

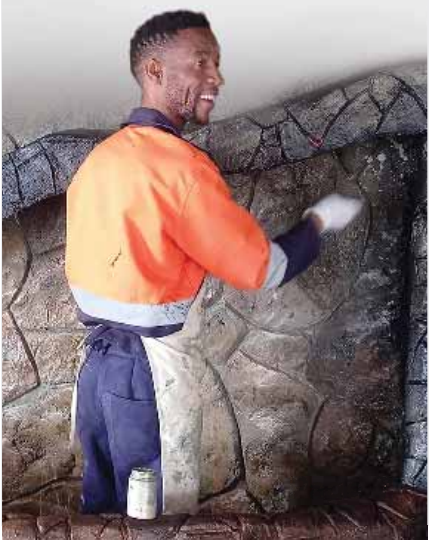
BOTSWANA

Daily News

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Govt deploys drones for FMD surveillance



Calviniah Kgauthe
GOODHOPE

Government has deployed drones to carryout Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) surveillance along the 182 kilometre FMD double cordon fence in Good Hope District. The system, which started operations at Phihetshwane on Tuesday, is automated to collect real time data to be used by veterinary services to monitor the situation.

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PRESS RELEASE

Boko to participate at AU ordinary session

President Advocate
Duma Boko



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Gasita support Constitutional Court

Marvin Motlhabane
GASITA

Residents of Gasita have expressed support for the establishment of a dedicated Constitutional Court in Botswana, viewing it as a vital step toward protecting citizens’ rights and addressing long-standing grievances.

This emerged during a consultative meeting held recently, where the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, Major General Pius Mokgware engaged the community on the proposed constitutional court’s creation.

The discussions formed part of ongoing nationwide consultations aimed at gathering public input on

introducing the court to strengthen constitutional interpretation and rights enforcement.

One resident, Mr Kelebileone Puoeng emphasised the need for the court to fulfill its intended mandate. He shared personal experiences of rights violations and expressed confidence that such a specialised court would provide timely and effective resolutions in the future.

Mr Ntshekisang Tekanyo echoed this view, stressing that the court must serve the interests of all Batswana without deviation from its proposed purpose.

Participants highlighted the constitutional court’s potential to make justice more accessible, particularly for those marginalised

Land disputes, a common issue in rural areas, could be resolved more fairly and affordably through the new judicial body.

by high legal fees. They noted that land disputes, a common issue in rural areas, could be resolved more fairly and affordably through the new judicial body.

Minister Mokgware reinforced these points with real-world examples. He referenced the case of Mr Pitseng Gaoberekwe, whose

body remained in a mortuary for three years amid a dispute over burial rights on ancestral land, a matter he described as a clear human rights violation that a constitutional court could have addressed swiftly.

The minister also pointed to the liquidation of the BCL mining group, suggesting that former employees might have used the court to contest their rights and entitlements more effectively. Additionally, he highlighted inheritance disputes as another area where the court would provide much-needed intervention.

Maj. Gen Mokgware further noted that restoring powers to traditional leaders through the court’s framework would aid in

resolving inheritance matters and uphold customary governance.

Meanwhile residents raised concerns about local infrastructure. They urged the government to prioritise tarring the Selokolela-Gasita-Lorolwane Road, which is currently in poor condition and hinders movement between villages.

The consultative meeting reflects broader national dialogue on constitutional reforms, with communities across Botswana weighing the benefits of a specialised court against other priorities. Residents in Gasita appeared optimistic about its potential to enhance justice and rights protection for ordinary citizens. **BOPA**

Campaign places men at forefront of GBV fight

Benita Magopane
GABORONE

Initiatives that do not involve men in addressing one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world, violence against women, usually have minimal impact.

According to an article by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on Gender-Based Violence (GBV), worldwide, an estimated one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime at the hands of men. In Botswana, over 67 per cent of women have experienced abuse, which is more than double the global average. Therefore, the article says effective responses to gender inequality and GBV require joint efforts by both women and men.

Ms Angela Phuthego, founder of the Man To Man campaign, an initiative that engages men and places them at the forefront of the fight against GBV, echoes this sentiment.

“In my research, I have found that in efforts to combat gender-based violence, men are often relegated to the background, with limited visibility and engagement in prevention initiatives, yet their voice is critical in the discourse,” said Phuthego. She highlighted that many campaigns and initiatives in Botswana were predominantly led by women, with limited male participation, and that the core GBV message was often directed mainly

at females.

She also noted a huge rift between men and women in the social media space, where discussions on gender-based violence frequently struggled to find common ground and quickly give way to defensiveness.

Ms Phuthego said her initiative had also faced similar challenges, where an almost cataclysmic chasm emerged between men and women when it came to the causes of GBV. However, she maintained that ending GBV could not be achieved without the involvement of men.

“I believe that men have the potential to help fight GBV. I also believe that it is time to change the narrative of men being painted solely as perpetrators to being seen as participants in the fight for change,” said Ms Phuthego.

Through the Man To Man initiative, which currently involves ten men, Phuthego explained that participants engaged in discourse with one another and encourage each other to abandon harmful stereotypes while fostering respectful and healthy relationships. The initiative also helps men better understand the dynamics of women’s experiences, with guidance from qualified professionals.

Essentially, Man To Man unites both men and women to confront each other’s raw perceptions with the objective of finding common ground in the fight against GBV. **BOPA**



Minister for State President, Defence and Security, Mr Moeti Mohwasa (left) conferring the rank of Deputy Commissioner of Police on Mr Stephen Tsheko in Gaborone on Monday. The conferment follows the retirement of former Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr Solomon Mantswe in December 2025 and the subsequent promotion of Mr Tsheko, who previously served as director of Strategy Development and Performance Monitoring. The promotion took effect on February 1. Mr Mohwasa expressed confidence in Mr Tsheko’s leadership and professional competence, saying the appointment reflected government’s trust in his experience, dedication and commitment to serving the nation. Photo: Courtesy of Botswana Police Service

Innovation drives lasting solutions - Boko

Keith Ketl
MAHALAPYE

Leadership should apply creative thinking and innovative approaches to confront societal issues such as economic inequality and unemployment, President Advocate Duma Boko has said.

Speaking during the Botswana Prison Service senior officers conference, in Mahalapye on Tuesday, President Boko said knowledge economy was driven by innovation, technology and capital accumulation.

He said success in government and society depended on the pace and scope of innovation, adding that institutions should continuously pursue innovation in

their organisational frameworks, operational systems and use of technology.

President Boko further said effective leadership required making compelling arguments for allocating resources based on proven cost savings, pointing to Botswana Prison Service cost containment and cutting strategies that generate financial savings, which could be redirected to other pressing institutional priorities.

He said creative solutions were necessary to address problems and improve operational efficiency. The President further said leadership should not be feared but should instead be open to feedback and suggestions for improvement.

He said improvisation was a

vital part of effective leadership, enabling adaptability and responsiveness, and emphasised that leadership was a collaborative process that depended on contributions and teamwork from all levels.

President Boko said addressing important societal questions was essential for both institutional and social advancement, highlighting that leaders should be willing to experiment with new approaches and learn from experience.

He also said exploring alternatives in the criminal justice system could help reduce prison populations and improve facility conditions.

For his part, Botswana Prison Service Commissioner, Mr

Anthony Mokento said some of Botswana Prison Service initiatives enhanced economic stability and prison self-sufficiency.

For instance, he said Botswana Prison Service was committed to supporting government initiatives focused on food security and cost containment to improve the economic situation and reduce import bill.

Mr Mokento said agricultural production for prisoners included maize, sorghum, cowpeas and vegetables, adding that the staff college supplied bread to various prisons, contributing to food self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, he said infrastructure maintenance projects carried out by inmates

had saved government over P2 million in labour charges, noting that such maintenance was conducted for various government departments.

On other issues, Mr Mokento said they were facing challenges including the smuggling of prohibited articles such as cell phones and drugs into prisons.

He said an integrated security solution had been proposed to address the smuggling problem.

He also noted that providing special diet for inmates places a strain on the budget, adding that they were working with the Ministry of Health to create suitable meals plans for prisoners with chronic health conditions. **BOPA**

About 6 900 farmers register for Lemang Dijo in Kanye District

Marvin Motlhabane
KANYE

A total of 6 965 farmers in the Kanye district have registered for assistance through the Lemang Dijo programme for the 2025/26 ploughing season, according to Kanye District Agronomist Ms Kealeboga Tonoko.

The Lemang Dijo initiative, a government-backed input subsidy programme aimed at boosting household food security and supporting micro-scale farmers, provides eligible participants with fully subsidised inputs such as tillage services (ploughing), seeds, and other essentials for up to one hectare of land.

Speaking in an interview with BOPA recently, Ms Tonoko said of the registered farmers, 3 632 were men and 3,333 were women, reflecting a near-balanced gender participation.

Ms Tonoko reported that the programme successfully supported 3 596 farmers with grants, benefiting 1 685 men and 1 911 women. These grants primarily covered ploughing services, seeds and fertilizer provisions.

While fertilisers were not distributed directly through the Crop Management System (CMS)- the digital platform used for programme registration and

administration, she said the district requested 5 810 units but received only 3 707. All received fertilisers were fully allocated to farmers, reaching 925 beneficiaries: 429 men and 490 women.

The district's cropping season faced significant weather challenges. Rains began in November 2025 but were unevenly distributed, with heavier precipitation on the eastern side in areas such as Lotlhakane, Molapowabojang, Moshana, Tswidi, and Diabo. The western side, including Segwagwa, Mogapinyana, Gasita, Lerolwane, and Masoke, regions that enjoyed bumper harvests in the previous season, experienced low to no significant rainfall initially, she added.

By December 2025, Ms Tonoko said rains improved and covered most settlements. However, she reiterated that January 2026 brought a complete dry spell.

"Many farmers who ploughed in December saw their germinating crops suffer from high temperatures, resulting in scorching and reduced viability."

Overall, ploughing activity in the Kanye district was notably lower than in previous seasons. Only 260 hectares were ploughed by 174 farmers; 81 men and 93 women, she said.



Kanye District agronomist, Ms Kealeboga Tonoko said 6 965 crop farmers in the district had registered for assistance through the Lemang Dijo programme for the 2025/26 ploughing season.

Ms Tonoko expressed optimism that February 2026 could bring more favourable rains, allowing farmers with means to expand their cultivated areas.

In the meantime, agricultural extension officers have advised farmers to opt for quick-germinating crops such as beans to better cope with the unpredictable

weather patterns. According to Ms Tonoko, the ploughing season for the Southern part ended on January 31.

The Lemang Dijo programme continues to play a vital role in supporting smallholder farmers across Botswana amid efforts to enhance agricultural productivity and food security. **BOPA**

Boko to participate at AU ordinary session

GABORONE

President Advocate Duma Boko, will attend the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, scheduled for February 12 to 16 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

A press release from the Office of the President states that the session will be held under the theme: Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063.

The theme elevates water and sanitation as strategic priorities for Africa's socio-economic transformation, climate resilience, public health and stability.

The summit is also expected to deliberate on issues pertaining to peace and security, governance and the African Union institutional reform.

As current chair of the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA), the release says, President Boko will host a high-level press briefing where he will present the findings of the 2025 Africa Malaria progress report, and call for enhanced efforts and strengthened commitment in the work being undertaken by the continent and international partners, to realise a malaria-free Africa by 2030.

He will also hold a series of high-level bilateral meetings with his counterparts, aimed at strengthening diplomatic relations and promoting Botswana's national and regional interests.

The summit will be preceded by the 48th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council which will take place on February 11 to 12 and Botswana will be represented by Minister for International Relations, Dr Phenyio Butale, who in his capacity as the African Union Ministerial Committee on Candidatures chair, will preside over the Ministerial Committee Meeting which will decide on several African Candidatures.

First Lady, Ms Kaone Boko, will accompany the President, while Vice President, Mr Ndaba Gaolathe, will assume the role of Acting President.

The President is expected back home on February 16. **BOPA**



President Advocate Duma Boko

Govt deploys drones for FMD surveillance

...from page 1

Speaking during a kgotla meeting in Phitshane Molopo addressed by the Vice President Ndaba Gaolathe, the acting Minister of Lands and Agriculture, Dr Edwin Dikoloti said government would also continue to strengthen prevention and control measures in the fight against FMD outbreak through construction and maintenance of cordon fences. He encouraged residents to refrain from vandalising the fences adding that biosecurity measures which included kraaling were

essential for controlling the spread of FMD and protecting livestock.

For his part, Mr Gaolathe said it was critical for everyone to unite in the fight against Foot and Mouth Disease, particularly during this period of strict budgetary limitations.

He said Botswana's import cover which used to comfortably address emergency situations including FMD crisis in the past had seen a decline over the years.

In the past, the country's foreign reserves were sufficient to cushion it against external shocks for up to one and half years, but they have since declined, largely due to trade deficit driven by the underperformance of the diamond sector, he explained.

Mr Gaolathe who is also Minister of Finance said Botswana was endowed with the necessary human resource capital and mineral resources to be able to resuscitate the economy and bring it back to its heydays.

He said government was working under tight fiscal constraints as such it was critical for the people to stand and be self-reliant, be resilient in the phase of adversity. Mr Gaolathe said government could not do it alone highlighting that it was the responsibility of every citizen,

civil society, local communities, business community, farmers, youth and experts to join in.

It is against this backdrop that the vice president said collaborative efforts was essential for addressing the current economic challenges, as well as preventing the outbreak of FMD in green zones.

Adopting this approach, he noted would reshape governance structures to be more networked and adaptive, allowing for more community participation in shaping outcomes.

He emphasised that to achieve high impact results, the spirit of volunteerism was critical and thus appreciated members of the community who had volunteered to fight FMD outbreak. Additionally, he said it was critical for the community to unite with government in the fight against outbreak of FMD to protect the beef industry, cautioning that the outbreak risked Botswana's reputation as a reliable beef exporter, especially to premium international markets.

He said should there be any outbreak in green zones, Botswana stood to lose grip of the lucrative market share, adding that the beef sector contributed significantly to country's Gross Domestic Product.

Mr Gaolathe emphasised that it was therefore pertinent for Botswana to protect its reputation by ensuring transparency in the fight against FMD to protect its market.

The Vice President said government was committed to the fight against FMD and had budgeted P97 million for the course.

Kgosi Odirile Sekwenyane of Phitshane Molopo appreciated extensive consultations by government with members of the community and farmers regarding the outbreak of FMD in neighbouring South Africa. He said farmers had generally heeded the call to look after their cattle and employed biosecurity measures by kraaling their cattle at night as well as driving their livestock to designated watering points.

Additionally, Kgosi Sekwenyane said farmers had concerted their efforts and were working with other stakeholders including the veterinary officers and law enforcement to patrol the fence. Currently, he said the youth have volunteered to maintain the double cordon fence, adding that they were looking forward to the establishment of eco rangers programme. **BOPA**

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BUSINESS BRIEFS

Tourism shows potential to drive job creation

GABORONE - Tourism is already demonstrating its capacity to mobilise private investment and create jobs across the country. During the 2025/2026 financial year, government facilitated the allocation of five (5) tourism sites and concession areas in Ngamiland and the Makgadikgadi National Park, attracting envisaged capital investment of P362 million. These projects are expected to create over 500 jobs and generate rentals for community trusts, directly strengthening local economies. In addition, the fast-tracking of eleven lease renewals covering 27 lodges in Ngamiland has unlocked further investment potential estimated at P800 million, while safeguarding more than 1,500 existing jobs. These developments underscore tourism's growing role as a driver of employment, citizen participation, and privatesector-led economic diversification. **BOPA**

Global markets yield tangible results

GABORONE - Fostering Economic Diversification Government's sustained efforts to deepen Botswana's integration into global markets are beginning to yield tangible and measurable outcomes. "We have secured market access for fresh citrus exports to 17 international destinations, including the European Union, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Russia and Hong Kong, reflecting the strengthening of our trade relationships and growing confidence in Botswana's agricultural standards and export capacity," said Minister of Finance Mr Ndaba Gaolathe. This expanded market access has translated into export performance, with fresh citrus exports increasing from 2 790.68 tonnes in the 2024 season to 13 711.53 tonnes in 2025. **BOPA**

China factory-gate prices see narrower decline

BEIJING - China saw signs of improvement in factory-gate prices in January 2026, with the decline in its producer price index (PPI) continuing to narrow, official data showed Wednesday. The PPI, which measures costs for goods at the factory gate, went down 1.4 per cent year on year in January, narrowing by 0.5 percentage points compared to the previous month, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. On a monthly basis, the PPI rose 0.4 per cent in January, 0.2 percentage points higher than the increase recorded in December, according to the NBS data. China's PPI has increased on a monthly basis for four consecutive months, noting that efforts to develop a unified national market led to price increases in the cement manufacturing and the photovoltaic industries. Stronger demand in some sectors also contributed to the increase, particularly in semiconductor materials and external storage devices linked to the artificial intelligence industry. **Xinhua**



Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis head of trade, industry and private sector development, Dr Pinkie Kebakile said Small and Medium Enterprises were pivotal to economic growth as they involved all members of the community, thereby promoting inclusivity.

SMEs unlock economic growth

Thato Mosinyi
GABORONE

At a time when the nation is navigating significant economic and social pressures due to the current economic downturn, sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without the full participation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Contributing during the First National Bank 2026 budget review, Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) Head of Trade, Industry and Private Sector Development, Dr Pinkie Kebakile, cautioned that unlocking sustainable growth would be unattainable without the involvement of SMEs. She indicated that Botswana has remained in the upper-middle-income category since 2004, with development performance more similar to lower-middle-income and low-income countries, hence the need for SMEs to play a more active role in jump-starting the economy. "As an upper-middle-income economy, it has been observed that Botswana lags behind its peers in economic indicators such as poverty levels and youth unemployment," she said. Dr Kebakile said SMEs were pivotal to economic growth as they involve all members of the community, thereby promoting inclusivity. "Botswana has been an upper-middle-income country for years, and we need something that can jump-start the economy so we can transition to a high-income economy by 2036. Entrepreneurship, particularly opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, is one of the key changes that will help our country transition towards a high-income economy," she said. She said opportunity-driven entrepreneurship should take precedence over necessity-driven entrepreneurship if the country is intentional about transforming the

economy. Owing to the current economic status, Dr Kebakile noted that technology-driven growth, characterised by high levels of firm productivity, should be a prerequisite for transforming Botswana's economy. She said the SME sector was a vital contributor to job creation, innovation and entrepreneurship, value chain development and value addition, and thus plays a critical role in the nation's sustainable development agenda and economic diversification. "In a private-sector-led economy and economic transformation agenda, the private sector is mostly dominated by SMEs, as 90 per cent of firms within the private sector are SMEs," she said. In this context, Dr Kebakile commended government for the introduction of the Botswana Economic Transformation Programme, citing that it was both timely and transformative, serving as the anchor policy instrument for the country's take-off phase.

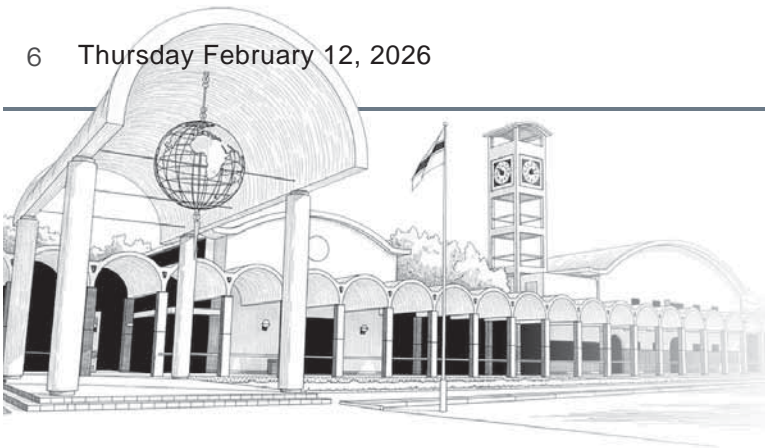
'Entrepreneurship, particularly opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, is one of the key changes that will help our country transition towards a high-income economy'

She said the programme would provide coherent policy direction by placing the private sector at the centre of development and driving diversification beyond traditional sectors. Dr Kebakile stated that countries around the world have shifted towards SME development as a policy for economic growth and job creation, adding that SMEs needed to be nurtured and developed as they play a critical role in Botswana's transformation trajectory. Contextualising the

importance of SME development, she said Botswana's Entrepreneurship Policy (2019) acknowledged that a common past approach to economic development assumed a small number of large firms were the primary source of economic growth. She said as a nation on a high-income economy trajectory, local SMEs must strive to widen their export destinations, which requires enhanced productivity and competitiveness. **BOPA**



Dr Pinkie Kebakile



PARLIAMENT 2026

BDF gets P5bn to settle pension matters

GABORONE

Government has allocated P5 billion for the next financial year to settle outstanding BDF pension transfer values.

This follows a major decision to adjust the pension denominator for nearly 10 000 personnel.

Answering a question in Parliament on Tuesday, Minister for State President, Defence and Security, Mr Moeti Mohwasa revealed that 9 972 military personnel were eligible for such enhancements, comprising 5 560 separated members and 4 412 serving members.

Minister Mohwasa said processing began in July 2024 and as of February this year, 3 599 separated members have been paid and 161 were currently in the process of being paid, leaving 1 800 separated members awaiting their calculated values.

Regarding active-duty personnel, he said all 4 412 serving members were still waiting to have their records credited with the recalculated transfer values.

The minister noted that the primary limiting factor on the rate of disbursement had been a shortage of funds. To date, he said government had disbursed P1.4 billion to the fund administrators (NMG), which will cover 3 760 of the received claims. For the upcoming financial year, he indicated that government had allocated P5 billion for pensions and gratuities.

"This will go towards payment of outstanding claims as well as updating the active and deferred member records with recalculated transfer values," Mr Mohwasa stated.

He emphasised that government was prioritising payments and continued to disburse funds to NMG as revenue became available. Currently, he said claimants owed less than P300 000 had been settled and those owed between P300 000 and P500 000 were now being processed.

Regarding the structure of the payouts, the minister explained that transfer value enhancements were governed by pension legislation, including the Retirement Funds Act, Income Tax Superannuation rules and BPOPF Fund Rules.

"Under these regulations, a member is only permitted to commute their entire retirement benefit if the remaining 50 per cent, after the initial lump sum, results in an annuity of less than P20 000 per annum," he said.

Minister Mohwasa explained that such provisions were mandatory, stating that the law did not allow for discretionary waivers regardless of a beneficiary's age.

He was responding to questions

from Member of Parliament for Chobe, Mr Goretsetse Kekgonengile, who asked the minister to brief on the progress of outstanding BDF dues.

Mr Kekgonengile requested clarity on the number of personnel paid versus those outstanding, the reasons for delays and the specific timeline for final payments.

He also questioned why members were required to purchase pension schemes with 50 per cent of their dues and whether flexibility could be exercised for older beneficiaries.

BOPA

'Find alternative transport for learners'

GABORONE

Local authorities have been instructed to find alternative modes of transport following government's resolve that donkey carts are unsuitable for ferrying learners.

The decision stemmed from concerns that donkey carts exposed learners to safety risks, including road accidents and harsh weather conditions.

Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, Mr Ketlhalefile Motshegwa, said this answering a question from Member of Parliament for Mmopane-Metsimotlhabe, Ms Helen Manyeneng in Parliament on Tuesday.

Minister Motshegwa stated that the use of donkeys for learner transportation was being abolished and therefore councils were now required to implement alternative arrangements that met acceptable safety standards, specifically citing the need for roadworthy and properly covered vehicles.

Ms Manyeneng had asked the minister if he was aware that learners from Dintoroko, Gamononyane and Mmamhiko were being transported to Metsimotlhabe via donkey carts.

She highlighted the serious safety risks involved and wanted to know whether the ministry would commit to providing safer and sheltered vehicles to ensure the protection and well-being of the children.

BOPA

Ministry plans to close and rehabilitate landfill

GABORONE

The Ministry of Local Government and Traditional Affairs is planning to close the Pilane Landfill.

Answering a question in Parliament on Tuesday, Minister Ketlhalefile Motshegwa noted that the move was linked to the development of an envisaged waste management facility at Dikwididi.

Mr Motshegwa stated that the ministry, through the Kgatleng District Council, was considering appropriate interventions to address ongoing challenges at the site.

He further explained that, given the current financial climate, government was considering to engage a private company to assist.

The minister emphasised that rehabilitation of a waste management facility, such as the one in Pilane, was both a regulatory and policy requirement once it reached the end of its operational life.

Member of Parliament for Kgatleng West, Dr Unity Dow, had asked the minister whether there

were plans to close and rehabilitate the landfill.

Additionally, Dr Dow sought an investigation into the adverse

health consequences of the smoke that regularly spewed from the site and affected nearby residents.

BOPA

Siviya health post project depends on funds availability

GABORONE

The upgrading of Siviya Health Post will be considered alongside other facilities in future development plans, provided that funds become available.

Responding to a question in Parliament on Tuesday, Minister of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, Mr Ketlhalefile Motshegwa said currently, it was not feasible to upgrade all the 350 health posts across the country due to budgetary constraints.

Minister Motshegwa added that

primary healthcare was officially transferred from the Ministry of Health to his ministry on April 1.

"Following this decentralisation, the ministry is currently assessing all facilities to determine how best to improve service delivery nationwide," he said.

MP for Tati East, Mr Tlhabologo Furniture had requested an update on the status of the Siviya Health Post. The MP also asked if there were plans to upgrade to a full clinic, given that the local population size met the required threshold for such a transition.

BOPA

Govt reviews BDF retirement age, pension disparities

GABORONE

Government is currently consulting on the minimum compulsory retirement age of 45 for Botswana Defence Force (BDF) members, a policy the Minister for State President, Defence and Security has admitted is a growing concern for the administration.

In response to a parliamentary question on Tuesday, Minister Moeti Mohwasa, told Parliament that the review was part of a broader effort to ensure that early retirement did not leave BDF members, particularly Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), at a financial disadvantage compared to other public servants.

Mr Mohwasa said the ministry, in collaboration with the Botswana Public Officers Pension Fund (BPOPF), had launched a series of interventions to fix anomalies in how military pensions were calculated. These included evaluating the long-term value of current payouts, cleaning up records to ensure accuracy as well as injecting funds to correct historical calculation differences.

Minister Mohwasa further emphasised that the goal was to ensure BDF pension outcomes were broadly comparable in value and security to those of civilian public officers with similar lengths of service.

Maun West MP, Mr Caterpillar Hikuama had challenged the relevance of NCOs retiring at 45 while their counterparts in the Commissioned officers category could serve until 60.

The MP further questioned whether the current alignment between the BDF Pension Scheme and the BPOPF truly provided equitable long-term security for those who served in the lower ranks.

BOPA



GABORONE

Parliament has been informed that the construction of the A35 Gumare-Sepopa Road is being carried out in half-width sections.

Answering a question in Parliament on Tuesday, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Mr Noah Salakae said the method allowed for the use of gravel bypasses until each section was completed, at which point traffic was diverted onto the newly constructed side while work continued on the opposite lane.

He explained that such approach was necessitated by a variation order and noted that the project was currently subject to funding limitations, which had constrained the ministry's ability to provide a fully surfaced or tarred bypass.

On safety concerns, Mr Salakae indicated that the road had registered a total of 13 accidents during the construction period, including seven due to driver error, two involving collisions with animals and four attributed to adverse road

conditions.

"Fortunately, no fatalities have been recorded. One injury was reported from a single incident, while the remaining accidents were classified as minor," he added.

He acknowledged that while traffic was currently using the completed half of the road, the ministry was aware that certain sections became impassable, particularly during the rainy season.

He assured Parliament that the sections had undergone maintenance and that the road would be monitored continuously throughout the duration of the project.

The minister was responding to questions from Ngami MP, Mr Phillimon Aaron, who raised concerns regarding whether the A35 construction complied with national standards.

Mr Aaron questioned the lack of a standard alternative road for users during construction, the number of accidents caused by thick clouds of dust and whether the contractor was fulfilling their contractual obligations regarding bypasses.

BOPA

Arts & Culture

Celebrating Spring Festival in China emerges as new global trend

BEIJING

As the Chinese New Year, or the Spring Festival, draws near, a growing number of international travelers are planning their trips around this traditional celebration to immerse themselves in China's vibrant culture and festive spirit.

For Finn, a young Dutch student who wore a horse-head hat and took photos under a theme park's golden wishing tree, his visit to Beijing shortly before the Spring Festival was great fun.

"The joyous atmosphere and diverse interactive activities here make me fully immersed and entertained. I will definitely share this with my friends in the Netherlands, and I would love to bring them here again to experience a different Chinese New Year," said Finn.

Finn's horse-head hat is popular among young travelers in the park because 2026 is the Year of the Horse according to the Chinese zodiac.

And the upcoming Spring Festival, which falls on February 17, marks the first day of this Chinese New Year. Just like Finn, many international tourists are taking China as their destination recently.

Data from major travel platforms shows a substantial rise in bound tourism for the 2026 Spring Festival.

During the last two weeks of January, international flight bookings to China jumped more than 400 per cent compared to the same period last year, led by tourists from Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore.

Notably, China has seen a ninefold increase in the number of reservations made by tourists from Argentina during this year's nine-day Spring Festival holiday, while bookings from European countries, including the Netherlands, Spain and Britain, more than doubled.

"Around one third of our room bookings during the coming holiday were made by foreign guests," said a staff member of a hotel in Chengdu, southwest China's Sichuan Province.

He added that many of these foreigners opted for extended stays to fully embrace the Chinese festival, which led to almost complete occupancy.

"Celebrating the Spring Festival in China is becoming a new global trend," an analyst

of the tourism industry said. "The uniqueness and immersive experience of Spring Festival traditions are emerging as core attractions for overseas visitors, injecting sustained momentum into the development of inbound tourism."

The tourism boom is not limited to major cities; China's diverse landscapes and culture have given rise to many unexpected destinations.

Recently, many Russian tourists have flowed into Hunchun, a small city of 200,000 people in northeastern China's Jilin Province that shares a border with Russia, as diverse local activities have begun for the Chinese New Year celebrations. Varvara is among the visitors.

During her trip, she plans to visit the New Year's market, enjoy traditional festival food like dumplings, and take part in activities such as paper-cutting and hanging couplets.

Learning about Chinese culture during China's most important festival is a truly unique experience," she said.

Since the beginning of 2026, the Hunchun port between China and Russia has processed about 58 000 inbound and outbound passengers, including 44 000 foreign nationals, marking a year-on-year increase of 74.8 percent, according to local authorities.

According to industry insiders, the travel boom could also be attributed to the relaxed visa and travel facilitation policies.

Data from the National Immigration Administration shows that in 2025, China expanded its unilateral visa-free entry to citizens of 48 countries, while the number of countries offering reciprocal visa exemptions rose to 29.

In 2025, the number of inbound and outbound travels by foreign nationals surpassed 82 million, up by 26.4 per cent year on year, and the visa-free entries rose by nearly 50 per cent year on year.

Furthermore, across global social media platforms, terms like "Becoming Chinese" and "China Shopping" have gained traction, reflecting growing interest in immersive, hands-on experiences in China.

Noting these trends in tourism and social media, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said he was glad to see that more and more foreign friends show interest in experiencing today's China. **Xinhua**

Tshepo Kebogane said he has taken the wisdom he used as a prophet and put it into images.

Kebogane carves niche in art world

Keetile Bontsibokae
MOLEPOLOLE

Born 42 years ago in Masilwana ward, Molepolole, Tshepo Kebogane's path to the creative industry has been anything but ordinary.

What began as a passion for fine art in his youth later intertwined with a spiritual journey as a prophet, before ultimately evolving into a unique artistic pursuit, rock art.

"I have taken the wisdom I used as a prophet and put it into images, which is why my art feels miraculous," Kebogane explained.

His early years were shaped by watching his elder brother, Ronnie, sketch with devotion.

That influence, coupled with encouragement from teachers, cemented his love for art, even as

he struggled academically.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Kebogane rediscovered his creative skill. Inspired by Chinese relief sculptures, he began experimenting with cement-based rock art, a medium he has since mastered.

His dedication paid off when a church prophet rewarded his extraordinary work with a Mercedes-Benz, a gesture that affirmed the value of his craft.

Trading under McRay Royal Arts (Pty) Ltd, Kebogane's creations now grace hotels, lodges, guest houses, and parks across Botswana.

His innovative use of cement mixed with recycled paper not only reduces costs but also contributes to sustainability.

"Rock art is marketable when you have established a market. I

believe it belongs in every yard, every space where nature can be celebrated," he said.

Beyond sculpture, Kebogane has ventured into fashion design, contributing ideas for Crown Badubi's winning dress at the Mini Miss Icon International pageant in the USA.

His versatility underscores his belief that art is both healing and transformative.

Looking ahead, Kebogane envisions opening an art academy in Molepolole to nurture young talent.

He urges government to support creatives, emphasising that not all gifts lie in academics, some are born in the hands of artists.

"Patience pays. Let your art heal you first, then let it heal the world," he said. **BOPA**

An artificial mountain created by Kebogane.





Ticket Prices

GOLD STAND
Grandstand North with a clear view of the final lap of the 100m):

Day 1 – \$120
(approximately BWP1598)

Day 2 onwards – \$150
(approximately BWP1986)





Team Botswana promises better game

Anastacia Sibanda
GABORONE

Better play is expected from the Botswana Badminton national team on Friday in the individual events of the All Africa Senior Badminton Championships.

This comes after the national teams lost their group stage matches and failed to proceed to the quarterfinals of the championships.

Nigeria won 5-0 against Botswana men’s team while Ghana beat the local lads 3-2. Algeria beat Botswana women’s team 5-0 but lady luck smiled on the local ladies as they beat Lesotho 5-0.

Botswana Badminton Association technical director, who is also Team Botswana manager, Tlholego Chamo, remained hopeful but acknowledged that the tournament was no walk in the park for Team Botswana because they were grouped with tough nations in the likes of Nigeria and Algeria.

Even though the women’s team won against Lesotho, Chamo said that was not enough for them to make it to the next leg.

Only the top two in the group will make it to the quarterfinals and in that group, Algeria and Mauritius would play in the quarterfinals.

Chamo was pleased that Botswana put up a good fight despite not proceeding to the next round.

“I am saying this because our performance in the championships we competed in, in the past was not good,” he said.

Chamo hailed the training the team had in India prior to the tournament, and expressed their determination to go far.

“With good preparations and constant training, I am confident of positive results. We just need to be patient and work very hard,” he said. *BOPA*



Botswana in action against Algeria during the All Africa Senior Badminton Championships on Tuesday. Algeria won 5-0. Botswana is expected to redeem their pride on Friday in the individual events. Photo: Thompson Keobaletswe

Momentum Fitness Club launches and hosts mini aerobathon

Mothusi Galekhutle
LETLHAKENG

The Letlhakeng-based Momentum Fitness Club will make a grand debut by hosting a mini aerobathon on Saturday.

It is hosting the event in collaboration with the Letlhakeng District Council and Dipogiso Thuto of Thuto Fitness Club in Phakalane.

The Partner Workout: Building Healthy Relationships’, is the theme of the mini aerobathon, which is part of the Botswana Aerobics calendar.

It is scheduled to take place in the Mphuthe Junior Secondary School hall and would feature various activities including boot camp, a five kilometre fun run and aerobics sessions.

There will also be health education, testing and screenings for non-communicable diseases. A member of the organising committee, Dikeledi Matebu, said the primary objective of the event was to promote fitness awareness within the Letlhakeng community.

“Exercise serves as a form of health remedy and not all treatments originate from healthcare facilities,” Matebu said.

Two fitness clubs from Mafikeng, South Africa, one from Lesotho and 12 clubs Botswana had confirmed their participation. Since Saturday is Valentines’s Day, Matebu encouraged couples and the community to come and participate. *BOPA*



Dikeledi Matebu