

Four convicted in P80,000 MoE scam

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Correspondent

Four of the five people implicated in the Ministry of Education and Skills Development scam were yesterday found guilty on all 12 counts of stealing approximately P80,000 from the government coffers.

When passing judgment, High Court bound Regional Magistrate Barnabas Nyamadzabo said the court has proved beyond reasonable doubt that the four men, Mogotsi Tadubana (unemployed), Kingston Mmolawa (unemployed), Brinnel Stock (accounts technician) and Biki Letsididi (teacher) acted jointly to defraud government.

Mogomotsi Molatlhegi was acquitted on all charges due to lack of evidence. Nyamadzabo however, reminded him that it does not mean he did not commit the offence but that he was just lucky the court could not find enough evidence to convict him.

The quartet together with Olatse Masisi who later turned state witness and Molatlhegi were charged with obtaining money on different occasions in October 2009 claiming that they were students under government



Access persons consulting with a court officer after their conviction

sponsorship at Limkokwing University and Gaborone Institute of Professional studies (GIPS), and were owed outstanding allowances.

Earlier on the court was notified by Letsididi's lawyer MacBain Kaang that Mmolawa was not present in court as he was hospitalised in South Africa. Court heard that Mmo-

law was involved in a car accident in that country. However, Kaang made it clear that he was not representing Mmolawa but simply passing the message to court. He added that he had no problem if the court found it fit to pass judgement in the absence of Mmolawa.

State Counsel Priscilla Israel had earlier told court that Mmolawa absconded with the

intention of frustrating court and "therefore the court should proceed without him."

Israel further said court should proceed, as Mmolawa was aware that the magistrate has limited days and simply want to put the court under pressure. She further complained that Mmolawa even went to South Africa without informing anyone, including the investigating officer.

"He did not submit any evidence of his hospitalisation and he could have faxed some documents to show that indeed he was in hospital or sent a family member to bring the documents to court," Israel said.

Magistrate Nyamadzabo concurred with state that the convict should not have crossed the border just days before judgment was delivered. He added that Mmolawa should have provided evidence of his alleged hospitalization hence the court will precede without him as the law allow.

After the judgment convicts begged court to reserve the mitigation and sentencing for today as they have been in court since morning and posed no flight risk. Nyamadzabo then ordered that they submit to fingerprinting to check if they have any previous convictions.

S'brana hosts workshop on happiness

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LOBATSE: A three-day workshop started at Sbrana Psychiatric Hospital on Monday to educate staff about happiness.

The workshop comes against the backdrop of Botswana being rated the least happy country in southern Africa in a recent survey. Speaking at the event, Adrian Mciman of the Happier Horizon Programme said numbers in psychiatric hospitals would be fewer if people slept well, ate well, did exercises, maintained good social support systems and stayed happy.

Mciman told the nurses, doctors, psychologists, therapists, lay-counsellors and other participants in the workshop that a lot could be done not as a cure, but in prevention of psychiatric problems.

He pointed out that most people would not be in psychiatric hospitals if they stayed optimistic and ensured that they had a good social support network.

It was important that people reduced worry and believed that they could positively make an impact in life, he noted, adding that happiness was not a cure for psychiatric problems but helped healthy populations and reduced chances of getting sick.

Even so, he acknowledged that it would not help much in an already sick population.

"Those engaging in little leisure time, physical activity and those not regularly eating breakfast have their mortality risk increased to the same magnitude as a current smoker," Mciman said.

He stressed the importance of workshops on happiness in Botswana. "A lot of times people talk about anger management, stress management and very little about happiness," he noted, adding that it would

make a huge difference if people knew how important happiness was.

He asserted that happiness determined if one was going to live long or not. It was therefore important that people had a sense of purpose and belonging because it would keep them contented with themselves.

Mciman said psychiatric patients should be advised strongly on the need for physical fitness. This was because the more they stayed fit and confident, the more they would be happy and live long. Exercise is good for mental health, hence patients who exercise more score lower depression levels.

Mciman said the most amazing thing was that while people knew almost all the information they needed to stay healthy, they did not walk the talk. Some did act on it but gave up too easily. "The secret is doing it consistently," he said.

A snap on-the-spot survey showed that participants had found the workshop useful. Mitu Sharmin Shultana, a clinical psychologist at Sbrana, said people were referred to the hospital (mainly) because they were not happy and were in pain because of break-ups in relationships.

A key achievement of the workshop was that staff appreciated the need to talk to patients about happiness better. "We already talk about stress and anger management and cure diseases, but now we are learning preventative measures, Shultana said. "If we teach them happiness, there will be less and less problems to deal with."

Kgomotso Vasco, a dietician at Sbrana, said though they already knew what Mciman was talking about, the workshop was motivating. "It motivates us to live it," she said. "I believe if patients see happiness in us, they would be inspired and motivated to make an effort."

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