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# Child trafficking shock at Zim border

*Buses stopped at the Beitbridge border post by Border Management Authority*

SIYABOGA MKHWANAZI AND OKUHLE HLATI

THE Border Management Authority (BMA) intercepted 443 children, under the age of 8, who were being trafficked from Zimbabwe into South Africa.

This is according to BMA commissioner Mike Masiapato, who was speaking during a media briefing yesterday.

He said the children were intercepted in a sting operation the BMA conducted with the SAPS and Home Affairs at the Beitbridge border post on Saturday.

He said human trafficking was becoming a serious problem and there would be ongoing operations during the festive season.

"Just last night, a sting operation conducted by the Border Guards, the Home Affairs Anti-Corruption team, and members of the SAPS stopped and searched 42 buses at the Beit Bridge border post.

"They found about 443 children under the age of 8 who were travelling without parents or guardians. They were being trafficked into South Africa.

"We denied them entry and activated the Zimbabwean officials to process them back into Zimbabwe," said Masiapato.

The SAPS has over the years reported an increase in human trafficking cases.

The 2023 Global Organised Crime Index report released in September said the country was both a source and destination for human trafficking.

The report noted the crime encompassed exploitative practices, from sex trafficking to forced labour and organ smuggling.

Masiapato said they would work with other law enforcement agencies during this time of year.

He said in the past few months they stopped about 100 000 people from entering the country for various reasons and some of them were wanted by Interpol in different parts of the world.

Masiapato said they also stopped 279 stolen cars from being taken out of the country.

"We were further able to intercept about 396 blasting cartridges as the criminal elements attempted to bring them into the republic to be used in exploding cash-in-transit vans across the country.

"At the Kosi Bay port of entry in northern KwaZulu-Natal, we intercepted 19 tower batteries and four solar panels en-route to Mozambique. We arrested two individuals and handed them over to SAPS detectives for further investigations," said Masiapato.

Stellenbosch University School of Public Leadership director, Professor Zwelinzima Ndevu, said child trafficking was a huge problem in southern Africa and was likely going to increase at this time of year.

"We will need to ensure that there

are proper safety and security controls at our borders with an effective policing system. Officials need to be vigilant because as the volume of traffic increases, our system must be adaptive to conditions while ensuring that service delivery happens," he said.

Teddy Bear Foundation director, Dr Shaheda Omar, said: "It is of paramount importance that at all times the child's best interests are promoted. It is essential to ensure that those children are safe and not at further risk.

"The officials should have included their local department of social development and child welfare organisations to assist in the safety and protection of these children.

"The children may have been sold by their parents and returning them back to the parents' care may place the children at further risk. An inter-sectoral approach with the relevant stakeholders will have to be undertaken to prevent any secondary trauma to these children."

Regarding festive season border operations, Masiapato said it was anticipated based on previous statistics that 6 million people would be moving through the country's border posts.

He said there were engagements with the country's six immediate neighbouring countries on the "synchronisation of processes and other work modalities", including working hours.

Masiapato said while some of the busiest border posts already operated on a 24-hour basis, the Minister of Home Affairs Dr Aaron Mokoaleli had approved a request to extend the operating hours at other posts during the festive season.

In addition, 380 additional personnel will be deployed and senior members from the Border Technical Committee will visit allocated individual border posts "to provide support to the operational teams on the ground".

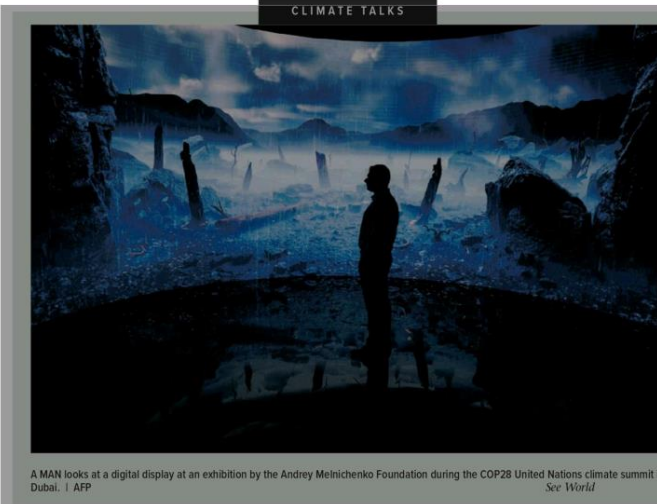
Masiapato said additional infrastructure had been sought including generators to mitigate the effects of load shedding on operations.

"After engagement with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI), they will be providing additional infrastructure such as temporary lighting, abatement facilities, special temporary barricades, and Jojo tankers for the provision of water to the travellers at the identified critical land ports.

"In addition, generators with the appropriate un-interrupted power systems are well serviced and ready to provide required energy during instances of load shedding.

"We have also deployed additional IT support teams to various ports to immediately address any kind of system glitches experienced on the ground," Masiapato said.

Additional Reporting: Mercury Reporter



A MAN looks at a digital display at an exhibition by the Andrey Melnichenko Foundation during the COP28 United Nations climate summit in Dubai. AFP

EXPANSION

## SAA in 'sound financial shape', says CEO

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SAA WAS in a healthier financial position than it has been in several years and audited results for the year 2022/23 would show that the airline had the strongest balance sheet since its last profit declaration in 2011, interim CEO John Lamola said at the weekend.

"Since last year, the airline has been running on financial resources generated from its own operations and management innovations," he said.

This is in contrast to the presentations to Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Socpa) last week, where SAA's external auditors presented their findings on the airline's financial statements for the past four years, from April 2018 to March 2022.

Media reports on these presentations had painted SAA as being marred by poor management and an uncertain future.

"The Auditor-General's report covers SAA's financials during the state capture years, and not its current cash positive and post-business rescue conditions," said Lamola.

He said the management and the board that has been installed since SAA emerged out of business rescue and started operations late 2021, would disprove any claim the financial position of SAA was currently at a breaking point, said Lamola.

"The recent financial year 2022/23 is still being audited and the formal tabling of the audited financial statements to Parliament, where the details of the structure of this public entity's financials will be revealed, is yet to take place," he said.

He said the airline, under the insistence of its shareholder representative, had put controls and policies in place to avoid a repeat of the years of financial mismanagement, and to ensure compliance with the Public Finance Management Act.

"The airline is on an expansion drive, and in the market for more aircraft and is pursuing a plan to add more international routes to its network," he said.

In the past month SAA had added its first intercontinental flight to São Paulo, and an additional regional destination to Abidjan.

Last week the opening of the Gqe-

berha route from December 13, 2023 was announced. The next inter-oceanic route was expected to be announced at the start of 2024.

SAA was also adding jobs it had shed during the business rescue restructuring, he said.

In the first six months the airline's expansion had hit a snag due to the worldwide shortage of aircraft following the Covid pandemic global supply chain constraints. To mitigate this, temporarily unbranded aircraft were deployed ahead of the permanent long-term acquisitions that were being pursued.

"Even against the historical negative performance of the years reported at Socpa, the Auditor-General could declare that SAA is a going concern, able to pay its liabilities as they became due," said Lamola.

He said SAA had a medium-term strategy that envisaged the airline being further strengthened by investment and business transformation from the private equity partner, Takatos Aviation.

"It is planned that until this transaction is concluded, the resized SAA will continue to defend and grow its market share and thrive financially," he said.

RAND MANIPULATION

## Malema: time to call SA banks to account

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EFF president Julius Malema has called for the establishment of a state-owned bank to compete with privately owned banks, especially in the wake of the rand manipulation scandal.

He was addressing the party's ground forces forum, including volunteers and party members in preparation for next year's elections, in Pietermaritzburg.

Malema addressed the claims of manipulation of the rand as pressure mounts on the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) and the national Treasury to communicate a clear message on the damage caused and repercussions for banks that were involved in the dollar-rand exchange scandal.

Almost 30 commercial banks are under fire for alleged price fixing involving the South African local currency, British multinational bank, Standard Chartered, was recently fined almost R43 million by the Competition Commission after it admitted to engaging in currency manipulation between 2007 and 2013.

Malema said one of the most practical things that could be done is for the country to establish its own state-owned bank which would compete with the other banks.

"Let there be state-owned and private banks. Today the banks manipulate the rand and no one has suggested any radical action against the banks because they are controlled and captured by capital.

"If people steal from you like that, why can't we show the power of the people? Let us have two days of no banking and all of them must close.

"Why can we not stop paying our bonds for two or three months because they (the banks) took this in advance,"

Malema said the manipulation of the rand even meant that those who own tax that are financed by banks "have paid more than they were supposed to".

"They punish people through heavy repayments. A tax paid over five years eventually becomes run-down and you have to buy a new one... you will never be rich.

"Why has there not been a call to take action against the banks, because we are controlled and owned by the owners of the banks and they think they have more power than all of us. But once the masses unite and say this is enough, all of us will be on the streets to teach banks a lesson."

A few weeks ago Malema raised the issue of the country's banks being bullies. He took to social media to voice his displeasure, saying "they think they are all-powerful".

Malema said the ground forces forum, which has been conducted