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STARLINK'S LICENSE  
SCRUTINISED FOR ALLEGED  
MISREPRESENTATION



# Starlink's license scrutinised for alleged misrepresentation



**RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA**

**M**ASERU - Rights body, Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution, popularly known as SECTION 2, should go to court if it feels aggrieved by the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA) decision to approve licensing for American billionaire Elon Musk's Starlink.

Last week the LCA approved Starlink's 10-year operating license against opposition from different stakeholders, including SECTION 2 and Vodacom Lesotho.

The authority's Chief Licencing and Compliance Officer, Advocate Thato Ponya, told Metro that SECTION 2 was clawing at straws; instead, "they shouldn't say it publicly, but they must argue in court."

"What they are saying, according to me, is their reason doesn't hold water; Starlink applied for a license in April last year.

"When they applied for registration, they said their offices were located at Industrial Area... Therefore, since they are not there, I should use that as a basis to recommend to LCA to cancel the license?!", Ponya quizzed.

He further said only when the LCA chief executive has put his signature will

the company be required to have offices.

"We will require Starlink only after they have become our licensee; as we speak, they are not ours," he said.

This comes in the light of a strongly worded press statement released by SECTION 2 this week, where it asked for the retraction of the approval for Musk's company.

"Retract the April 13, 2025, statement and revoke the 10-year license granted to Starlink Lesotho, as it was issued to a non-existent entity. Revise your licensing policies to ensure compliance with Section 82's immediate registered office requirement, closing the gap exposed by your post-approval sublease policy.

Transparency demands that stakeholders, including Econet Telecom Lesotho (ETL) and Vodacom Lesotho (VCL) and the nation at large, be informed of this nullity," SECTION 2 not in strongly worded press statement.

The group further appealed to the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) to investigate "misrepresentation as potential fraud, given its submission of a false address to secure a lucrative license. Lesotho's history of licensing irregularities necessitates swift action to deter future violations."

"SECTION 2 asserts that this



misrepresentation renders Starlink Lesotho's registration and incorporation null and void ab initio under the Companies Act of 2011, meaning no such company legally exists in Lesotho. Consequently, the Lesotho Communications Authority's (LCA) announcement on April 13, 2025, granting Starlink Lesotho a 10-year license to operate a satellite network and

provide internet services, is equally void, as the LCA can only license a legally incorporated entity.

"The Companies Act of 2011 establishes clear, non-negotiable requirements for corporate registration, which Starlink Lesotho has flagrantly violated: Fraudulent misrepresentation in registration: Section 82(1) mandates that "a company shall at all times



Starlink’s  
license  
scrutinised  
for alleged  
misrepresentation



have a registered office in Lesotho.”  
Newsday’s investigation confirms that  
Starlink Lesotho never occupied 20  
Motsoene Road, had no lease agreement,  
and misrepresented this address to the  
One-Stop Business Facilitation Centre  
(OBFC) during incorporation. This  
deliberate falsehood constitutes fraudulent  
misrepresentation, a fundamental breach  
that voids the registration ab initio. In  
legal terms, a registration obtained  
through fraud or material deception is  
invalid from the outset, as it fails to meet  
the Act’s foundational requirement for a  
physical, functioning office,” the advocacy  
organization stated.

It continued: “Section 83(1) further  
requires a physical address for service,  
not a post office box or private bag, for  
document delivery during business hours.  
Starlink’s use of Builder’s City’s address,  
without any presence or authorization,  
violates this provision, reinforcing the  
registration’s invalidity.”

SECTION 2 further argued that as per  
the Company’s Act, Starlink doesn’t have  
an office as required by law; thus, it misled  
LCA.

“As such, there is no “Starlink Lesotho  
(Pty) Ltd” recognized under the Act,  
rendering all subsequent actions, including  
the LCA’s license, legally baseless.

“The LCA’s statement on April  
13, 2025, described the license as a  
“landmark decision” for Lesotho’s digital  
transformation.

However, the LCA’s own policy, as  
articulated by Public Affairs Manager,  
Mothepane Kotele, requires that license  
applicants be “fully registered with the  
Ministry of Trade” and comply with the  
Companies Act.

“Since Starlink Lesotho’s registration  
is null and void due to misrepresentation,  
it was never a legally incorporated entity  
eligible for licensing. Consequently, the  
LCA’s license is void ab initio, as it lacks a  
valid recipient.

The LCA’s contradictory policy of  
requiring a sublease agreement only post-  
approval further underscores its failure to  
ensure compliance with Section 82, which  
demands an immediate registered office  
upon registration.”

# ...claims the LCA is a captured entity emerge



NEO SENOKO

MASERU - Following the approval  
and granting of operating  
licence to tech billionaire  
Elon Musk’s satellite internet services  
company, Starlink to operate in Lesotho by  
the Lesotho Communications Authority  
(LCA), the decision has been met with a  
clear rejection.

Renowned social movement, Section 2  
has labelled the communications authority  
a captured entity. The approval further  
calls into question the independence of the  
LCA and the commitment of government  
to the principles of good governance and  
national sovereignty.

The satellite company, which is owned  
by the United States president, Donald  
Trump’s close adviser, Elon Musk, has  
been issued with a licence valid for 10  
years.

“This landmark decision marks a  
significant step forward on the country’s  
digital transformation and underscores  
the Authority’s commitment to enabling  
a competitive, transparent and forward-  
looking communications sector that fuels  
economic growth and fosters innovation,”  
LCA said in a statement last week.

Section 2, however, has expressed  
disappointment in what they describe as a  
deeply concerning development.

“By proceeding with this decision,  
the LCA has not only disregarded the  
valid objections of local stakeholders but  
has also compromised the integrity and  
credibility of the regulatory process. It  
raises the specter of a captured regulator,  
one that no longer acts in the best

interest of Basotho but instead swayed  
by powerful external forces,” Section 2  
president, Kananelo Boloetse, said in an  
interview with Metro this week.

The decision, Boloetse says, comes  
despite Section 2’s well documented  
opposition, echoed by several key  
stakeholders in the communication  
sector, who raised serious and legitimate  
concerns.

Chief among these was the fact that  
Starlink Lesotho is 100 percent foreign-  
owned, a factor that should have weighed  
heavily in a licensing process that ought to  
safeguard national interests and promote  
inclusive local participation.

More alarming, a recent report  
by an American publication revealed  
that Lesotho authorities had given  
prior assurances to the United States  
government that Starlink would be  
licensed by April 15.

This revelation has exposed a deeply  
troubling lack of transparency and  
suggests that key decisions affecting the  
national communications infrastructure  
may be pre-determined and subject to  
foreign influence.

“It calls into question the independence  
of the LCA and the commitment of our  
government to the principles of good  
governance and national sovereignty.  
Such actions can only be described  
as betrayal, a shameful sell-out by a  
government that appears increasingly  
willing to place foreign corporate interests  
above the democratic will and long term  
developmental needs of the people of  
Lesotho,” Boloetse said.

While the company applied for an

operating licence in 2024, there is a strong  
believe that government has been forced  
to expedite the process to get favourable  
trade deal, perhaps, better offer than the  
current 50 percent slap.

Lesotho was hit with tariffs of 50  
percent on goods exported to the United  
States, the highest for any single nation on  
Trump’s reciprocal tariffs list. the levies  
however, have been reduced to 10 percent  
for a 90-day reprieve.

The country is in the process of  
sending a delegation to the United States  
with regard to the reciprocal trade tariffs.

Starlink submitted its application in  
April 2024 and at the time, according to  
the LCA, the company’s existing licensing  
and classification framework required  
enhancement to adequately accommodate  
low-earth orbit satellite technology.

This realization prompted a  
comprehensive review of the applicable  
regulations and this included period of  
public consultations.

As a result, all stakeholders who  
submitted comments were invited to in-  
person engagements, in keeping with the  
Authority’s believe that dialogue enriches  
understanding and ensures that public  
input is meaningfully considered.

The revised regulatory framework  
was gazetted on January 31, paving the  
way for the formal processing of Starlink’s  
application.

The approval of the operating licence,  
the LCA says, clears the path for it to  
finalise the terms and conditions under  
which Starlink Lesotho will provide  
satellite internet services to individuals  
and businesses across the country.



# Police retirement row

*...Minister gazettes police age law without telling the cops*



MOTSAMAI MOKOTJO

**M**ASERU - Minister of Local Government, Chieftainship, Home Affairs, and Police, Lebona Lephema, is yet to inform the police top brass about the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) (Administration) (Amendment) Regulations of 2025.

The LMPS (Administration) (Amendment) Regulations of 2025, were gazetted by Lephema on April 11, particularly Section 2(a), which amends the retirement age from 50 and 55 to 60 years.

"The Commissioner may have regard to the conditions of the Police Service and, after consultation with the Police Authority, retire a member of the Police Service before or after the member concerned attains the age of 60 years," Section 2(b) reads.

It is against the amendment that Commissioner of Police (Compol) Borotho Matsoso told Metro that they haven't been informed about the changes envisioned in the piece of legislation.

"We have not yet received them; maybe the minister will call us after Easter," Matsoso said, adding that they don't know what impact they will have

during the course of their work.

The Lesotho Police Staff Association (LEPOSA) has expressed ignorance about the gazette, saying they are waiting for an official legal instrument.

LEPOSA Secretary General, 'Makatleho Mphetho, informed Metro this week she went to Commissioner Matsoso's office to make inquiries about the law.

"I wanted to verify from the Compol whether the document is authentic or not, but unfortunately I was not able to meet him," Mphetho said.

This paper spoke to two senior police officers from the rank of senior inspector and superintendent who confirmed the veracity of the regulations.

As for the police, their spokesperson, Senior Superintendent Mpiti Mopeli, referred this paper to Lephema, noting that "if they were gazetted by the minister, you should ask him."

After repeated calls and WhatsApp messages, Lephema did not answer questions sent to him.

Questions the minister did not answer: 1) What was the rationale behind increasing the age of retirement as per the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (Administration) (Amendment), 2025? 2) Against such regulations, what is going to happen in the recruitment of new police officers? 3) Critics argue that the regulations contravene section 18 of the Constitution, which addresses the issue of protection from discrimination. Were you aware of the constitutional mandate? and 4) Did you consult the Lesotho Police Staff Association (LEPOSA) before gazetting the regulations?

Now the police are heading in the same direction, sources within the service told this publication.

"This is a serious issue with the government failing to address youth unemployment; what is the rationale for increasing the age of retirement? What are these people afraid of when they are supposed to head home to create space for young people?" a source quizzed.

Another source privy to the workings insisted that Lebona is brewing a war within the police ranks since the promotion policy is outdated and favours those close to the top brass.

"I know colleagues who have retired without being promoted simply because they were not aligned to ruling political parties," he said, adding that it's crucial to depoliticize the police.

"We come from a painful past as an institution where we fought with management; there's a need to avoid

falling into the same trap again with this piece of legislation, which lacks logic," the source said.

The paper was told by an independent lawyer, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, that if the regulations were challenged in court, the government would be defeated.

"The regulations go against Section 18 of the Constitution, which addresses discrimination... I don't see the logic behind the law because the Constitutional Court would declare the clause on age as bias," the lawyer said.

This comes hot on the heels of the controversial Lesotho Defence Force (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which was meant to do the same but was withdrawn before the Portfolio Committee on Prime Minister's Ministries, Governance, Foreign Relations, and Information Cluster after Members of Parliament criticized it last week.

The committee observed that since the minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Limpho Tau, spoke about "errors... therefore, (it) resolved it cannot proceed to discuss the bill with erroneous contents."

Subsequently, it recommended that "the House allow the minister responsible to withdraw the bill to allow the technical team that was working on the bill to review and properly redraft where necessary."

Human rights advocacy group, Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution, popularly known as SECTION 2, blasted LDF Amendment Regulations for violating Section 18, which addresses protection from discrimination.

"The government touts this bill as a step toward professionalism and global alignment, yet its provisions reek of arbitrary and unjust discrimination that disproportionately punishes lower-ranked soldiers.

Consider the following: Junior soldiers face forced retirement as early as 48 years, while officers enjoy contract extensions up to 62 years, a glaring disparity with no rational basis.

Special exemptions coddle medical officers, lawyers, and chaplains, permitting service until 60 years, while other personnel are cast aside earlier without operational justification.

The claim that non-commissioned officers require maturity in experience is a hollow excuse, selectively applied to extend service for elites while denying the same to lower ranks."

"This institutionalized bias, which disproportionately burdens soldiers often hailing from marginalized communities, constitutes discrimination devoid of military necessity, a direct assault on Section 18," the rights body wrote in a press statement on April 1 this year.



# LEFF blasts Trump and Musk in fiery rebuke of ‘imperialist exploitation’



RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU - Lesotho Economic Freedom Fighters (LEFF) has condemned American (US) president, Donald Trump, for ‘imperialist and extractive practices’ intended to ‘subjugate’ Lesotho.

In a fiery press statement, which was released this week, the LFF fired on all cylinders, describing the Trump administration’s 50 percent tariff hikes on products from the country as a deliberate distortion of reality on a ‘country nobody has ever heard of.’

“We are quite shocked that the US, with its entrenched control over the global economy and key manufacturing industries, a dominance achieved through centuries of colonial exploitation and deliberate underdevelopment of other nations, will one day go after the ‘African nation of Lesotho, which nobody has ever heard of,’” the LEFF states.

The party indicates further that truth of the matter is that US tariffs will

affect businesses and impact families and communities that have built their livelihoods through hard work.

“With all the darkness and uncertainty out there, the Lesotho Economic Freedom Fighters calls on the current government not to follow in the footsteps of the previous corrupt, sell-out leaders who brought Lesotho into shame for many years by negotiating with their stomachs for personal accumulation at the expense of our sovereignty.”

LEFF charges that Lesotho gets ridiculed and disrespected because of leaders who negotiate international relations matters like beggars.

“We mustn’t kiss anyone’s butt or engage in retaliatory tariff wars that will entangle our economy and sovereignty deeper into America’s economic manipulation. We should expand our trade relations with global partners who believe in our values and respect our people and products.

Furthermore, these “reciprocal tariffs” signal the effective end of the African

Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as it pertains to Lesotho. This is a wake-up call for Basotho to stand together, support our own businesses, support African trade, and invest in Lesotho businesses while continuing to buy and sell more Lesotho products.”

LEFF find this as a silver lining to the SADC region and African unity.

The organization further castigated Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane’s administration for granting an operating license to billionaire Elon Musk’s Starlink.

Last week the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA) approved Starlink’s 10-year operating license against opposition from different stakeholders, including Vodacom Lesotho and the Advocates for the Supremacy of the Constitution, popularly known as SECTION 2.

Thus “granting racist economic hitman Elon Musk a 10-year operating license. The decision is exactly what happens when a leader negotiates serious matters under desperation, with money in mind to enrich themselves, their families, and their friends. Selling out our data sovereignty and privacy to Starlink is one good reason why Africa never unites and develops because, due to a lack of privacy, we keep our enemies one step ahead in everything we plan to achieve as a continent.”

“The government must not fool us with Donald Trump and his friend who never knew a country named Lesotho. Basotho needs explanation and clarity on this deal that is going to cause more damage than good. This is the same economic hitman Elon Musk who’s working tirelessly with his buddy Donald Trump, taking advantage of the Ukrainians and threatening to cut Ukraine’s access to Starlink internet service over minerals.”

LEFF says they cannot trust a heartless imperialist who intends to take our

Lesotho telecommunications industry, divide Africa, and destroy Lesotho diplomatic relations with other nations with whom we share historic friendships. Starlink’s presence in Lesotho is going to make our country more dependent on former slave

This comes in the light of a strongly worded press statement released by SECTION 2 last week where it asked for the retraction of the approval for Musk’s company.

“Retract the April 13, 2025, statement and revoke the 10-year license granted to Starlink Lesotho, as it was issued to a non-existent entity. Revise your licensing policies to ensure compliance with Section 82’s immediate registered office requirement, closing the gap exposed by your post-approval sublease policy.

Transparency demands that stakeholders, including Econet Telecom Lesotho (ETL) and Vodacom Lesotho (VCL) and the nation at large, be informed of this nullity,” SECTION 2 notes in its strongly worded press statement.

The group further appealed to the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences to investigate “misrepresentation as potential fraud, given its submission of a false address to secure a lucrative license. Lesotho’s history of licensing irregularities necessitates swift action to deter future violations.”





# Enhancing media coverage of Zambian presidential engagements



**ASWELL K MWALIMU**

**L**USAKA – The Zambian government has set parameters within which the media is required to broadcast images of President Hakainde Hichilema while presiding in official state events.

Government has come to address recent media coverage of the Hichilema's recent engagement with the Ambassador of Germany and the GET FIT Zambia Programme Director at country's statehouse.

A government statement asserts that while they acknowledge the importance of transparent reporting, they have observed that the visual framing in the news clip conveyed an unintended impression of the president's demeanour.

Specifically, the presentation of Hichilema as a seemingly fatigued or disconnected listener, through camera angles and cutaways, regrettably detracted from the substantive discussions on critical matters such as energy sector growth, the Zambian government says.

Government further adds that this unintended visual narrative risks overshadowing the president's consistent display of positive engagement, characterized by warmth, attentive eye contact, and a welcoming smile, which those present in meetings often witness.

To ensure future media portrayals accurately reflect the president's active and engaged participation in such important engagements, government propose for consideration the optimized

seating arrangements for the media - exploring seating arrangements that facilitate a one-frame shot of the president, indicating that such shots could provide media personnel with a visually balanced perspective, similar to the imagery captured during initial greetings.

Creative media production has also been called for, encouraging media personnel to employ diverse and contextually appropriate visual techniques is crucial.

"The selection of footage should aim to project the president as the focused and capable leader he is. It is important to ensure that pre-recorded cutaways are thoughtfully integrated to avoid misrepresenting the president's engagement during specific discussions.

We are confident that by collaboratively considering these aspects, we can ensure that media coverage of future presidential engagements effectively convey the intended positive message of leadership and engagement, aligning with the standards observed in other African countries and the world stage," the statement says.

The president's recent inspiring words, "We are back in the Champion's league," is a timely call for Zambians to reposition their minds and elevate the collective national thinking to achieve social progress and economic advancement, the Zambian government continues, adding that this profound call resonates deeply with the aspirations of the country best known through the national motto of "One

Zambia One Nation."

This vision underscores the importance of fostering a positive and forward-looking national consciousness.

Furthermore, the sentiments expressed by the Vice President regarding the esteemed character of the Head of State as a "spotless-white-shirt" highlight the qualities of leadership that inspire confidence and unity.

"Unless we consider the strategic importance of effectively communicating the activities and achievements of the President of the Republic of Zambia on both the national and international stage, we risk losing the battle to misinformation and disinformation.

In this context, we believe that enhancing media coverage of presidential engagements presents a valuable opportunity.

Increased visibility will not only spotlight the tangible progress achieved under the current administration, such as the significant success in restructuring Zambia's global debt, but will also serve to elevate the president's image and showcase the leadership he brings to our nation.

It is important to bridge the gap between these accomplishments and public perception, particularly in an era where misinformation can easily take root."

Drawing lessons from the global arena, the government further observes that nations like China and the United States of America strategically employ

media to project their leaders as figures of international standing.

Similarly, within Africa, countries such as Egypt and Rwanda recognize the intrinsic link between a positive image of their leadership and the cultivation of a constructive national mindset conducive to development.

For Zambia, her distinguished history as a beacon of peace in Africa since 1964, and its progressive democratic trajectory since 1991 stands out! We have to keep building upon the legacies of successive Presidents – from the founding father, the late Dr Kenneth Kaunda, to the current Head of State, His Excellency President Hakainde Hichilema – underscores the enduring importance of leadership."

The media plays a crucial role in reflecting this legacy and in fostering a deeper understanding of the ongoing efforts to build a prosperous and unified Zambia.

This responsibility extends to providing balanced coverage of both current and former leaders, acknowledging their respective contributions to our nation's journey.

Therefore, it proposes a concerted effort to enhance media engagement surrounding presidential activities.

"This strategic approach will serve to amplify national achievements, strengthen public understanding, and project a positive image of Zambia's leadership both at home and abroad, ultimately contributing to a more informed and engaged citizenry."

# Alliance launches to advance African-led health research, development and innovation

**K**IGALI, Rwanda - The African Health Research, Innovation and Development Alliance (AHRIDA), a trailblazing pan-African movement for advocacy in health research, development and innovation (RD&I) has been launched during the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHAIC).

For over a decade, African regional coalitions have been advocating for sustainable RD&I for health; policy change to support innovation and equitable access to health solutions; an enabling environment for RD&I and access to lifesaving health technologies in Africa.

The launch of AHRIDA as an umbrella body brings together advocacy efforts to champion African-led health RD&I as a significant economic driver on the continent. Building on the successes of existing advocacy efforts, the alliance will elevate the immense potential of Africa's human capital, infrastructural and institutional capacity to contribute to advancements in global health.

This strategic advocacy alliance leverages the expertise of the Coalition for Health Research and Development (CHReD) in Kenya, the South African Health Technologies Advocacy Coalition (SAHTAC), and Speak Up Africa from Senegal to catalyze African-led RD&I as a driver for knowledge-based economies that will drive Africa's prosperity.

The launch comes at a critical time when the global health RD&I funding

landscape is experiencing a significant shift in priorities with changing political tides, including recent government transitions in the US.

Currently, sub-Saharan Africa imports 90 percent of its medicines and 99 percent of its vaccines, leaving it vulnerable to disruptions in the supply chain occasioned by catastrophic events like the Covid-19 pandemic.

AHRIDA's vision is to transform this landscape by driving increased domestic and international investment in research, while promoting the strategic exploitation of Africa's robust resources and biodiversity and the uptake of African-developed health solutions.

Caroline Mbindyo, Chief Innovations Officer at Amref Health Africa said: "AHRIDA presents a huge opportunity for a more coordinated effort, aimed at ensuring an Africa-led and owned health research, development and innovation agenda. It will bring together and collaborate with experts in the field, including like-minded organizations, the private and public sectors, research and academia, to make this happen.

By investing in African-led health research and innovation, we're not just addressing our immediate health challenges; we're building the foundation for knowledge-based economies that will drive Africa's future prosperity."

The alliance will focus on providing expert analysis and generating evidence



to enhance the understanding of Africa's HRD&I landscape among governments, funding agencies, and research organizations.

By advocating for a well-functioning and integrated regulatory system for medical products, AHRIDA will support the growth of resilient national health systems and foster a knowledge economy in African countries.





## Banana Kingdom Blues: When leaders pray while jobs disappear

MOTSAMAI MOKOTJO

“There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit... In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit,” Napoleon Bonaparte said. Such a statement comes after the United States president, Donald Trump, imposed a 50 percent tariff hike on products from our banana kingdom.

Trump suspended the tariffs for 90 days and reduced them to 10 percent, which is still huge, with the potential of destroying close to 40 000 jobs in the textile factories.

I was informed by two people with intimate knowledge that Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane refused to meet lobbyists a couple of weeks ago.

“I had brought the lobbyists to assist us in convincing the Trump administration to listen to our pleas as a country, but our prime minister was too busy to give an audience to the guy,” the source indicated.

Another said, “Why can’t they include the Taiwanese lobbyists in Washington to help us since their factories are located in Lesotho?”

“South Africans failed dismally in Washington; they didn’t even meet any official at the State Department. What makes our government think they will get an audience with members of the Trump government?”

I was thinking about our strategy going towards America to negotiate a tariff reprieve for us. Minister of Trade, Mokhethi Shelile, Foreign Affairs Minister Lejone Mpotjoane, and Finance Minister Dr Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane don’t inspire confidence.

Having said that, why does the government not explore other markets? They have been sleeping on the job, thinking that America is the only market when there are plenty of opportunities when duty-free products are allowed.

In 2021, Lesotho ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and has been offered duty-free access to the European Union’s (EU) Everything but Arms (EBA), but this country is a ship without a captain.

Our executive is fixated on the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), which has been rendered dead since the imposition of tariffs by Trump.

It’s such a mentality that our leaders fail to creatively come up with solutions; all they do is pray - that’s their mantra.

When has such an act helped Africans trade amongst each other? Lazy thinking and failing to implement are diseases that have afflicted our leaders.

Next week a delegation made up of South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, will meet with the Matekane administration to discuss how they will



tackle the issue of hikes, amongst other matters. I wonder what the meeting will achieve since the US doesn’t want anything to do with Pretoria.

Minister of Labour and Employment, Tšeliso Mohosi, refused to tell me about strategies they intend to employ.

What Mokhosi wanted to say was, “We have no strategy because we are just enjoying the perks of being ministers.

Qu’ils mangent de la brioche” (Let them eat), that’s our motto.”

This country is a crime scene where 40 000 jobs are at risk because it lacks leadership, which the government and the Lesotho Defence Force think they can remedy via that ridiculous and elitist boot camp, which costs M2 500 per head.

“If the politics are not right, nothing

else will work,” said a brother of mine recently. The Lesotho Textile Exporters Association (LTEA) needs to be assured, not with words, that factories will continue to operate.

“The politician should not ignore the fact that the future remains a closed book so long as the consciousness of the people remains imperfect, elementary, and cloudy. We African politicians must have very clear ideas on the situation of our people. But this clarity of ideas must be profoundly dialectical.

The awakening of the whole people will not come about all at once; the people’s work in the building of the nation will not immediately take on its full dimensions: first, because the means of communication and transmission are only beginning to be developed. Second, because the yardstick of time must no longer be that of the moment or up till the next harvest but must become that of the rest of the world; and lastly, because the spirit of discouragement, which has been deeply rooted in people’s minds by colonial domination, is still very near the surface.”

“But we must not overlook the fact that victory over those weaknesses that are the heritage of the material and spiritual domination of the country by another is a necessity from which no government will be able to escape,” Frantz Fanon wrote in The Wretched of the Earth.

It would be wise for our business barons cum government ministers to be warned and stop playing with ordinary folks lives.

Oh yes, I always listen to some Fela Kuti while writing such opinion pieces.

## Trade wars, continental wins: How Trump’s tariffs ignited Africa’s biggest economic shift

Trump’s protectionism disrupted trade, but Africa answered with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a bold new path to integration.

From Washington’s trade war to Africa’s trade revolution

When former US president, Donald Trump, launched his global tariff crusade in 2018, it was meant to protect American jobs, industries and strategic interests. But far from the corridors of Washington, it sent shockwaves across developing economies including Africa which though not a primary target, became collateral damage in the unfolding trade war.

Trump’s tariffs beginning with China and expanding to Europe, Canada and Mexico created uncertainty across global markets. African nations deeply tied to these external economies through raw material exports and fragile manufacturing supply chains, saw reduced demand, disrupted trade flows and a dangerous overdependence on volatile foreign markets.

According to the African Development Bank, Africa lost over \$7 billion in potential

trade opportunities between 2018 and 2020 due to global tariff tensions, yet this disruption sparked a continental awakening.

**The AfCFTA Emerges:** Africa charts its own course. Out of the ashes of global instability rose Africa’s boldest economic integration effort: AfCFTA, officially launched in 2021, is now the world’s largest free trade bloc by number of participating countries, 55 nations, 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP exceeding \$3.4 trillion.

Its mission? Reduce reliance on external markets, foster intra-African trade and unlock the continent’s industrial and economic potential. The goal is clear: grow intra-African trade from a meager 18 percent (as of 2019) to over 50 percent by 2030.

**Real results:** Rwanda’s textile industry as a case study When Rwanda resisted the influx of secondhand clothing and lost its AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) benefits under Trump, many predicted economic fallout. Instead, the country pivoted using AfCFTA to access regional markets, boost local production and attract investment.

Between 2020 and 2023, Rwanda’s textile sector grew by 37 percent, driven by firms like Utexrwa and supported by regional trade facilitation frameworks. The East African Business Council called it “a model for trade resilience.”

**Challenges: The Roadblocks to Integration**

AfCFTA’s promise is vast but so are the challenges.

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Africa requires \$130–\$170 billion annually to bridge gaps in transport, energy and logistics (AUDA-NEPAD).

- **Customs and Bureaucracy:** Cross-border delays and regulatory fragmentation continue to frustrate trade flows.

- **Uneven Political Will:** While leaders in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa have accelerated AfCFTA implementation, others lag in ratifying key protocols.

- **Inclusivity Gap:** Women, youth and informal traders, the backbone of African commerce must be integrated meaningfully into AfCFTA benefits. The private sector’s role: From passive to proactive. AfCFTA

is not just a government project, it’s a business imperative. Companies must begin thinking regionally, not just nationally. From Ethiopia’s electric vehicle startups to Nigeria’s booming digital services exports, innovation is lighting the path forward.

Civil society and business coalition’s including the Civil Society Coalition for AfCFTA are now pushing for accountability, transparency and broader participation in shaping the AfCFTA’s evolution.

**Conclusion:** Africa’s moment is now

What began as a US led trade war has ironically become the catalyst for Africa’s most unified economic leap forward? AfCFTA is more than a trade deal, it is the continent’s clearest path to resilience, industrialization and shared prosperity.

In a world of rising protectionism and trade weaponization, Africa is writing a new story, one built on collaboration, commerce and continental courage. Sourced from the African Union, World Bank, African Development Bank, Brookings Institution, AUDA-NEPAD, East African Business Council

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# Metro



# How has our economy failed, and possibly why?

KHASANE RAMOLEFE

This is possibly the most counterintuitive question, but could US president, Donald Trump, be the best thing to happen to Lesotho? My own answer would be an unequivocally, yes!

He has been an unprecedented boon for the name of Lesotho; following Wade Maya and his exploits on FaceBook, Trump has been the best cheerleader for Lesotho.

This will not hold water within many circles that look at the possibility of AGOA coming to an end in September, and the tariffs that he has imposed. But is this a weakness for us; or this an opportunity for Lesotho to take a serious look at her economy?

Do we really have a clear view of our international trade? What are the real numbers?

What has gone wrong with MAGA? MAGA 1.0 was about bringing jobs back to America, and this was moderately successful. In 2.0 it's not just jobs, it's the trade imbalance that heads the agenda.

And it is herein that Lesotho has an opportunity. We have an opportunity to reset our economy. Just as Trump is using his tariffs to attempt a reset, we should use this tariffs period to reset our own economy. But how would we do that?

To me the most deafening silence has been from the economists at the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC); why have they said nothing? The LNDC is the sharp point of our national investments spear, and it has been quiet. The silence is because they do not have an economics desk worth mentioning.

When Ntate Mokoaleli was the acting CEO of LNDC, I told him that the LNDC was a blight on any person or organisation that was in property/facilities management. All they are is a glorified landlord. The reset has to start with LNDC. It needs a strong economics desk, manned by people who publish at least two (2) research papers per year.

One, on the growth trajectory for the present year; another on the achievements of the year, and the possible growth for the coming year. These would be the bare minimum; many others can, and should be published.

The relationship this desk would have with the economics



department of the National University of Lesotho will be key. In fact, LNDC should sponsor the dean of the school of economics at the NUL. If this is not possible, due to NUL not LNDC, then LNDC should sponsor a chair.

But, in any scenario, LNDC must sponsor the economics department at NUL. Where, and how else will we get a crop of economists to drive our economy if not through this route? It will be long, it will be painful, but it must be done.

The government, through the Bureau of statistics, will be a net beneficiary. The Central Bank of Lesotho will also benefit, at least with first-degree graduates. The government, CBL and the banks will then have to put in place mechanisms to train the graduates further, including placement at international institutions (banks across Africa being a key focus), and schools.

The future of our economy will depend on a cadreship of the highest order, for our economic failures are based on not having these in place.

This would then mean that the National Planning Board, a constitutional requirement to any government, would have to be made operational; and find a large body of national knowledge from within which the national economic framework/plans are built. These persons need not be in, or on, the board, but they will be the think tanks that make the board, and our market economy work.

**How has our economy failed, and possibly why?**

In this tariffs era, we have been found wanting. We have not been able to make a succinct response to the tariffs. Do we indeed sell that much to the US? Do we indeed buy only that much of US products?

The truth, without even studying economics, is that that is not a true reflection of our trade. Most of the jeans produced here do not end up in the US. They are shipped to the various markets that the brand operates in, without going through the US.

The goods are paid for by the US company, from the US, Lesotho gets none of the money that the goods are bought for in the various markets. A good economics desk at LNDC would have been able to point this out. This would narrow the trade deficit with the US, and reduced the tariffs charged to Lesotho.

Our economy is a victim of the largess of the US. They gave us AGOA, and now we are being punished for it. And what about the tariffs and goods produced under AGOA?

What we have been told is that these are blanket tariffs; but does that 'blanket' include AGOA? This is what LNDC should be telling us; do these tariffs include AGOA? This is where the economics desk would once again come in.

We have no wide body of knowledge on our economy, our economic outlook, our economic direction. We have no planning board. Our economy is rudderless. The boat is filled with factory shells.

The unfortunate thing about my suggestion is that it requires patriotism. The Lesotho Defence Force has started what they call the boot camp. Its aim I hear is to instill patriotism in our youth. And that is what we need. That is all we need. A sense of patriotic duty. And with righteous indignation, have a sense of patriotism.

This is a nation that fought and won its own independence in 1881. Independence from being ruled by the government in the

Cape, and rule from Whitehall, London. A nation that fought to keep its own land; fought to allow free men, the men of Basutoland, to bear arms.

This similarity with that of America cannot be lost.

We are a nation that, with a population of barely 400 000, bought two Spitfire fighter plane squadrons in WWII; which were pivotal in the "Battle of Britain". We sent men to fight in that war. We have the highest number of sea fatalities, in the sinking of the Erinpura, of any African nation.

Bravely went on to be the only black Africans carrying guns in the Italian Alps, and on to Germany. Imagine, a black African shooting at a European in the 1940's; and not being charged.

Today what are we? Who are we? Where are we? Are we still recognisable? Does anyone care; internationally and locally?

Today we have become a nation of vassals. We fight for recognition from our foreign masters, without the ability to account for ourselves. We cannot account for our economic success and the punishment that has followed it.

We have reached that point made by Ntate Moleleki, where; we finish what is in the kitty, then look up to them to add more. We are now an Oliver Twist; may I have some more?

What would patriotism look like? Are the writing/s of a friend of mine, who took a look at the US trade with Lesotho and found some surprising numbers, possibly the best in the current situation?

He took the US imports of \$237m per annum from Lesotho; found that they equal \$0.70 per person in the US.

Lesotho imports of \$2.8m from the US; he found that

they equal \$1.27 per person in Lesotho. So per person there is a trade imbalance. He found that when the figures are "Adjusted for income, Lesotho gives 140x more of its GDP per capita to the U.S. than the other way around"

He then says: "And what do we get when we succeed at trade? Tariffs".

He continues, "If every American matched a Mosotho's \$1.27 (in purchasing Lesotho goods) Lesotho would gain over \$419m/year-a game-changer for jobs, health, and education". His conclusion is: "We need fair trade".

But it is in his "invisible flows" that my friend shows his superior understanding of the problem at hand. That the numbers are wrong. He states that: " we pay US firms for software licenses, platforms, and transaction fees- millions in annual digital rent."

We also "run on US tech, EMV payment systems, cloud platforms, operating systems, and search engines.

This man is not an economist. He is basically an electrician. But more than that, he is a patriot. He has simplified the numbers. To our national advantage.

His conclusion is on trade. Mine is, we need better educated, more patriotic citizens. Everyone studying economics, everyone working for LNDC, for the BoS, the CBL, our banks must read Elizabeth A Eldridge's A South African Kingdom: The pursuit of security in nineteenth-century Lesotho.

It details our economic prosperity. Our economic sovereignty. Things that we have lost. Through these tariffs, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to regain them.

I am not sure if Trump has ever read these words:

Ours is a chance today to change America and, by our example, to help America change the world. Richard B Nixon, 25th April 1968.

As a country, we need to read them; understand them. Put them to good national use. This is not an existential crisis, it is an opportunity. An opportunity at a national level we cannot miss.

This is important for our future and for that of our children. The US president has stated that countries are "kissing his ass" to do a deal.

We must do the math. We must have the numbers. With those, we can have the righteous indignation of our sovereignty, and our patriotism to show him that it is his numbers that are wrong.

That he has the "wrong facts". We shall have the superiority in, and of our data, our number to seek a new deal.

Leave his arse alone. Deal with his mind! Deal only in numbers. We will get a great deal.







# Business in Qacha set to flourish

NEO SENOKO

MASERU - Business in Qacha's Nek is set to boom, following the removal of electricity barriers that have been haunting the district for many years.

For a long time, the district has been relying from electricity from the neighboring South Africa, and had to endure frequent load shedding, thus among others killing the progress of business enterprises in the area.

Access to electricity is broadly recognized as an important factor in enterprise development as it unlocks a variety of energy services that can increase productivity and enable provision of new goods and services.

Thanks to the Lesotho Electricity Company (LEC), such challenges have been addressed, as the district is finally being connected to Lesotho's national electricity grid.

A 33kV line passing through Qhoalinyane to Qacha's Nek is expected to ensure electricity access to the area and do away with frequent load shedding.

"After years of relying on electricity

*"After years of relying on electricity from South Africa and enduring frequent load shedding, the district is finally being connected to Lesotho's national electricity grid. The project has reached Qhoalinyane from Quthing, marking a major milestone in ensuring uninterrupted power supply for Qacha's Nek, a true game changer for local development, service delivery, and economic opportunities," LEC said in a statement this week.*

from South Africa and enduring frequent load shedding, the district is finally being connected to Lesotho's national electricity grid. The project has reached Qhoalinyane from Quthing, marking a major milestone in ensuring uninterrupted power supply for Qacha's Nek, a true game changer for local development, service delivery, and economic opportunities," LEC said in a statement this week.

These developments come despite

the continuous shutdown of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project tunnel system and 'Muela Hydropower station for maintenance from October 2024.

The 'Muela hydroelectricity plant which is currently nonoperational is one of the primary energy suppliers of electricity in the country. Apart from that, the country imports electricity from South Africa as well as Mozambique to meet its electricity needs.

Meanwhile the utility company recently announced electricity tariff adjustments by 9.6286 percent per KWh as approved by the Lesotho Electricity and Water Authority (LEWA) for the financial year 2025/26.

The company stated that the adjustments, which include customer and rural electrification levies are necessary to maintain the sustainability of electricity supply while ensuring affordability for all







# HEALTH

## Recent aid cuts jeopardize 40% reduction in maternal mortality since 2000

**SOPHIA SAMANTAROY and  
HEALTH POLICY WATCH**

**M**aternal mortality rates have dropped by 40 percent since 2000, largely due to improved access to essential health services. But WHO officials warn that the recent, deep cuts to international aid could be as disruptive as the Covid-19 pandemic, if not more so, to a woman's chances of surviving pregnancy and childbirth.

And in 2023, more than a quarter million women still died from pregnancy and childbirth complications, according to a recent report on global maternal mortality released on World Health Day, which focused on maternal and new-born health.

That's a death every two minutes. "This is not just a medical failure," said Dr Pascale Allotey, director of the WHO Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research, at the report's launch. "It's a failure of society."

The report by UNICEF, WHO and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) comes as the dismantling of most of USAID's international health programmes, and other cuts to health and humanitarian aid send shockwaves through global health, forcing countries to roll back vital services for maternal, new-born and child health, the WHO said.

Without urgent action, fading attention, funding cuts, and humanitarian crises will jeopardize pregnant women in conflict settings – and make the persistent tragedy of maternal mortality "alarmingly high," warned WHO officials convened at a press conference last week.

Maternal mortality ratios by region. The Covid-19 pandemic caused an upsurge in deaths, particularly in 2021. This year's report is also the first to delve into how the pandemic affected deaths from pregnancy-related conditions.

"I hate to use the term 'surviving' pregnancy," said Dr Bruce Aylward, WHO assistant director general for Universal Health Coverage and life course at a press conference. "But that's what our reality is."

The pandemic "shocked" health systems, said Aylward, meaning that many women could not access needed care for their pregnancies and deliveries.

As a result, more than 40 000 more women died in pregnancy and childbirth in 2021 (322 000) as compared to 2020 (282 000) the report concludes, as the pandemic was gathering steam in low-income regions such as Africa and South Asia.

The upsurge in deaths was partly linked to direct complications caused by Covid-19 during pregnancy, but not only that. There were also widespread interruptions to maternity services – due to the competing demands of the pandemic on hospital beds and healthcare workers, limitations on travel, and other factors limiting access to hospitals and primary healthcare services.

Severe bleeding, infections, preeclampsia and eclampsia, delivery complications, and unsafe abortions are the largest drivers of maternal mortality.

Yet the spike in deaths during the pandemic was temporary. In 2022, the global MMR and number of maternal deaths were lower than they had been in the three years immediately prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the report notes.



Whether the disruptions now being experienced as a result of the broad funding cutbacks in international health assistance led by the United States, but also including the United Kingdom, will be as short-lived, remains to be seen.

To date, aid cuts have already led to facility closures and loss of health workers, while also disrupting supply chains for supplies and medicines for the pregnancy complications, WHO said in a joint statement with UNICEF.

"Global funding cuts to health services are putting more pregnant women at risk, especially in the most fragile settings, by limiting their access to essential care during pregnancy and the support they need when giving birth. The world must urgently invest in midwives, nurses, and community health workers to ensure every mother and baby has a chance to survive and thrive," UNICEF Executive Director, Catherine Russell, said in the press statement.

She added, "When a mother dies in pregnancy or childbirth, her baby's life is also at risk. Too often, both are lost to causes we know how to prevent."

Lead author Dr Jenny Cresswell also predicted a rise in unsafe abortions as one consequence of the recent funding cuts – which target reproductive health services, in particular.

"Any sudden disruptions will eventually lead to adverse outcomes," she said.

US international assistance also "underpins" WHO's ability to collect and analyse country data, and more importantly, support the "basic ability of a woman to survive during pregnancy," Aylward noted at last week's briefing.

"The American people have been incredibly generous in the past 25 years – and share in the credit for progress so far. It makes a real difference" Aylward.

This progress is now "at risk of disappearing."

And the most economically fragile countries are also the ones with the least ability to rapidly adjust to the abrupt funding halt, and are consequently at highest risk, he concluded.

The report gathers data from 195 countries and territories, with a third of all countries having "very low" maternal

mortality ratios (MMR). No country was rated as having an "extremely high" ratio for the first time, defined as the number of deaths per 100 000 live births.

In 2000, nearly a million women died from pregnancy-related conditions. In 2023, maternal mortality had declined to 260 000. That represents a 40 percent decline in the rate of maternal deaths, as compared to live births per 100 000 population.

And while the WHO pointed to these significant improvements since 2000, "there is a huge unfinished agenda in which a quarter million women die trying to give life," said Aylward.

The burden is not equal. Lower and middle income countries and countries caught in conflict are the places where the vast majority of maternal deaths occur – nine in ten in fact.

Sub Saharan Africa did see the largest improvements over the past two decades. Even so, some 70 percent of maternal deaths still occur in that region, noted Cresswell. Globally, Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, and Somalia face the highest burden of maternal mortality – along with Afghanistan.

Conflict zones are especially vulnerable to high rates of maternal mortality. Countries in conflict – such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and CAR – accounted for three in ten deaths.

The maternal mortality ratio is "significantly higher" in conflict-affected areas (504 deaths per 100 000 live births) compared to non-conflict of non-fragile settings (99 per 100 000 live births), the report notes.

Persistent social and economic inequalities underline uneven progress between regions. Post-2015, progress stalled in five regions: North Africa and Western Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

"We cannot be complacent," said Cresswell.

"This is not just a medical failure – it is a failure of society," said Dr Pascale Allotey of the WHO, referring to maternal mortality. A child is tested for malnutrition by a WHO healthcare provider.

The most important factor in healthy pregnancy outcomes is having a skilled attendant at the time of childbirth – most deaths occur around the time of delivery.

Part of the remarkable progress seen in the past two decades is attributable to the upsurge in midwifery programmes, as well as in programmes targeted at reducing unsafe abortions, a major cause of complications.

"Having a skilled health worker in place is key, and we have seen positive progress, particularly in Sub Saharan Africa," said Cresswell. "There is still work to be done. There are still too many women who are delivering without a skilled health provider."

Also imperative is improved access to family planning services, and preventing underlying health conditions like anaemias, malaria and non-communicable diseases that increase pregnancy risks, the report notes.

Allotey, from the department of sexual and reproductive health, also emphasized the role of access to comprehensive information throughout pregnancy. This means generally making sure girls stay in school and receive the knowledge and resources to protect their health.

"There are a whole range of preventive measures to make sure that women are safe," she said.

These include making sure the pregnancies are wanted, and therefore mothers are able to access better care, as well as political commitments.

In recent years, increased political support from African nations has begun to "move the needle" on maternal and child health.

This year's World Health Day theme "Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures," aims to raise awareness on maternal and child health because "it is not okay for a woman to die trying to give birth," said Aylward.

"While this report shows glimmers of hope, the data also highlights how dangerous pregnancy still is in much of the world today – despite the fact that solutions exist to prevent and treat the complications that cause the vast majority of maternal deaths," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of WHO.



# Africa CDC to pilot new health financing options



KERRY CULLINAN and  
Health Policy Watch

**A**mid bleak global economic and development aid trends, Africa's Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) is piloting innovative financing solutions and doubling down on efforts to get member states to invest more domestic funds in health.

A week ago, Africa CDC launched a new financing guide for member states and on Friday the continental body announced that it was starting to implement the first phase, which will focus on "updating national health financing plans in 30 countries, piloting innovative revenue mechanisms, and launching transparency dashboards."

The strategy urges governments to allocate at least 15 percent of national budgets to health, as agreed by the 2001 Abuja Declaration, which was adopted during another crisis: the HIV and

tuberculosis pandemics. Its proposals on innovative financing include "solidarity levies on airline tickets, alcohol, and mobile services, while exploring how Africa's US\$95 billion in annual diaspora remittances can support national health priorities", according to the body.

Finally, it proposes blended financing to "unlock public and private capital for critical investments in infrastructure, digital health, and local production of vaccines and medical supplies."

Phase 2 (2026-2030) will scale successful approaches and aims to ensure that at least 20 countries can finance 50 percent or more of their health budgets through sustainable domestic sources.

"Africa cannot continue outsourcing its health security," said Dr Jean Kaseya, Director General of Africa CDC.

"This strategy is not about aid - it's about ownership. We are building a future where Africa invests in its people, drives its own health agenda, and responds to crises with speed, strength, and self-

reliance." Meanwhile, at the Africa CDC briefing on Thursday, Professor Yap Boum, the Africa CDC's deputy head of the Incident Management Support Team, reported that Uganda's mpox outbreak is continuing to spread, increasing by 30 percent in the past week (from 190 to 247 confirmed cases).

Boum attributed the spread of Clade 1b to complex sexual networks, including sex workers with multiple daily clients.

"Mpox, specifically the Clade 1b strain, is sexually transmissible. Yesterday, Uganda's incident manager informed us that there are sex workers who have up to 10 clients per day," said Boum.

"Sexual networks remain the key driver of the outbreak [in Uganda], with cases spreading in slums, semi-urban, and urban areas. Last week, Mbarara City and Masaka City accounted for 50 percent of daily incidence," Boum noted.

Unlike the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), however, Uganda is managing to test all its suspected Mpox

cases, 60 percent of which have been positive. Uganda has also faced Ebola and Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever (CCHF) outbreaks in the past month.

While mpox cases in the DRC decreased slightly over the past week, the burden is likely underestimated because of challenges with testing, which has been adversely affected by the withdrawal of US funding and conflict in North and South Kivu.

Kinshasa was also affected by torrential rains in the past week that resulted in the Limete Health Center and other health facilities being submerged under water, damaged roads and power and water outages across multiple health facilities in Kinshasa.

However, testing in the DRC has risen over the past week from 18.4 percent of suspected cases to 21.7, largely as a result of decentralised laboratory services. Three new Gene Xpert testing machines have been deployed and 26 laboratories are now functional.





## Dream all-South African Champions League final at risk after Mamelodi Sundowns draw



HERMAN GIBBS

After Mamelodi Sundowns failed to capitalise on home-ground advantage over the weekend, a dream all-South African CAF Champions League final hangs in the balance.

Sundowns and Egypt's record 14-time title holders Al Ahly cancelled each other out in a tense 0-0 draw in the first leg of their CAF Champions League semi-final at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria.

The stalemate has set the stage for a thrilling return fixture on Friday night at the Cairo International Stadium (6pm kick-off).

Al Ahly are unbeaten at home in the CAF Champions League since 2021, and will fancy their chances of securing a place in the final as they chase a record-extending 15th continental crown.

On Saturday, both teams demonstrated their tactical prowess, with Sundowns managing only a solitary shot on target.

Al Ahly had two goals controversially ruled out for offside after viewing VAR, alongside striking the post.

Miguel Cardoso, the Sundowns coach, has maintained a positive outlook despite their first-leg defeat.

He said the tie was far from over, and his players have what it takes to perform in challenging conditions.

"I still believe we can beat Al Ahly because we didn't lose to them in this match. There is a lot to be played for

still, and we can do that out of belief and capacity for what we can put on the pitch," said Cardoso.

"We are going there and expecting a different match. "Whoever goes through, the other team will not be happy. But whoever goes through will be strong because these are the two best teams in Africa. "One will suffer in the end, but I hope we can be strong enough to cope. I believe we can cope, considering how we coped in Tunisia in different conditions.

"We believe in our team and the ability to upset anyone, especially looking ahead to the second leg."

Although he was disappointed with the stalemate, the outcome was a personal triumph for Marcel Koller, who became the first Al Ahly coach to record a clean sheet against the Brazilians in South Africa.

After the match, Koller said he was disappointed to see technology deny them a crucial away goal, but admits it was the right call.

"We didn't allow the opponent to control the game. We are fully aware that this match represents only half of the current stage," said Koller.

"There's still another half to be played in Cairo, and we must stay highly focused in the second leg to reach the final.

"Possession is not important if it doesn't lead to any benefit. Al Ahly created several chances, and one of them hit the crossbar.

"We were more dangerous overall.



We succeeded in playing with a great organisation." Koller has sent a clear message to Sundowns for the return fixture.

He said Al Ahly will adopt a more aggressive strategy to overturn the current stalemate. "We know the point (what is required) - we have not scored a goal. In Cairo, we must score two goals. We know that.

"In the beginning, I said only the halftime is over. We have another halftime of the game, and we should have 100% concentration in Cairo," said the Swiss-

born Koller.

But Sundowns will hope that talismanic figure Themba Zwane will inspire them to victory in Cairo.

The 35-year-old made his return to the team in the first leg after a long injury layoff, and came on in the second half to a warm welcome from the Masandawana fans.

Perhaps Cardoso should utilise the Bafana Bafana stalwart, who signed a contract extension just last week, in the starting XI on Friday to help unlock the Al Ahly defence.