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MASERU, LESOTHO

Sunday, 26 April 2026

# Lesotho Tribune

*Information Liberates*

www.lesothotribune.co.ls

VOL 5, ISSUE 33

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# News

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## Ramaphosa pledges R30m to Lesotho health as US aid vacuum deepens

*South Africa committed R30-million for Lesotho's HIV and tuberculosis response at the Senqu Bridge opening in Mokhotlong. The gesture arrives as Lesotho continues to reckon with the loss of at least 23 percent of its PEPFAR funding, 1,500 health counsellors, and a health system set back at least 15 years in a single year.*

By SEIPATI MATOBO



President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Wednesday that South Africa will provide R30-million in humanitarian assistance to Lesotho, directed at the country's response to HIV and tuberculosis. The announcement came at the official opening of the Senqu Bridge in Mokhotlong, where Ramaphosa stood alongside King Letsie III and Prime Minister Samuel Matekane. The pledge was made through the African Renaissance Fund.

The timing of the commitment was pointed. Ramaphosa named the context plainly: declining levels of international assistance. What that phrase gestures toward is a rupture that has quietly dismantled much of Lesotho's public health architecture over the past fifteen months.

When President Trump signed an executive order freezing foreign assistance on his first day back in office in January 2025, the consequences in Lesotho were immediate. Within weeks, clinics shut. Workers were dismissed. Patients stopped treatment. In Lesotho, PEPFAR had committed more than \$630 million to the HIV response since 2006. Over nearly two decades, with close to \$1 billion in cumulative US support, the country had assembled a health network capable of slowing one of the world's most severe HIV epidemics.

What the freeze exposed was how little of that system Lesotho could independently sustain. The government funded only M273.68 million of the country's M2.2 billion health budget in the year prior to the cuts. Of that, M268 million went directly to purchasing antiretrovirals, leaving, as HIV and AIDS programme manager Dr Tapiwa Tarumbiswa told a parliamentary committee in June 2025, just three percent for everything else.

"We're going to lose a lot of lives because of this."

MOKHOTHU MAKHALANYANE,  
CHAIRPERSON, LESOTHO LEGISLATIVE HEALTH COMMITTEE

The Center for Global Development found that PEPFAR-supported coverage in Lesotho declined by more than 50 percent at the height of the crisis, one of the steepest drops across the 53 PEPFAR-recipient countries. The Foundation for AIDS Research placed Lesotho in the top ten countries globally for the proportional share of PEPFAR funding cut, with a minimum loss of 23 percent. Testing numbers fell sharply after 1,500 HIV counsellors were dismissed in February 2025 alone. The WHO warned in March that the country might run out of antiretroviral

stocks altogether.

Progress that had taken a generation to achieve was halted abruptly. UNAIDS data had shown a 74 percent decline in new HIV infections in Lesotho since 2010. By late 2024, Lesotho had reached UNAIDS's 95-95-95 milestone. Makhalanyane said the cuts had set the country back at least 15 years.

Against that backdrop, South Africa's R30-million pledge is a gesture of solidarity, but its scale requires honest framing. Lesotho's total annual health budget ran to approximately M2.2 billion, of which the US contribution through PEPFAR represented the dominant share. The R30-million addresses a fraction of the gap. It does not replace the testing infrastructure, the counselling workforce, or the supply chains that were disrupted. What it signals is a shift: that South Africa is beginning to assume a role it has not previously been asked to play.

In May 2025, Congress voted to restore some PEPFAR funding, and by August only \$2.9 billion of the \$6 billion budgeted for the 2025 fiscal year had been made available. By the end of 2025, coverage had partially rebounded globally. But health workers said the disruption caused irreparable harm. For Prime Minister Matekane, who told the gathering that the royalties and infrastructure flowing from the project are central to Lesotho's development finance strategy, the ceremony offered a moment to reframe the country's position. Lesotho is not only a recipient of aid. It is a sovereign supplier of the water resource that sustains the industrial heartland of the Southern African region.

**Continues in Page 4**

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# News



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The Senqu Bridge was built to endure. The plaque reads: “Officially opened on 22 April 2026 in celebration of 40 years of partnership and regional development.” What the partnership has not yet fully reckoned with is that Lesotho’s ability to remain a stable, functioning state depends on a health system currently being rebuilt after a near-collapse it did not cause and could not prevent. The R30-million is a beginning. Whether the region treats the underlying

structural dependence as a problem worth solving at scale is a different, larger question.

### BACKGROUND · THE SENQU BRIDGE AND THE LHWP

The Senqu Bridge, 825 metres long and 90 metres high, is the first extradosed bridge in Lesotho and the largest of three major crossings being built to span the Polihali Reservoir. Constructed at an estimated cost of R2.4 billion, with 86 percent financed by South Africa, it was inaugurated jointly by King

Letsie III and President Ramaphosa on 22 April 2026, marking 40 years of partnership under the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Phase II of the LHWP will increase water transfer volumes from 780 million to 1.27 billion cubic metres per annum while boosting Lesotho’s hydropower capacity. The project is the largest single investment South Africa has made outside its borders. Gauteng sources approximately 60 percent of its water from Lesotho’s highlands. Construction created more than 1,200 jobs, the majority for Basotho workers.

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# High Court reserves judgment in Lesotho electricity tariff challenge

*Justice Polo Banyane will rule on 12 June 2026 on whether LEWA's 2024 tariff increase was lawful, following a challenge by civic group SECTION 2 on behalf of consumers.*

By **THOLOANA LESENYA**



## CASE AT A GLANCE

COURT	High Court of Lesotho
JUDGE	Justice Polo Banyane
APPLICANT	SECTION 2 (Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution)
RESPONDENT	Lesotho Electricity and Water Authority (LEWA)
FILED	28 March 2024, transferred from Commercial Court
JUDGMENT	Expected 12 June 2026

The High Court has reserved judgment in a case challenging the legality of Lesotho's 2024 electricity tariff increase, with a ruling expected on 12 June 2026. The matter was heard before Justice Polo Banyane, who will deliver the court's final position after considering submissions from both sides.

The case was brought by Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution, known as SECTION 2, a civic organisation acting in the public interest. The group is challenging a tariff hike approved by the Lesotho Electricity and Water Authority (LEWA) in March 2024, arguing that the increase was both unlawful and procedurally flawed. Advocate Fusi Sehapi, appearing for SECTION 2, told the court that the decision to raise electricity tariffs was irrational and disproportionately harsh given the economic pressures already facing ordinary Basotho. He submitted that LEWA relied on outdated financial statements when approving the increase, meaning the decision did not reflect the authority's true financial position at the time. Sehapi also raised concerns about public participation. He argued that

SECTION 2 represents the interests of consumers and should have been consulted before such a consequential decision was made. The failure to involve stakeholders, he said, undermined both the transparency and the fairness of the process. The tariffs are still in effect and continue to impact consumers. The matter is still very much alive.

## ADVOCATE FUSI SEHAPI, FOR SECTION 2

The court questioned whether the matter had become moot, given that the contested tariffs apply to the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 financial years. Sehapi rejected that suggestion, insisting the tariffs remain in force and continue to impose costs on consumers. He urged the court to set aside the increase and, should judgment go in the applicant's favour, to order that the public be reimbursed for the additional

amounts paid. LEWA defended its conduct through Advocate Kabelo Letuka, who told the court that the tariff increase was carried out in full compliance with the law. Letuka rejected the claim that the authority relied on outdated financial data, arguing that the allegation is unsupported by either the facts or applicable legal provisions. He maintained that the applicant had failed to produce sufficient evidence to demonstrate any procedural irregularity.

The case has a complex procedural history. It was first filed on 28 March 2024 in the Commercial Court, which later declined jurisdiction and transferred the matter to the High Court. That transfer caused delays but placed the dispute before a court with the appropriate authority to adjudicate constitutional and administrative questions.

The outcome carries wide implications. Electricity tariffs affect virtually every household and business in Lesotho, and a ruling on their legality could shape how the country's regulatory bodies exercise their powers in future. The case has also focused public attention on questions of accountability and whether institutions such as LEWA are required to consult those most directly affected by their decisions. Should the court find in LEWA's favour, the judgment would affirm the authority's regulatory mandate and bring the dispute to a close. A ruling for SECTION 2 would raise the prospect of consumer reimbursements and could set a precedent for how tariff-setting processes are conducted and challenged in Lesotho. Justice Banyane is expected to deliver her ruling on 12 June 2026.

# News

*Official Statements, government communications, and institutional announcements*



## NUL Pro-VC goes to court to block unlawful appointment

*The Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho has filed an urgent High Court application to halt a Vice-Chancellor appointment process he says contravenes the university's own statute.*

By MALEFO THINYANE



**P**rof. Kananelo E. Mosito, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho, has approached the High Court in Maseru for an order restraining the University Council from continuing with its process to appoint a successor to the incumbent Vice-Chancellor, whose fixed term expires on 31

July 2026. The application, filed as an urgent matter under case number CIV/APN/2026, seeks both a suspension of the process and the setting aside of all steps already taken.

Mosito contends in a founding affidavit that the Council initiated the appoint-

ment process on 22 October 2025, more than nine months before the vacancy would legally arise, purporting to exercise a statutory power that had not yet been triggered. He argues this renders the Council's conduct unlawful, procedurally improper, and liable to be set aside under

**Continues in Page 8**



# Kamoli bombing trial resumes as witnesses give conflicting accounts

*The long-stalled trial of former LDF Commander Tlali Kamoli and four co-accused over the bombing of a former police commissioner's residence has resumed, with the second state witness offering testimony that directly contradicts earlier evidence from a fellow soldier.*

By **THOLOANA LESENYA**



## WITNESSES AT ISSUE

Lt. Col. Thabiso Rajane SECOND STATE WITNESS · MI SUPERIOR	W/O Mpolokeng Moleleki FORMER PRIVATE · MI OPERATIVE
Says Moleleki reported that senior LDF officers were frequently visiting Liabiloe's residence Assigned Moleleki to surveil and confirm the visits Says Moleleki was dismissed after Liabiloe allegedly exposed her cover Heard reports of bombings in Moshoeshoe 2 and Ha-Abia on radio	Denies ever reporting that senior officers visited Liabiloe's residence Denies attending Liabiloe's home for any work purpose Says she visited coincidentally, accompanying mutual friend 'Mampe Says she did not know she was going to Liabiloe's house until she arrived

The trial of former Lesotho Defence Force Commander Tlali Kamoli and four co-accused army members, charged in connection with the bombing of the residence of former Police Commissioner Tsooana and the woman who is now former Prime Minister Thomas Thabane's wife, has resumed after dragging on for years.

The second state witness, Lieutenant Colonel Thabiso Rajane, told the court that he was the superior of Private Mpolokeng Moleleki, who was described as one of the

most capable soldiers attached to Military Intelligence. Rajane said her reports were thorough and compelled careful reading because they reached deep into state security matters.

According to Rajane, information received through Moleleki's sources pointed to frequent visits by high-ranking LDF members to the residence of Liabiloe Ramoholi, who is now known as 'Maesiah Thabane and was at the time the wife of former Prime Minister Thomas Thabane. Rajane said he accordingly assigned Moleleki to investigate and confirm whether those visits were in fact taking place.

"Private Moleleki was one of the outstanding and well performing soldiers while reporting. Her reports made one think when reading them."

### LT. COL. THABISO RAJANE, SECOND STATE WITNESS

Rajane testified that at some point he received a call from Moleleki saying that Liabiloe had contacted her and insulted her. He told Moleleki to come to his office and, after she arrived, he informed his superior, Major Lekhooa, of the matter. Moleleki was then called to give Major Lekhooa her account of what had happened.

Major Lekhooa informed them that the matter would be looked into, and Moleleki was subsequently dismissed. Rajane said Moleleki believed her cover had been blown by soldiers who were serving as bodyguards for Thomas Thabane and who knew her personally. Lekhooa instructed Rajane to question those soldiers, but all gave responses unrelated to the matter. Rajane further told the court that he was at home when he learnt through a radio station that bombings had taken place in different areas of Maseru. He heard reports of incidents in Moshoeshoe 2 and Ha-Abia, though he could not recall the exact station from which he received that infor-

mation.

Moleleki, now a Warrant Officer, gave an account that diverged sharply from Rajane's testimony. In her evidence in chief, she denied ever making any report about senior army officers visiting Liabiloe's residence. She also denied attending Liabiloe's home at Moshoeshoe 2 for any work-related purpose.

Moleleki told the court that she had no prior knowledge that she would end up at Moshoeshoe 2 that day. She said she had been visiting 'Mampe, a mutual friend she and Liabiloe shared, and that while she was in a vehicle, 'Mampe called and asked her to wait at the Moshoeshoe 2 stop known as Masoleng because she was already on her way there and they could travel together. 'Mampe arrived as arranged and together they went to a house where Moleleki said she only realised it was Liabiloe's residence once they entered and she saw Liabiloe inside. She said 'Mampe had come to help with cooking and when they arrived 'Mampe proceeded to do so. Moleleki offered to assist but was told to sit down.

Later, visitors arrived including former Prime Minister Thabane. Moleleki said his arrival made her uncomfortable and she indicated to 'Mampe that they should leave, and they did.

Warrant Officer Moleleki told the court she had been to Liabiloe's residence on only two occasions. The first was at Ha-Mabote, when she needed a document relating to coalition government that had been requested from the office of Thabo Thakalekoala, who declined to provide it. She approached 'Mampe and asked her to arrange a meeting with Liabiloe. 'Mampe contacted Liabiloe, who invited them to her home in Ha-Mabote. Upon arrival, Moleleki explained what she needed and Liabiloe contacted Thakalekoala. The document was delivered the following day.

The second occasion, Moleleki confirmed, was the visit to Moshoeshoe 2 that she had not anticipated when she set out that day.

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## Continued from Page 6

the principle of legality.

At the heart of the challenge is section 16(2) of the National University of Lesotho Order, 1992. That provision requires the Council to constitute a Joint Committee of the Council and the Senate to consider Vice-Mosito draws a careful distinction between administrative preparation and the formal exercise of statutory power. What is impermissible is the formal constitution of the Joint Committee itself, because that act marks the commencement of the statutory appointment process and is therefore an exercise of statutory authority, not a neutral or preparatory measure.

The applicant further relies on section 17(4) of the Act, which provides that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor shall act as Vice-Chancellor whenever that office is vacant, with full authority to discharge all its functions. He submits that this provision makes express and sufficient provision for continuity upon any vacancy, negating any practical justification for the Council's premature action. "To treat a future vacancy as present is to substitute administrative convenience for legislative command." PROF. KANANELO E.

## MOSITO – FOUNDING

**AFFIDAVIT** The proper reconciliation of sections 16(2) and 17(4), as Mosito presents it, is that the former prescribes the procedure for substantive On his standing to bring the application, Mosito is unequivocal. His interest is personal, legal, and immediate: upon the expiry of the current Vice-Chancellor's term, section 17(4) would by operation of law vest in him the authority to act as Vice-Chancellor. An appointment concluded through an unlawful process would directly displace that statutory entitlement.

Mosito states that he exhausted internal channels before approaching the court. He engaged the Registrar and sought ministerial intervention from the Minister of Education, who did not respond. He notes that the Council, at its meeting of 1 April 2026, did not resolve whether a vacancy had arisen as required by section 16(2) but instead continued to advance the process on the basis of an anticipated future vacancy. The case is expected to attract significant attention within Lesotho's public law and higher education communities. It poses a direct question about the limits of institutional authority and the extent to which statutory bodies may act in anticipation of, rather than in

response to, the jurisdictional conditions attached to their powers.


Chancellor candidates only when a vacancy occurs. Mosito submits that this phrase is a jurisdictional fact: the power to constitute the Joint Committee arises only upon an actual vacancy, not in anticipation of one.

Appointment once a vacancy has arisen, while the latter ensures interim leadership continuity immediately upon that vacancy. Together they constitute a complete statutory scheme that leaves no room for anticipatory action by the Council.

The National University of Lesotho had not responded to a request for comment at the time of publication.

## STATUTORY BACKGROUND

The National University of Lesotho was established under the NUL Order, 1992. Section 16(2) requires the Council to appoint a Joint Committee of Council and Senate to consider Vice-Chancellor candidates when a vacancy occurs. Section 17(4) provides that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor shall act as Vice-Chancellor whenever that post is vacant, with full authority to perform all functions of the office.




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# ESG Lens

*Sustainability, accountability, and development impact across Lesotho and the region*



## Grounded by design: the cost of ESG cost of thin-route aviation in landlocked Africa

*A single carrier. Three daily regional jets. No domestic alternatives. When Airlink suspended flights to Maseru in November 2025, Lesotho lost its only scheduled air service overnight. The episode was resolved in days, but the structural question it exposed will not be.*

**BY STAFF REPORTER**



**I**n 5 November 2025, Airlink grounded its daily Johannesburg-Maseru service. The reason was not a fare dispute or a network restructuring. It was missing fire and rescue equipment at Moshoeshe I International Airport. Within hours, Lesotho had no scheduled commercial air access. Passengers diverted to road. Cargo rerouted through Bloemfontein, 130 kilometres away. The interruption lasted two days. The vulnerability it revealed is permanent.

For investors and ESG analysts assessing the Southern African investment landscape, the episode is a data point that demands attention. Lesotho's aviation situation is not an anomaly. It is the extreme end of a regional spectrum of

thin-route dependency, shared in varying degrees by Eswatini, Botswana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Each of these landlocked states relies on a narrow thread of air connectivity that links it to the global economy. When that thread snaps, the exposure cuts across all three pillars of ESG analysis. The economics of thin-route aviation are structurally punishing. African airlines as a whole operate on margins that leave almost no room for reinvestment. Where the global airline industry generates approximately USD 7.70 in net profit per seat, African carriers average USD 1.20. For the regional jets that serve markets like Maseru, Maun, and Manzini, the calculus is even more unforgiving. Load factors must remain consistently high on routes

that carry a limited catchment population, with limited stimulation from business travel, tourism, or cargo density.

Airlines that commit capital to these routes do so against a backdrop of infrastructure risk they cannot fully price. The Moshoeshe I airport rehabilitation has stretched across multiple years, multiple contractors, and a cancelled ACSA tender later found to be mired in procurement irregularities. An ICAO audit in 2020 threatened to shut the facility down altogether. Renovation work resumed under a M184 million contract in 2023, phased through to late 2025. The carrier operating the route absorbs the commercial consequences of an airport whose governance failures are not its own making. Lesotho's airport lacks traffic. Enhancing it without addressing this issue only increases costs without proportionate benefits.

MINISTER MATJATO MOTEANE,  
PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORT, 2024

The minister's candour captures the circular trap at the heart of thin-route aviation economics. Carriers will not add frequencies or attract new entrants without guaranteed load. Governments cannot attract load without the infrastructure that signals stability and capacity. The airport upgrade is necessary but not sufficient. Without a traffic-generation strategy, it is capital deployed into a structure that cannot

**Continues in Page 11**

# Business & Economy

# 10<sup>IT</sup>

Markets, Monetary policy & the structural forces shaping Lesotho's economy

## Petroleum Fund urges media to improve reporting on fuel pricing and supply

*As global crude markets grow increasingly volatile, Lesotho's Petroleum Fund calls on journalists to deepen their understanding of pricing mechanisms and supply chains, warning that misinformation undermines public confidence.*

### By STAFF REPORTER

Adv Makananelo  
Kome · Interim  
CEO, Petroleum Fund

The engagement comes at a time when global oil markets are experiencing renewed volatility. Ongoing geopolitical conflicts in key oil-producing regions have disrupted supply chains, contributing to rising and unpredictable crude oil prices, including benchmarks such as Brent crude.

These external pressures have a direct ripple effect on small, import-dependent economies like Lesotho.

#### FACTORS DETERMINING PETROLEUM PRICING IN LESOTHO

International crude oil prices Exchange rate movements Transportation and logistics costs Domestic taxes and levies Adv Kome highlighted that petroleum pricing in Lesotho is not arbitrary but determined through structured mechanisms influenced by several factors, including international oil prices, exchange rate movements, transportation and logistics costs as well as domestic taxes and levies. Petroleum pricing and supply systems are complex. Without proper understanding, misinformation can easily spread, which may undermine public confidence and economic stability, she cautioned. The Petroleum Fund

also outlined the importance of understanding the full supply chain, from importation to distribution at fuel pumps, noting that each stage presents unique challenges

that require accurate interpretation and reporting. This media forum is part of the Fund's broader commitment to transparency, accountability and public engagement. By equipping journalists with technical knowledge, the institution hopes to bridge the gap between complex petroleum data and public communication. We value the media as key partners in ensuring that the public is well-informed. With this role comes the responsibility to report fairly, accurately, and with context.

Adv Makananelo Kome The initiative is expected to improve the quality of petroleum reporting in the country, foster a better-informed public and strengthen trust between the media, the Petroleum Fund and citizens. The CEO emphasised the power of informed dialogue, noting that collaboration between institutions and the media is essential in building public trust, especially during times of economic uncertainty driven by global oil market instability.

The Petroleum Fund reaffirmed its commitment to ongoing engagement and its role in supporting national

development through transparency and effective communication.



The Petroleum Fund has called on the media to strengthen accurate and responsible reporting on petroleum-related issues as global oil price fluctuations continue to impact Lesotho's economy. Speaking at a media forum held in Maseru on Friday, the Fund's Interim Chief Executive Officer, Advocate Makananelo Kome, emphasised the critical role journalists play in shaping public understanding of the petroleum sector. The forum aimed to enhance collaboration between the media and the Fund while building capacity around petroleum governance, pricing and supply systems. The petroleum sector remains central to Lesotho's economy and daily life. It affects transport, the cost of living and overall economic stability.

# ESG Lens

*Sustainability, accountability, and development impact across Lesotho and the region*



## Continued from Page 9

repay it. Rwanda offers the contrasting case. Also landlocked, also mountainous, Rwanda has made aviation a deliberate instrument of national economic strategy. IATA's 2025 value-of-air-transport study found aviation supporting USD 160 million in economic activity and 42,000 jobs, representing 1.1 percent of GDP.

RwandAir has turned geographic disadvantage into a transit hub model. By mid-2025, Rwanda had ratified twelve new Bilateral Air Services Agreements, positioning Kigali as a credible secondary hub for Southern and Eastern Africa. The governance dimension of this divergence is where ESG analysis becomes most precise. Lesotho's airport has been subject to repeated CAO safety findings, disputed procurement, failed tenders, and infrastructure neglect severe enough to trigger a near-closure notice. Eswatini, whose geographic position is analogous to Lesotho's, signed a Bilateral Air Services Agreement with South Africa in October 2025, formalising expanded services under SAATM obligations. These are not equivalent governance environments. IATA's December 2025 outlook for Africa forecasts 6.0 percent passenger growth in 2026, outpacing the global average of 4.9 percent. For landlocked states with aspira-

tions of becoming manufacturing or high-value goods export platforms, the cargo constraint is the most material one. Air freight is not a luxury supplement to sea trade for a landlocked country. It is the primary channel for time-sensitive, high-value exports. A single-carrier, single-route air link cannot reliably support that ambition. The social pillar of ESG is often the most difficult to quantify in aviation analysis, yet in Lesotho's case it is also the most immediate. Medical evacuations, diaspora connectivity, tourism arrivals, and the logistics supply chains of the garment sector all depend on the continuity of the Maseru-Johannesburg service. A two-day suspension may appear trivial on an annual traffic chart. For a textiles exporter trying to clear a time-sensitive shipment, it is not. The UNDP's August 2025 position paper on African landlocked developing countries coined the reframing from "landlocked" to "land-linked." Countries including Lesotho are already directing more than 30 percent of exports to other African countries. That integration, however, requires transport infrastructure that can keep pace with trade ambition. Rwanda and Uganda have reduced border clearance times by up to 80 percent through blockchain pilots. Lesotho's airport was still managing fire-rescue compliance failures at the start of the same year.

The investment signal embedded in all of this is not that landlocked Southern African states are unviable destinations. It is that aviation infrastructure governance is a leading indicator of broader investment-climate quality. The state of a country's sole airport, the reliability of its one scheduled carrier, and the quality of its bilateral air services diplomacy are, taken together, a compressed ESG audit of the state's capacity to govern infrastructure in the public interest. Three daily regional jets is not a foundation. It is a starting point. What follows from here depends on whether the institutions responsible for that single runway treat it as a national infrastructure asset or as another line item awaiting the next contractor.

ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL	GOVERNANCE
Regional jets on thin routes carry high per-seat carbon intensity relative to mainline services. Without route competition and frequency growth, decarbonisation investment remains commercially unviable. The green case for African aviation requires density first.	Single-point connectivity creates extreme social vulnerability in healthcare access, diaspora remittance flows, and export labour markets. Lesotho's November 2025 suspension showed that infrastructure governance failure cascades into immediate harm for ordinary citizens.	Airport procurement irregularities, deferred ICAO compliance, and repeated contractor failures represent a governance risk profile directly material to any investment thesis anchored in transport connectivity. Rwanda and Eswatini offer a benchmark for comparison.



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# ESG Lens

Sustainability, accountability, and development impact across Lesotho and the region



## Funeral planner in boardroom war as two factions claim authority

*Naledi Funeral Planners has been without a functioning board since January. A failed court interdict, a disputed AGM, and a formal warning of personal criminal liability have brought the standoff to a head this week.*

**BY STAFF REPORTER**




A Leribe-based funeral services company is embroiled in a contested boardroom dispute that has left it operating without a properly functioning board for months, with two rival factions each claiming lawful authority while policyholders and shareholders watch the standoff unfold.

Naledi Funeral Planners (Pty) Ltd, which operates from Hlotse and serves policyholders across Leribe and surrounding districts, has been at the centre of a governance crisis since its Annual General Meeting of 16 January 2026, at which a group of shareholders voted to remove five sitting directors and replace them with three new ones.

The removed directors have since challenged that outcome in court, seeking orders that would restrain the newly elected board from acting, interdict the Registrar of Companies from registering the new directors, and restrain seven shareholders from interfering in the company's administration and management.


The court declined to grant any of those interim orders, extending only urgency to the matter. That outcome has left the resolutions of 16 January 2026 legally operative, a position the new board has now moved to act upon.





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# Science & Technology



*Technology, Connectivity and the digital transformation of economics like Lesotho*

## Palantir wants to own the kill chain

*A surveillance giant with contracts spanning defence, immigration enforcement, healthcare and intelligence across dozens of governments published a 22-point ideological manifesto over the weekend. Critics have called it technofascism. Palantir calls it philosophy. The distinction matters less than the power behind the words.*

BY STAFF REPORTER ·



On Saturday 19 April 2026, Palantir Technologies posted a 22-point document to its account on X. The company described it as a “brief” summary of a book by its CEO, Alex Karp, and head of corporate affairs Nicholas Zamiska. Within 48 hours it had 32 million views. Philosophers, politicians, former employees and intelligence analysts responded. Almost none of them were reassured.

Palantir is not a name that regularly features in public debate in Lesotho or the broader Southern African region. It should. The company, co-founded in 2003 with the CIA’s venture capital arm as an early backer, has grown into one of the world’s most consequential technology firms. It builds data analytics and AI platforms used by militaries, intelligence agencies, police forces, immigration authorities, and health systems across the United States and its allied governments. Reve-

nue from US government sources alone spiked 66 percent year-on-year in Q4 2025 to \$570 million. The company projects total 2026 revenue of \$7.2 billion, a more than 60 percent increase from the prior year.

The manifesto draws from *The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West*, published by Karp and Zamiska in 2025. Palantir said it posted the summary “because we get asked a lot.

What follows is not, in any conventional sense, a technology company’s public statement. It is an ideological programme covering military doctrine, national service, cultural hierarchy, religious life, the restructuring of German and Japanese foreign policy, and the future of AI weapons. It is also, read carefully, a sales pitch.

### SELECTED POINTS FROM THE 22-POINT MANIFESTO

- 2. Silicon Valley owes a moral debt to the country that made its rise possible. Freedom is not free.
- 5. The question is not whether AI weapons will be built; it is who will build them. Adversaries will not pause to indulge in theatrical debates. They will proceed.
- 10. National service should be a universal duty. Silicon Valley has an affirmative obligation to support the defence of the nation.
- 12. One age of deterrence, the atomic age, is ending. A new era of deterrence built on AI and autonomous systems is beginning.
- 17. The postwar neutering of Germany

and Japan must be undone. The defanging of both nations was an overcorrection for which Europe is now paying a heavy price.

21. Some cultures have produced vital advances; others remain dysfunctional and regressive and harmful.

22. We must resist the shallow temptation of a vacant and hollow pluralism. Inclusion is not a value; it is a method. Point 21, describing certain cultures as “dysfunctional,” “regressive,” and “harmful,” drew the sharpest

responses. Belgian philosopher Mark Coeckelbergh described the manifesto as an example of technofascism. Former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis said Palantir had signalled a willingness to add an AI-driven threat to humanity’s existence “to nuclear Armageddon. UK MP Victoria Collins, whose concern is sharpened by the fact that Palantir holds an NHS contract, said the document sounded like “the ramblings of a supervillain.”

“These 22 points aren’t philosophy floating in space. They’re the public ideology of a company whose revenue depends on the politics it’s advocating.” ELIOT HIGGINS, FOUNDER, BELLINGCAT

Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins identified the structural problem precisely. Palantir is not a think tank issuing academic provocations. It is a company that sells operational software to defence agencies, intelligence services, immigration authorities and police forces. Its manifesto describes the ideology of the institution that will be operating those tools inside governments. When Palantir says certain cultures are regressive and harmful, it is not a philosopher speaking. It is a contractor describing the populations its systems will sort, track, and in some contexts, target. The commercial context for the manifesto is not incidental. Palantir was awarded a \$30 million no-bid contract to build ImmigrationOS, an AI platform that identifies non-citizens and tracks deportations for US ICE. Its federal contracts nearly doubled in 2025 to \$970.5 million.

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# Science & Technology



*Technology, Connectivity and the digital transformation of economics like Lesotho*

## Continued from Page 13

On 31 July 2025, the US Army awarded Palantir an Enterprise Service Agreement worth up to \$10 billion over ten years. It received over \$180 million from the IRS across 26 contracts since 2018. In February 2026 it emerged that Scotland Yard had been using Palantir AI tools to profile its own officers. Thirteen former Palantir employees signed an open letter warning that guardrails established to prevent discrimination, disinformation and abuse of power “have now been violated, and are rapidly being dismantled.” Their letter stated that Palantir’s platform “grants immense power to its users, helping control the data, decisions, and outcomes that determine the future of governments, businesses, and institutions, and by extension, all of us. Karp has been unusually candid about what the company does. On an earnings call in 2025 he stated that Palantir’s mission is to scare enemies, and on occasion, kill them.” He has defended the ID’s use of Palantir software to plan strikes in Gaza and called publicly for the US to prepare for a three-front war against China, Russia, and Iran. The manifesto is not a departure from prior Palantir messaging. It is its formalisation.

## BACKGROUND · WHAT IS PALAN-

TIR?

Palantir Technologies was co-founded in 2003 by Alex Karp and Peter Thiel, with early backing from In-Q-Tel, the CIA’s venture capital arm. It takes its name from the seeing stones in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. The company markets itself as providing “an AI-powered kill chain” enabling “decision dominance from space to mud.” Its primary platforms, Gotham and Foundry, are used by militaries, counter-terrorism analysts, immigration agencies and commercial clients globally.

Palantir holds contracts with the UK National Health Service, the US Army (a \$10 billion 10-year agreement), US ICE, multiple European defence ministries and the IRS. In 2025 its US federal contracts nearly doubled to \$970.5 million. It describes its consultants as “forward-deployed software engineers” and its internal communications as situational awareness reports.

For the African continent, and for the Southern African region specifically, the manifesto carries a charge that has not yet been named plainly in regional commentary. Point 21’s claim that certain cultures are “dysfunctional” and “harmful” arrives from a company with documented ties to the architecture of

Western military and immigration enforcement. The “West” whose defence Palantir has appointed itself to lead is defined in civilisational terms. The cultures it deems middling or regressive are not specified. They do not need to be.

This matters not only as philosophy but as a question of where Palantir’s tools will eventually be deployed.

The company’s growth strategy is unambiguously oriented toward expanding government contracts globally.


The governments of the Global South, which have historically been the subjects of Western surveillance

architectures rather than their operators, should read the 22 points not as an abstract ideological provocation

but as a mission statement from a company that intends to be inside their infrastructure. Dave Karpf, an associate professor at George Washington University, offered the clearest assessment:

“The message of the manifesto is that Palantir wants to be the weapons manufacturer of the next century. The future of the weapons business is software plus AI. Palantir would like the government to spend an

exceptional amount of money on Palantir products, please and thank you.” That is the honesty the manifesto withholds. The philosophy is the sales pitch. At \$7.2 billion in projected 2026 revenue, and rising, the distinction is academic.




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# Science & Technology

Technology, Connectivity and the digital transformation of economics like Lesotho



## TECHNOLOGY & POLICY Lesotho becomes first African nation to host Commonwealth Digital Roadshow as CTO Council opens in Maseru

*The 64th CTO Council Meeting and Commonwealth Digital Roadshow opened in Maseru with a clear mandate: Lesotho's digital future will be shaped by deliberate national policy, not the default outcomes of inaction.*

BY MOLEFI TSUMANE



Maseru

The 64th CTO Council Meeting and Commonwealth Digital Roadshow officially opened in Maseru on Wednesday, marking a historic milestone for Lesotho as the first African nation to host this prestigious Commonwealth event. Officially opened by Prime Minister Sam Ntsoakoane Matekane, the Digital Policy Forum set an ambitious tone for the week, shifting the focus from theoretical discussions to the concrete national policies needed to shape Lesotho's digital future. In a series of powerful addresses, national leaders stressed that technology must serve every citizen, regardless of geographic location. The Minister of Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Moorosi,



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# Editorial

*The Tribune's position, and voices that challenge, provoke and inform*

16 **IT**

## The electric ascent: can Lesotho's MaZero project really dethrone fossil fuels?

*A bold solar-powered blueprint aims to steer Lesotho away from the exhaust fumes of the past. But geography, cost and infrastructure gaps raise a pressing question: is this a realistic roadmap, or a high-altitude pipe dream?*

By Editorial



Elsewhere in this publication we run a story on Lesotho's dream to decarbonise its transport sector through the MaZero project, a bold, solar-powered blueprint designed to steer Lesotho away from the exhaust fumes of the past and into a decarbonised future.

But as the project sets its sights on a fossil-fuel-free horizon, a heavy

question hangs over it: is this a realistic roadmap or a high-altitude pipe dream? The project was launched by the National University of Lesotho's Energy Research Centre (NUL-ERC) in 2024 and was not just about importing fancy cars but about sovereignty. By leveraging Lesotho's most abundant resource, sunshine, the initiative aimed to power electric vehicles (EVs)

through localised solar charging and battery-swapping stations.

For a nation that is among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases through transport, the motivation was clear. "We are creating a circular economy. Why import expensive petrol when we

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# Editorial

*The Tribune's position, and voices that challenge, provoke and inform*



## Continued from Page 16

can harvest our own energy from the sky?”

While the vision of the project is electric, the reality on the ground faces a significant range anxiety.

2024  
NUL-ERC LAUNCHES MAZERO PROJECT 20–40%  
FASTER BATTERY DRAIN ON HIGHLAND ROADS 2035  
TARGET YEAR FOR EV TRANSITION

### VISION 2035

To reach its goals by at least 2035, the project and government must navigate three major roadblocks.

Lesotho's geography is a literal uphill battle. EVs thrive on flat city streets, but the country's steep passes and rugged rural tracks drain batteries 20 to 40 percent faster than average. For someone in the highlands, a car that needs a plug every few hours is a tough sell compared to a rugged diesel 4x4.

EV charging is currently largely confined to certain pilot sites. To sustain a national fleet, the country needs a massive rollout of charging points. With less than half of the country

connected to the national grid, and even fewer in rural areas, the MaZero project's focus on off-grid solar hubs is a necessity, not just a preference. Even with the government's recent move to slash VAT and customs duties on EVs, the upfront cost remains prohibitive for the average Mosotho. Without aggressive financing schemes or a robust market for second-hand EVs, the green lane may remain reserved only for the wealthy.

The most important factor to consider is economic empowerment. Currently, Lesotho is at the mercy of volatile global oil prices and import costs. By fuelling vehicles with home-grown solar energy, the project promises to keep more money within the borders. The focus on solar-based battery-swapping stations creates a massive opening for local SMEs.

Small business owners in rural hubs can become energy vendors, managing solar kiosks that serve everything from electric delivery bikes to communal taxis. For the logistics and taxi industries, the long-term savings on maintenance, as EVs have significantly fewer moving parts than petrol cars, could mean the difference between a struggling business and a thriving one.

### A PHASED REALITY

Will the roar of internal combustion

engines be silenced by 2035? Experts suggest a middle ground.


While a 100 percent phase-out of fossil fuels in a decade may be an Olympian task, MaZero is successfully building the technical foundation. By focusing first on urban commuter corridors in Maseru and transitioning into public transport, Lesotho can significantly dent its carbon footprint.

But is the project already training a new generation of green mechanics to ensure that when the EVs do arrive, the skills to fix them stay within the borders?

This project is more than a transport trial; it is a test of Lesotho's resilience. Sustaining the initiative will not require a miracle; it will require consistent policy, massive investment in solar infrastructure and a focus on "Made for Lesotho" EV solutions that can handle the cold and the climbs.

A decade from now, Lesotho may not see the total disappearance of the petrol engine, but thanks to MaZero, the country is finally beginning its descent toward a cleaner, quieter and more self-reliant future.

As Lesotho waits to move away from fossil fuels, one question endures: can it really do it, and how much is there to




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# Opinion

Official Statements, government communications, and institutional announcements

18 **IT**

## We are arguing about the wrong things: the poverty of political debate in Lesotho

*Lesotho has held five coalition governments in a decade, yet not one has collapsed over a policy disagreement. Our politics is consumed by personality, survival, and the scramble for position. That is not debate. It is noise. And noise is expensive.*

By MALEFO THINYANE



Ask yourself a simple question: what is the governing coalition's position on youth unemployment? Not the slogan, not the press release headline, not the minister's talking point at a donor conference. The actual, argued, contested position. The one that was tested against an alternative and survived the scrutiny of parliamentary debate. You will struggle to find it. That is the problem.

Lesotho has cycled through five coalition governments since 2012. Every one of them collapsed. Not one of them fell because two parties disagreed over how to address the country's unemployment crisis, or whether the national curriculum was producing graduates the economy could absorb, or what the

government's long-term plan for water revenue actually was. They fell because of who got which ministry, which faction controlled which security appointment, and which politician calculated that the arithmetic of the moment favoured a new arrangement. These are not policy disagreements. They are disputes about access. And there is a fundamental difference between the two.

Policy disagreement requires that the parties involved have policies in the first place. In Lesotho's political landscape, this is not reliably the case. More than fifty parties contested the 2022 general elections. The majority did not have ideologically distinguishable platforms. The Revolution for Prosperity entered the race six months before polling day and won 56 parliamentary seats. Its founder, Sam Matekane, was a businessman, not a career politician. The voters who backed the RFP were not endorsing a programme of government. They were expressing exhaustion with the parties that had preceded it. That exhaustion is legitimate. But exhaustion is not a policy alternative. And a parliament full of exhausted voters proxies, with no common analytical framework and no tradition of adversarial policy argument, cannot produce the quality of debate the country needs. A parliament that argues only about who leads it has no energy left for the question of where it is going.

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2026 Lesotho country report recorded what it called a persistent disconnect between democratic ideals and the delivery of governance, noting that voter

dissatisfaction with political leadership runs deep. That dissatisfaction is rational. Citizens who watch their parliament spend months litigating the constitutionality of a no-confidence vote rather than debating the education budget are not being apathetic. They are making a reasonable assessment that the institution is not performing its core function. A 2024 Afrobarometer survey found that 69 percent of Basotho believe their members of parliament rarely heed public concerns. When nearly seven in ten citizens have disengaged from the expectation of parliamentary responsiveness, the country is operating without one of the basic mechanisms of democratic accountability.

The quality of public discourse outside parliament is not noticeably better. Lesotho's media landscape is one of the most constrained in the region. The country has no daily newspaper. Most of its 26 radio stations depend on government advertising revenue, which creates structural incentives against editorial challenge. The Computer Crimes and Cyber Security Bill, reinstated in 2023 and revised in 2024, contains

provisions that critics from MISA to Freedom House have described as capable of criminalising legitimate expression. Political violence has compounded the chill. In June 2025, an activist was arrested after posting a video criticising the Prime Minister's unfulfilled commitments. These incidents signal to the citizenry what the ceiling on criticism is, and people adjust their behaviour accordingly.

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# Opinion

Official Statements, government communications, and institutional announcements



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The consequences of this debate are not abstract. They are visible in the specific decisions that go unmade, the problems that persist without ever being named precisely enough to be addressed. Lesotho's airport has been in a state of near-collapse for years. The country's 11 percent debt servicing burden, flagged by the UN Secretary-General in his December 2024 address to parliament, consumes resources that could fund the education and infrastructure the economy needs. The garment sector, which employs tens of thousands, was absorbing the shock of US tariff decisions in 2025 with no publicly aired industrial strategy to cushion the blow or plan the pivot. These are not governance failures that appeared without warning. They are the accumulated result of years of political energy directed at coalition arithmetic rather than at the work of government.

Civil society organisations, the natural counterweight to executive inertia, are treated by governing parties as threats rather than partners. The EU-supported civil society evaluation published in early 2026 found that CSOs are marginalised in political debates and that public discourse in Lesotho presents a hostile and dis-

abling environment for organisations trying to hold government to account.

There is a temptation to blame the electoral system, and the system does deserve criticism. Mixed-member proportional representation, which Lesotho adopted in 2002, was intended to produce more representative parliaments. Instead, it has produced parliaments in which the party list mechanism gives party leaders enormous power over who enters the legislature and who does not. Members who might otherwise hold the executive to account on policy grounds have structural incentives to remain loyal to their party principals.


There is also a temptation to reach for historical explanation, to trace the poverty of debate back to the coup years, to the army's long habit of resolving political questions by force rather than argument, to the culture of deference to authority that coexists uncomfortably with the Basotho tradition of community dialogue and collective decision-making in the pitso. The pitso is not a myth. It is a genuine institutional inheritance. But it has not been translated into a modern parliamentary culture that asks hard questions of those who claim to govern in the public interest.

What would better debate actually look like? It would look like a budget process where the opposition has genuinely inter-

rogated the assumptions behind the revenue projections and said so publicly, in detail, with an alternative. It would look like a parliamentary committee on education that has received testimony from teachers, economists, and employers, weighed the evidence, and produced a report that differs from the government's position on at least one substantive point. It would look like a civil society sector that is funded independently enough to challenge the government without fearing that the next cycle of state advertising will dry up.

None of this requires a new constitution or a different electoral system, though both would help. It requires a political culture that has decided, collectively, that the country's real problems are more interesting than the personalities of the people who fail to solve them. Lesotho has no shortage of intelligent, educated, motivated citizens. It has a shortage of institutions and incentives that put their intelligence to work on the country's actual challenges, in public, in ways that can be challenged and improved.

King Moshoeshoe I built a nation by choosing dialogue over conflict. That is not a piece of heritage tourism. It is a standing instruction. The question is whether the parliament that sits in his name is capable of honouring it.




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# Arts & Sports

*The stories Lesotho about itself - on the field, on the stage, and on the page*

# 20



## Ramakongoana Sets National Record at Historic Boston Marathon

BY LITS'ITSO LETSUNYANE



Lesotho's premier long-distance runner, Tebello Ramakongoana, has delivered yet another outstanding performance on the global stage, after finishing sixth place at the Boston Marathon and earning a prize of \$13,500 (approximately M224,117). The race, held on Monday, April 20, saw about 30,000 athletes tackle the iconic route from Hopkinton to Boylston Street in the United States.

This marked Ramakongoana's second appearance at this prestigious race. Having placed eighth in 2025 with a time

of 2:07:19, Ramakongoana returned stronger and more refined. In this year's race, he clocked an impressive 2:04:18, an improvement of three seconds. While that margin may appear minimal to casual observers, in elite marathon running it represents a significant leap. The time not only secured him sixth place but also established a new national record and personal best by just two seconds.

Founded on April 19, 1897, the Boston Marathon is the world's oldest annual marathon and is widely regarded as one

of the most challenging road races. It's demanding course and competitive field make it a benchmark for elite long-distance runners across the world, while it's prize structure ensures it remains among the most lucrative events in the sport.

On Friday, April 24, the Lesotho National Olympic Committee hosted a celebratory welcome for Ramakongoana upon his return from the United States. The event, held at the LNOC offices in Maseru West, brought together officials and members of the media to honor the national record holder's achievement.

Speaking at the conference, Ramakongoana expressed pride in his performance, particularly given the grueling nature of the race. He highlighted that the final three kilometres were the most difficult stretch, noting that exhaustion had already set in. Despite this, his determination remained intact.

He also explained to the media that he really wanted to finish in the top three, and if that wasn't possible, he'd at least try to aim to improve his personal best time, and he achieved to do that.

His coach, James McKirdy, echoed the sentiment, praising Tebello's discipline and progress. McKirdy emphasized the complexity of pacing in the Boston Marathon, describing it as one of the hardest races to time effectively. He further revealed that Ramakongoana's finishing time ranks as the eighth fastest in the event's long history, underscoring the magnitude of the achievement.

For McKirdy, the result stands as a defining moment in his coaching career. For Lesotho, it is yet another indication that its athletes can compete, and excel on the world stage.

# Arts & Sports

*The stories Lesotho about itself - on the field, on the stage, and on the page*

# 21



## The world's game, priced for the few

*Resale tickets for the 2026 World Cup final have reached \$2.3 million on FIFA's own marketplace. For the average Mosotho worker, even the cheapest official group-stage seat represents more than a month's wages.*

BY LITS'ITSO LETSUNYANE



## FIFA WORLD CUP

UNITED STATES - CANADA - MEXICO

**F**our tickets for the 2026 FIFA World Cup final at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey are currently listed on FIFA's official resale marketplace for \$2,299,998.85 each. That is not a misprint. A single seat at football's most prestigious match, sold through the governing body's sanctioned platform, is being offered for a price that exceeds the annual gross domestic product of a small village in Lesotho.

The statistic is extreme and largely symbolic. No rational person expects those seats to sell at that price. But the number is not the anomaly that FIFA would like fans to believe. It sits atop a pricing struc-

ture that, at every level, places the 2026 World Cup beyond the reach of supporters from low- and middle-income countries, including most of Southern Africa.

With the tournament fifty days away, ticket pricing has become the dominant controversy of the pre-competition period. The anger has a clear arithmetic foundation: the numbers simply do not add up for the majority of the world's football-following population.

KEY FIGURES · APRIL 2026  
\$2.3m

Highest resale asking price for one World Cup final ticket \$11,000  
Cheapest standard resale seat for the final M4,500  
Average monthly wage in Lesotho (~\$281)

The cheapest standard ticket for the final on the official resale platform is listed at just under \$11,000. FIFA's own direct ticketing site released final seats at \$10,990. For context: the average gross monthly salary in Lesotho sits at around M4,500, or approximately \$281. Attending the final would cost a Mosotho wage-earner the equivalent of more than three years of salary, before flights, accommodation, or any other expense is considered. Group-stage tickets tell a slightly less extreme but equally revealing story. FIFA has promoted a \$60 'entry tier' category as evidence of accessibility, but this tier is severely limited and effectively unavailable to most fans in general sales phases. The realistic entry point is the Category 3 band, priced at \$140 to \$200 per match, with a further 15 per cent service fee added at checkout. For a Mosotho on the minimum

wage of M2,000 per month, a single group-stage ticket in the most affordable realistic category represents between one and a half and two months' wages. The flight from Maseru to any of the sixteen host cities adds several multiples of that figure. The South African comparison is instructive. With an average monthly wage of around R23,000, a South African fan would spend roughly 13 per cent of one month's income on a single group-stage ticket. The relative burden on a Mosotho worker is more than four times greater. For a fan in Nigeria, where average wages place the ticket at roughly 38 per cent of monthly income, the picture is similarly stark.

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# Arts & Sports



*The stories Lesotho about itself - on the field, on the stage, and on the page*

## Continued from Page 21

Against this backdrop, FIFA president Gianni Infantino's public defence of the pricing structure has done little to reduce the temperature of the debate. Speaking at a business summit in New York last week, Infantino argued that the World Cup is his organisation's sole

revenue-generating event and that all proceeds are reinvested across its 211 member associations. "There is something for every budget." — Gianni Infantino, FIFA president. For the average Mosotho worker, the cheapest realistic ticket consumes more than half a month's wages. The claim that \$60 seats are available 'even for the final' is technically accurate but analytically misleading. That entry tier, introduced in December after an immediate public backlash to the initial prices, is allocated to a small number of seats at a limited selection of venues. It has not been meaningfully available during general sale phases. When Football Supporters Europe filed a legal complaint against FIFA in March, it noted that the original North American bid had promised tickets from as little as \$21.

FIFA's own data simultaneously undermines and complicate Infantino's accessibility argument. Despite claiming a record 150 million ticket requests were received during the December sales window, the governing body has since run five separate sales phases, with the fifth opened just this week.

An unplanned fifth tranche of tickets, with 50 days to the opening match, is not the profile of a tournament selling out through overwhelming demand. The dynamic pricing model FIFA has applied to this tournament has attracted particular criticism from analysts. Unlike surge pricing, which spikes immediately in response to demand peaks, dynamic pricing

under the FIFA model adjusts over time based on sustained demand signals. In practice this has meant prices increased between sales phases regardless of whether individual matches were selling out. The resale market, operating on FIFA's own official platform, adds a further layer of opacity. Because the tournament is hosted in the United States, no statutory cap exists on resale prices, and FIFA's marketplace charges facilitation fees aligned with, in its own words, 'industry standards across North American sports and entertainment sectors.' The governing body profits from secondary market transactions at prices that bear no relationship to the financial reality of the majority of its member associations' populations. For supporters in Lesotho, the conversation about attending the World Cup in person has long been theoretical. The country has not qualified for a senior men's World Cup. The national team's 2026 qualifying campaign ended in the group stage. But the question of whether any Mosotho, travelling to support a different African nation or simply to witness the tournament, could afford to attend, is a direct measurement of what FIFA's pricing philosophy means in practice.

The answer, by any reasonable reading of the data, is that the overwhelming ma-

jority could not. At the minimum wage, a single group-stage ticket represents two months of earnings before travel is considered. For a family of four, the arithmetic moves from unlikely to impossible. There is a structural argument worth making here that goes beyond the 2026 tournament. FIFA distributes development funding to its 211 member associations, including the Lesotho Football Association. The organisation's non-profit status, which Infantino invokes repeatedly, is genuine in the technical sense. The question is not whether FIFA reinvests, but what the ratio is between what it extracts from the moment of the match and what filters back to the associations whose supporters cannot afford to attend.

A supporter in New Jersey paying \$500 for a group-stage seat is, in a narrow accounting sense, contributing to football development in Lesotho. A supporter in Maseru who cannot afford the ticket is not contributing to the moment that generates that revenue. The World Cup, in this configuration, is an event staged in wealthy markets, priced for wealthy consumers, with a portion of the proceeds returned to the associations whose populations were priced out of the experience in the first place. Infantino characterised North America as 'a very special market' in his defence of the pricing approach. The characterisation is accurate. It is also, for supporters from Lesotho, Southern Africa, and most of the African continent, the core of the problem. The world's game has, for this edition, been priced to fit one market's standards. The rest of the world watches on television.




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