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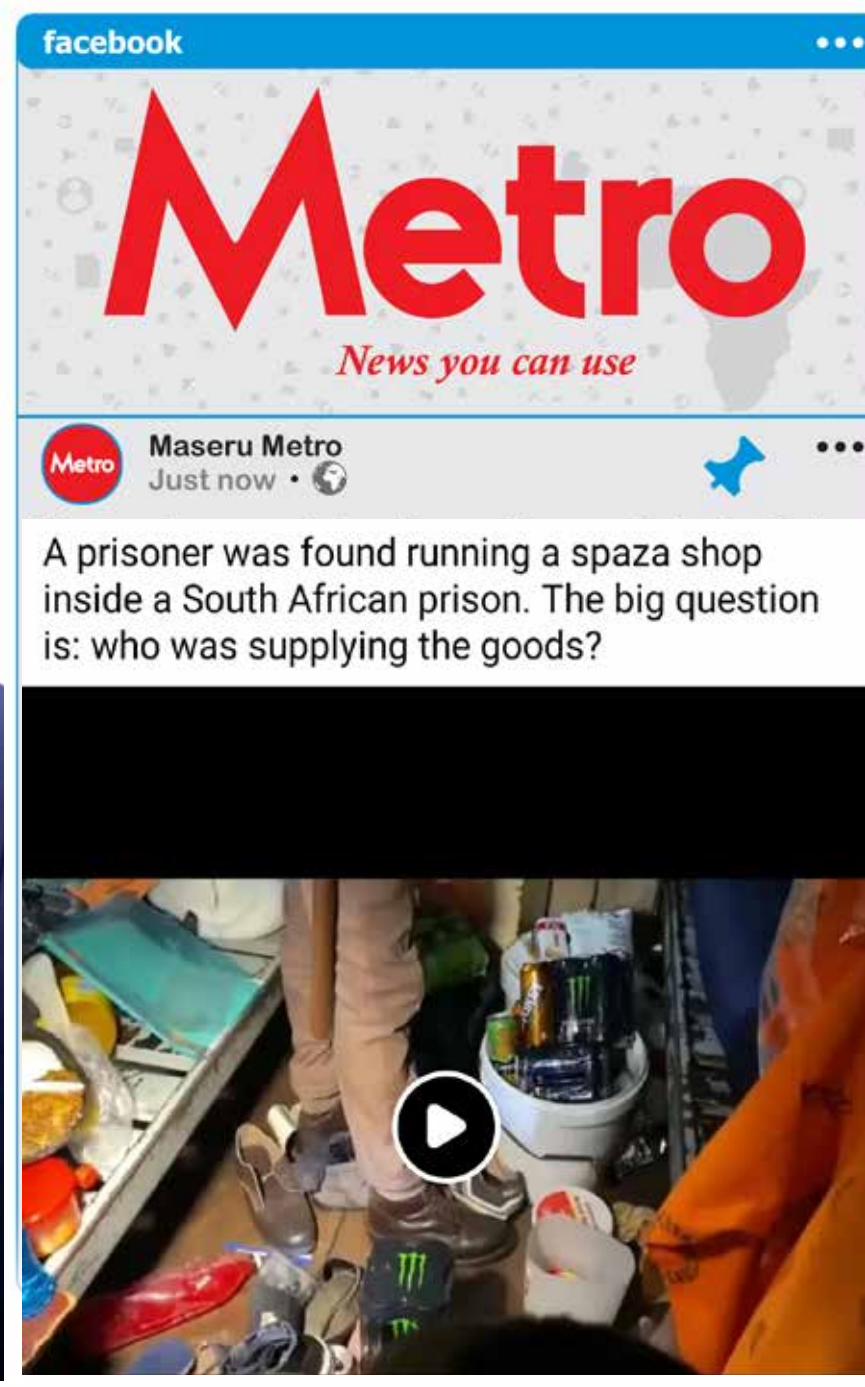
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MATEKANE HITS BACK: PM REJECTS “DEFIANCE” NARRATIVE, POINT BY POINT



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Matekane hits back: PM rejects “defiance” narrative, point by point

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU-Prime Minister Samuel Ntsokoane Matekane has issued a detailed and pointed rebuttal to the Official Leader of the Opposition, Mathibeli Mokhothu, rejecting in the strongest terms the Opposition’s characterisation of his Government as one engaged in a “calculated and systematic pattern” of defying the courts of Lesotho.

In a five-page response dated August 5, 2026 – coming just over two weeks after the Opposition’s blistering press statement accusing the RFP-led administration of trampling the Constitution – the Prime Minister goes case by case through each of the eight matters Mokhothu raised in a letter to him dated August 3, 2026, and systematically disputes the Opposition’s version of events on nearly every count.

“I respectfully disagree with the suggestion that the Government has adopted a posture of disregard for judicial authority or that it has deliberately chosen not to comply with decisions of our courts,”

Matekane writes at the outset of his letter, insisting that such an assertion “neither reflects the government’s constitutional commitment nor accurately represents the legal position in a number of the matters you have cited.”

“That is not what the court ordered”

The most striking pushback in the Prime Minister’s letter concerns the case that has arguably generated the most public sympathy: the reinstatement of 76 axed National Security Service officers, ordered, according to the Opposition, by the Court of Appeal on November, 7 2025.

Matekane flatly disputes this framing. “Respectfully, that is not what the Court ordered,” he writes, in the case of *Lietsiso Mothala and 76 Others v Director General, National Security Service and Others*.

According to the Premier, the Court of Appeal expressly acknowledged that more than seven years had elapsed between the institution of the officers’ case and the delivery of judgment, and that counsel for the appellants themselves had conceded that reinstatement was “no longer a viable remedy.”

The Court, he says, therefore declined to order reinstatement at all, and instead left the practical implications of its ruling to be resolved through an appropriate process.

Government, the Prime

- Premier tells Mokhothu several cited court orders “were never made” as he dismantles Opposition’s contempt allegations
- Government says NSS reinstatement was never ordered by Court of Appeal, LCS and Chiefs’ arrears already settled
- PM appeals for Opposition’s return to reform talks, warns “history will judge us... by the institutions we leave behind”

Minister writes, has since initiated discussions between the Attorney General, counsel for the respondents and counsel for the appellants “in an effort to reach a practical and lawful resolution,” a process he says has had to account for the considerable seven-year gap between the case’s institution and its determination.

“The matter is therefore not one of Government refusing to comply with a court order, but rather one of implementing a judgment whose practical consequences require structured engagement between the parties,” he states.

A similarly sharp correction is offered on the matter of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Advocate Hlalefang Motinyane, whose case the Opposition had cited as an example of a court-ordered reinstatement being ignored.

Matekane points out that the applicant in that matter, *The Law Society of Lesotho v The Prime Minister and Two Others*, was in fact the Law Society and not Advocate Motinyane herself, and that the Law Society had expressly stated it was not litigating on her behalf but was instead seeking constitutional clarification.

“There was no prayer seeking the reinstatement of the DPP, nor did the Constitutional Court grant such relief,” the Prime Minister writes, adding that while the Court found her suspension unlawful, it issued no consequential order directing her reinstatement.

“It cannot therefore be asserted that Government is in contempt of an order that was never made,” he says.

On the case of RSL Commissioner General Advocate ‘Mathabo Mokoko, the Prime Minister notes that the matter was instituted against the Revenue Services Lesotho board and other respondents, not against government as such, and that when the applicant subsequently brought contempt proceedings, the Court itself found the respondents were not in contempt. “In those circumstances, it cannot fairly be suggested that government has failed to comply with the Court’s order,” he writes.

Sub judice and settled accounts

On two further matters – the case brought by Advocate Tlotliso Polaki (referenced by Mokhothu regarding the Ombudsman) and the case involving Village Health Workers – the Prime Minister declines to engage on the



merits at all, citing the fact that contempt proceedings have already been instituted by the applicants themselves in both matters and remain before the courts.

“Since the issue of alleged non-compliance is now properly before the court, it is only appropriate that the court be allowed to determine whether contempt has in fact occurred,” Matekane writes of the Polaki matter, warning that “any further comment from Government would risk prejudicing pending judicial proceedings.” He adopts an identical position on the *Village Health Workers’* case, saying it would be “neither prudent nor appropriate” to comment on issues the courts have yet to determine.

The Prime Minister takes a similar sub judice approach to the case of *‘Mating Mahooana*, whom the Opposition’s earlier statement said had been dismissed from the Public Service in direct violation of a Labour Court interdiction. Citing “the long-established convention against commenting on matters that are sub judice,” Matekane declines to discuss the merits of her several pending cases, but adds a detail he clearly regards as significant: that Mahooana “continues to receive her salary and attendant benefits while the litigation remains before the courts.”

On the two remaining matters – the Lesotho Correctional Service Staff Association’s salary arrears, and Chiefs’ salary arrears – the Prime Minister takes a firmer, more categorical line, asserting outright that Government has complied.

“I am advised that the successful applicants were paid the salary adjustments and arrears awarded by the Court. Accordingly, Government complied with the judgment, and the assertion that it has refused or failed to do so is factually incorrect,” he writes of the LCS matter. On the Chiefs’ arrears, he says outstanding amounts have already been paid, with processing of the remaining April payments “at an advanced stage” and being

finalised.

The position is considerably more nuanced

Having gone through each of the eight cases, the Prime Minister draws his own conclusion, one directly at odds with the Opposition’s central charge.

“I trust that the foregoing demonstrates that the position is considerably more nuanced than suggested in your letter,” he writes. “In several of the matters cited, no order of the nature alleged was ever granted.

In others, the alleged non-compliance is itself the subject of pending contempt proceedings before the courts. In yet others, government has already complied with the judgments or is actively engaged in lawful processes aimed at implementing them.”

On that basis, Matekane insists, “it is therefore difficult to sustain the broad proposition that government has adopted a deliberate policy of disregarding court orders or undermining judicial authority.”

He reaffirms that his administration “remains unwavering in its commitment to constitutional governance, judicial independence, and the rule of law,” and stresses that this commitment extends to ensuring “every public institution, including the Executive itself, functions strictly within the confines of the Constitution.”

Notably, the Prime Minister is also careful throughout the letter to draw a sharp institutional distinction the Opposition’s statement had elided – repeatedly stressing that allegations of contempt of court “fall exclusively within the jurisdiction of the courts, and it is for the courts – not the Executive, the Legislature, or political actors – to determine whether contempt has

occurred.” The implicit rebuke is unmistakable: that it is not for the Opposition, however serious its concerns, to pronounce the Government in contempt outside of a courtroom.

An olive branch on reforms

Beyond the legal rebuttal, the Prime Minister’s letter carries a clear political appeal.

Referencing the Opposition’s separate decision to suspend its participation in the national reforms process, Matekane “respectfully” appeals to Mokhothu and the Opposition parties “to reconsider your decision to withdraw” from the talks.

“The reforms process is not the property of any Government, political party, or institution,” he writes. “It is a national undertaking born out of the collective aspirations of Basotho to strengthen our constitutional order, promote stability, improve governance, and secure a better future for generations to come.” He argues that Opposition participation is “indispensable” to ensuring the reforms carry broad national legitimacy, and urges Mokhothu to “return to the consultation table so that, notwithstanding our political differences, we may continue to work together in the national interest.”

The Prime Minister closes on a reflective note, writing: “History will judge us not by the positions we defended as political actors, but by the institutions we leave behind for the people of Lesotho.”

The letter sets up what is likely to be a continuing exchange between the two offices.

Whether Mokhothu’s office will respond point-by-point to the Prime Minister’s rebuttal – and whether the Opposition will reconsider its position on the reforms boycott in light of Matekane’s appeal – remains to be seen.

METRO understands both matters are being closely watched by civil society and legal observers ahead of further developments expected in the coming weeks.



A lean authority, a fat problem: what the NRA consultation really told us

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

MASERU-When Basotho finally secured the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution in August 2025, after eleven years of dialogue that began in the ashes of the 2014 political and security crisis, the temptation was to treat enactment as the finish line.

Last week's Multi-Stakeholder Consultative Meeting at the Avani Maseru Hotel was a useful, if uncomfortable, reminder that it was nothing of the sort. Passing a law is the easy part.

Building the machine that makes the law mean something in the daily life of the Mosotho who queued at Mafeteng magistrate's court or waited for a service at a government office that still runs on 2014 habits that is where reforms have historically gone to die in this country.

The forum, convened by the Ministry of Law and Justice with support from the National Reforms Transitional Office, was government's attempt to avoid that fate for the National Reforms Implementation Authority, the body meant to succeed the discredited National Reforms Authority.

What emerged was a candid, occasionally awkward, conversation about how not to repeat the NRA's mistakes and an uncomfortably long list of questions government still cannot answer.

The ghost of the NRA still haunts the room

It is telling that so much of the day was spent relitigating the failures of a body that no longer exists. Professor Motlamelle Kapa, Advocates Lintle Tuke and Tšepo Thibinyane an all-legal panel that itself drew criticism from the floor for narrowing the range of perspectives on offer were largely in agreement on the NRA's record.

It produced the Omnibus Bill and it built a degree of national ownership by pulling political parties, chiefs, churches, youth and the private sector into one room. But it was also, by the panel's own account, oversized, slow to reach consensus, starved of timely funding, short on technical expertise when it mattered, and weakly monitored.

Perhaps the most damning admission from the platform was that sitting allowances appear to have been paid with only a loose connection to attendance or the actual completion of assigned work a polite way of saying that some people had every incentive to make the process last as long as possible.

Basotho taxpayers, who have watched reform timelines slip for over a decade, will recognise that pattern instantly.

The consolation is that nobody at the forum tried to defend that record. The convergence across panel and floor was clear: whatever replaces the NRA must be smaller, more technically capable, and better monitored, while retaining enough inclusivity to command legitimacy.

That is a sound starting principle. The trouble, as always in Lesotho's reform story, will be in the execution.

A two-tier compromise, still a draft

The Minister of Law and Justice, Richard Ramoetsi, used his presentation slot to table a proposed structure rather than a final one a distinction he was at pains to stress, and one worth taking him at his word on, given how openly he invited revision.

The design on offer is a two-tier arrangement: an apex board of between seven and thirteen members drawn from governing parties, opposition parties, extra-parliamentary parties, the College of Chiefs, academia, women's and youth formations, persons with disabilities, civil society and the media, sitting monthly; and beneath it, a Secretariat led by a Chief Executive Officer and staffed with technical experts across the seven thematic reform areas constitution and parliament, governance and public service, the economy, security, media, the judiciary, and peace and stability.

On paper this addresses the central lesson of the NRA experience: separate the representative, political function from the technical, implementation function, so that legitimacy and competence are no longer fighting each other inside the same overstuffed room.

It is a defensible architecture. But architecture is not the same as delivery, and the forum surfaced at



least three fault lines that government will need to close before this structure earns public trust rather than merely stakeholder attendance.

Three unresolved fault lines

The first is the clock. The Minister told participants that the eighteen-month implementation window set out in the gazetted Act should be understood as beginning only once the Authority is actually formed not from the date of enactment a year ago. Fair enough, legally.

But he also volunteered, candidly, that the realistic legislative runway is closer to six months once one accounts for the approach of elections and the inevitable thinning of parliamentary attendance that comes with campaign season.

That is a startling admission to make in the same breath as unveiling a structure that has not yet been costed, has not yet been legislated, and has not yet had its twenty-one associated Bills sequenced. Twenty-one Bills spread across eight ministries, from a Media Bill to a National Security Commission Bill to an Auditor-General Bill, is not a six-month programme by any honest reading.

Either the timeline is aspirational political messaging, or the Authority's first task will be managing the politics of missing its own deadline. Basotho deserve to know which.

The second fault line is cost. Government's own position, delivered candidly from the podium, was that the reforms have not yet been costed because the structure must first be settled.

That is procedurally logical but politically risky, because it means Parliament and the public are being

asked to weigh in on a design without knowing what it will cost the fiscus to run.

Given that the NRA's ballooning size and allowance culture were named repeatedly as its central sin, an apex-plus-Secretariat model that has not been priced is asking stakeholders to trust the framework's discipline on faith.

Faith has not served this country's reform process especially well over the past decade.

The third, and perhaps most politically loaded, fault line is legitimacy itself. Several interventions from the floor questioned the very source of government's authority to design and propose this structure at all, with at least one panellist arguing that the Leaders' Forum the cross-party mechanism that has anchored the reforms process from the start should be the body determining the Authority's character and composition, not a ministerial presentation at a hotel consultation.

Civil society representatives pressed, separately, for the opposition to be brought more visibly and meaningfully to the table, notwithstanding the minister's assurance that opposition parties have been consulted throughout.

Both concerns speak to the same underlying anxiety: that a structure designed principally inside government, however well-intentioned, risks being received by the public and by Parliament as an Executive project dressed in consultative clothing rather than a genuinely co-owned national institution.

If that perception hardens, the Authority will spend its early life defending its legitimacy instead of doing its job precisely the trap the

forum was convened to avoid.

What should count as success from here

None of this is a case for abandoning the exercise. The consultation format itself, whatever its limits an all-legal panel, a single day, questions about whether the invitation promised broader engagement on the reform content itself rather than just the structure was more transparent than much of what passed for stakeholder engagement during the NRA years.

Government deserves credit for publishing the criteria it says it will now apply: constitutional compliance, inclusivity, effectiveness, affordability, feasibility, efficiency and legitimacy. Those are the right words.

The test, as ever in Lesotho, will be whether the next document to emerge from this process – the actual Bill establishing the Authority reflects the substance of what was said in that room on August 5, or reverts to whatever was already decided before the forum began.

Three things would signal that government has genuinely listened. First, publish the costing before, not after, the Bill is tabled, so that Parliament debates a fully priced institution rather than another blank cheque.

Second, resolve the timeline question honestly either commit to the eighteen months the Act contemplates and build a Secretariat resourced to hit it, or be transparent that the six-month political runway means a phased, prioritised legislative programme rather than twenty-one Bills marching in parallel.

Third, give the Leaders' Forum and the opposition a documented, verifiable role in finalising the Authority's composition, not merely a seat at a consultation whose outcomes Government retains sole discretion to interpret.

The Tenth Amendment was hard-won. It would be a peculiar tragedy if the institution built to implement it collapsed under the same weight of size, cost and thin accountability that discredited its predecessor. The forum showed that Basotho stakeholders already know what went wrong the first time.

NMDS must make repayment easier



LIAPENG RALIENGOANE

Every time the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) is in the news, the focus is usually on debt collection. While recovering money is important, I believe there is another question we should be asking: Is NMDS making it easy enough for people to repay what they owe? Many Basotho who benefited from government scholarship understand that the money was not a gift. It was an investment in their education. Paying it back helps another

young Mosotho get the same opportunity. That responsibility should never be ignored. At the same time, NMDS also has a responsibility to make the repayment process simple, clear and convenient. In today's digital world, there is no reason why beneficiaries should struggle to find out how much they owe. NMDS should have an online portal where every beneficiary can log in using their student number or national ID to see their outstanding balance, payment history and repayment options.

The portal should also allow instant Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) and online card payments, especially for Basotho living outside the country. It should work with banks, mobile money services and other digital payment platforms so that people can pay wherever they are. Payments should reflect immediately on a beneficiary's account. Another issue is communication. Many people may not even know about the repayment incentives already offered by NMDS. For example, people who pay early

can reduce what they eventually pay. There are also discounts for graduates who achieved merit or distinction. If more people knew about these benefits, more borrowers might choose to repay voluntarily. NMDS should invest more in public awareness campaigns. Instead of only contacting people when it is time to collect money, it should regularly educate beneficiaries about their responsibilities, payment options and available incentives. This is not about letting people escape their debts. Everyone

who benefited from public funds should honour their obligation. However, collecting money becomes much easier when the system is simple, transparent and user-friendly. At the end of the day, NMDS and beneficiaries want the same thing: a scholarship programme that continues to help future generations. That can only happen if people repay their loans and if NMDS makes it easier for them to do so. Sometimes, the best way to recover more money is not by being tougher, it is by making it easier for people to pay.

Calls grow for release of 95-Year-Old Shincheonji leader



LIAPENG RALIENGOANE

Calls for the release of 95-year-old Shincheonji Church of Jesus leader Lee Man-hee are growing, with human rights activists and scholars urging the South Korean Government to reconsider his continued detention.

The latest appeal comes from a group of European scholars and human rights activists who visited South Korea and met with Chairman Lee Man-hee and related officials on August 6.

Three members of the group met Lee at his place of detention, according to a statement issued in Seoul on August 7.

The group says some of its members have studied Shincheonji for many years, including conducting interviews with Lee and researching the movement's international missionary activities.

The appeal comes days after the Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP-LC), an NGO in special consultative status with the United

Nations, submitted a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council expressing concern over Lee's detention.

CAP-LC said the case raises questions about the treatment of elderly defendants, freedom of religion or belief and the interpretation of constitutional principles.

Lee, who is 95, is being detained in connection with allegations relating to the political participation of members of his religious community.

The European scholars and activists said South Korean legislation concerning the political participation of clergy is among the most restrictive in the world and questioned whether such restrictions are compatible with international norms protecting the right of believers to participate in political life.

They also expressed concern about how Shincheonji is portrayed in the Korean media.

According to their statement, descriptions of the church as a "cult" often rely on accounts from religious opponents who describe



it as "heresy", while academic research on the movement receives less attention.

The group stressed that it respects South Korea's democratic institutions and does not seek to interfere with the country's justice system.

However, it argues that Lee's advanced age makes his continued pre-trial detention a matter of humanitarian concern.

"Chairman Lee is ninety-five years old," the group states, arguing that in the European Union, pre-trial detention of older defendants is regarded as an exceptional measure. It says that in comparable cases, house arrest may be used instead.

CAP-LC has similarly raised concerns about Lee's age and vulnerability, saying international human rights standards require pre-trial detention to be used only when strictly necessary and that the circumstances of elderly defendants should be

taken into account.

The organisation also questioned comments attributed to South Korea's Minister of Justice, who reportedly described criminal punishment of Lee as the "inevitable" consequence of his being a "false prophet".

CAP-LC said such comments, made while investigations were still ongoing, risk undermining the presumption of innocence and could affect public perceptions of a case that had not yet been adjudicated.

The activists and scholars have now gone further, calling for Lee's immediate release from custody so that he can face trial without being detained.

"For humanitarian reasons," they said, their request is based on international principles protecting older defendants and standards including the Mandela Rules.

The statement was



signed by Hans Noot, Associate Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers; Professor Massimo Introvigne, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief of CESNUR and Bitter Winter; Thierry Valle, President of CAP-LC; Michael Langhans, Executive Director of FOREF Germany; and Dr Mark Nemes, Deputy Director of CESNUR.

CAP-LC has separately urged the South Korean Government to review the necessity of Lee's continued detention in light of his age, health and the nature of the allegations.

It has also called for judicial proceedings to respect the presumption of innocence and for public authorities to avoid statements that could compromise the appearance of impartiality.

The issue is now before the wider international human rights discussion, with the Human Rights Council's upcoming 63rd session scheduled to consider human rights situations requiring the Council's attention.

Two-horse race to Zambian August poll

Fourteen candidates have lined up but in reality, the contest is between the UPND's Hakainde Hichilema and Tonse Alliance's Brian Mundubile

DENNIS MULILO

Zambia heads to a general election on 13 August, with incumbent Hakainde Hichilema expected to secure a second term. But the opposition is seeking to turn voter frustration over the high cost of living into a campaign against the incumbent.

Fourteen candidates have lined up but in reality, it is a two-horse race between Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UPND) and Brian Mundubile of the Tonse Alliance (TA), a faction that emerged out of the former ruling Patriotic Front (PF) which lost power to UPND in 2021.

Hichilema, 64, who has maintained his Vice-President Mutale Nalumango as running mate, enters the election with the advantages and challenges of incumbency while benefiting from a weak opposition. His five years in office have enabled him to make inroads into former PF strongholds by capitalising on and integrating the party's once-formidable political structures into his own.

Frustrated by infighting in the PF, several senior party figures have defected to Hichilema's camp, complicating the opposition's efforts to reclaim its heartlands.

Until May, Hichilema appeared headed for a relatively unchallenged re-election. However, the opposition has shown signs of regaining momentum. Leading the TA is Mundubile, 55, a lawyer, accountant, former minister and later government chief whip in Parliament. His running mate is Makebi Zulu, 45, who also serves as spokesperson for the family of the late former president Edgar Lungu.

The pair have concentrated the campaign in the northern half of the country, seeking to revive the fortunes of the former ruling party in its strongholds. Their task is to reunite a fractured opposition and rebuild the coalition that brought the PF to power in 2011.

The remaining contestants are barely visible. The campaign of former foreign affairs minister Harry Kalaba, 50, who finished third in the 2021 election,



has been overshadowed by the more crowd-pulling Mundubile. Socialist Party leader Fred M'membe, 67, a former newspaper publisher and journalist, has said his campaign is focused on grassroots mobilisation and has largely avoided the high-profile rallies.

Both sides have sought to project strength through the size and enthusiasm of their campaign crowds. Hichilema's supporters point to the ruling party's ability to draw large gatherings as evidence of an expanded national footprint. The Mundubile camp has used the size of its rallies as proof that it retains a deep grassroots base and public frustration with the government is translating into renewed political vigour.

Matters of the stomach As in 2021, the economy remains the dominant election issue. The election is seen as a referendum on Hichilema's economic reforms. He inherited a country that had defaulted on its external debt, with credit rating agencies having downgraded Zambia to "junk" status. The copper mining industry was also in disarray.

Hichilema says his administration has restructured 94% of Zambia's sovereign debt, reducing annual debt servicing obligations from \$2.3 billion (R38bn) to \$900 million. He says the \$1.4bn in savings is being redirected towards social sectors.

Over the past five years,

the government says it has recruited 45 000 teachers, built thousands of new classrooms, introduced free education, bringing 2.5 million more learners into the education system. It also says 18 000 health workers have been hired and several hospitals constructed. Major roads have been paved. More than 1.5 million people are benefiting from the Social Cash Transfer programme.

The government says inflation has fallen from 24% in August 2021, when Hichilema took office, to 6.5% in June 2026. There is resurgence in the mining industry with a reported \$12bn in new investment, the exchange rate has stabilised and foreign exchange reserves have increased to \$6.5bn.

But the opposition argue that macroeconomic gains mean nothing if they don't improve the lives of the people. Mundubile has dismissed the government's macroeconomic story as "big English" while the masses were hungry.

He promised that once elected, he would dip into the reserves to resolve what he sees as pressing economic challenges. Supporters cheered him; critics doubted his understanding of economics.

Hichilema and the opposition agree that the cost of living remains unacceptably high but they differ on the reasons. The opposition portrays it as evidence of failed economic



management and government incompetence. Hichilema argues that the hardship is a temporary consequence of difficult but necessary reforms. He says his first term was devoted to stabilising the economy and laying the foundations for recovery, while reducing the cost of living is the next phase. The opposition is telling voters that the increased cost of living is enough reason to vote Hichilema out.

Burial politics The election campaign has also unfolded against the backdrop of a dispute over the burial of the former president. Lungu died in South Africa on 5 June 2025. His death was followed by a battle between his family/party and the Zambian government over his burial. The family insisted that the government play no role in the funeral arrangements. The government argued that Lungu was entitled to a state funeral and burial at the Presidential Burial Site in Lusaka.

The dispute culminated on 23 June 2026, when South Africa's Supreme Court of Appeal ruled in favour of Lungu's family. Many Zambians view the failure to lay a former president to rest more than a year after his death as a national embarrassment.

On the campaign trail, the TA has invoked Lungu's legacy to broaden its electoral appeal. Mundubile has pledged to give Lungu "a dignified burial" if he wins. Such

rhetoric has drawn criticism from those who argue that his death and burial have been unnecessarily politicised.

The path to victory There are 8.7 million registered voters. To win outright, a presidential candidate must secure 50% +1 vote of the valid votes cast. Assuming a turnout of 70%, a candidate would need at least 3 045 001 votes to cross the constitutional threshold.

Hichilema is expected to dominate in his strongholds of Southern, Western and North-Western provinces, which together account for about 2.2 million registered voters. Lusaka and Copperbelt, the country's two largest electoral battlegrounds, have 1.4 million and 1.2 million, respectively.

The opposition is expected to perform strongly in the former PF strongholds of Northern, Muchinga and Luapula where Hichilema has spent the past five years expanding the UPND's presence. To reach the 50%+1 threshold, the opposition will need to maximise turnout in Northern, Muchinga and Luapula and make inroads into Lusaka and the Copperbelt.

The opposition alliance's failure to field parliamentary candidates in 75 of the 226 constituencies deprives its campaign of mobilisation networks in large parts of the country. Overall, Hichilema appears to have more plausible pathways to securing victory than the opposition.

- MAIL & GUARDIAN

Tinubu Applauds Rescue Of 308 Kwara, Niger Kidnap Victims

163 Woro, Kwara abductees freed, 145 Niger victims released | Victims rescued by military, DSS, police from Kainji Lake National Park Forest- Presidency



ABDULLAHI OLESIN AND JONATHAN NDA-ISAIAH

President Bola Tinubu has hailed the rescue of 308 Nigerians abducted in separate attacks in Kwara and Niger states, describing the operation as evidence of growing synergy among the country's security agencies.

Of those rescued, 163 were abducted from Woro community in Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara State, while 145 others were kidnapped from Niger State.

The victims were rescued from the Kainji Lake National Park forest in New Bussa Local Government Area of Niger State during a coordinated intelligence-led operation involving the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC), the Armed Forces of Nigeria, the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Nigeria Police Force.

The operation is regarded as the largest single-day rescue carried out by the joint security team.

In a statement issued by his spokesman, Bayo Onanuga, President Tinubu commended the security agencies for their professionalism, bravery and collaboration.

"The successful execution of this intelligence-led operation demonstrates the growing efficiency and collaboration among our security services.

"I commend our gallant men and women in uniform for their bravery and unwavering commitment to safeguarding Nigerian lives. The rescued citizens are receiving first aid and essential medical care at the medical facility at Wawa Cantonment. "Upon completion of their medical evaluations, they will be formally handed over to their state governments for

comprehensive care and reunification with their families," the President said.

Tinubu directed security agencies to strengthen early-warning systems, improve community intelligence gathering and enhance rapid-response capabilities to prevent similar attacks. He also reaffirmed his administration's commitment to eliminating security threats, protecting vulnerable communities and restoring lasting peace across the country.

163 Woro Victims Moved To Wawa Military Base

The 163 residents of Woro community rescued during the operation had been in captivity since gunmen attacked the community on February 3, 2026.

The member representing Gwanabe/ Gweria/Bani/Adena Constituency in the Kwara State House of Assembly, Hon. Saidu Baba Ahmed, confirmed the victims' release to LEADERSHIP.

"Yes, the Woro kidnap victims have been released. I'm very, very excited about this development. We give thanks to President Bola Tinubu, Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq and our security operatives," he said.

The Senior Special Assistant to the Kwara State Governor on Communications, Ibraheem Abdullateef, also confirmed the development.

"Kwara State Government is happy to share that the security forces have rescued the people who were kidnapped at Woro community in Kwara North.

"Kudos to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, security forces and everyone who played a role in this huge feat. We are grateful!" he said. Kaiama Local Government chairman, Hon. Abubakar Abdullahi Danladi, told

LEADERSHIP that the rescued victims had been moved to the Wawa Military Base.

"It was the state governor who informed me about the release of the Woro kidnap victims. He told me to call the Brigade Commander. I did, and he confirmed that the victims had been rescued and taken to Wawa Military Base," he said.

Danladi disclosed that four coaster buses had been deployed from Ilorin to convey the victims from Wawa to Kwara on Thursday.

According to him, they will first be taken to Sobi Army Barracks in Ilorin, where they will undergo medical examination and receive treatment for two or three days before being handed over to the Kwara State Government and reunited with their families.

Asked whether ransom was paid, Danladi said he had no information to that effect.

He thanked President Tinubu, Governor AbdulRazaq and the security agencies for their efforts, particularly commending the governor for standing with the affected communities throughout the ordeal.

LEADERSHIP observed a viral video showing a convoy of military vehicles transporting the rescued victims to Wawa, with residents cheering the soldiers and expressing gratitude in Hausa.

Families Express Relief

Relatives of the rescued victims expressed gratitude to the government and security agencies.

Medina Usman, whose daughter was among those rescued, said she had yet to reunite with her child but was informed that the victims were at a military facility in Kainji awaiting transfer to Ilorin.

She thanked Allah and appreciated the efforts of the federal and state governments as well as the security agencies.

Similarly, Abdullah Suleiman, who has relatives among the victims, described the rescue as a huge relief and thanked President Tinubu, Governor AbdulRazaq and the security operatives.

Former members of the Kwara State House of Assembly, Hon. Ibrahim Sabi and Hon. Aliyu Mande, also confirmed the development and praised the security agencies, governments at all levels and the media for sustaining attention on the plight of the victims.

Six-Month Ordeal Ends

The victims were abducted on February 3, 2026, when terrorists attacked Woro and neighbouring Nuku communities in Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara State.

The attackers reportedly killed scores of residents, razed homes and shops and abducted mostly women and children. Community leaders later put the number of abductees at 176.

Security sources said the attack followed the communities' rejection of attempts by extremists to impose their own version of Islamic rule and their decision to report the matter to security agencies.

The attackers were believed to be elements linked to Lakurawa, Boko Haram and Ansaru operating around the border communities.

Before the rescue, families of the victims had repeatedly appealed to the federal and Kwara State governments to intervene after spending nearly six months in captivity.

- LEADERSHIP

Explainer: What is New Zealand's MMP electoral system and does it favour coalitions?

Social care is not free at the point of use and high costs sometimes mean people are forced to sell their homes

LUCY GRAYMER

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said this week he was open to a referendum on the country's electoral system, sparking vigorous debate, with critics saying any such move would be seen as a "power grab" by the larger parties.

New Zealand currently has a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system, which has made coalitions the norm since it was introduced three decades ago.

WHY MMP?

New Zealand switched from a British first-past-the-post system, in which the top finisher in each electoral district wins the seat, to MMP on the recommendation of a commission addressing concerns that smaller parties were being left out.

All governments under MMP have been coalitions of the centre-left Labour or centre-right National with the support of smaller parties, except in 2020 when the Labour government swept to power after successfully managing the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Originating in Germany, MMP has been adopted, sometimes with modifications, in countries including Bolivia, Lesotho, South Korea and Thailand.

HOW IT WORKS

Under MMP, voters cast two votes: one for their preferred constituency candidate and one for a party. The candidate with the most votes wins and becomes an MP, while the party



vote decides how many seats each party gets in parliament.

The winning candidates of the country's 71 constituencies take their seats automatically, while the remaining seats are filled from party lists, allocated to match each party's share of the nationwide vote.

A party or bloc can form a government when it secures a majority in the single-chamber parliament, usually at least 61 of 120 seats.

There are expected to be about 49 list seats in this election, though that number can change.

Political parties must

get at least 5% of the party vote or win at least one electorate seat to get any seats in Parliament.

Parliament normally has 120 seats, but extra seats can be added when a party wins more electorate seats than its share of the nationwide party vote would otherwise entitle it to.

This happened after the 2023 election, when Te Pati Māora won six electorates while receiving 3.1% of the party vote. Polls indicate this could happen again in 2026.

In the system, seven of the electorate seats are Maori electorates, reserved for voters who

choose to enrol on the Maori electoral roll. Maori voters may instead choose to enrol in a general electorate.

QUIRKS

Since MMP was first used in New Zealand in 1996, minor parties have often played a decisive role in the formation of the government.

New Zealand First has been the most prominent kingmaker, backing National after the 1996 election and Labour after the 2017 election.

Te Pati Maori has also helped larger parties govern, supporting National-led governments after the 2008, 2011 and

2014 elections.

At this election, the centrist Opportunity Party could also become pivotal if it reaches the 5% party-vote threshold or wins an electorate seat.

The 2017 election showed how the largest party does not always end up in power. National won 56 seats, more than Labour's 46, but was unable to assemble a majority.

Labour formed a government through a coalition with New Zealand First and a confidence-and-supply agreement with the Green Party.

- REUTERS

Stop barking at the wrong tree: why the PAC is not the problem in Lesotho's war on corruption

Metro

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

In the dusty corridors of the country's political landscape, a tired and misguided narrative has taken root among certain sections of the public.

There is a vocal group of zealots and fanatics who have made it their daily mission to castigate the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the National Assembly, labelling it a "dog without teeth."

They watch the televised hearings, they see the squirming of principal secretaries, and they witness the unearthing of millions in unaccounted funds, yet they cry foul because no one is led away in handcuffs at the end of the session.

This frustration, while understandable in a nation bled dry by fiscal indiscretion, is fundamentally misplaced.

To blame the PAC for the lack of prosecutions is to reveal a profound ignorance of our constitutional architecture and the specific National Assembly Standing Orders of 2022 that govern our democracy.

If we are looking for the "teeth" in the fight against corruption, we must stop staring at the Parliament and start looking toward the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) and the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO).

The Mandate of the PAC: Oversight, Not Prosecution

To understand why the PAC is doing its job, one must first look at what its job actually is.

According to the Standing Orders, "Oversight" is defined as demanding accountability regarding the actions and conduct of Government Ministries and Departments, receiving reports thereon, and making findings and recommendations. The PAC is a specialized instrument of this oversight.

Under Standing Order 97(5), the Public Accounts Committee is explicitly tasked with considering the financial statements and accounts of all government ministries and departments, as well as any audit reports issued on those accounts.

Its primary function is to probe the queries raised by the Auditor General's Report. When the PAC calls a witness, it is performing its duty of "Parliamentary financial oversight or supervision".

The committee has significant powers to facilitate this. It can call for papers, hear oral evidence, and ensure the attendance of any person at its meetings.

It is the "bloodhound" of the state, sniffing out where the money



went and why the rules were ignored. But a bloodhound is not the judge, the jury, or the jailer.

Its job is to find the scent and point the way.

The Enforcement Vacuum: The LMPS and DCEO

The "teeth" that the public so desperately craves—the power of arrest, the power of criminal investigation, and the power to bring charges—reside entirely outside the National Assembly.

While the PAC uncovers the rot, it is the LMPS and the DCEO that are legally empowered to act on those findings.

The DCEO is recognized within the Standing Orders as the statutory body responsible for receiving the register of assets and dealing with corrupt practices.

When the PAC uncovers evidence of "corrupt practices, conduct or abuse of power," the legislative framework expects these external bodies to take the baton.

However, we are currently living in a reality where the PAC does the heavy lifting of investigation, only for the files to gather dust on the desks of the police.

The fanatics who call the PAC "toothless" fail to realize that the PAC has already used its "teeth"—the power of subpoena and public exposure—to bring the truth to light.

It is the anti-corruption bodies and the police that are choosing not to bite.

They are the ones who have been rendered impotent, whether by political interference, lack of resources, or a sheer lack of professional will.

The Process of Accountability
Let us be clear about how the system is designed to work. When a committee like the PAC concludes its business, it must formulate a report for presentation in the House.

Once the House adopts the recommendations contained in that report, those recommendations become resolutions of the House.

These resolutions are then formally communicated by the Clerk to the Leader of the House and the relevant Ministers.

The law is very specific: a Minister who receives such a communication must, within thirty days, report back to the Speaker on the steps undertaken to implement the resolution.

If they fail to implement the resolution, they must provide reasons and a plan for future implementation.

This is a rigorous cycle of accountability. The PAC finds the error, the House resolves that it must be fixed, and the Minister is legally bound to report on the progress.

If the zealots took the time to read Standing Order 105, they would see that the mechanism for accountability is robust. The failure occurs at the execution phase.

If a PAC report suggests that money was stolen, it is not the PAC's job to go to the suspect's house with a warrant; that is the job of the LMPS. If the police do not act, why are we blaming the MPs?

The Danger of Misdirected Anger

By attacking the PAC, the public is inadvertently protecting the real culprits: the incompetent

or compromised heads of our law enforcement agencies.

When we call the PAC a "toothless dog," we are providing a smokescreen for the DCEO and the LMPS.

We are allowing them to hide in the shadows of our collective misplaced rage.

The PAC is perhaps the most transparent body in our government. Its proceedings are, by default, open to the public.

It facilitates public participation and educates the public on the role of Parliament. It is one of the few places where "Accountable" actually means something—where officials are forced to account for their actions.

In contrast, the investigations of the DCEO and the police are opaque. We do not see the "queries" they are probing.

We do not see the "oral evidence" they are hearing. We only see the results—which, in Lesotho, are tragically few and far between.

A Call for True Teeth

If the fanatics and zealots truly want to see change, they must redirect their energy. We should be demanding that the DCEO and the LMPS be held to the same level of public scrutiny as the ministries that appear before the PAC.

The Standing Orders provide for the establishment of Portfolio Committees, such as the one on the Law and Public Safety Cluster, which is responsible for the ministerial portfolios of Justice and Human Rights.

These committees have the power to exercise oversight over the executive authority and any organ of

state, including the police.

The public should be asking: Why aren't these portfolio committees summoning the Commissioner of Police and the Director-General of the DCEO to explain why zero prosecutions have arisen from the last five years of PAC reports?

Why are these bodies not being made to "account for the actions and conduct" of their departments as required by the definition of oversight?

The PAC is doing exactly what it was designed to do under the National Assembly Standing Orders 2022. It is probing, it is questioning, and it is reporting.

It is fulfilling its mandate to consider the financial statements of every "executive organ of state, court, authority and commission".

To call it a "dog without teeth" is a gross mischaracterization that ignores the legal limits of parliamentary power. The PAC provides the evidence; the police and the DCEO provide the handcuffs.

If the criminals are still walking free, it is not because the "dog" failed to bark; it is because the "hunter" refused to shoot.

It is time for the Basotho people to stop blaming the messengers in the PAC and start demanding that the police and anti-corruption bodies do the job they are paid to do.

We don't need a new PAC; we need a police service and a DCEO that are not afraid to use the teeth the law has already given them.

Until then, the "zealots" will continue to bark at the wrong tree, while the real thieves continue to enjoy the fruits of their silence.

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B BUSINESS

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

PM expects improvement in food production



NEO SENOKO

MASERU- Prime Minister Ntsokoane Sam Matekane has delivered more than 150 farming machinery to local farmers in a move that seeks to boost agricultural production across the country.

The machinery includes tractors and hand held tractors wherein a total of 48 tractors were allocated to youth farmers who are expected to change the narrative and encourage others that jobs can be created

through farming in the country. Women have also been recognized through the government initiative with a total of 30 tractors being handed over to women farmers, while 40 tractors were delivered to those farmers who received government subsidy through the Lesotho Post bank.

A total of 22 farmers' associations also received tractors in order to increase production in the current farming season.

Furthermore, 16 tractors were received from the government of Korea and the People's Republic of China,

where the government of Lesotho has decided to share them with the security agencies and tertiary institutions that includes Lerotholi Polytechnic, Lesotho Agricultural College and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition.

"I expect improvements in food production and job creation as the government continues to support farmers by helping them purchase tractors," Matekane said during the event on Friday.

The PM went on to express gratitude to the People's Republic

of China, government of Korea and suppliers for their continued support to Lesotho through initiatives that also includes food production and donation of farming equipment.

He went on to reveal that through partnership with the Lesotho Post Bank, 102 local farmers have benefited under the tractor financing scheme with more expected to benefit as the partnership continues.

"I would like to congratulate all the beneficiaries and wish to remind all of you that these tractors are

intended to benefit Basotho in eradication of hunger and poverty, therefore it is important to take proper care of the machinery to ensure its sustainability and long term service," the PM added.

Agriculture has been identified as one of the productive sectors for job creation and poverty reduction under the extended National Strategic Development Plan II.

The sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is currently estimated at 10 percent and has been declining in recent years.

Institutional, technical capacity key to unlock AfCFTA opportunities



NEO SENOKO

MASERU-In order to ensure that Lesotho carries its trade responsibility effectively, the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat (AfCFTA) is hosting a five-day capacity building workshop on dispute settlement mechanism and trade of goods for the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development as well as the private sector. The workshop is aimed at providing depth in understanding of dispute resolutions mechanism to ensure that Lesotho carries its trade responsibilities effectively. Minister of Trade, Industry and Business development Motlatsi Maqelepo revealed in his opening

remarks that while the AfCFTA remains the largest free trade area in the world, its opportunities can only be fully realized if member states, including Lesotho, possesses the institutional and technical capacity to implement the agreement and safeguard their rights under its legal framework. “The AfCFTA represents unprecedented opportunities for economic transformation, industrialization, investment, job creation and increased intra-African trade. However, these opportunities can only be fully realized if member states possess the institutional and technical capacity to implement the agreement and safeguard their

rights under its legal framework,” Maqelepo said in his opening remarks this week. The AfCFTA is one of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063 Africa’s development framework. The project aims to accelerate intra-Africa trade and boosting its trading position in the global market by strengthening common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations. Among some of its objectives, the AfCFTA is looking to create a single market for goods and services facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African continent. It is also focused on creating a liberalized market for goods and services through successive

rounds of negotiations and contribute to the movement of capital and natural resources as well as facilitate investments building on the initiatives and developments being taken by the member states. In her own remarks, AfCFTA head of delegation Balkissou Alfa Hassan Sido Kabo said the workshop will enable participants to appreciate the full extent of responsibilities for the success of the common market, revealing that the AfCFTA’s main objective remains the commitment to strengthen the economic relations between Africans through the creation of an expanded and safe market of goods and services. She further emphasized that protocol of and open procedure for

the settlement is crucial, thus providing effective and practical legal framework. The AfCFTA further seeks to bring together all 55 member of the African Union (AU) into an integrated and combined market of 1.4 billion, with a GDP of approximately US\$3.4 trillion. It establishes a framework for tariff liberalization across the African continent and harmonises trade-related rules to encourage greater flows of intra-African trade and investment. It preserves current sub-regional arrangements, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the East African Community (EAC).



HEALTH

HIV therapy under threat as drug resistance emerges

HELLEN SHIKANDA

Scientists have detected a troubling new trend in HIV drug resistance in Sub-Saharan, affecting treatment once considered reliable.

Presenting findings from the Ndovu Study at the recent International Aids Society (IAS) summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, researchers reported the resistance among HIV-positive people in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Lesotho.

If the trend continues, they said, HIV transmissions would rise. Without intervention, patients resistant to the drug will face weakened immunity, leaving them vulnerable to opportunistic infections that could eventually lead to death.

The drug under trial is dolutegravir, or DTG. It has been the preferred first and second line HIV treatment since 2018.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), DTG is more effective, easier to take and causes fewer side effects than other drugs in use. It is also recognised for its strong genetic barrier against developing drug resistance.

Dr Loice Ombajo, the principal investigator and an infectious disease expert, shared results from resistance testing after enrolling the first 2,994 participants in 131 sites in Kenya. The participants had been on DTG-based treatment for at least six months.

She said those identified with major DTG-associated drug resistance mutations were enrolled in a nested



clinical trial to generate evidence that would guide the optimal management of people experiencing DTG treatment failure.

"There is limited evidence to guide the management of DTG resistance among people with HIV. Through the study, we are generating evidence to inform treatment decisions for patients who develop DTG resistance," Dr Ombajo said in a statement released by Centre for Epidemiological Modelling Analysis.

"These results highlight the urgent need for accessible tools to detect DTG resistance and support timely, evidence-based treatment decisions, particularly in resource-limited settings."

Dr Ombajo added that while nearly nine in 10 people on DTG respond well and achieve viral suppression, a proportion fails to suppress the virus. The most common reason is that they do not take the drug as prescribed.

Viral suppression

Viral suppression occurs when treatment reduces the amount of HIV in the blood to fewer than 200 copies per millilitre.

"People can get tired

of taking drugs, some can forget and others may not be happy with the diagnosis. When you don't take the medicine or take it intermittently, the virus changes and becomes resistant to the drug," she said.

Dr Ombajo explained that when participants were first enrolled in the study, many showed no signs of resistance. The team worked with them to improve adherence to treatment.

In that cohort, about 70 per cent achieved viral suppression. It was the 30 per cent that interested her team, as they sought to determine if the high viral loads were due to drug resistance.

When scientists examined the 30 per cent cohort, they found that three out of every 10 were resistant to the drug.

"The challenge with resistance is that it doesn't matter whether you take the drug or not. The drug is unlikely to work. That is a concern because that is a drug we are using for HIV treatment," she told the Saturday Nation.

Dr Ombajo added that resistance testing is costly, and many countries lack

the resources to carry it out.

When testing is not done and treatment fails, people with HIV who are resistant to the drug become severely immunosuppressed. This leaves them vulnerable to opportunistic infections such as meningitis or certain types of pneumonia.

Mother-to-child transmission

"It is important to identify those that are likely to have resistance so that we change their drugs. For those who don't have resistance yet, we need to identify how to support them better so that they keep taking their medicine," she said.

The National Syndemic Disease Control Council says mother-to-child transmission remains a major challenge.

The study findings suggest this could partly be driven by drug resistance in pregnant and breastfeeding mothers who may not have been taking their medication consistently.

A woman with a high viral load is likely to transmit the virus to her child, while adults are more likely to pass it on to their sexual partners.

"We identified pregnant

and breastfeeding women with drug resistance. It is the medicine that kills the virus and stops it from multiplying," she said.

Dr Ombajo added that participants in the cohort who were resistant to DTG were switched to other drug combinations, and their progress monitored for three months.

About eight in 10 participants who were initially resistant to DTG-based treatment achieved viral suppression after new treatment options.

"We are continuing with the study to see if they maintain this level of suppression," she said.

According to Dr Ombajo, viral load monitoring should be done once a year.

However, funding cuts have strained resources, reducing the frequency of testing.

"We can't do the viral load testing as well as we should because of issues of availability of reagents and supplies," she said.

She said drug resistance tests are costly and have not been routinely carried out in Kenya.

While resistance is beginning to be documented in countries like Kenya, the WHO released its HIV Drug Resistance Report in 2024, highlighting the growing number of people resistant to the drug and offering recommendations to governments.

The WHO urges countries routinely implement standardised surveillance of HIV drug resistance in a bid to track prevalence and patterns among people not achieving viral suppression.

DAILY NATION



SOCIETY

Ariana Grande says her decision to step back is not 'reactive or impulsive'



JACK GUY

Singer Ariana Grande has reassured fans that her decision to step back from the spotlight “was not a reactive or impulsive thing.”

Speaking during a performance in Chicago, Illinois, on Monday, Grande addressed the reaction to Sunday’s announcement that she will be suspending future appearances and taking a break from the public eye.

“The announcement that was made yesterday was not a reactive or impulsive thing,” she

said in a fan video shared to her Instagram Stories. “It is something that I had decided to plan... a long time ago.”

Grande, 33, added that the decision “was made from a thoughtful and empowered place,” with her speech receiving a rapturous reception from the crowd at the United Center.

“I heard that my fans were worried that negativity was ruining things for me but I just have to say, that could not be more the... opposite,” said the singer. “Boundaries do need to be set, human beings can need a break sometimes.”

“No matter what noises exist out there, nothing will ever be able to distort my reality, or be more real to me or louder to me than this love that we share,” added Grande. “I love you.”

The speech, and Grande’s announcement that she “will be taking a step back from visibility,” delivered by her representative in an exclusive to *People* magazine, comes amid renewed speculation about her thinness and health.

The pop star had just released the music video for her latest single,

“Petal,” which showed her always petite frame ridged with shadows of the bones of her chest, sparking concern and alarm.

This is not the first time that Grande has had to deal with public scrutiny of her body.

In 2013, when she was 19, Grande wrote on Tumblr that while she didn’t “usually like to address rumors,” she “felt like since some of you are worrying about me that I should take the time to write you all a little note to address this whole ‘eating disorder thing.’”

Ten years later, she

again let her boundaries be known by posting a video on her verified TikTok account.

“I think we should be gentler and less comfortable commenting on people’s bodies, no matter what,” she said.

“If you think you’re saying something good or well-intentioned, whatever it is, healthy, unhealthy, big, small, this, that, sexy, nonsense...we just should really work towards not doing that as much.” Grande’s *Eternal Sunshine Tour* is scheduled to end in London on September 1.

- CNN

FIFA defends Infantino against allegations tied to his time at UEFA



SMISO MSOMI

FIFA has issued a statement defending its president, Gianni Infantino, against what it calls a “concerted and ongoing effort” to undermine his leadership of the organization. The statement was released Saturday, a day after a report by British newspaper The Daily Telegraph raising questions about an exit package paid by

UEFA to a female staffer who worked with Infantino when he was general secretary of European soccer’s governing body. UEFA confirmed that a “departure payment” was made to the employee and said it was “in line” with regulations at the time. Infantino worked at UEFA for 16 years before being elected FIFA president.

In the statement Saturday, FIFA accused Infantino’s critics of trying to weaken his authority and remove him from office without due process. “It is increasingly evident that there is a concerted and ongoing effort by some to undermine FIFA and its president,” the FIFA statement said. “Those who do not have the support of FIFA’s member associations should not seek

to achieve through allegation, insinuation or misinformation what they cannot achieve through FIFA’s established democratic processes.” It said some reporting has included “unsubstantiated assertions and demonstrably false claims” which shouldn’t be presented as fact. “Change inevitably challenges established interests, but disagreement with that

change cannot justify efforts to undermine the democratic mandate of FIFA’s president or the institution he was elected to lead.” Infantino faced intense backlash after details of his plan to sell World Cup profits to private equity were published. UEFA and two other continental confederations – North America’s CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation – rejected the plan. He did receive backing from FIFA’s management board last Wednesday following a meeting in Morocco, and he apologized over the process. UEFA’s threat to have its 55 member countries boycott FIFA competitions until the plan was scrapped remained, with UEFA saying Thursday that the announcement “changes nothing.” While confirming the exit payment “was in line with the regulations that existed for departing staff at the time,” UEFA said the rules had been tightened since 2016 and currently “reflect those found in a modern, high-profile organization.” - AP



Orlando Pirates and AmaZulu share spoils in a chilly Kings Park encounter

SMISO MSOMI

ORLANDO Pirates and AmaZulu compromised their positions at the top of the log when they played to a 1-1 draw in the Betway Premiership encounter at the Kings Park Stadium on Wednesday night. Pirates took the lead with a Tshepang Moremi strike early in the first half, before Thandolwenkosi Ngwenya equalised from the penalty spot at the stroke of half time. Virtually unknown in South African football, Usuthu goalkeeper Faveur Kouassi raised eyebrows in a wrong way when he parried a relatively harmless shot into the path of oncoming Pirates attackers in the box. That was all it took for the ball to find its way to Tshepang Moremi’s feet, and he slotted home to hand Pirates the lead, breaking the hearts of his former club. One thing is for sure: the 23-year-old Ivorian goalkeeper will face intense scrutiny going forward in his debut season in South Africa.

-iol

Premier League				
		Pld	Pts	
1	Arsenal	38	85.24	
2	Man City	38	81.65	
3	Liverpool	38	76.84	
4	Man Utd	38	75.38	
5	Chelsea	38	72.70	
6	Spurs	38	64.76	
7	Aston Villa	38	58.44	
8	Bournemouth	38	51.56	
9	Brighton	38	49.99	
10	Brentford	38	49.55	
11	Everton	38	48.50	
12	Fulham	38	45.09	
13	Newcastle	38	44.66	
14	Leeds	38	43.58	
15	Sunderland	38	39.12	
16	Crystal Palace	38	36.85	
17	N. Forest	38	35.08	
18	Coventry	38	35.05	
19	Ipswich	38	34.29	
20	Hull City	38	27.82	

