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Conversations *with the* President



Creating opportunities for young people while strengthening schools

■ By **PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA**

IN the State of the Nation Address last week, I spoke about the work we are doing in our schools to prepare young people to compete and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

While we have made significant progress over the last three decades, from expanding access to school to steadily improving matric results, there are still huge challenges in education. Access to resources and quality teaching is uneven. Schools in townships and rural areas often struggle with overcrowding and educators have limited access to professional development and support.

One of the efforts helping to fill

this gap is the Basic Education Employment Initiative, which was founded in 2020 as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus. The initiative deploys young people to schools as education assistants.

To date, the school assistants programme has created more than 1.3 million work opportunities. It is the largest youth employment programme in our country's history, giving young people their first foothold in the world of work while strengthening the foundations of learning in the schools that need it most.

The young people involved in the programme go into schools well prepared. General school assistants need to at least have

grade nine, while education assistants need at least a matric certificate. In the most recent phase of the programme, 32% of education assistants had some sort of tertiary qualification and 14% had a teaching qualification. Education assistants are provided with both compulsory and optional training including on school safety, online safety, financial literacy, word processing, AI fluency and coding.

The initiative provides work experience and livelihood support while at the same time advancing the public good. This is part of the goal of the Public Employment Stimulus to deliver public employment and livelihood programmes on a large scale while providing social value in



the process.

The work of the education assistants allows teachers to spend more time on teaching and on lesson preparation, thereby contributing directly to improved educational outcomes.

Education assistants have been placed at 19,000 no-fee primary schools to support numeracy and as Reading Champions to support literacy and bilingual reading. The effect of this intervention is being seen in rapid improvements in foundational literacy skills in many schools.

Beyond educational and curriculum support, education assistants are supporting digital learning, working in care and support with at-risk learners, and serving as laboratory and workshop assistants.

This is not only good for the schools. For many of the school assistants, this experience is transformative. They are gaining skills and real work experience that will serve them well in finding employment and succeeding in their careers.

As we work to expand access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) through the Bana Pele mass registration of ECD facilities and an increase in subsidies for ECD learners, the Presidential Employment Stimulus has stepped up support to the sector through the Social Employment Fund.

The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, working with an implementing partner, is helping more than 1,000 previously disadvantaged, underfunded ECD centres to meet

the qualifying criteria for a ECD subsidy. The centres are also receiving nutritional support for learners, as well as toys, books and learning materials. The work supported by the Social Employment Fund now reaches over 50,000 children in ECD centres across the country.

Meeting the constitutional imperative to provide quality education to our nation's young is an all-of-society effort. These initiatives illustrate clearly the benefits of multisectoral cooperation between government, the private sector and civil society.

It is our aspiration that this successful programme should continue to grow as we strive to create more work opportunities for young South Africans and at the same time deliver quality education for all.

The State of the Nation Address is about building a stronger South Africa

REPLY TO THE DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS BY
PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

19 FEBRUARY 2026

We are a nation of builders. We are a nation that does not run away from problems. We confront them.

We do not lament and complain. We find solutions.

When faced with challenges, we do not fracture. We do not fall apart.

We unite and we work together to overcome those challenges.

And so, as we conclude this debate on the State of the Nation Address, our shared commitment to our country and to our people must guide our every action in the year ahead.

The State of the Nation Address is about building a stronger South Africa. It is about rising to the challenges that we face in our own country and around the world, and emerging more prosperous, more secure and more resilient.

There can be no doubt that we have made progress.

Over 30 years, we have fundamentally improved the lives of South Africans.

Over the last eight years our coun-



try faced some of the most difficult challenges. But working together, we have undertaken a programme of institutional renewal by stabilising what was weakened through state capture, restoring integrity and accountability, and rebuilding the capacity of the state to serve the people of South Africa.

We have overcome a global pandemic that led to the worst decline in our economy, where our GDP contracted by 6 percent.

We stood firm in the face of an attempted insurrection that was aimed at destabilising our democracy.

We rebuilt in the wake of catastrophic flooding, and brought to an end more than 15 years of load shedding.

Through effective macroeconomic management, we have been able to tackle an unsustainable debt burden, where we ended up spending more to service our debt than we spent on health or education.

To deal with all these challenges, we have had to rebuild the capacity of the state and to embark on major reforms, while addressing the immediate challenges that our people are facing.

All these efforts have been aimed at improving the lives of our people and to create a conducive environment for our economy to grow.

And over the last year, we have seen promising signs of recovery.

We see this in reducing unemployment and accelerating growth. We see the signs of recovery in improved public finances, lower inflation and growing business and consumer confidence.

Although this progress is modest, the momentum of change is building.

Our task now is to sustain this momentum, to protect and build on the progress we have made, and to ensure that it results in a tangible improvement in the life of every South African.

Improved economic indicators may seem distant and abstract, but they have a real impact on our lives.

Lower borrowing costs for the state frees up resources for health and education, for the police and for better services.

Reduced public debt enables the private sector to invest more of its capital in expanding production and jobs.

A lower inflation rate reduces the cost of living, enabling families to pay for food and other basic needs.

And a declining unemployment rate means an income for more families and hope for more young South Africans.

And yet, as we have heard in this



debate, we still have a long way to go.

More than 10 million South Africans are estimated to live below the food poverty line.

More than 11 million people are unemployed.

These are not simply statistics. These are individuals, families and communities that are facing great hardship, that experience violence on a daily basis, that run short of food, that face water cuts and that long for a better life.

We can stand on the sidelines and lament, as some have done in this debate.

Or we can roll up our sleeves and work together to change this reality – to build a stronger economy that benefits all South Africans and to build a more equal society in which all South Africans have a place.

The State of the Nation Address outlined the steps we are taking as the Government of National Unity, working together with all social partners and all sections of society, to achieve these objectives.

We are determined to reach every person in this effort. To leave no one behind.

Through the measures we are taking we are improving the lives of the youngest in our society.

Through the Child Support Grant, which reaches 13 million children, we are protecting millions of children from the worst effects of poverty.

Through free primary health care for pregnant women and children under six, we are improving the health of children.

We are directing more resources to the early development of children.

We have increased the subsidy for early childhood development and made Grade R compulsory for all children, establishing a solid base for their entry into the education system.

And we are focusing on strengthening literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase.

And now through the measures we are putting in place to end child stunting, we will improve the

developmental outcomes and the life prospects of millions of children.

These measures will fundamentally change the prospects of an entire generation of children and each generation that will follow.

On none of these issues is government working alone. We are working with social partners, service providers, NGOs, parents and communities.

At this moment, more than 3.5 million people between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in employment, education or training.

We are working together to change that.

In addition to the steady increase in the matric pass rate, more and more learners from schools in poor communities are passing and achieving university exemptions.

And more and more students from poor backgrounds are being supported to attend universities and colleges. In the five years from 2019 to 2024, funding from NSFAS nearly doubled from R27 billion to R54 billion.

Now we are undertaking a fundamental overhaul of our skills development system by embracing the dual skills development model that has served other countries that have reduced their unemployment levels extremely well.

This will produce the skills that our economy needs and enable more and more young people to find meaningful and lasting jobs.

We know that it will take many years for the economy to grow enough to create enough jobs for all those looking for work.

That is why we introduced initiatives like the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which has created more than 2.5 million work and livelihood opportunities since it was established in 2020.

The Youth Employment Service – which is a partnership between government and business – has given over 214,000 young people work experience opportunities in industries such as manufacturing, renewable energy, tourism, logistics, finance and the digital economy.

Over 5.7 million young people are now registered on the SA Youth platform. To date, over 2 million earning opportunities have been secured by young people on the platform.

These opportunities provide more than an income. They provide young people with skills and experience while contributing to social development.

These opportunities are making a real difference in millions of young people's lives.

And they are helping to prepare them for a better future.

Yet we know that what will make the greatest difference in people's lives are jobs and other livelihood opportunities.

What will make the greatest difference is accelerated economic growth. A growing economy means expanding opportunity and it means hope.

We have not experienced the excitement and the promise of rapid growth for almost twenty years, but we are on the cusp of achieving it now.

We are focused on rebuilding the economy and driving investment.

We should not underestimate the scale of the task ahead nor diminish the progress we have made.

For our economy to grow, we are steadily addressing several impediments:

Severe load shedding was debilitating our economy, lowering production, raising costs and deterring investment. We have effectively ended load shedding. Unreliable power raises costs, stops production, and deters investment.





Overburdened infrastructure and inefficiency at our ports and on our rail lines have for years been reducing our competitiveness and harming our export industries. We are improving operational performance through investment, increased capacity and far-reaching reforms.

We are addressing the skills mismatch between what young people have and what our economy needs through an overhaul of our education and training system.

To respond to low levels of investment and policy uncertainty, we are strengthening policy formulation and reducing regulatory burdens.

We have had to tackle poor governance, diminished state capacity and corruption by focusing on the professionalisation of the public service, improved efficiency and the modernisation of our procurement system.

Crime and insecurity remain significant impediments to growth, which is why we are intensifying the fight against organised crime, gang violence, gun crime and gender-based violence.

Our economy has also been constrained by a challenging macro-economic environment, which is why we have been reducing high debt service costs and supporting lower inflation and interest rates.

Perhaps one of the most immediate impediments to faster economic growth is dysfunctionality in many municipalities. We are addressing this through an overhaul of our local government system through the review of the White Paper, and through direct interventions in municipalities in trouble.

The transformation of our network industries is the platform on which rapid inclusive economic growth will be achieved.

Already, South Africans are feeling the benefits of some of these changes, from the improved supply of electricity to the return to service of commuter rail lines to the reduction in the cost of data.

In 2022, we had 205 days of load shedding. In 2023, we had over 330 days. This was the most severe period in an energy crisis that stretched back more than 15 years.

To address this crisis, we established the National Energy Crisis Committee, or NECOM.

There were groans from some quarters, who said: *“Yet another committee”*.

We have heard the same tired refrain from some speakers in this debate.

Yet what NECOM did was to bring together all the key role-players to focus on the immediate tasks necessary to end load shedding, to restore the integrity of our power system and to lay the basis for stable, sustainable and universal access to electricity into the future.

It succeeded because it was able to draw on the skills, capabilities, resources and efforts of a broad range of departments and public institutions, as well the best experts in South Africa and around the world, and to build a platform for collaboration with social partners.

It was never about meetings and talk shops. It was about taking a hands-on approach to solving the problem, making sure that things

actually get done and that they get done quickly.

The experience of NECOM shows that complex problems need collaborative solutions.

Now, through its generation recovery plan, Eskom has increased its average Energy Availability Factor (EAF) from 56 percent in April 2023 to around 65 percent at present.

There is currently a pipeline of more than 220 gigawatts of renewable energy projects at various stages of development.

The Minister of Electricity and Energy is leading the building of more than 14,000 km of new transmission lines, and an innovative new model for independent transmission projects.

For an economy that has long been held back by energy constraints, these developments are potentially transformative.

For homes that have suffered years of electricity supply interruptions, the end of load shedding is a relief. For businesses, it was the removal of an obstacle to growth.

The next phase of our energy transformation – the establishment of a fully independent state-owned transmission company – is a complex process and one of the most important reforms in our country’s history. It requires detailed technical work and strong coordination across different entities. That is why I have established a dedicated task team under NECOM which reports to me in which participates the presidency, minister of electricity and energy and his department, minister of finance and his de-

partment as well as Eskom to effectively manage and steer the process.

The value in establishing these types of structures is to enhance intergovernmental cooperation as well as breaking down the Silos that are often given rise to in government.

Drawing on our experience in energy, we established the National Logistics Crisis Committee.

Thanks to the work of the NLCC, we have seen a turnaround in the performance of our freight rail lines and ports.

The volume of goods transported by rail is increasing year on year, and the efficiency of our port terminals has improved.

Collaboration between Transnet and the private sector has, for example, seen a 50 percent reduction in security incidents on the coal line to Richards Bay. The total length of cable stolen has been reduced from 180 kilometres of stolen cables in 2024 to 59 kilometres in 2025.

The reform of our logistics system is well underway, through strong collaboration between the Department of Transport, the Presidency and National Treasury.

This year will be a watershed moment for logistics reform, as private rail companies begin to operate on our freight rail network and major opportunities for private sector participation are initiated for port and rail infrastructure.

In undertaking these far-reaching changes, we are strengthening the state and we are rebuilding state-owned entities.



We are mobilising investment on a massive scale – from a range of public and private sources – into electricity generation and transmission, into our ports and our rail lines, and into our water infrastructure. We are mobilising new skills, new capabilities and new technologies.

Let us be clear: we are retaining public ownership of our strategic national assets.

Private train operators will carry freight on rail lines that are owned by the state.

Private electricity producers will provide electricity to consumers across a power grid that is owned by the state. Through these changes, we are strengthening the financial position and the operational performance of entities like Eskom and Transnet. We are making them more competitive and more efficient.

We will now apply the successful methodology that we have used in energy and logistics to other urgent challenges that confront South Africa today.

We are already working to establish a National Water Crisis Committee to restore a reliable

supply of water to municipalities that face disruptions right now, but also to ensure water security in the long term.

Like electricity and logistics, the crisis in water has many causes stretching back many years.

Like electricity and logistics, we have already embarked on far-reaching reforms that will fundamentally change the way the water sector functions and serves the people.

This will enable investment in water infrastructure to meet growing demand and build our resilience to climate change, alongside institutional reforms to enable greater investment and stronger regulation of water service delivery.

It will also require mobilising resources and expertise to support municipalities in crisis, and intervening more quickly and effectively where they consistently fail to meet set norms and standards.

The National Water Crisis Committee is building on work already done – by the Water Task Team chaired by the Deputy President, by Operation Vulindlela, by the Department of Water and Sanitation and by the respective municipalities.



To drive local production and create more jobs in sectors with great potential, we are finalising our National Industrial Policy, focusing on decarbonisation, diversification and digitalisation.

This will contribute to an economy that is equipped for the future, drawing on our vast capabilities and abundant natural resources.

As we build an economy for the future, a number of industries in our country are currently in distress

The Presidency, together with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, is working with individual companies and sectors to develop short term plans to stave off closure and save local jobs.

Among the sectors involved are cement, autos, steel and pharmaceuticals.

In addition, there are sectors – such as oil and gas – that require coordination across government departments and planning together with business and labour.

In all these efforts, we have to show determination and urgency.

It is not only in the area of economic growth and transformation where collaboration, partnership and focus needs to play a key role.

We are also establishing a dedicated initiative to oversee the reform of the criminal justice system, learning from the successful model of Operation Vulindlela.

This initiative will be led by the best experts that our country has to offer. It will work closely with the South African Police Service,

the National Prosecuting Authority, the Special Investigating Unit and other law enforcement agencies to drive a comprehensive reform programme.

Other countries, when faced with the threat of organised crime and the penetration of criminal syndicates, have been able to reform their criminal justice system and restore the rule of law.

We have the resources and ability to do so in South Africa. We will not allow the criminals to prevail.

One of the most important developments in recent years has been the mobilisation of society to end the violence that men commit against women.

Faced with this pandemic of violence, South Africans came together to develop a National Strategic Plan against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

And since the adoption of the plan, government departments, agencies, NGOs, business organisations, sporting bodies and others have been working together to implement the six pillars of the plan.

They understand that gender-based violence and femicide cannot be stopped by government alone. It must be stopped by society.

Over the past five years, South Africa has made progress in critical areas.

We have strengthened laws, expanded survivor-centred services through the Thuthuzela Care Centres, rolled out victim-friendly rooms at police stations, and invested in women's economic empowerment as a critical pillar

of prevention.

For the first time, we have a national prevalence study that gives us clear evidence of the scale and drivers of gender-based violence.

These gains matter and they show what is possible when the state and civil society act together.

The classification of gender-based violence and femicide as a national disaster enables all spheres of government to act with greater speed, reduces the fragmentation of effort and establishes a clear command, coordination and accountability framework.

It gives both government and broader society far greater capacity and impetus to implement the measures that I outlined in the State of the Nation Address.

These measures include the mobilisation of all sectors of society to challenge harmful attitudes and practices.

We are continuing the extensive work already underway to promote women's economic empowerment, strengthen law enforcement and scale up survivor-centred support.

The Premiers who spoke during the debate highlighted the progress being made across the country in strengthening local economies, improving service delivery and investing in the future.

Provinces are taking the lead in infrastructure investment, from the resuscitation of Pilanesberg Airport in North West to the rehabilitation of roads and bridges in KwaZulu-Natal. Then there is the innovative partnership between

the Limpopo provincial government and mining companies to mobilise funding for the construction and maintenance of local roads.

Provinces like Free State are investing in education, refurbishing and maintaining ECD centres, building new schools and hostels, and ensuring that all learners from poor communities attend no-fee schools and are part of the school nutrition programme.

Mpumalanga has launched the uBuhlebezulu E-Learning programme which is designed to bridge the digital divide through the use of smart devices.

We welcome the initiative by KwaZulu-Natal to forge provincial skills compacts with the private sector in logistics, energy, construction and the digital economy.

We have also heard about how Mpumalanga is investing in health, appointing doctors to Community Health Centres and building new clinics and hospitals, including the Middelburg Regional Hospital and the Mapulaneng Hospital.

Limpopo is providing leadership on tackling the country's water challenges, establishing operational "war rooms" in the Mopani District, particularly in Giyani, to ensure that water reaches the remaining 5 of 20 villages.

The Premier of the Northern Cape outlined the work being done in the province to drive investment in mining and renewable energy, in infrastructure and in education and health.

It is these efforts that have contributed to the steady growth of employment and GDP in the

province over the last five years, and the notable improvement in the province's Human Development Index.

Gauteng has introduced the Rapid Land Release Programme to enable investment and expand access to affordable housing.

The Western Cape is contributing to job creation by expanding tourism, increasing air access and promoting foreign direct investment in other key sectors.

Free State is setting an example in the provision of government services, through the integrated services programme to reach rural and underserved communities. This initiative brings together various government entities and departments to offer comprehensive services to communities, ranging from the issuance of title deeds, birth certificates and IDs to business support.

The Premier of the Free State spoke about how the loss of the province's top spot in matric results has spurred the province to do better and to regain its position.

We welcome that determination, as provinces should be learning from each other. They should be driven to improve not only their matric pass rates, but health outcomes, service delivery, crime reduction, infrastructure maintenance and many others.

Healthy competition encourages innovation and improves efficiency, accountability and transparency.

We have seen the value of government working as one through the District Development Model.

The DDM seeks to eliminate silos between government departments and the three spheres of government.

It further aims to strengthen integrated planning and coordination, improving service delivery, eliminating fragmentation and ensuring inclusive, people-centred development.

The DDM brings together national, provincial and local government and stakeholders like organised business, labour and



communities in a particular district to collectively address challenges.

Where the DDM has been integrated into government operations and structures, it has begun to make a measurable difference.

For example, the work done by the Presidential eThekweni Working Group in line with the DDM approach has contributed to significant improvements in the city.

By bringing national, provincial and local government together with business, labour, civil society and residents, we have seen improvements in the delivery of services like water and sanitation, the recovery of key industries like tourism, increased business sentiment and improved efficiency at the Durban Port.

In the State of the Nation Address, I said that our Constitution calls on us to redress the injustices of the past, to build a society that is equal and just.

We cannot do that without transforming our economy.

It cannot be acceptable to anyone in this House for African people, coloured people and Indian people to be poorer and have fewer opportunities than white people.

It cannot be acceptable to anyone in this House for women to earn less than men, to own less than men and to run fewer businesses than men.

And yet there are people in this House, in this debate, who tell us to get rid of the measures that we have put in place to correct this gross historical injustice.

They say we must get rid of



broad-based black economic empowerment, falsely claiming that it benefits only a few, falsely claiming that it inhibits economic growth, falsely claiming that it enables corruption.

And yet the progress we have made since the introduction of these laws is undeniable. We have seen real changes in ownership patterns, including more businesses owned by women. We have seen changes in management control, enterprise development and skills development.

It is no accident that between 2006 and 2023, black African households experienced real income growth of 46 percent, coloured households 29 percent and Indian households 19 percent.

It is no accident that the level of poverty in the black African population fell from 67 percent in 2006 to 44 percent in 2023. Nor is it any accident that the level of poverty in the coloured population fell from 43 percent to 25 percent in the same period.

Despite this progress, the average income of white households

is still nearly five times higher than that of black African households.

This is the gulf we must close through deliberate and sustained efforts to expand opportunity. Now is not the time to abandon BEE. Now is the time to make it more effective.

Just remember what our forebears said when they drafted the Freedom Charter.

They said *“These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty.”* We should all be working together to ensure that we rid our country of the injustices of the past.

We must see broad-based black economic empowerment not as a cost to the economy, but as an investment in the sustainable growth of our economy.

That is why I announced in the State of the Nation Address that we are undertaking a review of our Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment framework to ensure that it supports greater transformation and inclusive growth.

During the course of this debate, MPs have spoken on behalf of their political parties.

When they are out on the streets, they campaign for their parties.

But in Cabinet, there are no parties.

There are no ANC or DA or IFP or PA or UDM or GOOD or FF Plus or PAC or AI Jama-ah ministries.

Every Minister and Deputy Minister is part of a collective, working together to implement a common programme, the Medium Term Development Plan.

No Minister or Deputy Minister should be claiming their work in the GNU as an achievement of their party.

In many cases, the basis for their achievements were laid before they came into office. And in many cases, the work to realise their objectives will continue after they have left.

Our successes are the achievements of the collective. By the same measure, we are collec-

tively responsible for our mistakes and shortcomings.

It is our commitment to the principle of partnership and shared responsibility that has made the Government of National Unity work and that will stand us in good stead for the work ahead.

We are undertaking these tasks in a global environment that is uncertain, unstable and rapidly changing.

During our Presidency of the G20, we set out our vision and programme for a better, more inclusive, more peaceful and more equal world order.

Most of the G20 countries overwhelmingly aligned themselves with that vision.

It is a vision that is shared by most Member States of the United Nations, BRICS and the Non-Aligned Movement.

We will continue to work with like-minded countries and on all available international platforms to advance that vision and implement that programme.

The African continent remains at the centre of our foreign policy.

South Africa is now the chair of SADC for the next two years, and will use that position to promote peace, integration and economic development in our region.

We have also been elected to the AU Peace and Security Council. In this capacity we will be working with other countries to promote peace efforts on the continent.

At the AU Summit in Addis Ababa this past weekend, we chaired the Ad-Hoc High-Level Committee on South Sudan, known as the C5, which is working to stabilise the situation in South Sudan, ensuring that elections take place and that a sustainable resolution to the conflict in the country is achieved.

We do this because a better Africa and a better world are in our national interest.

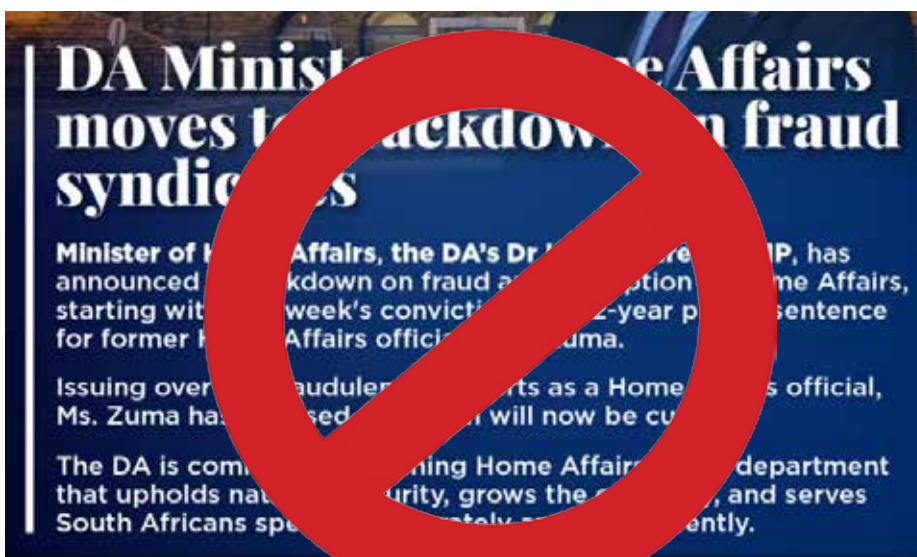
At the same, we are having to adapt very quickly to changing circumstances.

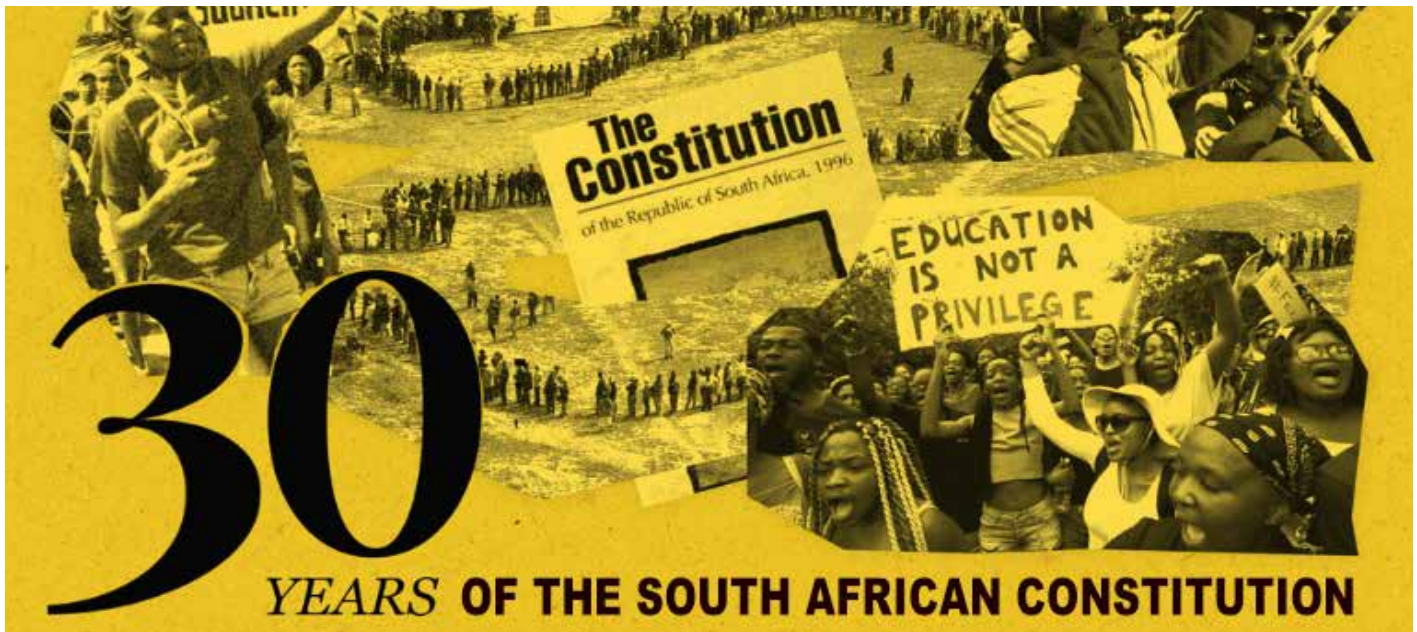
We cannot rely on goodwill and fine sentiments.

That is why we are being more assertive in our trade policy, seeking out new markets and reaching trade agreements that support growth and job creation in our economy.

We are intensifying our efforts to mobilise investment into our country and find investment opportunities for our businesses abroad.

This relies on a stronger, more capable state. Our foreign missions must be focused on driving trade and investment.





We are working to ensure that our departments – from DTIC to agriculture, to mineral resources to tourism – are aligned around a common trade strategy.

Amid the global turmoil, we have set a clear path to advance the interests of our country and its people. We must now pursue that path with greater focus and purpose.

Thirty years ago, South Africans came together to craft a Constitution that would define the values and the principles of our democracy. It placed on all of us a responsibility to correct the injustices of the past and to ensure that all people would progressively be able to exercise their right to housing, health care, food, water, social security and education.

As a nation, we have travelled far in giving effect to the promise of our Constitution.

But we have much further to go.

It is therefore fitting that this year, South Africans will once again come together to forge a vision for our country into the future and to agree on a programme of ac-

tions to achieve that vision.

This is the year in which the National Dialogue will reach every corner of our country.

The National Dialogue is led by a Steering Committee of more than 100 people representing over 30 sectors in our society.

It continues to be guided and inspired by the Eminent Persons Group, prominent South Africans drawn from many fields and backgrounds who have all made a contribution to social cohesion and nation building.

It is ultimately the people of this country, engaged in dialogue and united action, who will determine the path that our country takes.

Dialogue and partnership are woven into the fabric of our society.

They have enabled our country to overcome great difficulties, from the crime of apartheid to the political violence of our transition to a devastating global pandemic to a persistent energy crisis.

It is this spirit that infuses the work of the Government of Na-

tional Unity, that informs our approach to collaboration and co-ordination, that encourages us to draw on resources and capabilities from across society to solve difficult problems.

It is dialogue and partnership that will take the country forward.

It is the people of South Africa, working together, who will sustain the momentum of our recovery and who will accelerate progress to an inclusive economy and a transformed society.

As I conclude, I extend my gratitude to Deputy President Mashatile for his support and the leadership he continues to provide in the areas assigned to him.

I thank all Ministers and Deputy Ministers for diligently implementing the actions contained in the Medium Term Development Plan.

The Deputy President and I have been spending more time evaluating Ministers and Deputy Ministers, as well as Directors-General. This is part of an effort to promote accountability, to engender a culture of performance and

to ensure action.

I am grateful to the leaders of the political parties in the Government of National Unity, who meet regularly to discuss matters of national interest. Their contributions have been very useful in managing the challenges our country faces.

I thank all the Honourable Members who have participated in this debate.

As the elected representatives of the people of South Africa, we have much to do.

Now is the time for action, for greater effort and for faster progress. Together and in unity.

Last year I spoke about the imagery of weaver birds working together to build their nest. Today I want to end by using another imagery of beavers, working together to build their nest.

Beavers are like a team of engineers. They work together to fell

branches, pack mud and raise dams and lodges that create a safe “neighbourhood” of deep water around their home.

Beavers are a reminder that real building is rarely a solo act.

Think of a river that runs too fast, too exposed, too uncertain.

One beaver can’t change it. But a community can. They don’t wait for perfect conditions; they start with what’s in reach.

One drags a branch. Another places it. Others pack mud and strengthen the weak points. Bit by bit, they raise a dam and shape a lodge – not as a monument, but as a home.

And what does that teamwork create? Not just a structure, but a safer environment: calmer water, protection from danger, space for life to grow. Their work turns risk into refuge.

It doesn’t happen through noise or ego; it happens through co-

ordination, consistency and a shared purpose.

That’s what working together looks like for us.

We don’t all have the same role, but every role matters. Some people plan. Some people lift. Some people reinforce. Some people spot the leaks early and fix them before they become disasters.

When we build like that – patiently, practically, together – we don’t just complete a project. We create a “neighbourhood”: a place where others can thrive because we chose to cooperate.

So let’s build like beavers: with urgency, with unity and with the quiet determination to make something strong enough to hold – something that lasts and something that shelters more than just ourselves.

Let us be the real builders of South Africa, working together.



South Africa Reclaims Its Position As **Africa's Largest Economy**, A Clear Demonstration of **ANC Policy Working**

■ By **ANC SECRETARY GENERAL FIKILE MBALULA**

THE African National Congress welcomes the latest update by the International Monetary Fund confirming that South Africa has officially reclaimed its position as Africa's largest economy in nominal GDP terms for 2025. With revised projections placing South Africa at approximately \$426 billion, ahead of Egypt at \$349 billion and Nigeria at \$285 billion, this milestone affirms the resilience of our economy and the correctness of the policy direction pursued under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa.

This achievement is not accidental, nor is it cosmetic. It comes at a time of global economic instability, geopolitical uncertainty, inflationary pressures and post-pandemic recovery challenges that have tested economies across the world. Yet South Africa has emerged stronger. Through disciplined fiscal management, the stabilisation of key financial institutions, decisive structural reforms in the energy sector, and a sustained programme to rebuild investor confidence, our country has demonstrated that consistent, reform-oriented



leadership yields measurable results. The restoration of macroeconomic stability, improved credit outlooks, declining inflation and renewed investment commitments are all part of a broader national recovery anchored in the ANC's economic transformation framework.

From maintaining fiscal discipline and narrowing the budget deficit, to advancing energy reform that has significantly reduced load shedding and unlocked private generation, government has acted deliberately to restore certainty and growth momentum. The investment drive, infrastructure

rollout and industrial support programmes are beginning to translate into renewed confidence in South Africa as a premier destination for capital on the African continent. These are not abstract achievements; they are the outcomes of deliberate policy choices grounded in the ANC's commitment to inclusive growth, economic reform and social protection.

While nominal GDP rankings can shift due to exchange rates and global market conditions, the significance of this moment lies in what it is representing, resilience, credibility and stability. South Africa's position as



the continent's most industrialised and diversified economy has been reaffirmed. Our financial sector remains robust, our institutions remain credible, and our reform agenda continues to gather momentum.

The ANC remains clear that economic size alone is not enough. The next

phase of our programme focuses on converting growth into jobs, accelerating local industrialisation, strengthening municipalities, and ensuring that ordinary South Africans feel the benefits of recovery in their daily lives.

South Africa is back at number one. This development demonstrates that steady leadership, policy consistency and structural reform work.

The task before us now is to deepen this progress, expand opportunity and ensure that economic growth translates into dignity, employment and shared prosperity for all.

THE ANC EXTENDS CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF AMBASSADOR LEILA SHAHID

THE African National Congress (ANC) joins the people of Palestine and the global community in mourning the passing of Ambassador Leila Shahid, a towering figure of diplomacy, courage and moral conviction. Her life was dedicated to advancing the cause of justice, self-determination and human dignity for the Palestinian people. In her passing, the world loses a principled voice who consistently reminded the international community that freedom and peace are inseparable from justice.

As Palestine's first female Ambassador and an internationally respected diplomat, Ambassador Shahid carried the aspirations of her people into the highest forums of global engagement. With intellectual depth and unwavering

resolve, she championed Palestinian identity, culture and nationhood, while building bridges of solidarity across continents. Her work resonated profoundly in South Africa, where our own liberation struggle forged an enduring bond with the people of Palestine and their quest for freedom.

The ANC extends its heartfelt condolences to her family, colleagues and the Palestinian people during this difficult time. We honour her as a leader who stood firm in the face of adversity, who elevated the voice of her people on the world stage, and who remained steadfast in the pursuit of a just and lasting peace. Her legacy reflects the enduring power of solidarity among oppressed peoples and the responsibility of nations to uphold international law and human rights.



As we reflect on her remarkable life, we reaffirm our historic commitment to the just cause of the Palestinian people. Ambassador Shahid's life reminds us that diplomacy grounded in principle can shape history, and that courage in defence of justice leaves an indelible mark on the world. May her soul rest in peace, and may her legacy continue to inspire generations committed to freedom, equality and lasting peace.

The Case for a State-Owned Bank

■ By **ANDILE LUNGISA**

SOUTH Africa's banking system is one of the most concentrated and exclusionary in the world. A handful of powerful commercial banks dominate the sector, posting obscene profits year after year while millions of people are locked out of meaningful access to finance. In a country scarred by colonial dispossession, apartheid, and racial capitalism, this is not a neutral market outcome. It is a continuation of economic injustice by other means.

This is not a system that has failed accidentally. It is a system that is working exactly as designed – to serve capital, not people.

Commercial banks operate on one principle alone: profit maximisation. In an unequal society, that principle entrenches inequality. Those with wealth are rewarded with cheap credit, personalised services, and financial flexibility. Those without wealth are punished – charged simply to exist in the banking system.

The poor, overwhelmingly Black and Coloured, pay monthly fees just to hold an account. They are hammered with transaction costs, punitive penalties, and extortionate interest rates on unsecured credit. This is not mismanagement or bad luck. It is systematic financial extraction from the working class and the poor.



Instead of financing productive investment, industrialisation, and inclusive growth, commercial banks increasingly profit from debt and financial speculation. Low-income workers are aggressively targeted with high-interest loans that lock households into permanent indebtedness. Informal traders, township businesses, cooperatives, and rural enterprises are denied affordable credit because they do not conform to narrow risk models built around established, formal, and historically White-owned enterprises.

Even social grants – money meant to alleviate poverty – have been turned into profit streams for private banks. Grant beneficiaries are charged to access their own money. Their accounts are linked to predatory financial products

that push loans, insurance, and overdrafts onto the poorest households. This is private capital extracting value from poverty, underwritten by the democratic state.

This is nothing less than the quiet privatisation of social welfare.

This reality demands a structural response, not tinkering at the margins. A state-owned bank is not a radical fantasy. It is a necessary intervention to break the grip of private finance over the lives of the poor.

Importantly, this demand is not isolated from the political will of society. The majority party in the country, the African National Congress, has a conference resolution calling for the establishment of a state bank. The political

mandate exists. What is lacking is the courage to confront the financial sector and act decisively in the public interest.

A state-owned bank would not exist to enrich shareholders. Its mandate would be public service: financial inclusion, developmental lending, industrialisation, job creation, and the reduction of household debt. Crucially, it would ensure that public money circulates within public institutions, rather than leaking into private profit.

The argument that state-owned institutions are inherently corrupt or doomed to fail is both lazy and dishonest. The Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) stands as a clear counterexample. GEMS has successfully provided affordable, reliable healthcare coverage to public servants at scale. It proves that when governance, regulation, and public purpose are taken seriously, state-led institutions can and do work.

The failure of some state-owned entities does not invalidate public ownership. It indicts political interference, weak oversight, and elite capture – problems that also plague the private sector, but are conveniently ignored there.

One immediate step should be to channel all South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) payments through a state-owned bank. Social grants are public funds. Allowing private banks to skim fees and profits from them is indefensible. A state-owned bank could provide zero-fee, secure accounts, shield beneficiaries from predatory lending, and ensure grants serve their purpose: poverty alleviation, not shareholder dividends.



The same must apply to public sector wages. Teachers, nurses, police officers, and other public servants should be banked through a state-owned bank. This would create a stable deposit base, reduce the state's indirect subsidisation of private banks, and strengthen a public financial institution that serves the public interest.

The logic extends to students and young people. NSFAS funds are public money meant to support education and human development. They should not be deposited into private banks that exploit students with fees and debt traps. NSFAS deposits should be housed in a public youth bank – a state-owned institution designed specifically to meet the needs of students and young adults. Such a bank could offer zero-fee accounts, financial literacy support, affordable credit, and savings instruments that empower young people rather than indebted them before they even enter the labour market.

Beyond payments and deposits, the real power of a state-owned bank lies in developmental finance. Commercial banks have consistently failed to finance small and medium enterprises,

Black-owned businesses, cooperatives, township economies, and rural enterprises. These are precisely the sectors with the greatest potential to create jobs and transform the economy.

A state-owned bank could provide patient, low-interest capital to productive sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure. It could align lending with national development and industrial policy instead of short-term profit targets. This is how real economic transformation is financed.

Financial exclusion is economic exclusion. Without affordable banking, savings instruments, and access to credit, the poor are locked out of entrepreneurship, asset building, and wealth creation. A state-owned bank could offer basic accounts with no minimum balances, non-exploitative micro-credit, and support for cooperative and community-based financial models.

This is not charity. It is investment in people and productive capacity.

A state-owned bank will not magically resolve South Africa's economic crisis. Strong governance, transparency, and accountability are non-negotiable. But in a society shaped by racialised dispossession and deliberate financial exclusion, it is a necessary reform.

If finance is the bloodstream of the economy, it cannot continue to flow only to those who already have wealth. It must be reclaimed and redirected to serve the people – not extract from them.

Andile Lungisa is an ANC NEC Member and Former ANC YL Deputy President.

A New Dawn for South Africa's Economy:

Markets Rebound, Greylist Exit, and the Path for Fiscal Policy

■ By **ISHMAEL MNISI**

SOUTH Africa's economic outlook is finally showing glimmers of optimism. The recent rally in local markets, the South African Reserve Bank's (SARB) reaffirmed commitment to a more flexible inflation target, and the country's long-awaited exit from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) greylist all signal that the tide may be turning. These achievements, however, are only the foundation. To translate these positive signals into lasting, inclusive growth, the fiscal policy response for 2026-27 must be bold, targeted, and aligned with both the African National Congress (ANC) Conference Resolutions and the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA).

Markets, Inflation, and the Greylist: Winds of Change

Investor sentiment has improved markedly in 2026. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) has outperformed many emerging market peers, and the rand has shown increased stability, buoyed by renewed confidence in South Africa's reform trajectory. The SARB's recent statement that it will allow for a more flexible inflation targeting band – shifting from a rigid 3-6% to a broader range – signals a willingness to support growth without undermining price stability. This move



lower business costs and unlock private investment. The President's SONA emphasized the urgency of completing ongoing energy reforms and expanding infrastructure partnerships; the fiscal response must translate these words into sustained action and measurable outcomes.

2. Backing Growth and Job-Creating Sectors:

The ANC's policy documents and resolutions are clear: agriculture, manufacturing, green industries, tourism, and the digital economy are the engines that must drive job creation and transformation (ANC Economic Transformation Discussion Document, 2022; 55th National Conference Resolutions). The 2026-27 budget should offer targeted incentives, blended finance, and skills development support for these sectors. For example, funding for agro-processing hubs, local manufacturing clusters, and renewable energy projects will not only create jobs but also reduce South Africa's trade deficit. Support for township and rural enterprises – aligned with the ANC's call for a “*capable developmental state*” – is essential for spatially inclusive growth.

3. Unleashing Small Business, Rural, and Township Economies:

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of job creation and innovation in South Africa, yet they continue to face barriers in access to finance, markets, and infrastructure. The ANC's economic resolutions and the SONA both prioritize the revitalization of township and rural economies as a core driver of inclusive growth. The fiscal policy response must expand grant and loan guarantees for SMEs, incentivize public procurement

from black-owned and community-based businesses, and invest in business infrastructure such as trading hubs, digital incubators, and logistics in rural and township areas. By fostering an enabling environment and removing red tape, government can empower entrepreneurs, support local supply chains, and bring hope and opportunity closer to where people live.

4. Mass Employment and Youth Relief:

To address the country's alarming youth unemployment rate, the ANC resolutions and the National Development Plan stress the need for large-scale, labour-intensive public employment programmes and expanded support for work-based learning. The fiscal response must fund initiatives such as the Presidential Employment Stimulus, expanded EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme), and youth entrepreneurship grants. The 2026-27 budget can further reduce the financial burden on young people by increasing funding for higher education, vocational training,

and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), as well as through targeted relief for first-time job seekers, such as transport vouchers, tax rebates for youth hires, and support for digital skills training. These interventions, referenced in both SONA and ANC resolutions, are critical to restoring hope and dignity to millions of young South Africans.

5. Skill Development for the Future:

The ANC's resolutions and the Presidential SONA both call for aggressive investment in skills development – especially in the digital, technical, and green sectors. Fiscal policy must support partnerships between government, industry, and educational institutions to scale up technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, digital learning platforms, and artisan development. Targeted bursaries, internships, and workplace-based training will align the workforce with the needs of a changing economy and unlock new opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.



6. Fiscal Discipline and Revenue Mobilization:

While growth is the goal, fiscal prudence remains essential. Improved markets and a stronger rand should not be a license for unsustainable spending. Instead, the Treasury must use this window to broaden the tax base, enhance revenue collection through digitalization, and clamp down on wasteful expenditure. The President's SONA highlighted the importance of rooting out corruption and improving state capacity; the fiscal framework must operationalize these priorities, linking budget allocations to performance and outcomes, as also emphasized in ANC resolutions on good governance and public sector effectiveness.

Seizing the Opportunity

Exiting the greylist, a more flexible inflation target, and improved market sentiment give South Africa a rare window of opportunity. But optimism alone is not a strategy. The fiscal response must be bold yet disciplined, ambitious yet grounded in the realities of state capacity and resource constraints.

By investing in infrastructure, driving mass employment, supporting skill development, empowering SMEs, and backing high-growth sectors, South Africa can turn recent gains into a new era of prosperity and hope – especially for its youth.

This is the moment for the state – guided by the ANC's vision and the President's call to action – to build an economy that works for all, not just the few. Fiscal policy in 2026-27 must rise to this challenge, laying the foundation for a more just, inclusive, and dynamic South Africa.



Justice must not **bankrupt** public healthcare

■ By **BANDILE MASUKU**

THE recent Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) judgment reaffirming that damages for future medical expenses in state medical negligence cases must be paid as a lump sum, poses an existential threat to South Africa's public healthcare system. While the court sought to uphold legal principles and ensure equal treatment between public and private claimants, the ruling ignores the catastrophic consequences such payments inflict on an already fragile health sector.

As Convener of the Subcommittee on Education and Health, I must state plainly: **justice that systematically drains public health budgets ultimately becomes injustice to millions.** Lump sum awards are not paid

from some abstract pool of money. They are extracted directly from provincial health budgets, the same resources that fund clinics, hospitals, medicines, medical equipment, staff salaries, maintenance, ambulances, and community health programmes.

When courts require decades of future care to be paid immediately, those funds vanish from the services that millions of South Africans rely on daily.

Parliament and the Auditor General have repeatedly warned that medico legal claims have evolved from a marginal issue into a **primary driver of budget instability.** Contingent liabilities now run into tens of billions of rand, while actual cash payouts consume billions more annually.

These are resources that should be strengthening primary health-care, improving maternal and child outcomes, and stabilising hospitals.

The devastation is already visible. Provinces divert money allocated for service delivery to settle claims. The result: frozen posts, medicine stock outs, broken equipment left unrepaired, crumbling infrastructure, and suppliers waiting months for payment. The consequences are not abstract financial pressures—they are diminished patient care and unsafe working conditions for healthcare workers.

This reality threatens the very foundation of universal health-care. South Africa's Constitution commits the state to progressively realise the right to healthcare for all. Yet large, unplanned lump sum awards destabilise health budgets and undermine service delivery at facility level. A rigid legal rule, applied without regard to public sector realities, risks hollowing out the very system on which universal access depends.

The question is not whether patients harmed by negligence deserve redress; they unequivocally do. The question is **how** that redress is structured in a way that is fair, humane, and sustainable.

A better path exists. South Africa should invest deliberately in **public tertiary hospital centres of excellence**, particularly for complex, lifelong conditions such as cerebral palsy, which dominate medico legal claims. These centres must be built around multidisciplinary teams i.e special-ists, rehabilitation professionals, therapists, psychologists, social workers, and specialised nurses, working within the public system.

This approach would provide coordinated, high quality care while significantly reducing costs compared with fragmented private sector care funded through lump sum payouts. When linked to academic hospitals and medical schools, these centres would strengthen training and research, improve prevention, and influence future standards of care, therefore reducing harm and liti-

gation over time.

The consequences of the SCA ruling extend far beyond health-care facilities. When budgets are destabilised, suppliers go unpaid, invoices accumulate, and businesses suffer. Government's ability to meet financial obligations weakens, supply chains are disrupted, and frontline health-care workers are left without the tools they need to save lives.

For these reasons, government must **take this matter to the Constitutional Court**. The balance between individual compensation and the **collective right to healthcare raises constitutional questions** that demand final scrutiny. Medical schools and academic institutions should support this effort, as the erosion of public tertiary hospitals undermines training platforms and research capacity. Business has a direct interest in sustainable public finances and should add its voice.

Healthcare workers and communities must continue to mobilise lawfully and peacefully in defence of a public health system that serves all.

The SCA judgment may be legally orthodox, but it is socially and fiscally dangerous. If left unchallenged, it will accelerate the depletion of public health resources, weaken service delivery, and deepen inequality in access to healthcare.

Justice must heal, not bankrupt the public health system.

Bandile Masuku is the Convener of the ANC Gauteng Subcommittee on Education and Health, and a Member of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature.



Reclaiming **ANC Branches** as **centres of learning**

■ By **YONELA DIKO**

ANC Branches were once dependable centres of intellectual stimulation and character building. Today, outside of being election machinery both for internal and external elections, Branches have become anachronistic, complacent and generally uninviting.

Inbetween elections branches barely quorate, the attendance is very poor, and those who manage to attend are an eccentric and peculiar bunch who seem to belong to a time that no longer exists.

Unfortunately as the competition for state deployment intensified and political views themselves became a test of loyalty rather than each teaching one, the Branch has lost its usefulness to a lot of members, especially those who hold no interest in state deployment.

How then can ANC branches reclaim their position as intellectual hubs and educational centres that are attractive and beneficial to members, outside of the nominations of members to various houses of the state and elections of BEC members.

Reclaiming the Branch

The first thing we have to do is to free our branches from a dog-



matic political process that have become off-putting to many people and embrace new ways of engaging our members and keeping them interested.

We have to have a clear and deeper understanding of what our members and communities want. This means we have to have a holistic approach to our Branch programmes mindful of the fact our members are more than just political fodder to be used by politicians for political advantage.

It is true that our Branches have a primary duty to discuss and find solutions to things that are of great concern to communities within which the Branches exist. Inside our branches we have to have solution-orientated discussions on such issues as the state local hos-

pitals, primary school challenges, social housing, bus services and public transport, youth programmes, libraries and are how our communities are experiencing their government services.

Beyond discussions about services and other primary needs, our Branches have to go much further in the work of keeping our people interested in its work.

Firstly, we don't have to invite only politicians as guests for our Branch programmes. Academics, business leaders, journalists, Financial Advisors, and other experts with an ability to enrich our members should be on a lineup of guest in our year plans.

The task of ensuring our members are active citizens in their

communities means we have to equip them with a wide and broad spectrum of knowledge while keeping them engaged and appreciated in our Branches.

Secondly, hosting various events that hold a sentimental and important value to our communities must be embraced by the Branch. Hosting events like an **“Art and politics”** night, where we showcase wonderful work of conscious artists while discussing politics of the day is a start in cultivating interest in our branches.

Without being crass and excessive we could also host other community friendly non-political events. We should not be ashamed of being a platform that showcases local talent, writers, singers, performance arts, in order to give our local communities access to things that may not always be affordable to them.

Most of these events could also be scheduled as post-meeting events to give our people something to look forward to after engaging in long discussions about the state of their communities and their organisation.

Our Branch members and our communities have to find the branch a reliable source of information about their wards and about the world around them so that coming to the branch must have a fulfilling purpose for all those who attend.

It is true that today, Branch meetings compete with so many important and entertaining issues that mean a lot to our people.

We have to give them a reason to come to our branch meetings and sacrifice all the other competing interests.

The Branch is the ANC’s footprint in communities

Without vibrant and engaging branches, our people have only what they read and see in the media as the basis for their vote and political consciousness

Our Branches have to close the distance between them and their communities. Some community members don’t even know there are ANC branches in their communities. What is happening in communities must first and foremost be discussed in ANC Branches and solutions have to be also found in those branches.

The process of rebuilding and renewing the ANC will start at the Branch. Our branches have to be

functional. We have to be able to invite even critics and spectators to come and participate inside ANC branches and test their views among other members and see how they measure up.

The presence of an ANC Branch must be felt so as to give people an opportunity to touch and feel politics personally and not only be fed politics by TV and YouTube and Facebook and Twitter.

We have to revive the spirit of activism through an exciting version of politics, inside our Branches, and among community members.

Yonela Diko is Author of the book *‘Ramaphosa the Long Game’*.

A Proposal to Potentially **“Rescue the ANC”**

■ By **THOVHELE MASIA**

THE recent exchange of gunfire at an ANC meeting in Musina, the permanent vulgar insults at elders such as one directed at the late Dr Tshenuwani Farisani by unsober youth hoisting the flag of the once glorious movement, gate keeping at branches of the ANC for purposes of self-preservation at all cost and power grab, contentless meetings assembled to nominate friends and funders to attend or to be elected leaders by the ever-singing but shallow minded and unpoliticised mobs have unfortunately become hard truths to swallow. The singers, as

the National Chairperson, Cde Gwede Mantashe said by inference, have nothing to offer as solutions to the ailing movement. These sloganeerings have nothing to offer to influence policy to accelerate the transformation agenda let alone to get rid of the misfortunes that have befallen the ruling party.

The action of some unruly elements have alienated intellectuals and the middle class and turned some branches into stokvels and gatherings of no political consequence. Despite these actions, there is still a sizable part of the

population that would still be re-energised to rebuild the ANC brick by brick. Not all is lost, willing members can still act well to bring the ANC gets back to its glory but with a mindshift.

Perhaps, it has become more important to reflect on what it means for the ANC to be called a broad church in practice. It has meant and still means that the ANC is a platform for expression of people from different ideologies and backgrounds and from different sectors of society. As a matter of fact, the voices of the founding sectors namely the clergy and traditional leaders have dwindled beyond recognition because some of them have simply been co-opted without having been identified by their peers. They don't feel duty bound to report to their sectors because they have not been elected by them in the first place.

The majority of members of these sectors such as the clergy, traditional leaders, business people, academics and the middle class may not cope in branches where the exchange of gunfire, of insults and shallowness have become the order of the day. In the ab-

sence of proper platforms, ANC matters are discussed in restaurants and many other places of no consequence to the life of the ANC. Branch meetings have become war zones where the brawns matter than brains.

In order for the ANC to crawl back and cover the lost ground, the structural arrangement must radically change and create more platforms for participation. This could be turning the ANC to adopt a federation outlook similar to how COSATU is structured, in which different sectors organize themselves guided by the main constitution and run their affairs as affiliates of the ANC.

These sectors could be organized from regional level. They would then elect capable individuals to represent them in regional, provincial and national structures of the ANC. A small percentage like a thirty percent or less could be the only once directly elected, and the rest would be representatives. This approach would allow healthy discussions about the economy, morality, human rights issues and politics in general, etc. In this

model, organisations such as Contralesa, Religious, business, academic and civic organisations would remodel themselves and become affiliates and not allies of the ANC. This approach would also allow contestation of ideas within the broad church context and interestingly create a pool of leadership to run government at all levels.

Insistence on branch politics in its current form is arrogance and the consequences are too obvious.

There is no doubt that the African National Congress has changed the lives for the better for the masses of our people and made South Africa a better place for the poor, vulnerable and weak. That journey is not complete and without fixing the ANC, all that has been achieved will be reversed over a period of time.

Thovhele Masia is a member of the ANC, Deputy Chairperson of Contralesa, Vhembe Region and former Provincial Chairperson of SASCO, in the then Northern Transvaal. He writes in his personal capacity.





BORN OUT OF BONDAGE, PERISHED **A MASTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

■ By **SELLO SHAI-MORULE**

TODAY, we mourn the loss of a giant, Rev. Jessie Jackson, a champion of human rights and social justice. Born out of bondage, he broke the shackles of oppression and dedicated his life to fighting for the rights of the marginalized, the weak and those who are faced with difficulties beyond their commands.

February 17, 2026, will be remembered as a somber day

when a dark cloud fell on the community of nations. As we mourn the loss of Rev. Jessie Jackson, we take solace in our collective persistence and perseverance yearning for a better future and national democratic society.

Though grief envelops us, we know that the light of hope will ultimately prevail. Rev. Jackson was a dear brother to Africa, and his bond with the oppressed masses was sealed with blood.

He was a revolutionary guided by true feeling love and compassion for his people. He spoke for a raped Africa, against apartheid Israel when it was not fashionable to do so, and he chose peace in the face of brutality and violence. Rev. Jackson's legacy is a testament to his unwavering commitment to justice and equality. His courageous leadership paved the way for future generations, including the first Black President of America, President Barack Obama.

Rev. Jessie Jackson fought a good fight to the end. He knew that our ancestral land in Africa was stolen, and we were taken as slaves to build foreign lands. He fought tooth and nail so that the transatlantic slave trade should not repeat itself in anywhere, where our people faced brutal conditions, and many lost their lives.

Rev. Jackson was aware that modern-day slavery persists, including in South Africa, where farm workers face exploitation and violence. He knew that our people were killed and buried in shallow graves during apartheid, and our culture was crushed by colonization.

He leaves us as a shocked nation, still struggling to silence the guns of oppression. He was a man who knew only one human race and proudly claimed his African heritage. His legacy is rooted in unity, pride, and autonomy, echoing Marcus Garvey's words: *"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots"*.



Rev. Jackson received the Order of the Companions of OR Tambo in Silver in 2013 for his contributions to the anti-apartheid movement. He reminded us that "the struggle is not over" and that freedom is not equal without justice in land ownership, education, healthcare, banking, and business.

Let us pause to remember Rev.

Jackson's contributions to humanity and recommit to the fight against slavery, child labour, genocide, gender-based violence, and femicide. We call on the people of Greenville, South Carolina, to erect a monument in his honour, and for the United Nations to declare October 8, Rev. Jessie Jackson's birthday, an international Peace and Harmony Day. We stand in solidarity with his family, relatives, friends, and comrades, and we share in their grief.

His legacy will continue to inspire us to strive for justice, equality, and human rights. We will honour his memory by carrying on the torch of hope and perseverance.

Rest in peace, Rev. Jessie Jackson, a friend of Africa to the grave, a true patriot of human dignity and social justice.

Sello Shai-Morule *Is a public servant of South Africa and writes in his personal capacity.*



THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

21–28 February 2026

Source: *SA History Online, O'Malley Archives, Africa Today/Yesterday, The Africa Factbook and Amazwi SA Museum of Literature*

21 February 1858 Walter B Rubusana, ANC founder member born



Walter Benson Rubusana was born in Mnandi in the Somerset East district of the then Cape Colony. He was a founder-member of the African National Congress (ANC). His father was a senior councillor (umphakathi) to the Paramount Chief, Sandile Ngqika. Rubusana trained as teacher at Lovedale College, taught for a number of years, and went on to study and was ordained as minister of the Congregational Church in 1884. He transferred to East London, which became his home for the rest of his life. As a recognised Xhosa language authority, he served on the Xhosa Bible Revision Committee, to review the translation by Tiyo Soga in the 1850s. Rubusana supervised its publication in Britain when he accompanied the Thembu king, Dalindyebo, to the coronation of King Edward VII in 1904. In London, he also published his first book, *Zemk' Inkomo Magwalandini (Defend Your Heritage)*, an

anthology of traditional epic poetry, essays and history. Rubusana by then was active in politics, and in 1909 was part of the African and Coloured delegation to the British King, to plead for inclusions of Africans and Coloureds in the soon-to-be formed Union of South Africa. The delegation included Dr A. Abdurahman, African People's Organisation leader, D Dwanya, Matthew Fredericks, John T Jabavu, D J Lenders, Thomas Mapikela and parliamentarian WP Schreiner. Alfred Mangena who was in London also joined the delegation. The deputation fell on deaf ears, and on their return Rubusana announced his intention to stand for the Thembuland Constituency of the Cape Provincial Council. W B Rubusana ran a most effective campaign, with his church and community roots providing a network to mobilise the voters; strengthened by support of the newspaper *Iizwi Labantu*. When the results were announced on September 21, Rubusana had won the seat; the first African ever to be elected to serve as a member of the Cape Provincial Council. In 1912, Rubusana was a co-founder of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which later became the African National Congress. In 1914, he went to Britain with the SANNC delegation to protest against the Native Lands Act and was co-ordinator of the ANC 1919 constitution. Dr Walter Rubusana was not only a gifted intellectual with many talents, but a political activist in the service of his people.

Dr Rubusana passed away on 19 April 1936 at Frere Hospital in East London after a protracted illness.

21 February 1917 SS Mendi Sinks



The sinking of the SS Mendi on 21 February 1917 became one of South Africa's worst tragedies of the First World War (1914–1919). The steamship sank in the English Channel on the way to France, one of the worst tragedies of the First World War (1914–1919). A total of 616 South Africans, including 607 black troops serving in the South African Native Labour Contingent died.

21 February 1973 Israel shot down Libyan passenger plane

A Libyan Arab Airline Boeing 727, Flight LN 114, flying from Tripoli

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

to Cairo via Bengazi wandered off course due to equipment failure and bad weather, into airspace of Israel occupied Sinai Peninsula. Two Israeli fighter jets intercepted the aircraft, shot it down, killing 108 civilians of the 113 passengers on board. When the jets intercepted the plane, the pilot was already correcting the route and turned back. The incident was condemned by all member-nations of the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

21 February 1985 99-year leaseholds introduced for Gugulethu, Langa and Nyanga

Apartheid influx control was aimed at allowing black South Africans into cities only as migrant labour, with impediments against owning land or property in 'white' South Africa. Following the 1973 strikes, the 1976 uprising and pressures from capital for more skilled and stabled black labour, the Black Urban Amendment Act of 1978 introduced a system of 99-year tenure for sites in black townships and villages outside of bantustans. The 99-year leasehold was first introduced for Soweto in 1979. The Cape Town leaseholds deliberately excluded the informal settlements of Crossroads, as the regime continued to try and control movement of black people to the city, with forced removals continuing.

21 February 2001 Miriam Makeba nominated for Grammy

South Africa's legendary musical sensation, Miriam Makeba, was nominated in the category World Music Album for her album *Homeland* at the 43rd Annual Grammy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles, USA. The album



was released world-wide and featured a collection of songs from buoyant to the plaintive, illustrating the vocal range and power of this celebrated performer. The nomination followed closely upon her being the first Kora Lifetime Achievement Award recipient.

22 February 1968 Mixed Marriages Act of 1968 extended



On this day in history, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Amendment Bill was adopted – despite opposition from the United and Progressive Parties. This amendment furthered the existing ban on marriages between White and Black people (Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) by extending it to White and Coloured people. Marriage officers were given the power to decide the race of couples wanting to be married. If South African citizens of mixed racial descent were married outside of the country, the marriage would not be recognised in South

Africa. One year after the original Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) was adopted, a supplementary law, known as the Immorality act, was adopted. It prohibited sex between people of different races. These laws often split families, and entrenched racial division. President PW Botha removed the Act from the statutes book in 1986.

22 February 1996 Black pupils arrive at school escorted by Police

A few days after the ruling by the Supreme Court to force Potgietersrus Primary School in Limpopo Province to allow Black pupils to enroll, sixteen Black children arrived at school protected by police officers to register. They were subjected to a barrage of racist verbal abuse by some members of the White community whose children attended the same school. The low attendance by White pupils affirmed their parents' stance. Only twenty out of almost 700 pupils came to school on that day. Many White parents threatened to establish their own school, rather have their children attend a multiracial school.

22 February 1914 Valliamma Munuswamy Mudaliar, teenage political activist dies from a fever

Born to Indian Emigrants from Tamil Nadu, India, Mudaliar grew up in Johannesburg. As she entered her teenage years in South Africa, Valliammai became increasingly aware of the oppressive system she and her family were living under. At age 16, Mudaliar joined her mother and a large group of other women in an illegal march from the Transvaal to Natal. In October 1913, once again mother and daughter were



part of the second batch of women who marched to Natal. They were arrested and sentenced to three months of hard labour at the Pietermaritzburg prison. Mudaliar fell ill soon after her conviction but refused an offer to be released early. She died on 22 February 1914, soon after her release from prison. Gandhi, who visited her at her death bed, designed the Indian flag with the colours of Mudaliar's sari which she had held up in defiance, not having a flag. Mudaliar's contribution is recognised in India, with a public library, school and commemorative stamp in her honour.

23 February 1963 15 African states table Resolution against Racial Discrimination

At the annual conference of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) at Leopoldville in Congo, fifteen African states tabled a draft resolution requesting the UN Economic and Social Council to denounce racial discrimination and apartheid. The motion was adopted by thirty votes, with three countries – Britain, France and Spain – opposing the resolution. The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is commemorated annually on 21 March. On that day, in 1960,

police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville. Proclaiming the Day in 1966, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

24 February 1988 UDF, COSATU and other organisations restricted



State President P.W. Botha amended the emergency regulations so that the Minister of Law and Order could restrict the activities of organisations or individuals. On the same day, 17 anti-apartheid organisations were restricted in terms of Section 6 of the Public Safety Act of 1953. The organisations included the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA), the South African Youth Congress SAYCO), the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, did not ban the organisations completely, but the implementation of the Act effectively halted their activities. By February of that year, over 25 000 people had been detained

under the State of Emergency first declared in July 1985.

25 February 1994 Women's National Coalition Conference starts



The non-racial inclusive Women's National Coalition Conference (25-27 February 1994) started in the World Trade Centre, Kempton Park. The conference focused primarily on the drafting of the (second) Women's Charter. The Women's Charter was adopted on the last day of the conference, and formed the basis of women's inputs into the negotiations and constitutional process, including the CODESA Interim Constitution of 1993 and the final Constitution of 1996, which provide a framework for women's equality and emancipation, and a non-sexist society.

26 February 1915 Poet Elizabeth Eybers born

On 26 February 1915, Elisabeth Eybers was born in Klerksdorp, then western Transvaal. Her poetry was mainly written in Afrikaans, although she translated some of her own work – and those of other Afrikaans poets – into English. Her work was also translated into German, French, Italian and Hebrew. Her poetry collections pub-

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

lished include: *Belydenis in die Skemering/Confession in the Twilight* (1936); *Die Stil Avontuur/The Silent Adventure* (1939); *Die Vrou en Ander Verse/The Woman and Other poems* (1945); *Die Ander Dors/The Other Thirst* (1946); *Tussensang/(In-between song)* (1950); *Helder Halfjaar/Bright half-year* (1956); *Versamelde Gedigte/Collected poems* (1957) *Neerslag/Precipitation* (1958) *Balans/Balance* (1962) *Onderdak/Shelter* (1965); *Kruis of Munt/Heads or Tails* (1973). Eybers moved to Amsterdam in 1966, and lived there until her death in 2007.

26 February 2017

Judge Essa Moosa passed away



Essa Moosa was born in District Six, Cape Town on 8 February 1936. He was a judge in the Supreme Court of South Africa. Moosa was a human rights lawyer and activist who defended political detainees during the Apartheid regime, and a founding member of the National Association of Democratic Lawyers. Essa Moosa formed part of the African National Congress's constitutional committee, which supported the party's negotiation team for the goal of establishing a democratic South Africa. A firm supporter of the United Democratic Front, Moosa practiced as an attorney until late 1997, before being

employed as judge of the Western Cape High Court in 1998. Moosa was awarded the Order of the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) by the Western Cape Province in 2004. He served as judge for 13 years before retiring in February 2011, and passed away on 26 February 2017 in Cape Town after a battle with cancer.

27 February 1978

Robert Sobukwe passes on

Founder and first president of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), Robert Mangaliso (Wonder) Sobukwe (54), passed away in the Kimberley General Hospital between midnight and 01h00 on February 27, 1978. Sobukwe died of lung complications after having been hospitalised in 1977. His medical doctors requested that he should be granted freedom of movement on humanitarian grounds, as he was banned to Galeshewe Township, Kimberley, but it was turned down by the authorities. The day is now celebrated by PAC members as Sobukwe day.

27 February 1990

Mandela visits ANC Headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia

After his release on 11 February 1990, Madiba's first foreign trip was the headquarters of the Afri-



can National Congress (ANC) in Lusaka, Zambia, where he met with the exiled ANC Executive Committee, leaders of the Frontline states, and Commonwealth representatives.

28 February 1980

Trade unionist and cricket administrator, Butshingi died

Makhwenkwe Harrison Butshingi died in Orlando West, Soweto on this day. Butshingi was born in the Transkei in 1906, and moved to the Transvaal in 1925 to become an insurance company agent. During the 1940s and into the 1950s, he became involved in the Transvaal worker's unions. Butshingi was President of the South African Cricket Board from 1956-1970, and a community leader in various capacities.

28 February 1989

Olof Palme assassinated



The Swedish Prime Minister was assassinated whilst walking home with his wife from a concert. Palme, Swedish Social Democratic Party leader from 1969 till his assassination, served as PM from 1969 to 1976 and 1982 to 1986. Palme was a strong proponent of non-alignment, and support to liberation and anti-apartheid movements. He was the first European leader who visited Cuba after its liberation.

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL DAYS

21–28 February 2026

Source: www.un.org, www.au.int, *The Africa Fact Book (2020)*, www.daysoftheyear.com

21 February

International Mother Language Day

Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and planet. Yet, due to globalization processes, they are increasingly under threat, or disappearing altogether. When languages fade, so does the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity. Opportunities, traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking and expression — valuable resources for ensuring a better future — are also lost. At least 43% of the estimated 6000 languages spoken in the world are endangered.

21 February

International Tourist Guide Day

Tourist or tour guides are persons who guide visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cul-

tural and natural heritage of an area. The tour guide must have area-specific knowledge and/or qualification, recognized by the appropriate authority.

21 February

National Armed Forces Day

The day aims to celebrate the contribution of South African men and women in the armed forces and to garner public support for our armed forces. The day coincides with the commemoration of the sinking of the SS Mendi steamship on 21 February 1917, one of South Africa's worst tragedies of the First World War (1914-1918). South African armed forces is ranked 33th amongst 140 ranked countries in the 2024 Global Firepower ranking (down from 26th in 2022), third in the African continent with Egypt (#15) and Algeria (#26). SANDF operations are guided by three objectives, in line with the Constitution: (i) defense of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the

“

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

— Nelson Mandela —



THIS WEEK IN HISTORY



Republic of South Africa, (ii) promoting regional and continental peace, security and stability in support of government initiatives and (iii) support to the people.

22 February World Thinking Day

World Thinking Day is an annual observance day since 1926, introduced by the World Association of Girl Guides and Scouts, to promote international friendship. The day is also used as “an opportunity to speak out on issues that affect young women and fundraise for 10 million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 150 countries.”

22 February Be Humble Day

On **Be Humble Day**, people across the world, irrespective of their religion, culture, and philosophy come together and stress the importance of being humble. Humility helps one extend more compassion and empathy to others. Those who practice humility are more likely to consider others’ beliefs and opinions. Humility offers the opportunity to become less self-involved and more attuned with the feelings of others, promoting the idea that accepting our errors and faults makes us better human beings.

“

Never look down on anybody
unless you’re helping
them up.

Get involved in Digital Learning Day



27 February International Digital Learning Day

World Digital Learning Day was first celebrated in 2011, at a time when digital or e-learning were just being introduced, and ICT tools reserved for a few. Technology has changed learning, but it is also exacerbating inequalities within countries and across the world. Although South Africa has been talking about making e-learning more accessible, through initiatives such as a laptop/tablet per learner, connecting schools to the internet, the introduction of ICT as a school subject, the digital divide remains stark, including training for teachers to understand e-teaching and learning.

28 February World Rare Disease Day

World Rare Disease Day takes place on the last day of February each year. The main objective of Rare Disease Day is to raise awareness amongst the general public and decision-makers about rare diseases and their impact on patients’ and family lives. The theme for 2026 is **EQUITY**. We often talk about equality – treating everyone the same. But for people living with a rare disease, that’s not always enough.

- Equality = giving everyone the same support.
- Equity = recognising that people start from different places and may need different kinds and levels of support to have a fair chance.



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2026: The Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy

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