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MASERU, LESOTHO

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Manaka says he is hated at MCCI



By: Tholoana Lesenya

Maseru-
The Officer Commanding Maseru Central Correctional Institution (MCCI) Assistant Commissioner Tsoto Manaka says numerous people dislike him and have falsely incriminated him before the Commission of Inquiry on the escape of inmates.

Asst. Comm Manaka said this when giving evidence before the Commission on number of issues mainly the events of December 22, 2023 whereby a number of witnesses told the Commission that him and other two senior officers saw and heard the cries of inmates when

they were being beaten by the recruits during the search exercise that was conducted at the institution.

He related that an inmate by the name of Sekantši earlier told the commission that he was not fit to command the institution and assumed that he was a thief. Manaka added that other officers including some of the recruits suspected that they saw and heard inmates crying when they were being assaulted by the recruits as they passed by in block C to punishment cells during the search.

Manaka further said that one more officer alleged that he did not stop the Christmas party which was scheduled to take place at the institution, yet he did as the inmates had fled the previous day and officers were busy re-capturing the escaped inmates. He therefore said all these issues prove that people have been gunning for his head.

"It could be that I was accidentally placed because since I headed the institution, there have been so many issues raised against me," he stated. Inquired to shed light on what he meant by this, he continued that he was once falsely implicated as some people claimed he was responsible for soldiers who left the institution and were in charge of towers in central and new block.

He added that he once had a misapprehension with Lesotho Correctional Service Commissioner over an inmate by the name of Mo-soeunyane, saying it took him a long time to recognize things were not good between him and the Commissioner as the latter even accused him of being a rebel. "Personally, I have a doubt that the escape of inmates was arranged" he stressed, saying he had heard lately that one of the Deputy Commissioners alleged that he has abandoned and left Correctional Officers in the hands of the commission.

"I believe it is because I recognized people who assaulted the late Bokang Tsoako on the footage" he added. On the other hand, the Officer Commanding Correctional Staff Training School, Assistant Commissioner Nthako, who testified first regarding the alleged cries of inmates told the Commission that he picked during his presence at MCCI to attend the Commission's proceedings that some Officers dislike Ass. Comm. Manaka and his Deputy, based on how they salute them.

He also explained before the commission that they were falsely implicated regarding the cries of inmates and Asst. Comm. Manaka also repeated that. Meanwhile, MCCI second in charge Senior Superintendent Mahlebe is due to testify on this matter as well.

Joki murder trial begin in High Court

By: Tholoana Lesenya

Murder trial of Ralikonelo Joki (Leqhashasha) and two others proceeded this week before Judge Tšeliso Mokoko in the High Court of Lesotho. The first crown witness, Teboho Kumi who was a cab driver that took the accused person to and from the deceased gave his testimony. Kumi said he was called by Sootho Liphoto earlier that day requesting him to transport him and his friends to lower Thamae later that day.

He said when they got near Tsenolo FM that is when he learnt that the accused are going to kill Joki. "When we got closer to Tsenolo FM, that is when I asked what were

we going to do there, then I was told by the accused persons that they were going to Kill Joki. I asked as to why I was not told earlier about this and Sootho replied that he knew I was going to refuse to take them here," said Kumi.

Kumi further stated that Sootho and Mothusi Tlelase exited the car leaving him in company of Kamo Phakoe and Atang Majara who is his friend. He said few minutes later after the accused have entered Tsenolo FM premises he heard gunshots and the two men came back rushing to the car and told him to drive, which he did. Kumi said, "I asked as to why did they kill Joki and Sootho replied that Joki was full of himself.

The second state witness who I also an ac-

complice, Sekhobe Maama gave incriminatory evidence as he stated that Moabi Sesioana disclosed to him about the payment he made when they met at his shop in Mokema, about a week after the killings. He said, "Sesioana had just returned from South Africa when met him at his shop.

He asked me to keep him company to his home, which I did and on our way he asked about the events in the village." Maama said he told Sesioana about the killing of Mothibe and Ntsane by Sootho and Mothusi. "He then asked me if Sootho had given me any money in regard to those killing but I told him no. He then replied that he had paid Mothusi and Sootho M5000.00 to kill both Mothibe and Joki," disclosed Maama.

Maama stated that before the murder of Joki and Mothibe, Sootho and Tlelase came to his home asking if he had contacts of anyone from St. Michaels or whether his father



could possibly have Joki's numbers. He said he told them that he did not have them but he would try to find them for him. "When I asked why they needed Joki's numbers, they told me that they were going to kill."

Maama said when he inquired why they would want to kill him, they told him that it was initiation related issues which he would not understand because I am not part. In his evidence, Maama told the court that he was present when Sootho and Tlelase shot and killed Mothibe and Ntsane.

Makhetha says promotions are not politically influenced

By: Tholoana Lesenya

Maseru-
Lesotho Correctional Service (LCS) Human Resource (HR) Officer Itumeleng Makhetha said promotional positions within LCS are not politically motivated, so is skipping of the ranks. She mentioned this before the Commission of Inquiry on the escape of inmates after numerous witnesses alleged that some officers get promotions due to political parties.

Makhetha stated that she has never seen anyone skipping ranks since 2021, demonstrating that promotional positions from that of Assistant Superintendent to that of Deputy Commissioner are publicized, analyst by Senior Officers including the Principal Secretary and the Minister of Law and Justice. She further stated that after the analysis, candidates are shortlisted and interviews are conducted and paneled by representatives from Public

Service, Ministry of Law, LCS Senior Officers and the HR Officer who takes minutes of such interviews.

"I believe the promotion of officers in these ranks is transparent based on the process carried out" she stressed, also approving that many Commissioners exchanged the Office before she arrived but was not sure if it was due to changing of new governments which were alleged to appoint new LCS Commissioners in the process. However, she made clear that promotions in lower ranks are usually done by LCS Commissioner in accordance with LCS Act of 2016.

"HR Office does not have any title role in positions of lower ranks as we are just told certain people have been promoted through the Commissioner's Office" she added. Makhetha additionally emphasised that currently there is no policy or framework dealing with promotions hence it is the Commissioners privilege to promote people in lower ranks.

In the meantime several officers who gave evidence earlier before the Commission alleged that the issue of new appointments and promotions of officers, which they believe is politically inspired has brought divisions within LCS and bitterness amongst some officers. The Commission, which commenced its work in May this year was established with the objective to amongst others, examine, appraise and evaluate the security measures within LCS, investigate on the instances around operations undertaken by members of LCS staff after the escape of inmates as well as to investigate and determine the circumstances that led to the use of force during the search operation.

Meanwhile, LCS Commissioner Mating Nkakala said appointment of LCS Commissioner should be on the basis of excellence to promote stability within the Service. He raised this point before the Commission of Inquiry on the escape of inmates after he was called

to clarify some of the issues which were raised by some Senior Officers in their testimonies such as unmanned maximum tower, reports, leadership, promotions and appointment of Commissioner amongst others.

Commissioner Nkakala said the appointment of the Commissioner should not be done directly as currently as things stand, anyone could be a Commissioner. He added that superiority should be considered when appointing the Commissioner, highlighting that one should also not be given the acting position of the Commissioner if he or she will not be confirmed.

"Even in other ranks, seniority should be considered because juniors usually become seniors even when they do not have necessary qualifications or experience" he strained. He also acknowledged that his appointment might had disrupted LCS as it was not transparent since he was the Assistant Commissioner when he was appointed thus skipped the position of Senior Assistant Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner.

"I was already not expecting full support from other Senior Officers even those who acted in my position due to some occurrences that happened along the way" he added. The Commissioner also explained some of the issues mentioned above.

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Joystick Working Control (Single-lever)	Hydraulic Actuated Drum Brake
ROPS&FOPS Cabin	Combination Instrument
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Makoanyane Barracks transformed by massive tree-planting



Majara said the initiative started in 2023 when RSL celebrated twenty-years with initial 5000 trees planted at the Ratjomo-se Barracks and this week one notable tree-planting takes place and RSL has donated 10000 trees to further improve the local ecosystem.

He highlighted that LDF has a long History of tree-planting and it has contributed to afforestation efforts country wide, adding that this is part of the RSL community responsibility.

“RSL has committed to plant 20,000 trees annually, recently we have planted 4000 trees in Berea and have donates additional 10000 to the Lesotho Defence Force,” he said

He indicated that’s the trees were bought form local farmers further supporting agricultural community while also contributing to environmental sustainability.

Delivering his speech, Senior District Forestry Office Moipatlile Lejaha said tree planting is part of broader environmental goals to combat issues of deforestation and climate change.

“Tree planting enhances air quality, combats soil erosion, and helps regulate cli-

mate change by absorbing carbon dioxide this contributing to both local and global environment health,” he said

He mentioned that types of trees planted are piner and blue-gum trees due to; they grow faster and are easily adaptable, adding that pine thrives in all of climate range while blue gum were chosen by their quick establishment.

Speaking on behalf of the Lesotho Defence Force, Staff Officer II Barracks Support Officer Unit, Major Lethala Mathatela emphasized that LDF areas should remain green, with trees and flowers to maintain cleanliness and a health environment. Additional said trees play an important role in addressing irregular rainfall and temperature changes caused by climate change.

Lethala acknowledged that there were challenges causes by certain invasive trees that have disrupted land and building however he reassured that the LDF is collaborating with the ministry of Forestry to address this issues.

He said already they are replacing problematic trees with species that are better suited for the environment.

By: Selloane Nyakane

Maseru-



on Friday 27th Revenue Service Lesotho (RSL), Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), Ministry of Forest-

ry joined forces to plant trees at Makoanyane Barracks promoting environmental conversation and contributing to climate change.

Speaking on Behalf of RSL, Pheello

Lesotho Joins Global Fight Against Child Labour with EU-Backed Project

By: Mamello Mochesane

Maseru-



World Vision Lesotho has launched a new project aimed at eradicating child and forced labour in the country. Funded by the European Union (EU), the Acceleration Action for Eliminating Child Labour and Forced Labour (AECFL) initiative will be carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, marking a new chapter in the fight against child exploitation.

James Chifwelu, the National Director of World Vision Lesotho spoke at the launch, stating, “Child labour is a reality in Lesotho, driven by poverty and economic pressure. Our aim is to prevent, eliminate, and raise awareness about this grave issue that is depriving children of their rights.”

Despite Lesotho’s beauty and resilience, it is no exception to the global issue of child and forced labour. According to world latest statistics, about 16% of Lesotho’s youth are involved in child labour. Many of these children are forced into demanding and dangerous jobs such as herding animals in harsh weather, domestic work with long hours, or street vending that include activities that do not only risk their health but deprive them of their childhood.

The AECFL project will be rolled out in five districts which are; Berea, Maseru, Mafeteng, Mohale’s Hoek, and Quthing and is set to last two years and six months. The project plans is to initially train 500 community members, with that number growing to 6,000.

Mathabang Nkosi, the Project Coordinator portrayed that this fight requires a collective effort from everyone.

“We need to involve not only the govern-

ment but also communities, legal enforcement, and other stakeholders,” Nkosi stated.

The project aims to empower local communities by training members to become advocates and fighters against child labour. At least 100 young people will be leading activities in their communities, raising awareness and advocating for the rights of children. These young leaders will be central to ensuring that the voices of Lesotho’s youth are heard and respected.

The 2023 report on child labour in Lesotho revealed that children are subjected to the worst forms of exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, often tied to human trafficking. Many are forced into dangerous tasks like animal herding, which poses extreme risks to their safety and well-being.

EU Representative Mario Varrenti ex-

pressed the EU’s strong stance on this issue, “This is a grave violation of fundamental human rights. It deprives children of their dignity, childhood, and the opportunity to get an education. Child labour traps families in cycles of poverty, and for the EU, eliminating it is key to achieving sustainable development.”

The EU’s involvement in this project highlights the international and community’s role in supporting Lesotho’s efforts to tackle child labour. As Varrenti pointed out, the project is not only about eradicating child labour; it is also about investing in the future of the country.

“Every child deserves a safe, healthy childhood and access to education. By eliminating child labour, we are giving children the chance to break the cycle of poverty and unlock their full potential.”

This project will act as a significant step towards a future where all children in Lesotho are free from exploitation. By promoting education and child rights, the initiative hopes to foster long-lasting change that benefits both the current generation and the next.

Speaking at the event, the Minister of Labour and Employment, Ts’eliso Mokhosi emphasized that the government is deeply committed to creating an environment where every child is protected and valued.

“This is not just about statistics, it’s a call to action. Our commitment as a government will include strengthening legal frameworks to ensure children are comprehensively protected,” Mokhosi said.

To support this, the government plans to review existing laws and introduce new regulations aimed at preventing exploitation.

“We will also enhance reporting mechanisms to empower communities to report incidents of child labour and forced labour,” the minister added.

He also showed that raising awareness is key, and the government will work closely with civil society organizations, educational institutions, and international partners to ensure that this message reaches every corner of the country.

The AECFL project represents hope for children trapped in the cycle of labour and exploitation. Through collaboration between the government, civil society, international organizations, and the communities themselves, Lesotho can envision a future where children are free to learn, grow, and thrive.

As Chifwelu of World Vision Lesotho concluded, “Together, we can break this cycle and create a brighter, more just future for the children of Lesotho.”



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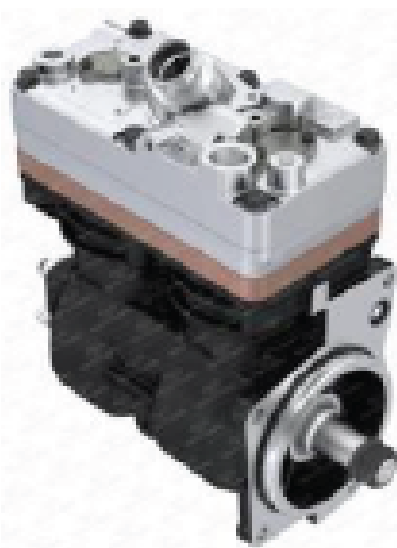


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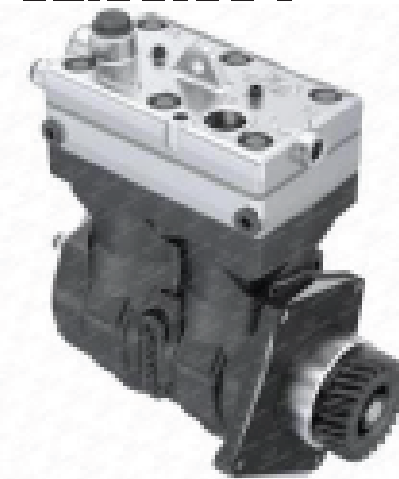


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Lesotho Tribune

By Ben Payton

President Mokgweetsi Masisi basked in a moment of triumph on 22 August, as he unveiled the largest diamond discovered anywhere in the world for more than a century to an excited crowd of journalists and officials in Gaborone. “What?!” he exclaimed, his eyes popping with delight as he felt the weight of the stone. “I am lucky to have seen it in my time.”

The presentation of the second-largest diamond ever wrenched from the Earth appears to be the latest glittering chapter in Botswana’s success story. The stone, extracted from the Karowe mine by Canadian company Lucara, provides seemingly irrefutable evidence that the southern African nation remains a diamond superpower.

“We are ecstatic about the recovery of this extraordinary 2,492-carat diamond,” said William Lamb, president and CEO of Lucara in a statement. “This discovery reinforces Karowe’s position as a truly world-class diamond mine.”

Lamb’s ecstasy is unsurprising, given that the stone is thought to be worth more than \$40m. His joy must have increased further when the company announced another find, weighing in at 1,094 carats, just weeks later. Lucara recovered these diamonds through x-ray transmission technology that it installed at Karowe in 2017. Diamondiferous ore is scanned before it goes through the mechanical crushing process, enabling the company to identify and preserve exceptionally large stones.

Competition from the labs

But the long-term outlook for the industry in Botswana looks less rosy. Even the recent discovery of such enormous riches cannot disguise the fact that Botswana’s diamond mining industry is facing serious headwinds.

“The basic problem with diamond mining is that synthetic, lab-grown diamonds are getting cheaper and better,” says mining historian Duncan Money. “It’s now hard to distinguish between natural and synthetic diamonds. If people are happy with synthetic diamonds, then why mine natural ones?”

He does note that the discovery of the 2,492-carat diamond is “good news, because a diamond of this size is something distinct and eye-catching, it adds something to the romance and desirability of the stones.” The giant diamond represents “good publicity for Botswana too, as a place where large, high-quality diamonds are discovered.”

“Beyond this, what does it mean for Botswana?” Money asks. “Not much. It doesn’t change the basic outlook for the diamond industry.”

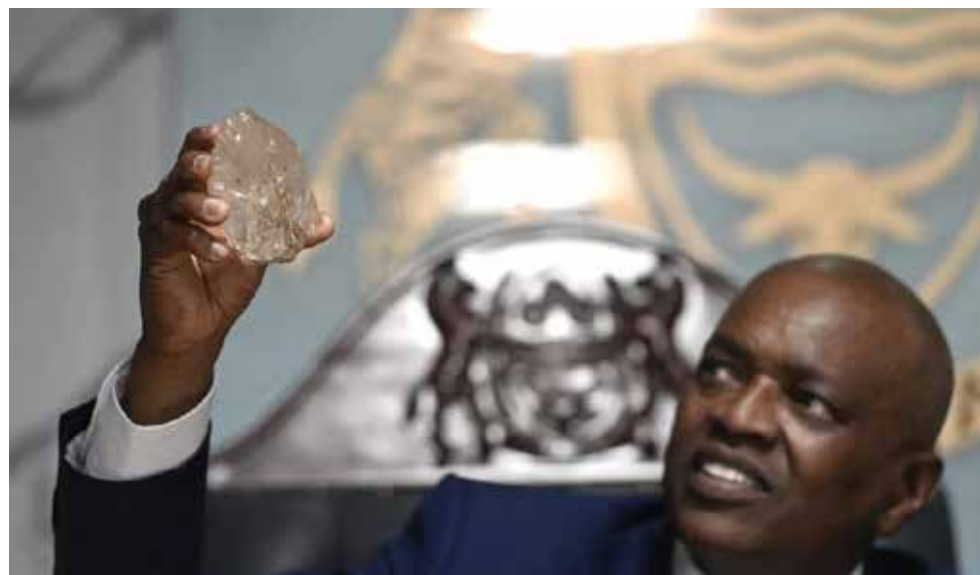
Losing its shine

One of the poorest and least-developed places in the world at independence in 1966, Botswana is now among the wealthiest countries in Africa. Its per capita income of around \$19,000 is similar to

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Diamonds aren’t forever: Botswana looks beyond mining

With the diamond industry facing an uncertain future, Botswana is seeking to develop sectors including agribusiness, copper and tourism.



Brazil’s. The World Bank classifies Botswana as an upper-middle-income country, one of just eight in Africa.

There are several reasons for Botswana’s relative prosperity. It has never suffered from sustained political violence. Elections have been held regularly ever since independence. And Botswana has proven far more successful than most of its peers in curbing corruption: it is the third-best performing country in Africa in Transparency International’s latest Corruption Perceptions Index.

But the role of diamonds in Botswana’s economic development is impossible to overlook.

The young country received a huge stroke of luck in 1967, just one year after independence, when diamond mining giant De Beers came across diamond deposits at Orapa, around 250 miles from Gaborone. Since then, several other deposits have been brought into production.

Botswana is now the largest diamond exporter in the world by value, and the second largest by volume. The government has proven adept at maximising its share of diamond revenues. It negotiated what consultant Keith Jefferis describes as a “very favourable deal” to form Debswana, a joint venture with De Beers, in 1968.

“The terms of the revenue-sharing deal were progressively improved over time through many rounds of negotiations,” Jefferis noted in recent analysis for the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government now receives almost 85% of the profits from diamond mining. A new deal, signed last year after lengthy negotiations, reinforced this trend.

Visible benefits

The benefits that diamond mining has brought to Botswana are visible in the paved roads, the healthcare facilities and the schools and universities that are funded largely through diamond revenues. But the country’s dependence on diamonds also represents an obvious liability.

“Botswana is facing a severe slowdown,” an IMF delegation warned earlier this month following consultations with Botswana’s government. It predicts that GDP growth will shrink to just 1% in 2024, down from 2.7% last year and 5.5% in 2022. The blow to the economy “reflects weaker global

demand for diamonds and a sharp increase in inventories,” the IMF said.

Botswana generates 80-90% of its export revenues from diamonds in a typical year. The country’s dependence on a single industry – even one as lucrative as diamonds – leaves it severely exposed to fluctuations in the global market. Diamonds are a finite resource – and the growth of synthetic alternatives poses a clear challenge to the diamond mining industry.

Botswana’s leaders have been aware of the dangers of diamond over-dependence for decades. There have been no shortage of plans and projects to diversify Botswana’s economy in recent years. Time is now running out for other sectors of the economy to take-off if Botswana is to extend its track record of economic success.

Growing success

At Selebi Phikwe, a dusty town in the east of Botswana, efforts to transform the country’s economy are slowly taking shape. In March, President Masisi descended on the area to mark the first harvest of fruits at the Selebi Phikwe Citrus farm, a major agribusiness project that he inaugurated four years earlier. The first harvest at the 1,500-hectare site, which grows grapefruits, lemons, mandarins and oranges, “epitomises a prologue in our journey to achieve export-led growth,” the president said.

“This project is not just about cultivating citrus fruits; it’s about cultivating hope, economic growth, and a sustainable future for Botswana,” effused Pieter Scholtz, the South African agribusiness entrepreneur who serves as CEO of Selebi Phikwe Citrus. Ownership of the project is split among Scholtz’s company Blydevallei Citrus, fruit trading company AfriGold and a consortium of investors from Botswana. The government has backed the scheme through the Botswana Investment and Trade Centre and SPEDU, a local economic diversification agency. The European Union also chipped-in with technical assistance.

The horticulture business, which includes a 12,000-square-metre packhouse, intends to export around 70% of its produce. However, since the harvest ceremony six months ago, not everything has gone to plan. The farm found that much of its grapefruit crop had blemishes, making it unsuitable

for international markets. Desperate to dispose of unwanted produce, it invited local farmers to collect low-grade fruit for use as animal feed in May. But a large quantity ended up dumped on the roadside, generating unwanted headlines in local media.

The farm said in a statement that it is making plans to export low-grade fruits to juice factories and that the dumping incident was the result of a “one-off problem”.

The reality is that Botswana badly needs agribusiness projects such as Selebi Phikwe Citrus to succeed. The scheme is set to generate 1,500 jobs once it reaches peak production, a significant number for a country with a total labour force of just 1.2m. In fact, the town of Selebi Phikwe has been in special need of an economic boost ever since a nearby copper and nickel mine ceased operations in 2016.

Indeed, for all Botswana’s success in becoming a leader in diamond extraction, and to some extent in value-added processing industries, diamonds alone have never provided enough jobs. The World Bank notes that unemployment is “structurally high”, at more than 25%. Youth unemployment is almost 35%.

Digging deep for diversification

The good news is that, outside of diamonds, other segments of the mining industry enjoy a more positive outlook. “Copper production provides the most immediate source of economic diversification,” notes Lyle Begbie, an economist at Oxford Economics Africa. Buoyed by soaring global demand for energy and electrification projects, Begbie says that copper mining is “starting to rise from the ashes again” in Botswana. He expects copper output to rise by over 50% this year, largely due to the ramping-up of production at the Motheo mine, operated by Australia-based Sandfire Resources.

Several other copper projects are at varying stages of development. A Canadian company, Premium Nickel Resources, is looking to restart operations at the shuttered Selebi Phikwe mine. As well as mining and agriculture, tourism is a major strength, thanks largely to the country’s remarkable biodiversity. Arrivals in the first quarter of 2024 were up 18% from the same period last year, according to Statistics Botswana. Including its indirect contributions, tourism accounts for nearly 10% of GDP.

The government passed legislation to establish eight special economic zones in 2015, each of which aims to promote certain sectors, including agribusiness, manufacturing and ICT. But for further progress towards diversification, Botswana will need to tackle some of its longstanding challenges.

In a 2022 report, the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation listed infrastructure bottlenecks as a key factor in limiting Botswana’s economic diversification. The country relies on imports from South Africa to meet around half its electricity demand – but it is making tangible progress with renewables. Norwegian company Scatec commenced construction on the country’s largest solar farm in March. The 120 MW project represents “a step towards sustainability, energy independence and economic growth for Botswana” said Scatec CEO Terje Pilskog.

Increasing the supply of low-cost renewable power will be vital if power-intensive industries are

to have any chance of taking off. Improving logistics infrastructure is another priority, with the proposed Trans-Kalahari Railway between Gaborone and the Port of Walvis Bay in Namibia set to facilitate mining and manufacturing exports.

Development partners have also waged a long-running campaign to persuade Botswana to rein-in state-owned enterprises. The World Bank warned in a report last year that “competition in sectors such as energy, beef, and transport is dampened by the large public sector footprint and the prefer-

ential treatment of some state-owned enterprises”. It added that subsidies to parastatal firms “create distortions that discourage competitiveness and diversification”.

Political stability

Meanwhile, as Botswana prepares for elections next month, maintaining political stability will be key to improving investor confidence. A feud between President Masisi and his predecessor, Ian Khama, has sent shockwaves through the country’s usually

sedate politics. Khama returned from self-imposed exile in September to campaign for opposition parties seeking to unseat Masisi. He will also face criminal charges over alleged money laundering and firearms offences.

Khama’s return “is likely to escalate tensions and frustrate the current regime,” says Begbie, although he anticipates that Masisi will secure a second term. “The main questions are: will the [ruling Botswana Democratic Party] maintain its majority, and will the opposition make significant gains or simply split the

vote in key constituencies.”

The political turbulence adds to the sense that Botswana is coming to a crossroads.

Yet despite its challenges, Botswana remains in an enviable position compared to most other African countries. The task for whichever party wins the upcoming election is to build on the strengths that have been built-up over decades and move the country into the next phase of economic development.

LeSwitch Takes Financial Convenience to the Next Level

By Mamello Mochesane



Maseru-

The Central Bank of Lesotho announced the launch of the LeSwitch Card Stream, building on the success of its initial Instant Payments Stream. This development brings a new era of convenience for cardholders across the country, enabling ATM withdrawals and access to funds, no matter which bank the account is with. The LeSwitch initiative is setting the pace for a modern, integrated financial system, and its latest phase promises to make accessing money simpler and faster than

ever before.

Earlier this year, the introduction of the Instant Payments Stream within LeSwitch allowed individuals and businesses to transfer funds instantly across participating fintech platforms. The feature proved to be a game-changer, enhancing the speed and reliability of everyday transactions in Lesotho. However, the Card Stream now takes that vision further by ensuring that cardholders can withdraw money from any ATM, regardless of the bank affiliation, marking another key step toward building a seamless, national payment infrastructure.

One of the standout advantages of this latest phase is the flexibility it offers to consumers. Gone are the days when people had to hunt for specific ATMs tied to their bank to avoid additional fees. Now, with LeSwitch’s Card Stream, ATM access will be universal across Lesotho’s banks, making it easier for customers to get cash when they need it. This not only saves time but also brings significant convenience to areas where certain bank ATMs might not be readily available.

In addition to easier access, the Card Stream promises to reduce transaction costs over time. As domestic ATM transactions will be handled locally through LeSwitch, both banks and consumers stand to benefit from lower fees. It’s a win-win situation

where cost savings are passed on, making banking more affordable for the average citizen.

Security and speed are also at the forefront of this new payment system. LeSwitch ensures that transactions are processed quickly and securely, so customers will not have to worry about long waits or potential security breaches when accessing their funds. The Central Bank of Lesotho has put considerable effort into making this system both efficient and safe, providing peace of mind to all users.

The launch of the LeSwitch Card Stream is not just about individual convenience; it also aims to boost the economy as a whole. By making financial services more accessible, especially through digital transactions, LeSwitch encourages greater participation in the formal financial system. This is particularly important for promoting a cashless society, which can lead to broader economic growth. With more people using digital payment methods, Lesotho is positioning itself to thrive in a modern, increasingly cashless economy.

Moreover, LeSwitch supports financial inclusion, a critical goal for the Central Bank of Lesotho. Many Basotho who previously had limited access to formal banking services can now engage with the financial system more easily. The widespread availability of ATM services, and soon point-of-sale and online transaction capabilities, will empower individuals and small businesses alike to take advantage of secure, digital financial solutions.

While the current focus is on ATM transactions,

the Central Bank has made it clear that this is just the beginning. In the near future, LeSwitch’s Card Stream will extend to include retail payments and online transactions, further enhancing the ease and speed of doing business in Lesotho. These planned expansions will integrate point-of-sale terminals and e-commerce platforms into the system, making it possible for businesses and consumers to complete transactions with a simple swipe or click, solidifying Lesotho’s place in the digital economy.

However, it is important to note what LeSwitch will not do. Despite the advancements, it will not replace global card systems like Visa or MasterCard for international transactions. Its scope is purely domestic, designed to streamline and improve payments within Lesotho. Furthermore, LeSwitch is not intended to eliminate cash entirely but to provide better digital alternatives, allowing people to choose what works best for them.

The journey toward full modernization of Lesotho’s financial infrastructure is ongoing, and while LeSwitch represents a giant leap forward, there will be continuous upgrades and improvements. Collaboration between banks, fintech, and the Central Bank, along with public engagement, will be essential to ensuring that LeSwitch reaches its full potential.

For now, the Central Bank of Lesotho encourages all citizens to embrace the convenience and flexibility that the LeSwitch Card Stream offers. With real-time access to funds and more ways to transact.

Legal Blow For Platinum Credit: Court Orders Over M351 Million Payout



The High Court of Lesotho’s Commercial Division, ordered that Platinum Credit Limited pay more than M351 million to Platcorp Holdings Limited and Premier Credit South Africa, following a lengthy legal battle.

The judgment, handed down by His Lordship Justice Mokhesi, marks a major victory for the two financial companies in a case that has highlighted the risks of money laundering within the region’s credit markets.

The Case

The dispute began when Platcorp Holdings and Premier Credit South Africa filed a lawsuit against four defendants: Motena Lishea, Nthabiseng Nthako, Platinum Credit Limited, and the Commissioner of the Central Bank of Lesotho. The crux of the lawsuit revolved around outstanding “debts” owed by Platinum Credit to the plaintiffs. According to the court papers, these debts accumulated over time and resulted in the financial companies seeking legal recourse.

In a judgment, Justice Mokhesi struck down the defenses presented by the first, second, and third defendants — Lishea, Nthako, and Platinum Credit — effectively clearing the way for the plaintiffs to claim the full amount of what was owed.

Judgment Breakdown

The court’s decision involved two key claims made by the plaintiffs. In the first claim, Platinum Credit Limited was ordered to pay a staggering M31,917,600.

This amount will also accrue 18% interest per annum, calculated from October 2022 until the debt is settled.

In the second and far larger claim, the court ordered Platinum Credit to pay an eye-watering M271,143,742. Interest on this sum is set at 15% per annum, starting from October 2023. Combined, these two claims result in a total payout of M351,813,677, a figure that could increase further as interest continues to mount.

Writ of Execution: Bank Accounts Seized

A s
p a r t
of the
court’s
ruling,
a writ

of execution was issued, allowing the court’s sheriff to recover the money owed by seizing Platinum Credit’s assets. On September 26, 2024, the sheriff, Makabelo Ntoi, took swift action and attached over M210 million from Platinum Credit’s accounts at Standard Bank.

According to court documents, these funds were immediately transferred into the trust account of Webber Newdigate Attorneys, the legal team representing Platcorp and Premier Credit. However, despite this significant seizure of funds, Platinum Credit still owes more than M144 million to the plaintiffs, along with any additional interest that will accrue until the final payment is made.

Legal Costs and Further Proceedings

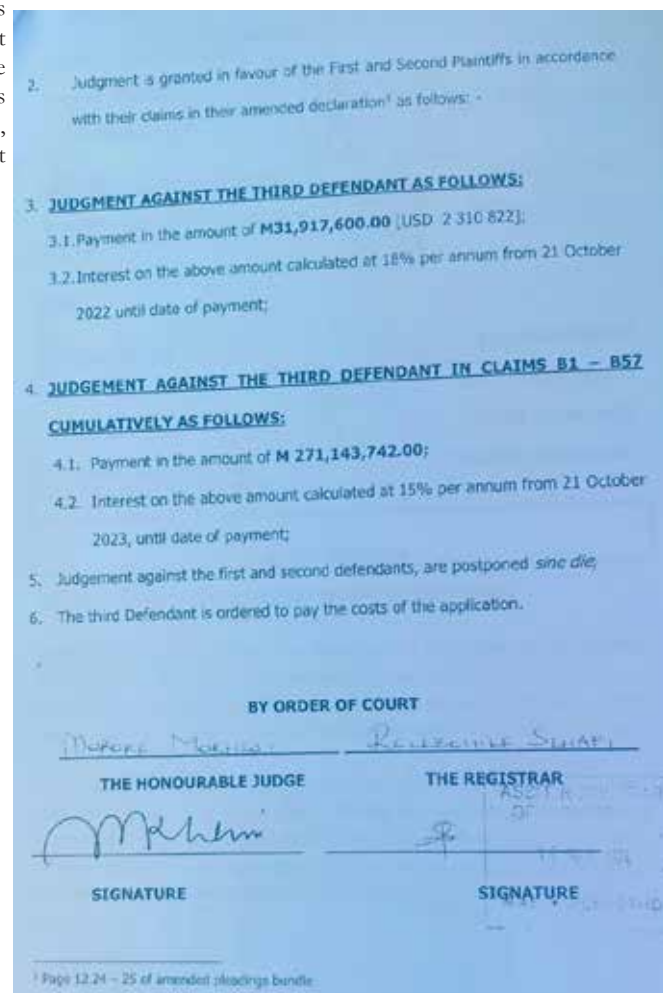
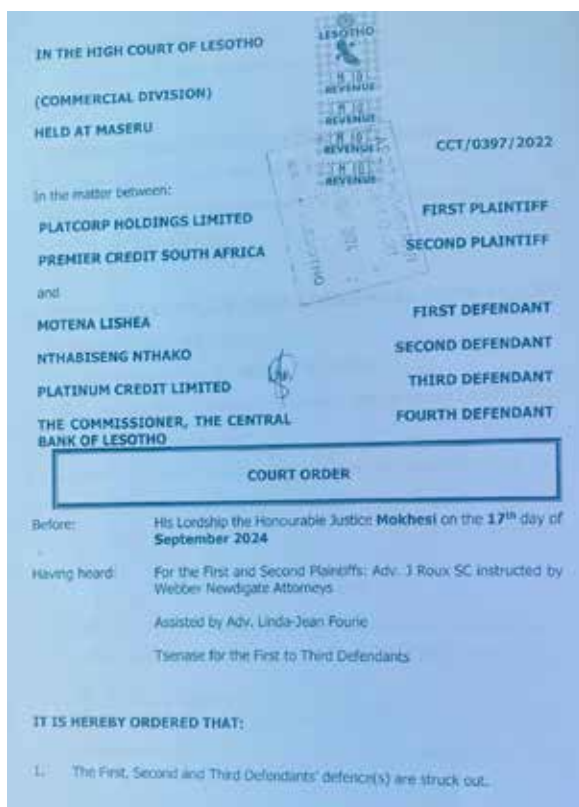
In addition to the massive payout ordered by the court, Platinum Credit Limited will also be responsible for covering the legal costs incurred by the plaintiffs, adding further financial pressure on the company. The court noted that the exact costs would be taxed and determined at a later date, meaning the total amount owed by Platinum Credit could still rise.

Meanwhile, the court postponed judgment against the first and second defendants, Motena Lishea and Nthabiseng Nthako, sine die (indefinitely), meaning their fate in the case remains unresolved for now.

Moving Forward

For now, Platinum Credit faces a significant challenge in settling the remainder of its debt, with more than M144 million still outstanding. As interest continues to accumulate on this amount, the total could grow even higher.

With the sheriff having already seized substantial assets from Platinum Credit’s accounts, the company will be under intense pressure to find a way to fulfill the court’s demands.



MP's training yields no benefit, seen as waste of time



By: Selloane Nyakane

Maseru-

A training session aimed at educating Members of Parliament (MP's) on human rights and country reporting under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and Commonwealth Secretariat sparked criticism among MP's on Tuesday at Lancer Inn hotel.

Trio, MP's namely Lekhetso Rakuoane, Rethabile Letlailane, Montoeli Masoetsa expressed that the training offered no real benefit, according to the trio the time spent on the training which was scheduled to last three days but ended after just one, could have been better utilized in focussing more on pressing issues such as the army brutality against citizens.

They also argued that existing laws should be enforced instead of conducting further seemingly unproductivity training sessions over and over. Delivering his speech, Minister of Justice and Law Richard Ramoetsi stated that the workshop was intended to remind lawmakers of their responsibilities, he emphasized that MP's play a crucial role in serving citizens, particularly in the promotion and protection of human rights.

He further highlighted the importance of Parliamentarians in monitoring human rights reporting as well as the ratification and domestication of

international treaties.

He mentioned that Lesotho is a State Party to major international human right instrument which include, "Civil and Political Rights" the covenant on Economic Social Cultural Rights, Convention Against Torture (CAT) and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

He indicates that the treaties promote respect for inherent human dignity, non discrimination, equality, fairness, liberty and the right to life regardless of the person's race, language, religion, social or political status while remaining subject to the constitution and other national laws.

Additionally the 1993 constitution of Lesotho, in it's chapter II guarantees the respect and promotion and protection of this rights and also the Vienna Declaration and Programmes of Action also affirm that human rights whether civil, political, economic or social are universal and indivisible and also state that states have a duty to respect and fulfill human rights within their own political, economic and cultural systems.

However, there are some challenges the country face which includes lack of specialized person body to report, constraints in decline in Agriculture Production as a result of deteriorating rangelands, Lesotho has also been

vulnerable to global finance crisis, high HIV prevalence rate, Covid-19 of which all require urgent attention when it comes to promotion and protection of human rights.

"Parliamentarians are essential actors to oversee the whole legislative process, adopting the budget, cover the entire range of political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights and thus they have immediate and direct impact on the enjoyment of human rights by people," he stressed

He urged Parliamentarians to be always cognizant of their role at all times at the country's social harmony, peace steady largely depend on the extend on which human rights underpin all parliamentary activities.

The MP's also expressed their concerns where Montoeli Masoetsa, All Basotho Convention (ABC) and also member of Parliament expressed his opinion that Members of Parliament do not need additional sensitization on human rights because the constitution already outlines this rights.

Additionally, he criticized the failure to address or suppress issues involving the army and possibly other sectors. Sharing almost similar sentiments Rethabile Letlailane of Democratic Congress candidate for Lithoteng said the army instill fear to the community.

He voiced concerns about the growing influence of the army in communities, stating politicians should retire

after their terms to avoid falling victim to military power adding that politicians and other men are increasingly acquiring guns forming gangs and inciting violence in neighborhoods.

Letlailane criticized the army's recent actions, accusing them of acting like terrorist with reports of detentions and torture on the rise.

He further raised an issue that families of those killed and tortured by military receive no government support and also the government does not support Members of Parliament to show some remorse and support to such families rather take their own money to travel there.

He called for strict measures against perpetrators, also noting that some Members of Parliament seem to tolerate this behaviour, making it more urgent and necessary to address the issue.

Letsekang Moloi, a Member of Parliament under the Democratic Congress (DC) for the Lebakeng Constituency also raised concern on methods used by Police in detaining and torturing people to extract information.

He said this, is abuse of human rights adding there is a need for law enforcement to operate within legal entities also criticized this approach, implying that Police are focussing on coercive tactics rather than following due process to gather information. It's highly notable that Moloi before venturing into politics has a background as a Police Officer therefore his experience gives very insight to law enforcement.

The LCD leader, Mothejoa Metsing raised a critical points regarding human rights and prison conditions "overcrowding in prisons not only violates human dignity but also highlights systemic issues such as lack of resources and inadequate rehabilitation," he said

He emphasized that building advocacy capacity is crucial to address these challenges, ensuring that education on human rights becomes a priority. Metsing called for a broader understanding of human rights culture among MP's as they are policy makers and shape reforms.

Adding that education on human rights principle is essential in fostering a society that respects and unfolds the rights for all.

The capacity building was attended by seven MP's with the support from the European Union, Commonwealth Secretariat, The Ministry of Law and Justice and Convention of Torture.

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10

Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial

This past week, the nation witnessed a disturbing yet revealing trend: the selective gagging of the press during critical parliamentary proceedings. On Tuesday, the *Lesotho Tribune* was barred from broadcasting certain segments of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearings. The reason? The alleged “sensitive” nature of the information being discussed. These were no ordinary proceedings. At the heart of the investigation lies Mergence and Akani Financial Services, corrupt trustees accused of capturing Lesotho’s largest pension fund. And again, on Thursday, the **Lesotho Tribune** faced another block—this time during a hearing involving the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), investigating accusations of torture and the suspicious deaths of two men.

This raises fundamental questions: **How much do we, the public, deserve to know?**

And why, in moments that demand transparency, are we being left in the dark?

The role of the media, particularly a publication like the *Lesotho Tribune*, is not merely to entertain or offer opinions. Its core responsibility is to inform the public, to be a conduit for the truth, and to hold power to account.

The PAC’s investigation into the alleged capture of the pension fund by Mergence and Akani Financial Services is of monumental public interest. The fund is the lifeblood of Lesotho’s pensioners, those who’ve worked their whole lives and are now dependent on the integrity of that system. Any hint of corruption or mismanagement directly

EDITORIAL

The truth, is never too sensitive to be heard



affects the livelihoods of thousands of Basotho. To withhold coverage of such proceedings is to deny them insight into matters that affect their financial future.

Transparency, especially in matters of public interest, should be non-negotiable. When the proceedings of a parliamentary committee are cloaked in secrecy, when critical information is deemed too “sensitive” for the public ear, it begs the question: sensitive for whom? Is it sensitive because it may expose the depths of corruption and negligence, or is it sensitive because the revelations may threaten the very institutions that have long operated with impunity?

It is easy to argue that not all information should be public, especially if it involves national security or could incite unnecessary panic. But this is not the case with the Mergence and Akani scandal. Financial services companies managing public funds should be subject to the highest level of scrutiny. By barring the media from reporting, Parliament inadvertently fosters suspicion and distrust. *It gives the impression that the hearings may not be about truth and justice, but rather*

about protecting certain individuals or entities from the consequences of their actions.

Then, there is Thursday’s gag order involving the LDF. The military is an institution that holds immense power and, as recent events have shown, can wield it in ways that have deadly consequences [Literally & figuratively!]. The deaths of two men and the allegations of torture at the hands of the LDF should set off alarms in any democratic nation.

For Parliament to stop the press from airing this segment of the hearing is deeply troubling. When the military is called into question, the stakes are higher. The actions of the LDF, an institution sworn to protect the people, are under scrutiny. **Why should the public be denied full transparency into such a serious matter?**

We must be wary of the path Lesotho seems to be treading. History has shown us that corruption thrives in darkness, and institutions emboldened by the lack of oversight grow ever more dangerous. By blocking the press, Parliament signals that it prioritizes protecting cer-

tain interests over serving the people.

This isn’t just about the *Lesotho Tribune*. It’s about the very fabric of our democracy. The free flow of information is the cornerstone of any functioning democracy. When you stifle the media, you stifle the voice of the people. You deny them their right to know, to question, and to demand accountability from those who govern.

Will we be a nation that values transparency, that trusts its people with the truth, or will we slide into an era where information is selectively filtered, where inconvenient truths are buried, and where those in power operate in the shadows?

It’s time for the legislature to ask itself: Who are we serving? If the answer is the people, then let us know the full story. The pension fund scandal, the military’s actions, and any other matter of public interest should be out in the open.

Lesotho deserves no less. The truth, after all, is never too sensitive to be heard.



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Lesotho Tribune

BY: Staff Reporter

In Tuesday, 24 September 2024, Lesotho's Prime Minister, Sam Matekane, took to his X account (formerly Twitter) to inform the nation that he and the delegation he is leading at the UN General Assembly met with Starlink CEO Elon Musk. He announced, "Today, I had the pleasure of meeting with Elon Musk, to discuss advancing connectivity in Lesotho. We are committed to exploring innovative solutions to improving internet access and bridging the digital divide for our people. Exciting developments lie ahead."

This statement marked a significant development in the country's push to bridge the digital divide. Lesotho, like many other African countries, struggles with limited internet access and high costs, leaving a significant portion of the population offline. The introduction of Starlink, SpaceX's satellite internet service, promises faster and more reliable internet access across the country, but will it be affordable for the average Basotho?

Lesotho Tribune sought comment from both the office of the prime minister and minister of communications but both were unable to divulge details of the prime minister's meeting with Elon Musk.

For the benefit of the entire country Lesotho Tribune analysed what "arrival" of Starlink will mean for consumers in Lesotho.

Current Internet Pricing in Lesotho

At present, two major players dominate Lesotho's internet service market: **Econet Telecom Lesotho** and **Vodacom Lesotho**. Both offer entry-level internet packages that provide unlimited data, but their services, pricing, and features vary:

Econet Telecom Lesotho offers an entry-level fibre or mobile package with 40Mbps download speed and 25Mbps upload speed for M649 per month. This package includes a fair usage policy (FUP) of 150GB, after which the speed may be throttled. The setup cost, including the modem, is M2500.

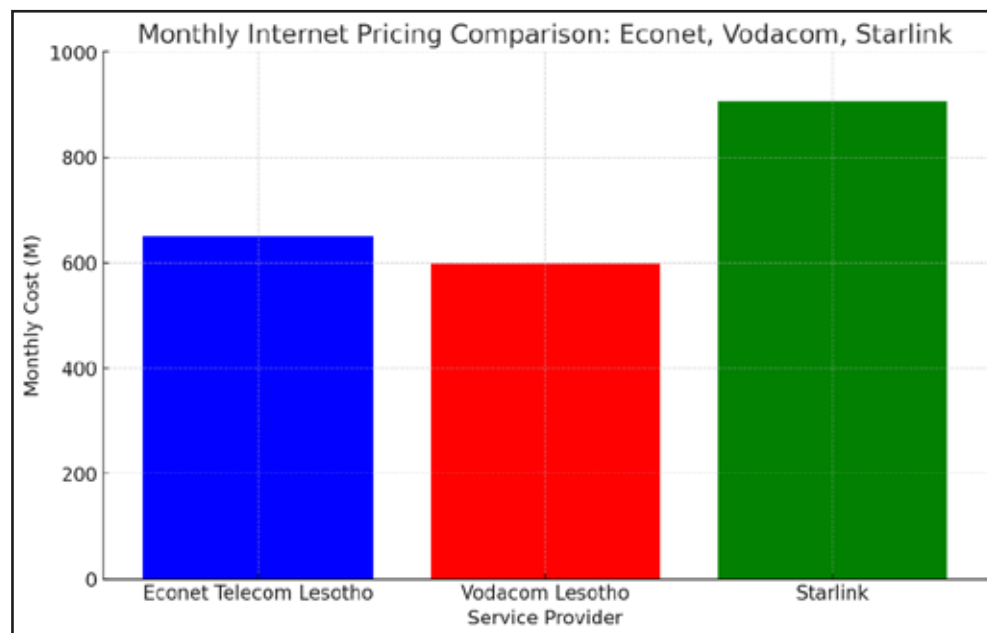
Vodacom Lesotho provides uncapped internet through fixed wireless technology at an average speed of 15Mbps. The monthly cost for this service is slight-

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Lesotho's Starlink Deal: A Promising Step Towards Bridging the Digital Divide, But...



Lesotho's Prime Minister, Sam Matekane poses for a photo with Starlink founder Elon Musk



ly lower at M599, and the setup cost is M2400. This package is ideal for small businesses or home offices but comes with slower speeds compared to Econet.

Starlink, based on Botswana pricing and adjusted for inflation, offers much faster speeds through satellite technology. However, it comes at a higher cost: M6354.50 for the hardware and a monthly subscription of M907.03. While this may offer a premium service, the high setup and monthly costs may limit its appeal to the average consumer.

Socioeconomic Barriers to Uptake

Despite the promising introduction of Starlink, the socioeconomic landscape in Lesotho may hinder its rapid adoption. According to the latest available data, by the end of 2022, approximately 47.0 percent of Lesotho's population had access to the internet, leaving

53.0 percent – around 1.24 million people – offline. With a large portion of the population living in rural areas where poverty levels are high, affordability remains a critical challenge.

Number of people with access to internet, source World Bank 2022.

Lesotho's economy, with a high unemployment rate and widespread poverty, means that even the existing services provided by Econet and Vodacom can be financially burdensome for many. Starlink's higher pricing for both hardware and monthly subscriptions may make it inaccessible for the majority, at least in the short term.

However, Starlink's presence could still serve as a catalyst for price competition. With the potential entry of a third player in the market, Vodacom and Econet will be forced to revise their pricing strategies in an attempt to retain customers. Price cuts, more competitive service bundles, or improved speeds could be part of their response to avoid losing market share.

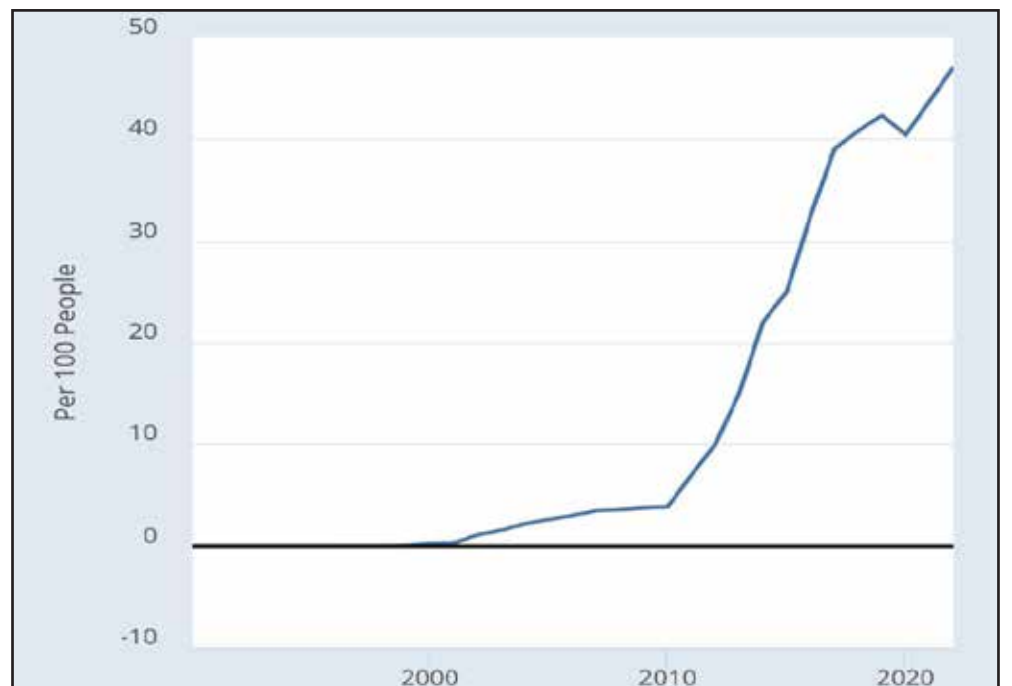
Impact on Digital Inclusion

The digital divide in Lesotho is significant, with rural areas particularly underserved. Starlink's satellite-based technology could be a game-changer, offering internet access in areas where terrestrial infrastructure like fibre and mobile networks are lacking. This has the potential to boost educational opportunities, improve access to health services, and promote economic development in these regions.

Yet, for Starlink to make a real impact, there needs to be a balance between its high-quality service and affordability. Policymakers may need to consider subsidies or partnerships to ensure that the most underserved populations can benefit from this technology.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Sam Matekane's meeting with Elon Musk and the potential introduction of Starlink to Lesotho signals a significant step toward improving internet access in the country. While the high costs may limit initial adoption, the competitive pressure on existing providers like Econet Telecom Lesotho and Vodacom Lesotho could result in lower prices and better services for consumers. Ultimately, bridging Lesotho's digital divide will require a combination of innovation, competition, and careful economic planning to ensure that all Basotho can benefit from the opportunities that come with being connected to the world.



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AFRICA

ANC wants to continue repatriating freedom fighters who passed away in exile, as some remains brought back



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Lesotho Tribune

By Staff Reporter

African National Congress (ANC) secretary general Fikile Mbalula said in honor of the former liberation heroes and heroines who were buried in Zambia and Zimbabwe, government must continue its programme of repatriating those who passed away in exile, so that families are assured closure.

Mbalula was speaking in Pretoria during the repatriation and restitution homecoming ceremony of South African freedom fighters who lost their lives in Zambia and Zimbabwe during the apartheid era, where he pointed out that repatriation of those buried in countries such as Tanzania, Angola, Uganda, Lesotho, Mozambique, and others will follow.

President Cyril Ramaphosa officiated Friday's ceremony.

The remains of over forty former liberation heroes and heroines were brought back to South Africa on Wednesday, after decades of exile, with Mbalula saying this represented various generations, united by the desire to liberate their motherland.

He said the homecoming was a culmination of extensive work over the years by the ANC government, highlighting that many hurdles had to be overcome to correctly trace the final resting places of the free-

dom fighters.

"Some have been quick to claim easy victories and arrogate this homecoming to their preferred leaders. This homecoming is a culmination of years of painstaking work by the ANC to fulfil a commitment to the families to bring their loved ones home," he stated.

The frontline States that stood as a bulwark against the aggression of the apartheid State gave the

ANC's struggle momentum and rallied the continent and the world, Mbalula noted.

He pointed to the "indelible" role that Zambia and Zimbabwe played in giving the ANC's struggle momentum.

"Both Zambia and Zimbabwe became victims not only of cross border raids and strikes, but also assassinations, bombs, grenades and other attacks. Despite these they

remained steadfast in their solidarity with the liberation movements and peoples of South Africa," he said.

However, he noted the bitter-sweet moment of bringing back the remains of these freedom fighters to South Africa, as they were never able to taste the fruits of freedom in their homeland, let alone see their loved ones

Polity.org.za





Empty Leg Flight

"An empty leg flight is also referred to as a repositioning leg. This is a segment of a trip that places an aircraft in the correct location for the next flight. Individuals can seek to purchase individual flight tickets when these empty leg flights become available"



Group Charters

"The option to rent (charter) an aircraft as a group from a departure/destination of your choice. Whether you want to give your employees an experience of a life time or whether as individuals who want to organise an escapade to Durban, a group charter will allow you to decrease the individual's cost"



Aerial Survey Charters

"Aerial survey is a method of collecting geomatics or other imagery by using airplanes. Companies or NGOs use such when satellite imagery lacks the resolution required. For example mapping land to build an electrical grid, or for assessing land for a housing estate development"



Air Cargo Charters

"The renting (charter) of an aircraft or space in the cargo bay of the plane (freight forwarding) to ship your goods from your departure/destination of choice. We provide the full package of AWB and customs clearing. If you have something perishable or valuable in large quantity that needs shipping - we're your go to service provider"



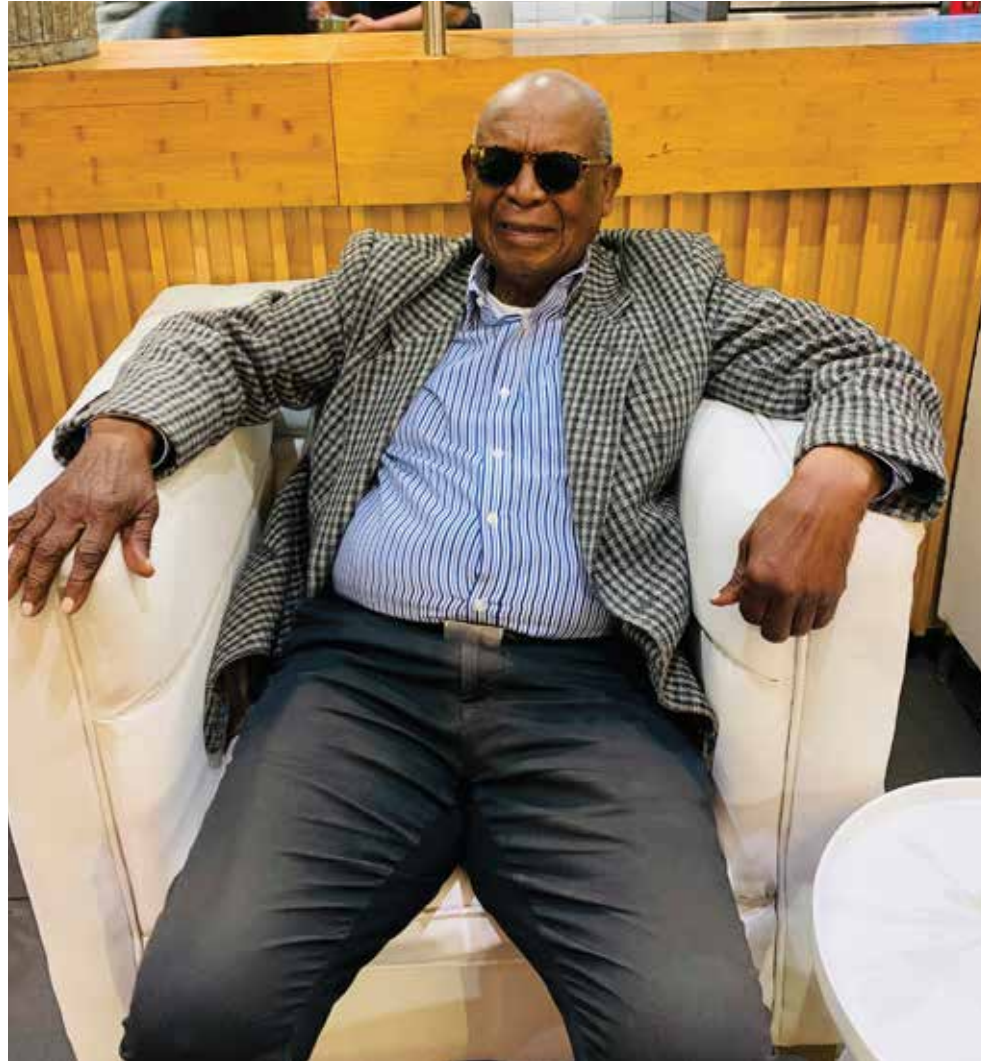
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Befitting panegyric for ntate Meshu

By Mahlomola Letsie

Veteran freedom fighter cum celebrated artist, Meshu Mokitimi, was on Thursday night showered with an exclusive encomiastic fund raising dinner at the famed opulent eatery in Maseru, The Market.

PR And Network Africa, a vibrant come of age marketing and events firm, under the tutelage of young people, machinated the event to celebrate and honour the nonagenarian who has sold countless artworks across the globe.



In his words, ntate Meshu, called himself a doormat which had transformed into a relic. He reminisced about how he used to share an apartment with the legendary American muso, Miles Davis. He further recalled how Miles Davis spouse sang praises of ntate Meshu in front of the then crown prince and now Lesotho's monarch, King Letsie III.

One of the organizers, Libe Mohale, when praising ntate Meshu before blissful crowd inside The Market, aptly named him the Picasso of our time.





16

Lesotho Tribune

By Litšitso Letsunyane

The Lesotho National Under 20 Football team, known as Makoanyane XI, opened their COSAFA group stage qualifiers with a challenging match, suffering a narrow 1-0 loss to U-20 Comoros on Friday, September 27, 2024. The encounter took place at ABB Stadium 2 in Mozambique, and the match kicked off at 12 PM.

Despite the defeat, Makoanyane XI showcased promise throughout the match, particularly in the first half where they created numerous scoring opportunities. Left winger Paseka Maile emerged as a standout player, frequently threatening the Comoros defense. However, his efforts were hampered by delayed passes and a lack of support in the final third. Makoanyane XI's inability to capitalize on their chances was evident, leading to missed opportunities that could have changed the game's outcome.

The team's young goalkeeper, Leduma Mofoka, was another bright spot in an otherwise disappointing match. Mofoka made several impressive saves that kept Lesotho in contention, he definitely demonstrated his growing reputation in Lesotho football.

As the match progressed, Makoanyane XI lost momentum in the second half, allowing Comoros to seize control. The turning point came in the 81st minute when 21-year-old French-based striker Ben-Chayeel Hamada scored the decisive goal for Comoros, sealing the match at 1-0.

ARTS & SPORTS

Makoanyane XI Faces Tough Start in COSAFA U-20 Qualifiers



In a post-match interview, Comoros' coach, Youssef Samirdine, acknowledged his team's lackluster performance in the first half but praised their resurgence after halftime. He expressed respect for the Lesotho side and emphasized the importance of their opening win in the tournament.

Conversely, Makoanyane XI's coach, Halemakale, reflected on the match with a mix of pride and disappointment. He highlighted the significant chances his team missed in the first half that they could have used to

kill the game off early and noted that their relaxed demeanor in the second half contributed to the late goal conceded. Halemakale pointed out the challenges faced by some players who are also preparing for upcoming school exams, affecting their training schedules ahead of their COSAFA campaign. He remains optimistic and plans to emphasize concentration and discipline during matches as the team prepares for their next matches.

Looking ahead, Makoanyane XI is set to face South Africa U-20 on Sunday, September 29, at 3 PM, followed

by a clash with Malawi on Tuesday, October 1, at the same time.

South Africa currently leads Group C after a commanding 5-0 victory over Malawi, with Comoros in second place. Lesotho and Malawi share the bottom spot, putting pressure on Makoanyane XI to secure crucial points in their upcoming fixtures.

As the tournament progresses, Makoanyane XI will need to build on their early performances and capitalize on the opportunities that arise if they hope to advance in the competition.