling faces with hands up on this? (5,5)
- 24 Adult butterfly (4)
- 25 Like getting home to eat a Chinese? (5)
- 26 Instrument in song by Queen (8)

**Down**

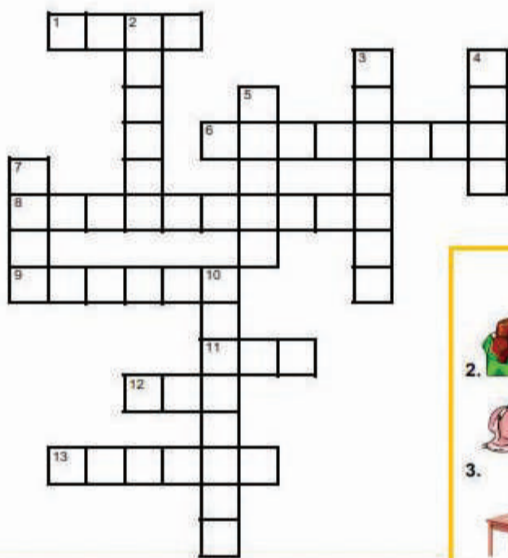
- 1 Party people getting present (8)
- 2 Middle part of classic family film (4)
- 3 Go after money you picked up for investment (6)
- 4 Deep regret as vibrations not leading to ecstasy (7)
- 5 Perfect single knocking off Number 1 (8)
- 6 One likes to chat old male up with right opening (10)
- 7 Small bird in water (6)
- 13 Could be unfit: primarily heavy with it? (6,4)
- 16 Separating without husband moving (8)
- 18 Song's good within musical (8)
- 19 Type date, line going over part of index (3,4)
- 21 Train overcrowded at the start: main line to occupy platform worker? (6)
- 22 Topless bar: stand to get strong drink (6)
- 24 British vessel in bay (4)

# Last week solution

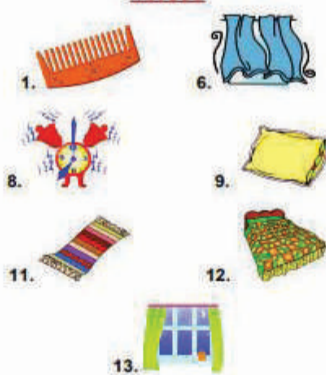


# Kiddies

## Bedroom Crossword



**Across**



**Down**



## Skeleton



# Curtis



SIX-PACK CHARMIN FOR THIRTY BUCKS AND ONE-OUNCE PURELL BOTTLES FOR SEVENTEEN BUCKS EACH





# World-renowned HIV scientist, dies of Covid-19 complications

**P**ROFESSOR Gita Ramjee, who recently returned from a trip to London, had been admitted to hospital with pneumonia. She was Chief Scientific Officer at the Aurum Institute and former chief specialist scientist and director of the South African Medical Research Council's (SAMRC) HIV Prevention Research Unit. She died in an Umhlanga hospital on Tuesday from Covid-19 related complications.

Professor Glenda Gray, president and CEO of the SAMRC, informed staff in an email of Ramjee's "tragic passing" due to "Covid-19 related complications".

Contacted last night, Gray said "We are still reeling. What to say?"

"Gita was fundamental and inextricably linked to the endeavour to find solutions to prevent HIV in women in South Africa. She was tireless in this pursuit. Her tenacity will never be forgotten. I have tremendous respect for her contribution and her passion to find solutions for women in our country. All of us have worked so hard in this country to find solutions to prevent HIV and it so sad to have to part with someone so soon in this journey. I am devastated and my thoughts go out to her family and friends," said Gray.

The Aurum Institute said it was deeply saddened by the death of Ramjee whom they described as a "world-renowned scientist, who worked tirelessly to find HIV prevention solutions for women".

"The world has lost a bold and compassionate leader in the response to HIV," said Professor Gavin Churchyard, Group CEO of the Aurum Institute. "Gita Ramjee firmly believed in health as a fundamental human right. Her ground-breaking research in HIV prevention contributed to the global response to HIV and AIDS. Our thoughts during this difficult time are with her family, colleagues and the many people her life and work touched," he added.

Many also expressed their sadness and paid their respects on social media.

UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima: "Deeply saddened at the news of the passing of Gita Ramjee. An eminent scientist who dedicated her life to #HIV prevention for women and girls in #Africa and #EndingAIDS. A huge loss at a time when the world needs her most. My condolences to her family, friends & colleagues at @MRCza  
Meg Doherty, Director, Global



PROFESSOR Gita Ramjee

HIV, Hepatitis, STI Programmes at World Health Organisation: "WHO and all the HIV department sends its deepest condolences to Prof Gita Ramjee's family and all of S Africa.

This is a terrible loss. In solidarity," Professor Salim Abdool-Karim, Director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in Africa (CAPRISA): Professor Gita Ramjee's

passing is an immense loss and has left an indelible void in HIV research and treatment, particularly on the African continent. On behalf of @CAPRISAOFFICIAL I extend our

heartfelt condolences to her family.

Ramjee, recognised as a world-class scientist, spent her life focused on finding HIV prevention methods, which were conducive to the lifestyles, circumstances and perceived risk factors that South African women face. While at the SAMRC, Ramjee's KwaZulu-Natal based team was also at the forefront of attempts to find an effective HIV vaccine.

Ramjee held Honorary Professorships at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the University of Washington in Seattle and the University of Cape Town.

Ramjee was a critical player in the field of HIV prevention clinical trials and was acknowledged internationally for her expertise in the field of microbicide research, including a Lifetime Achievement Award for HIV Prevention.

In 2018, she was honoured with the "Outstanding Female Scientist" Award by the European Development Clinical Trials Partnerships (EDCTP) for her life's work that has focused on finding new HIV prevention methods.

Ramjee has published more than 200 research articles. She was a reviewer and editor of several scientific journals and a member of several local and international committees and advisory groups including the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC).

"The Aurum Institute and the global HIV research community will mourn Gita Ramjee's passing and celebrate the huge contribution to the response to HIV she made in her life," said Churchyard.

Ramjee had been involved in the clinical trials of microbicides for over a decade. She collaborated with all the major sponsors involved in HIV prevention research, including UNAIDS, Population Council, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust.

— Daily Maverick

**This article was first published by Daily Maverick**

**A**FRICAN people know how to crack a good joke, even in tough times. But the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that, in an African context, the disease is anything but a joke.

In its attempt to curb the spread of Covid-19, South Africa has adopted similar measures to countries in Europe, North America and Asia by closing schools, putting curfews on restaurants, abandoning shopping malls and encouraging people to work from home.

We tend to forget, however, that global precedents are not always applicable to Africa, simply because the contexts we live in are entirely different.

Most Western countries have enjoyed democracy for centuries. As it stands currently, there are still African countries such as Zimbabwe that don't enjoy democracy in its truest form. How then could the two continents ever compare or collaborate or mirror the actions of the other, even in what is a global pandemic?

We coined the term "African solutions for African problems" and allowed it to become something that was never put into practice in terms of legislation and policy.

According to the OECD, people in South Africa are more vulnerable to the virus because of the poor air quality. The country also performs below the OECD average in terms of water quality, with only 67 percent of people satisfied with the quality of their water — compared to the OECD average of 81 percent.

Political leaders have been telling us about social distancing and regularly using disinfectant to avoid spreading the Covid-19 disease. Is that truly enough though? Will being on lockdown for 21 days decrease the impact

## Covid-19: A plague for the poor

of the pandemic on our society?

The actions of the South African government, in particular, echo those of leadership in Germany, which decided to completely ban leaving the home for anything but absolute necessities in Bavaria. Police Minister Bheki Cele even issued what were essentially threats to arrest any individual or establishment found to be breaking the rules, as many other states have done.

Videos circulate of our army violently enforcing lockdown restrictions. Some 26 years after the end of apartheid we find ourselves in a situation reminiscent of when South Africa was a police state.

The intrinsic difference between Bavaria, Germany, and, for instance, a place like Yeoville in Johannesburg is that the German population is not suffering from an epidemic of HIV/AIDS with a significant number of people immuno-compromised. They are also not dealing with overpopulation which means people are 10 times more likely to catch disease because of poor sanitation.

The issue is so much more nuanced in the context of our townships and villages. The reality is that if the coronavirus hits the townships the damages will be exponential.

The government is already struggling to provide and distribute ARVs. Considering that we're going into winter and people's immune systems are naturally weakening, will it be able to handle the task of distributing ARVs and treatments for Covid-19?

The virus could spread like a bushfire,

fuelled by a lack of information, poor education and poor sanitation, for which the government must take responsibility.

In Soweto, there are 1.27 million people living in 200km<sup>2</sup>. How do you practice social distancing and self-isolation when more than seven people live in a single household, often with less than three rooms?

How do we increase sanitation in Eastern Cape towns such as Ugie and Barkley East which already had poor sanitation due to water scarcity and government neglect?

Without being facetious, the worst implication of corona for our middle-class lifestyles is that we'll have less money in our medical aid funds after seeking treatment.

Naturally, solutions proposed by the government to curb Covid-19 are scientifically proven and thoroughly researched. But, ask yourselves, are these measures really enough?

I am 16 years old and to me, it is evident our solutions would work perfectly well for a state with reliable healthcare facilities, a population that was not crippled by lawlessness and a state that was more than willing to use the necessary funds to target the virus without abusing them. Is South Africa a country to which one can ascribe those characteristics?

My message is simple: Covid-19 is possibly the biggest socio-economic threat our society has had to face since the dawn of democracy.

When the government set curfews on restaurants and began encouraging social distancing, they endangered the livelihoods of

millions of people.

For instance, the shopping malls we've abandoned have car guards whose financial security is dependent on people actually utilising the shopping malls. These guards now have no income. They will be able to feed their families or buy the basic necessities they need to survive.

More importantly, they will not have money to buy the items the government has labelled as necessary to fight the virus, such as sanitary products, gloves, masks and vitamin supplements. What then will these measures have done to stop the spread of the virus?

The British government has said it is capable of providing people who cannot work due to Covid-19 with at least £2,500 a month.

Listening to international news I mostly hear about Italy, China, Spain and the US. There is little mention of South Africa and an infection rate that potentially could skyrocket overnight? There's not even a headline at the bottom of the screen about how our population stands to be affected the most by Covid-19 because a large part of our population is immuno-compromised.

We have bent to the solutions and suggestions of a Western leadership that does not even care enough to report our news.

It is now near impossible to listen to the news and not hear about the coronavirus. If it manifests in South Africa in the way it has in China and Italy we will reach a point of no return. The rich may be safe, but the poor will once again be subject to unending suffering.

— DM/MC

**Danai Pachedu (not her real name) is a Grade 11 learner at Sacred Heart College**



# Will it be enough? Inside South Africa's plan to ramp up coronavirus testing

**T**HE National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) has only managed to do about 6 000 tests since the first coronavirus case was reported about a month ago, which is slightly higher than the number they claim to be able to do in a day.

## What test does South Africa currently use?

South Africa detects the coronavirus, known as SARS-CoV-2, by using a technique called a polymerase chain reaction, or PCR. A health worker uses a swab (it looks like a giant eardrum) to collect a sample taken from a person's throat and/or nose, which is then placed in a type of fluid and sent to the lab. The sample is fed into a PCR machine that makes thousands of copies of the virus' genes — if it is present in the patient's sample — until there is enough of the virus to detect.

According to National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) guidelines, if someone tests positive, this will be confirmed with another test. If that diagnostic comes back negative, then the test will be repeated to verify the result. This kind of repeat testing means it can take up to four days to definitively detect Covid-19. While waiting for the result, the person needs to self-quarantine.

The use of PCR to test for SARS-CoV-2, an approach that is used in South Africa at present, is recommended by the World Health Organisation.

## How many PCR tests can South Africa run per day and are we on track?

South Africa is currently able to do 5 000 tests per day through our National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), its CEO, Kamy Chetty, said in a press release at the end of March.

The idea was to increase that to 15 000 per day starting in April and eventually process 36 000 tests daily by the end of the month, said Chetty.

Right now, the country is not conducting close to 5 000 tests per day in public labs — and private labs are conducting more than 4 000 every day.

Private labs have done about 80 percent of all tests in the country.

Here's how we have done the calculations:

A total of 44 292 tests was done by Wednesday, according to the NICD. Only around 6 000 of those have been done by public laboratories under the NHLS, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said during a briefing on Wednesday evening.

That means the NHLS has only managed to do about 6 000 tests since the first case was reported about a month ago, which is slightly higher than the number they claim to be able to do in a day. Over the past week, public labs have increased testing to around 570 per day.

On Wednesday, Mkhize said at a press briefing: "This (the total number of tests and low number of tests conducted at the NHLS) is way too few considering the size of our population and other important factors such as inequality, poverty and the underlying disease burden we have."

## Will PCR tests alone allow us to diagnose enough people?

The short answer is no.

First, the global demand for PCR tests makes it challenging for South Africa to ensure it has enough of the chemicals needed to conduct the tests — all countries need these.

It is therefore better for the country to not put all its eggs in one basket: procuring a wider range of test technologies will increase its chances of getting hold of them.

But there are also other reasons.

Firstly, PCR tests are expensive — in the private sector, for instance, a test can cost anything between R900 and R 1400 — and they are time consuming to do. At a Thursday press briefing, Mkhize said: "We want to conduct hundreds of thousands of tests."

Although the NICD says the test takes 48 hours to produce, at the moment test results can take up to four days. Because of this, results are produced too slowly to ramp up testing significantly within a short period of time — against the background of a fast-moving epidemic.

The slow pace at which results are produced also makes it difficult to use PCR tests to map the Covid-19 outbreak in South Africa so that researchers know exactly where the virus is spreading and are then able to send out contact tracers to hot spots as fast as possible.

"Speed is of the essence, it's important that we are able to reach out to those who are infected as fast as possible," Mkhize told journalists Thursday. "Knowing where and how this disease spreads is crucial. This will enable us to stay as far ahead of the virus as we can."

In order not to run out of PCR tests, and to



A GAUTENG Health Department official conducts a swab test on an Alexandra resident.

help labs keep up with the high demand for testing, South Africa has stringent testing criteria. Many people who might be infected with SARS-CoV-2, for instance, those without any or with only a few symptoms, therefore do not qualify for testing.

PCR tests also require specialised equipment that is hard to move around: PCR machines are about the size of large photocopiers and require trained technicians to operate them, which limits testing only to laboratories that have these machines and staff on hand. And, when health workers collect samples from people's noses and throats, they are exposed to the risk of infection.

Lastly, while PCR tests produce few false positives (so they are really good at detecting the coronavirus), false negatives (results that incorrectly indicate that someone is clear of the virus), are sometimes a problem.

PCR tests are therefore great at detecting the virus in patients with acute infection — in other words, those who have clear symptoms — but not so great at picking up the virus in those with mild symptoms and who are in the early or late stages of infection when there is not enough of the virus present in someone's system for the test to detect.

## Will South Africa use any other coronavirus tests?

There are plans underway to start using another, much faster, PCR test to diagnose Covid-19 cases using GeneXpert machines.

South Africa's national laboratory service has more than 180 of these GeneXpert

machines already on hand as they are already used for tuberculosis testing.

These testing machines come in two different size options, a large one for laboratory settings and a much smaller version for clinics. The tests are considerably easier to use in the new mobile testing vans set up for Covid-19, which will be going to rural communities.

"The advantage, according to the supplier, is that tests can be processed in 45 minutes, and the smaller machines can be placed in mobile vehicles, which makes it ideal for community testing.

"It's a pity that this new test kit was not available sooner, as it would have made a huge difference to how testing gets done. We are nevertheless pleased that it will be ready shortly," Chetty said in a statement.

On Wednesday, during a briefing, Mkhize said he was hopeful these tests would be rolled out by the end of next week. But, he added, the exact timeframe was dependent on when the new coronavirus tests are validated by the NHLS, or in other words tested to make sure they worked in the South African context.

Once the GeneXpert tests have been rolled out, Mkhize said, capacity will increase to 30 000 tests per day.

A new form of testing, called a rapid antibody test, is currently being investigated as another option for use in the country.

## When will the new tests arrive?

So far, the health department has not given an exact date when the new tests will arrive.

This timeline will be dependent on how quickly the tests can be approved and validated by the relevant bodies.

All diagnostic tests, being imported, need to be approved by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) first.

While, ordinarily, this may take some time, the SAHPRA will be speeding up the process for licensing medical devices, such as these test kits, to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic timorously.

In order to make sure that tests still meet the necessary standards despite the fast-paced decision-making, each rapid antibody test kit company will need to have approval from another regulatory body recognised by the SAHPRA. This includes kits being used in Australia, Europe, Canada, Brazil, Japan, and the US.

The US Food and Drug Administration has already approved the use of GeneXperts to diagnose Covid-19 cases, which is why the NICD has recommended them. But they still need to go through the SAHPRA's validation process before the test can be used.

A potential cause for delay with the arrival of any new tests is that they will have to be imported and, at this time, air travel is severely restricted globally.

These test manufacturers are largely based in China and Germany. Should the kits be approved and the companies have enough stock, there would still need to be a plane available to deliver them.

— News24



# Trump gets help from Kushner, rails against new 'witch-hunt' at coronavirus briefing



SHORTAGES of equipment have roiled healthcare facilities in New York and across the US.

**D**ONALD Trump sparked fresh criticism on Thursday by deploying his son-in-law at a White House coronavirus taskforce briefing and accusing Democrats of launching a fresh "witch-hunt".

Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to the US president who is married to his daughter, Ivanka, made a surprise appearance on the podium and said Trump had instructed him to "break down every barrier needed to make sure the teams can succeed".

He added: "The president also wanted us to make sure that we think outside the box, make sure we're finding all the best thinkers in the country, making sure we're getting all the best ideas."

But by way of example, Kushner said Trump became concerned about supply shortages after hearing about them "just this morning" from "friends of his in New York"—implying the president responds to anecdotes rather than the state governor or public health officials.

"We went to the president today," Kushner continued. "And earlier today, the president called Mayor [Bill] de Blasio to inform him that we are going to send a month of supply to New York public hospital system." The vice-president, Mike Pence, later said there would 200,000 masks sent to New York.

Kushner said: "We'll be doing similar things with all the different public hospitals that are in the hotspot zones and making sure that we're constantly in communications with the local communities."

Media reports have suggested that Kushner, a property developer with no medical expertise, is running a "shadow taskforce"—a rival power base that conflicts with the official task force led by Pence.

He said: "I've been serving really at the direction of the vice-president. He's asked me to get involved in different projects. The vice-president and I speak, probably, sometimes five, 10 times a day, but everything that I'm doing is at the direction of the vice-president."

He glanced over at Pence, who smiled benignly.

Earlier on Thursday, Nancy Pello-

si, the House speaker, announced a new House committee would oversee "all aspects" of the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic and did not rule out an investigation in the style of the commission on the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.

Such a prospect clearly stung Trump, who compared it to the special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation and the congressional hearings into his dealings with Ukraine that led to his impeachment.

"This is not the time for politics," he told reporters. "Endless partisan investigations—here we go again—have already done extraordinary damage to our country in recent years. You see what happens. It's witch-hunt after witch-hunt after witch-hunt and, in the end, the people doing the witch-hunt have been losing, and they've been losing by a lot. It's not any time for witch-hunts."

Yet even as the president spoke, the White House was releasing a letter in which he assailed Senator Chuck Schumer, the Democratic minority leader from New York. "Thank you for your Democrat public relations letter and incorrect sound bites, which are wrong in every way," Trump wrote.

"If you spent less time on your ridiculous impeachment hoax, which went haplessly on forever and ended up going nowhere (except increasing my poll numbers) and instead focused on helping the people of New York, then New York would not have been so completely unprepared for the 'invisible enemy'."

Along with Kushner, Trump introduced Peter Navarro, the national Defense Production Act (DPA) policy coordinator. Navarro claimed there was a "black market springing up" to drive up prices of protective gear, involving brokers and middle men. "We are going to crack down on the

hoarders," he said.

Navarro, a hardliner on trade, also used the opportunity to claim the pandemic showed "we're over-dependent on a global supply chain" and was a "vindication" of Trump's stance on buying American goods and strengthening borders. More than once he praised "Trump time"—shorthand for getting things done fast.

The president said he was again invoking the DPA to ensure parts were available for the mass production of ventilators. Adm John Polowczyk, in charge of the supply chain, said the federal government

had now produced 22.4m pairs of protective gloves, 5.2m face shields and 7,600 ventilators.

But distributing the supplies to the places most in need has been a problem. Trump became defensive under questioning, seeking to shift blame to individual states.

Some were well prepared, he said, but "in some cases their shelves were bare". He went on: "By the way, the states should have been building their stockpiles. We're a backup, we're not an ordering clerk. Whoever heard of a governor calling up the federal government and saying, 'Sir, we need a hospi-

tal?'"

Trump also faced queries about the economy on a day that saw the number of people filing claims for unemployment benefits surge to a record of more than 6.6 million. He made the astonishing claim: "I will always protect your Social Security, your Medicare and your Medicaid"—despite having supported cuts in the past.

The president announced that he had taken a second test for coronavirus and, like the first, it came back negative. The second test was much simpler and took about 15 minutes. "I've done them both and the second one is much more pleasant," he said.

America now has more than 236,000 confirmed cases of the virus, according to Johns Hopkins, the highest in the world, and more than 5,600 fatalities.

Deborah Birx, the taskforce response coordinator, warned that Americans are not yet taking the risks seriously enough.

"I know you've seen the slope in the United States vs the slope in Italy," she said. "We have to change that slope... we see country after country having done that. I can tell by the curve as it is today that not everyone is following the social distancing guidance. We can bend our curve, but everyone has to take responsibility as Americans."

Earlier, the treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, rejected reports that some Americans might have to wait months for direct payments in the \$2.2tn emergency rescue package stimulus package.

"I don't know where you're hearing these things," Mnuchin said. "I told you this would be three weeks; I'm now committing to two weeks. We're delivering on our commitments to the IRS, which I oversee, within two weeks."

— *The Guardian*

# Brazil's message to the world: Our president is wrong about coronavirus

**T**HE Covid-19 pandemic has its villain. And it's not the virus. Even the most outlandish Hollywood disaster movie wouldn't entertain the notion of a president who encourages the public to go out more during a public health emergency, as Jair Bolsonaro has done.

The Brazilian president has denied the seriousness of coronavirus, rejected the advice of health officials, fought with governors trying to take precautions, put the poor at greatest risk—and jeopardised a coordinated global response to a threat that might change the course of humanity. Even before the pandemic, Bolsonaro stood out within a group of elected despots—yet with Covid-19, he has truly surpassed his peers. Donald Trump, despite his initial xenophobic response, has started to recognise the seriousness of the coronavirus. Viktor Orbán has used the health emergency as an excuse for a power-grab, but recognises that the virus is a real threat.

Meanwhile, Bolsonaro has promoted protests against congress and the supreme court and repeatedly doubled down on denial of coronavirus science: "This virus isn't everything they say it is," he said to supporters on 16 March.

According to Imperial College London, the difference between adopting total isolation and not doing so equals one million lives lost in Brazil. Bolsonaro, however, believes only in himself. With him, it's not about post-truth but self-truth. He goes live on Facebook to discredit scientific research and call coronavirus a "little flu" or "little cold". This week, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram removed coronavirus-related posts from his profile because they spread "disinformation" and did "actual harm to people".

In March, following Bolsonaro's visit to his idol Trump, more than 20 people in his entourage tested positive for coronavirus. What did he do? He broke quarantine and headed



JAIR Bolsonaro.

off to a demonstration against congress and the supreme court. He shook hands and held his supporters' mobile phones for selfies. "If I get the virus, the responsibility is mine," he said. At no point did he stop to think he might infect others. Brazilians do not even know whether Bolsonaro caught Covid-19. He claims he had two negative tests, but refuses to show results.

In a nationwide broadcast last week, he urged an end to the isolation advocated by his own government. The next day, followers held rallies across the country calling for businesses to reopen. The already overwhelmed courts had to ban an official proclamation that pushed people to end isolation with these words: "Brazil can't stop".

It was only this Tuesday that Bolsonaro finally started to accept the crisis is more than "media hysteria". Under pressure from min-

isters and losing support among his allies, he called the pandemic "the biggest challenge of our generation". As he spoke, city streets echoed with protests as those already opting for self-isolation clanged pots and pans and shouted "Bolsonaro out!" for the 15th consecutive night.

But this doesn't represent a meaningful U-turn. It just adds to the chaos. Just a few days before, Bolsonaro had visited Brasilia's satellite cities and talked to residents about the need to restart the economy. He ramped up the ongoing war against state governors, especially São Paulo's and Rio de Janeiro's, formerly Bolsonaro's allies but now declared enemies. On Monday, João Doria, São Paulo's governor and a 2022 presidential hopeful, enjoined people in Brazil's richest state: "Don't follow the advice of the president of the republic!"

Bolsonaro behaves like a maniac, but he is calculating. He is gambling with the lives of 210 million Brazilians because he wants to avoid a recession that might undermine his re-election. But the president's survival chances are diminishing. Many requests have been lodged for his impeachment, and opposition leaders signed a letter calling for his resignation. Even among the staunchest conservatives, a consensus is emerging that he must be isolated.

At greatest peril are poor communities, which struggle to self-isolate because of one- and two-room favela homes that often lack plumbed sewage and running water. Social movements have launched campaigns to guarantee basic food and cleaning products for such residents, most of whom are black. "Us for us" is the motto of these organisations that know they cannot rely on a state intent on destroying the public health system, along with labour rights.

Bolsonaro had offered informal workers a paltry 200 Brazilian real (£31) a month to see them through the pandemic—congress finally approved BRL 600 (£93). This is not enough for a population already starting to go hungry and grappling with a dengue epidemic.

As elsewhere, the poor have been contaminated by the jet-setting rich. The first death in Rio de Janeiro cast a light on Brazil's unofficial apartheid: the victim was one of the many housemaids forced to continue working during the pandemic—her employer had just come back from Italy. After this avoidable tragedy, the children of domestic workers launched an online campaign, "For our mothers' lives". They urged rich employers to support their poor parents so they didn't need to travel to work during this time of risk.

Yet the president is sending exactly the opposite message. Since a virus respects no borders, Bolsonaro is not just a threat to Brazil, but the entire world. — *The Guardian*



# Reasons to consider a career in cybersecurity

If you're finishing middle school, graduating college or even thinking of switching jobs, chances are that you have given some thought to the sprawling tech industry. With cyberthreats looming large and cybercrime predicted to cost the world US\$6 trillion by 2021, it's no wonder that cybersecurity professionals are a "hot commodity".

In fact, there aren't enough of them to go around; the number of available cybersecurity professionals would need to grow by a whopping 145 percent just to meet the global demands of the market.

We have rounded up five reasons why cybersecurity may be the right career path for you.

## The future is digital

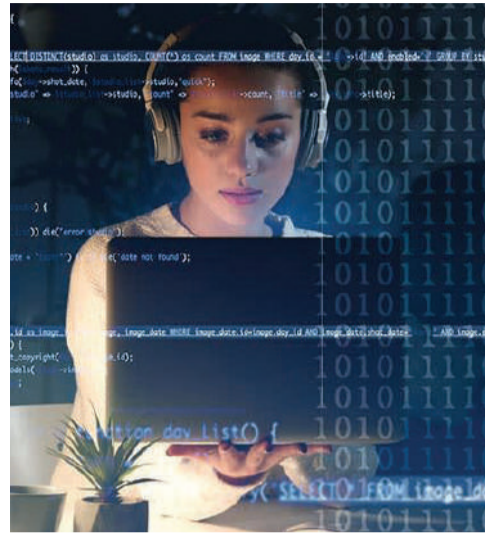
Few doubts that cybersecurity will increasingly become an important part of most industries. Considering that on a global scale the average cost of a data breach is almost US\$4 million, it's not surprising that organisations are looking to bolster their ranks with cybersecurity professionals.

The doors are open to you in the private or public sector or even as a freelancer. You wouldn't necessarily have to stick to one role — or one industry, for that matter — since everything is connected nowadays. Everybody needs protection: be it a small and up-and-coming startup, or an enterprise with billions of dollars in revenue.

## Variety

Cybersecurity keeps on evolving, just as the rest of the tech world does, which means that new roles will emerge while old roles will gradually evolve to encompass new skills. Even now there is an abundance of roles to choose from.

For example, you can become a big data scientist, and work with emerging technologies such as machine learning. If you're more into solving riddles and looking for flaws, you might become a penetration tester working to crack the security of clients' IT systems or be-



come an ethical hacker enrolled in official bug bounty programs. While both test the security of different IT systems, their working methods are different. Often, penetration testers are more specialised in specific areas, while ethical hackers are jacks of all trades.

## Salary

Since the talent gap is so large, companies are offering competitive salaries to entice their prospective candidates. One thing to note is that although salaries are good, they vary depending on the position you are applying for and the region where you are applying.

According to an ISC study, the average salary in North America for cybersecurity-related jobs is about US\$90,000 a year. Indeed, a job and recruiting website, pretty much backs that with an average figure of US\$111,000.

Depending on the position and your seniority level, for example, penetration testers make around US\$122,000 per year, while network security engineers have an average

income of US\$117,000 per year and information security analysts have an average salary of US\$89,000.

## Job satisfaction

The ICS study found that job satisfaction is high among cybersecurity professionals in North America, with 71 percent respondents saying they are satisfied.

Professionals working in this field take pride in the fact that they are defending people and organisations against cybercrime, as well as helping them find solutions to technical problems.

Another benefit is that the environment is always changing, which keeps the job interesting: these professionals have a constant series of challenges they must analyse and conquer.

## Education and certification

Contrary to popular belief, you don't need a degree in cybersecurity to get started in the field. Although an increasing number of universities and colleges offer such degrees, many specialists are self-taught, as clearly there's more than one route to your goal. If you're a student applying to universities, then seek out a program that best fits your needs.

If you're considering a career switch, then you may not have the luxury and time to attend university. In that case, you can get started by trying online courses, attending meetups, and following cybersecurity professionals on online media.

Certification can be an important part of your education, since certified professionals tend to rise through the ranks faster and have better salaries. There are multiple certificates available depending on the area you want to specialise in, you just need to choose the right one for you.

There's no better time than the present to join the ranks of cybersecurity experts. So if you're ready to dive in, we suggest you start with this article as a jumping-off point. — Welivesecurity

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