

ABC Bigwigs In Near Fist-Fight



By Lesotho Times

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NEWS LOCAL NEWS



ABC member of working committee Prince Maliehe

...as feuding Majoro-Kabi factions' reconciliation talks flounder

'Marafaele Mohloboli

RULING All Basotho Convention (ABC) bigwigs Keketso Sello and Prince Maliehe engaged in a heated argument that almost descended into blows as tempers boiled during last week's peace talks between the warring party factions.

The talks, at the parliament building in Maseru, were aimed at reconciling the feuding factions led by Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro and party leader, Nkaku Kabi.

But the talks, which have been going since February this year, are nowhere close to achieving their desired objective of reuniting the erstwhile close allies ahead of the make-or-break elections due in October this year.

Dr Majoro and Mr Kabi fell out after the latter accepted the party's national executive committee (NEC)'s decision to nominate him to replace the former whom it had "recalled" from the premiership at its 2 December 2021 meeting.

Announcing the decision at the time, ABC spokesperson, Montoeli Masoetsa, said the NEC had decided to recall Dr Majoro following an outcry by the rank and file of the party as well as the general public over a plethora of issues including poor service delivery and the premier's alleged failure to stop the high murder rates in the country ever since he succeeded Thomas Thabane on 20 May 2020.

However, Dr Majoro refused to resign and make way for Mr Kabi saying prime ministers are only removed through a no confidence vote in parliament and not by political parties. He even fired Mr Kabi from his post as Agriculture, Food Security and Marketing minister.

The two subsequently squared off at the 28-29 January 2022 leadership contest to choose a replacement for Mr Thabane who stepped down on 31 December 2021.

In March this year, Mr Kabi and his allies failed in their bid to oust Dr Majoro who comfortably survived a parliamentary no confidence motion sponsored by former ABC member and current Basotho Patriotic Party (BAP) leader, Tefo Mapesela.

The truth eventually dawned on Mr Kabi and his faction that it was they who had the most to lose if the intra party feuding within the ABC persisted until the elections. Dr Majoro has already qualified for his pension benefits having already completed two years in office. Mr Kabi, on the other hand, failed in his push to oust Dr Majoro and become prime minister.

Faced with the reality of floundering in his ambition to lead the country, unless his ABC fights the impending general elections united, Mr Kabi had made overtures for reconciliation with Dr Majoro and his allies who are mostly serving in the current cabinet.

After months of sending their intermediaries to negotiate on their behalf, Mr Kabi and Dr Majoro finally met for face-to-face talks a fortnight ago at the premier's official State House residence in Maseru under the mediation of Bishop David Thakadu Ramela of St Paul African Apostolic Church.

The *Lesotho Times* saw a leaked picture of Dr Majoro and Mr Kabi sitting next to each other and holding a stick under the watchful eye of Bishop Ramela. According to sources close to both politicians, they were made to hold the stick by the Bishop and recite a pledge to work together to iron out their differences.

But as indicated by the sources, even this face-to-face meeting failed to yield the hoped for breakthrough as hardliners on both sides continued to throw spanners into the works.

One such hardliner is Mr Kabi's ally, former cabinet minister Temeki Tšolo.

A few days after Mr Kabi and Dr Majoro's State House meeting, Mr Tšolo launched a blistering attack on Dr Majoro, calling him a "hypocrite" and a "rag".

In an interview with the *Sunday Express*, Mr Tšolo said even though he and Dr Majoro are both members of the ABC, he hates the premier with a passion for allegedly throwing him under the bus over the government's botched 2018 M1, 7 billion solar energy deal with Frazer Solar.

Unsurprisingly, Mr Tšolo's scurrilous attack on Dr Majoro took centre stage when the two factions met at the parliament building for their latest round of talks.

According to ABC insiders, matters came to a head when Dr Majoro's ally, cabinet minister Sello, demanded to know why some members of the Kabi faction like Mr Tšolo were disrespecting the premier through their vituperative public outbursts.

Mr Tšolo himself was not present at the talks. Nonetheless, Mr Sello's demands that he be reined in did not go down well with some of the Kabi allies including former deputy leader, Prince Maliehe.

Tempers flared and Messrs Sello and Maliehe almost came to blows before being calmed down by other party officials, the sources said.

"What happened is that *Ntate* Sello and Likhetlane MP Moshe Leoma had a fracas with *Ntate* Maliehe over the evident disrespect shown to the premier and some of his cabinet ministers by *Ntate* Tšolo.

"Sello had accused Kabi's side of not taking Tšolo to task and the party leader's faction replied that it was none of their business. Hence, the heated quarrel which ensued. Fortunately, they were restrained before they came to blows. When tempers had cooled down, both sides acknowledged that they have to work hard to achieve peace and reconciliation more so with the elections just around the corner. We can't afford to go to the polls divided," an ABC insider said this week.

Mr Maliehe's mobile phone rang unanswered when this publication called him for comment this week.

On his part, Mr Sello confirmed the fracas but sought to downplay its impact on the factions' quest to achieve reconciliation.

"I admit that tempers flared, but they later subsided. Nonetheless both sides admit that there is need for peace within the party and they are committed to achieving it," Mr Sello said in a brief interview.

The talks were then postponed to Monday but on that day they failed to proceed. Party insiders said this was because Dr Majoro and Mr Kabi were unavailable as they both had other pressing commitments.

It remains to be seen when they will proceed and if at all they will yield the hoped for breakthrough as party hardliners continue to pour cold water over their prospects.

Two weeks ago, Mr Masoetsa – who is seen as a hardliner- said he was unaware of any talks between the two factions.

"I don't know about the talks you are referring to. As far as I know, there have never been any peace talks and I'm surprised about it," Mr Masoetsa said.

Notwithstanding those comments, Mr Masoetsa was well aware of the talks. Last month, the ABC spokesperson had also rubbished the idea of talks, saying, "Those who have gone their own way have gone and we have nothing left to discuss with them". This was in reference to Dr Majoro and his faction after the premier had defied NEC calls for him to hand over power to Mr Kabi.

Mr Masoetsa and Dr Majoro have their own feud. This after the ABC spokesperson was briefly detained last year after he announced that Dr Majoro was no longer prime minister in the wake of the 2 December 2021 decision by the NEC to recall him in favour of Mr Kabi.

Mr Masoetsa blamed Dr Majoro for his arrest but the premier denied any involvement.

After Mr Kabi subsequently won the ABC leadership contest, Mr Masoetsa was among the NEC members who called on Dr Majoro to relinquish the premiership to the new leader. Dr Majoro rejected the calls and survived the vote of no confidence subsequently pushed against him.

Mr Tšolo also has his own running feud with Dr Majoro. There is no love lost between the two over the Frazer Solar debacle.

Mr Tšolo, who was a minister in then Prime Minister Thabane's office in 2018, allegedly appended his signature to a deal with the Germany company for the latter to provide solar power to Lesotho over a four-year-period.

The deal was not implemented after Dr Majoro, who was finance minister at the time, refused to sign the financing agreement for the project on the grounds that Mr Tšolo had signed without cabinet approval.

Frazer Solar was later awarded M856 million in damages by a South African arbitrator in 2019 for breach of contract after the deal fell through. The Lesotho government is challenging the award in both the Lesotho and Gauteng High Courts.

In his court papers, Dr Majoro accuses Mr Tšolo of "fraudulently and corruptly" signing the botched deal on behalf of the government.

Dr Majoro says he had no right to negotiate and sign such an agreement. Mr Tšolo has denied signing the deal on behalf of the government.

But Dr Majoro insists that he signed and, in the process, violated national laws which stipulate how such contracts are agreed and how payments to third parties are made.

He accuses the former minister of acting outside his powers by "clandestinely" signing the agreement without the knowledge and approval of parliament, cabinet and himself as the finance minister at the time.

It was against this background that Mr Tšolo made his scathing attack on Dr Majoro a fortnight ago.

In an interview this week, Mr Tšolo poured scorn on any attempts by the Kabi faction to reconcile with Dr Majoro.

“I don’t have anything to do with these talks. I don’t have any faith in them because there is nothing genuine about them. If they were about the removal of Majoro, then I would back them. But since they are meant to achieve a fake unity, I’m against them. I don’t understand them and I never will. I’m a disillusioned member of the ABC who is just waiting for the elections,” Mr Tšolo said.



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