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The South African Newsletter of the South African Embassy in Tehran

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2015

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Deputy Minister Mfeketo Meets Minister Zarif in Tehran

The South African Deputy International Relations and Cooperation Minister, Nomandla Mfeketo met with the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, on August 30, 2015 in Tehran.

Deputy Ministers of Energy and Finance also attended the meeting.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mfeketo congratulated Minister Zarif on the nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1. She described her visit to Iran as very positive and expressed the hope that the achievements gained during her visit would help develop all-out relations between the two countries.



Minister Zarif described Iran-South African relations as excellent and thanked South Africa for remaining Iran's friend in all ups and downs.

The Iranian Minister mentioned that South Africa is Iran's biggest trade partner in Africa. Minister Zarif moreover, stated that terrorist groups in the African continent are now regarded as a potential threat to the regional and global peace and security and fight with extremism is a prominent issue for cooperation between Iran and South Africa.

6th Deputy Ministerial Working Group Held in Tehran

The 6th Iran-South Africa Deputy Ministerial Working Group (DMWG) meeting was held in Tehran on August 29-30, 2015.

Deputy Ministers from South African Department of International Relation and Cooperation, Department of Energy and Department of Finance attended the meeting.

The opening session was held on August 29, 2015 at the Institute for Political and International ...
Cont. on P. 2



From Ambassador's Pen

The conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the 14th of July, 2015 marks the turning point for the relations

between Iran and the international community. It opens up avenues for Iran to interlock with the rest of the world as a non-stigmatised component.



Cont. on P 6

The 6th Meeting of Deputy Ministerial Working Group Held in Tehran

Cont. from P. 1

Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Deputy Minister Mfeketo and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Countries, Mr. Amir Abdollahian, co-chaired the opening session which was also attended by the representatives from Iranian ministries.

South African Ambassador to Iran, Mr. Whitehead, as well as Iranian



Ambassador to South Africa, Mr. Faraji, expressed the hope that this meeting would help to take a further step and materialize the plans which were agreed in the course of the 12th Joint Commission between Iran and South Africa which was held in May 2015 in Tehran.

You may read the full text of the opening statement by the Deputy Minister Mfeketo on page 3.

Iran and P5+1 Agreement Offers Big Opportunities for South African Incorporations



On 14 July 2015, after 22 months of intensive negotiations, Iran and the P5+1 finally agreed a nuclear deal. The Joint Comprehensive Programme of Action, or JCPOA, is a historic turning point that will, in the words of President Rouhani, 'open a new page in Iran's history.' The JCPOA is a complex 100 plus page agreement under which Iran accepts stringent, long term restrictions and unprecedented transparency measures on its nuclear programme in exchange for comprehensive sanctions relief. The core of the agreement is that Iran eschews nuclear weapons in return for recognition of its right to peaceful nuclear energy.

Once the IAEA verifies that Iran has implemented certain initial measures set out in Annex V of the deal, which is expected to take a few months, EU and US economic sanctions will be lifted immediately. The lifting of sanctions will be game-changer for Iran's economy. Growth is predicted to boom to 8% within 18 months, providing opportunities in almost every sector to South African businesses. Iran has been billed as 'the most exciting frontier market' and 'the largest country to rejoin the global marketplace since the break-up of the Soviet Union.' In 2014 the IMF ranked the country as the World's 18th largest economy based on purchasing power parity (PPP). Iran, with a population of 78.5 million, is the largest consumer market in the Middle East. Disposable income is estimated to be around \$287

billion and consumers have very little debt. Even under sanctions, Iranians spent around \$77 billion on food, \$22 billion on clothes and \$18.5 billion on outbound tourism.

Since the conclusion of the nuclear deal, Tehran has been flooded by top-level western political and business delegations seeking to position themselves to re-enter the Iranian market before sanctions end, including from Germany, France, Italy, South Korea, India and Japan.

The South African Minister of International Relations, Ms Maiite Nkoana Mashabane, already visited Iran with a significant business delegation in May 2015. This was followed up by a visit by four Deputy Ministers three months later. More high-level official visits and business delegations/exhibitions from South Africa are planned before the end of the year to build on the positive dy-



namic and enhance trade and investment between the two countries.

As one of the few countries that stood by Iran even during the most difficult times, South African companies have received a warm and enthusiastic welcome in the Islamic Republic.

Opening Remarks by Deputy Minister Mfeketo: 6th SA-Iran Deputy Minister Working Group Meeting,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 29 August 2015



Your Excellency, Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Your Excellencies, Deputy Ministers in the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Ambassador Faraji, Ambassador of Iran in the Republic of South Africa

Mr Archie Whitehead, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to Tehran;

Fellow Deputy Ministers of South Africa;

Officials from the Governments of Iran and of South Africa;

Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, Your Excellency, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation for the gracious hospitality extended to my delegation and I by the Government and the People of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We bring with us the warm greetings of our President, President Jacob Zuma, as well as the Government and the People of South Africa.

Your Excellency, I am pleased to be back in this beautiful, historical city of Tehran. More importantly, I am pleased to be among our friends. We remember the significant role that Iran played in our struggle for freedom and democracy, and we therefore continue to express our appreciation to the Government and the People of Iran for their support.

Your Excellency, at the outset I wish to express my personal appreciation for making this visit possible. Our Ambassador informs me that you changed your schedule to accommodate this visit. Thank you.

Your Excellency, we in South Africa attach great importance to our relations with our brothers and sisters here in Iran. We recognise that Iran is a pivotal and influential player in its region, as well as internationally. Your country has a rich history and a vibrant culture. In this regard, I would like to thank you for inviting me to visit the majestic city of Isfahan yesterday, where I saw first-hand your rich cultural endowment.

Iran has a large and growing economy and possesses skills and expertise that could positively influence the countries around it - and even beyond. Not only is Iran one of the world's largest sources of energy, it is also one of the most diverse and industrialised economies in the region. It is for this reason that we are pleased that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action has been concluded and Iran will take its rightful place among the economies of the World.

Your Excellency, please allow me on behalf of the Government and People of South Africa to congratulate the Government and the People of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the successful outcome of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. We are fully cognisant that negotiations may sometimes be difficult, however, we are pleased that you endured and you now have this road map to take you out of the unilaterally imposed sanctions by the Western nations.

Your Excellency, following the conclusion of this historic agreement, my Government considered it of utmost importance that a high-level delegation undertake a Working Visit to Iran to exchange views with our Iranian partners on how best to enable trade and economic relations in preparation for the time when we can conduct our bilateral trade and economic relations free from any unilaterally imposed restrictions.

For this reason, I have the honour to lead a delegation of Deputy Ministers and senior officials representing trade and industry, energy, agriculture and finance. We are here to convey the strong will of the Government and People of South Africa for the full normalisation of our economic, trade and investment relations with Iran.

Your Excellency, the purpose of the Deputy Ministerial Working Group Meetings is to assess progress and ensure follow up in between meetings of the Joint Commission. When you visited South Africa last year, we agreed that the period of review should be shortened to ensure even better monitoring of the implementation of the decisions of the Joint Commission. It is in this regard that I return to Iran with three Deputy Ministers three months after the 12th JC to assess progress, in particular to understand what has been done in each sector since May.

We have had a number of delegations, from Agriculture, Energy and Water & Sanitation visiting Iran. In South Africa we have also had visits from the Iranian Minister and Deputy Minister of Finance and Economics, as well as the Department of Science and Technology, in which an agreement was reached for investment by both parties of 200 000 Euros for Research and Development. Anchoring all this are regular meetings between the Iranian Foreign Ministry and DIRCO.

As I have noted, the purpose of this particular working group meeting is aimed at assessing programme and project specific initiatives that emanate from the 12th Joint Commission.

My expectation is that Working Groups must now report back on progress made since the 12th JC. We must move to the level of actually implementing i.e. what is the way forward? We need to initiate the projects that we agreed upon in the last JC and therefore are required to develop action plans with SMART objectives. We need to identify challenges and prepare possible solutions and move to the level of identifying possible individuals, entities and focal points from both countries to move projects forward.

Our strong political relations must now give meaningful expression to our economic cooperation. It must anchor trade and cooperation between our two countries. The outcome of this Working Group meeting must also simultaneously identify key areas of future cooperation.

Deputy Minister Abdollahian, in our country we have created an intersectoral mechanism that is made up of the Deputy Ministers that are here, whose function is to monitor implementation and progress.

Your Excellency, allow me express my personal gratitude for the warm hospitality that you have extended to us. With these brief remarks, I look forward to our engagement today and to a constructive outcome towards deepening our bilateral relations and the full normalisation of our economic, trade and investment relations.

I thank you

ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION

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Deputy Minister Mfeketo Visited Esfahan



The office of the Deputy Minister Amir Abdollahian arranged for a visit to Esfahan for Deputy Minister Mfeketo on Friday August 28, 2015 prior to the meeting of the Deputy Ministerial Working Group.

The one-day visit was aimed at giving a taste of the rich heritage and history of the Iranian nation. Officials from the Office of Esfahan Governor General welcome the Deputy Minister at the Esfa-

han airport VIP lounge.

Deputy Minister visited Imam Khomeini Square, Imam Khomeini Mosque, Lotf Ali Khan Mosque and Ali Qapoo Monument in the beautiful city of Esfahan.

Iranians constantly refer to Esfahan as "half of the world" thanks to its cultural, artistic and historical wealth.

Photos by: Jacoline Schoonees



South African Deputy Ministers Met with Their Iranian Counterparts



Photo: Jacoline Schoonees
The South African Deputy Ministers of International Relation and Cooperation, Energy and Finance with Deputy Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian on August 30, 2015.



Deputy Energy Minister Majola meets Minister Zarif.. She also met with another Iranian Deputy Oil Minister, Mr. Kazemi who is also the President of the National Iranian Oil Refining & Distribution Company and the Chief Director for International Affairs at the Oil Ministry.



Shana/Photo: Hasan Hosseini

Deputy Energy Minister Majola met with Mr. Moazzami, the Iranian Deputy Oil Minister for Planning and Supervision on Hydrocarbon Resources on August 30, 2015.



Photo: NPC.ir
Deputy Energy Minister Majola also had a meeting with Deputy Oil Minister and President of the National Petrochemical Company, Mr. Sha'ri Moghadam.

The Closing Session of the 6th Meeting of the DMWG



The closing session of the 6th Deputy Ministerial Working Group was held on August 30, 2015 at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the presence of deputy ministerial delegations from South Africa, Iranian Deputy Minister Amir Abdollahian as well as the two countries' Ambassadors.

The Deputy Ministers briefed the attendees on



the meetings they had with their Iranian counter

parts and the extent of the progress their respective teams could achieve.

At the end of the closing session, the South African and Iranian Deputy Ministers signed the Agreed Minutes of the 6th meeting of the DMWG.

Photo by: Jacoline Schoonees

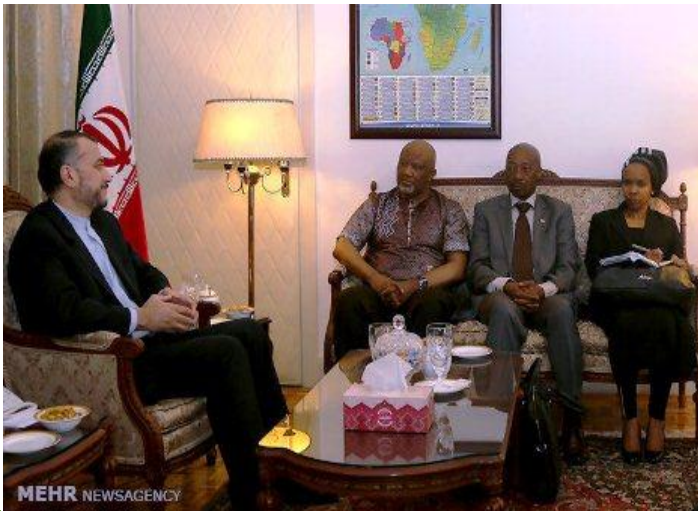
Deputy Minister Jonas Leads a High-ranking Finance Delegation to Iran

South African Deputy Minister of Finance, Mr. Hubert Jonas, led an economic delegation to Iran on September 19-20, 2015 as a follow-up to the 6th Deputy Ministerial Working Group Meeting.

As part of his busy schedule, Deputy Minister Jonas paid a courtesy call on the Iranian Deputy Minister for Arab and African Affairs of Iran on September 20, 2015. South African Revenue Services Commissioner Mr. Moyane also accompanied the Deputy Minister to the meeting.

The two Deputy Ministers expressed hope that relations between the two countries would quickly expand in all areas and asked the officials to think about new viable and practical public and private projects that could be implemented within the next three to six months.

Deputy Minister Jonas also met with his Iranian counterparts Dr. Khazaei, Deputy Minister and President of the Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (O.I.E.T.A.I), Mr. Afkhami Rad, Deputy Minister and President of Trade Promotion Organization (T.P.O), Mr. Panahi, the Deputy President of the Organization of Tax Administration of Iran and Dr. Kamyab, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Iran.



From Ambassador's Pen



Cont. from P. 1

Though the road will still be stormy with many obstacles as regards the implementation of the JCPOA, it does not depart from the observation that Iran went into these negotiations with the full intention to overcome the removal of unjustified unilateral sanctions by some of the world's major powers. The removal of the United Nations Security Council sanctions was the catalyst for the victory of Obama in the Congress to block the hands of the right wing forces in the House and defeat the Israeli lobby.

The conclusion of the agreement is irreversible and any attempt by the Congress to overturn the agreement will create division between the P5+1 in their quest to establish themselves within the Iranian market which has great prospects for growth and development.

The Middle East has never been at peace since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Unprecedented conflict prevails in Syria and Iraq. These have already engulfed the neighbouring countries such as Jordan.

At the centre of the conflict, ISIL terrorist organization continuously raises its specter. Across the Gulf is the war on Yemen and on the protest in Bahrain. The roots of the conflict in the Middle East can be traced back to the support and arming of Middle Eastern regimes by some super powers. The rise of ISIL points directly to support by some certain Middle Eastern countries and Western powers in order to effect regime change.

It has always been the position of the South Africa Government that conflicts within countries can be only resolved through a negotiated settlement by the peoples of the affected territory. The intervention of a foreign force can only exacerbate the situation as has been demonstrated in Iraq and Syria.

Imperial and hegemonic aspirations, that so dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, continue to re-surface where the old orders seek to re-assert their domination over the weak and voiceless in institutions such as the United Nations. It is for this reason that South Africa calls for restructuring of this international body. The developing world through the creation of alternative institutions such as BRICS seeks an equalization of past domination of the means of production by those who came first to the altar of inequality, taking the lion's share and leaving the rest of mankind with the shining remains of meatless bones.

The current migration of refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia has its roots in broader historical colonial plundering of the resources of developing countries, the arms race and the interference in the internal affairs of other nations by other more resourced countries. The challenges of refugees flooding Europe can only be addressed through the mechanism of negotiations in the afflicted countries through the voices of the indigenous communities there. Western countries have a positive role to play in promoting peace and development without any hidden agenda. The cause of the disease must

be traced to the root and a band aid approach is not the solution.

The recent visit of four Deputy Ministers of South Africa to Iran in August is a clear statement by the Government that it intends to continue to strengthen political relations, promote trade, investment and economic activity between the two countries. Both countries sit in a unique geo-political location that offers ample opportunity for the diversification of both economies. Iran sits at the crossroads of the Commonwealth of Independent States as well as the Silk Road which in future will become a key trading route for Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Iran has a strong human resource development base, mineral wealth, oil and gas and a population of 80 million which due to sanctions can be considered debt free and therefore their capacity to spend is currently untapped. It also has a strong research and development capacity. South Africa is the gateway into Africa and has strong financial institutions, ICT, mining expertise and its role in Southern African region development cooperation. There is a strong compatibility at an economic level between the two countries. The challenge facing both countries is to increase trade, exchange technology, engage in joint-ventures premised on continued equity and trust that the two countries currently enjoy with one another.

South Africa sits on the cradle of mankind as recently demonstrated by the finding of our potential cousin, Homo naledi. We accept our interrelationship with the nature. Our trepidation is with regard to the future of mankind due to a continued plunder of the earth resources. This is irrespective of scientific and technological advancements that have been made and have opened up new avenues and horizons for mankind. We have however preferred to ignore the whispers of nature which are currently at a thunderous level imploring us to guard the planet or else face the extinction of the species man. It is imperative that the forthcoming climate change conference in Paris focuses on saving the planet and mankind and should not descend into futile self-centred infantile self-interest and an international point-scoring exercise.

During a period in which there is hope and optimism about the future prospect of Iran taking its place on the globe and contributing its dynamism it would be appropriate to end with the words of the great Iranian poet Hafez:

The days of absence and the bitter nights
Of separation, all are at an end!
Where is the influence of the star that blights
My hope? The omen answers: At an end!
Autumn's abundance, creeping Autumn's mirth,
Are ended and forgot when o'er the earth
The wind of Spring with soft warm feet doth wend.

The Day of Hope, hid beneath Sorrow's veil,
Has shown its face—ah, cry that all may hear:
Come forth! The powers of night no more
prevail!

Praise be to God, now that the rose is near
With long-desired and flaming coronet,
The cruel stinging thorns all men forget, the
wind of Winter ends its proud career.

Ambassador's Provincial Visit: Markazi Province

The South African Ambassador to Iran paid a two-day official visit to city of Arak upon official invitation extended by Arak Chamber of Commerce, Industries, and Mines & Agriculture.

During his stay, the South African Ambassador paid a courtesy call to the Governor General of Central province, Mr. Zamani Qomi.

The Ambassador held a fruitful meeting with the Governor General, and the Iranian official pointed out the economic strength and capabilities of the province, including the major industries, tourism attractions, agricultural sector's products and the main export commodities.

The official further emphasized on the potential areas of mutual cooperation between the private sectors of Central province and South Africa, and invited South African business delegations to visit the province to become familiar with its capabilities.

The outcome of the visit is that the two South African and Iranian



officials agreed on assisting and facilitating business delegations from Arak to visit South Africa and South African delegation to visit to the decorative stone exhibition held in city of Mahalat in September 2015 as well as South African business delegation accompanying the South African Deputy – President visit to Iran in November 2015, to visit Arak and become familiar with industrial capabilities of Arak and possible business cooperation and business ventures.

The identified areas of mutual cooperation between Central province and South Africa consist of machine making, industrial plants machinery, and export of refinery equipment to South Africa as well as possibility of mutual cooperation between Transnet & Pars Wagon Co. in the railway industry.



The South African Ambassador visited two major industrial machinery production plants of the province namely; Machine Sazi Arak and Hepco Company.

The Industry, Mines & Trade Organization of Arak in joint collaboration with the Arak Chamber of Commerce, Industries, and Mines & Agriculture hosted a seminar on the South Africa business and investment opportunities for the province's private sector companies.

The South African Ambassador made a presentation on the South Africa's business environment and investment opportunities for the Arak private sector companies present in the seminar. The seminar was followed by a Q& A session.

South African Classrooms Go Digital

A teaching and learning programme to create paperless classrooms in 375 high schools would start rolling out today, said the Gauteng department of education.

The programme is about combining and using a range of technology like interactive boards and mobile devices such as tablets and laptops with internet connectivity, to conduct teaching and learning. There will be unlimited data usage from 5am to 9pm.

Empowerment and responsibility

"A child of a domestic worker or a child of a gardener or a child of an unemployed parent will have a tablet in their hands," Gauteng education MEC Panyaza Lesufi told Grade 12 pupils at the Grace Bible Church in Soweto. "Gone are the days where [only] those that are rich will have a quality education."

The top three students in their schools would also be given a four-year bursary, he said.

"We are empowering you that when you finish your education and are given a form in a bank, and they ask you how much you earn, you will cancel that and say I don't earn a salary, I pay salaries."

He warned that social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp would not be allowed on the devices. Pornography sites would also be blocked. "[With] every tablet, we will get an activity report which will show us which sites you visited," he told the pupils.

"The department has also purchased over 17 000 tablets for

Grade 12 learners and 1 800 3D LED interactive boards that are currently being installed in matric classrooms at the targeted schools," said the department.

Over 4 000 classrooms were also refurbished with new ceilings and specialised lights and blinds to cater for the lighting requirements of the interactive boards. The boards are integrated with the tablets to increase interaction between teachers and students during class.

Security risk

Earlier this year, tablets were recalled from schools. They needed to have additional security measures installed to stop theft of the devices.

"The devices have been fitted with trackers to ensure that they are traceable should they get lost," said the department. All schools were also linked to police stations to ensure rapid response.

Lesufi said if a pupil's device was being stolen, the student should not act like Rambo and fight the criminals. "Your life comes first." In addition, if a matriculant did not return the device after the exams, the school would withhold the pupil's results until it was returned.

"This tablet belongs to government... not you. But you are allowed to take pictures with your friends and family."

The deadline for the completion of the renovations to the classrooms, mainly in schools in townships and rural areas, is the end of August.



The Gauteng department of education envisions a future of paperless classrooms.

INDABA 2016

INDABA, Africa's Top Travel Show, is one of the largest tourism marketing events on the African calendar and one of the top three 'must visit' events of its kind on the global calendar.

The three-day show attracts Africa's best tourism and travel trade offerings who, in turn, attract the most influential buyers in the world. INDABA is the biggest platform for African tourism businesses to meet global buyers of their products and services.

It showcases the widest variety of Southern Africa's best tourism products and attracts international buyers and media from across the world. INDABA is owned by South African Tourism and organised by Pure Grit Project and Exhibitions Management (Pty) Ltd.

INDABA, will remain focused on delivering value to exhibitors both in the recruitment of quality hosted buyers, and in providing opportunities for exhibitors to interact valuably with each other with African tourism stakeholders and with those who set trends and define the environment in which tourism business is conducted.

INDABA has won the awards for Africa's best travel and tourism show. This award was presented by the Association of World Travel Awards.

Venue

- Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre (Durban ICC)
- Durban Exhibition Centre (DEC)
- KwaZulu Natal South Africa

Show Dates

- Show Days: 7 - 9 May 2016
- International Trade Days: 7 - 9 May 2016
- Local Trade Days: 7 - 9 May 2016
(Admission Reserved for delegates over 16 years of Age).

Show Times



● 09h00 - 18h00, 7 - 8 May 2016

● 09h00 - 17h30, 9 May 2016

www.indaba-southafrica.co.za

www.southafrica.net

Why attend?

● Its Africa's top travel and tourism exhibition in the Southern Hemisphere



● Keep abreast of global trends and new developments within the African tourism and travel industry

● Meet industry stakeholders and decision makers face to face

● Conduct business with new and existing clients

● Gain competitive advantage with a view to becoming market leaders

● Meet with over 1200 exhibitors from a diverse range of destinations and industry sectors

● Opportunity to network with key decision makers and stakeholders on an exciting and informative platform. Not only can you meet and network with the industry's key role players and decision-makers, but also consider all the continents leisure tourism options and negotiate the best deals on these products, all in one place.

South African biofuel project recognised for sustainability

A South African initiative, Project Solaris, received the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) certification this week for producing a crop that can be used as feedstock for bio jet fuel.

The energy-rich tobacco crop has been named "Solaris" and it is grown in South Africa's Limpopo province. It is a nicotine-free and GMO-free plant that yields significant amounts of sustainable oil, which could be converted into bio jet fuel.

"Project Solaris has demonstrated that it can deliver sustainability on the ground in line with the RSBs global standard," said RSB's executive director, Rolf Hogan.

"This is the result of a serious commitment to working with local stakeholders, rural development and reducing greenhouse gases while safeguarding the Limpopo's unique natural environment."

Project Solaris got RSB involved from the start to make sure the correct standards were applied from the beginning. The programme was developed and patented by Sunchem Holding, a research and development company based in Italy.

Benefits

Project Solaris has brought economic and rural development to Limpopo.

"Developing a biofuel crop in South Africa's 'breadbasket' province has, of course, drawn us into the centre of the food vs fuel debate," said Joost van Lier, the managing director of Sunchem South Africa.

"Having to undergo a systematic process of evaluating the social and environmental ramifications of this development as prescribed by the RSB has allowed us to feel confident in promoting Solaris, not only as a financially viable crop for farmers in the region, but also one that will not affect food security or lead to environmental degradation."

Sergio Tommasini, the chief executive of Sunchem Holding, added: "Thanks to all partner efforts, we earned this important certificate. RSB believed in our technology and gave us the right advice to improve it during our scale up programme."



SAinfo reporter

South Africa's Blue Train: 4 new plans to make it worldly Superior

Cape Town – Mention luxury rail travel in South Africa and ultimately the Blue Train springs to mind.

As the only passenger rail service run by Transnet, with all other rail services operated by Prasa, the iconic 'five-star hotel on wheels' is an exclusive, world-renowned offering that sees passengers fork out an estimate R20 000 for a single 27hr trip from Gauteng's Pretoria station to Cape Town in the Western Cape.

For over 65 years the legendary train has been carving its niche in the world's luxury rail experiences and in a new partnership announced by Transnet and Sun International, the Blue Train is set to undergo a momentous recapitalisation initiative.

Over the next 18 months the agreement, signed at a media briefing at the Blue Train's arrival lounge at Pretoria station, is expected to take Africa's leading luxury train for the past seven years, to the next level.

While sparse on the finer details, Transnet CEO Siyabonga Gama described the event as an engagement ceremony, with the more intricate planning of the actual "Wedding Ceremony" still to be decided.

It was at this point that Sun International CE Graeme Stephens said, "Let's just say, we're deciding to live together before there will be any commitment of marriage."

A rather telling analogy especially when you consider the issues currently being investigated around Prasa's management of passenger rail services in South Africa.

But as Gama explained, the goal of the partnership is to "exploit the global appeal of the Blue Train to enhance Sun International and brand South Africa as a whole".

And the Blue Train is legendary when it comes to experiencing South Africa from a different vantage point. Here's what they have in the pipeline for the 'Blue Jewel of Africa'...

1. Fresh destinations: A Garden Route experience amongst others on the cards

The Blue Train mainly operates a weekly service between Pretoria and Cape Town – departing on selected Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 08:30. There are also seasonal packages to Durban and Kruger National Park. With an estimated 70% demand on its trains at the moment,

Transnet is hoping to increase this to 95% capacity by the time the partnership does take place.

When you consider how SA Express and Sun International are working together to open up tourism to the North West and specifically Sun City, it would be interesting to see how the business mode is applied to this

heritage luxury experience. Gama specifically mentioned Garden Route – which might hold better appeal than its seasonal Durban route and chartered trips to Hoedspruit as a Kruger Park option. It was a particular sore point when the Outeniqua Choo tjoë stopped operating due to an unsuccessful tender process, so developments here will be interesting to watch.

Gama said the partnership would certainly be looking at the possibility of opening up old routes such as Victoria Falls. Trips to Mozambique would also be a welcome development.

2. New trains sets

The Blue Train operates two train sets and received two brand new locomotives from Transnet this year.

The first is able to accommodate 52 guests in its 14 coaches and is just on 300m long. The second train is longer, measuring 399m, with 19 coaches and is able to accommodate a maximum of 80 guests.

"The vision is to include state of the art trains to extend the reach and foot print of the Blue Train. We will be looking at whether we have the optimal number of trains in order to do so," said Gama.

3. Dynamic package and pricing

Sun International certainly holds the expertise, products and services to ensure that the Blue Train extends its reach. It would be exciting if its off-train excursions could be expanded to include more of SA's heritage attractions. Currently between Cape Town and Pretoria passengers are introduced to the historic diamond mining town of Kimberley with its largest man-made hole and Maatjiesfontein an official Heritage Town in the little Karoo, with a stop in at the Lord Milner Hotel.

"The Blue Train is an icon of SA, a symbol we want to preserve through this ground-breaking agreement," said Thulani Nzima, Head of South African Tourism.

"We have over three decades of international marketing expertise in the luxury tourism market and a very strong international brand, both of which will be brought to bear in this exciting partnership," said Graeme.

4. Increase opportunity for aspirational domestic travel

Gama said that since tourism is seasonal it would be ideal if the packing of the product could be done in order to accommodate aspirational or bucket list travellers who wanted to experience this local legend "sooner rather than later".

traveller24.com



Photos: Selene Brophy

