

Dear Marang Readers,

The current edition of Marang is themed around Johannesburg's resilience being tested by recent developments that might suggest change in climate and vulnerability of the city's infrastructure, the XV BRICS Summit as well as the Executive Mayor's continued strides in collaborating with international stakeholders.

In July 2023, Johannesburg did not only witness an unexpected and historic snowfall, but also faced a significant incident, where a methane gas explosion led to the collapse of a road in the inner city. This was then followed by a devastating incident in August 2023, where a fire engulfed a hijacked building in the heart of our city. Read all about it in Section one, where the City's resilience journey is showcased.

Section two takes the reader through the recent XV BRICS Summit, which Johannesburg served as the host City. This global gathering indeed raised the international profile of South Africa's powerhouse city, reinforcing its reputation as an open, collaborative, and viable global city.

The last section shows courtesy calls held this year with the aim of continued collaboration with international stakeholders. Since assuming office in May 2023, the Executive Mayor (EM) of Johannesburg, Councilor Kabelo Gwamanda has always stressed the importance of forging relationships and collaborating with numerous countries to promote technical knowledge sharing as well as improve development, cultural and educational exchange and learning through international engagements.  
Editor In Chief: Hlompho Mphanje

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## SECTION 1

# Johannesburg’s resilience journey tested as recent weather extremes suggest changes in climate system, gas explosion ruptures CBD road and fire engulfs one of the City’s hijacked buildings.

In recent months, Johannesburg, the economic powerhouse of South Africa, has experienced a series of dramatic weather events and infrastructure damages.

The weather events highlight the growing challenges associated with climate change while the methane gas explosion and the fire in one of the City’s abandoned and hijacked building could mean the Municipality setting even better standards for the management of underground infrastructure and buildings.

In July 2023, Johannesburg witnessed an unexpected and historic snowfall. Due to Johannesburg’s mild climate, snowfall is truly a rare event for the city. The last snowfall in Joburg was recorded in August 2012 when temperatures dropped to below freezing.

Despite the excitement from the residents, the weather service warned that the people should be cautious as the snow can get disruptive and pose possible hazards, including hypothermia. Indeed, the snow disrupted transportation, disrupted electricity demand and supply, and added pressure to emergency services to some degree.

As a matter of fact, it also showcased the vulnerability of the city’s infrastructure to extreme weather events, calling for greater investment in weather resilient systems. Furthermore, the city has experienced extended periods of extreme heat which have strained the water resources.

The elevated temperatures led to an increased demand for water, causing a drop in some parts of Joburg’s reservoir levels. This situation highlights the need to address our water security and invest in innovative water-saving technologies as well as finding mitigation measures to operational challenges.

With climate projections indicating more frequent and intense heatwaves, aiming to improve and develop water infrastructure is crucial for the city’s economic stability.

The Municipality’s commitment to climate adaptation includes integrating climate resilience into urban planning and development, which will help reduce risks and enhance its adaptive capacity.

Additionally, the City of Johannesburg’s Environment and Infrastructure Services Department’s (EISD) Climate Change unit is currently hosting three webinars dedicated to the city’s Climate.

Action Plan (CAP) implementation. The initiative, aims to facilitate knowledge exchange, share leadership stories and promote collective action in pursuit of the city’s climate goals and is designed to introduce Johannesburg residents and stakeholders to the CAP and explore key topics related to the plan.

Still in July, Johannesburg faced a significant incident, a methane gas explosion that led to the collapse of a road in the inner city, followed by a devastating fire that engulfed a hijacked building in the heart of our city in August 2023.

Both these events sparked an international interest to understand the causes thereof and to build knowledge on such things as they occur across globe.

According to Johannesburg’s City Manager, the ‘type of gas that fuelled the explosion is Methane, which is lighter than air and travelled up along the services tunnel, from an unknown source to the crest of the tunnel near Von Brandis Street’.



Snowy Jozi Metro Centre on the 7 July 2023. ©Dumisani Basini

1 Johannesburg has a subtropical highland climate, characterized by mild winters and moderate precipitation.

2 A condition of having a lower body temperature than normal body temperature. It causes excessive shivering, slowed breathing, mumbled speech, confusion, drowsiness and weak pulse.



*Gas explosion ripped apart Lilian Ngoyi Street in the Joburg CBD.*

The city placed medium interventions which included the restoration and repair work and estimated repair cost for this was approximately R178 million.

With regard to the five-storey Marshalltown building fire that killed 77 people in August, a commission has been appointed by Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi to investigate the cause of the fire and the prevalence of hijacked buildings in the Joburg CBD.



*A view of emergency services in the Johannesburg CBD attending to the Marshalltown building fire, which claimed the lives of 77 people. © Jacques Nelles/Eyewitness News*

Many disused buildings in the city continue to be occupied by squatters and informal settlers, which in most cases turn out to be foreign nationals. Such a situation causes many different challenges for the city, including concerns about safety, sanitation, and the overall livability of these spaces.

While the events were tragic and unexpected, they have catalyzed the city's efforts to enhance resilience, sustainable development and require significant shifts in responses and readiness to natural and man-made disasters.

Collaboration with global stakeholders will also assist in ensuring assistance is given and other measures are found to help in preventing further incidents of such nature.

For as long as COJ shows signs of struggles from effectively adapting and recovering from shocks and stresses, its resilience and global reputation as a city will be under pressure as these might indicate lack of good governance and the ability to manage complex urban issues.



## SECTION 2

### XV BRICS Summit-Through the eyes of Joburg

On the 1st of January 2023, South Africa (SA) took on the rotating chairmanship of the BRICS Forum. Since joining the BRICS group in 2010, this marks the second time that SA assumed the seat (1st time was in 2018).

As such, SA hosted the 15th BRICS Summit in August 2023 (22 – 24), with the City of Johannesburg serving as the host city. The city took pride in hosting this prestigious global gathering within its borders and indeed prepared for a successful and safe summit.

It worked with other law enforcement bodies from the National and Provincial government to enhance security plans for the Summit.

The Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Cllr. Kabelo Gwamanda and the City Manager, Mr Floyd Brink extended a warm welcome to the global stage, then emphasizing that the Summit is expected “to amplify the City of Johannesburg’s diplomatic influence, solidifying its status as a global diplomatic nucleus”.

Certainly, the summit raised the international profile of South Africa’s powerhouse city, reinforcing its reputation as an open, collaborative, and viable global city. The event took place in Sandton, dubbed as the financial hub of Johannesburg.

The recent investments made to the area, including extensive public environment upgrades such as road rehabilitation, pothole reduction, park upgrades, bicycle lanes, pedestrian walkways and facilitation of multi-story offices and high-density hotels through land use rights, depict the City of

Johannesburg’s commitment to spurring economic growth, driving tourism and fostering job creation while trying to address the community’s challenges, create a livable city and pull citizens into a better standard of living.

Outside the scope of the Summit, the BRICS Business Council, which is a significant parallel stream initiated to focus on business-to-business engagements in the interest of creating tangible inter-trade and investment opportunities between the partner countries, was held on the 22nd August 2023, also at the Sandton Convention Centre.

Approximately 1200 business and government leaders gathered at the event, with over 500 of the attendees being from Brazil, Russia, India, China and other African markets.

This event is welcome as it will not only unlock trade and investment opportunities in BRICS market, but also has the potential of driving trade and investment promotion across all sectors in Johannesburg while helping entrepreneurs and small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) to thrive.

To get a sense of how local business partners perceive such engagements, the IR Unit had a chance to interview the CEO of Randburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (which aims to effectively protect and promote the interests of business in the Randburg, Sandton and Midrand regions), Mrs Linda Blackbeard.

She mentioned that the conference being held in Johannesburg was great as it has

a chance of enhancing many people’s perception of what exactly the forum offers businesses, especially for young entrepreneurs and youth in business.

When asked if such forums can create opportunities that can bolster jobs, tourism, economic growth of the City of Johannesburg, Mrs Blackheard said she feels that ‘we need to get to the heart of what this does for us and explain this in layman’s terms to those who are not yet familiar with the great benefits of such a wonderful opportunity’.

Additionally, she stated that ‘SA is deepening trade ties with the BRICS member and will be remembered as the summit where the 5 member states made a commitment to expand the group to include several other countries. It also celebrated the 10 years since the BRICS Business Council was established.

All to promote business, strengthen trade and investment ties and to ensure regular dialogue between the various businesses and governments to ensure great economic T&I relationships.’

Despite the inconvenience caused by hosting the Summit to the citizens, there are several positive offshoots. The Summit has promoted collaboration and showcased opportunities not just within the City of Joburg, but also in Gauteng Province and South Africa at large. This should in the long run foster economic growth and attract more investment.



*In-preparation: The various departments of COJ with DIRCO in talks ahead of the XV BRICS Summit 2023.*



## SECTION 3

### The City of Johannesburg's Executive Mayor continued to strive for collaboration with international stakeholders.

Since assuming office in May 2023, the Executive Mayor (EM) of Johannesburg, Councilor Kabelo Gwamanda has always stressed the importance of forging relationships and collaborating with numerous countries to promote technical knowledge sharing as well as improve development, cultural and educational exchange and learning through international engagements.

As such, via the International Relations unit, the EM held numerous courtesy calls between September and November 2023 through physical and online meetings that allowed various Ambassadors, Mayors and Consul Generals the chance for individual interactions with the Executive Mayor.

Indeed, successful international engagements were held despite some resolutions pending. It is with hope that through direct communication, relationship-building, and collaborative problem-solving, these visits will contribute to effective governance, community development, and the overall well-being of the City of Johannesburg.

#### Courtesy Calls on the 14th September 2023



*Ambassador Chull-joo Park, South Korea*

Ambassador Park proposed a creation of a better understanding environment that creates opportunities, promotes economic development, and strengthens business ties between South Korea and Johannesburg.



*Consul General Tang Zhongdong, CG of the People's Republic of China*

CG Tang suggested that the link with Chinese companies be strengthened and dialogues that will lead to development of both cities be created. The EM wants to collaborate and liaise with Chinese community.



*HE Ms. Ayşegül Kandaş, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey*

Ambassador Kandaş ready to partner with Johannesburg on sponsoring sporting events, offering Turkey Scholarships to successful students, supporting women, sharing knowledge on solar energy as well as realizing TIKA Projects by investing in the city.



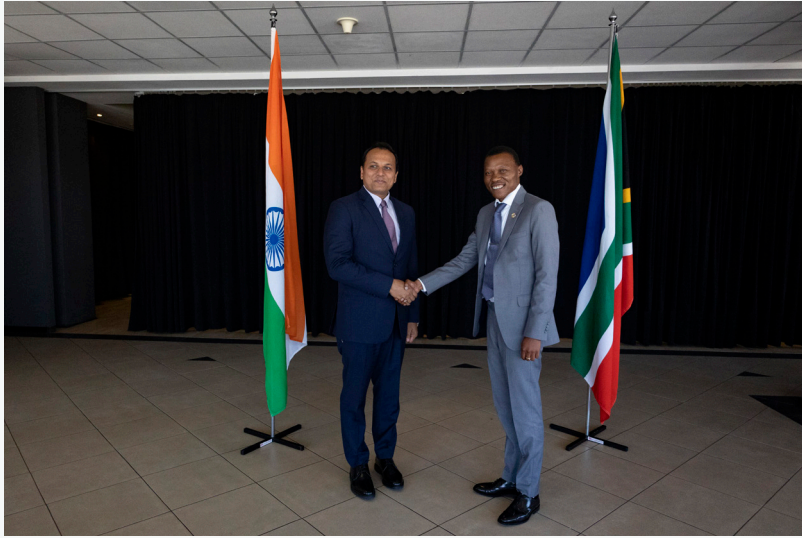
*H.E Ms. Elsebeth Søndergaard, Ambassador of Denmark*

Ambassador Søndergaard expressed that Denmark (Copenhagen) wants to expand cooperation with Johannesburg, exchange information and learning especially on climate, energy, and Greenfields sector.



*Consul General, Mr. Vincent Spera USA Consulate*

CG Spera mentioned that education relationships with the City have indeed strengthened and there is a need to continue building and promoting knowledge sharing especially when it comes to HIV & AIDS among the youth.



*Consul General of India, Mr. Mahesh Kumar*

CG Kumar urges for fine tuning of relationship between the two cities. The cities should also engage on areas of common interest to find a way forward in terms of collaborating.



*The Consul General of Argentina in South Africa, Mr. Carlos Tagle*

CG Tagle proposed corporation in different sectors such as sports, environment, trade, economy, and tourism.

As it is, on the 4th December 2023, the CG and his staff were invited to Skeen Primary School in Alexandra to fulfill the Sports Cooperation and Sponsorship of soccer equipment.



*Virtual call: Mayor Kassis and City Director: **Ahmed Abulaban, Ramallah***

Mayor Kassis welcomes future cooperations that can be created between the two cities and expanding on a solid foundation.



*The Vietnamese Delegation, led by Mr. **DUONG Anh Duc, Vice Chairman of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City***

Mr. Duong Anh Duc stated that there are great opportunities to collaborate and elevate sectors such as science & technology, trade, investment, and tourism between the two cities. As such, he proposed four potential areas of collaboration (tourism, Smart City, Education and Trade).

The EM conceded that it is important for COJ to build on the existing MOU and revive it through an Action Plan.