

LITERACY ALARM: JUST 3 IN 10 FOUNDATION PHASE PUPILS MEET READING STANDARD



New research reveals most Grade 1 to 3 pupils in South Africa are struggling with basic reading skills, raising concerns about long-term educational outcomes. Picture Credit: Child Magazine

By Aisha Zardad

South Africa – Fewer than one in three Grade 1 to 3 pupils in South Africa read at the required level in their home language, according to the latest Funda Uphumelele survey. The study assessed more than 27,000 pupils across 710 schools nationwide, revealing that most children in the early grades are struggling with basic reading skills. Speaking at the uMlambo Foundation reading panel conference in Melrose Arch, Johannesburg, on Tuesday, Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube said learning gaps start in the first years of schooling, when children are still learning to recognise letters, connect sounds and read simple sentences. “The survey gives government a clearer picture of where children are falling behind. It shows specific weaknesses in areas such as letter-sound recognition and oral reading fluency,” she said. Even though the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) no longer includes reading targets, Gwarube said this does not mean reading has been pushed aside. Instead, reform plans have been put in place to focus on fixing the system. She said the government has committed

R10 billion to support early childhood development (ECD) centres across the country. Through an outcomes-based fund, a further R496 million will be used to create 115,000 new ECD spaces in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal.

The department is also introducing reforms in the early grades, including a national support package aimed at improving literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase.

“A new national catalogue of learning and teaching support materials for grades 1 and 3 will ensure that classrooms have proper graded readers, big books and teacher guides in all official languages,” she said.

The minister emphasised that the ability to read is not merely an educational issue, but a national development priority.

“When children cannot read, inequality grows, dropout rates increase, and future job opportunities shrink,” she said.

The minister urged businesses, NGOs, universities, and communities to partner with government to make reading a basic right for every South African child.

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ECONOMIC GROWTH: THE KEY TO SOUTH AFRICA'S MARKET MOMENTUM



South Africa's markets are on the rise, but sustained gains depend on real economic growth. Picture Credit: Vusithembekwayo

By Aisha Zardad

South Africa – South African markets are enjoying a surge of optimism unseen in years, but its sustainability depends on one factor: economic growth. Interviews with four market participants in Cape Town reveal a shared concern: South Africa's sluggish economy remains the biggest hurdle preventing stocks from sustaining their recent rally. So far, gains have been driven by a narrow segment of the market, with mining companies benefiting from record gold and silver prices. Jithen Pillay, portfolio manager at Allan Gray Ltd., said South Africa needs clear evidence of corporate earnings strength to sustain momentum after the stock market soared nearly 40% last year. “We're focusing on companies with global revenue streams, like Standard Bank Group Ltd., which is expanding in Angola, Ghana and Kenya.” Strong gold and platinum prices accounted for much of last year's 33% earnings growth, while domestic sectors saw a more modest recovery. Mining companies alone posted a 112% increase, according to Bloomberg data. Analysts expect earnings growth to slow to 7.2% in 2026. “The market is watching to see whether economic reforms can broaden growth beyond the mining sector,” said Hannes van den Berg, portfolio manager at Ninety One Plc. “If GDP growth reaches even 2%, it could unlock substantial operating leverage for industrial and cyclical companies.” Government reforms in focus: Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana is set to outline key reforms in his upcoming budget

speech, which market participants say will be crucial for sustaining investor confidence. Economic growth has struggled to surpass 1% over the past decade, far below the 7%-plus rates achieved during the last commodities supercycle in 2006. Bloomberg forecasts expansion of around 1.6% in 2026 and 1.9% in 2027.

While foreign investment is pouring into South African equities at rates not seen in two decades — with non-residents net buyers of Johannesburg-listed shares to the tune of R658 million a day — analysts caution that much of the rally depends on commodity cycles and government policy. “South Africa has become more investable than a few years ago, but elevated commodity reliance and political risks remain,” said Gustav Schulenburg, portfolio manager at Old Mutual Investment Group. Banks remain a core holding for equity managers, particularly those with diversified earnings streams. Outside financials, companies with offshore revenue or defensive characteristics — like British American Tobacco Plc and Anheuser-Busch InBev SA/NV — are attracting interest for their hard-currency earnings and resilience in volatile markets.

Retailers and industrial companies that have lagged the broader market are also on the radar, as portfolio managers believe internal efficiency improvements could lift earnings even in a modest growth environment. “Growth is the real lever,” Pillay said. “If it accelerates, companies benefit. If not, self-help measures can still drive improvement, but the economy will ultimately determine the sustainability of these market gains.”

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WALMART EXPANDS AGGRESSIVELY IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH 21 NEW STORES

By Aisha Zardad

South Africa – Retail giant Walmart is accelerating its South African expansion, announcing plans to open 21 additional stores across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape as it positions itself against established players such as Checkers and Pick n Pay.

The next store opens this weekend at East Point Shopping Centre in Boksburg, Ekurhuleni — marking the retailer's third local outlet following earlier launches in Clearwater and Fourways.

The company says its strategy centres on consistent low pricing rather than short-term promotional campaigns commonly used by competitors including Checkers, Pick n Pay and Spar.

According to Massmart's André Steyn, independent basket comparisons of everyday essentials — including bread, milk, eggs, rice, sunflower oil and sugar — indicate that Walmart has delivered a

measurable price advantage. Customers have also responded positively to the retailer's broad product range, which combines fresh food and groceries with home, family and entertainment offerings under one roof, similar to the model used by Makro. Beyond physical stores, Walmart is expanding its digital footprint to compete with rapid-delivery services such as Checkers Sixty60, Pick n Pay Asap! and Woolworths Dash. Through its local shopping app, customers can access a 60-minute express delivery option. Strong early demand has prompted the retailer to expand its delivery radius from 5km to 8km from participating stores, with the majority of first-time online shoppers indicating plans to place repeat orders. The retailer says the planned 21-store rollout signals the beginning of a broader national expansion strategy aimed at strengthening its footprint in South Africa's competitive grocery market.

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workers," Godongwana said.

Godongwana announced the withdrawal of R20 billion in proposed tax increases, thanks to a positive revision of tax revenue by R21.3 billion. Personal income tax brackets and rebates have been fully adjusted for inflation, while retirement fund deduction limits and tax-free investment allowances have been increased.

"Improving fiscal position allows us enough room to withdraw the proposed tax increases, without putting fiscal sustainability or economic activity at risk," he said.

Targeted savings of R12 billion over the medium term include enhanced social grant verification, which has already terminated nearly 35,000 fraudulent grants.

Finance Minister Godongwana outlined adjustments that directly affect households:

*** Social grants:** Old-age and disability grants rise to R2,400; the war veterans grant to R2,420; child support grant to R580.

*** Fuel levy and excise duties:** Fuel levies will rise by 9 cents per litre for petrol (R3.96) and 8 cents for diesel (R3.82), alongside carbon and Road Accident Fund (RAF) levies. Excise duties on alcohol and tobacco also rise: 20-pack cigarettes to R23.58, 340ml beer by 8 cents, 750ml wine by 15 cents, and 750ml spirits by R3.20.

Experts warned the impact is cumulative: "Fuel is not simply a transport cost for motorists. It underpins the entire retail value chain. From farm to distribution centre to store, every product carries embedded logistics costs. A levy increase, even a modest one, gradually filters through these systems. It does not create a sudden spike in prices. It creates incremental pressure," said Spar.

"Fuel increases are financially regressive. They hit lower-income households hardest. This is where emergency funds and careful cash-flow planning become essential," said Tando Ngibe, Senior Manager at Budget Insurance.

"Consumers should not view this Budget passively. While sin taxes have increased broadly in line with inflation and the fuel levy has risen, these adjustments will still have an impact on monthly household budgets. Now is the right time for individuals to...adjust for these incremental cost pressures," added John Manyike, Head of Education at Old Mutual.

Government plans to spend R2.67 trillion in 2026/27, with social services accounting for over 60% of non-interest spending. Key allocations include:

*** Social Grants & Livelihood Support:**

The Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant will continue at R370 per month for 2026/27, with discussions underway for a new Livelihood Grant to replace it. Old age, disability, and care dependency grants rise to R2,400, child support to R580, war veterans grant to R2,420, and foster care grants increase in two phases.

*** Health:** R410 million has been allocated over the medium term to the South African Medical Research Council to sustain vital HIV/AIDS research initiatives, following US withdrawal of funding. Total health spending rises to R334.3 billion by 2028/29, with 44.4% allocated to primary healthcare. R24 million is also redirected to the Office of Health Standards Compliance to fill critical posts and improve inspections.

*** Education:** Funding for post-school education and training is R155.8 billion for 2026/27, with the NSFAS supporting 744,203 students with R54.3 billion. Basic education is allocated R358.6 billion, including R33.9 billion for the National School Nutrition Programme and an

expansion of early childhood development services from R12.2 billion to R18 billion over the medium term.

*** Peace and Security:** Funding for policing, defence, and border management rises to R291.2 billion by 2028/29.

Deployment of the SANDF to tackle gang violence and illegal mining will be supported under emergency funding provisions, though exact costs are yet to be determined.

*** Infrastructure:** More than R1 trillion for transport, water, and energy projects, alongside utility model reforms for local government.

A government-led audit identified 4,323 "ghost workers" in the public sector. Salaries for unverifiable employees will be withheld, and verification includes facial matching against the National Population Register and physical inspections. The next phase integrates improvements to payroll systems for better oversight and expenditure management.

As the government balances fiscal pressures, some state services, like the South African Post Office, remain unfunded directly. However, revenue and expenditure reforms signal cautious optimism for growth, with R2 trillion projected in tax revenue, and measures such as VAT registration threshold increases aimed at supporting small and medium enterprises.

While SARS Commissioner Edward Kieswetter received a standing ovation during the Budget Speech, Godongwana gave a detailed tribute during a press briefing. Kieswetter transformed SARS from a state capture-affected institution into one the President could be proud of. "You'll recall that SARS was actually hollowed out at the time through the State Capture processes... It is through the commissioner that we've been able to transform that institution into what it is today. And we thank the commissioner for that," Godongwana said.

The process for filling the new commissioner post is underway, with a likely appointment by 1 April 2026.

DA finance shadow minister Mark Burke welcomed the absence of tax increases and bracket creep.

"This budget displays a wholesale rethinking of tax policy by National Treasury under a coalition government," he said.

But he warned that unemployment remains high and GDP growth of 1.6% is "unacceptably low."

MK Party acting parliamentary leader Des van Rooyen criticised the modest growth projections.

"They always get these projections wrong. This is more of an exercise of balancing the books rather than addressing the plight of our people," he said.

EFF leader Julius Malema argued that without real economic growth, infrastructure and job creation remain out of reach.

"The reality is that the economy is not growing... even if SARS collects more revenue, it does not mean economic growth," he said.

GOOD Party secretary-general Brett Heron noted the absence of a meaningful Basic Income Grant.

"At R370 per month, the SRD does not lift a single recipient above the food poverty line. A meaningful Basic Income Grant is not charity; it is economic justice," he said.

While the 2026 Budget signals cautious optimism, fiscal stability alone is not enough. Growth, job creation, and poverty reduction remain pressing challenges. Households, small businesses, and government institutions will watch closely to see if these reforms and investments translate into tangible improvements in daily life.

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GAUTENG SOPA 2026 MILLIONS PUMPED TO ADDRESS PERSISTENT WATER WOES



Gauteng pumps millions into water infrastructure as Premier Lesufi vows to restore supply, create jobs, and tackle service delivery challenges. Picture Credit: Inside Metros

By Ndivhuwo Mukwehvo

Gauteng - After residents spent days without any form of running water supply in several parts of Gauteng Province earlier this year after an unexpected huge explosion at the Rand Water Plant, several millions have been put aside to address the issues by Premier Panyaza Lesufi. During the State of the Province Address (SOPA) on Monday this week, Lesufi announced that his government has put aside R760 Million to address water issues, which range from water infrastructure upgrade.

"Construction of a new ground reservoir and a tower in Brixton is underway and will go live by this Saturday to improve the supply. In response to this crisis, we built emergency boosting pumping station which will go live next week, to ensure that these areas are covered with water," said Lesufi.

Lesufi further said that permanent solution will be realised once the construction of the 5km pipeline is concluded at the end of the year.

"Furthermore, the national government is assisting us in realising the return on investment made, so that the people of Hammanskraal, Bronkhorstpruit, Kokosi, Fochville, Kwa-Thema and other areas can have their dignity restored," said Lesufi.

Lesufi also promised Gauteng residents that his government will continue to create jobs in order to keep up with the rising living conditions.

"As the economic heartland of our country, Gauteng should never be allowed to stop beating, for the consequences would be too dire for all of us. Our approach to economic growth is firmly grounded in the reindustrialisation of Gauteng and the deliberate inclusion of township and local enterprises in the mainstream economy," said Lesufi.

According to Lesufi towards the end of 2025, South Africa's labour market showed modest improvement with national employment rising by almost a quarter million due to growth in the infrastructure and service sectors.

"Our province outperformed the national trend, reaching a record 5.24 million employed and accounting to nearly 70% of national job gains over the past year, with growth strongest in construction, finance, community and social services," said

Lesufi.

Lesufi says that though he is happy with the quality of healthcare workers which they have in the province, he remains concerned about the long queues and continued use of manual paperwork within public health facilities in Gauteng.

"It is generally known that our public hospitals have the best talent in terms of doctors, specialists and healthcare professionals. The problems we have in our hospitals are long queues, manual paperwork, old infrastructure and overcrowding. It's within this context that we have undertaken the following initiatives," said Lesufi.

Lesufi concluded by stating that the SOPA address puts the huge responsibility on the shoulders of those in charge. But opposition parties are not entirely moved by Lesufi's speech as they want more.

EFF Gauteng Member of Parliament, Nkululeko Dunga said that more than anything the premier used the platform to make his ANC comrades happy within the structures of all his municipalities.

"He over glorified, I mean how would you speak of Sedibeng and not equate the issue of service delivery. The people of Sedibeng are marred with potholes; there is no waste collection, sewage spillages everywhere," said Dunga.

Dunga also stated that the premier failed to deliver on his last year promise of new schools.

"Last year he made a commitment of 18 schools, but he only spoke of only two schools that he could have opened. With Gauteng having a backlog of 2500 classrooms, two schools do have a meaningless impact particularly to the people that he would want to elevate, which are people in the townships," said Dunga.

Dapheny Woodworth from Kliptown says she is happy with the premier's speech but she is worried about the high rate of unemployment in Gauteng and the rest of the country.

"I am really excited about what I have heard about a number of issues, such as water, job creation," said Woodworth. "But for some of us who live in rural areas and experience services deliver woes daily such as water and sanitation water and unemployment more still needs to be done, because that is how rate of crime keep on growing,"

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RURAL MABILA RESIDENTS ARE DISPLEASED WITH PROPOSED CLOSURE OF A LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOL

By Ndivhuwo Mukwevho

Thohoyandou – School Governing Body (SGB), parents, learners and educators at Mabila Primary School, outside of Thohoyandou in Limpopo says that they are dissatisfied and heartbroken by what they call a 'harsh' decision by the Provincial Department of Education to shut down the school and move learners to another school far away from their homes. Earlier this month Mabila Primary was notified by the Provincial Department of Education that the school will be closed down at the beginning of March this year and learners will be moved to Mufulwi Primary School, which is situated in Mufulwi village, more than 20 kilometres away from Mabila Primary. Rotshidzwa Maluga SGB chairperson at Mabila Primary told Timeless News that the decision was not well calculated by the department as Mufulwi Primary is very far from Mabila and it will be impossible for some of the learners to make it to the school on time. "First of all they should have notified us last year that they planned to shut down our school this year so we could make arrangements in time to move out our children from the school. Now look, they want to shut down the school in the middle of a year which is very wrong and move our children to a school which is very far away from us. We are so disappointed,"

said Maluga. Mabila Primary currently has an enrolment of 142 learners from grade R to 7 and all these learners reside in Mabila village, which is a walking distance from their homes to the school, something which will not be possible if they are moved to Mufulwi Primary. Maluga said that they are also failing to understand why the department wants to shutdown Mabila Primary instead of Mufulwi Primary which has a low enrolment of less than 60 learners and consists of only three blocks of classrooms. "We have been told that the reason to shut down the school is due to low enrolment, but to our surprise the enrolment has been always like this for years as we hardly had over 200 learners a year. But why do they want to close down the school now? What is the motive behind their decision? Those are the questions which we are asking ourselves," said Maluga. Currently, Mabila Primary consists of one principal, and four teachers, two for intermediate and two for foundation phases. Speaking to Timeless News, a teacher at the school who wished to remain anonymous said that she is not looking forward to the proposed move as she is happy with the current set up at Mabila primary, a school she has worked at for over a decade. According to Maluga, even learners and parents are not looking forward to the proposed move.

"When we notified our stakeholders which include learners and parents, they both told us that they are not prepared for the proposed merger and they are going to contest to stop it from taking place," he said.

Mike Maringa, the provincial spokesperson for education in Limpopo told Timeless News that Mabila Primary was first pronounced for a merger in 2022 owing to learner enrolment of below 135. "Merging centre is said to be Mufulwi Primary school. MECs consultation took place on the 17th October 2022. Circular 82 of 2025 directed that all learners and educators whose pronounced schools move to identified merging centre. Merging ensures that learners receive quality of basic education," said Maringa. Maringa further stated that, small schools do not have adequate educators to implement prescribed curriculum. "Such learners have content and knowledge gaps that lead to learner drop

out or poor results especially in grade 12," he said. Maringa failed to respond to questions on whether transportation arrangements will be made available for learners from Mabila in order to get to Mufulwi primary with ease should the merger take place. Mabila Primary school is currently struggling without proper sanitation, after their pit latrines were demolished but never replaced. Maluga now believes that the delay in building new toilets for Mabila learners is being done deliberately to force them into agreeing to the merger. "Now it is clear why these people do not want to build us new sanitation blocks. The pit toilets were demolished about 20 months ago, but till today we continue to wait for new toilets or just a date on when the construction process will take place," said Maluga.

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EXTRA DAY OFF? SA COULD GET BONUS PUBLIC HOLIDAY IN 2026



South Africans could receive an extra public holiday in 2026 if President Cyril Ramaphosa declares the upcoming local government election day a national holiday. Picture Credit: GGA

By Aisha Zardad

South Africa – South Africans could be in line for an additional public holiday in 2026 — but it all depends on whether President Cyril Ramaphosa declares the upcoming local government elections a national day off. South Africa officially observes 12 public holidays each year. However, the actual number of days off employees enjoy depends largely on how those dates fall on the calendar. In 2026, two public holidays will fall on a Saturday — Human Rights Day on 21 March and the Day of Goodwill on 26 December. Under the Public Holidays Act, if a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday is observed as a public holiday. But when a holiday falls on a Saturday, no substitute day is granted for those who do not ordinarily work weekends. For many workers, this effectively means losing out on two potential days off for the year. That's where the 2026 local government elections come into play. Municipal elections must take place between 2 November 2026 and 1 February 2027, within 90 days of municipal councils completing their five-year term on 1 November 2026. The exact date will be

announced by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in consultation with the Electoral Commission of South Africa. Once the election date is proclaimed, the President has the authority under Section 2A of the Public Holidays Act to declare it a public holiday. This has happened before. In 2021, Ramaphosa declared the local government election day a national public holiday to allow citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote. If the same approach is taken in 2026, South Africans would gain an additional day off — potentially offsetting at least one of the weekend public holidays that would otherwise be lost. While additional public holidays often spark debate over economic productivity and business disruption, research suggests that time off can reduce burnout and improve long-term performance. Long weekends also tend to boost spending in tourism, hospitality and leisure sectors, providing short-term stimulus to the economy. For now, the possibility of a bonus public holiday rests on one key decision: when the election date is set — and whether it is declared a day of rest nationwide.

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Parents, educators and learners at Mabila Primary outside Thohoyandou say they are devastated by plans to merge the school with Mufulwi Primary, more than 20km away, raising concerns over transport, timing and sanitation challenges. Picture Credit: Supplied

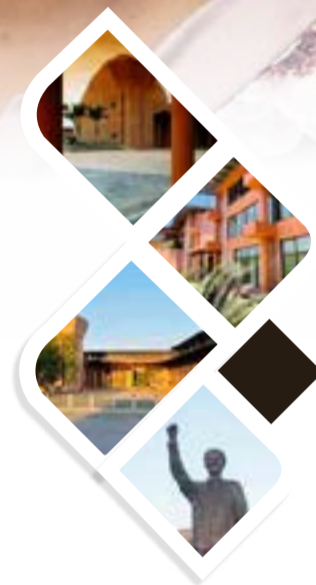




Ms Makhosazane Christine Masilela
Speaker

SOPA 2026

State of the Province Address



OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE: STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS 2026 – 05 MARCH 2026

The Speaker of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature, Ms Makhosazane Christine Masilela has the pleasure of announcing the Official Opening of the 3rd Session of the 7th Mpumalanga Legislature and the delivery of the State of the Province Address (SOPA) by Premier, Mr Mandla Padney Ndlovu. The event is scheduled to take place as follows:

Date : Thursday, 05 March 2026

Time : 10:00 (Invited guests are expected to be seated by 09:00)

**Venue : Riverside Government Complex: Baobab Building,
Legislature Chamber**

The Proceedings will be live on Legislature's Facebook page and YouTube Channel, Ligwalagwala FM, Ikwekwezi FM, Rise FM, Parliamentary channel 408 and on several Community Radio Stations in the Province.

A people-centred, African world class Legislature



MEDIA FREEDOM GIANT JOE LATAKGOMO PASSES ON, PRESS COUNCIL PAYS TRIBUTE

By Staff Reporter

South Africa – The Press Council of South Africa has expressed deep sadness at the passing of one of the country's most respected media figures, Joe Latakomo, who died on Sunday. Latakomo served as Public Advocate of the Press Council from 2018 to 2020, bringing with him more than five decades of distinguished service in journalism.

His remarkable career included being the founding editor of the Sowetan in 1981. Before that, he was a stalwart at The World and Weekend World, both banned by the apartheid regime, and served as Assistant Editor at the Post and Sunday Post. He later became Assistant Editor of The Star and Assistant Editor of the Argus Africa News Service, before taking up the role of Public Editor at Avusa (Times Media). Writing in October 2020 to mark the 43rd anniversary of Black Wednesday, The Star's sub-editor Nhlanhla Mbatha reflected on Latakomo's leadership during one of the darkest periods in South Africa's history. Mbatha recalled how Latakomo's editor at The World, Percy Qoboza, "was detained in a world headline-grabbing spectacle in the newspaper's office (on 19 October 1977) ... and had become a symbol of press freedom." Latakomo effectively stepped in to lead.

Mbatha wrote: "In yesteryear politics, Nelson Mandela was the face of the ANC from the prison walls while Oliver Tambo was keeping the fires burning in exile. I draw parallels and dare say that if Qoboza was the Mandela of the press, Latakomo must have been the Tambo of the Fourth Estate." Press Council member and veteran journalist Joe Thloloe described Latakomo as "a journalist's journalist" and a hero of steadfast reporting during the most turbulent years of apartheid.

"He would go out to do the reporting, come back to the office, pick up the dummy pages, design and lay them out for the printer.

"But what is never brought out to the fore

is that he was running The World as Editor when Soweto drew the line in the sand in 1976. Percy, who got the honours for this, was out of the country on a Nieman Fellowship that year. Joe shepherded the young Willie Bokabas and the Sam Nzimas as they recorded the story of 1976.

"Joe wasn't imprisoned like the rest of us that year, but South Africa carries the imprint of his foot. May his soul rest in peace and condolences to all his family and friends." Latakomo's voice was equally powerful beyond the newsroom. In his 1997 submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he detailed the harassment journalists endured under apartheid, including the deliberate spread of disinformation and the surveillance of newsroom telephones. "Sometimes we got telephone calls, people telling us what was happening. But we knew our telephones were being bugged. If we got a call like that and published it, it could be somebody sitting in security headquarters giving the impression he was from Tanzania or Lusaka, giving you disinformation and you would end up publishing what would eventually be untrue information and they would prove that you published false information and therefore discredit you forever.

"So, we were very careful about that. Therefore, it inhibited us in terms of what we could publish. Of course, there was also the danger that once somebody called you,

I don't know the number of times that, while you were talking to a contact, somebody would interrupt and in a very famous kind of way would say: 'Julle praat maar kak, man.'"

When asked by the panel whether it was the police listening in, Latakomo replied: "Yes. He would lose it and probably suddenly regret having done this. I don't know how many people have had that kind of experience, and I bet you it will be hundreds of people. It was either arrogance about it or they were particularly dumb." His journalism extended beyond South Africa's borders. He worked extensively on the continent with the Argus Africa News Service and also reported in the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan and Hungary.

In 1991, he was awarded the prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University.

Latakomo was also widely remembered for his passion for football. He was inducted into the SAB Sports Journalists Hall of Fame in 2009 and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the South African Football Association in 2011. His book, *Mzansi Magic, Struggle, Betrayal & Glory: The Story of South African Soccer*, was published in 2010. In 1996, he wrote the accompanying text for global icon Peter Magubane's photographic commemoration, *June 16, Never, Never Again*.

Khanyi Ndaweni, Case Manager at the Office of the Press Council, who worked closely with Latakomo, said "he stood out

as a kind and caring colleague who treated everyone with respect and warmth, and will be greatly missed."

Executive Director of the Press Council Phathiswa Magopeni said: "We mourn the passing of Joe Latakomo, whose voice as Public Advocate of the Press Council of South Africa carried both courage and conscience. "He understood that robust, independent media accountability is the lifeblood of democracy.

"We honour and celebrate his contribution to strengthening the credibility, integrity, and public trust in our media accountability and oversight system." Current Public Advocate Thabo Leshilo described Latakomo as a mentor to many in the generation that followed.

"Bra Joe's mastery of this craft and his fearless in speaking truth to the power of the apartheid regime played an important part in inspiring some of us to joint this noble craft." In a 2010 Media Freedom Day speech, Latakomo's words captured the enduring responsibility of the press:

"The responsibility of the media is to report what citizens or government, or both may not want to hear, as well as what they do want to hear. Newspapers dare not sanitise the news and thereby play God ... and exclude news that may be perceived to be detrimental to the government or the ruling party.

"No doubt, we sometimes see our private picture of the world as the whole truth and nothing but the truth. For this reason, we want to demand everyone to see the world the way we see it.

"Freedom of the media means for us to say what we want to say and what we want to believe. This is enshrined in the Constitution."

The Press Council conveys its deepest sympathies to his wife, Angie Latakomo, the Latakomo family, and to Bra Joe's friends and former colleagues. His contribution to South African journalism will be remembered for generations to come.

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Joe Latakomo, former Press Council Public Advocate, is remembered as a fearless journalist whose legacy shaped South Africa's media landscape. Picture Credit: MSN

DURBAN TO JOBURG IN RECORD TIME AS HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROJECT GAINS MOMENTUM

By Aisha Zardad

KwaZulu-Natal – Plans to develop a high-speed rail connection between Durban and Johannesburg have entered the feasibility stage, signalling concrete progress on the long-awaited infrastructure initiative.

KwaZulu-Natal Premier Thami Ntuli said the provincial government is set to engage the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) to obtain clarity on the feasibility study and map out the way forward for the project.

Ntuli said earlier talks with national departments showed that feasibility studies were ongoing, but the province is now requesting detailed updates on the project's current status.

"We require certainty on the current position of the feasibility study," Ntuli said. "Our engagement with PRASA is aimed at establishing precisely where the project stands."

If implemented, the proposed corridor is expected to reduce travel time between Durban and Johannesburg by nearly three hours, significantly improving connectivity between the two major economic hubs. President Cyril Ramaphosa reaffirmed government's commitment to high-speed rail during his recent State of the Nation Address. He said preparatory

work is continuing on strategic routes, including eThekweni to Johannesburg and Johannesburg to Musina. President Ramaphosa revealed that approximately 30 companies responded to a Request for Information issued last year, indicating interest in developing high-speed rail corridors. Government is preparing to move to the next stage by issuing a formal Request for Proposals.

He said the initiative forms part of efforts to modernise South Africa's long-distance rail network and enhance the country's competitiveness in a changing global economy.

Durban Mayor Cyril Xaba welcomed the progress, saying the initiative is moving forward as planned and has the potential to greatly enhance travel efficiency between Durban and Johannesburg.

Xaba commended Transport Minister Barbara Creecy for issuing a Request for Information covering regional high-speed train routes linking Durban, Johannesburg, Polokwane, Musina, Pretoria and Mbombela.

He said he continues to engage with Transport Minister Barbara Creecy, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) and Transnet on the high-speed rail project, alongside wider efforts to strengthen port operations and rail infrastructure. Xaba said the project has the potential to



Government has advanced feasibility studies for a proposed high-speed rail link between Durban and Johannesburg, with officials saying the project could cut travel time by nearly three hours. Picture Credit: Travel News

deliver a major economic boost for Durban, especially within the tourism industry. Improved rail speeds would allow for more regular travel between Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. City officials say shorter travel times could

encourage weekend getaways and same-day business travel, drawing thousands of additional visitors to Durban once the service is up and running..

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FAITHFULNESS

SERMON BY GIVEN APHANE



Beloved, today let us focus on being faithful to God at all times. We know sometimes it is not easy because of what we go through in our lives. Sometimes things are great and next they are bad. This can truly be challenging to remain faithful. Maintaining faith requires constant gratitude and always remember God's blessings. In the good times we must always remember who is our Divine source of blessings. By His might and power we are blessed. In bad times we should also remember who took us out of difficult times. He protected us from situations that we thought we would never get out of. But because He is a faithful God, a promise keeper He protected us. He said "He will never leave us nor forsake us", Hebrews 13:5 So Beloved let us practice to be faithful at all times. Let us not be like the Israelites who started well with God but along the way they compromised their relationship with Him. Instead of continuing in faithfulness, they allowed surrounding nations to influence them to worship idols, and they rebelled against God despite witnessing many miracles and receiving divine provision. Their lack of faith and

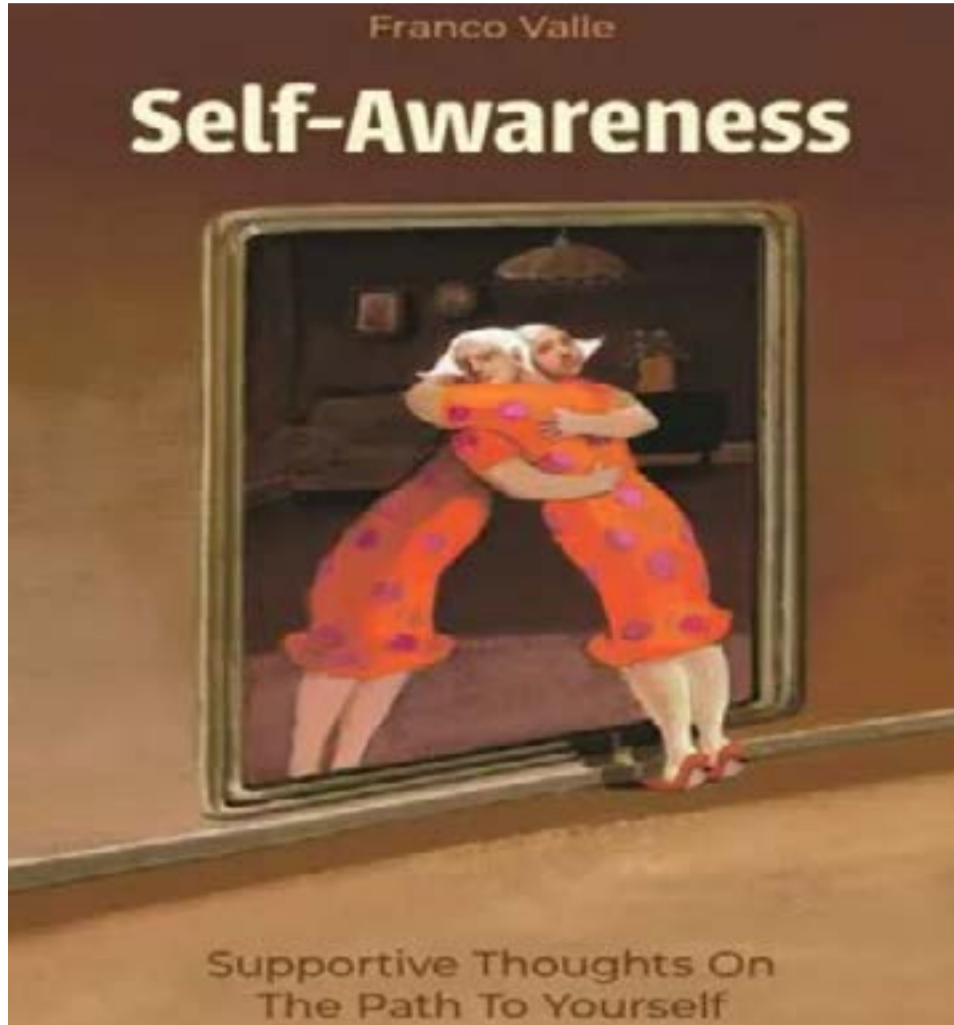
not trusting in God's promises resulted them in a 40 year period in the wilderness. In the book of Joshua 5:6 says " For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey voice of the Lord "[Rebellion against God can delay God's promises and blessings in your life] So Beloved, let us guard our relationship with the Lord with all seriousness, continue to be faithful and worship Him [Him only not idols]. James 4:8 say " Draw near to me and I will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. " Let us not allow anything to distract our attention from Jesus Christ. Never compromise our spiritual life or our relationship with God so that we can become good vessel He can count on and use. Let us always be in touch with God, it will bring the best in us. We thank God for telling us to always guard our faithfulness with Him. Let our eyes always be fixed on Him. In Jesus name, Amen.

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BOOK REVIEWS

SELF-AWARENESS: SUPPORTIVE THOUGHTS ON THE PATH TO YOURSELF BY FRANCO VALLE



It felt less like a self-help book and more like a quiet conversation I didn't know I needed. Short, clear, and deeply reflective, it reminded me that growth doesn't start with big changes — it starts with noticing your patterns, your reactions, and the way you speak to yourself. Sometimes the most powerful shift is simply choosing to look inward with honesty. Picture Credit: Gandhi.com

By Aisha Zardad

I picked up *Self-Awareness: Supportive Thoughts On The Path To Yourself* expecting another typical self-help guide filled with dramatic promises and bold declarations about transforming my life overnight. What I found instead was something quieter — and surprisingly more powerful. This book is a compact and digestible guide to self-awareness — not a long academic text weighed down by theory or research citations. From the beginning, I noticed how accessible it felt. Valle uses clear language and relatable examples that made it easy for me to recognize my own behaviours and inner motivations. Instead of just telling me what self-awareness is, he walks me through simple, honest reflections that feel like sitting across from a thoughtful friend asking, "Why do you think you reacted that way?" As I moved through the chapters, I kept coming back to the book's central idea: self-awareness grows when you observe your patterns — how you react to situations, how your emotions show up, and how you connect with others. That focus on observation really stayed with me. The book doesn't push dramatic action plans. It encourages attention. It makes inner reflection practical rather than abstract. What worked especially well for me was how short and approachable it is. At under 120 pages, I finished it in a few sittings, but I didn't feel rushed. It's perfect if you want real insight without committing to a long, heavy read. The reflections are practical — not just motivational quotes meant to sound good on social media. They actually prompt you to pause. The writing is clear and easy to follow, and at times it genuinely felt like a guided

conversation rather than a lecture. There were several lines that I found particularly outstanding and reflective. A few that lingered with me were: "You cannot change a pattern you refuse to see." "Your reactions are often memories in disguise." "Self-awareness begins the moment you stop defending your behaviour and start observing it." "Growth does not start with action — it starts with honesty." "The way you speak to yourself shapes the life you believe you deserve." "Silence is often where your truest answers are waiting." Whether brief or expanded upon in the text, these reflections made me pause. They pushed me to examine moments where I've been operating on autopilot — reacting quickly, defending instinctively, or avoiding discomfort instead of understanding it. I won't say this book delivers earth-shattering revelations. It doesn't try to. Its strength lies in its simplicity. It reminded me that awareness is foundational. You can't shift behaviour you haven't acknowledged. You can't grow past patterns you haven't identified. And being honest with yourself requires far more courage than setting another goal. By the final page, I felt calmer rather than hyped up. More reflective than fired up. And honestly, that felt healthier. In a world obsessed with constant transformation, this book felt like permission to slow down and quietly meet myself where I am. It may be a short read, but the conversations it starts within you can stretch far beyond its pages. My final thoughts — a thoughtful, accessible and genuinely reflective companion for anyone ready to look inward with honesty

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TIMELESS SPORTS

PROTEAS POWERPLAY: MARKRAM LEADS SOUTH AFRICA TO CONVINCING NINE-WICKET WIN OVER WEST INDIES



Aiden Markram celebrates his unbeaten 82 as South Africa cruised to a nine-wicket victory over West Indies at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Picture Credit: Crictoday

By Aisha Zardad

Ahmedabad – South Africa's Proteas strengthened their ICC T20 World Cup campaign with a commanding nine-wicket victory over West Indies at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Thursday, powered by a superb captain's knock from Aiden Markram and a disciplined bowling performance from the seamers. After winning the toss and electing to bowl, Markram set the tone by entrusting the new-ball attack to Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi, who delivered early breakthroughs, reducing the Windies to 52/4 after six overs. Despite a resilient eighth-wicket stand of 101 runs between Romario Shepherd (52*) and Jason Holder (49), the Caribbean side were restricted

to a below-par 176/8, a total that proved manageable on a flat Chennai wicket. Chasing 177, South Africa's top-order capitalised on the advantage gained in the powerplay. Markram, in his dual role as captain and opener, emphasised the importance of setting a strong foundation: "Chasing 180, the powerplay was a big thing for us... a nice partnership with Quinny and then we pretty much scored runs really well throughout the powerplay," he said. Partnering with Quinton de Kock, the duo amassed 69 runs without loss in the first six overs, blunting the Windies' early momentum. Their partnership eventually extended to 95 runs, providing a solid platform for the rest of the innings. De Kock's measured 47 and Ryan Rickelton's unbeaten 45 ensured South Africa

reached the target with 23 balls to spare, showcasing not just firepower, but also control and strategic pacing. The victory not only cements South Africa's standing in Group 1 of the Super Eights but also sends a strong statement to rivals. With the semifinal picture still shaping up, maintaining momentum is key, and the Proteas' powerplay dominance — both in taking early wickets and scoring runs — could be decisive in tight matches. Markram's leadership was evident both on and off the pitch. Winning the toss, making bold bowling choices, and leading by example with the bat, he demonstrated the value of experience combined with tactical acumen. "Whether I'm captain or not, opening is a responsibility... we try to make sure the team gets off to a good start, especially on wickets like this," he added.

The performance also underlines the effectiveness of the Proteas' bowling depth. Rabada and Ngidi each took two wickets in the crucial early overs, limiting West Indies' ability to build partnerships. Their ability to extract bounce and movement from the pitch played a critical role in applying early pressure. As South Africa look ahead to their final Super Eight clash against Zimbabwe, this win provides not only confidence but also a template: dominate the powerplay, build partnerships, and maintain pressure throughout. Fans and analysts alike will be watching closely to see if Markram's leadership and the team's execution can carry them all the way to the semi-finals and beyond.