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MASERU, LESOTHO

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**MOHAHLAULA**  
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# High Court Intervenes as Magistrate Accused of Using the Bench to Punish Accused

By Staff Reporters

The High Court has ordered Magistrate Mamorojele Qoo to deliver a ruling within 24 hours on a bail application in a case where she is accused of being conflicted.

Justice Polo Banyane issued the directive after hearing an urgent application brought by Thato Masheane of Ha-Motloheloa in Maseru, who has been in custody since 2 January this year.

Masheane alleges that Magistrate Qoo deliberately delayed her bail application as a form of punishment, citing a close personal and familial relationship between the magistrate and the complainant in the matter, 'Manthatasi Sekonyela.

According to Masheane, she was first accused of theft by Sekonyela in July last year, arrested, and detained for seven days at Maseru Central Police Station before being released without charge.

She told the court that during that detention she fell ill due to inhalation of coal smoke from the police holding cells, and that Sekonyela later paid her medical bills.

However, Masheane alleges that the investigating



officer subsequently handed her personal cellphone and medical booklet to Sekonyela, who retained them.

Masheane was arrested again on 2 January this year for the same alleged offence and was taken to court immediately, where she applied for bail. The application was not opposed by the prosecution, yet bail was not granted. She contends that the magistrate's refusal to rule on the application was influenced by bias arising from her relationship with the complainant.

In an affidavit before the High Court, Masheane detailed what she described as extensive personal connections between Magistrate Qoo and the Sekonyela

family.

She alleged that the complainant's husband, Advocate Borenahabokhethe Sekonyela, is the brother of the magistrate's father, making them close blood relatives. She further stated that this relationship is reflected in the magistrate's maiden name, Mpati Sekonyela.

Masheane also told the court that in 2023 Magistrate Qoo hosted her birthday celebration at The Market, which both Masheane and the complainant attended. She further alleged that in 2024, when Magistrate Qoo's house was damaged by fire, the magistrate contacted the complainant for assistance. At the time, Masheane was still em-

ployed by Sekonyela and was instructed to transport the magistrate's children to Sekonyela's home, where they stayed under her care. "With the greatest respect and humility, I consider this to be the greatest abuse of power by the learned magistrate, which flagrantly violates my rights as a citizen and a human being," Masheane stated. Masheane argued that her continued detention since 2 January infringes her constitutional right to personal liberty and that her bail application was urgent. She also told the court that her hospitality business has been left unattended during her incarceration and risks collapsing, particularly as it is still at an early stage.

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# Minister Alleviates Concerns Over School Buses

By: Staff Reporters

MASERU

The Minister of Public Works and Transport, Mr. Matjato Neo Moteane, has addressed growing concerns on social media regarding school buses, also known as Noah motor vehicles. In a statement, Minister Moteane clarified that the ministry is yet to receive recommendations from the relevant Board on the matter, and therefore, no decisions have been made.

According to Minister Moteane, the Board is required to follow due process, and he will await their recommendations before making a final decision. He also explained the legal position on passenger capacity, citing the Road Traffic Regulations of 1981, Regulation 103(1), which outlines how children are counted in vehicles.

The regulations state that children under three years old are not counted as passengers, two children between three and six years old are counted as one person, and three children between six and 13 years old are counted as two persons. Minister Moteane emphasized



that passenger capacity is determined by law, not by the Board.

The Minister urged the public to remain patient

and rely on official announcements, which will be communicated through appropriate channels. He assured that

once the Board submits its recommendations, he will carefully consider them before making a final decision.

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# Lesotho And WFP Reaffirm Partnership To Fight Hunger And Malnutrition

By: Lemohang Botsane

MASERU

The World Food Programme (WFP) has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Lesotho's development agenda, particularly in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. On Wednesday, WFP Representative and Country Director, Ms. Anna Mukiibi-Bunya, presented her letters of credence to Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, Mr. Lejone Mpotjoane, marking a significant milestone in the long-standing partnership between Lesotho and WFP.

During the ceremony, Minister Mpotjoane expressed the government's deep appreciation for WFP's unwavering support, guided by the Second-Generation Country Strategic Plan, which is aligned with Lesotho's National Strategic Development Plan II and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 17 (Partnerships).



"We reaffirm our commitment to supporting WFP's mandate and strengthening collaboration in building resilient food systems, protecting vulnerable populations, and advancing sustainable development for all Basotho," he said. Ms. Mukiibi-Bunya echoed the sentiment, highlighting WFP's impactful interventions in Lesotho, including school feeding

programmes, emergency assistance, nutrition initiatives, and climate-resilient support for vulnerable communities. "WFP remains committed to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in Lesotho, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with the government to achieve our shared goals," she said. Over the years, WFP

has played a critical role in supporting Lesotho's efforts to address hunger and malnutrition, particularly among vulnerable populations. The partnership has yielded significant results, including improved food security, increased access to education, and enhanced resilience to climate-related shocks.

As Lesotho continues to grapple with the challenges of poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, the partnership with WFP remains a vital component of the country's development agenda. The government is committed to strengthening this partnership, with a focus on building sustainable food systems, promoting nutrition, and supporting climate-resilient agriculture. The reaffirmation of partnership between Lesotho and WFP comes at a critical time, as the country seeks to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs and realizing its vision of a prosperous and food-secure nation.

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# High Court Orders Exhumation, Compensation in Naledi Funeral Planners Case

By: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

The High Court of Lesotho has issued a detailed consent order in a sensitive case involving Naledi Funeral Planners (Pty) Ltd and two bereaved families, directing that two bodies be exhumed, proper burials be conducted, and compensation be paid.

The matter was heard in the High Court sitting in Maseru before Justice Banyane. The applicant in the case was Naledi Funeral Planners (Pty) Ltd. The respondents included Pulane Ramohapi, Lerenyane Khohlooa, Senekane D07 Community Council, Chief Matlole Matlole, the Ministry of Health, the Officer Commanding Pitso Ground Police, the Commissioner of Police, and the Attorney General.

After hearing the parties and by consent, the court made an order setting out clear steps that must be followed to resolve the dispute surrounding the burials of the late Seabata Samuel Ramohapi and Khotso Elliot Khohlooa.

The court directed that Naledi Funeral Planners is permitted and ordered to exhume the body of the late Seabata Samuel Ramohapi at Ha Khohlooa, where he was buried, and return it to the applicant's mortuary.

The exhumation must be carried out no later than 29 January 2026. It must take place in the presence of all interested parties.

These include Naledi Funeral Planners, the affected families of Khohlooa and Ramohapi, and all other cited respondents. This condition was included to ensure transparency and to



avoid further disputes. Once the exhumation has been done, the bereaved families will be free to bury their loved ones according to their own wishes. The court order clearly states that the families may bury Seabata Samuel Ramohapi and Khotso Elliot Khohlooa "in a manner and places of their choice." This gives the families full authority to decide where and how the final burials will take place, bringing an end to uncertainty over the resting places of the deceased.

The court further ordered that Naledi Funeral Planners must bear the full costs of the exhumation process. In addition, the funeral company must cover the burial expenses of both deceased persons. The order sets out specific amounts and obligations for each family.

For the Khohlooa family, Naledi Funeral Planners is directed to pay M21, 900 for necessary burial costs and related expenses. Over and above this cash payment, the company must also buy a cow, valued at M13, 000, together with the Khohlooa family, and deliver it to them for burial purposes.

For the Ramohapi family, the applicant is directed to pay M29, 400 for burial

costs and related expenses. The court instructed that these amounts must be deposited into bank accounts to be provided by the concerned families. Payment must be made no later than 28 January 2026.

Beyond the financial obligations, Naledi Funeral Planners has also been ordered to provide caskets for the burial of both deceased persons.

The company must further provide transport for the delivery of the remains of Khotso Elliot Khohlooa and Seabata Samuel Ramohapi to their respective families. It must also provide transport from the families' homes to the graveyard on the day of burial.

These measures are meant to ensure that the families do not carry any further logistical burden in laying their loved ones to rest.

In a significant part of the order, the court directed that Naledi Funeral Planners must compensate the two affected families in the amount of M60, 000 each. This compensation is separate from burial costs. The money is to be paid in six monthly instalments of M10, 000.

For the Khohlooa family, payment is to start on 28 January 2026. For the Ramohapi family, payment

is to commence at the end of February 2026.

This staggered payment plan was set to allow the applicant to meet its obligations while ensuring that the families receive compensation over a defined period.


To ensure that the order is followed, the court directed all parties to appear before it on 4 February 2026. On that date, the parties are expected to report on the level of compliance with the order.

This return date gives the court an opportunity to check whether the exhumation has taken place, whether payments have begun, and whether the other conditions, such as provision of caskets and transport, are being met. Importantly, the order was made by consent of the parties. This means the court did not impose the terms after a contested judgment, but rather recorded an agreement reached between those involved.

The structure of the order reflects an attempt to balance accountability with the urgent need to give the families dignity, closure, and the freedom to bury their loved ones in accordance with their wishes. The detailed nature of the ruling, covering exhumation, costs, compensation, transport, and continued court supervision, shows the seriousness with which the court treated the matter.

For the affected families, the order opens a path toward proper burial arrangements and a measure of compensation, after what has clearly been a painful and difficult experience. The matter is expected to return to court in early February, when progress on the execution of the order will be formally reviewed.

# THE BUDGET — UNDER OATH —



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# 10

Lesotho Tribune

By: Lemohang Botsane

Maseru

The Central Bank of Lesotho this week delivered a Monetary Policy Committee statement that was less about celebration and more about discipline. At its core was a familiar message, but one that matters: the loti-rand peg remains non-negotiable. Governor Dr Maluke Letete (pictured below) outlined an international environment that is stabilising, but not settled. The International Monetary Fund has marginally revised global growth upward, supported largely by technology investment in North America and parts of Asia. Inflation pressures have eased in several major economies

## BUSINESS & ECONOMY

### CBL Holds the Line as Reserves Surge and Risks Gather



as energy prices softened, allowing some central banks to begin cutting policy rates. Yet the optimism is measured. Trade tensions remain volatile. Geopolitical fault lines are unresolved. Public debt levels in many economies remain high. These are not abstract global risks.

For a small, open economy like Lesotho, they transmit quickly through trade, capital flows and confidence. South Africa, Lesotho's anchor economy, recorded a modest uptick in business cycle indicators in the final quarter of 2025. Inflation there has continued to ease,

supported by a firmer rand and lower oil prices, although food price pressures persist in areas such as meat due to foot-and-mouth disease disruptions. The South African Reserve Bank held its policy rate at 6.75 percent, a stance that inev-

*Continues in Page 11*

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*Continued from Page 10*

itably shapes Lesotho's own monetary posture. Domestically, the picture is mixed.

The economy rebounded between October and November 2025, supported by stronger domestic demand, a buoyant financial sector and increased private sector credit. Imports also picked up. However, this recovery was uneven. Manufacturing contracted, weighed down by weaker textile exports to the United States. Transport activity softened, reflecting lower fuel consumption and subdued industrial momentum. Looking ahead, growth is expected to remain modest. The anticipated renewal of AGOA and higher SACU revenues offer some support. But reliance on preferential trade arrangements and customs transfers underscores the economy's structural vulnerabilities. Trade uncertainty has not disappeared.

Inflation in Lesotho eased to 4.1 percent in December 2025 from 4.3 percent in November, largely driven by lower food and fuel prices and exchange rate movements. The MPC, however, expects inflation to average around 4.7 percent in the medium term, suggesting that price pressures re-

main embedded.

On the fiscal side, the numbers warrant attention. The deficit stood at 4.5 percent of GDP in November 2025, reflecting weaker revenue collection and elevated expenditure. The shortfall was financed through a drawdown of government deposits. Public debt declined to 53.9 percent of GDP, primarily due to favourable exchange rate movements that reduced the local currency value of external debt. This improvement is welcome, but it is partly technical rather than structural. The most significant development lies in the external position. Net International Reserves rose by approximately US\$108.73 million to reach US\$1.22 billion as of January 21, 2026. This places reserves comfortably above the existing target floor. In a country operating under a currency peg, reserves are not cosmetic. They are the first line of defence.

The MPC resolved to raise the NIR target floor to US\$860 million from US\$830 million, reinforcing its commitment to the credibility of the peg. The policy rate was maintained at 6.50 percent per annum, signalling continuity and alignment with regional

conditions.

The message from the Central Bank is clear: stability first.

The loti-rand peg anchors inflation expectations, facilitates trade with South Africa and underpins financial system confidence. Preserving it requires adequate reserves, policy credibility and fiscal coordination. The surge in reserves strengthens that position. But reserves alone do not substitute for structural reform, export diversification and fiscal consolidation.

Lesotho's economy remains exposed to external shocks, particularly shifts in global trade policy and developments in South Africa. The easing of inflation and the accumulation of reserves provide breathing room. Whether that space is used to

deepen resilience will determine how durable this stability proves to be.

Key Signals from the MPC

- Global growth is projected to remain resilient, supported by technology investment in advanced economies.
- Global inflation is moderating, though risks remain.
- Trade tensions, geopolitical disruptions and elevated public debt pose ongoing threats to stability.
- Domestic growth is expected to be modest, supported by AGOA renewal and higher SACU revenues.
- Inflation is projected to average around 4.7 percent in the medium term.
- Net International Reserves have strengthened, reinforcing the credibility of the loti-rand peg.

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# Court Awaits Update in MP's Corruption Case

By: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

The High Court is expected to receive a progress report on February 23, 2026, regarding preparations for the hearing of a corruption case involving the current Member of Parliament for Matlakeng Constituency, Dr. Mahali Phamotse. She is jointly charged with 'Mapaseka Kolotsane and Ratsiu Majara. The matter is before the High Court under Justice Molefi Makara. In November last year, the court ruled that the case was not yet ready to proceed to trial and could not be allocated a hearing date. This decision followed submissions by both the prosecution and the defence that key pre-trial requirements had not been completed. At the centre of the delay is the issue of full discovery of documents. Discovery is a crucial stage in criminal proceedings, as it allows the defence to access all documents and evidence that the prosecution intends to rely on during trial. The court was informed that this process had not been fully concluded. The defence teams for the accused persons told the court that the prosecution had not yet furnished them with all the documents required to properly prepare their case. They further indicated that some of the documents that were provided were either unclear or illegible, making them unusable for effective preparation. As a result, the defence requested that these documents be replaced with clear and readable copies. Justice Makara agreed that proceeding to trial without full and proper disclosure of documents would be un-



fair and could prejudice the accused persons. He therefore ruled that the matter could not move forward until the outstanding issues had been resolved. Another important issue discussed during the November appearance was the status of the Pre-Trial Conference. A Pre-Trial Conference is a formal meeting held before the trial begins, where parties clarify issues, agree on certain facts, and narrow down the matters that will be contested during the trial. This process is meant to ensure that trials run smoothly and without unnecessary delays. The court directed that the Pre-Trial Conference be revisited. This decision was influenced by the fact that Advocate Shaun Abrahams, who had initially been assigned to prosecute the matter, no longer holds a brief in the case. His withdrawal meant that certain procedural steps needed to be reconsidered and, where necessary, repeated under the guidance of the current prosecutor. The prosecution is now being led by Advocate Peleha Joala. The court expects that by the next appearance, the prosecution and defence will have addressed all pending pre-trial matters, including full discovery and the proper conduct of a Pre-Trial Conference. The update scheduled for

February 23 is therefore significant. It will allow the court to assess whether sufficient progress has been made to ensure that the matter is finally ready for trial. If the court is satisfied that all requirements have been met, it is expected that a hearing date will then be set.

Dr. Phamotse and her co-accused are facing serious allegations linked to a government tender issued in 2015. At the time of the alleged offences, Dr. Phamotse was serving as the Minister of Education and Training.

According to the prosecution, the accused persons unlawfully influenced the awarding of a High Schools Textbooks Tender to two companies, Epic Printers and Molumeli (Pty) Ltd. The tender related to the development, printing, supply, and delivery of textbooks and teachers' guides for Grade 5 under the national curriculum. It is alleged that Dr. Phamotse abused her authority as minister by improperly influencing the tender process. The prosecution claims that she took undue advantage of her position to ensure that the tender was awarded to the named companies.

One of the key allegations is that the tender bid document was unlawfully amended.

The prosecution alleges that changes were made to the required years of experience stipulated in the tender, allegedly to favour specific bidders. These amendments are said to have undermined the fairness and transparency of the procurement process.

The state contends that such actions, if proven, would amount to corruption and abuse of office, as public officials are required by law to act in the best

interests of the state and follow established procurement procedures. Dr. Phamotse and her co-accused have denied the allegations. Their legal representatives maintain that their clients are innocent and will contest the charges when the matter eventually goes to trial. They have also insisted on full disclosure of all evidence to ensure a fair trial.

Corruption cases involving senior public officials often attract significant public attention, particularly where large government tenders and public funds are involved. This case is no exception, as it touches on the education sector and the procurement of learning materials for schools. The court has emphasized the importance of ensuring that all legal procedures are properly followed before the trial begins. Justice Makara has repeatedly stressed that while the court is keen to see matters finalized without unnecessary delay, this cannot be done at the expense of fairness and due process.

As the February 23 date approaches, all eyes will be on whether the prosecution has completed its outstanding obligations and whether the defence is satisfied that it has received all necessary information. The outcome of the progress update will determine the next steps in a case that has already experienced delays but remains of high public interest.

If a hearing date is eventually set, the trial is expected to shed light on how the tender was awarded and whether any laws were broken in the process. Until then, the matter remains in the pre-trial stage, with the court awaiting confirmation that it is finally ready to proceed.



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Lesotho Tribune

By Staff Reporters

A Lesotho-based human rights organisation has formally petitioned South Africa's Parliament to scrap passport controls at the Lesotho–South Africa border, arguing that the current system is constitutionally outdated and socially harmful.

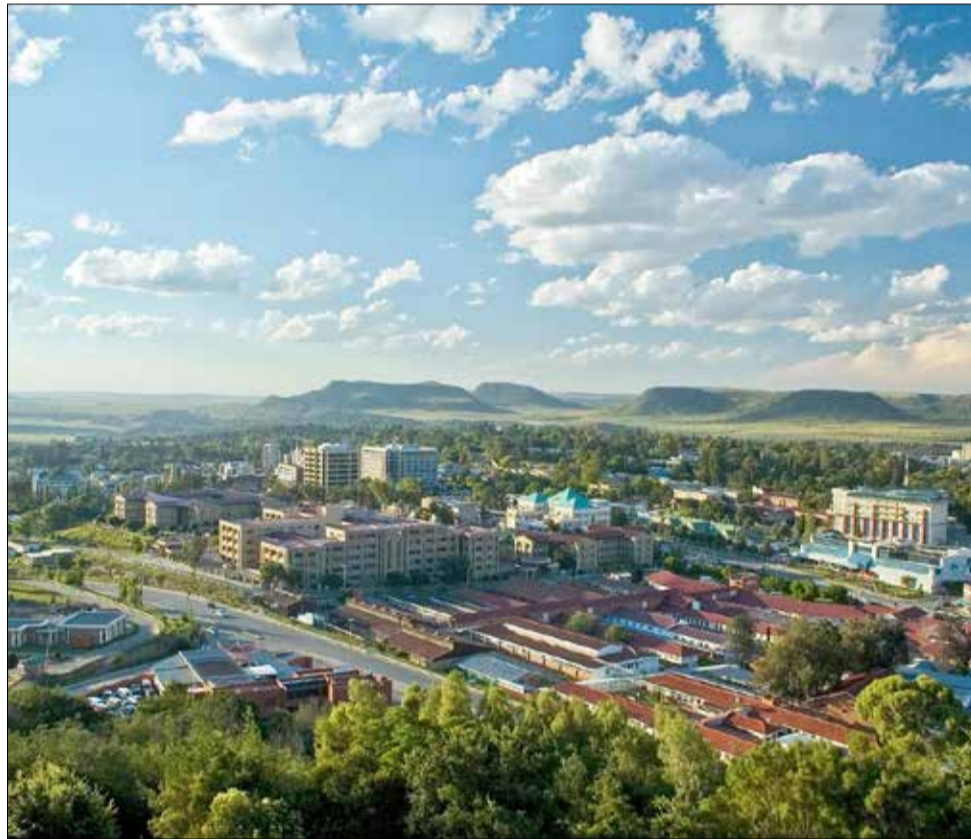
Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution, commonly known as Section Two, says the long-standing passport requirement no longer reflects the political and social realities of the two countries. In its submission, the group contends that the rule, introduced in 1963, originated in an era defined by apartheid-era security controls and racialised movement restrictions.

Although South Africa has since transitioned to democracy, Section Two argues that the legal architecture governing cross-border movement has not meaningfully evolved. The organisation maintains that mandatory passport controls undermine constitutional principles such as dignity,

equality and freedom of movement. A Border That Cuts Through Communities Lesotho remains geographically encircled by South Africa. Families, language groups and economic networks span both sides of the border, often predating colonial demarcations. According to the petition, the border regime disrupts social and economic life for thousands of people whose daily routines involve movement between the two countries. The group argues that what appears administratively routine in Pretoria or Maseru translates into significant hardship at community level.

Section Two also highlights operational failures within Lesotho's passport system, citing prolonged backlogs that can leave applicants waiting months for travel documents. The delays, it argues, carry serious consequences. Families reportedly miss

funerals, births and urgent medical situations. Cross-border workers risk losing employment when documentation lapses. In more desperate circumstances, some individuals attempt to cross through informal routes along the Mohokare, also known as the Caledon River, exposing themselves to drowning, arrest, deportation and criminal charges. The organisation contends that these realities illustrate a policy framework disconnected from lived experience along the border. Proposed Alternative Rather than abolishing border controls entirely, Section Two proposes a shift from passport-based entry to national identity document recognition between the two states. The group argues that ID-based travel would preserve sovereign border management while acknowledging the deep socio-economic integra-



tion between Lesotho and South Africa.

South Africa's Parliamentary Petitions Office has confirmed receipt of the submission. However, it noted that international agreements fall within the competence of the Executive branch rather than Parliament.

Section Two coordinator Kananelo Boloetse acknowledged the procedural response but said it side-stepped the substantive issue.

"The response was technically correct on treaty-making," Boloetse said. "But it avoided the substance of what we were asking Parliament to do. We are not asking Parliament to negotiate directly with Lesotho, but to exert oversight and pressure on the Executive to act."

A Debate Larger Than Documentation

The petition raises broader questions about regional integration, labour mobility and the unfinished business of post-apartheid reform. At its core lies a tension between sovereign border enforcement and the practical realities of communities whose social and economic ties ignore political boundaries. Whether the proposal gains traction remains uncertain. What is clear is that the issue touches not only immigration policy, but constitutional values and the everyday lives of Basotho and South Africans who navigate one of the most unusual borders on the continent.

# AFRICA

## Passport Politics: Rights Group Urges SA to Rethink Lesotho Border Controls

# Farmers Urge Government to Address Commercial Farming Challenges

By Lemohang Botsane

MASERU

Farmers from various sectors have called on the government and relevant stakeholders to tackle the obstacles hindering commercial farming in Lesotho. The appeal was made during a one-day stakeholders' forum organized by the Portfolio Committee on Economic and Development Cluster in Maseru. Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU) President, Mr. Khotso Lepheana, highlighted several challenges facing commercial farmers, including limited access to natural resources like water and land, and inadequate aggregation structures for produce such as vegetables, eggs, and milk. He also cited the lack of accredited abattoirs for meat processing and unclear national policies on food standards as major hurdles.

Mr. Lepheana emphasized the need for re-agro ecological zoning to optimize the National Subsidy Program, focusing on large-scale fodder production, storage infrastructure, and processing facilities. This, he believes, will



help boost commercial farming in the country. On the other hand, Mr. Mpho Sekonyela from block farming encouraged farmers to explore alternative solutions, such as investing in agricultural equipment, rather than relying solely

on government support. He acknowledged the limited land available for cropping but urged farmers to seize business opportunities in agriculture.

The government has been working to improve the agricultural sector, with initiatives

like the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (SADP) and partnerships with organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

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# EDITORIAL

## How the DCEO Is Undermining Lesotho's Knowledge Economy



# 15

Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial

**B**efore the courts decide guilt or innocence, a more basic failure demands attention. The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences appears not to understand what a university research and innovation hub is, how it functions, or why it exists. That ignorance matters. Because when an anti-corruption agency applies blunt instruments to institutions it does not comprehend, it does not merely risk miscarriages of justice. It risks sabotaging the country's ability to produce knowledge, retain scarce expertise, and convert research into national development.

Research hubs, whether branded as innovation centres, technology transfer offices, or applied research



units, are not peripheral add-ons to universities. They are the engine rooms of national knowledge production. They exist to translate academic expertise into practical solutions, commercial products, policy tools, and public value. In developing countries especially, they are one of the few mechanisms through which scarce intellectual capital is retained, funded, and directed toward national development priorities. The National University of Lesotho's Innovation Hub was conceived within this logic. It is meant to mobilise in-house expertise, attract external funding, incubate research-driven enterprises, and ensure that academic work does not remain trapped in journals that no policy-maker reads or laboratory shelves that gather dust. This is not a novel idea. It is how universities across

the world, including the Ivy League institutions so often cited as benchmarks, organise their research ecosystems.

At Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia, the overwhelming majority of spin-offs, funded research projects, and innovation entities are led by professors who are full-time employees of the university. The same academic who lectures undergraduates is often the principal investigator on a grant, the scientific founder of a start-up, or the director of a research centre. This is not a loophole. It is the design.

Universities do not outsource their brains. The idea that a professor's dual role as an employee of the university and a researcher involved in externally funded projects is inherently suspicious betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of how

research institutions function. Academic expertise is not an incidental input. It is the core asset. Strip universities of the ability to leverage their own staff for research and innovation, and you reduce them to teaching factories.

This is the context within which the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences has now arraigned Professor George Mosotho, an analytical chemist, on allegations of conflict of interest linked to research funding. The courts will, and must, determine the legal merits of the case. But outside the courtroom, a far broader and more troubling question arises. Does the DCEO understand the mandate, structure, and operational logic of university research hubs at all? For a country like Lesotho, this is not an abstract concern. Analytical chemistry is not a surplus skill here. It is a rare, strategic capability. Professor Mosotho is not merely another academic. He represents a depth of scientific expertise that the country can ill afford to casually criminalise without a sophisticated appreciation of context.

In most research universities, conflict of interest is

*Continues in Page 17*

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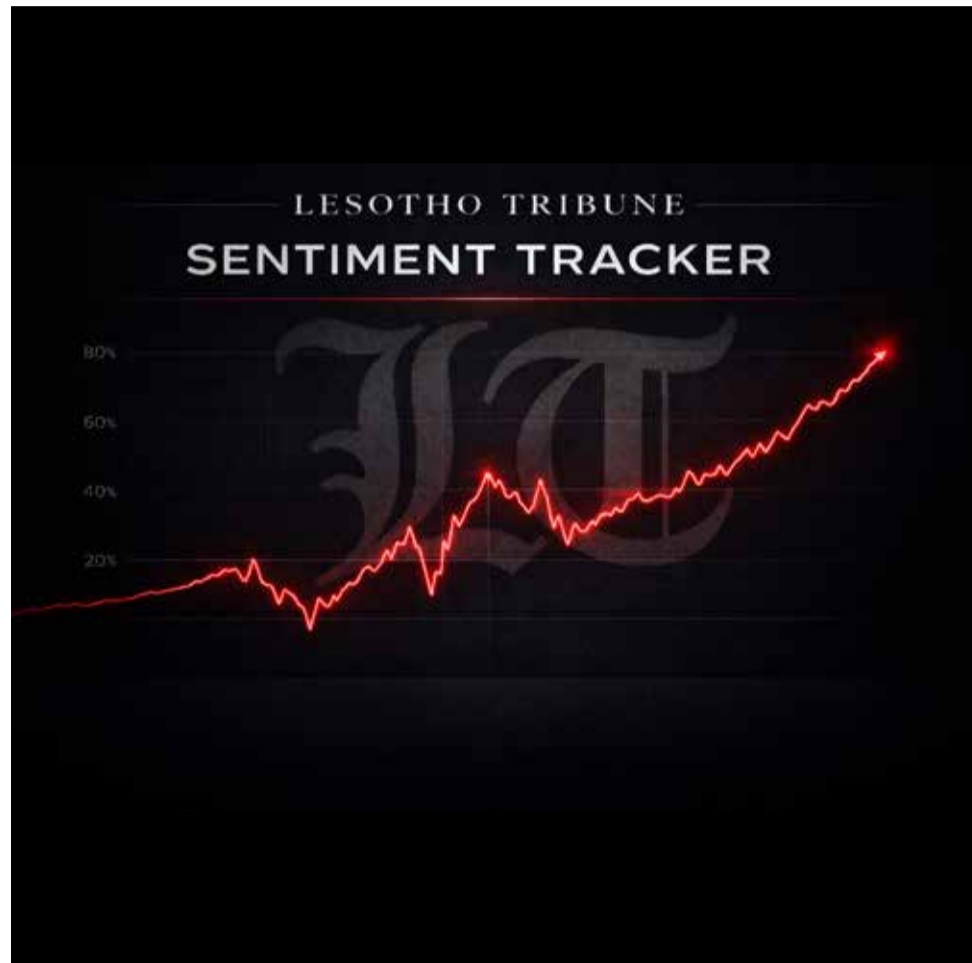


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# SENTIMENTAL TRACKER

## Sovereignty Holds, But Economic Frustration Runs Deep



By Lesotho Tribune

**L**esotho Tribune's latest Sentiment Tracker reveals a nation divided, but not evenly.

In a cross-platform poll asking, "Should Lesotho be part of South Africa?" a plurality of respondents rejected the idea of incorporation, signalling that sovereignty remains a powerful emotional and political anchor.

Across 107 recorded votes on X, 45 percent selected "No, protect sovereignty." Meanwhile, 36 percent supported integration for economic reasons, 13 percent favoured regional integration only, and 6 percent remained undecided.

The margin is clear, but the underlying message is more complex.

**Sovereignty Leads, But By No Landslide**  
At 45 percent, the pro-sovereignty camp leads. Yet it does not command an outright majority. Combined, 49 percent of respondents either favour full integra-

tion for economic reasons or prefer a deeper regional arrangement.

That near parity tells its own story. Attachment to independence remains strong. But economic pressure is clearly reshaping public thinking. Economic Anxiety Is Driving the Debate  
The 36 percent backing incorporation specifically for economic reasons suggests frustration rather than ideological realignment.

This bloc appears less concerned with national identity and more focused on jobs, income stability, market access, and currency alignment. It reflects a growing sentiment that economic performance, not symbolism, is what matters at household level.

If the question had been framed purely in economic terms, the numbers may have looked

even tighter.

**Regionalism as a Middle Ground**

Thirteen percent opted for "Regional integration only." This group represents a pragmatic middle path: deeper economic and administrative coordination without formal political absorption.

In many ways, this bloc may represent the strategic centre of the debate. It suggests that voters are exploring structural solutions beyond the binary of independence versus incorporation.

**Online Reaction Reflects Emotional Undercurrents**  
Comments under the poll reveal that the debate is not merely technical.

Some users questioned the practical meaning of sovereignty in light of economic dependency. Others defended independence as non-negotiable regardless of economic hardship.

The tone underscores how closely sovereignty is tied to dignity and identity, even as economic realities challenge that attachment.

**What This Means**

Three key signals emerge:  
1. Sovereignty remains the single strongest position.  
2. Economic frustration is large enough to seriously challenge the status quo.  
3. The debate is no longer fringe. It is mainstream.  
While this poll reflects online participants rather than a scientific national sample, it offers a snapshot of an evolving conversation.

For policymakers, the message is clear. Citizens may not be ready to surrender sovereignty, but a significant portion are questioning whether current economic outcomes justify the existing model. If economic performance improves meaningfully at household level, sovereignty sentiment will likely strengthen. If not, the 36 percent may grow.  
**Sentiment Tracker Question: Should Lesotho be part of South Africa?**

Platform: X

Total Votes: 107

Results:

No, protect sovereignty – 45%

Yes, for economic reasons – 36%

Regional integration only – 13%

Undecided – 6%

Lesotho Tribune will continue tracking shifts in public sentiment on key national questions.

*Continued from Page 15*

not addressed by banning professors from engaging in research-linked entities. It is managed through disclosure, governance frameworks, ethics committees, and institutional oversight. Universities regulate these relationships precisely because they are expected, not because they are aberrations.

The danger of the current approach is not only reputational damage to an individual. It is systemic chilling. When anti-corruption enforcement is applied without institutional literacy, it sends a signal to every academic that engaging in applied research is legally risky. It discourages innovation. It

deters external funders. It accelerates brain drain. It turns universities inward, fearful, and timid.

And the cost is national. Lesotho already struggles to retain scientists, engineers, and researchers. We cannot compete with South Africa, Europe, or North America on salaries. What we can offer is relevance, impact, and the opportunity to build something meaningful at home. Research hubs are one of the few instruments through which that promise is made credible.

This is not an argument for impunity. Nor is it a plea for special treatment of academics. It is an argument for competence. Anti-corruption agencies,

like all institutions of the state, must understand the environments they police. Financial regulation requires financial literacy. Environmental enforcement requires environmental science. University governance requires an understanding of academic ecosystems.

When enforcement is blind to institutional purpose, it becomes destructive rather than corrective. If the DCEO proceeds as though universities are no different from procurement departments or parastatals, it risks doing long-term damage to Lesotho's already fragile knowledge economy. The irony is painful. In attempting to protect public funds, the

state may be undermining the very institutions capable of generating future public value.

One hopes that this moment becomes a turning point. Not just for this case, but for a deeper reckoning about how law enforcement engages with complex institutions. Because if we continue down this path, the message to the country's brightest minds will be clear. Do not innovate. Do not apply your knowledge. Do not build. Just teach your classes and keep your head down.

For a nation that speaks endlessly about development, that would be a tragedy entirely of our own making.



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# Funeral Company Directors Take Fight to High Court over Control Dispute

By: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

A serious legal battle has erupted at Naledi Funeral Planners (Pty) Ltd, with a group of shareholders and directors approaching the High Court of Lesotho, Commercial Division, to challenge what they describe as unlawful and irregular decisions affecting the company.

Court papers filed in Maseru show that the matter involves deep divisions within the company's leadership and raises questions about corporate control, management, and the role of public offices in company administration. At the centre of the case is Malefetsane Tlelima, who says he is the chairman of the board of directors and a shareholder of Naledi Funeral Planners. In a founding affidavit sworn before the court, Tlelima states that he brings the application both in his personal capacity and on behalf of other shareholders and directors who have authorised him to act for them. He explains that the group decided to institute legal proceedings after a company resolution taken on 22 January 2026. According to him, this resolution was adopted because certain decisions had been made which they believe were unlawful and irregular, and which were harming the company's structures, management, interests, and day-to-day operations. "The effect of these decisions has been to negatively impact how the company is run," he says in his affidavit, adding that the situation has become serious enough to require the intervention of the court.



The applicants listed in the matter include Tlelima as the first applicant, followed by Thoolo Mohapi Sheea, Soaile Mochaba, Bonang Phooko, and Mphamo Tente. Naledi Funeral Planners (Pty) Ltd itself is also cited as the sixth applicant. All, according to the court papers, are shareholders and directors of the company and are bringing the case in both capacities. On the other side are nine respondents. These include several individuals, among them Thabiso Madiba, Khojane Madiba, Tšolo Seutloali, Mohau Linake, Sidwell Jackson, Christopher Kao, and Retšepile Linake, as well as the Registrar of Companies and the Attorney General. Although the full details of the disputed decisions are contained in the main application, the founding affidavit gives a clear picture of a company in turmoil. Tlelima states that he has personal knowledge of most of the facts he places before the court, while other information is drawn from company documents in his possession. Where necessary, he relies on records held by the company secretary, Advocate Peter Matekane, whose supporting affidavit is attached to confirm those facts. He further explains that he is deposing to the affidavit not only for himself but also to avoid unnecessary duplication by having several applicants each file similar statements. This, he says, is meant to

prevent burdening the court record.

The applicants' main concern, as reflected in the documents, is that the decisions taken without proper authority or procedure have interfered with the lawful management of Naledi Funeral Planners. They argue that these actions threaten the stability of the business and the interests of its legitimate shareholders and directors. By approaching the Commercial Division of the High Court, the applicants are seeking clarity, protection, and corrective measures from the judiciary. They want the court to examine how certain changes or actions were made, who authorised them, and whether they comply with company law and established corporate governance principles. Legal analysts say disputes of this nature are becoming increasingly common as companies grow and internal power struggles emerge. When shareholders and directors disagree over control, management, or registration matters, the Registrar of Companies is often drawn into the dispute, as appears to be the case here. The inclusion of the Attorney General also suggests that the applicants believe public authorities may have played a role in decisions they now contest. In corporate law, directors are expected to act in the best interests of the company and in accordance with its founding documents and the law. When decisions are taken outside these boundaries, affected parties have the right to seek the court's intervention. The court can review the legality of such decisions, set them aside, and issue orders aimed at restor-

ing proper governance.

For Naledi Funeral Planners, a company operating in the sensitive funeral services sector, stability and public trust are critical. Prolonged internal conflict can disrupt operations, affect employees, and undermine confidence among clients who rely on the company at vulnerable moments in their lives.

The applicants argue that this is precisely why the matter cannot be left unresolved.

They maintain that unless the court steps in, the ongoing disputes will continue to damage the company's reputation and functioning.

The case is now before the High Court, which will consider the affidavits and any opposing papers to be filed by the respondents. Once all documents are in, the court is expected to hear arguments from both sides before making a ruling.

For now, the filing of the application marks the formal beginning of what could be a lengthy court process. It is a process that may not only determine who lawfully controls

Naledi Funeral Planners, but also set an important example for how corporate disputes are handled in Lesotho.

As the matter unfolds, attention will focus on the evidence presented, the role of the

Registrar of Companies, and whether the contested decisions will withstand legal scrutiny. What is clear is that the shareholders behind the application are determined to fight for what they say is the lawful management and future of their company



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Lesotho Tribune

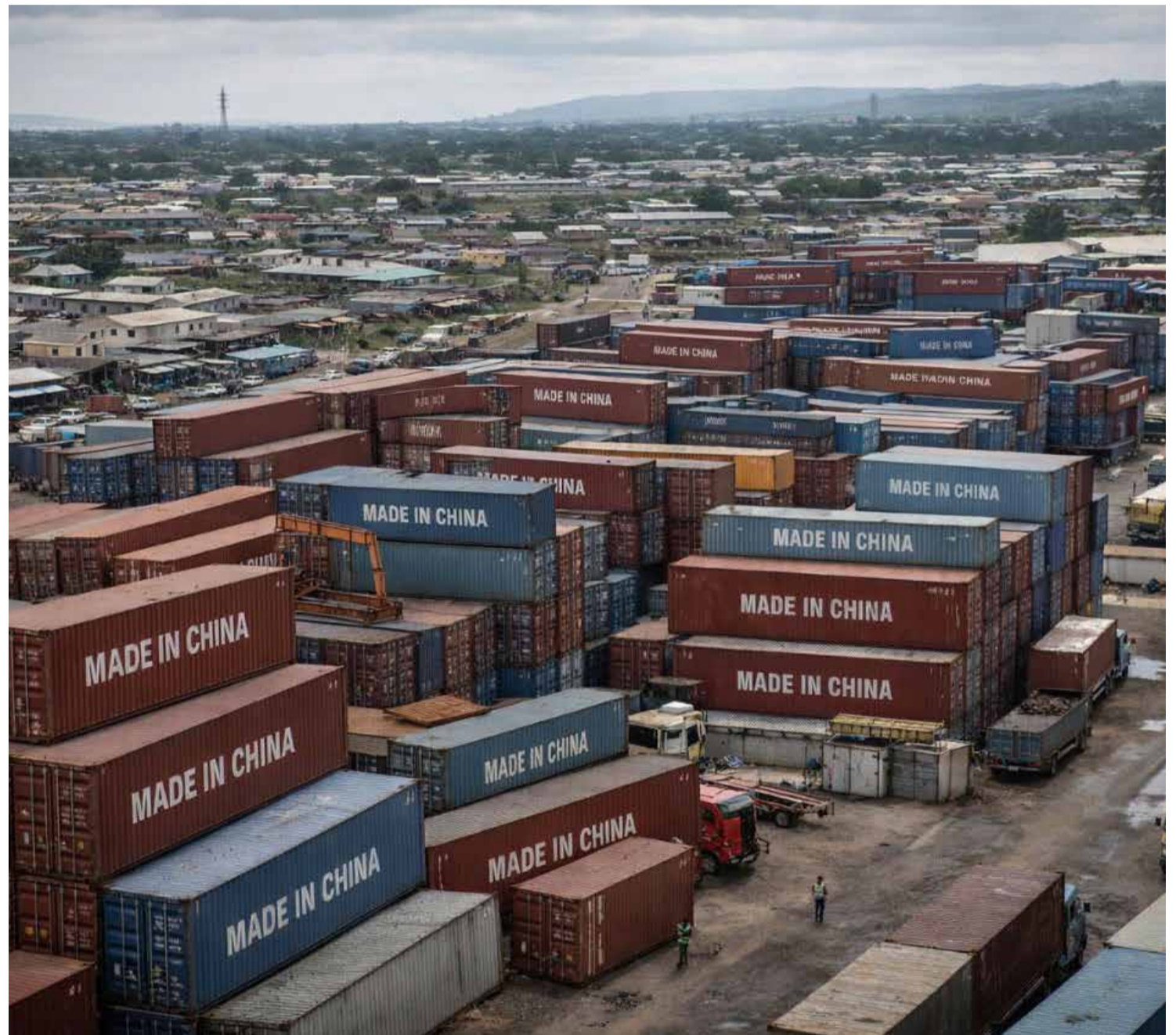
By: Staff Reporter

For years, African policymakers have been told that China represents opportunity. Infrastructure, trade, South South cooperation, an alternative to Western conditionality. That narrative is now collapsing under the weight of hard numbers. For countries like Lesotho, China is not merely an imperfect partner. It is a structural problem.

The problem is not ideology. It is economics. China's global trade strategy is built around export dominance, domestic market protection, and selective import dependence limited largely to raw materials. That model is devastating for small developing economies that lack scale, bargaining power, or diversified export baskets. Lesotho fits that description almost perfectly. China Buys Almost Nothing from Lesotho

# OPINION

## China Is Not Lesotho's Partner. It Is Its Biggest Economic Threat.



Start with a simple but uncomfortable fact. China does not buy meaningful value added goods from Lesotho. It never has. Lesotho's exports to China are narrow and shallow. Wool, a small volume of diamonds, and a handful of low value electrical components dominate the trade data. In total value terms, Lesotho exports tens of millions of dollars to China annually. In contrast, imports from China into Lesotho span machin-

ery, electronics, vehicles, textiles, household goods, and industrial inputs. This is not trade partnership. It is asymmetry. China's import appetite is structurally constrained. Beijing has spent the past decade pursuing self sufficiency in high value manufacturing while aggressively expanding export capacity. The result is a record global trade surplus exceeding one trillion dollars. That surplus exists because China produces far more than

it consumes and because it has little incentive to open its domestic market to foreign manufactured goods, especially from small economies. Except for raw materials, China buys almost nothing from Africa. Lesotho is no exception. Market Access Is a Myth Defenders of China often argue that African producers simply lack competitiveness. That explanation ignores China's deliberate

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market architecture. China protects its domestic market through regulatory barriers, standards regimes, state subsidies, and industrial policy that favors national champions. These are not accidental outcomes. They are policy choices.

For a country like Lesotho, which struggles to access even regional markets, penetrating the Chinese consumer or industrial supply chain is effectively impossible. This is why Lesotho's export relationship with China has not evolved beyond commodities despite years of diplomatic engagement.

Trade without access is not trade. It is dependency. Dumping and the Destruction of Local Industry China's export model relies on scale, cost suppression, and state backed manufacturing ecosystems. When surplus goods flood developing markets, local producers cannot compete. South Africa is already responding by considering antidumping duties on Chinese and Indian vehicles after imports surged by hundreds of percent while local production stagnated. If South Africa, with its industrial depth, is under threat, smaller economies like Lesotho do not stand a chance.

Cheap imports may benefit consumers in the short term, but they hollow out domestic industry. Once local manufacturing collapses, jobs disappear, skills erode, and economies become permanently import dependent. This phenomenon has a name in economics. Premature deindustrialisation.

Africa has experienced it before. China is accelerating it.

Botswana, Diamonds, and the Synthetic Shock The damage is not limited to manufacturing. Botswana's diamond industry is under severe pressure, not only from cyclical downturns but from structural shifts in global demand. China is one of the world's largest producers and consumers of synthetic diamonds. These lab grown stones are cheaper, scalable, and increasingly accepted by consumers. As synthetic supply expands, natural diamond prices weaken.

Botswana's fiscal stability is tied to diamonds. Lesotho's diamond sector, smaller but still significant, faces the same threat. This is not a coincidence. It is the downstream effect of China's industrial strategy. China manufactures the substitute. China consumes it. African producers absorb the loss. The Illusion of Infrastructure for Trade Supporters of China often point to roads, buildings, and projects. Infrastructure matters, but infrastructure without industrial development is a dead end.

What is the point of better roads if they only carry imported goods inland? What is the value of industrial parks if local firms cannot compete against subsidised imports? Trade policy cannot be separated from production. China understands this. Africa has been slower to learn.

Why the West Now Makes Economic Sense Again This is not a call for nostalgia or blind alignment. It

is a strategic reassessment. Western markets, for all their flaws, remain more open to value added imports from developing economies. They offer clearer rules, deeper consumer markets, and greater scope for integration into global value chains.

Lesotho's textile exports to the United States under AGOA demonstrate this reality. When access exists, production follows. China offers scale without access. The West offers access with conditions. From an economic development perspective, access matters more.

A Strategic Imperative for Lesotho, Lesotho cannot

afford sentimental geopolitics. It must pursue hard headed economic realism. Diversify trade partners. Reduce exposure to dumping. Protect fragile domestic sectors. Push value addition relentlessly. Prioritise markets that buy more than raw materials. China is not an enemy. But it is not a development partner either. It is a competitor with overwhelming scale, a closed domestic market, and a trade model that structurally disadvantages small economies. Pretending otherwise is no longer intellectually honest. Or economically sustainable.



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# LSRC rolls out early nationwide talent search for AUSC Region 5 Games



of the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games, Lesotho's preparations were often delayed, which negatively affected performance. He said the new approach prioritises long-term planning, with athletes progressing from district level competitions into successive stages until a national team is confirmed.

Team Manager Mrs 'Malineo Makhang also informed the media that the district youth games will officially commence in Botha-Bothe on 14th February 2026. She stated that the programme will feature a range of sporting disciplines, among them basketball, boxing, taekwondo, netball and football, with additional codes also expected to be included. Mrs Makhang further disclosed that M700,000 has been ring-fenced to fund the preparation phase of the youth games.

The delegation, under the leadership of Mr Maphallela, has been tasked with overseeing and evaluating the entire process, from the initial district competitions through to Lesotho's participation at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games in Maputo later in the year.

By: Lits'itso Letsunyane

The Lesotho Sport and Recreation Commission (LSRC), through Team Lesotho management, briefed the media today on the country's roadmap towards the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games scheduled for December 2026 in Maputo, Mozambique.

Addressing the press on Wednesday 28th January, Head of Delegation and Chef de Mission Mr Refloe Maphallela revealed that preparations will formally get underway on 14th February with the launch

of a countrywide athlete identification mission. The initiative will move from district to district, beginning in Butha-Buthe, and will continue until September 2026.

The scouting programme is designed to uncover outstanding young sportsmen and women who will be channelled into the National Youth Games in October. From there, the strongest performers will be filtered into a final squad to represent Lesotho at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games. Beyond Maputo 2026, the process is also intended to build a tal-

ent pipeline for the 2027 African Games in Egypt and the 2028 AUSC Region 5 Games to be hosted in South Africa. LSRC spokesperson Advocate Jobo Raswoko said the Commission had taken a deliberate decision to start planning well in advance after recognising the importance of early preparation. He explained that the Commission will cover all ten districts to ensure that promising athletes are identified, developed and supported regardless of their geographic location.

Mr Maphallela noted that in past editions

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Lesotho Tribune

By Litšitso Letsunyane

**L**ioli Football Club have put speculation to rest by officially presenting Halemakale Mahlaha as their new head coach, completing a move that had been widely anticipated during the week. At the same time, Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) FC confirmed that the seasoned tactician has vacated his position, clearing the way for his switch to Tse Nala. Mahlaha steps into the role following the departure of Bongani Maseko, whose tenure with Lioli came to an end in December 2025. During the interim period, Kenny Mohoanyane oversaw the team and will now remain part of the technical bench as Mahlaha's

# ARTS & SPORTS

## Lioli FC confirm Mahlaha appointment as LMPS formalise his exit



assistant.

The appointment brings to Lioli one of Lesotho's most experienced football minds. Mahlaha has built a strong reputation in domestic football, having guided some of the country's leading clubs and worked extensively within youth national team structures. Before his current move to Lioli, he was taking charge at LMPS FC, a club with which he shares a long history dating back to his playing days.

Prior to his time at LMPS, Mahlaha was at the head coach of Matla-

ma FC, where he led the giants through demanding league campaigns and domestic competitions. His time at Matlama reinforced his image as a coach capable of managing pressure at high-profile clubs, while maintaining tactical organisation and consistency across a season.

Beyond club football, Mahlaha has also been entrusted with developing young talent at national level, having coached Lesotho's Under-20 side (Makoanyane XI) in regional and continental assignments.

His involvement in youth football has underlined his emphasis on long-term player development, a quality Lioli will hope to translate into sustainable success.

Known for advocating discipline, structure and collective responsibility, and his formal unveiling complete and LMPS having acknowledged his resignation, attention will now turn to how quickly Mahlaha can imprint his philosophy at Lioli, which currently sits on 5th Place on the Vodacom Premier League table.

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