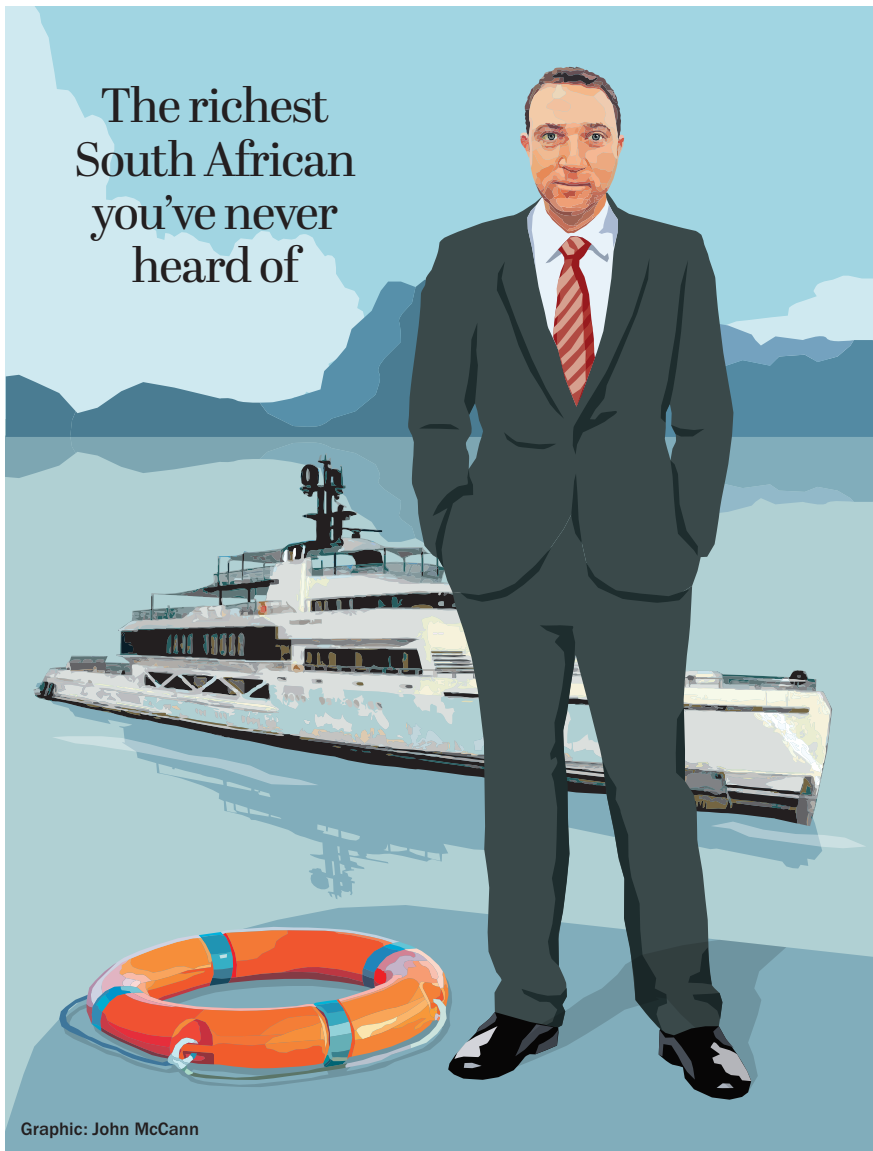


The Friday Paper

with **The Continent**

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM | 7 NOVEMBER 2025 | ISSUE 2

The richest
South African
you've never
heard of



Graphic: John McCann

The soundtrack

Life is better with music. So are newspapers

“WHAT does one call this music?” the curious record-shop assistant asked me when I picked *KwaNtu*. I had to think – the new record defies categorisation.

A few minutes later, I had it. “Roots music, that’s it. African roots, spiritual roots. African spiritual roots.”

Madala Kunene is an elder statesman of Zulu guitar. He made his first record in 1990. His protégé Sibusile Xaba was only six years old at the time. However, with their voices and guitar interweaving seamlessly, it sounds as if they have been playing together forever.

The album is named after Kwantu Village, a cultural centre in Utrecht in northern KwaZulu-Natal – the region in which both musicians have their

roots. KwaNtu is also a state of mind: loosely translated, it means “the place of the life-spirit”.

This week’s soundtrack was chosen by DJ and journalist **Charles Leonard**.

INKOMO

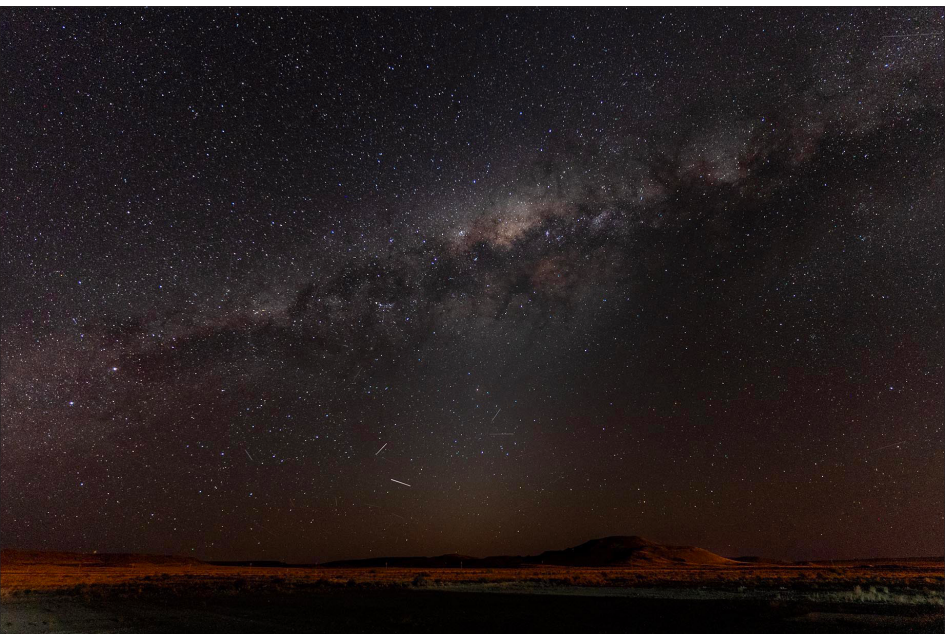
by Madala Kunene and Sibusile Xaba, from the album *KwaNtu* (Mushroom Hour 2025)



Life-spirit: Madala Kunene and Sibusile Xaba. Photo: Sharp Fede

Click this [link](#) to listen to the song while you read *The Friday Paper*. To make your experience even better, find a comfortable chair and have your drink of choice on hand.

EDITORIAL



Stars align: The night sky from the airstrip in Carnavon, Northern Cape. Photo: Jasmine Sarwoko

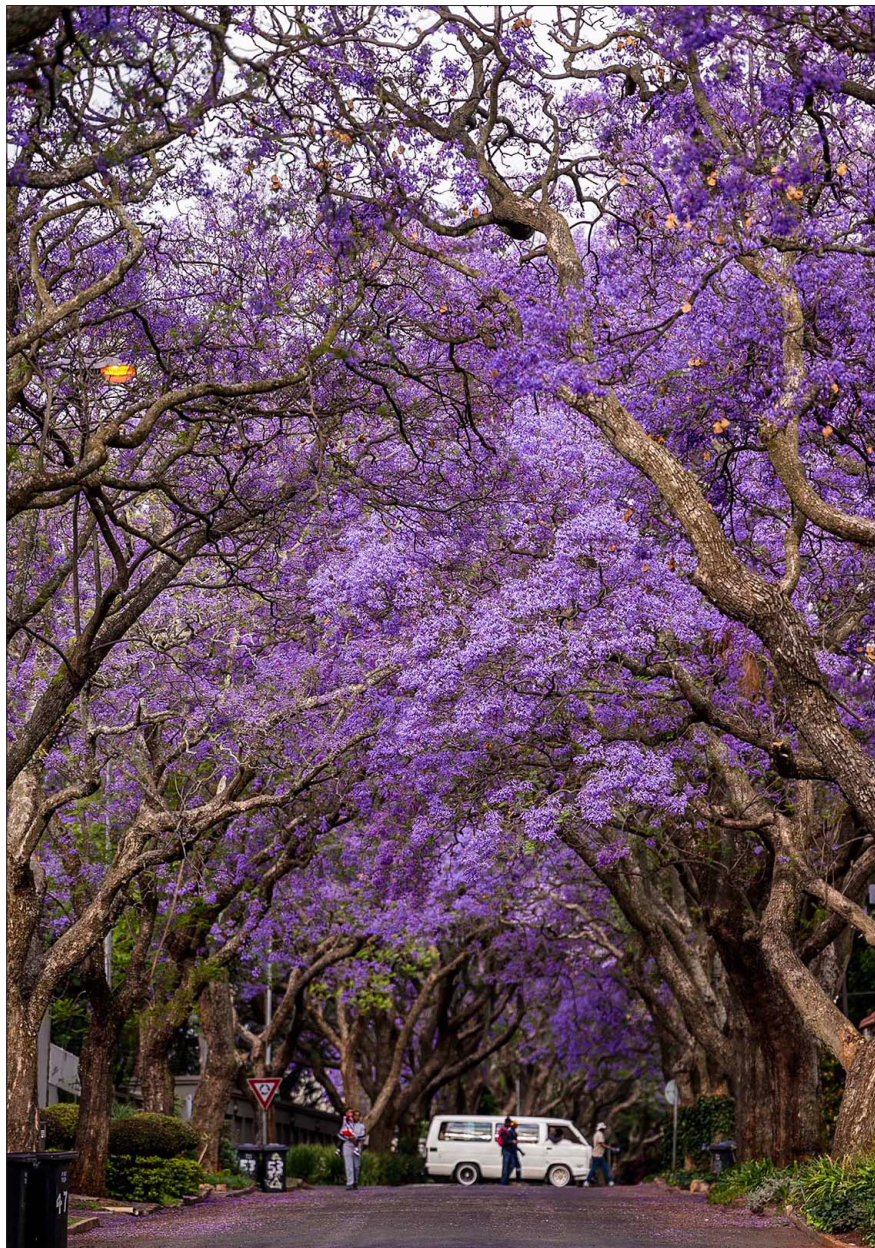
The secret to South Africa's happiness

**Good music, great views, fresh air – and a braai.
It's really not that complicated.**

THE FRIDAY PAPER is an experiment in creating a new national newspaper. Early last month, we published the pilot edition. This is a second pilot edition, and there will be a third before the end of the year. More than 1,500 people have already signed up to be part of this

experiment. Thank you. Together, we'll explore this extraordinary country.

Let's begin right here, right now. We asked some new subscribers to tell us about their South African happy place – so that we can get to know you, and you can get to know each other.



Purple haze: Time to celebrate the glorious display of jacaranda blossoms. Photo: Delwyn Verasamy

A certain horizontal mountain came up a lot. So too did our sheer abundance of natural wonders.

“How can I choose between a sun-downer on the West Coast, checking stars in the Karoo, watching wild animals in Kruger or taking a dip in Sodwana Bay?”

“Storms River Mouth – taking deep breaths of that incredible sea air. Or in the Drakensberg, looking at the mighty majestic mountains ... Basically anywhere out in nature where I can soak up the magnificence of God’s creation.”

“Fynbos, blue sky, warm smiles, and living with and inside of complexity.”

Wine featured prominently, as did our national obsession with fire and meat.

“Anywhere with a sea view, some fresh seafood, and a crisp glass of white wine.”

“Wherever the braai is.”

“The community of a braai every time and everywhere.”

“A braai with mates and a catch up of all the news.”

“Tavern.”

Some readers took us somewhere specific, their words conveying a deep emotional attachment. “There’s a

mountain in Qumanco, Eastern Cape, called Ngqwarhu Hills (although it is commonly known as Amabele Ntombi – ‘maiden breasts’). It is the most tranquil place ... It’s quite a sanctuary for spiritual attunement too.”

“Strangely, the arrivals hall at OR Tambo. I love coming back home and seeing all the love others are received with.”

“Sipping a cold Guinness at the Jolly Roger in Johannesburg on a Sunday afternoon.”



Bungeel: The Eastern Cape is glorious. Photo: Dawie Verwey/Gallo Images

“Storms River Mouth – taking deep breaths of that incredible sea air. Or in the Drakensberg, looking at the mighty majestic mountains”

“The N1 highway. Endless rolling beauty along an incredible infrastructure project. What a thing we have here!”

“The 21st floor of the Es’kia Mphahlele Building on Wits East Campus. The view of town is wonderful.”

"My house, filled with love, the laughter of children and grandchildren, my garden."

For others, it is a smell or a sound that evokes the feeling of community and belonging.

"Listening to live jazz anywhere, with original music, good sound – and an audience that prefers really listening to filming themselves listening."

"In the messy mix of shared stories, veiled references, and spectacular memes on repeat. Accompanied by clinking glasses, Johannesburg jazz, and the glint of steel-stringed guitars."

"A highveld thunderstorm, preferably while keeping dry, hearing the rain fall on the tent canvas."

"The rich smell of soil after the first spring rain. The abundant purple of Jacaranda trees in bloom. 'Hope and optimism in spite of present difficulties' (Muafangejo)."

The latter is a reference to the Namibian artist John Muafangejo, whose iconic linocuts were informed by his experience of studying in apartheid South Africa. He found hope in despair – and hope is perhaps the most powerful emotion of them all.

Luckily, we seem to have plenty of it. This land is vast and happiness can be found everywhere, according to you, including but not limited to: Alexandra, Bloemfontein, Bloemhof, Bulungula, Cape Town, Cederberg, Chintsa, Clarens, Coffee Bay, the Drakensberg, Durban, East London, eManzimtoti, eMdloti, Ezibeleni, Franschhoek, Goniwe, Gqeberha, Greytown, Hamburg,



Hope and optimism: An artwork by Namibian artist John Muafangejo

Hoedspruit, Jeffreys Bay, Johannesburg, Jonkershoek, Kariega, Kimberley, Knysna, Kokstad, Kommetjie, the Kruger, Lady Grey, Llandudno, Makhanda, Mamelodi, Mashishing, the Midlands, Midrand, Mogalakwena, Paternoster, Phuthaditjhaba, Pietermaritzburg, Pilanesberg, Plettenberg Bay, Port Alfred, Port Edward, Pretoria, QwaQwa, Ramsgate, Rosendal, Scarborough, Schoenmakerskop, Shirley Village, Somerset East, Somerset West, Soweto, St Francis Bay, Stellenbosch, Stilbaai, Struisbaai, Tshifudi, Tsitsikamma, uMhlanga, uMngeni, Walkerville, the Wild Coast, and Wilderness.

We see you, wherever you are. ■

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Let's read from the same page.



The Friday Paper

Kumsa Masizana

THE BEST way to understand thunderstorms is to imagine making popcorn on the stove. You need the corn kernels, and the oil, and the heat. For a while, it looks like nothing is happening, and then suddenly – pop!

Thunderstorms need sufficient moisture in the atmosphere. They need heat. They need what meteorologists call “uplift” – something that causes that warm air to rise. As the air rises, it cools, forming towering cumulonimbus clouds that can stretch more than 10km into the atmosphere.

When it hits the tropopause – the

The weather report

atmospheric boundary, beyond which lies the stratosphere – the cloud can’t go any higher and it begins to fan out, becoming less stable.

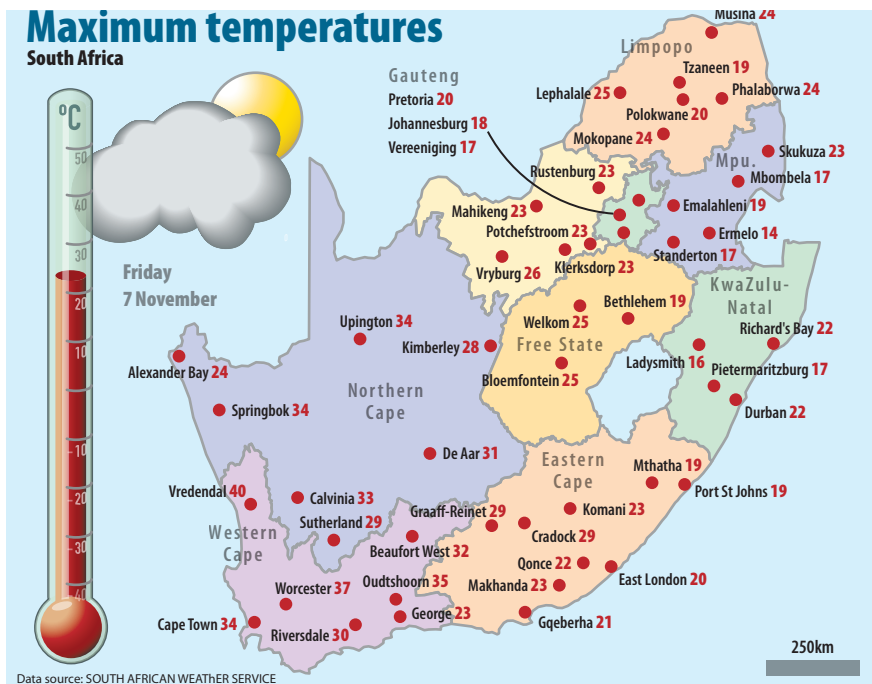
This instability creates friction and – crack! The cloud discharges all this energy in the form of lightning.

Because of the Highveld’s elevation – the clue is in the name – cumulonimbus clouds are closer to the tropopause, and can form more easily. That’s why Joburg gets lightning all the time, whereas it’s much rarer in Cape Town. ■

Kumsa Masizana is a meteorologist and broadcaster.

Maximum temperatures

South Africa



ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW



Paint by numbers: The Nasrec Expo Centre is spruced up in time for the G20. Photo: Wikus de Wet/AFP

Joburg's glow-up, specially for our visitors

It seems that residents of Johannesburg only get nice things if there's a big event on, not because they have rights and elected officials to run the city. This time around it's the G20 summit in late November. A surge of public investment has gone into fixing streetlights, filling potholes, mowing lawns or weeding fields. To explain this phenomenon, the president said: "In any household, when visitors come, they do a cleaning up." Cyril Ramaphosa was born and grew up in Johannesburg. He's been critical about the state of the country's largest

city. His answer was in response to the DA asking if Johannesburg only matters when the world is watching.

● Meanwhile Donald Trump, the world's current loudest bully, said this week that South Africa shouldn't be in the G20, despite it being this year's chair. And the fact that the grouping of richest countries operates by consensus. In fairness, Trump might not understand that method of governance. Denied his presence, the people of Johannesburg will instead host the deputy president, JD Vance.

Dudula (and the police) ordered to stop xenophobia

Operation Dudula has been ordered by the high court to stop spreading hate speech, evicting people from their homes and workplaces, and demanding IDs from people trying to go to hospital. The police and home affairs department were chastised for standing by and allowing Dudula to do what it wants. The police were also told they can't ask for IDs from people without due cause. Dudula didn't bother going to court, with the judge noting "they were aware of it and decided to ignore the court proceedings".

Good luck getting hold of Senzo Mchunu

Suspended police minister Senzo Mchunu surrendered his electronic devices to investigators today. He has been accused of interfering in political murders in KwaZulu-Natal, and of having ties to criminal gangs. Mchunu denies the claims. The long-running saga continues, as does the fractious life at the ANC's top table - Mchunu was deemed suitable enough by the party to be in the Cabinet.

Elon Musk and the trillion-dollar pay cheque

So we know this is one we don't want to claim, but Pretoria's export to the world is on track to be the first dollar trillionaire. This after Tesla shareholders agreed to the incentive to keep him at the company. In his spare time, the man controls algorithms that continue to spread hate around the world, including about South Africa. Eat the rich, some say.



Chapeau: Siya Kolisi. Photo: Franck Fife/AFP

O captain, our captain: Siya gets 100 caps

The captain of the most successful team in the history of men's rugby runs onto the field for his 100th cap this weekend, against proud underachievers France. The last time Siya Kolisi captained SA on a Paris pitch, he lifted the Rugby World Cup. The Springboks are in the northern hemisphere for a series of games after winning back-to-back Rugby Championships. Although they are dubbed "friendlies", these games are anything but. And the world rankings at the end decide the fixtures at the next World Cup.



Rubi[•]con

It matters where you get your news

More than half of all news articles on the internet are AI “slop” – designed to attract clicks, rather than inform. That’s according to a recent report by SEO firm Graphite. The companies behind these articles are using trends to make a profit, regardless of the social impact. This week *News24* published an investigation into an enormous fake

news network based in an office block in the small Indian town of Dehradun. Its modus operandi is to buy up real companies’ lapsed domain names and then flood them with AI-generated news articles. These articles included viral – and fake – stories about South African social grants, which reached mainstream audiences.



Winner: Zohran Mamdani celebrates his victory in New York. Photo: Angelina Katsanis/AFP

Zohran Mamdani: No DNA, only RSA

OK, so he was only here for two years – at a primary school in Cape Town from age five to seven – but we’re claiming him anyway. South Africa’s very own Zohran Mamdani is officially the next mayor of New York City, the largest and richest city in the US. His mayor-

al campaign – slick on social media, heavy on hope and practical ideas to lower the cost of living – represents perhaps the greatest challenge to Donald Trump’s political dominance, and offers a few lessons for how others can take on the US president.

BOOKS

It's time for a wild ride with your favourite cartoonist

Ahead of the launch of Carlos Amato's first collection, *The Friday Paper* asked him to choose one of his favourite cartoons – and tell us why.

"THIS cartoon responded to Trump's mockery of Lesotho – 'Who's ever heard of Leso-though?' – when he killed United States health funding to that country. I enjoyed concocting this retaliation on Lesotho's behalf, even though the joke would fly well over the Maga hats of its intended targets," Carlos Amato writes.

"A big theme in *This is Wild* is the rise of authoritarian, xenophobic populism across the world. That's not just a spontaneous zeitgeist: it's a project cannily nurtured by Big Tech robber barons. Toxic politics is a handy way to distract voters and politicians from demanding the effective regulation and taxation of Silicon Val-



Carlos
Mail & Guardian
7.3.25



ley's supranational empires." ■

This is Wild by Carlos Amato is published by Jonathan Ball. The launch is at The Bioscope at 44 Stanley in Johannesburg on 16 November at 2pm with a cinema-screen cartoon show.

SPORT

1,198 days of brilliance

A few years ago, administrators began taking women's sport seriously. Our athletes took care of the rest.



Graphic: Felix Dlangamandla

Firdose Moonda

IN THE days between 22 July 2022 and 2 November 2025, the national women's cricket, football, and rugby teams have collectively embarked on an extraordinary run of sporting success. They've shattered glass ceilings and, in the process, gone where their male counterparts have never been before. And it's not over yet.

Cricket has led the way. The women's side became the first senior team to reach the final of a World Cup, at the T20 tournament in 2023. They were also the first to make a World Cup final in the 50-over version of the game – falling just 52 runs short to an equally brilliant Indian team in Mumbai on Sunday.

It was only 12 years ago that the first contracts were given to women cricketers in South Africa. At the time, just six players made it onto the books, including Marizanne Kapp and Chloe Tryon – both of whom are still part of the setup. In 2025, Cricket South Africa issued 16 central contracts to women cricketers. It also runs a six-team professional domestic league that contracts 66 players.

Kapp, the fast bowler who skittled through England's top order in the World Cup semifinal, remembers the days of flying economy class and living on small stipends. All-rounder Annerie Dercksen does not: she has only known luxurious travel and equal match fees to men. "They did the hard yards for us," Dercksen says, of the pioneering generation of South African women cricketers. "And we've got it so much better than they have."

Rugby was the next to get on board.



Plenty to celebrate: World Cup joy for South Africa's cricket (above) and rugby (below) teams. Photos: Biju Boro/AFP and Paul Ellis/AFP



SA Rugby began to contract women players in 2019. Just six years later, the team made it to the quarterfinals of the World Cup. But there's work to be done at the domestic level – only the Bulls have a fully professional women's team.

Football lags behind, despite enjoying the first of this recent run of success. In July 2022, Banyana Banyana were crowned continental champions at the Women's Africa Cup of Nations. The next year, they were the first senior football side to advance beyond the group stage of a World Cup. But there is no professional domestic league in South Africa and coaches such as national assistant Thinasonke Mbuli urge players to seek deals abroad. "We must export our players," she says. "That's the only way to close the gap."



*On the ball: South Africa's Thembi Kgatlana in action against the Netherlands at the 2023 World Cup.
Photo: David Gray/AFP*

That is happening fairly regularly. Many of Banyana's star players are based in Mexico, such as Hildah Magaia (Club Tijuana) and Thembi Kgatlana (Tigres UANL), or in Europe, such as Linda Motlhalo (Glasgow City). There they are exposed to international coaching methods and bring that experience back to the national team camp.

The long overdue professionalisation of women's sport has made it a viable career choice for players.

South Africa's cricket captain Laura Wolvaardt was a top student who was accepted into medical school. She gave up her place because she knew she could make a living from sport. As well as her national contract, she plays in leagues in Australia, England and India – bringing her winning mentality everywhere she goes.

But it's what these women are doing beyond winning that matters too.

In a country rooted in misogyny and rife with gender-based violence, the women's cricket team wear an all-black kit every year to raise awareness about these issues. Banyana's former captain Amanda Dlamini talks about them on a global stage.

Other players speak out about their battles with alcoholism and social media bullying, such as wicket-keeper Sinalo Jafta; or the impact of period poverty, such as prop Babalwa Latsha.

The women are often much more representative of the diversity of South African society across race and class lines than men's sports stars, because they don't come from elite schooling systems as the men tend to do. They are us – and they are winners. ■

The photo essay



Ameena Amira Anthony and Kalou Survivor

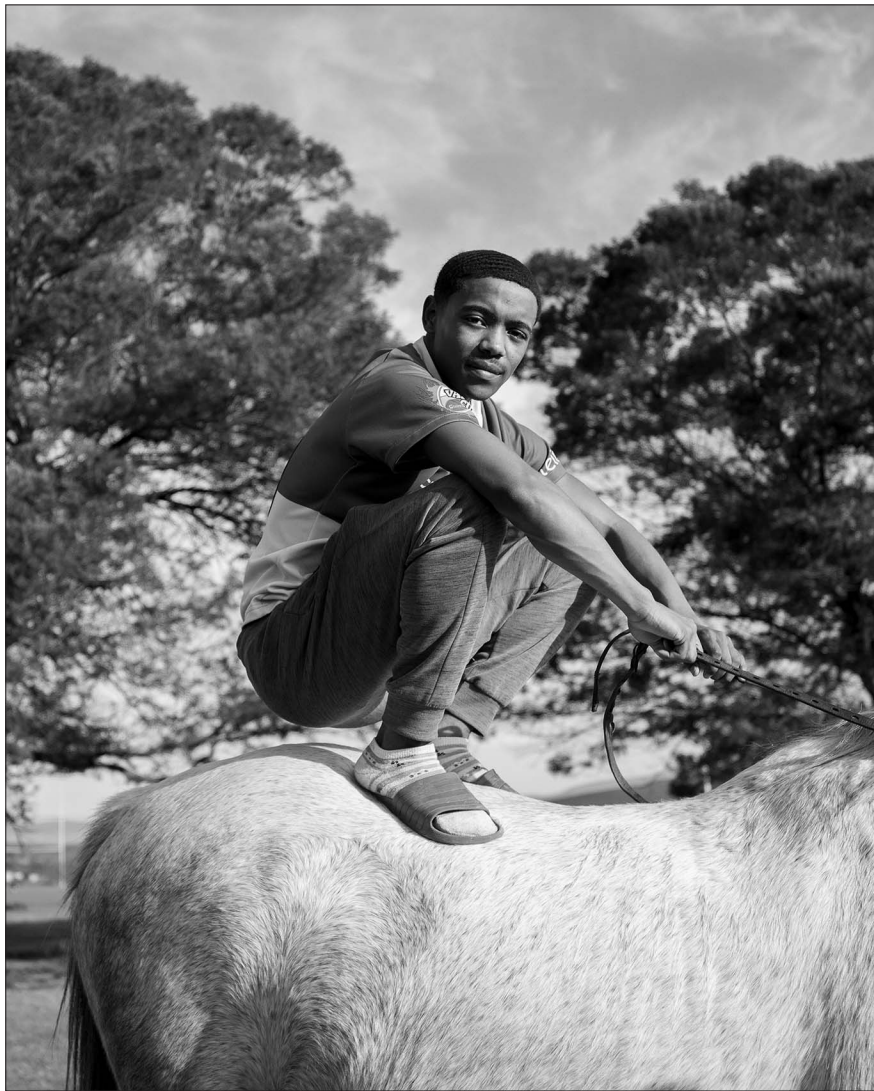
Reclaiming the horse

In Cape Town and the Overberg, the horse is woven into centuries of history.

Dutch coloniser Jan van Riebeeck requested horses from Amsterdam, claiming they were as necessary as bread. Once a tool of conquest, and a key stand in the making of South African society, they are now a symbol of pride. In *As Necessary as Bread*, visual artist and rider **Gabrielle Kannemeyer** turns her lens toward these horses – and the people who ride, groom, and love them. Across these portraits, the horse is no longer burdened, the rider no longer erased. Together, they reclaim the frame – rewriting what mastery, freedom, and beauty look like in motion. – *Lindokuhle Nkosi*



Top left: Rafeeq Anthony with Du-Dre Highland Queen at the hackney Championships in Beaufort West.
Top right: Niyaz Marlie with Julietta owned by Abdullah Davids.
Above: Dino Louw and Stallion.
Left: Pietie Sauls, Zaden Fourie and friends in Genadendal.



Utim Palmer and Aunty madam, Genadendal

REPORT

The legend of Benjamin Mauerberger

Capetonian. Conman. Alleged criminal mastermind.

Simon Allison

HIS friends in Bangkok knew him as Ben Berger, or Ben Smith, and didn't pay much attention to what he did for a living – something in “finance”, he told them. He was rich, sure, but not super rich. His two teenage children went to an international school in the Thai capital; his second wife, Cattaliya Beevor, was a famous Thai model.

But towards the end of the last decade, the family's lifestyle began to change. They bought an apartment in the St Regis, one of Bangkok's most exclusive apartment blocks, where a three-bedroom flat goes for more than R70-million. “Ben Berger” upgraded from a Ferrari to a bright orange McLaren supercar. One of his front companies acquired a 120-foot superyacht, the *Wanderlust*, spending R1.7-billion to do so.

For one friend who knew him then, the extravagant spending did not compute. “He might have blended in as a ‘gray man’ if it weren't for discrepancies and red flags that started adding up,” this friend told journalists. “Why were the kids called Mauerberger but he always went by ‘Ben Berger’ or ‘Ben Smith?’ Why did he carry multiple burner phones?”



Cleaning up: Alleged money-launderer Benjamin Mauerberger.

These details come from an extensive investigation by Project Brazen, an independent investigative journalism outlet. It concluded “Ben Berger” is actually Benjamin Mauerberger, a 47-year-old from Cape Town. They allege he is the mastermind of “a shadow empire of companies and properties valued at about \$1.5-billion (R26-billion)” by laundering money for ruling elites in Cambodia and Thailand.

Transcontinental conman

Mauerberger grew up in one of South Africa's richest families. Morris Mauerberger, the family patriarch, was a self-made textile baron – he co-founded the Ackermans retail chain, among other successful businesses. Today, the family is primarily known for its philanthropic initiatives, which are run through the Mauerberger Foundation Fund. In his early twenties, instead of going into the family business, he made his way to Bangkok. There, he allegedly discovered a unique talent for a certain type of con, as Project Brazen recounts:

"The 2000 Ben Affleck and Vin Diesel movie *Boiler Room* captures this period: greedy young men cold-calling mom-and-pop investors

to sell them worthless stocks, much like parts of the crypto ecosystem today. In Bangkok, they worked the phones from cheap office spaces, targeting investors in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom, before heading to the city's 'girly bars.'

Mauerberger allegedly started his own boiler room, which was raided by Thai police in 2001. He was later convicted of contempt in a New Zealand court for failing to appear in connection with a stock scam involving New Zealand investors.

A few years later, regulators in the UK shut down another stock fraud scam connected to Mauerberger and his brother, Adam Mauerberger, who used to own the Mount Rozier vineyard in Somerset West.

For a while, Mauerberger kept under the radar. Then he met Yim Leak – the son of a prominent political figure in Cambodia, the southeast Asian country neighbouring Thailand. This is when he apparently evolved from small-town crook to multinational criminal mastermind.

In 2018, Mauerberger and Yim Leak allegedly concocted a money-laundering scheme in which parcels of prime Cambodian land were flipped to wealthy Chinese investors, often to develop casinos. The pair were reported to have taken a 20% cut, generat-

These scams were so lucrative they allegedly catapulted Mauerberger into the upper echelons of global organised crime

ing more than \$1-billion in revenue. Mauerberger has also been accused of profiting from Cambodia's notorious cyber-scam compounds.

Scams and sanctions

These scams were so lucrative they allegedly catapulted Mauerberger into the upper echelons of global organised crime – and gave him extraordinary influence at the very highest levels of southeast Asian politics.

Mauerberger has a Cambodian passport in the name of "Ben Smith", and is listed as an "adviser" to the country's Senate. He developed a close relationship with Thaksin Shinawatra, the former Thai prime minister who once owned Manchester City Football Club, helping him to purchase



Rich man's toy: Benjamin Mauerberger's yacht. Photos: Project Brazen

a private plane worth \$60-million. Mauerberger's yacht was the venue for a diplomatic meeting in December last year between Shinawatra and the current prime minister of Malaysia. Shinawatra is currently in a Thai prison, serving a one-year sentence for corruption.

Mauerberger's sudden accumulation of extraordinary wealth, together with his ties to politically connected figures in both Cambodia and Thailand, have put him on the radar of authorities in the United States.

They are worried about the geopolitical implications of Mauerberger's activities, given his close connections with dodgy Chinese money. So worried, in fact, that in September the US Congress recommended sanctions be imposed on 44 individuals connected to

"transnational criminal syndicates perpetuating mass online scam operations against Americans".

Benjamin Mauerberger was the second name on the list.

If the South African Revenue service wanted to ask Mauerberger a few questions, they would first need to find him. Mauerberger is reported to have left southeast Asia, perhaps for Dubai, and could not be located for comment.

His only response to the allegations by Project Brazen came from his Thai lawyer, who issued a statement in his name. "These are vile fabrications, entirely baseless, and unsupported by any evidence." The lawyer added. "These accusations are false, unfounded, and deliberately misleading." ■

COMMENT



Reclaiming the Casspir: Artist Ralph Ziman's Project Casspir aims to make the vehicle 'less threatening'.

The apartheid ghost that haunts the world

**Got a rebellion to crush? Unrest to suppress?
South Africa has just the vehicle for you.**

Sahar Vardi and Mamello Mosiana

IN MARCH 1980, the South African Police ordered their first 140 Casspirs. This homegrown armoured vehicle quickly became one of the apartheid state's favourite tools. It was used to ram into the homes of anti-apartheid activists; drive over dissidents in their shacks; and protect police as they opened fire

on protesters – children, students, and civilians alike.

The Casspir was initially intended for use in the border wars in Angola and Namibia, but it was primarily used as a weapon of occupation in the townships. As *New Frame* noted in an editorial: "The Casspir ... is a tool of colonial domination designed to be used in



Photos: Ralph Ziman

circumstances where access to military hardware is fundamentally unequal and where people, rather than rival armies, are the enemy.”

It remains one of the most enduring symbols of apartheid brutality. But this has not stopped the democratically elected South African government from using the armoured vehicle. The new government has used Casspirs to counter gang violence in eThekweni and the Cape Flats, and to combat student movements during #FeesMustFall. It is easier, perhaps, for the government to send Casspirs into impoverished communities than it is to deal with its failures to provide sufficient education, electricity, employment, housing, and policing.

Armoured vehicles are also a lucrative export. In 2023, South Africa sold R1.6-billion of them – not only Casspirs, but also Mbombes, Maatlas, and Pumas. The buyers included Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Togo, the United Arab Emirates, and Zambia.

All around the world, when state security wants to quell a protest, South African armoured vehicles are their transport of choice. American police used them to control #BlackLivesMatter demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. Police in Eswatini drove a Casspir onto the University of Swaziland campus in 2016, into a group of students who were boycotting classes.

In India, more than 200 Casspirs worth R345-million are used to patrol



Beaded: Detail of Ralph Ziman's Spoek 1 Casspir.

the streets of Srinagar in Kashmir. These same vehicles are used to enforce curfews across the Jammu and Kashmir region – like in June 2021, when a days-long curfew was imposed in several areas. The curfew, together with internet shutdowns, was intended to prevent protests against Islamophobic statements by Indian politicians.

One of the biggest purchasers of South African armoured vehicles is the UAE – accounting for 40% of sales in 2020, according to *Business Insider South Africa*. This is despite the Emirates’ well-documented track record of human rights abuses in its ongoing war in Yemen; and, more recently, allegations that it is funding the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan. The RSF – among other atrocities – was responsible for the recent massacre of thousands of civilians in El Fasher, Darfur.

The rationale for selling deadly vehicles to such a wide range of oppressive regimes is simple: that economic gains trump humanitarian consequences. But whatever South Africa makes from exporting arms, it spends at least five times more each year to import other



Photos: Mauricio Hoyos Photography

Rainbow hippo: A detail of Ralph Ziman's Casspir, which was exhibited at the 34th San Francisco Textile & Tribal Art Fair in 2020.

weapons and military equipment. This is what a militarised global economy looks like – financed, in part, by South African public money that is not going to health, education, or infrastructure.

Perhaps the most effective response to this absurdity comes from the artist Ralph Ziman. He bought an old Casspir and covered it in vivid, colourful panels of glass beadwork. By doing so, he wants to “reclaim the Casspir ... Africanise it ... make it less dangerous, less threaten-

ing.” With Ziman’s permission, images from The Casspir Project have been used to illustrate this piece. ■

Sahar Vardi is on the steering committee of the global 10% for All Campaign to cut military spending. Mamello Mosiana is head of campaigns at Open Secrets, a civil society organisation that holds profiteers of economic crime, human rights abuses, and war crimes to account.

FEATURE

Land of peanuts and honey

In rural areas, people are lucky to find work. If they do, they earn peanuts. Five friends turned this around by making the groundnut work for them.

Bongeka Gumede

MFULA IS a small village in Willowvale in the Eastern Cape, southeast of Idutywa. On the banks of the Mbhashe River, life is simple. You wake up to roosters crowing and crisp air flowing in from the sea. It's the kind of tranquillity that isn't found in the cities, where the cost of living is high, the roads busy, and the air polluted.

But the tranquillity comes at a price. Like many rural areas in South Africa, Mfula residents struggle to access basic resources like water and electricity. Its young people are forced to look elsewhere for work – even then, jobs are hard to come by.

This was the situation that Anathi Mnukwa, Elihle Mpikwa, Lisa Lolwana, Anda Zaku, and Notemba Jonas found themselves in last year. “For us young people and women from rural areas, it was a deeply painful and humbling experience,” says Zaku, who studied industrial relations at the Tshwane University of Technology.

In the absence of opportunities, the five friends looked around for a more abundant resource – and found it in the shape of the humble peanut. They began making peanut butter with lo-

cally grown groundnuts, mixing it with honey from nearby producers Qombe Honey and Zingisa Co-op. When ready, they bottled it in Consol glass jars: better for the environment – and better for the taste.

The new peanut butter has been a smash hit. Soon, demand outstripped supply, and the newly formed Mbhashe

‘For us young people and women from rural areas, it was a deeply painful and humbling experience’

Gold co-operative had to begin sourcing their peanuts from elsewhere.

Each jar passes through careful, hands-on stages – roasting, cooling, de-skinning, grinding, and packaging – and upholds food-safety standards. “No additives, no shortcuts,” Zaku says – unlike South African favourites Black Cat and Yum Yum.

“Unemployment was a dark chapter – it also became the soil where the Mbhashe Gold idea was planted,” Zaku says.

Mbhashe Gold aims to make its product available in shops across South Africa. For now, its growth is constrained by its small-batch equipment.

The Big Picture



Moon shadows: Every month's full moon has a different name. In November, it's the Beaver Moon – that's it, pictured above Cape Town on Wednesday night. It is the largest and brightest full moon of the year. *Photo: Esa Alexander/Reuters*

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