

ABC On The Ropes



By Lesotho Times

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NEWS LOCAL NEWS



Minister of Police Sekola Lepota

- *as police minister Sekola dumps party for DC,*
- *other bigwigs will not contest the general elections.*

'Marafaele Mohloboli

IT never rains but pours for the All Basotho Convention (ABC) after Police and Public Safety Minister Lepota Sekola this week dumped the strife-torn party for the Democratic Congress (DC).

Mr Sekola is the second minister and high-profile politician to dump the beleaguered party in a week. Last week, Finance Minister Thabo Sophonea crossed over to former ABC deputy leader, Nqosa Mahao's Basotho Action Party (BAP).

Messrs Sekola and Sophonea timed their defections for the period after the 13 July 2022 dissolution of parliament by His Majesty, King Letsie III. Now that parliament has been dissolved and the country is being run by a caretaker government, the two probably felt it was safe to defect because ministers and other heads of key state institutions are rarely fired from their posts during

the transitional period before the elections. Some sources close to the politicians said their defections could be the harbinger of more such movements by opportunistic politicians seeking new homes ahead of the 7 October 2022 elections.

The two defections are only just a part of the massive problems confronting the Nkaku Kabi-led ABC amid reports that several bigwigs including cabinet ministers Matebatso Doti (Social Development), Keketso Sello (Agriculture and Food Security) and Motlohi Maliehe (Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation) and former cabinet minister Lesego Makgothi (Foreign Affairs and International Relations) will not be seeking re-election in their constituencies on the ABC's ticket.

It is not clear these whether these bigwigs will also defect or they will not drum up support for the Kabi faction.

Party insiders say the defections and some of the bigwigs' decisions not to seek re-election are a culmination of the infighting that has ravaged the party since its highly acrimonious February 2019 national executive committee (NEC) elections which saw Professor Mahao being elected to deputise then party leader, Thomas Thabane. Tired of the incessant squabbling and Mr Thabane's refusal to accept him as the second-in-command, Prof Mahao eventually threw in the towel and formed his own BAP in April 2021. He left with 10 ABC MPs. But the infighting did not end with his departure as Mr Thabane and his closest allies later turned on Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro who had been coopted into the NEC as Prof Mahao's replacement. They backed former cabinet minister Kabi in his ultimately successful campaign to succeed Mr Thabane after the latter's 31 December 2022 retirement from the top party post.

Following a highly acrimonious power struggle wherein Mr Kabi tried unsuccessfully to wrest state power from Dr Majoro, the former announced two months ago that they had buried the hatchet and they would work together ahead of the make-or-break October elections.

Mr Kabi broke the news of their reconciliation while addressing thousands of ABC supporters in Hlotse, Leribe in late June. He said as a demonstration of their newly-minted unity, the erstwhile foes would henceforth be addressing joint rallies.

But Dr Majoro is yet to appear at any of the ABC rallies. ABC insiders say this is because hardliners who back either politician are opposed to any rapprochement between the two factions.

In fact, according to some ABC sources, Mr Kabi's loyalists have been pulling out all the stops to ensure that legislators loyal to Dr Majoro do not win the primaries should they decide to contest in their constituencies.

"This is why the likes of ministers Sekola and Sophonea have jumped ship because they knew the odds were stacked against them after they refused to support moves to oust the prime minister earlier this year," the source said.

"For the same reason, other Majoro loyalists like ministers Maliehe, Doti and Sello have decided not to seek re-election on an ABC ticket. Makgothi has said he will not be standing because he wants to concentrate on his private business ventures while Sekola, who has always been DC at

heart, is going to his party because it is seemingly in the ascendancy,” an ABC source said.

Mr Sekola was unreachable for comment. However, DC secretary general, Tsitso Cheba, yesterday confirmed that the minister had indeed defected to the DC with an undisclosed number of ABC members from his Makhaleng constituency.

“*Ntate* Sekola has joined us together with many ABC members from his constituency,” Mr Cheba said in an interview.

“They are not the only ones who joined us this week. We also welcomed *Ntate* Mochaka Monku and several others from the RFP (Revolution for Prosperity). *Ntate* Monku did not make the final list of candidates to represent the RFP despite winning the primary elections in his Likhetlane constituency,” Mr Cheba said, adding the defections confirmed that his party was on the right trajectory and poised to win the forthcoming elections.

Meanwhile, Ms Doti yesterday confirmed that she would not be seeking re-election for personal reasons “I would rather not disclose”.

She however, vehemently denied rumours that she was dumping the party for Prof Mahao’s BAP.

“I had long decided that I would not be contesting for a third term. It is a lie that I have joined the BAP. I would never join the BAP for reasons known to me. I would rather go to any other party,” Ms Doti said in an interview.

When called for comment yesterday, Messrs Maliehe and Sello that they had other pressing commitments to attend to while Mr Makgothi was not reachable on his mobile phone.

Authoritative party sources said Messrs Sello and Makgothi had indicated that they would not be seeking re-election as they wanted to focus on their business interests. But these were merely face-saving excuses by the ministers as they were well aware that they would be rejected in their constituencies for sticking with Dr Majoro even after the NEC had made it clear that he should make way for Mr Kabi, the sources said.

The sources said it was clear from the weekend branch meetings that the ministers had lost support and this would be confirmed at constituency level should they decide to contest the primaries.

Speaking specifically about Mr Maliehe, another ABC source said “he has never supported Kabi even after he won the ABC leadership contest in January.

“He has always been Majoro’s right hand man, influencing the prime minister to defy the NEC. Even after some of us crossed the floor in parliament (to the opposition benches in a failed bid to unseat the government), Maliehe and Sello were in the forefront of defying NEC decisions. They even went to State House and vouched their support for Majoro.

“Nevertheless, we resolved not to expel them from the party. We felt it was best to leave their fate in the hands of the constituencies which would send them packing in the event they contest the primaries,” the source added.

ABC spokesperson Montoeli Masoetsa would neither confirm nor deny that Messrs Maliehe, Sello and other bigwigs would not be contesting.

He said the party would not bar anyone from contesting under the ABC banner even if they had refused to support Mr Kabi. But it was clear from his remarks that he believes the ABC primaries, which are expected to begin on Sunday, will be the Waterloo for those who had defied party directives to support Mr Kabi against Dr Majoro.

“We have nothing to gain by standing in the way of people who want to contest if they feel they still have what it takes. Even those who defied the leader (Kabi) will be allowed to contest and they will soon know their fate as the door closes in their faces. That is how powerful the masses are.

“Sunday will be a moment of truth for most people. We just pray and hope that they will accept the outcome because we don’t want to lose focus as a party. What we are striving for right now is peace and oneness,” Mr Masoetsa said.

Should the likes of Messrs Sello and others not stand, this will be regarded as a victory by Mr Kabi’s loyalists. But it could well turn out to be a pyrrhic victory as it could cost the ABC the elections. These heavyweights have been in the political game for quite a while and their aggrieved supporters may decide against voting for the ABC.

While the ABC has been ravaged by infighting, the DC appears to be on the resurgence under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Mathibeli Mokhothu who replaced founding leader Pakalitha Mosisili following the latter’s retirement in January 2019.

In fact, the results of a survey released last week by the internationally acclaimed Afrobarometer Institute indicate that the DC is most likely to win the 7 October elections.

At least 42 percent of the respondents said they would vote for the DC in the coming polls. As a testimony of the ABC’s seeming fall from grace, only 21 percent said they would vote for the fractured party.

While the findings may be good news to the DC, the caveat is that the research was conducted between February and March this year. It did not factor in the RFP which was only formed on 22 March.



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