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Basotho scramble for fool's gold

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News

MAJIRATA LALELA

MOKHOTLONG - It is common knowledge that Mokhotlong is Lesotho's richest district in terms of minerals, mainly diamonds and water.

But could recent claims of gold discovery along the Senqu River banks in the district be true? Well, the area chief of the rural settlement of Sekoka and his subjects believe they are settled on a land rich with gold. But for others, the glittering substance found in the deep grey soils creating a "gold belt" in Sekoka is brass, not gold.

Situated on the banks of the Senqu River, Sekoka is about an hour's drive through the ragged terrain from Mokhotlong town.

The villagers are convinced that gold lies beneath the ground here and all they have to do is dug a deep hole on the river bank, in what could best be described as a quasi-surface type of mining. For more than a year now, foreign "geologists" have visited the "mine" and conducted soil tests, but there have not been any developments.

What mostly worries the residents of Sekoka is that the "gold area" forms part of the Senqu River earmarked for construction of the Polihali Dam in the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

They fear the gigantic dam will erode all the gold elsewhere, especially to South Africa where the water is destined. "Foreigners come in large numbers here; they take the gold and leave us with nothing. They pay peanuts to the village boys who help them mine," Sethabathaba Koti told the MNN Centre for Investigative Journalism during a recent visit.

Koti, who is convinced what he saw at the mine was indeed gold after working in South African gold mines for 36 years, spoke on behalf of the village chief, 'Matšoanelo Tšita.

"People who speak South African Sesotho and other foreign languages have come in different groups here, some from as far as Limpopo. They claimed to be conducting

Scramble for fool's gold

soil tests, but all they have been doing was to dig the gold and take it away. They pay small incentives to the villagers who help them to dig," he said.

The Centre learnt from several interviews with the villagers that other than being paid by the foreigners for digging, the village boys and men also collected "the gold" themselves and sold it in containers that include match boxes and one-litre bottles of canned fruit.

A box of matches filled with "the gold" generally fetched around M100 whereas a full canned fruit bottle was sold for anything between M5, 000 and M13, 000 depending on the buyer.

In fact, the Centre was made to understand there was a certain exceptional "white man" who bought the bottle at M13, 000, "the other buyers refuse to pay us anything beyond M10, 000 per bottle", said 24-year-old Bitsane Leisa.

Leisa is a young villager who frequented the mine before it was declared dangerous by the village authorities earlier this year.

He told the Centre they used to earn from M50 a day per man "for helping the foreigners by digging the gold". But the mine, Koti said, was declared unsafe for visiting following threats posed by some of the foreign miners to the villagers.

There was tension between the miners after a group of pistol-toting men allegedly seized the mine and kicked ordinary villagers from the site last year. "Since then, it has been unsafe to visit the mine. We have organised villagers to safeguard the mine against these foreign intruders who are trying to steal what is rightfully ours," said Koti.

Movement within the mine is now limited and is strictly controlled by Chieftainess Tšita.

"But the smugglers still come to the mine at

irregular times, especially at night. We recently noticed on-going digging at the mine despite the order to vacate the mine. We realised the thieves are working at night," Koti said.

Under permission and instruction of Chieftainess Tšita, the Centre's team was guided by the village young men on a tour of the mine. Although upon arrival at the site there were no men in operation in sight, the Centre notice there had been some digging a few hours before.

The impression given to the Centre was that whoever was digging at the time, fled or hid upon noticing the village men approaching from afar.

"All the signs that some people continue to dig here are visible. We can only conclude that the smugglers keep hiding somewhere as we approach," whispered Leisa.

Inside the hollow mine, it is pitch dark and the team had to use cellphone lights to get a better view. Due to tightness of the passage deeper into the mine, everyone kept in a strict straight line, what is labelled "single file" in military jargon.

The site is unfriendly for any ordinary human being and is certainly a no-go for oversized folks. Within the passage, the glittering substance keeps shining at every passing light of the cellphone flash. The village men use simple tools to dig up the unfamiliar deep grey soil that contains small pieces of "the gold". After some sufficient collection, grey soil is washed off in the flowing Senqu waters, leaving the glittering substance. The work needs a lot of patience to ensure not a single glittering piece is lost into the water.

Clearly, it is not so easy to fill up a match box, let alone an empty canned fruit bottle. For Neo Bere, an old man and one of the village

pioneers who developed keen interest in the "gold belt" in Sekoka, the glittering stuff is "not gold."

Unlike most villagers, Bere believes in no uncertain terms the substance is brass, instead.

"I have sold this stuff for long now, it's not gold, it's brass. I have met with a lot of buyers coming from outside the country. They have been taking the stuff for testing in South Africa and, although some of them never came back, others have returned to confirm it is brass," Bere said.

A brief desk research by the Centre shows brass is a pure metal yellowish in colour which has a gold-like appearance, hence it is mostly used in decorations. Brass is also used in the making of locks, knobs and bearings, among others, as it provides low friction.

Compared to brass, gold is much more valuable since it does not tarnish or react to most acids and is denser than brass. Bere, who currently has eyesight problems following a hospital operation that went wrong, has appealed to government or potential investors to conduct proper soil tests in Sekoka, "in case we may be losing valuable minerals to South Africa through the coming Polihali Dam". At the hype of gold discovery in Sekoka last year, the Mokhotlong District Administrator Serame Linake visited the area to witness the gold himself.

"I also took those glittering stones from Sekoka, which were believed to be gold, to Lihobong Mine for testing. The response I received from them was that the stones, although glittering like gold, they appeared under no recognised valuable type of minerals," said Linake.

He was, however, quick to indicate they, as the District Administration office, were convinced there were ample minerals along the Senqu River, especially diamonds, which they feared were going to be eroded by the coming construction of Polihali

Dam.

Linake wished the issue of ample minerals in Mokhotlong could be dealt with in utmost urgency by the relevant authorities in government, "so that the communities around can benefit and their standard of living would be improved.

"Our district has many minerals but the communities are not benefiting from that as Mokhotlong remains underdeveloped regardless of all the richness in minerals in the country". For instance, Linake noted all the mining companies operating in Mokhotlong had their head offices in Maseru. "This means all the core services rendered by the companies are found outside Mokhotlong, despite the fact that they operate in the district. All the minerals that are found in Mokhotlong get ferried to Maseru leaving just a trace in Mokhotlong," said the DA.

Meanwhile, according to preliminary test results by the Ministry of Mining's Senior Geologist Kelebone Letsie, the Sekoka stones appear to be sulphide minerals found in the basalt rock. Letsie said it was a common for lay people to mistake these for gold.

"It is not a new thing in mining history that people mistake sulphides for gold. The mineral is famously known as 'fool's gold'. Having gold in mind, most goldfields workers are familiar with sulphides that exist in Wits conglomerates which have also gold mineralisation.

"Wits conglomerates and altered basalts are completely different in nature but one cannot ignore the association of gold and sulphides as they do co-exist in other places. It is therefore recommended that further studies be undertaken and the mineral assemblage of this basalt be well understood," said Letsie.

The Centre could not verify claims of existence of other valuable minerals in Mokhotlong that include red mercury and platinum.

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RELEBOHILE TSOAMOTSE

MASERU- Factory workers have locked horns in a legal battle with their employers and government over non-payment of their wage increase which they say should have been effected from April 2018 not September 2018 as it has been done.

Their association, the Independent Democratic Union of Lesotho (IDUL), has petitioned the Labour Appeal Court to reverse the government gazette instructing employers to commence paying factory workers a new minimum wage from September 2018 as opposed to April 2018.

IDUL want the decision to be reviewed, corrected and set aside because they deem it unlawful and irregular.

Their (factory workers) wages were in 2018 adjusted in September not April as per the decision by the wages advisory board in 2014 that minimum wages for all sectors be revised in April each year.

According to the association, factory workers' wages were initially adjusted in September but a decision was reached to shift them to April each year so as to coincide with the government's new financial year.

However, there was resistance by employers' associations to adjust the salaries in April 2018 resulting in the government, through labour minister Keketso Rants'o, publishing the minimum wage Gazette in September instead of earlier in April.

Employers argued that the decision was unlawful and irregular in that the minister made the decision without the wages advisory board. The further state that employers and employees failed to agree on the effective date upon which the increased wages would be implemented.

In their court papers, IDUL said government imposed the commencement of the gazette notwithstanding the law and also that natural justice principles

Factory workers in row over wage back payment



were not observed since the minister failing to intervene after she was asked to.

"When first respondent was asked to intervene over the issue, she left the matter for the contesting parties to resolve," IDUL said.

IDUL cited Labour and Employment ministry, Association of Lesotho Employers and Business, Lesotho Textile Exports Association, Wages and Advisory Board and the Attorney General as respondents.

The association want the court to declare that the Government Gazette (Legal Notice No 62 of 2018) which effected their wages increase in September as opposed to April be declared illegal and of no force.

They also want the court to declare that factory workers are entitled to payment of salaries effective from April 2018.

Secretary General of IDUL, Daniel Pako Theko in the affidavit filed with their application

said government and the employers' association were not agreeable on the effective date upon which the increased wages should be implemented and that their efforts to settle the dispute failed when Rantso allegedly avoided intervening but left the parties to resolve their issues.

Nonetheless, the minister went on to publish a gazette which reflected that the new minimum wage would commence on September. The association challenged the decision by the minister in the High Court but the court said it had no jurisdiction over the matter hence their appeal.

"Notwithstanding the decision of the Wages Advisory Board of 2014, Minister of Labor and Employment endeavored to publish a gazette of Minimum Wage Notice No 62 of 2018 which reflects that the new minimum wage shall commence as at 1st September 2018," Pheko said in the affidavit.

He also pointed out that their association expressed its dissatisfaction regarding the commencement of the gazette and its legal implications as well as bringing to the attention of the minister that she should be advised by the Wages Advisory Board on the commencement of the new wages and the effective date.

IDUL urged the minister to rectify the error since "it was to the adverse prejudice of applicant members who are adversely affected by the decision.

"I must point out that this is very prejudicial on account that commencement of the gazette effectively meant that employees forfeited their increased pay from the 1st April."

IDUL argue that the minister does not have powers to impose and act in the manner that she did therefore her decision is subject to the review by the court. "I must mention there are no valid reasons that were given by

the 1st respondent before publishing the gazette as it were; I must also point out that it is not a novelty for the commencement of the gazette to have retrospective effect as this has happened in the past," Pheko said.

The association insist that the minister imposed the commencement of the gazette notwithstanding the law was not observed and also that principles of justice were not observed.

IDUL further argued that the associations have always observed April 1 as the new date for a wage increase with the exception of 2018.

In reply, the employers said the decision by the Wages Advisory board to shift the adjustment date of the salaries from September to April was not mandatory and that they would not be in a position to fulfil their obligations if the gazette was published on April 1 as the commencement date.

The case was postponed to June 10.

News

500 000 Basotho face dire food shortage

MATHATISI SEBUSI

...as monster of 'nutritional emergency' closes in

MASERU – More than half of Basotho will need food assistance from the cash-strapped government for them to survive an impending crisis set to hit home in July following another poor cropping season.

Also, ensuing water shortages have reportedly forced some health centres to stop providing maternity services while health experts have noted a spike in water borne diseases such as typhoid, as well as bloody and non-bloody diarrhea.

A government minister revealed this week the Thabane administration was in desperate need of M203 728 million to buy food for 640 000 Basotho who are staring at possible food shortages in two months.

Public Eye on Sunday can report the shortage was due to drought conditions the country experienced in the 2018/2019 agricultural season.

Minister in the Prime Minister's office Temeki Ts'olo said the country has experienced punishing droughts since the 2016 farming season which, coupled with hail storms, has left the country's huge army of subsistence farmers without food.

To combat the impending crisis, government scrambled the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) to make a quick assessment of the drought situation and its effects on the population so the Government can map out ways of dealing with the situation.

According to Ts'olo, the DMA study, which was concluded last year in March, showed that rains came late, causing some farmers to plant late while others do not plant at all.

He added that the country received little to no rain at all between September and November leaving the country's main rivers dry, adding that the drought had resulted in a 21 percent drop in the



country's harvest. "In total 487 857 people from all around the country are facing hunger and poverty, and 401 191 from the population are from rural areas while 80 666 live in urban areas.

"Last year May, only 257 283 people needed food assistance, in November the number increased by 200 making 273 635 and this year it has increased to 487 857," he said. He added that the most vulnerable districts are Mphahle's Hoek, Quthing, Qacha's Nek and Maseru.

"Under this situation, the country has a shortage of 25 255MT of food which costs M203 728 million," Ts'olo said.

Preliminary results of the Lesotho Vulnerability Committee (LVAC) 2019, released earlier this month show that the late onset of rainfall resulted in the agricultural season starting later than normal.

It shows that the rainfall received in all districts was below average from September to November, which is the normal period for planting most crops.

This has resulted in water levels in the country's main rivers dwindling rapidly before beginning to improve in February 2019.

The LVAC report shows that most crops across the country had not reached the expected stages of growth during the cropping season, hence the sharp decline in yields. The results also show that the current drought has impacted main income sources for smallholder farmers with a considerable decline in

crop and livestock sales. Crop sales have decreased by an estimated 64 percent while sales of livestock products dropped by 70 percent.

"The rapid assessment results concluded that 487 857 people nationally are currently considered to be food insecure. Rural populations are the worst affected, out of whom an estimated 28 percent making a total of 407 191 people are affected in comparison to 15 percent of the urban population to a total of 80 666 affected.

"This is an increase of 19% (273 635) from an update results of November, 2018 and 18 percent (257 283) from May 2018 vulnerability assessment and analysis results," reads the LVAC report. The office of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator in Lesotho added that due to the prevailing dry conditions, several key sectors have been negatively impacted to date.

Within the Health and Nutrition sector, health centres have reportedly stopped providing maternity services due to water scarcity. "Although the rate of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) was 3.5 percent in 2018, there is evidence of a silent nutritional emergency which could worsen with the ongoing food and water shortage crisis with the number of malnutrition cases likely to rise during the period April-July 2019.

"Additionally, the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector

have reported a number of cases of typhoid and bloody and non-bloody diarrhoea in some districts as a result of poor hygiene practises. "Protection related issues, including incidents of gender-based violence (GBV), have been reported in several districts. "The reduction of water availability for household consumption increased the distance and time spent collecting water among women and girls who are progressively becoming exposed to the risk of being physically assaulted by herd boys who forcefully take water away from them. The identified main forms of GBV forms are physical violence, sexual violence and emotional abuse."

Additionally, incidents of early child marriages have also been reported over the last months, adding, this was similar to previous El Niño-related drought emergencies when an increase in child protection issues among communities impacted by the drought, including an increase in the number of separated and unaccompanied children left behind by their parents/caregivers who migrate to South Africa or within Lesotho's urban areas.

"Furthermore, incidents of child abuse, social distress, and school dropouts have been reported. Cited reasons for migration include a lack of food for family members and the unavailability of water. "Finally, forced and/ or voluntary internal migration from rural to urban areas; international migration, typically to

South Africa; temporary migration in search of work and; permanent migration due to food insecurity and insufficient water has grown substantially and been confirmed by anecdotal evidence, direct observation as well as the project reports from UN agencies and NGOs.

"As the situation worsens, peri-urban and urban regions will also be increasingly affected with the level of migration expected to rise in the coming months with various types of human rights abuses and exploitation, including GBV and Trafficking in Persons (TiP), reported."

Although maize meal prices fell slightly in October 2018, before stabilising in November and December 2018 with prices reported at seven percent below the five-year average, prices are likely to increase due to increases in local demand (from the poor harvest), as well as an increase in prices from the source markets in South Africa.

"The majority of households in Lesotho are currently relying on markets to access food as food stocks have been exhausted. Staple foods are well stocked in local markets as they are consistently supplied from South Africa.

However, access to markets is currently limited for very poor and poor households due to low incomes. "Poor households' income sources are limited as agriculture labour is atypically significantly below average for this time of year. During the harvesting period, May to July, households are most likely to begin accessing incomes from agriculture labour, however this is expected to be significantly below average due to anticipated poor harvest.

"Also, below-average incomes from crop sales is likely with households expected to rely more on income from off-farm activities between May and September 2019."

Let journalists do their work: Ntsukunyane

MAPALO NKHELOANE

MASERU – A media rights group has launched a blistering attack on public officials and businesses who exert pressure on journalists to drop stories that expose malfeasance and corruption that has become endemic in Lesotho.

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) acting director Lekhetho Ntsukunyane criticised the twin scourges of political and business interference in editorial independence, saying this militated against media freedom.

Ntsukunyane was speaking at the

commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on Friday, which was this year celebrated under the theme: “Media for Democracy: journalism and elections in times of disinformation”.

This year’s theme sought to focus discussions on challenges faced by media during elections, along with the media’s potential in supporting peace and reconciliation processes.

Ntsukunyane told Public Eye on Sunday democracy was incomplete without access to transparent and reliable information.

He indicated freedom of press was the cornerstone of democracy, emphasising that “to

claim there is democracy in Lesotho when there is no freedom of press would really be lying to ourselves”.

This year, MISA hosted political leaders as well as Principal Secretaries to urge them to allow the media to do its job without any restrictions.

MISA also encouraged party leaders to pass laws that give journalists access to information and promote freedom of the press.

Ntsukunyane said this year the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was given an award for allowing journalists to report on its public hearings.

The former Public Eye reporter however

bemoaned what he termed a national crisis in which men are always considered better candidates in almost every field for senior management positions.

He added most newsrooms are run by male editors when women are also capable of holding those positions.

Ntsukunyane said media houses, especially independent ones, are forced to censor themselves to safeguard crucial advertising revenue and in some instances to stave off political censure.

He said political leaders indirectly edit newspapers thereby directing how news related to them and their political parties should be disseminated.

News editors, in fear of being sanctioned and denied adverts, abide.

Ntsukunyane said “full page adverts that newspapers receive automatically force the

paper to report news in favour of such advertising companies”.

“Yes, we do need those adverts but there is also the downside of them when they interfere with free press in a cases where an article that is not in favour of the advertising company is not published because the company is an indirect shareholder,” Ntsukunyane said.

Ntsukunyane, also indicated that many reporters have skipped the country fearing for their lives while some have been permanently injured.

“There are correct procedures to be followed should there be a case of defamation. The first one could be to ask for a retraction. If the victim is still not satisfied, then he or she should take the matter to the courts of the law. It is unethical to torture a journalist demanding that he or she reveals his sources,” Ntsukunyane explained.

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News

JP donates radio station, sanitary wear



Girls queue for sanitary wear yesterday at Thaba Tseka



Teboho Mojapela hands sanitary pads



Motjoli FM Community Radio Station

STAFF REPORTER

THABA TSEKA - Opposition Socialist Revolutionaries (SR) leader, Teboho Mojapela, yesterday officially handed over a building valued at almost M1 million, which he donated to Motjoli FM Community Radio Station in Thaba-Tseka.

Since its inception in 2012, the radio station had been operating from an office at the Roman Catholic Church.

Mojapela was in 2018 approached by the radio station's board in 2018 to assist and he decided to construct the building which cost just under a million maloti.

Thaba-Tseka District Administrator (DA) Masheane Raphoole, donated the site on which the structure stands.

Raphoole said while the Thaba-Tseka community, affectionately known as Lilala were grateful, SR should desist from laying a claim on the station and that the party should be content to being given air time equal to everybody else.

The wealthy socialist who led a breakaway party from the popular ruling All Basotho Convention which he used to generously sponsor also donated plastic chairs to pre-school children, while teenage girls also received much needed sanitary towels from his largesse yesterday.



LGBTI, disabled applaud National Reforms

Maseru - Maputsoe Wellness Centre, which is funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is providing valuable services to the population, which includes Sex Workers and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gender and Inter-sex (LGBTI) people among others.

These groups of people said they continue to face discrimination when accessing health services at some government clinics.

They made the disclosure during UNFPA's commemoration of the 25 anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which put reproductive health at the centre of development. One of the sex workers, identified only as Ms. Silvia, said they used to be called names and harassed by nurses in front of other patients when seeking health services for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI) or when collecting the Antiretroviral (ARV) medication.

She said she was on the edge of stopping to take ARVs because she couldn't stand being harassed in front of other patients.

However, she said her health progressed positively when she

began accessing health services at Maputsoe Wellness Centre.

The centre provides them with counselling sessions and is described as a patient-centred care health facility. Mrs Thabang Masopha, a transwoman, said she used to be harassed and called names by nurses serving at government health centres.

"I always felt insulted and belittled in front of other patients" she said but her life has since changed with the advent of health services at the Maputsoe wellness centre. There was need for the country to sensitise health practitioners, particularly nurses, about LGBTI people so that they would also appreciate them also citizens of this country who have the right to access health services without being discriminated against.

Maputsoe Wellness Centre Site Coordinator, Sister Manthabiseng Masilo, said the centre has contributed immensely towards provision of health services to the key population since its establishment in 2016.

She indicated that they provide health services that include, among others, HIV testing, treatment and counselling, family planning, pre-exposure

prophylaxis (PrEP), TB screening and STI treatment to the key population which includes truck drivers, sex workers, LGBTI people as well as the community living around the border, among others. She said such people test for HIV in large numbers which is an achievement. She further explained that those who tested negative are on PrEP while those who test positive are put on ARVs where the viral load is suppressed.

However, she said the centre closed for four months due to lack of funds and they had to work voluntarily for some time but things went back to normal when UNFPA funded the centre.

UNFPA is commemorating its 50th anniversary and the 25th anniversary of ICPD which was held in Cairo in 1994. To this end, UNFPA is leading conversations on 'What has changed'. Focus is on what has changed in reproductive health, women's rights and empowerment since the Cairo conference in 1994.

Meanwhile, various marginalised sectors of society including the LGBTI community have come out to say they feel included in the national reforms process under way, LGBTI Matrix Executive Director, Mr Tampose

Mothopeng told the media an interview on Friday. Mothopeng said from the start of the process, including first phase and the ongoing in-districts consultations, they have had their representation.

"It is through these representatives that we feel our needs shall be addressed effectively and efficiently," he noted. Although the current constitution does not acknowledge them, he said, taking part in the reforms process was an indication there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

"We are part of the society with special needs, and we appreciate it if we are officially acknowledged in various areas of decision-making, hence these reforms bring hope to us," he stressed.

The disabled, through the Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD) have also come out to acknowledge that their voice is included in the reforms process.

The much-talked about reforms in mainly the Security, Judiciary, Parliamentary and Media sectors are expected to improve the country's governance in general and set Lesotho on the path to development and peace.

Lena/Staff Reporter

Treatment removes risk of passing on HIV: study

STAFF REPORTER

MASERU - Lesotho's efforts to curb the spread of HIV got a shot in the arm this week following reports noting the risk of passing on the HIV virus is completely eliminated by effective treatment.

The landmark study should spur experts and the government to encourage more patients to go on anti-retroviral treatment.

Lesotho has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world with 25 percent of people, or one in four people in the country are living with HIV. Over half of the 300,000 adults living with HIV in Lesotho are women and there are currently more than 200,000 orphans in Lesotho, most of whom are AIDS orphans.

According to the National Guidelines for HIV and AIDS Care and Treatment (5th Edition), antiretroviral treatment is the best treatment for HIV so far.

ART reduces HIV-related opportunistic infections and

cancers, deaths, as well as diseases not traditionally considered to be associated with HIV such as non-HIV related cancers, cardiovascular disease, kidney failure, and liver failure.

Suppression of HIV replication with ART reduces the risk of HIV transmission by over 90 percent, the guidelines further show.

These guidelines emphasise the importance of the HIV 'care cascade' - identifying people with HIV as early as possible after infection, promptly linking them to HIV care and beginning preparations for starting ART, and retaining them on treatment through robust adherence support and monitoring systems.

Lesotho in 2016 became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to institute the Test and Treat programme, which aims to put all people with HIV on ART.

A study of nearly 1,000 gay male couples in the UK with one partner with HIV who took antiretroviral therapy (ART) found

no new cases of transmission to the HIV-negative partner during sex without a condom.

Over the course of the eight-year study, 15 men were infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. But genetic tests showed that the transmissions were a result of the HIV-negative men having sexual relations with someone other than their regular partner. The report, published in *The Lancet* medical journal, shows that using ART to suppress HIV virus to undetectable levels renders it incapable of transmission during sex, according to the researchers.

If everyone in the world with HIV knew their status and had access to effective treatment, no new cases would occur, the study suggests.

Alison Rodger, a professor at University College London who co-led the research, told CNN that if everyone had access to treatment, the virus could be eliminated.

"We've got a way to go to get people easier access to testing and treatment, but if we could get global coverage, then we could really make headway in eliminating the virus," she said.

"It was such a powerful result that we thought we just improve the quality of life for people with

HIV." Rodger said what the study shows is that the risk of transmission is zero with ART treatment "and that's quite new and important."

An earlier study showed that the drugs protected heterosexual couples in which one partner was HIV-positive; the latest research completes the picture, Rodger said. "The question has been definitively answered; there is no need for further research. It's not often we get to say that. Finding ways to get the knowledge in practice is what we need to do next."

There was still considerable work to be done to ensure that everyone who has HIV can access testing and treatment, she added.

Other experts welcomed the results. "These important results serve to inspire and challenge us. Timely identification of HIV-infected people and provision of effective treatment lead to near-normal health and lifespan and virtual elimination of the risk of HIV transmission," Myron S. Cohen, a professor at the UNC Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases at Chapel Hill in North Carolina, who conducted the study of heterosexual couples, wrote in a commentary. - CNN



Bantu blow league open

...hard fought win puts league on knife edge

NTHETHE MAPHAONG

MASERU - The battle for the Econet Premier League title will this season go to the wire after second placed Bantu yesterday beat leaders Matlama in a pulsating encounter at Setsoto Stadium. As an added bonus - to reducing the points difference between the titans to two - Bantu pocketed a M50 000 bounty laid out by Alliance Insurance Company and Metropolitan, who had pledged M25, 000 each to the winners.

The two commercial

powerhouses sponsor Bantu and Matlama. Metropolitan bankroll Bantu. On the pitch, defending champions Bantu FC showed more desire than Matlama, winning most individual duels and were first to every second ball.

Lits'epe Marabe of Bantu broke the ice in the 38th minute when he rose unchallenged to thump a powerful header into the net from a corner swung in by Lundokuhle Phungulwa.

Lehlomla Ramabele equalised for Matlama heading in a cross from Jane Thabants'o.

Bantu were undeterred though

and masterfully controlled the game, keeping the ball expertly and forcing Matlama on the back foot. They were duly rewarded when Lazola Tjokoatjokoane headed in what proved to be the winner with 10 minutes to go.

Bantu players and their fans jumped for joy at the final whistle, turning the pitch into a sea of bodies as they celebrated their victory over their fiercest opponent this season.

Bantu head coach James Madidilane brushed aside suggestions his side's performance was motivated by the prospect of

pocketing the handsome winner-take-all lucre.

"Look, it is not about the money but we want to retain our prize. We wanted to close the gap between ourselves and Matlama. Remember we are the defending champions.

We don't know what will happen at the end of the season because this league is still open. "What I have to do is to win all our remaining games," Madidilane said after the match. Matlama currently lead the EPL standings with 56 points after 24 games with Bantu two points behind.