

Majoro Out, Other ABC Bigwigs Tumble In Primaries



By Lesotho Times

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NEWS LOCAL NEWS



Prime Minister and Thetsane legislator Moeketsi Majoro

- *as controversial ex-First Lady 'Maesaiah wins the right to represent party in Mokhotlong*

'Marafaele Mohloboli

PRIME Minister Moeketsi Majoro's future as a member of the All Basotho Convention (ABC) is up in the air amid revelations that he will not be representing his Thetsane constituency in the 7 October general elections. Dr Majoro did not contest the party's weekend primaries where Senator Mphonyane Lebesa won the right to stand in the outgoing premier's constituency.

Dr Majoro and his press attaché, Buta Moseme, were unreachable on their mobile phones this week to shed light on whether the premier's decision not to seek re-election in Thetsane has anything to do with his fallout with former ally, now ABC leader, Nkaku Kabi.

Although Mr Kabi has publicly stated that he and Dr Majoro have buried the hatchet, some hardliners loyal to the ABC leader had told the *Lesotho Times* last week that they would ensure that any of the ministers and outgoing legislators loyal to Dr Majoro do not win the primaries should they decide to contest in their constituencies.

It appears they got their wish. The premier did not contest while some of his ministers, including 'Matšepo Molise-Ramakoae (Foreign Affairs and International Relations) and Likopo Mahase (Prime Minister's Office) lost in the primaries.

Ms Molise-Ramakoae was beaten in her Matsieng constituency by the little-known Motlalehi Ralentsoe Letlaka. Mr Likopo Mahase, Minister in the Prime Minister's office and National Security Principal Secretary, Kabelo Lehora, both lost out to a lightweight, Phoka Ramoea in the Khubetsoana constituency.

They joined fellow 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) who did not seek re-election in their constituencies on an ABC's ticket.

The alleged Majoro loyalists are not the only ones who lost in the primaries. One of the premier's bitter foes, former Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Temeki Tšolo, fell by the wayside in Mafeteng. He was beaten by one 'Masenate Posholi. There is no love lost between Mr Tšolo and Dr Majoro. This after the premier decided not to include him in his cabinet after taking over from the former incumbent, Thomas Thabane. Dr Majoro subsequently accused Mr Tšolo of unprocedurally appending his signature to the abortive M1, 7 billion solar energy deal with Frazer Solar.

The German company was in 2020 awarded £50 million (M856 million) damages for the government's alleged breach of the 2018 'deal'. Frazer Solar insists it had a valid agreement that was signed by Mr Tšolo. The project was not implemented due to Dr Majoro's dogged refusal to sign the financing agreement when he was finance minister under the Thabane government. The premier has since challenged the £50 million award in the local and South African courts.

Former Defence and National Security Minister Prince Maliehe also fell by the wayside in Teyateyaneng.

Mr Thabane, who stepped down as ABC leader on 31 December 2021, will not be seeking re-election in Ha Abia, Maseru. The little-known Thebe Mokoatle will represent the party in the former premier's constituency.

Nevertheless, the responsibility to continue the Thabane political legacy has fallen on the shoulders of his wife, 'Maesaiah, who triumphed in her native, Mokhotlong. The constituency is currently in the hands of her equally motor mouth ally-turned-foe, Tefo Mapesela.

A former Thabane favourite, Mr Mapesela dumped the ABC to form his Basotho Patriotic Party (BPP) in April 2021. Prior to jumping ship, he had called 'Maesaiah all sorts of pejorative names such as "dunderhead" or 'Malinkoana (a derogatory term for a mentally unstable person). He had also called her a "jailbird" after she spent some time in remand prison over charges of murdering her husband's ex-wife, Lipolelo. Both Maesaiah and Mr Thabane have had the charges dropped on account of the unavailability of a key witnesses. Some lawyers who spoke to the publication on condition of anonymity have said the two are not yet out of the woods as the charges can be reinstated anytime after the witness has been located.

Meanwhile, another Thabane protégé, Mosito Moqhekoana, has won the right to represent the ABC in his native, Mokhetsoaneng in Bera. Mr Moqhekoana, served as Mr Thabane's press attaché before the latter was forced out of his post as prime minister by his own party in May 2020.

Former Women's League president, 'Mathato Phafoli will represent the party in the 'Maliepetsane constituency. The former incumbent, Michael Molefe, died last year. Ms Phafoli is currently Deputy Minister of Local Government and Chieftainship Affairs. Her controversial boss, Minister Lehlohonolo Moramotse (Lithoteng constituency) is one of the old horses who will be seeking re-election in their constituencies.

Mr Moramotse has often grabbed the spotlight for unsavoury matters.

In April 2020 when he was Police and Public Safety minister, Mr Moramotse was charged with contravening Covid-19 regulations. This after he allegedly bought alcohol in contravention of gazetted regulations forbidding such purchases during the national lockdown at the time.

He was accused of illegally purchasing two boxes of assorted whiskeys at Borokhoaneng Urban Offsales in Maseru.

He was later released on M500 bail. The matter is pending in the Maseru Magistrates' Court. His son, Thabo, was also arrested and charged with the 22 June 2016 murder of the minister's daughter-in-law, 'Mateboho Moramotse, in Lower Seoli, Maseru. Thabo was acquitted by Judge Semapo Peete in May this year after the Crown was adjudged to have failed to prove a *prima facie* case against him. The state had based its case on Thabo's alleged confession to the crime. He allegedly made the confession before the now deceased Maseru Magistrate Phethise Motanyane in 2016.

It had also relied on a confession by one of Thabo's co-accused, Pako Sekhonyana, who is now deceased. Another co-accused, Tekane Tekane, is now deceased and this had left Thabo as the only accused on trial for the murder.

Another ABC veteran, Thabang Mafojane, will again be contesting in the Motimposo constituency. The legislator has a pending stock theft case in the Maseru Magistrates' Court.

Communications Science and Technology Minister, Sam Rapapa, and former secretary general, Samonyane Ntsekele, are some of the bigwigs who will again be representing the party in their constituencies. Mr Rapapa will stand in his Mosalemane constituency while Mr Ntsekele got the

nod in Tsikoane, Leribe.

It remains to be seen how the fractured ABC will fare in the polls.

The party is already reeling from a string of high-profile defections to other parties.

Just last week, Police and Public Safety Minister Lepota Sekola dumped the strife-torn party for the Democratic Congress (DC).

The week before that 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.

Shorn of tried and tested heavyweights like Dr Majoro and others, the ABC could struggle against more stable political outfits like Deputy Prime Minister Mathibeli Mokhothu's DC, Prof Mahao's BAP and the new kid on the bloc, business mogul Sam Matekane's Revolution for Prosperity (RFP).

If the recently released Afrobarometer Institute survey findings conducted before the March 2022 formation of the RFP are anything to go by, the ABC should kiss its chances of winning the elections goodbye.

According to the survey, 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.

Asked to comment on the state of the party in the aftermath of the primaries, ABC spokesperson, Montoeli Masoetsa, said they were yet to conclude the primaries. Without elaborating, he said there were complaints which still needed to be addressed in some constituencies before they could come up with the final list of party candidates.



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