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GABORONE GLITZ, MASERU MISERY

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EU Slaps €200 Million ($232 Million) Fine on Temu for Selling Illegal Products

European Union regulators have fined Chinese e-commerce giant Temu €200 million ($232 million) after finding that the platform failed to protect consumers from illegal and dangerous products sold on its site.
The penalty, announced Thursday by the European Commission, marks the first major enforcement action against Temu under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) and signals Brussels' determination to hold online marketplaces accountable for harmful goods reaching European consumers.....
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Gaborone glitz, Maseru misery

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU- As the engines of the Prime Minister's executive jet begin to whine this week, preparing to ferry Ntsokoane Matekane and his entourage to the sun-drenched capital of Botswana, one cannot help but feel a sense of profound irony.

The Prime Minister travelled to Gaborone at the invitation of President Advocate Duma Boko for the Bi-National Commission (BNC), a forum designed to foster cooperation and progress, according to a press statement released last weekend by the Office of the President.

Yet, as our leader prepares to exchange pleasantries and high-level diplomatic platitudes, the ground beneath his own office in Maseru is rotting.

The latest report from the Auditor-General for the financial year ended 31 March 2024 is a devastating blow to the "business-unusual" mantra that Matekane rode to power.

It reveals an Office of the Prime Minister—the very apex of our executive branch—that has failed the most basic tests of financial accountability, presiding over millions in unspent funds, ballooning arrears, and a culture of international travel that treats the public purse as a bottomless ATM.

The Auditor-General, 'Mathabo Gail Makenete, has issued an Adverse Opinion on the government's consolidated financial statements. This is the accounting equivalent of a "no-confidence" vote. It means the books are so poorly managed that they do not represent the truth.

When Matekane stands before Adv Boko this week, representing Lesotho, he does so as the head of a government whose financial records are essentially a work of fiction.

Let us look specifically at the Office of the Prime Minister (Head 309). While this office is supposed to be the guardian of the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II) and the champion of "Good Governance and Accountability," its own ledgers tell a story of administrative lethargy.

In the 2023/24 financial year, the Office of the Prime Minister recorded actual recurrent payments of M106.12 million. While they managed to stay within their revised budget of M116.58 million, the "efficiency" ends there.

The most glaring red flag is the issue of payment arrears. As of 31 March 2024, the Office of the Prime Minister sat on M3.79 million in outstanding debts to individuals and suppliers.

While this is a decrease from the M5.61 million owed the previous year, it remains a staggering sum for an office that should be the model of fiscal discipline.

Why are Basotho businesses waiting for payment from the highest office in the land? Is the money being diverted to more "glamorous" pursuits, like the very international travel that defines this week's agenda?

The travel budget is where the betrayal of the taxpayer becomes most visible. Across the government, the Auditor-General reports that a massive M125.28 million was spent on "Subsistence (International)" and another M27.05 million on "Fares (International)".

This combined M152 million spend on global jaunts happened while the government failed to meet M2.81 billion in total payment obligations to suppliers and lenders.

The Prime Minister leads many of these delegations. When he flies to Botswana this week, the cost of his travel, his "subsistence," and the allowances for his bloated entourage will be added to this tally—a tally that is often paid while local suppliers of basic hospital linen and food are told the "coffers are empty".

The Auditor-General is blunt about the consequences of this travel-heavy, payment-light culture. She notes that the government's failure to pay its debts promptly leads to the closure of local businesses and increased unemployment.

It is the ultimate hypocrisy: Matekane travels to Botswana to discuss "economic cooperation," yet his own office's financial mismanagement is actively strangling the Lesotho economy by withholding payments from the private sector.

Furthermore, the Auditor-General highlights a disturbing pattern of "year-end payment pressure". Ministries, including the Prime Minister's, often fail to spend their budgets during the year, only to initiate a mad scramble in March, submitting vouchers at two or three times the normal volume.

This practice, the report warns, "adversely impacts on cash management, budget credibility, and payment efficiency". It is a chaotic, fly-by-night approach to governance that suggests our leaders are more concerned with "clearing the budget" than with achieving actual service delivery.

Then there is the ghost in the machine: the dormant bank accounts. The Auditor-General's review of bank confirmations discovered that the Food Management Unit, which falls under the Prime Minister's Office, has a bank account (9080002298917) that has been inactive for three years.

While the balance is currently listed as zero, the very existence of such accounts is a security risk. The report notes that "unreported accounts might be used for illicit activities" and that delays in closing them "increase the risk of fraud and misappropriation of public funds".

If the Prime Minister cannot even ensure that his own Food Management Unit's bank accounts are audited and closed properly, how can he claim to be managing the nation's food security crisis?

The lack of accountability goes even deeper. The Auditor-General points out that many Chief Accounting Officers (CAOs)—the very people who should be managing the PM's funds—do not even "own" the preparation of their reports.

They consistently delay submissions, ignore queries from the Treasury, and fail to own their budgets. This is a failure of leadership that starts at the top.

If the Prime Minister does not demand accountability from his own Principal Secretary, the culture of "I don't know where the money went" will continue to permeate every level of the civil service.

The Botswana trip represents more than just a diplomatic mission; it represents the perpetual "away game" of Lesotho's leadership.

While Matekane and Boko discuss regional stability, who is looking at the M422 million unexplained variance between the government's consolidated receipts and the IFMIS ledger?

Who is answering for the M152.43 million drawn from the Contingency Fund for items that were neither urgent nor unforeseen, a direct breach of Section 113 of the Constitution?

The Auditor-General's report lists the 78th UNGA trip (M1.14 million) as one of those questionable uses of the Contingency Fund.

It seems that whenever a leader wants to fly, the "emergency" button is pressed on the public purse.

This week's trip to Botswana will likely be funded through similar creative accounting, while the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is being investigated for failing to return M80 million to the Consolidated Fund at the end of the year.

We are living in a country where the Auditor-General has to remind the government that "all transactions introduced into the accounting records must actually exist".

That we have reached a point where the existence of transactions must be verified as a "Key Audit Matter" is a testament to the level of decay in Maseru.

Matekane, as you land in Gaborone and receive the 21-gun salute, remember the businesses in Maseru that have closed because your office didn't pay their M3.7 million in arrears.

Remember the M7.2 million lost to public servants who defaulted on their bonding agreements while you were away. Remember that while you enjoy the hospitality of Botswana, back home, your government is sitting on a M2.81 billion debt to its own people.

The "Adverse Opinion" of the Auditor-General is not just a report; it is a scream for help from the heart of our financial system. It tells us that our leadership is more interested in the subsistence of travel (M125 million) than the subsistence of the Mosotho child.

It tells us that "Good Governance" is a slogan for the BNC, but a myth in the Prime Minister's own office.

Before he embarks on his next international flight, Prime Minister Matekane must account for the last one.

He must explain why his office is an accounting black hole. He must explain why his arrears are unpaid while his travel budget is always full.

If he cannot manage the books of a single office in Maseru, he has no business trying to manage the destiny of a nation in Gaborone.

The era of diplomatic glitz masking domestic misery must end. The people are counting the costs, and they are tired of being left behind on the tarmac.

LESOTHO BE SHARP, NOT FOR PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF 18.

18+ ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

Ombudsman launches probe into pension payment delays

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU-The Office of the Ombudsman (OoO) has fired a formal warning shot at the government machinery responsible for distributing social assistance benefits in the counry, announcing a sweeping investigation into persistent delays in the payment of Old Age Pensions and other social grants that continue to leave some of the kingdom's most defenceless citizens without their lifelines.

The announcement, contained in a statement released last week by the Office of the Ombudsman (OoO), whose head is Advocate Tlotiso Polaki, signals growing institutional impatience with what appears to be entrenched administrative dysfunction in the delivery of social protection benefits- dysfunction that has continued unabated despite previous investigations and recommendations.

At the heart of the inquiry are complaints from beneficiaries across the country who say they are being made to wait for extended periods before receiving payments meant to cover food, healthcare, transport and other basic necessities.

The affected parties include elderly persons, people living with disabilities and households living in conditions of poverty- groups that have little margin for error when government payments fail to arrive on time.

"Social protection programmes exist to uphold human dignity and reduce poverty," the Ombudsman's statement declared. "Beneficiaries should not be prejudiced by avoidable administrative failures."

The decision to launch what is termed an "own motion investigation"- meaning the Ombudsman is initiating the process independently rather than waiting for individual complaints- reflects the seriousness with which the office is treating the matter.

It also underscores what the OoO describes as the systemic nature of the problem.

This is not the first time the office has been forced to intervene on this issue. In 2024, the Ombudsman investigated a case involving a pensioner whose Old Age Pension was delayed for approximately fifteen months owing to administrative failures within the Ministry Social Development.

Following that investigation, Advocate Polaki's office found that the delay constituted maladministration and issued recommendations calling for improved service delivery, the establishment of clear processing timelines and measures to prevent similar incidents going forward.

Yet the complaints have not stopped. If anything, they have multiplied. The OoO notes with evident frustration that many of the new complaints mirror the very issues that were investigated and supposedly resolved.

This raises uncomfortable questions about whether the ministry concerned took the Ombudsman's earlier recommendations seriously, and whether any meaningful reforms were actually implemented.

"The persistence of such concerns raises doubts about the extent to which corrective measures have been implemented and sustained," the statement noted, adding that the continued complaints suggest "the existence of systemic weaknesses in the administration of social protection programmes that may be adversely affecting vulnerable beneficiaries across the country."

The scope of the new investigation is broad. The Ombudsman intends to examine the causes and full extent of payment delays, the effectiveness of the registration and verification processes that beneficiaries must navigate, and whether the administrative and payment systems currently in place are adequate for the task. Crucially, the investigation will also assess compliance with the recommendations the Ombudsman previously issued — a move that sends a clear message that the office intends to hold the responsible institutions accountable not just for current failures, but for their response to past ones.

Investigators will also assess the real-world impact of these delays on beneficiaries and identify the measures needed to improve efficiency, accountability and overall service delivery going forward.

In an unusual step that signals just how seriously the office is taking public engagement, the Ombudsman has issued an open call for information.

Beneficiaries who have experienced delayed payments, their family members, civil society organisations, community councils and members of the public are all being invited to come forward and submit relevant information to the OoO.

This participatory approach should help investigators build a comprehensive and ground-level picture of the scale and nature of the problem.

The investigation comes at a time of heightened public sensitivity around government accountability and service delivery in Lesotho.

For elderly citizens who depend entirely on their monthly pension to survive, a delay of even a few weeks can mean going without food or medication.

For persons with disabilities and impoverished households, the stakes are no different.

What makes this investigation particularly significant is that it is as much about institutional culture as it is about administrative processes.

The Ombudsman's office is, in effect, asking whether government departments take their obligations to the poor seriously-and whether the recommendations of oversight bodies carry any real weight.

The OoO has indicated that further details about the investigation will be communicated to the public in due course.

The nation will be watching closely to see not only what the investigation uncovers, but whether its findings will this time translate into lasting, meaningful change for the thousands of Basotho who depend on social grants to get through each month.

Beyond the surface: reclaiming the legacy of inclusion for Basotho with albinism

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU- As the sun rises over our Mountain Kingdom this June 13, Lesotho joined the global community in observing International Albinism Awareness Day.

While the day itself is marked by official ceremonies and public gatherings, the real conversation began much earlier this month.

In a pointed and comprehensive press statement released last week, the Persons with Disability Advisory Council (PWDAC) set a solemn yet hopeful tone for this year's commemorations, reminding us that the struggle for true inclusion is far from over.

The Council's message serves as both a celebration of our inherent diversity and a sharp critique of the systemic barriers that continue to marginalize our brothers and sisters with albinism. At its core, the statement argues that to be truly Basotho is to reject the very discrimination that has recently plagued this community.

The foundation of our nation was built upon a radical vision of acceptance. As the PWDAC reminds us in their statement from last week, "King Moshoeshoe I built the Basotho Nation on diversity and no one was ever diminished on the colour of their skin".

This historical legacy is not just a point of pride but a moral compass. The Council highlights that our ancestors despised discrimination, a sentiment immortalized in the wise saying "u se re ho moroa, moroa tooe," which serves as a timeless warning against disparaging others based on their identity.

By drawing on these roots, the PWDAC calls on the nation to "carry Moshoeshoe's legacy with pride, celebrating persons with albinism for their humanity, resilience, and contribution to society".

This year's global theme, "Proudly In My Skin: Celebrating All Skin Tones," fits perfectly within this Basotho context, as it "affirms the dignity and humanity of persons with albinism, while drawing attention to the psychosocial impacts of colour based discrimination, inequality and segregation".

However, the Council is clear that we cannot celebrate skin tones while ignoring the harsh realities faced by those living in them. The statement highlights a growing recognition that "stigma, myths, and social bias continue to undermine the rights and well-being of persons with albinism".

To address this, the PWDAC has committed to ensuring that individuals are "seen beyond their skin tone and respected as human beings of value with full rights and freedoms".

This commitment is particularly urgent given the findings of the United Nations Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, who visited Lesotho in April 2024.

While the Expert noted positive steps—such as the ratification of international treaties and the adoption of the Persons with Disability Equity Act in 2021—she also exposed the "urgent challenges" that remain.

The reality is stark: despite our legislative progress, "persons with albinism continue to face discrimination in schools, workplaces, and communities".

One of the most distressing sections of the PWDAC statement addresses the persistent cultural myths that continue to endanger lives. It is a tragedy of our modern era that "myths such as the belief that persons with albinism 'disappear' or 'turn into donkeys after death' fuel exclusion, bullying, abandonment, and depression among families".

These are not mere superstitions; they are weapons of social destruction that cause profound "psychosocial impacts... including trauma, depression, low self-esteem, and internalized stigma".

The Council argues that these factors underscore an "urgent need for mental health support" that has been largely overlooked in our national health strategy.

We are faced with a situation where the greatest threat to a person with albinism is often the unfounded fear and ignorance of their neighbours.

Beyond the social stigma, the physical health of persons with albinism is at a crisis point in Lesotho. The PWDAC identifies "skin cancer as the leading cause of death among persons with albinism" in our country.

This is a preventable tragedy, yet the Council points out that "sunscreen remains inaccessible through the public health system".

For many, the very thing that can save their lives is a luxury they cannot afford. Furthermore, the statement notes that "access to visual aids is unaffordable, and specialist care is scarce".

This is especially true for those trapped in "poverty and rural isolation," who often find themselves "furthest behind," lacking even the most basic access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

In response to these systemic failures, the PWDAC is using the momentum of last week's statement to demand concrete policy changes.

They are calling for the "recognition of albinism within disability and social protection frameworks" and, most crucially, the "inclusion of sunscreen in the national essential medicines list".

The Council's list of demands is practical and necessary: "subsidies for visual devices," "nationwide distribution of health support," and "reasonable accommodation in schools".

They are pushing for specialized teacher training and awareness curricula to ensure that schools become havens of inclusion rather than arenas for bullying.

In the labour market, the Council advocates for "quotas and anti-discrimination measures in employment" to break the cycle of poverty that grips so many in this community.

Looking toward the future, the PWDAC has placed high stakes on the 2026 census. They carry "high hopes that albinism statistics will be clearly outlined" in the final report, as this data is essential for the "adoption of a national action plan aligned with the African Union Plan of Action".

Without accurate data, persons with albinism remain invisible in the eyes of the state, making it impossible to allocate the resources necessary for their survival.

The Council also aligns itself with the UN Expert's call for a comprehensive "review and amendment of the Disability Equity Act to align it fully with the CRPD" (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

There is a pressing need to "mainstream albinism into relevant national policies" to meet our commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, we must address the specific vulnerabilities of the most marginalized among the marginalized. The PWDAC statement acknowledges that "women and girls with albinism often face compounded discrimination".

They are subjected to "heightened risks of gender-based violence, exclusion from education and employment, and psychosocial impacts such as isolation and exploitation".

Their lived experience is a painful intersection of gender and disability, which the Council argues requires "gender-responsive policies, counselling, and protection measures".

If we are to achieve a society of true equality, our protections must be as robust for a girl in a remote village as they are for a professional in the capital.

As we commemorate International Albinism Awareness Day 2026 today, let us not forget the call to action issued by the PWDAC last week. They have invited the "government, civil society, and communities to celebrate every skin tone as part of Basotho's shared humanity".

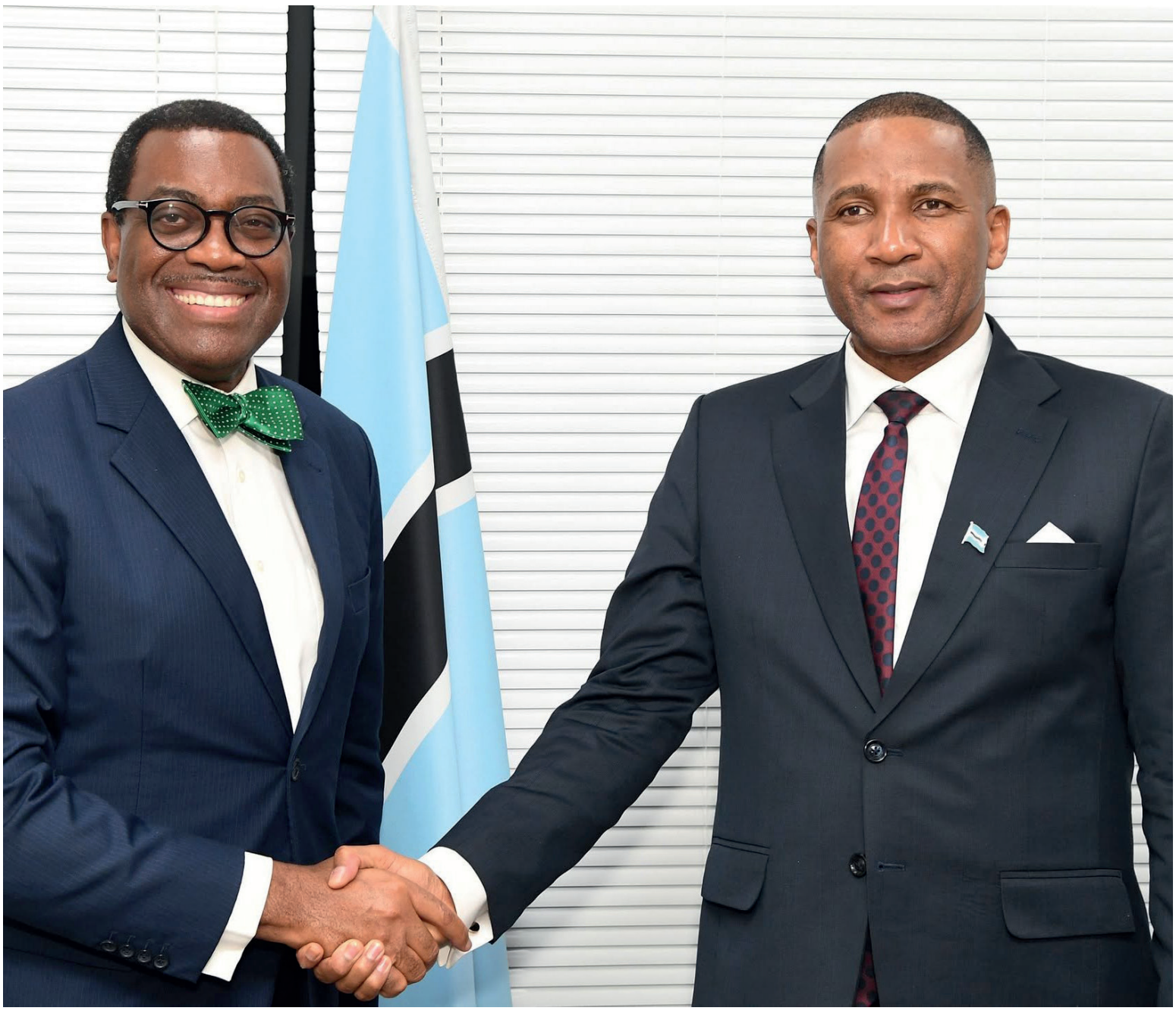
We are challenged to "challenge prejudice and debunk harmful myths," and to "amplify the voices of persons with albinism and all persons with disability".

Our goal must be to "promote environments where dignity, equality, and well-being are guaranteed" for every citizen.

It is time to move beyond the surface and ensure that the legacy of King Moshoeshoe I is not just a memory, but a lived reality for every Mosotho, regardless of the colour of their skin.

Akinwumi Adesina to chair Botswana and De Beers diamond fund

The former president of the AfDB will chair the Diamonds for Development Fund, which seeks to ensure that Botswana benefits from diamonds.



Botswana's government and De Beers have appointed former African Development Bank President Akinwumi Adesina as chairperson of a fund to ensure that Botswana benefits more from its diamonds.

The Diamonds for Development Fund, which aims to use diamond proceeds to boost economic growth and diversification in Botswana, was established during tough negotiations between Botswana and De Beers – which concluded in 2025 – to extend diamond mining licences through to 2054 for their 50:50 mining joint venture, Debswana.

De Beers has committed to an upfront investment of BWP 1 billion ($74.4m) in the Fund, as well as annual contributions from its dividends from Debswana, based on the latter's performance.

Adesina, a former Nigerian agriculture minister, was elected the eighth president of the AfDB in 2015, and re-elected for a second term in 2020.

He ended his second term as president in September 2025.

"The Diamonds for Development Fund represents a bold and visionary initiative to ensure that the people of Botswana benefit directly from the wealth created by diamonds," Adesina said.

"It is not only diamonds that should shine, the lives of the people of Botswana must also shine.

The Fund's success will set a global benchmark for how natural resource wealth can create enduring value for generations to come."

Adesina will formally assume his new role on 15 June 2026. The Fund is in the process of finalising the appointment of independent directors to its board.

Bogolo Kenewendo, Botswana's minister of minerals and energy, said: "We are proud and honoured to have Dr Akinwumi Adesina join the Diamonds for Development Fund as Chairperson.

His appointment solidifies the position of the Government of the Republic of Botswana to maximise the value of Botswana diamonds as an anchor for economic transformation, diversification, innovation, beneficiation and citizen participation in the diamond value chain."

Botswana seeks benefits as diamonds slump

In recent years, Botswana has demanded more benefits from its decades-long partnership with De Beers, including the return of sightholder sales to Gaborone from London, and investments in labs, training centres and manufacturing facilities.

The negotiations which concluded last year also resulted in a new 10-year sales and marketing agreement for Debswana's rough diamond production, with a potential five year extension. Under the deal, the share of Debswana's production sold by Botswana's Okavango Diamond Company will increase from 30% currently to 50% by 2035-40, with De Beers handling the remainder.

De Beers said the long-term agreement would "deliver long-term value from existing mining assets and mine-life extension projects, including Jwaneng Cut-9, Jwaneng Underground and Orapa Cut-3."

The diamond industry has been undergoing a prolonged slump, triggered by factors including the rise of synthetic stones, a slowdown in the Chinese luxury goods market and US tariffs on India, where the majority of the world's stones are cut and polished.

Parent company Anglo American is looking to sell De Beers as it undergoes a major restructuring amid its merger with Canada's Teck Resources. In February, Anglo American cut the value of De Beers by half — marking the third writedown in three years.

- AFRICAN BUSINESS

AFRICA NEWS

Eye in the sky, knife in the back

Africa CDC says Starlink is essential to containing the Ebola outbreak, but security experts say it's certain to help militant groups too. And Elon Musk could pull the plug on a whim.

MOUTTASEM ALBARODI

Starlink has donated 150 satellite internet kits for deployment in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where health workers are battling a growing Ebola outbreak.

Jean Kaseya, the director of Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC), told a recent press conference that the equipment will help responders know exactly "who is where" and maintain accurate contact-tracing lists.

"Without it, we cannot say that we can control this outbreak," Kaseya said. The donation marks a remarkable reversal for a technology that Congolese authorities considered a security threat until recently: Starlink was banned in the DRC in 2024 over fears that its terminals could fall into the hands of armed groups operating in the country's east. year, however, the government lifted the ban as part of a wider agreement with the United States, which included provisions granting preferential access to American firms in the mining sector. The initial concerns have not disappeared.

A spokesperson from African Security Analysis, a Swedenbased consultancy, told The Continent: "Any deployment of advanced communications equipment in an active conflict zone carries a dual-use risk.

Even when the purpose is humanitarian, the equipment can become valuable if captured, diverted, or absorbed into local conflict economies."

Evidence is growing that Starlink does get absorbed into local conflict economies. Across the Sahel and Central Africa, the portable yet reliable highspeed connectivity has helped militant groups to co-ordinate attacks, distribute propaganda, evade law enforcement, and sustain illicit economic activities, according to 2025 investigations by Bloomberg and The Global Initiative Against Organised Crime.

African Security Analysis reports that Starlink terminals have already surfaced among Islamic State cells in Butembo, one of the areas in eastern DRC affected by the current Ebola outbreak.

This isn't the only concern. "Dependence on foreign-controlled communications for critical functions such as emergency services or public health means states have limited insight into how the network is operated and data is processed," said Joscha Abels, a lecturer in political economy at the University of Tübingen.

Lamine Traore, the director of digital and information systems at Institut Pasteur Dakar, which is part of the DRC Ebola response, said end-to-end encryption should prevent a connectivity provider such as Starlink from accessing the health data it carries – if properly implemented.

But the question of control remains open. Elon Musk, whose SpaceX provides the Starlink services, retains the ability to decide when, where, and under what conditions it is available. That proved risky for Ukraine.

According to Reuters, on Musk's orders, SpaceX employees deactivated more than 100 Starlink terminals in Ukraine in September 2022.

During a pivotal push to regain territory from Russia, Ukrainian drones monitoring the battlefield went dark.

Efforts that mitigated this risky dependence on a private corporation were kneecapped by last year's aid cuts.

After the 2018-2020 Kivu Ebola epidemic, the DRC received substantial international support to modernise and digitise its disease-surveillance systems.

Much of that infrastructure, however, depended heavily on donor funding. When major aid cuts hit last year, surveillance capacity deteriorated rapidly.

The DRC was the African country hardest hit by USAid cuts and the thirdmost-affected globally.

THE CONTINENT

I have a duty to stay on, says PM as he justifies defence spending decisions

Metro **KATE WHANNEL**

Sir Keir Starmer has told the BBC he has a "duty" to stay on as prime minister as he justified his decisions on defence spending.

Speaking the day after two of his defence ministers quit in a row over funding, Sir Keir insisted he had made "hard-edged" choices, including getting every department to make cuts to pay for defence.

In a veiled warning to potential leadership challengers in his own party, he said: "Whoever is prime minister is going to face the same prevailing winds as I am facing, none of that is going to change."

Asked if he wanted to lead Labour into the next election, he said that was what he wanted to do, but acknowledged: "I need to turn things around."

He said he did not want to "plunge" the country into the "chaos" of a leadership election but added: "If it does happen, I will fight."

"Let me be clear that this is not about personal vanity, it is not about stubbornness, it is about a very deep sense of duty," he said.

"I was elected to serve this country notwithstanding difficult circumstances - that is what I am doing."

He added that he had a "very sound platform" and that his government had stabilised the economy, increased defence spending and invested in public services.

In his resignation letter, Defence Secretary John Healey made scathing criticisms, accusing the PM of being "unable" to commit to the spending needed to keep the country safe.

Sir Keir said he was grateful to Healey for his work but rejected his analysis, arguing that defence spending was his "number one priority" and would continue to be so at future spending reviews.

He pointed to cuts to overseas aid as evidence that he was able to make difficult decisions to increase spending on defence.

Asked if he would be willing to reduce spending on welfare to pay for a further boost, Sir Keir said the government was making changes to help people into work and said that would "free up resources".

On Friday evening, it was announced that Louise Sandher-Jones has been made armed forces minister, taking over from Al Carns, who resigned on Thursday.

The new veterans minister is Calvin Bailey, while Angela Eagle is now a security minister, taking over from Dan Jarvis after he replaced Healey as defence secretary.

Healey's resignation was triggered by an ongoing internal row over funding of the government's defence investment plan (DIP).

The plan, which sets out how new military equipment and infrastructure will be paid for over the next decade, was due last autumn but has been repeatedly delayed.

The government has committed to increasing defence spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035.

Healey suggested that the current defence investment plan proposed increasing defence spending to 2.68% of national income by 2030. He argued that the UK should be hitting 3% by that date.

The prime minister said the government had put "considerable" money into defence already, and that the DIP outlines "further money on top of that".

This has to be seen in the context of "the commitment I've made... to get to 3% in the next Parliament," he said.

He added: "I can tell you now that defence will be the number one priority at every spending review, including the next spending review."

Sir Keir also insisted that, despite the resignations of Healey and his Armed Forces Minister Al Carns, he remained committed to publishing the plan ahead of a Nato summit in early July.

The prime minister has been facing leadership questions for more than a year, with pressure intensifying following his party's poor results at elections in May and now the resignation of Healey, previously one of Labour's most consistently loyal ministers.

A leadership contest has not yet been triggered, however Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is expected to launch a challenge if he wins the Makerfield by-election next week.

Sir Keir did not mention Burnham, or other potential leadership rivals by name, but said that on questions about spending: "For every answer that is being suggested, the question has to be when you're in government - which is about trade-offs - what is it then that you wouldn't do?

"Because easy answers are by their nature easy. Decisions in government involve trade-offs, so they always have to come with that second question well, if you're going to do that, what is it you wouldn't do?"

Former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, who has said he would enter a leadership race, wrote in a post on X, the "failure to make the right choices on the defence investment plan is just a symptom of the indecision at the heart of this government".

"Case in point: The prime minister just said defence is 'a number one priority'. Growth was meant to be the number one priority, is it still?

"There's not enough money for defence, but today the government announced £4.5 BILLION for walking and cycling. Make choices. Decide. Lead."Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said the prime minister wasn't funding defence "properly" and should "cut welfare" in order to do so.

Liberal Democrat defence spokesperson James MacCleary said the Conservatives had "recklessly and shamelessly eroded our defence capabilities but the Labour government is now refusing to give our Armed Forces the genuine backing they need".

His party has called for the introduction of war bonds, which it says could raise £20bn.

- BBC

Blood on their hands

The shocking depravity of financial mismanagement within the Ministry of Health

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

If the walls of our public clinics could talk, they would scream. They would scream not just from the agony of the sick, but from the systemic, cold-blooded betrayal by those entrusted to lead the Ministry of Health.

The latest Auditor-General's report for the financial year ended 31 March 2024 is not merely a collection of spreadsheets and accounting terminology; it is a damning indictment of a ministry that has effectively turned its back on the Basotho.

While our citizens languish in queues for basic Panado, the bureaucrats in Maseru are busy presiding over an empire of uncollected revenue, unaccounted-for millions, and a fleet of destroyed vehicles that no one seems to care about. This is not just mismanagement; it is a moral failure that borders on criminal negligence.

The Auditor-General has issued an Adverse Opinion on the government's consolidated financial statements, a rare and severe red flag indicating that the books are so riddled with discrepancies that they do not fairly represent the truth.

At the heart of this chaos lies the Ministry of Health, a spending unit that seems to treat public funds as a suggestion rather than a sacred trust.

Let us look at the most staggering figure first: the Ministry's failure to collect what it is owed.

In the 2023/24 financial year, the Ministry had a revised revenue budget of M29.59 million, yet it managed to collect a pathetic M7.20 million.

This represents a 76% under-collection. Think about that for a moment. In a country where the health system is perpetually "bankrupt," the leadership of this ministry left over M22 million on the table. These are funds that could have been used to stock pharmacies or pay the very doctors who are currently fighting for their call allowance arrears.

This under-collection is a direct threat to our fiscal position, creating funding gaps that literally cost lives.

Where does this missing money go? The report highlights a culture of "salary overpayments" that are never recovered. Four employees at the Ministry of Health were wrongly paid a total of M125,000, and as of the audit date, not a single cent of this public money had been returned.

While this might seem like a small amount in the grand scheme of a multi-billion-loti budget, it reflects a broader, more sinister truth: if the Ministry cannot even be bothered to recover five-figure overpayments from its own staff, how can we trust them to manage millions in donor grants?

The ministry's handling of COVID-19 vaccine funds is another masterclass in administrative incompetence. An advance of M26 million was drawn from the Contingency Fund to buy vaccines.

However, the Ministry erroneously labelled this as an "imprest advance" rather than a "contingency advance". Because of this "error," the money was listed under funds to be allocated in a Supplementary Bill, creating a legislative mess.

To make matters worse, while the Ministry issued this imprest to guarantee payment to a supplier, a development partner eventually stepped in and paid for the vaccines.

Did the Ministry then promptly clear the books? No. There was a significant delay in clearing the imprest, leaving millions in limbo while the bureaucrats fumbled their paperwork.

This pattern of "slow movement" extends to the very tools required to save lives. The Auditor-General's report notes with grave concern that three vehicles—X4257, X45BBG, and Y4733—were involved in accidents. Two of these vehicles were "severely damaged".

Yet, the Ministry failed to submit accident loss reports to the Auditor-General. There was no indication of repair costs, and no action was taken to fix them.

These vehicles are now useless hulks of metal, and the Auditor-General is blunt: the officers involved have "obstructed the services that could have been delivered using those vehicles".

Every minute an ambulance or a service vehicle sits rotting in a yard because a manager couldn't be bothered to file a report is a minute a Mosotho mother or child goes without care.

The Ministry's capital project execution is equally dismal. While the Maseru District Hospital construction was reportedly completed by the end of the year, the broader financial picture shows a ministry that cannot spend the money it begs for.

Under the "Government of Lesotho" capital expenditure category, the Ministry had a revised budget of M162.6 million but only spent M67.7 million—a variance of M94.8 million or 58%.

Similarly, for donor-funded grants, they left M59.5 million unspent. It is a cruel irony: the Ministry under-collects revenue by 76%, and then fails to spend the capital budget it does have, all while our health infrastructure crumbles.

Then there is the issue of payment arrears, which have ballooned to terrifying proportions. As of 31 March 2024, the Ministry of Health owed individuals, suppliers, and contractors a staggering M68.79 million.

This is a massive jump from the M27.66 million owed the previous year. Over M18 million of these debts have been outstanding for more than a year. When the government fails to pay its suppliers, businesses close and people lose jobs. But in the context of health, it's even worse: suppliers stop providing oxygen, linen, and medicine. This is a manufactured crisis born of administrative lethargy.

The legal exposure of the Ministry is another ticking time bomb. The report reveals a M1.6 million discrepancy between what the Ministry thinks it might lose in court and what is actually recorded in the Consolidated Financial Statements. The CFS lists an exposure of M12.87 million, while the Ministry's own internal statements only show M11.25 million.

Furthermore, the status of long-standing cases like CIV/T/617/2009 and CIV/T/279/2019 remains "not clear," even to the auditors. While payments for cases involving individuals like "Tankiso" and "Maliakae" are supposedly in progress, the lack of a comprehensive litigation register means the taxpayer is essentially flying blind into a storm of legal fees and compensation claims.

We must ask ourselves: who is being held accountable? The Auditor-General's mandate is to identify these "potential issues" and provide recommendations.

But the recommendations in this report read like a repetitive plea for basic sanity. "The CAO should ensure that the estimated loss is recorded," "The CAO should investigate the discrepancies," "The CAO should implement tighter monitoring".

The Chief Accounting Officer (CAO) is the gatekeeper of these funds. Under the Treasury Regulations of 2014, the CAO is responsible for the "collection and safe custody of public money".

If the Ministry of Health is under-collecting revenue by 76%, the CAO has failed. If the Ministry is losing millions to unrecovered overpayments and unrecorded asset losses, the CAO has failed. If the Ministry is sitting on unspent donor loans while our hospitals lack equipment, the CAO has failed.

The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning has noted that corruption and wasteful spending must be mitigated to protect government resources. But these are just words. The reality is found in Table 18 and Table 13 of the Auditor-General's report—tables that tell a story of a ministry that has lost its way.

Basotho are tired of "workshops" and "sensitization" programs.

We are tired of hearing about the NSDP II and its lofty goals of "strengthening human capital" when the ministry responsible for that capital is a financial black hole.

We need action. We need the recovery of the M7.2 million lost to bonding agreement defaulters across the public service. We need the M125,000 in salary overpayments back in the treasury. We need the accident reports for those three vehicles, and we need to know why the officers responsible aren't being surcharged.

Most of all, we need a Ministry of Health that understands that every loti it mismanages is a loti stolen from a patient. The "Adverse Opinion" of the Auditor-General is a final warning.

If the leadership of the Ministry of Health cannot manage a simple car repair or a salary deduction, they have no business managing the lives of two million Basotho.

It is time to clear out the deadwood in Maseru and replace them with people who realize that public service is a duty, not an opportunity for enrichment or a license for laziness.

To the Minister and the Principal Secretary: the Auditor-General has laid bare your failures.

The question is no longer if you have misused our funds, but whether you have the integrity to resign before the next report shows even more blood on your ledger.

The people are watching, the auditors are counting, and the time for excuses has run out.

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Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle."
– Napoleon Hill, author

Out of your vulnerabilities will come your strength." –
Sigmund Freud, neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis

Gvt. on track towards implementing National Digital Transformation Strategy

Metro **NEO SENOKO**

MASERU- Government has taken a decisive move towards implementation of the Lesotho National Digital Transformation Strategy with more focus at building a digitally inclusive, innovative and prosperous Lesotho.

Minister of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Nthati Moorosi revealed that the establishment of this facility demonstrates the Government's unwavering commitment to harnessing technology as a catalyst for national development and inclusive economic growth.

"Following the Prime Minister's declaration of youth unemployment as a national disaster, the project provides a targeted response by creating opportunities for young Basotho in the creative industries to develop skills, generate employment and participate meaningfully in the digital economy.

"It is firmly aligned with the National Strategic Development Plan II, particularly its objectives of economic diversification, job creation and technology-driven sustainable growth, while also advancing the National Digital Policy's vision of transforming Lesotho into a knowledge-based digital economy," Moorosi said.

The Digital Outreach Studio will serve as a national hub for digital content, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It will provide opportunities for young Basotho to acquire skills in multimedia production, digital marketing, and creative industries, while also creating avenues for enterprises development and income generation. In doing so, the project will contribute meaningfully towards addressing the challenge of unemployment, particularly among our youth.

This initiative forms part of the e-Government Infrastructure Phase II Project, supported by the African Development Bank. The project seeks to strengthen digital services, promote inclusion and improve the delivery of public services to citizens across the country.

"Today's programme goes beyond the turning of the sod for the Digital Outreach Studio. It also marks the signing of three important national digital policies: the Broadband and Infrastructure Sharing Policy, the Artificial Intelligence Policy, and the Data Management Policy," Moorosi added.

Together, these policies provide a coherent foundation for Lesotho's broader digital transformation agenda. The Broadband and Infrastructure Sharing Policy will promote wider, more affordable and efficient access to the connectivity upon which digital services and creative industries depend; the Artificial Intelligence Policy will guide the responsible adoption of emerging technologies for innovation and economic development; and the Data Management Policy will strengthen the governance, protection and effective use of data as a national resource.

The Digital Outreach Studio will translate these policy commitments into practical opportunities by providing the infrastructure, skills and creative environment through which young Basotho can produce digital content, develop innovative solutions and participate competitively in the digital economy.

At a continental level, this project contributes directly to the aspirations of the African Union Agenda 2063, particularly those relating to inclusive growth, innovation and youth empowerment. It is equally aligned with the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa, which advocates for expanded access to digital technologies and the development of a competitive African digital economy.

Furthermore, it positions Lesotho to take advantage of opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area through the development and export of digital services and digital content.

UNDP to Launch Creative Challenge Tackling GBV, Mental Health and Substance Abuse

LIAPENG RALIENGOANE

MASERU - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Lesotho through the UniPod, is preparing to launch a creative challenge aimed at addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), mental health and substance abuse among young people.

The initiative is being implemented in partnership with UNESCO, UNFPA and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and seeks to harness creativity as a tool for awareness, healing, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Neo Matsoso from UNDP Lesotho said the challenge is designed to encourage young people to develop creative solutions to some of the country's most pressing social issues while equipping them with practical skills and opportunities for growth.

"The initiative focuses on Gender-Based Violence, mental health and substance abuse, using creativity as a tool for awareness, healing, innovation and entrepreneurship," Matsoso said.

She explained that the programme goes beyond awareness raising and will provide participants with opportunities for incubation, mentorship and skills development.

"Beyond raising awareness, the project will provide participants with opportunities for incubation, mentorship and skills development.

We want participants to not only engage with these important issues but also develop ideas that can be nurtured into meaningful projects and ventures," she said.

According to Matsoso, the challenge seeks to demonstrate the role that creativity can play in driving social change while opening pathways for young people to explore entrepreneurship and innovation.

She expressed confidence that the initiative would attract young creatives from across the country who are passionate about contributing to positive social change.

UniPod is an initiative supported by UNDP and is embedded within university environments to cultivate a culture of innovation and active learning among students and educators.

Online activism: Govt would have banned social media if... — Seun Kuti

ABISOLA ADIGUN

Afrobeat musician Seun Kuti has said online activism is often overstated, arguing that governments would have restricted access to social media if it were truly as powerful as people believe.

Speaking in a video posted on his verified Instagram page, Kuti questioned the effectiveness of digital campaigns in driving real-world change, insisting that repeated online advocacy has not always translated into tangible outcomes.

He referenced Nigeria's past advocacy efforts, including the "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign that followed the abduction of schoolgirls, noting that despite sustained public attention across multiple administrations, the issue persisted.

"If you remember clearly, during the previous administration, we kept shouting 'Bring Back Our Girls' every day. From Jonathan to Buhari, the slogan continued. Even when Buhari came into office, the girls were still not returned," he said.

Kuti also said persistent criticism often follows when such issues are revisited.

"It later became a situation where if you bring it up, people will attack or insult you," he added.

He argued that Nigeria tends to repeat the same approaches while expecting different results.

"As usual, in Nigeria, we keep repeating the same tactics and expecting a different result.

"Nigeria deserves more than our videos from you," he said.

On social media activism, Kuti questioned its perceived influence.

"Social media is not as powerful as many people think it is. If social media truly had the power people believe it has, governments would not allow unrestricted access to it."

He further claimed that digital platforms are subject to control and moderation. "Social media is regulated and controlled. Algorithms can suppress content. My last video had its audio removed, and I returned to post again, but the post was restricted."

Kuti concluded that relying solely on online campaigns is insufficient to drive meaningful change.

"So, in reality, what we think we are achieving by simply making videos online is not enough."

- NIGERIAN TRIBUNE

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A milestone for Majara at Comrades Marathon

NEO SENOKO

MASERU- Lesotho's elite long distance runner Likeleli Majara secured a gold medal at the prestigious Comrades Marathon that took place in Durban South Africa on Sunday.

Majara completed the 86 kilometer race, finishing in 8th position and taking home M58, 000 in a process.

She is the only Mosotho who managed to secure a gold medal at this year's race, cementing the country's position as a one of the top performers in long distance marathons across the continent.

Majara had said in her previous interviews that her main target was to finish in top ten in the Comrades Marathon after making her debut in 2025 edition.

"This year I have a targeted top 10 for Comrades. Last year was my first time. I just went there to check and see how the race goes.

I was not going for competition. So it was encouraging to finish the race and immediately told myself when I crossed the finish line that I would be coming back this year.

I do not see it as difficult thing especially when you are well prepared and injury free.

All it needs is preparation and you're done. It is not that difficult," Majara had previously said in her interview with the Top Runner.

With M1.5 million at stake, the South African runner Gerda Steyn once again demonstrated her dominance, securing the first position in this year's edition.

A total of 76 runners from Lesotho from various clubs joined thousands of athletes from around the world to compete to compete for the ultimate glory in this year's edition.

The 2026 Comrades Marathon offered a combined prize purse of over M8.2 million in prize money and incentive bonuses, rewarding the top perfoming runners for their race-day efforts.

A prize purse of M5 790 400 was on offer across the top ten positions, individual prizes, age categories and team prizes for men and women, including prize money for the first South African finisher and top KwaZulu-Natal athletes.

A further M2 420 was on offer for various records or time incentives, taking the total prize monies available to M8 210 400, which represents a 10 percent increase across all categories on the total prize monies on offer in the 2025 edition of the race.

Elijah Just: 'skinny kid' lights up World Cup, makes New Zealand history

ZAAHIER ADAMS

He has been repeatedly written off as too small and skinny, but Elijah Just has now emerged as a World Cup star after his two clinical goals made New Zealand football history.

The 26-year-old combined to deadly effect with striker Chris Wood in Monday's lively 2-2 draw with Iran in Los Angeles. Just gave New Zealand — who came into the tournament as the lowest-ranked team — a surprise lead after seven minutes.

Skipper and Nottingham Forest forward Wood teed him up, and Just transferred the ball neatly from his left foot to his right, before smashing it past goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Iran levelled before half-time, but Just linked up with Wood once more to put the Kiwis within sight of a historic first World Cup win.

The slight Just, who is listed as 1.74m tall, was the first New Zealand man to score twice in a World Cup match. Back came Iran for a second time as the Group G encounter, which took place in a politically charged atmosphere because of the Middle East war, ended in stalemate.

"It's difficult to put into words, I was just buzzing to score the first and then I got the opportunity in the second half and I saw it in the back of the net, it was an incredible feeling," said Just, who plays as a winger or attacking midfielder for Motherwell in Scotland's top tier.

"Running over and seeing my team-mates and how happy they were — that will stay with me for the rest of my life." Coached by the Englishman Darren Bazeley, New Zealand are at their first World Cup in 16 years. In their two previous appearances, in 1982 and 2010, they failed to win a match.

That wait for a landmark first World Cup win goes on but Just warned that, while tougher assignments await against Egypt and Belgium, New Zealand can spring a shock. "If people were surprised maybe they have not been following because we have such a talented group and we work really hard," said Just, whose parents, brother and uncle were there to witness his two-goal performance.

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