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Matekane and Majara Spend M3 Million from Emergency Fund on Travel

By: Staff Reporter

MASERU

A report by a parliamentary portfolio committee has revealed that the Office of the Prime Minister spent M3 million from Lesotho's emergency fund on official and family travel for Prime Minister Sam Matekane and his deputy, Justice Nthomeng Majara.



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Lesotho Poised for HIV Breakthrough as Government Proposes Lenacapavir Injection to Prevent New Infections

By: Staff Reporter

Maseru

Lesotho could soon introduce Lenacapavir (LEN), a breakthrough long-acting HIV prevention injection, in a major step toward ending new HIV infections and achieving epidemic control by 2030.

The Ministry of Health has formally proposed the rollout of Lenacapavir to Cabinet, positioning the twice-yearly injectable drug as a critical addition to Lesotho's HIV prevention strategy. If approved, the initiative would strengthen the country's already strong HIV response and help close persistent prevention gaps.

Lesotho's HIV Success Story Faces Prevention Gap
Lesotho remains one of the global leaders in HIV treatment and control, having surpassed the ambitious UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets ahead of schedule.

According to the latest figures released in December 2024:

- 97% of people living with HIV know their status
- 97% of diagnosed individuals are receiving treatment
- 99% of those on treatment have achieved viral suppression

This progress has resulted in an 87% reduction in new HIV infections, placing Lesotho among the best-performing countries globally in HIV treatment outcomes.

However, the Ministry of Health warned that Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake remains at only 43%, significantly below national targets. This short-



fall highlights the urgent need for more convenient, accessible, and stigma-free HIV prevention options. What is Lenacapavir and Why It Matters

Lenacapavir is a long-acting injectable HIV prevention medicine administered just twice a year, offering a powerful alternative to daily oral PrEP pills.

The drug works by interrupting key stages of the HIV lifecycle, preventing the virus from establishing infection.

Health officials say Lenacapavir offers several critical advantages:

- Eliminates the need for daily pills
- Requires only two clinic visits per year
- Provides discreet protection, reducing stigma
- Improves adherence among high-risk populations

"Lenacapavir is a new, long-lasting and powerful tool to prevent HIV infection," the Ministry of Health said in its submission, adding that the drug could significantly accelerate Lesotho's progress toward eliminating HIV as

a public health threat. WHO Approval and Global Support Strengthen Rollout

The World Health Organisation has recommended Lenacapavir following extensive clinical trials confirming its safety, effectiveness, and quality. The injection is considered safe for:

- Pregnant women
 - Breastfeeding mothers
 - HIV-negative individuals at high risk of infection
- Lesotho expects to receive initial Lenacapavir consignments through support from the Global Fund and the United States Department of State, reinforcing international backing for the country's HIV elimination strategy.

National Rollout to Begin with High-Risk Districts
The Ministry of Health plans to implement Lenacapavir in three phases over approximately 27 months to ensure nationwide coverage.

Phase One, scheduled to begin as early as March, will target:

- 50 high-volume, high-prevalence health

facilities

- Coverage across all 10 districts

The phased rollout will allow health authorities to scale up gradually while building public awareness and ensuring effective implementation.

Government Investment Critical for Long-Term HIV Elimination

Despite donor support, the Ministry has emphasised that domestic funding will be essential to sustain Lenacapavir access in the long term.

Cabinet approval is being sought to:

- Secure national procurement funding
- Expand community awareness campaigns
- Increase prevention uptake
- Strengthen partnerships with global and local health organisations

A Turning Point in Lesotho's Fight Against HIV

The introduction of Lenacapavir could mark a historic turning point in Lesotho's HIV response, positioning the country to become one of the first in the world to achieve zero new HIV infections. With one of the highest HIV prevalence rates globally, Lesotho's success could also serve as a model for other countries battling the epidemic.

If implemented successfully, Lenacapavir may transform HIV prevention from a daily burden into a twice-yearly intervention, bringing the goal of ending HIV within reach.

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Crisis fears at Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital as patients report bed shortages, long waits

By: Molefi Tsumane

MASERU

Fresh concerns are emerging over the state of Lesotho's flagship referral facility, Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital (QMMH), after reports of bed shortages, long waiting times, and patients being turned away surfaced both on the ground and across social media.

The situation has triggered fears that Lesotho's most advanced public hospital could be sliding back into the very crisis conditions that once defined the country's struggling health sector.

Patients told to go home as wards reach capacity. Information gathered by Lesotho Tribune from a source familiar with recent events at QMMH paints a troubling picture.

According to the source, who requested anonymity for fear of victimisation, the hospital's wards were recently full when they arrived for admission.

"They told us there were no beds available," the source said. "We were given two options. Either go back home and return the next day, or wait in the admission area until a bed became available."

The source chose to wait. While waiting, more pa-



tients continued arriving, quickly filling the hospital's waiting areas.

The situation placed visible strain on the limited staff on duty, who were forced to manage growing patient numbers with

constrained capacity. Social media amplifies complaints about QMMH. Similar experiences have increasingly been shared by Basotho on social media platforms, where patients and their families

have complained about overcrowding, delays, and what they describe as declining service conditions at the national referral hospital.

Many users have ques-

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tioned whether the Ministry of Health is doing enough to address persistent systemic challenges at the facility.

QMMH, located in Maseru, is Lesotho's main tertiary referral hospital and is designed to handle specialised and complex medical cases from across the country.

Hospital management responds to allegations. In response to questions from Lesotho Tribune, QMMH management acknowledged that some patients may experience delays or be redirected. However, the hospital stressed that its primary mandate is to provide specialist care, not routine or primary healthcare services.

"Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital is a modern facility that aims to provide high-quality specialist care," management said.

The hospital explained that some patients arriving at QMMH present with conditions that could be treated at filter clinics or district health facilities. To manage limited bed availability, such patients are often redirected to appropriate facilities to ensure that critically ill patients and emergency cases receive priority.

Bed shortages reflect wider health system pressure. Management admitted that bed shortages do occur, particularly due to the high volume of referrals

from district hospitals and clinics.

"The hospital was designed as a national tertiary referral facility for complex cases," management said.

It added that its triage system prioritises life-threatening conditions, major trauma, and specialised procedures.

This approach, while medically necessary, means some patients – including those with referral letters – may be asked to wait or return later.

Ministry of Health yet to publicly address concerns

The Ministry of Health referred questions to QMMH management and has not issued an independent public statement on the situation.

The lack of official clarification has further fuelled public concern about the stability of Lesotho's health system.

Echoes of the past raise alarm. QMMH has previously been at the centre of national debate over healthcare delivery, particularly during and after the end of its controversial public-private partnership with Netcare.

At the time, concerns were raised about sustainability, staffing, and service delivery continuity.

The latest reports of overcrowding and capacity strain are now raising fears that systemic pressures may once again be intensifying.

Growing demand versus limited capacity

Healthcare demand in Lesotho continues to rise

due to:

- Population growth
- High burden of HIV and non-communicable diseases
- Limited capacity at district facilities

As a result, the national referral hospital faces increasing pressure.

QMMH management says it continues to balance its specialised role with public demand, even as patients experience extended waiting times.

The bigger question for Lesotho's health sector

The emerging situation at Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital raises

broader questions about:

- National health system capacity
- Referral system efficiency
- Staffing levels
- Long-term sustainability of specialised care

For many Basotho, the hospital represents the last line of defence in medical emergencies.

Any sign of strain is therefore a national concern.

Whether the current situation reflects temporary pressure or deeper structural challenges remains to be seen.

But for patients waiting in admission corridors, the crisis already feels real.



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Katse Festival Grows Beyond Weekend Celebration

By: Tholoana Lesenya

THABA-TSEKA

The 2026 Katse Tourism Festival is unfolding in the highlands with renewed energy and visible growth, as this year's celebrations stretch beyond the traditional weekend programme and draw extraordinary participation from local schools and communities.

What was once largely a Friday and Saturday event is now beginning on Thursday, a shift organisers say signals steady expansion. The additional day is dedicated largely to schools' activities, and this year alone, 16 primary schools are taking part, a development that has added colour, excitement and a deeper sense of community ownership to the festival.

The festival, organised by the Katse Dam Action and Aid Community Forum and supported by the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), is currently drawing crowds to Katse Dam as part of its annual celebration of culture, tourism and community development. It forms part of broader efforts linked to



From early Thursday morning, the festival grounds were alive with children in school uniforms, teachers guiding performances, and parents cheering from the sidelines.

Traditional dances, poetry, choral performances and cultural displays are taking center stage as young learners showcase

their talents against the breathtaking backdrop of the dam and surrounding mountains. Organisers say introducing a Thursday programme focused on primary schools demonstrates clear growth.

"In the beginning, we were only focusing on the main weekend days,

but now we are seeing real expansion," says Selikane Rakuoane, chairperson of Katse Action Aid as one of the festival organisers. "Sixteen primary schools are participating this year. That alone shows that the festival is growing."

He explains that the vision for the Katse

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Lesotho Tribune

By: Lesotho Tribune

Data is the lifeblood of policy and without reliable statistics, it's impossible to measure progress, identify gaps or design effective interventions. These words were uttered by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning Deputy Principal Secretary, Mahlape Ramoseme when delivering her remarks during the launch of the Three-Year Equitable Lesotho project aimed at reducing multidimensional poverty among Basotho by strengthening the National Statistical System in Lesotho.

The project, funded by the European Union (EU) to the tune of EUR 1,800,000 (M34,123,320.00), will be implemented by Expertise France with INSEE (French National Statistical Institute), providing long-term technical assistance embedded within the Bureau of Statistics (BoS).

Ramoseme emphasised that the project will ensure Lesotho's data is

accurate, inclusive and accessible, all factors she said will strengthen governance, improve service delivery and empower citizens. "The project represents a milestone in our national journey to enhance equity, inclusion and evidence-based development," she said.

She also highlighted Lesotho's profound challenges, quoting a widespread poverty that is at 49 percent, high inequality at 44.9 percent, increasing youth unemployment that rests at 38 percent, persisting gender-based violence, 41 percent, prevalent among women aged 15-49 years and the marginalisation of persons with disabilities.

However, Ramoseme said with the right tools, partnerships and vision, there is hope to transform these challenges into pathways

for progress.

Speaking at the same launch, the EU Ambassador, Mette Sunnergren, said supporting statistical systems is vital for fostering transparency, accountability and informed decision-making. Reliable statistical data, she informed, is the backbone of effective governance which enables policymakers to develop strategies that truly resonate with community needs.

Sunnergren said the EU has consistently championed the enhancement of statistical systems worldwide, underscoring its commitment to strengthening institutional capacities, ensuring sustainable development and driving positive societal change through comprehensive and precise data. It has also emphasised gathering quality, gender-sensitive data that speaks to the challenges faced by citizens in Lesotho with a focus on gender

equality.

She stressed the importance of coordination among institutions involved, effective communication and collaboration to ensure aligned efforts and enhance the overall impact of the programme.

Sunnergren added to her sentiments by acknowledging the upcoming Housing and Population Census as a vital tool for gathering comprehensive data, however urging that the activity should not disrupt other activities of the Equitable Lesotho project.

The three-year project commenced in September 2025 and is expected to come to an end in 2028. Ramoseme called on all stakeholders to utilise the opportunity to harness their collective strengths, working together to ensure data collection is a powerful tool for promoting inclusion and gender mainstreaming in Lesotho.

"Data is Key To Lesotho's Progress' - Ramoseme





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Lesotho Tribune

By: Staff Reporter

MASERU

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has unveiled the Top-9 finalists of the 2026 Growth Stage Impact Ventures (GSIV) Programme, marking a major boost for Lesotho's private sector and signalling growing investor confidence in the country's emerging enterprises.

The GSIV Programme is a flagship enterprise acceleration and investment readiness initiative designed to identify high-growth businesses in Lesotho with strong commercial potential and measurable contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

UNDP Announces Top-9 Growth Stage Impact Ventures Finalists, Boosting Lesotho's Private Sector Prospects



(SDGs). UNDP GSIV Programme Signals Confidence in Lesotho's Entrepreneurs
In a statement released this week, UNDP said the selection of the nine ventures demonstrates that Lesotho's private sector is ready to scale, attract investment, and

compete regionally and internationally, despite ongoing economic challenges.

The programme focuses on:

- Increasing business visibility and credibility
- Connecting enterprises with investors and partners
- Strengthening Lesotho's

investment pipeline

- Supporting sustainable and scalable business models

Importantly, GSIV does not function as a basic entrepreneurship training programme but instead focuses on positioning already-established

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lished growth-stage businesses for expansion and investment readiness.

Only 9 Ventures Selected from Competitive National Pool

UNDP received 15 nominations from impact funds, development organisations, and enterprise support institutions, but only nine met the programme's strict selection criteria.

Key requirements included:

- Strong operational presence in Lesotho
- Innovative products, services, or technologies
- Demonstrated market traction and revenue growth
- Experienced and capable management teams
- Clear potential for regional or continental expansion

UNDP said the selected enterprises reflect Lesotho's rising entrepreneurial capacity and innovation potential.

Finalists Span Key Economic Sectors Including Agriculture, Technology, and Manufacturing

According to UNDP, the nine finalists represent a diverse cross-section of Lesotho's priority growth sectors, including:

- Agriculture and agro-processing
- Manufacturing
- Technology and innovation
- Renewable energy
- Hospitality and tourism
- Health services

• Creative industries
 "Their innovations demonstrate the breadth of opportunities emerging in Lesotho's evolving private sector landscape," the statement said.

These sectors are widely viewed as critical for job creation, economic diversification, and reducing Lesotho's high unemployment rate.

UNDP Training to Prepare Businesses for Global Investment

The finalists will now undergo specialised Impact Measurement and Management (IMM) training, aligned with the UNDP SDG Impact Standards.

This training will help participating businesses:

- Strengthen internal management systems
 - Integrate sustainability into their core strategies
 - Measure and communicate their social and environmental impact
 - Improve readiness for international investors
- UNDP said the initiative comes at a time when global investors are increasingly prioritising transparency, sustainability, and long-term value creation.

Programme Expected to Support Job Creation and Economic Growth

UNDP believes the GSIV Programme will play a critical role in:

- Supporting private sector-led economic growth
- Creating employment opportunities for Baso-

tho

- Attracting foreign and local investment
 - Strengthening Lesotho's economic resilience
- "As Lesotho works to strengthen economic resilience, create jobs and expand opportunities for youth and women, growth-stage businesses serve as essential drivers of inclusive development," UNDP said.
- Major Milestone for Lesotho's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem
- The GSIV cohort represents an important milestone in Lesotho's transition toward a more

innovation-driven and investment-ready economy.

UNDP said the nine enterprises demonstrate that Basotho entrepreneurs are ready to drive sustainable economic transformation, positioning Lesotho as an emerging hub for impact-driven business in Southern Africa.

As these ventures scale, they are expected to deliver financial returns, social benefits, and environmental sustainability, contributing to a more inclusive and prosperous economy.



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CBL, AFI Extends Efforts To Boost Financial Inclusion For Women-Led MSMEs

By: Lemohang Botsane

MASERU

The Central Bank of Lesotho (CBL), in partnership with the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI), has launched a four-day Regional Joint Learning Program on Alternative Finance Instruments for Women-Led Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Maseru this week. This initiative seeks to promote financial inclusion and support the growth of women-led businesses in Lesotho, aligning with the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The CBL First Deputy Governor, Lehlomela Mohapi, welcomed participants to the first physical seminar hosted by the bank, following virtual engagements held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lehlomela spotlighted the importance of the programme in providing a platform for knowledge, exchange and skills sharing aimed at identifying innovative ways to enhance financial inclusion for women-led MSMEs.

“Financial inclusion is a key driver of economic growth and development



and women-led MSMEs are crucial to this process,” Lehlomela said, adding that as the bank they are committed to working with partners to create an enabling environment that will support the growth of women-led businesses and promote economic empowerment for women. AFI Chief Executive Officer, Dr Alfred Hannig, highlighted the significance of the programme, noting that women constitute a significant proportion of the population but continue to face barriers in accessing financial services.

“Women-led SMEs are key drivers of economic activity, innovation and

employment creation, yet financial exclusion remains a persistent challenge,” he said.

He emphasised that the challenges faced by these businesses, including limited access to finance, collateral constraints and informality, require deliberate policy interventions, strengthened collaboration among stakeholders and peer learning platforms such as the regional programme.

It was said that the initiative directly contributes to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by promoting women's economic empowerment and improving their access to financial

resources.

This programme is expected to bring together policymakers, financial institutions and other stakeholders to explore innovative solutions to address the financial inclusion gap faced by women-led businesses in Lesotho and its surrounding regions. It will also provide a platform for participants to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned in promoting financial inclusion for women-led MSMEs while contributing to the development of policies and strategies that support the growth of women-led businesses and promote economic empowerment for women in Lesotho.

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Lesotho Tribune

By Staff Reporters

MASERU

Zimbabwe has walked away from a proposed US\$367 million health funding agreement with the United States, citing concerns over sovereignty, health data control, and biological specimen access. Yet just weeks earlier, Lesotho signed its own US-backed health cooperation deal worth US\$364 million.

The contrasting decisions are now raising uncomfortable questions in Maseru: what exactly did Lesotho sign, and why did Zimbabwe refuse a similar offer?

Zimbabwe stops negotiations over “sensitive data” Zimbabwe’s government terminated negotiations on the five-year agreement after objecting to provisions requiring the sharing of sensitive health information and biological samples.

Officials in Harare argued the proposed deal would have obligated Zimbabwe to provide pathogen samples and health surveillance data without sufficient guarantees that

Zimbabwe would benefit equally from any vaccines, treatments, or technologies developed using that data. Zimbabwe’s leadership reportedly viewed the agreement as “asymmetrical” and a potential compromise of national sovereignty, choosing to halt negotiations before signing.

The move positions Zimbabwe among a growing number of African countries reassessing bilateral health agreements that include extensive data-sharing requirements.

Lesotho signed US\$364 million health cooperation agreement

Lesotho, by contrast, formally signed its own five-year Bilateral Health Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding with the United States in December 2025.

According to official government statements, the agreement includes:

- Up to US\$232 million in US funding
- Approximately US\$132 million contribution from Lesotho
- Programmes focused on:
- HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment



AFRICA

Zimbabwe rejects US\$367m health deal over sovereignty fears. Lesotho signed Similar Deal.

- Ownership of biological materials

- Future access to vaccines and treatments developed using such data

Government has not publicly released the full signed agreement text.

Sovereignty versus survival

The fundamental difference between Zimbabwe and Lesotho may come down to timing and economic reality.

Zimbabwe rejected the agreement before signing, citing sovereignty concerns.

Lesotho, heavily dependent on external health funding, accepted the deal.

Lesotho faces one of the world’s highest HIV prevalence rates. The potential withdrawal of US funding would pose a severe risk to national treatment programmes.

Zimbabwe, by contrast, appears to have calculated that the sovereignty risks outweighed the financial benefits.

A broader shift in global health diplomacy

The developments reflect a changing landscape in global health financing.

Increasingly, health agreements are incorporating provisions on:

- Data sharing
- Disease surveillance
- Research cooperation

While these measures can strengthen global pandemic preparedness, they are also raising questions about:

- Data ownership
- Equity
- Sovereignty

Africa CDC has already warned that African countries must ensure fair access to benefits arising from shared health data.

- Health workforce strengthening

- Disease surveillance

- Health information systems

Government described the agreement as essential to sustaining Lesotho’s HIV response and strengthening national health systems.

For a country where HIV programmes have historically relied heavily on US funding through initiatives such as PEPFAR, the deal represents continuity of critical financing.

The controversy lies in the details

However, scrutiny has intensified following reports that draft versions of the agreement include provisions extending beyond financial support.

Local reporting has suggested the deal could include long-term arrangements related to sharing biological specimens and associated health data, including genetic sequence information of pathogens.

These provisions, critics argue, could have implications for:

- National control over health data



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Lesotho Tribune

FARMERS CORNER

Lesotho Confirms First Case of Foot-and-Mouth Disease



By Staff Reporter

Lesotho has recorded its first ever confirmed outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in cattle, marking a serious development for the country's livestock sector and animal health authorities.

According to official statements from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, veterinary teams identified cattle displaying symptoms consistent with FMD on 18 February at a cattle post in Mahlasela, Botha-Bothe District, near the border with South Africa's Free State Province. Laboratory testing confirmed that 6 out of 17 cattle were positive for FMD antibodies, prompting immediate containment measures. What Is Foot-and-Mouth Disease?

Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious viral illness affecting cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. While not a direct health risk to humans,

FMD can spread rapidly among livestock and lead to significant economic losses, trade restrictions, and disruptions to agricultural communities.

Lesotho Takes Swift Action

In response to the outbreak:

- The affected cattle have been placed under strict quarantine.
- Neighbouring cattle posts are under active surveillance and precautionary quarantine to prevent further spread.
- Additional samples have been sent to a regional reference laboratory of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) in Botswana for virus typ-

ing and vaccine matching. The Ministry has urged livestock owners, traders and the public to report suspected cases immediately, especially animals showing excessive salivation, lameness, or mouth and hoof lesions.

Border Region FMD Context

Lesotho had previously maintained a FMD-free status, but its shared border with South Africa — where outbreaks have spread widely — has placed it at increased risk. South Africa recently declared FMD a national disaster, with tens of thousands of cases reported in domestic livestock, particularly in neighbouring

provinces.

Regional agricultural bodies are now calling for coordinated cross-border strategies to strengthen surveillance, vaccination and control efforts, underlining that the outbreak is not only a national issue but a Southern African animal health concern. What This Means for Farmers

For Lesotho's livestock farmers, the outbreak represents a major biosecurity threat. FMD outbreaks often trigger movement controls, vaccination campaigns, and restrictions on trade — all of which can significantly affect farmers' incomes and market access.

Authorities are encouraging preventive measures:

- Immediate reporting of suspicious livestock illness
- Restricting movement of cattle from affected areas
- Coordinating with veterinary officers on testing and surveillance

Looking Ahead

As Lesotho grapples with this first confirmed case of foot-and-mouth disease, the focus is on containment and early detection to prevent further spread. Provincial and regional animal health systems are expected to step up cooperation, but farmers and industry stakeholders will play a crucial role in monitoring and reporting.

EDITORIAL

Lesotho and South Africa cannot afford this dangerous diplomatic decline



15

Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial



It is difficult to escape the conclusion that relations between Lesotho and South Africa have entered one of their most fragile phases in recent memory. What may appear, on the surface, to be a political allegation exchanged in a parliamentary setting carries implications far beyond the personalities involved. When South Africa's Mineral Resources Minister, Gwede Mantashe, accuses Lesotho's Prime Minister, Sam Matekane, of engaging with illegal miners, the damage is not confined to reputations. It seeps into the foundation of a relationship that hundreds of thousands of Basotho depend on for their daily survival.

Lesotho's geographic reality has always defined its

economic reality. Completely surrounded by South Africa, our country does not have the luxury of diplomatic distance. Every truck carrying exports, every worker crossing the border in search of employment, every litre of fuel, and every imported commodity passes through South African territory. This interdependence is not theoretical. It is lived, daily, by ordinary citizens whose livelihoods are tied, directly or indirectly, to the stability of that relationship.

It is precisely for this reason that the current deterioration in tone between Maseru and Pretoria should concern every Mosotho, regardless of political affiliation. Diplomatic relations are not abstract exercises conducted for cer-

emonial purposes. They are practical instruments that shape economic opportunity, labour mobility, trade access, and ultimately the welfare of citizens. When mistrust begins to define that relationship, it is ordinary people who feel the consequences long before political leaders do. There is already a broader context that makes this moment particularly sensitive. Illegal mining in South Africa has become a deeply politicised and emotional issue, associated with violence, economic losses, and social instability. Many of the individuals involved are Basotho, driven not by criminal ambition but by economic desperation and the absence of opportunity at home. This reality has created growing frustration within South Africa and,

increasingly, a narrative that associates Lesotho itself with the problem. Whether fair or unfair, such perceptions influence policy attitudes and political behaviour.

When a senior South African minister publicly links Lesotho's head of government to such an issue, it inevitably deepens suspicion. It risks reinforcing negative perceptions about Lesotho at a time when the country can least afford reputational damage. Investors pay attention to diplomatic signals. So do employers, border officials, and policymakers. A strained relationship can translate, quietly but effectively, into tighter labour access, slower cross-border movement, and diminished

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Lesotho Tribune

OPINION

Ukrainians keep fighting for their children, their country, and a rules-based international order



flagrant violation, in defence of principles of the United Nation (UN) Charter that the overwhelming majority in the international community hold dear: independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the obligation to settle international disputes by peaceful means.

As Europeans, we have a direct stake in Ukraine's security and future. Supporting Ukraine is an investment in Europe's own security and in the stability of our continent. That is why we are committed to securing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. Nobody wants peace more than Ukraine. But peace cannot come at any cost. Any agreement must ensure Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognised borders, while at the same time guarantee Ukraine's long-term security and the ability to defend itself. Europe must be involved, when it comes to European security and assets. And it is the EU and Europe who decide upon the issues concerning EU and Europe. In addition, a ceasefire without security guarantees is not peace; it is merely a pause before Russia decides to strike again. Ukraine has continuously demonstrated a commit

By Staff Reporters

When the first explosions were heard by nurses and nannies at the Kherson Regional Children's Home in southern Ukraine on 24 February 2022, they were alarmed and confused. The building had no shelter, not even a basement. As Russian forces occupied Kherson in the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, staff moved the children to a church, attempting to hide them. Eventually, Russian soldiers found them. They forcibly transferred and deported 48 Ukrainian children. Witnesses recall how the Russians wrote the children's names on their little hands to identify them – only to later change the identity of many. This was not an accident of war. It was a deliberate policy of erasing their identity. According to the Bring Kids Back initiative of the

President of Ukraine, there are records confirming the deportation and forced transfer of approximately 20,000 Ukrainian children by Russia. These children are still missing and illegally being placed in foster families and adopted in Russia, in the process of depriving their national identity - changing their names, biographies, and even dates of birth. This makes the ongoing mediating role of South Africa to facilitate their return so urgent and important. We support South Africa's efforts and work together, as we did recently in the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a resolution on the return of all Ukrainian children forcibly transferred or deported by Russia since 2014. Almost 1,500 days have passed since Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine but let us keep in mind that the aggression started twelve years ago by

the occupation of Crimea. A reckless Russia's war of aggression that has to date according to estimates cost nearly two million casualties, including citizens of South Africa and other African countries tricked into fighting for Russia. This is the heaviest casualty rate suffered by any military offensive since the second World War, and it has barely translated into gains on the ground: in 2025, Russian forces seized only 0.8 percent of Ukraine's territory.

In contrast, what is visible is the global damage generated by Putin's war: threatened food insecurity, ecological disasters, disrupted energy exports, increased inflation and slowed globalisation.

Ukrainians are fighting with extraordinary courage not only to defend their people and territory. They are fighting for the rules-based international order, standing up against Russia's

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economic goodwill. The most troubling aspect of diplomatic deterioration is that its effects are rarely announced formally. There is no declaration that citizens will now suffer. Instead, the consequences emerge gradually. Border processes become less accommodating. Employment conditions become less secure. Economic cooperation becomes less enthusiastic. Opportunities that once existed begin to narrow.

Lesotho's economy remains fragile. The government itself has acknowledged its inability to absorb the growing number of unemployed citizens into the public sector. This reality

makes regional economic integration not merely beneficial, but essential. South Africa is Lesotho's largest trading partner, its primary labour destination, and its main economic gateway to the world. Any weakening of that relationship carries direct economic risks.

This does not mean Lesotho must accept every allegation without question. National dignity requires that accusations, especially serious ones, be addressed with clarity and firmness. But firmness and diplomacy are not mutually exclusive. The priority must be to prevent political tensions from evolving into long-term diplomatic damage.

South Africa, too, carries responsibility. Lesotho's stability is not a peripheral matter. Economic hardship and instability within Lesotho inevitably spill across borders, affecting migration, labour markets, and regional security. A cooperative relationship serves the interests of both nations. Ultimately, what is at stake is not the reputation of individual leaders, but the economic future of citizens. Diplomatic relationships, particularly for a country in Lesotho's position, are among its most valuable strategic assets. They sustain trade, enable employment, and provide access to opportunity beyond national borders. The danger now is not sim-

ply the allegation itself, but what it represents. It reflects a relationship under strain, a relationship that requires careful management to prevent further deterioration. Lesotho cannot afford prolonged tension with the one country upon which so much of its economic life depends. For ordinary Basotho, the concern is not diplomatic language or political point-scoring. It is whether they will continue to find work, move freely, and pursue livelihoods in a region that has always been interconnected. That is why this moment demands seriousness, restraint, and above all, leadership that recognises the true stakes involved.



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ment to a just and lasting peace. Meanwhile, there is a stark asymmetry between Russia's statements on "seeking peace" and the war crimes being committed on the ground. In the midst of the coldest winter in Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression, Russia is ruthlessly intensifying its blatant attacks, deliberately striking homes and civilian infrastructure. Energy facilities and heating systems are routinely targeted by Russian strikes, leaving innumerable families without power, heating and water in freezing temperatures. By doing this, Russia is creating a humanitarian crisis. This is not the conduct of a state seeking peace. It is the behaviour of the Kremlin, waging a war of attrition against an innocent civilian population.

The EU will continue to

provide comprehensive political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to the Ukrainian people. Since the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion, the EU and its Member States have stood firmly by Ukraine and, together, constitute the largest provider of financial assistance to the country.

So far €103.3 billion have been mobilised in financial, economic and humanitarian support. Additionally, we have decided to provide Ukraine with a loan of €90 billion (appr. Rand 1.71 trillion) for 2026 and 2027. With this support, we ensure that Ukraine can bolster its defence on the battlefield; keep basic services running and strengthen its position at the negotiation table.

After four years of war, the future is uncertain for those children deported and forcibly transferred

by Russia from the Kher-son Regional Children's Home. While a few children from this Children's Home have been located and returned to Ukraine, the fate of more than 40 remains unknown. Returning all deported and forcibly transferred children to Ukraine and pursuing accountability for those responsible is paramount, including through their criminal prosecution and indictment under international law.

Europe will always stand with Ukraine and its people, as they show the most extraordinary resilience and keep fighting Russia's attempts to assert its dominance over their country. As history has shown, when such brutal aggression continues unchecked, it brings tremendous suffering.

2026 must be the year Russia ceases its war of aggression against Ukraine, pav-

ing the way for a just and lasting peace for Ukraine, in full compliance with the principles of the UN charter and international law. Signed: *Amb. M. Sunnergren (European Union), Amb. R. Königsbrun (Austria), Amb. P. Jansen (Belgium), Amb. M. Tzorzorkova (Bulgaria), Amb. A. Cicvaric (Croatia), High Com. A. Mandritis (Cyprus), Amb. T. Ulicny (Czechia), Amb. Des. K. Poulsen (Denmark), Amb. at Large for Africa D. Schaer (Estonia), Amb. P. Metso (Finland), Amb. D. Martinon (France), Amb. A. Peschke (Germany), Amb. A. Gormley (Ireland), Amb. A. Vecchi (Italy), Amb. R. Jankauskaite (Lithuania), Amb. J. Doornewaard (Netherlands), CdA J. Chodorowiz (Poland), Amb. C. Costa Neves (Portugal), Amb. M. Sitaru (Romania), Amb. V. Gracz (Slovakia), Amb. Des. J.M. Pascual (Spain), Amb. Des. A.K. Eneström (Sweden)*

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Tourism Festival is long-term. While progress may seem gradual, the organisers remain optimistic.

“This event will eventually grow into what we want it to be,” Rakuoane says. “It is going to take baby steps. We understand that growth does not happen overnight, but we are moving in the right direction.”

He adds that collaboration remains key to achieving that vision. According to him, stronger partnerships with tourism bodies and other stakeholders are essential to elevate the festival to national and even regional prominence.

“We need the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC) and others to fully support us,” he says. “If we work together, this can become one of the biggest tourism events in the country.”

The presence of learners this year has injected new life into the programme. Teachers say the festival gives children a rare opportunity to express themselves outside the classroom while celebrating Basotho culture. For many of the pupils, it is their first time performing before such large audiences.

The inclusion of schools also strengthens the fes-

tival’s long-term sustainability. By engaging children at a young age, organisers are nurturing future performers, cultural ambassadors and even tourism entrepreneurs.

While Thursday and Friday are filled with school competitions and community-based activities, Saturday remains the main attraction, featuring entertainment by local and international artists, food exhibitions, sporting events and cultural showcases.

However, concerns are being raised about attendance patterns.

One member of the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation says Saturday, despite being the headline day, does not always attract the numbers organisers hope for.

“The festival on Saturday needs more collaborations and broader advertising,” she says. “It is normally not fully packed as other days like Thursday and Friday.” According to her, increased marketing efforts and strategic partnerships could significantly improve turnout on the main day.

“If we promote it more aggressively and collaborate with more stakeholders, especially in the tourism sector, we can

draw bigger crowds on Saturday,” she explains. She emphasises that the Katse Tourism Festival has strong potential but requires coordinated efforts to maximise its impact.

The broader aim of the festival remains clear, to position Katse Dam as a vibrant tourism hub while creating economic opportunities for surrounding communities. Throughout the festival grounds, local vendors are selling traditional food, crafts and handmade products. Small business owners say the event provides a crucial platform to reach new customers and boost income.

For the LHDA, which supports the festival as part of its 10-Year Strategy, tourism is seen as a pathway for livelihood diversification in project-affected communities. By strengthening participation in the tourism value chain, the Authority hopes to ensure that development linked to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project translates into tangible community benefits.

As the LHWP celebrates its 40th anniversary, the festival also serves as a reminder that infrastructure development is about more than dams and tunnels. It is about people,

culture and shared growth.

The energy at Katse this week reflects that spirit. Children’s laughter echoes across the open spaces. Traditional drums beat in rhythm. Parents and visitors mingle among food stalls and performance stages. The highlands, often known for their quiet beauty, are currently alive with colour and movement.

Organisers acknowledge that challenges remain, particularly in marketing, sponsorship and logistics. Yet they remain encouraged by the visible signs of progress. The addition of Thursday activities, the participation of 16 primary schools and growing community involvement all point to a festival that is steadily evolving. As the celebrations continue into Friday and build toward Saturday’s main programme, one message resonates among organisers and partners alike, growth may be gradual, but the foundation is being laid. If collaboration strengthens and advertising widens, the Katse Tourism Festival could soon stand among Lesotho’s flagship tourism events. For now, it is taking confident steps forward, one extra day, one school performance and one partnership at a time.

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Battle over Court Venue in High-Profile Fraud Case

By: Tholoana Lesenya

A legal battle has erupted in the High Court over where a fraud and corruption case involving several accused persons should be heard, with senior lawyer Advocate Motiea Teele (KC) arguing that the matter properly belongs before the Thaba-Tseka Magistrate's Court and not the High Court. The case involves Bokang Nthimo, Mabela Lehloanya, Bahlakoana 1966 Group PTY LTD, Semekekane Khooa and Lehlohonolo Ntlama, who are facing charges of fraud and corruption. However, before the allegations can be verified, the High Court must first decide a procedural dispute concerning the correct forum for the trial.

Advocate Teele made his submissions this week during argument of a review application in which the applicants are asking the High Court to review, correct and set aside a decision made by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). The DPP had removed the matter from the magistrate's court and directed that it proceed before the High Court. According to Adv. Teele, the DPP's decision amounts to "forum shopping", a practice where a party attempts to move a case to a court perceived to be more favourable. He argued that such conduct should not be permitted, as it undermines fairness and proper administration of justice. He told the court that when the DPP initially decided that the matter should proceed before the magistrate's court, she had already considered all rele-



vant legal and factual factors. At that stage, she was satisfied that the magistrate's court was competent to hear and determine the case and that justice would be served in that forum. Adv. Teele emphasised that the case was already pending before the Thaba-Tseka Magistrate's Court when the DPP reversed course. A hearing date had been set, and the matter was moving forward within the ordinary course of the criminal justice process.

He argued that there was no new development that justified removing the case from the magistrate's court. In his view, the magistrate's court is legally empowered to hear and determine the charges in question. "The High Court should not be clogged with matters that can be meaningfully heard by subordinate courts," Adv. Teele submitted.

He further stressed that the High Court, as a superior court, should focus on matters that require its exclusive jurisdiction or involve particularly complex legal issues.

Allowing cases that fall squarely within the competence of magistrates to be routinely transferred to the High Court would, he suggested, create unnecessary backlogs and strain judicial resources.

The applicants are therefore asking the High Court to

intervene and set aside the DPP's directive, effectively sending the case back to the Thaba-Tseka Magistrate's Court for trial. On the other hand, the state strongly opposed the application.

Advocate 'Malerato Ntsatsi, representing the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), defended the DPP's decision. She argued that the DPP was exercising her statutory powers when she directed that the matter be committed to the High Court.

Adv. Ntsatsi submitted that the DPP has constitutional and statutory authority to determine how prosecutions should proceed, including deciding the appropriate forum for trial. She maintained that the decision to move the case was lawful and proper.

"It cannot be said to be forum shopping," she argued. She explained that in criminal proceedings, the magistrate's court often acts as a remanding court at the early stages of a case. During that phase, the accused may appear before the magistrate's court for purposes such as bail applications or preliminary procedures. However, the DPP retains the authority to decide whether the matter should ultimately be tried in that court or committed to the High Court.

Adv. Ntsatsi acknowledged

that the magistrate's court has jurisdiction to hear the matter. However, she pointed out that there are circumstances in which the DPP may issue a directive that a case be referred to the High Court.

She told the court that the gravity and seriousness of the offences facing the applicants justify committal to the High Court. According to her, the nature of the charges, fraud and corruption carries significant public interest implications and may involve complex issues that warrant the attention of the superior court.

She further submitted that it is in the best interest of the state that the matter be tried before the High Court. In her view, the DPP's decision was guided by considerations of justice, seriousness of the allegations and proper prosecution strategy, rather than any improper motive. The High Court must now determine whether the DPP acted within the bounds of her powers or whether her decision can be reviewed and set aside. At the heart of the dispute is the balance between prosecutorial discretion and judicial oversight. While the DPP enjoys wide powers in directing prosecutions, those decisions remain subject to review by the courts if they are shown to be irrational, unlawful or procedurally unfair.

If the court finds in favour of the applicants, the matter will return to the Thaba-Tseka Magistrate's Court for trial. If it dismisses the application, the case will proceed before the High Court.

The ruling is expected to be delivered on March 26, 2026.



SENTIMENT TRACKER

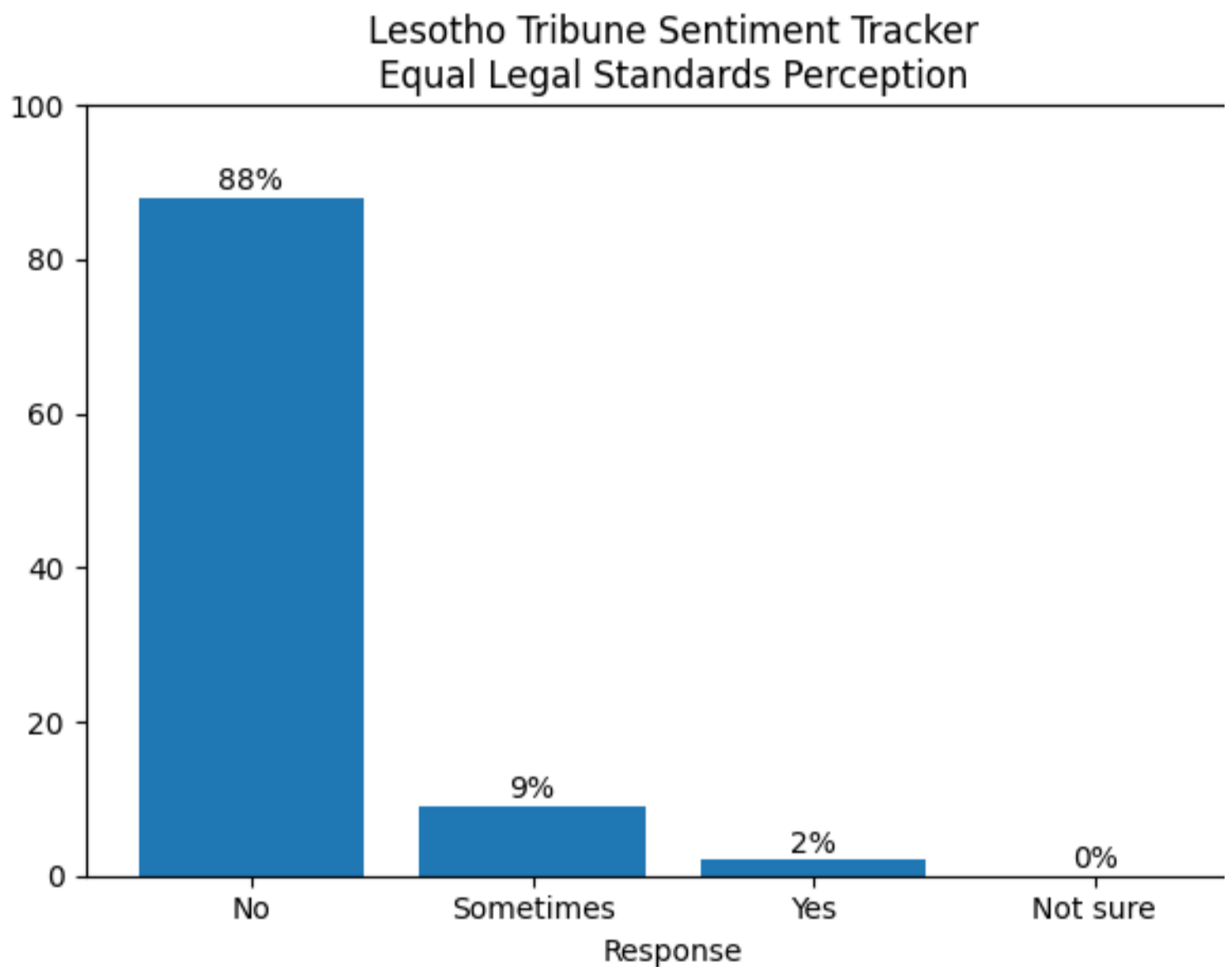
Lesotho quietly confronts a hidden drug addiction crisis

A Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker poll has revealed that drug addiction is far closer to Basotho households than many may publicly admit, exposing what appears to be a deeply personal but largely unsupported national crisis.

By Lesotho Tribune

The poll, which asked whether people personally know someone struggling with drug addiction who cannot access professional rehabilitation, found that 64 percent of respondents said yes, either within their own family or their community. Specifically:

- 33 percent said a community member
 - 31 percent said a close family member
 - 29 percent said no
 - 7 percent preferred not to say
- The results suggest that drug addiction is not a distant social issue affecting isolated individuals, but one embedded within families, neighbourhoods, and daily life.



A silent crisis with no safety net Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the poll is not simply the prevalence, but the

implication behind the question itself: access to rehabilitation. Lesotho currently has extremely limited special-

ised drug rehabilitation infrastructure, meaning families often carry the **Continues in Page 22**

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burden alone.

This creates a dangerous cycle where addiction persists untreated, increasing risks of crime, unemployment, mental health breakdown and long-term social instability.

What the numbers really mean When nearly two-thirds of respondents acknowledge knowing someone affected, it points to a systemic challenge rather than isolated personal failures.

It also suggests the visible drug use in urban centres may represent only a fraction of the true scale. The 7 percent who declined to answer may further reflect stigma, denial, or fear.

Policy implications

The findings raise urgent questions:

- Is addiction being treated as a public health issue or a criminal one?
 - Why has rehabilitation infrastructure not kept pace with rising drug use?
 - How many families are fighting this battle alone?
- Without intervention, the economic and social costs will continue to grow quietly in the background.

Sentiment Tracker conclusion The poll reveals a country confronting addiction privately, without

sufficient public systems to respond.

The crisis may already be far deeper than official policy discussions suggest.

Basotho demand evidence on explosive illegal miners allegation

Basotho are reserving judgment following explosive allegations linking Prime Minister Sam Matekane to illegal miners in South Africa, with nearly half of respondents demanding proof before forming an opinion.

According to the Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker poll:

- 47 percent said they need evidence first
 - 27 percent believe the allegation is true and worrying
 - 20 percent believe it is false and politically motivated
 - 6 percent are unsure
- Public reaction defined by caution, not outrage The dominant response was neither belief nor rejection, but caution. This reflects a population increasingly aware of political messaging, but reluctant to accept claims without verification.

It also suggests institutional credibility and evidence matter more than political rhetoric alone. A divided but careful public The poll shows a country split into three

main groups:

Those concerned by the allegation.

Those dismissing it as political manoeuvring. And the largest group, waiting for proof.

This middle group may ultimately shape the political impact of the allegation.

Why this matters economically Illegal mining in South Africa has become associated with violence, economic losses, and diplomatic tension. Any perceived connection to Lesotho's leadership risks reputational damage, regardless of whether claims are substantiated.

Sentiment Tracker conclusion Basotho are not reacting emotionally, but rationally.

They are watching. And waiting.

Majority say their lives have worsened since Trump returned to power A majority of respondents say their personal lives have worsened since Donald Trump became President of the United States, highlighting how global politics directly affects ordinary Basotho. The Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker found:

- 54 percent said their lives have become worse
- 23 percent said their lives stayed the same
- 19 percent said there

was no impact

• 4 percent said their lives improved

Why a U.S. President affects Basotho

At first glance, it may seem surprising.

But Lesotho's economy is deeply connected to global systems influenced by U.S. policy, including: Foreign aid flows Trade access such as AGOA

Currency strength Global inflation and fuel prices Changes in any of these areas can quickly affect daily life.

Economic perception matters as much as reality Even where direct policy changes are not immediately visible, public perception reflects lived economic pressure.

Higher prices, job insecurity, and uncertainty often become associated with global political shifts.

Very few see improvement

Only 4 percent reporting improvement suggests optimism linked to U.S. political changes is extremely limited among respondents.

Sentiment Tracker conclusion

The findings reinforce a simple reality:

Global politics is local economics.

And Basotho are feeling the effects.

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Lesotho Tribune

By Litšitso Letsunyane

 On Thursday, February 26th, the Premier League Management Committee (PLMC) convened a strategic meeting with the presidents of all 16 clubs competing in the Vodacom Premier League. This session particularly focused on structural growth, competitive advancement, and the broader professionalization of local football.

A mutual resolution of the meeting was the establishment of an off-season tournament, which will be scheduled to take place during the league recess. Unlike previous short-term off-season competitions, which operated under limited contractual arrangements, this initiative is said to be designed to become a permanent annual fixture on the football calendar.

The competition will be

ARTS & SPORTS

Lesotho Premier League Winner to Play in CAF Champions League from 2025/26



financed through a solidarity fund structured to provide clubs with direct financial assistance and match incentives (bonuses). The strategic objective is to ensure these clubs maintain competitive rhythm during the break while improving pre-season readiness ahead of the new campaign.

In another incentive-driven approach, the PLMC revealed that the winner of the tournament may earn an opportunity to qualify for one of the national cup competitions, which will surely add competitive drive and hunger beyond financial support.

Corporate entities were also urged and encouraged to partner with the league in sponsoring the initiative to guarantee its sustainability and long-term viability.

Another landmark moment of the meeting is when the President of the Lesotho Football Association, Lijane Nthunya, confirmed that beginning with the 2025/26 season, the winner of the Vodacom Premier League will qualify for the CAF Champions League. That announcement itself represents a major advancement for local football, positioning the country's top clubs within Africa's premier interclub competitions. Nthunya further indicated that, contingent on continued improvements in governance standards and football development structures, the league's runner-up could also, in future secure qualification for the CAF Confederation Cup. Participation in these continental competitions carries substantial

financial implications especially for smaller teams like our local teams. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) recently confirmed increased prize allocations: CAF Champions League winners will now receive over R95,000,000 (\$6,000,000) while the runners-up receive over R31,000,000 (\$2,000,000).

CAF Confederation Cup winners will receive over R63,000,000 (\$4,000,000) and the runners-up will win over R15,000,000 (\$1,000,000).

These financial rewards could provide transformative economic support to local clubs, enhancing infrastructure, player welfare, and institutional stability. But beyond monetary gain, qualification offers our local teams the opportunity to showcase their talent on the continental stage, potentially increasing player market value and attracting sponsorship interest.

In closing, Nthunya appealed to all football stakeholders to prioritize strong governance frameworks, financial sustainability and cooperation and unity. He emphasised that the success of these newly introduced initiatives depends on institutional discipline and collective commitment.

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