

SUMMARY OF EVENTS IN LESOTHO: FIRST QUARTER 2000

Millennium Stamps Plunge New Depths of Irrelevance

Dennis the Puny (Dionysius Exiguus) was less numerically sophisticated than his contemporary Hindu mathematicians who considered zero to be a number. As a consequence, counting Anno Domini began in the Year 1 not 0, and the Third Millennium begins on 1 January 2001.

Nevertheless, commercial opportunism and the attraction of round numbers have given the year 2000 a certain status as a quasi-millennial milestone. Certainly the firm in New York which has secured the contract to produce Lesotho's stamps was not going to wait another year to reap profits. It was also not concerned to take the trouble to make the stamps the slightest bit relevant to Lesotho. As a result, the 'millennium' was celebrated with a total of 45 new stamps, of which 17 were pictures of 12th century (but why the *12th* century?) persons or objects (including Easter Island statues, Barbarossa (King of Germany) and Yoritomo ('First' Shogun of Japan)); and no less than 28 were pictures of ocean-going vessels ranging from sailing schooners to the Titanic. The stamps as usual were badly researched, introducing errors, so that the German U-boat depicted was described as from World War I when in reality it was from World War II. Not a single stamp had relevance to Africa, let alone Lesotho.

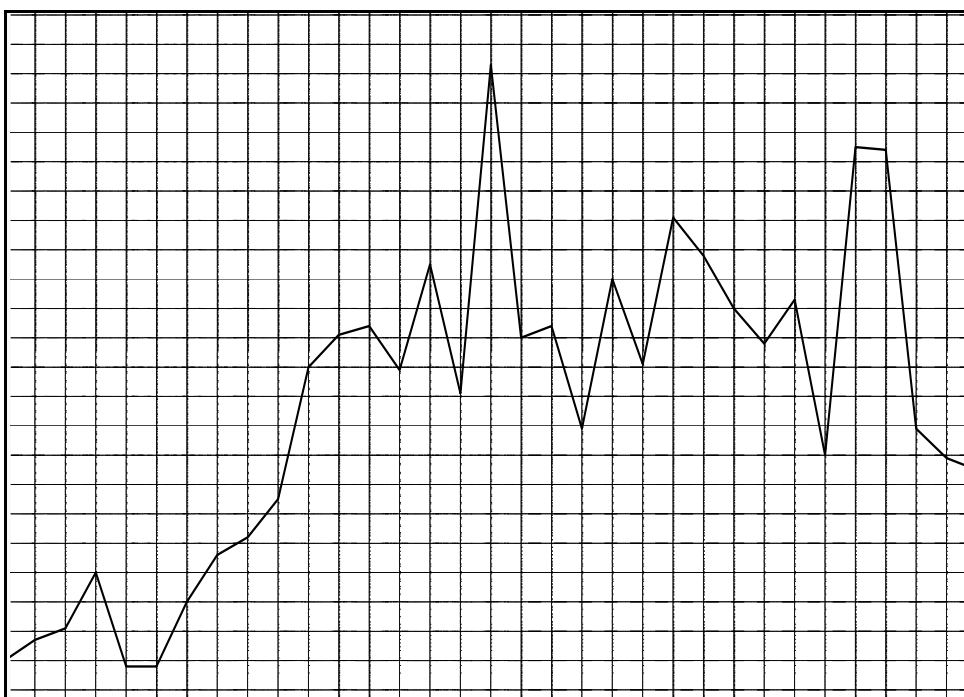
Lesotho is the only country in southern Africa which allows a commercial enterprise to design and produce its postage stamps.

Inflation Lowest for 28 Years

The October 1999 Consumer Price Index (which is usually published two months in arrears) shows the inflation rate in Lesotho to have dropped to the lowest rate since 1971.

The graph shows how inflation has changed over a period of some 40 years with a conspicuous rise to double digits fuelled by the oil price rise of 1973. Since 1993, inflation has dropped below 10% and now stands at 6.8%.

An even more spectacular decrease in inflation was recorded in the published South African consumer price index, which fell in October 1999 to 1.7%, the same rate as in September 1968. This was achieved because of a large decrease



(-3.0%) in the cost of housing as a result of falling interest rates, a factor not considered in calculating the Lesotho index. The South African rate and Lesotho rates are predicted to rise again in the near future, particularly as a result of increased fuel costs.

Motemekoane Family Suffers a Further Death in Police Custody

A 20-year old resident of Seapoint, Maseru, **Tšepo Motemekoane**, who had been arrested on Christmas Day on suspicion of theft of a mobile phone, was found dead in the cells on the following day. He was the nephew of Peters Motemekoane, a veteran member of the Lesotho Liberation Army, who had suffered a similar fate five years earlier on 30 December 1994. While Peters Motemekoane had been detained overnight in gaol and was found dead in the morning, the police had raked his house with gunfire causing the death of several youths. Despite promises from Government at the time, no action had in fact been taken against the police.

Faced with a similar incident five years later, the family of Tšepo Motemekoane, failing to get satisfaction from Queen Elizabeth II Hospital doctors on the cause of death, approached a Professor Jan Botha from the Free State to carry out a post-mortem. Advocate K. T. Khauoe, as reported in *Moafrika* of 7 January, stated that Professor Botha had found that Tšepo Motemekoane had died as a result of bruising caused by being beaten by a blunt instrument and by massive internal bleeding.

Two University Academic Staff Die in Shooting Incident which Kills Three

Dr 'Mapitso Sekoati and **Mr Polongoe Moleko**, both staff members of the National University of Lesotho's Institute of Extra-Mural Studies, were shot dead in the Maseru suburb of Naleli at about 6 p. m. on the evening of 3 January 2000. The gunman, Sekoati Sekoati, aged 50, who was the husband of Dr Sekoati, and a driver for the Maluti Mountain Brewery, then shot himself dead.

The two NUL staff members were both graduates of the former University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. 'Mapitso Sekoati (née Seitlheko), aged 48, had later studied overseas in Australia, while Polongoe Moleko, aged 50, had studied in Massachusetts in the United States. He had also for a time been a staff member of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre.

Taxi Fares Increase

Following fuel price rises, there was a general rise in fares charged by minibus taxis throughout Lesotho in January. The Department of Transport and Traffic originally announced the prices for implementation on 1 January 2000, but the necessary notices that taxis were required to display were not ready, and the date of implementation was changed to 15 January.

The new fare for taxis plying between the Border Post and parts of central Maseru went up from M1.40 to M1.80, while long distance fares increased by an average of 20%. For example the fare between Roma and Maseru was increased from M4.30 to M5.20. Implementation of the fares followed a somewhat chaotic situation in the earlier part of January, when various different fares were being demanded by some taxis. Maseru taxi owners in particular had been coercing passengers to pay M2, instead of the M1.80 which was eventually agreed.

Newspaper Reports Bribery Allegations

Allegations were reported in *Public Eye* of 7 January 2000 that the Minister of Natural Resources, **Monyane Moleleki**, had received a bribe of M1.9 million from the company, JCI Mining, which won the tender to re-establish the Letšeng-la-Terae Diamond Mine. The newspaper stated, without giving names, that the allegations are being levelled against him by fellow party members and the opposition. Mr Moleleki is quoted as saying that the allegations are unfounded, malicious and irresponsible. He further stated that two cabinet ministers had assisted him to strike a good deal with the company and these had been Dr Leketekete Ketso, former Minister of Finance, and Mr Tom Thabane, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Dysentery Outbreak Results in Fatalities

An outbreak of **dysentery**, which had begun in November, by January had affected several thousand people in southern Lesotho, including adults, school age children and infants. The outbreak was blamed on heavy rains which led to faecal contamination of water supplies.

Reports about the number of fatalities from the outbreak varied. Some newspapers quoted a figure of 18, others a figure of 14, but according to *Public Eye* of 21 January 2000, 17 persons had died in Mekaling and 10 had died in Mpharane (both in Mohale's Hoek District). Because the outbreak had affected a very wide area, there were likely to have been other fatalities.

Deadline Extended for Old Coins

The old series of coins, which were supposed to be no longer legal tender after 31 December 1999 had their life extended by the Central Bank until 31 March 2000. Those being phased out were the 5s, 10s, 25s, 50s and M1 coins, each being replaced by a newer and smaller coin, with the 25s coin being replaced by a 20s coin. The future of the 1s and 2s coins was not clearly stated. There were no new ones to replace them, and they now served little practical use, being worth as a result of inflation respectively about 0.1p and 0.2p in sterling or 0.16c and 0.32c in US currency. It was notable however that South Africa had not yet phased out its corresponding 1c and 2c coins. As a result of 10% Sales Tax in Lesotho and 14% VAT in South Africa most shopping bills did not come to a multiple of 10 cents or 10 lisente, so that the very small denomination coins were still needed to pay the arithmetically correct sum demanded at the till.

Death of B. M. Khaketla

A distinguished political and literary figure, **Senator Bennett Makalo Khaketla**, died in Maseru on 9 January 2000, after suffering from stomach cancer for several months.

Khaketla was born in 1913 at Makhalong, near the town of Qacha's Nek, which was then little more than a village. He first went to school at Souru near Qacha's Nek in 1924, transferring shortly afterwards to Ha Ramohlakoana near Matatiele (the nearest South African town to Qacha's Nek), where he passed Standard VI in 1929. He proceeded to Mariazell (also nearby in South Africa), where he obtained his Primary Teacher's Certificate in 1932. After a short spell seeking work in Durban, from 1933 to 1939 he taught at St Patrick's Anglican School in Bloemfontein. He held a number of different clerical and teaching posts in South Africa and Lesotho (Heilbron, Eagle's Peak, Mohale's Hoek, Ficksburg, Middelburg, Kroonstad) before being engaged to teach at Basutoland High School in 1946.

During his teaching career, he studied privately for the Junior Certificate, Matriculation Certificate and then a BA degree in Politics and Sesotho, which he completed with the University of South Africa in 1942. In 1946, he married Caroline Ntšeliseng Ramolahloane, the first Mosotho woman graduate. Five years younger than Khaketla, she had graduated from Fort Hare in 1940, and had been a teacher at Basutoland High School since 1943.

Not long after his second return to Lesotho in 1946, he had his first taste of politics as a member of the Maseru District Council and the Basutoland National Council. He was offered and accepted the principalship of Charterston High School in Nigel near Johannesburg in 1951, but stayed there only a short while before returning to Basutoland High School in 1952.

Khaketla's literary career began with as co-editor with Cyprian Thorpe of the Anglican Church magazine, *Paki ea Kereke* (later simply named *Paki*) from 1949 until 1952. By this time he had completed his first novel, *Meokho ea Thabo* ('Tears of joy') which was published in 1951, and had as central character a teacher, Moeketsi, who like Khaketla himself, trained at the Mariazell Institution.

Thereafter there was a flurry of literary activity, including the play *Tholoana tsa sethepu* ('The fruits of polygamy') published in 1954, followed shortly by a sequel, *Bulane*, which takes its name from the chief who is central to the action of the play. (In the 1990s, these plays were made into SABC television serials by Mmula Productions, using the Basotho Cultural Village in Qwaqwa as a setting.)

In 1954, Khaketla had also published a historical play, *Moshoeshoe le baruti* ('Moshoeshoe and the missionaries') and a book of Sesotho poetry, *Lipshamathe* ('Literary morsels'). This included elegies on the sinking of the World War II troopship *Erinpura* and on the death of close relatives, as well as poems of great moral indignation and feeling, such as one that he had composed many years earlier about the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Another novel which appeared in 1960 was *Mosali a nkhole* ('My wife has brought a disaster upon me') which is about chieftainship and medicine murder. There were also textbooks on Sesotho language and grammar such as *Sebopeho sa Sesotho* (1951) and *Thapholiso ea Sesotho* (1958).

In September 1954, Khaketla became editor of Lesotho's first political periodical, *Mohlabani* ('The Warrior'). It was a joint enterprise between himself and two other teachers at Basutoland High School, Ntsu Mokhehle and Zeph Mothopeng, one of whom was later to become Lesotho Prime Minister and the other leader of the South African Pan Africanist Congress. In parallel columns, *Mohlabani* contained elegant but hard-hitting prose in English and Sesotho, which dared to challenge the authority and complacency of the colonial authorities. An article 'Basutoland: a white man's paradise' in the January 1955 issue particularly annoyed the colonial administration. The three teachers at Basutoland High School associated with *Mohlabani* were warned that they would lose their jobs if they continued to be associated with the newspaper. They ignored the warning and were duly dismissed in March 1955 with further orders that they must leave the Maseru Reserve (urban area) within 48 hours.

If the colonial administration thought that *Mohlabani* would now cease publication, it was mistaken. The first three issues had been a mimeographed publication, produced at Riverside Farm with the help of Patrick Duncan, a former Basutoland colonial administrator, who became a South African political activist. From March 1955 it was properly printed in Cape Town, and appeared more or less monthly under Khaketla's editorship continuing to represent the views of the Basutoland African Congress (Basutoland Congress Party from 1958) until Khaketla (who was Deputy Leader of the BCP 1959-60) quarrelled with Ntsu Mokhehle. They were at one time close friends and Mokhehle called Khaketla 'Oom Shell', a play on the meaning of his Sesotho name, while Khaketla called Mokhehle 'Clem'. However at the 1960 Party Conference, Mokhehle made a veiled attack on Khaketla, whose urbane manners and lifestyle (Khaketla always travelled with sheets, others only with blankets) had increasingly offended his belief that the party leaders should not adopt the lifestyle of the colonisers. The day following the final public meeting of the Party Conference, Khaketla submitted his resignation from the party in writing.

In 1961, along with other former BCP colleagues, Khaketla formed the Basutoland Freedom Party. After a political merger, he revived *Mohlabani* in 1963 as the paper of the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP), a party which was generally perceived as closely supporting the monarchy.

In the meantime, the British administration had allowed constitutional advancement so that a largely elected Legislative Council was created in 1960. Within this Council, Khaketla was elected MLC for Maseru by an overwhelming majority, and he also became the 'Member Responsible for Education', *de facto* Lesotho's first Minister of Education. He was also the Chairman of the First Council of the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland which was created in 1964 from the former Pius XII College.

The MFP secured only 4 seats out of 60 in the Parliament of 1965, and subsequently dwindled as a political force. Khaketla had stood for the Maseru Constituency, but was defeated by the BCP candidate. He was Privy Councillor to King Moshoeshoe II from 1965 to 1970.

In January 1970, the BCP won the General Election, but the change of Government was forestalled by a coup. Khaketla was amongst opposition members arrested and also subjected to house arrest. It provided him with the impetus and opportunity to write the book *Lesotho 1970: an African coup under the microscope* (1971), the manuscript of which was smuggled out of Lesotho so that it could be published overseas. The book documents the sorry tale of Lesotho's loss of democracy and the excesses of the new regime. It has long been out of print and has never been translated into Sesotho.

From 1971 to 1985, Khaketla was an active member of a team which worked on a new translation of the Bible. *Bibele: phetolelo e ncha* finally appeared in 1989, published by the Bible Society of South Africa.

Meanwhile, the regime of Leabua Jonathan had been overthrown in 1986 by a military coup, and Khaketla, who had been arrested following a visit to Pretoria immediately before the coup, accepted an invitation from the King and served for a short time in the new Council of Ministers as Minister of Justice and Prisons.

With the return to democracy, the MFP fought the 1993 General Election, but without success. Khaketla was defeated by Ntsu Mokhehle in the Qoaling constituency by a large majority, and the BNP candidate came second. Following the election, Khaketla was made a Member of the Council of State.

In 1996, the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, was conferred on Khaketla by the National University of Lesotho, and after the 1998 General Election, he was appointed a member of the Senate of the Lesotho Parliament.

Bennett Makalo Khaketla was buried at Kokobela Cemetery, Maseru West, on Friday 14 January 2000. He is survived by his wife, 'Masechele, who is a leading educationist and author in her own right and who was also awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, by the National University of Lesotho in 1983. He is also survived by three sons (Sechele, Motloheloa and Maieane), a daughter (Dr 'Mamphono Khaketla (Mrs 'Mefane)) and eight grandchildren.

Irish Prime Minister Visits Lesotho

An Taoiseach (the Prime Minister) of Ireland, Bertie Ahern, visited Lesotho briefly in the second week of January, a visit which included a visit to Thaba-Tseka, and also enabled him to be present for the opening on 10 January of the new Irish Consulate in Maseru.

The Irish Government has currently pledged M50 million in aid to Lesotho, and amongst areas supported are rural water supply, access roads in remote areas, rural footbridges, and support to health including TB control, hospital laboratories and the National Health Training Centre. Notable earlier Irish funded projects have been the Centre for Accounting Studies and the Basotho Pony project.

Basotho Die in Mine Disaster; Others are Dramatically Rescued

A rockfall on Monday 10 January in a mine at Orkney in Gauteng Province of South Africa resulted in 15 miners being trapped, of whom 8 were from Lesotho. After 30 hours, contact was made with eight of the trapped miners, and a tube was pushed through the rockfall providing them with air and water. Conditions were so difficult that it took another 48 hours before they could be rescued. Five of their seven colleagues had been killed in the rockfall, and the two others had died from injuries before they could be rescued. Of the Basotho miners, six survived and two (one each from Butha-Buthe and Mohale's Hoek) died in the accident.

Court Martial Resumes: Arrested Soldier Also Demands Trial

The Court Martial in which 38 soldiers are being charged with mutiny resumed on 17 January after a recess of over a month. It was now over a year since it was first convened on 4 January 1999, and the soldiers had in the meantime been confined to the Maximum Security Prison.

One occupant of the prison, however, had not even had the luxury of being put on trial. He was **Private Hosana Sako**, who had been held without trial for almost a year, having been arrested somewhat later than the other soldiers. According to *Mopheme* of 25 January 2000, lawyers acting on Sako's behalf brought the matter of Sako's detention without trial before the High Court, as a result of which a Court Order was issued requiring a Court Martial to be convened to try him within 14 days following 21 January 2000. The respondents in the case were Sako's commanding officer, the Commander of the Defence Force and the Attorney-General and they were ordered to pay the costs.

Police Acquire New Speed Trap Equipment

According to a report in *Mopheme* of 18 January 2000, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service has acquired 'PRO Laser III Infra-red Cidar System' equipment which will enable it to make both a video record and simultaneous speed record of vehicles exceeding speed limits. Lesotho has the lowest speed limits in southern Africa, and probably at the same time the least observed speed limits. The urban speed limit is 50 km/h while the speed limit elsewhere is 80 km/h. Minibus taxis, however, commonly cruise on main roads at speeds between 100 and 120 km/h.

Lerato Masoabi Replaces Thabane in IPA

Lerato Masoabi, who was until recently editor of the LCD newspaper *Mololi* was on 21 January sworn in as one of the two LCD representatives on the Interim Political Authority. He replaces the Foreign Minister, Tom Thabane, whose other activities have prevented him from giving time to the IPA.

Disputes Continue within BNP

The former leader of the Youth Wing of the Basotho National Party, **Thesele 'Maseribane**, was suspended from the party by the party leader, **Justin Metsing Lekhanya**, just three days before the party's youth conference. This led to an attack on the BNP office by a 'gang' of about 40 youngsters on Tuesday 18 January. *Public Eye* of 21 January 2000 quoted a BNP secretary, 'Masemisi Motšepe, who said that during the incident: 'I was at the end of my wits with fear when they surrounded me and suddenly started ripping off my clothes and tried to snatch the keys from my hands'.

A number of incidents followed which were reported in *Mopheme* of 1 February 2000. A youth from Pulane supporting the 'Maseribane faction was kidnapped and assaulted on Sunday 23 January, and Tefo Koetle who was accused of the kidnapping was involved in a shooting incident at the BNP Centre on the following Wednesday in which three rounds were fired at Thesele 'Maseribane but missed.

Meanwhile 19 members of the BNP including Thesele 'Maseribane and Mamello Morrison were served with High Court Orders following an action brought in the High Court by the Party Leader, Justin Metsing Lekhanya. It was alleged that they had been harassing tenants at the BNP Centre, the larger part of which is leased out as shop and office space. The reality had been that the numerous members of the youth league had camped at the BNP Centre ('Leabua Square') for several days after arriving in Maseru on finding that their meeting had been cancelled and 'Maseribane suspended. During their occupation of the Centre, they held meetings at one of which they passed a vote of no confidence in Lekhanya. The general atmosphere had made normal business life at the Centre impossible. Indeed, they had even taken to assaulting people, such as Afrika Molungoa, editor of the *Mohahlaula* newspaper, who (according to *The Mirror* of 28 January) had unwisely asked the youth whether they were being paid by the LCD to ensure that the Setlamo Alliance (BNP, BCP, MFP etc) loses the next election.

Reconciliation between the opposing factions within the party remained elusive. Archbishop Mohlalisi offered his house as venue for a meeting on 23 February over which Bishop Khoarai would

preside to try to bring the sides together. The fact that the BNP has always been considered as the party closest to the Catholic Church prompted this move. However, the party leader, Metsing Lekhanya failed to turn up at the meeting. Meanwhile insults were traded. Mamello Morrison, as quoted in *The Mirror* of 3 March chided Lekhanya for snubbing a Bishop, while the BNP Secretary-General on Lekhanya's side spoke about the other faction as 'abusive kids'.

Mamello Morrison was meanwhile travelling with other baggage. She remained a salaried member of the Interim Political Authority, but not as a member of the BNP (nor indeed the MFP, which she had once staunchly supported) but as a representative of the Lesotho Education Party, which had received just 92 votes nation wide in the May 1998 general election. Although Thabo Pitso (who is the LEP leader and the party's other IPA representative) had sought to replace her, she had refused to vacate her seat, and had launched a tirade against him, with allegations that she had been 'sold like a cow in a public auction' (*The Mirror*, 3 March 2000). This seemed to relate to an allegation that Pitso had been given M10000 if he would nominate Morrison for an LEP seat on the IPA. In defending her decision not to vacate the LEP seat, Morrison challenged LEP procedures. Pitso had told her that the party does not have an executive committee, but she had now purportedly been dismissed following the advice of an LEP executive committee.

[Thabo Pitso, Leader of the Lesotho Education Party, is a quite different person from his namesake, the veteran educationist, Thabo Pitso, who is a former Principal of Morija Training College, and also a writer and Sesotho lexicographer]

Disputes Continue within BCP

The other main opposition party, the Basutoland Congress Party was also riven with internal disputes. A High Court ruling by Judge Tšeliso Monaphathi on Monday 17 January 2000 declared that the 25 September 1999 Special Conference called by the Leader of the Party, **Molapo Qhobela**, had been convened in breach of the party's constitution and was null and void. The rival 'six-pack' group held its own National Conference on 22 January 2000, and elected a new National Executive Committee without Molapo Qhobela, who did not attend. Indeed his membership was said to have lapsed because he had not renewed his membership by the deadline of 30 November 1999.

The Executive Committee elected on 22 January 1999 is led by **Tšeliso Makhakhe**, with Deputy Leader, Sekoala Toloane; Chairman, Thulo Mahlakeng; General Secretary, Sekoala Machali; and Treasurer, Molomo Malebanye.

Meanwhile, the party paper, *Makatolle*, which supported the Qhobela faction, failed to come out after December. However, the newspaper *Mohahlaula* generally supports the Qhobela faction, while *Moafrika*, previously an ardent supporter of this faction, was now showing signs of changing allegiance. Its headline of 28 January 2000 was *BCP e fetoloa terakone/kokoana ka ho e etsa lihlooho tse peli* (The BCP is being changed into a dragon monster by its developing two heads).

Plant and Vehicle Pool Service Privatised

The **Plant and Vehicle Pool Service (PVPS)**, the branch of Government responsible for the government's transport fleet, was privatised as a result of an agreement signed on 26 January 2000 with **Imperial Fleet Services**, a part of the Imperial Group. The Director of the Privatisation Unit, Muthusi Mashologu, as quoted in *Private Eye* of 28 January, stated that the plan to restructure PVPS was defined after government had 'received a forensic audit report that revealed shocking inefficiencies in the operations of the plant and mismanagement as well as waste of government's resources and assets'.

Under the agreement worth M80 million, Imperial holds 80% of the shares in the service, while 20% are held for sale to Basotho. Imperial acquires vehicles, equipment and existing stock as well as rights of rental at six PVPS garages in Maseru, Hlotse, Mohale's Hoek, Mphaki, Thaba-Tseka and

Qacha's Nek. The three-year agreement binds Imperial Fleet Services to outsource 30% of the services to Basotho in the transport industry. Direct management and control of the vehicles still remains, however, with user ministries and departments as if the vehicles are still owned by government.

New Periodicals Appear

A new monthly 8-page A4 Sesotho newspaper *Mesikong ea Thaba Machache* ('In the foothills of Mount Machache') appeared in January 2000. It is apparently a brainchild of members of the Lesotho Youth Federation. Stories covered include the King's impending marriage and extensive space is given to obituaries. More than 30% of the total news is devoted to football.

A very different 20-page A4 periodical is *The Storm*, which first appeared in December, and appears to be likely to appear once in two months. Two young people, Tsebo Matšasa and Pholo Letsosa are respectively the Editorial Manager and Administration Manager, and the titles of the articles in the first issue give some indication of the fare: Sex Boost (about traditional aphrodisiacs); Caring for Your Hands and Feet; Sex Trade Continues in Maseru; Beat Stress Now; Wedding of the Season (about former footballer, Moorosi Matela); Getting Set for Miss Lesotho; Father of My Child; Lesotho Gay's Organisation on the Rise; and Showbizz [sic] Giant in Politics (about Masitise Seleso, Leader of the newly formed Social Democratic Party).

Free Education in Standard One Begins

The introduction of free education in Standard One became in January a topic much discussed by teachers, parents and the press.

In a headline *Ke eo ntlo ea 'mamasianoke* ('This is the hamerkop's nest'), the Catholic Church paper, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* of 30 January 2000 reported on a meeting on 19 January of parents, teachers and Ministry of Education Staff held at Mazenod. Amongst developments promised were that the Ministry would be supplying M2 per child for school lunches and that tents would be used in place of classrooms when needed. Less acceptable was the requirement that teachers might have to teach two sittings of pupils, one in the morning and one in the afternoon without additional payment. It appeared that embarking on free primary education was as difficult as entering a hamerkop's nest: it was large and visible, but the way to go in was so disguised that successful entry was well nigh impossible.

Expanding on its avian theme, *Moeletsi* on page 2 of the same issue had a headline *Nthoena ke maholi a patile maeba* ('This thing is just pied starlings hiding the pigeons') referring to the Sesotho proverb which derives from the fact that pied starlings (largely insectivorous and therefore harmless) are often visible when rock pigeons are wreaking havoc hidden amongst the crops. The writer of this article, 'Chefane', makes reference to the fact that the Lesotho Government owns only two of the 1300 primary schools in the country (while 6 others are under Government control), and that what was happening was continuing the process of the *Education Act 1995* in which schools were being removed from church control and teachers no longer able to choose where they worked.

Elsewhere in Lesotho, all sorts of problems were arising. Some schoolteachers even reported that children who had already passed Standards Two to Four were being returned by their parents to Standard One (not necessarily in the same school), so that they could benefit from the free education not only this school year, but as promised in future years.

Moafrika Reports Rumours about new IEC Members

According to *Moafrika* of 28 January 2000, the new Independent Electoral Commission will have as members **Leshele Thoahlane**, **'Mamosebi Pholo** and **Mokhele Likate**.

Abel Leshele Thoahlane, who will head the commission, is both a lawyer and economist by training. During the period of military rule, he was for a time Minister of Finance & Planning, having replaced E. R. Sekhonyana in that post. Mamosebi Pholo, also a lawyer, has most recently been Chief Executive of the Water and Sewerage Authority. Mokhele Likate is a former Registrar of the National University of Lesotho, after which he has been in business for a number of years.

The previous Commission, which had conducted the 1998 election, had also been headed by a lawyer, Sekara Mafisa. The three members were given a farewell party and terminal benefits in February 2000. Although there was no evidence to suggest that they had done other than a good job under difficult circumstances, the majority of the political parties had looked for a scapegoat for their own lack of success and had regarded their continued employment as members of the IEC as unacceptable.

Luckless Police Remain in Gaol while Prosecutor Seeks Time to Study the Case

The 31 police who had been held in gaol since their arrest shortly after the police rebellion in February 1997 seemed likely to be destined for another lengthy period before judgment in their case was given.

The expatriate Director of Public Prosecutions who was leading the case on behalf of the Crown retired with effect from 31 December 1999, and when the court reconvened after the Christmas recess on 17 January 2000, the new DPP, Thakamatona Thetsane, asked for time to study the case. This was despite the fact that it had been long known that his predecessor, Siphon Mdluli, was leaving, which ought to have given him time to prepare to take over immediately. The trial judge, Mr Baptista Molai, granted the new DPP's application, and adjourned the case until 20 March 2000. Meanwhile the 31 police remained in gaol, bail not having been granted during the whole of the case.

When the trial did resume on 20 March, it was not the DPP who had taken over the case, but a newly hired South African lawyer, Advocate Roland Suhr, who appeared on behalf of the DPP.

Police Trialists Set World Record

The length of trial of those involved in the police rebellion has set a world record. Most of the accused had been arrested on 16 February 1997 and had been formally charged in the Magistrate's Court on 27 April 1997, the charges being High Treason, Seditious Conspiracy and Contravention of the Internal Security Act. The case had been transferred to the High Court where the same formal charges were made against them at the opening of the case on 24 November 1997. By February 1998, the defence lawyer had already been complaining about the long detention and that 'justice delayed is justice denied'. At the time few could have imagined that two years later the trial would still not have been completed.

According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, the world's longest criminal trial lasted from 30 November 1992 to 29 November 1994 in Hong Kong. The High Court then sat for 398 days to hear charges against 14 South Vietnamese boat people accused of murdering 24 North Vietnamese adults and children who died in a blazing hut during a riot at a refugee camp in Hong Kong in February 1992. The defendants were eventually acquitted, although some were convicted on lesser charges.

Lesotho's previous entries in the *Guinness Book of Records* related to its being the country with the highest lowest point and also for its being the place of discovery of the world's earliest mammal, *Megazostrodon*. The second record had subsequently been lost to elsewhere, but the highest lowest point record still stands. It no longer appears in the *GBR*, however, because the *GBR* varies its content each year in order to attract people to buy each new annual volume.

The 731 day record of the Hong Kong trial was passed by the Lesotho trial on 25 November 1999. This could mean an entry in the *GBR*, although many would probably prefer Lesotho to be known for other more pleasant reasons.

The trial of the 31 police is before Mr Justice Molai, who is aged 66 (the compulsory retirement age for judges in Lesotho is 75 (*The Constitution of Lesotho* §121(8))). If for some reason he were unable to complete the hearing or unable to deliver the judgment, the consequence could be a second trial of similar length, an outcome which would surely be in no-one's interest.

'Unsafe' Taxis Operating in Lesotho

A report in the *Mail & Guardian* of 4 February 2000 looked at the minibus taxi industry in southern Africa, where there are 120000 such 15-seater vehicles in South Africa alone, most of them manufactured by Toyota in South Africa, where special axles had been developed to accommodate the heavy passenger loads. However, minibus taxis still had an appalling accident rate (over 2000 deaths per year), and South Africa was taking steps to have the whole fleet replaced with either 18 or 35 seater vehicles which were considered safer.

The same report revealed that some 15000 similar vehicles were being imported annually direct from Japan by private syndicates mainly operating out of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. These vehicles were designed in Japan for transporting families, and were not designed for high axle loads. They were being bought in Japan when three or four years old at rock bottom prices and exported to southern Africa, where many of them found their way illegally into South Africa, as minibus taxis, even though they did not reach South African safety requirements.

If the facts in the report are true, it would imply that many, if not most, of Lesotho minibus taxis fall short of South African safety standards, and that the importers are making profits at the expense of many additional lives being lost in minibus taxi accidents.

Chinese Businessman Shot Dead at Lekhaloaneng

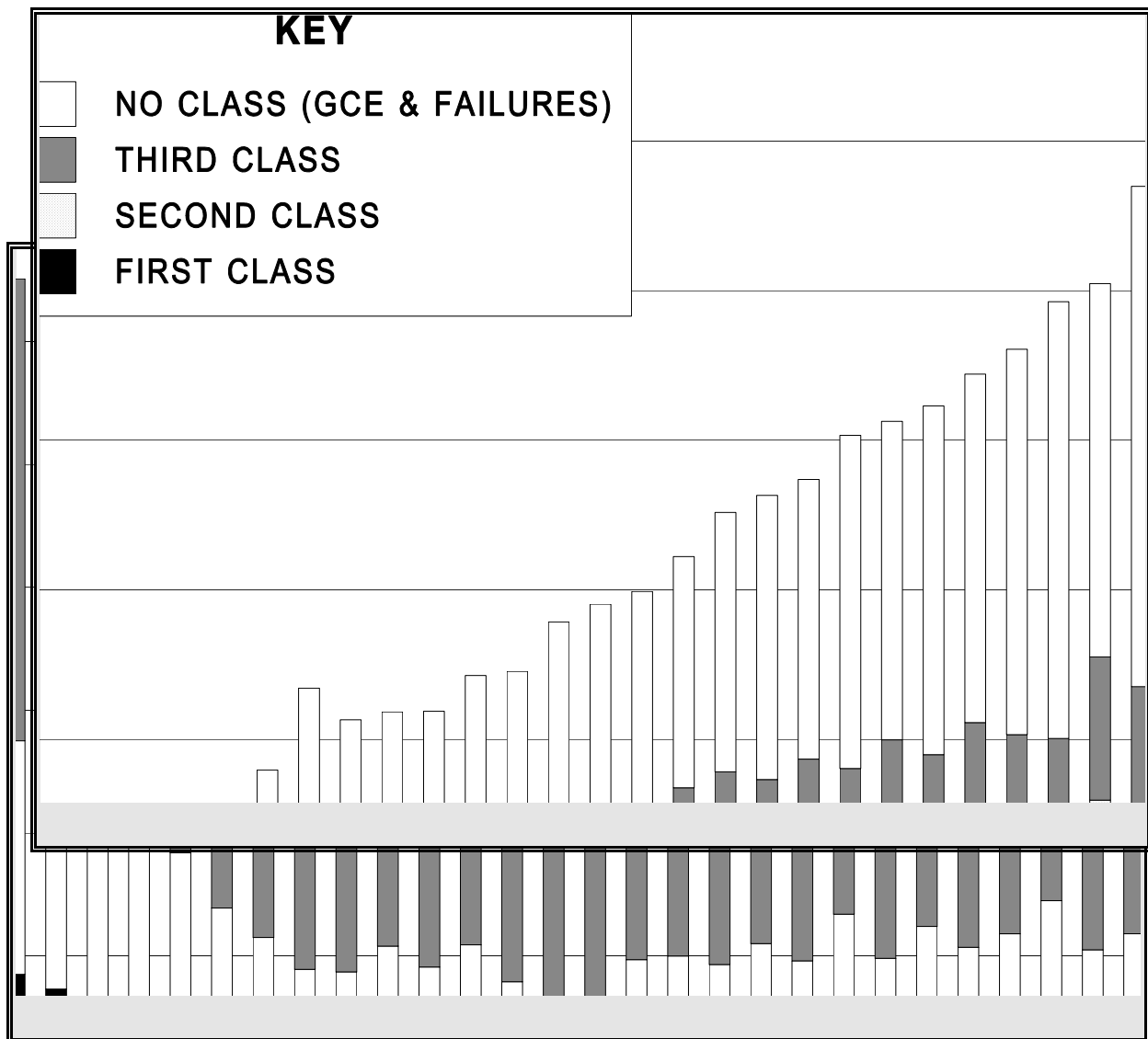
A Chinese businessman, **Wu Xiu Vu**, was shot dead on Friday 4 February, at his supermarket at Lekhaloaneng, which is close to Maseru on the Mafeteng road. The armed robbers stole a cash register, a cellular phone and the firearm of the supermarket's security guard.

All Chinese owned businesses in Maseru were closed on 9 February as a token of respect to the late Mr Wu. His death is one of a series of similar incidents over the past year when Chinese businessmen had been killed in robberies in both Maseru and Maputsoe, while in Mohale's Hoek, there had been an incident where a Chinese couple were stabbed but not killed.

1999 COSC Results Show Welcome Improvement

The 1999 **Cambridge Overseas School Certificate** results were released by the Examinations Council of Lesotho on 8 February 2000. There was a significant improvement in the results compared with 1998. However, the proportion of First Class passes was lower than in some recent years (see chart). Examination of the detailed lists shows that this was because of a poor performance in English, a credit in which is needed for a First Class Pass. Only 4% of candidates obtained a credit in English, but even this was better than the 1998 English performance which had contributed to the lowest ever proportion of COSC First Class passes. 7% of candidates obtained a credit in Mathematics.

Overall, the proportion of candidates obtaining a Certificate (First, Second or Third Class) was 44.2% and the best since 1973. In recent years, there have been considerable fluctuations in the results, the explanations for which can often be found in national events. For example the drop in 1995 followed a prolonged teachers' strike, and while there was a recovery in the following two years, there was again a drop in 1998 following civil unrest in the latter part of the year, the very time when pupils would normally be preparing for examinations.



The 1999 results show an enormous variation between the performance of candidates in different schools, suggesting that only a fraction of the potential of pupils is being brought out by the teachers in most schools. For example in two schools 100% of pupils obtained Schools Certificates. These two schools proved that 100% success can be achieved both in the Lowlands and the Maloti, because they were **Sacred Heart High School** at St Monica in the Lowlands of Leribe District and **St James High School** at Rafolatsane in Mokhotlong District. Other schools which returned excellent performances are **St Stephen's High School**, Mohale's Hoek (98.8% School Certificate pass), **St Mary's High School** (93.9%) and **Tšakholo High School** (92.1%). At the other end of the list of 124 Examination Centres were four institutions which describe themselves as high schools, although between them they did not have a single pupil who obtained a School Certificate. Two of these schools have been in existence for over a quarter of a century. One of them is **Peka High School**, one of the six oldest high schools in Lesotho. In the mid-1960s it was well known for obtaining the best COSC performances in Lesotho. What is not shown by the first chart is the enormous expansion in secondary education since Independence and this is shown in the second chart.

One feature that the second chart shows is that in 1999, for the first time since 1976, there has been a drop in the number of COSC candidates (from 5992 in 1998 to 5648 in 1999). In 1976 the drop followed a bulge which had been moving through the secondary school system since 1971, when there was a double promotion into secondary schools in order to shorten primary education from eight to seven years. This had led to a tremendous drop in standards, as can be seen on the first chart, in part because a large number of primary teachers were employed in secondary schools to teach subject

matter they were unfamiliar with, but also because of the politics of the time which had led to the arrest of many secondary school teachers, while others had gone into exile.

This time the drop in numbers must be ascribed to other causes. One may be the increasing numbers of Basotho attending secondary and high schools in South Africa. Also in 1999, the economic downturn following the unrest of 1998 has certainly resulted in more and more families finding it difficult to find the fees for high school education. However, which is the dominant cause is far from clear.

22 Die in Typhoid Outbreak in Qacha's Nek District

News reached Maseru and was broadcast over Radio Lesotho on 17 February of a **typhoid outbreak at Libobeng** in the north of Qacha's Nek District, which had claimed at least 22 lives since December, including 11 children. Libobeng is a valley on the remote right bank of the Senqu where there are no roads. The nearest village health centres served by the flying doctor are also at a considerable distance.

LUTARU Attacks Chairman of University Council

In a statement that was published on notice boards at the University and also appeared in the press, the **Lesotho University Teachers' and Researchers' Union (LUTARU)** on 10 February attacked the Chairman of the University Council. The statement was a follow-up on its earlier demands to have the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor R. I. Moletsane, dismissed. It accused the Chairman of Council, **Moletsane Monyake**, of ignoring LUTARU's previous demand, and planning to ensure that the Vice-Chancellor's contract was renewed when it expired in a year's time. Amongst accusations against Mr Monyake were one of nepotism, because of his family relationship to the Vice-Chancellor.

In its issue of 20 February 2000, the newspaper *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, published a Sesotho version of the LUTARU statement and also published pictures of 'Maletsema Secondary School at the Vice-Chancellor's village of Liphiring, the construction of which was claimed to have been aided by NUL funds. It also mentioned the pending case in which the Vice-Chancellor was suing LUTARU, *Moeletsi oa Basotho* and Radio Lesotho for M500000 damages for defamation.

New Sports Newspaper Makes its Début

A new tabloid Sesotho newspaper, *Selemela* ('The Pleiades'), made its appearance on 11 February 2000. Its name continues the tradition of naming newspapers after heavenly bodies. The editor is the veteran writer and journalist, A. B. Thoahlane, who until the previous November had been editor of Lesotho's oldest church newspaper, *Leselinyana la Lesotho*. The first issue of *Selemela* is 8 pages of tabloid, and its editorial claims it is the first Lesotho newspaper to cover sport at length. However, memories are short because there was a similar Sesotho weekly newspaper *Tsa Lipapali*, which lasted for just over two years from February 1990 to February 1992.

The sponsors of the new newspaper are the M K group of companies which has interests in the Lesotho clothing and construction industries and also owns the Wool Wagon shop in Maseru which serves as the newspaper's distribution office. The first issue devotes more than half of its copy to football, but also has news stories on tae kwon do, volleyball and darts.

Thaba-Bosiu Telephones Remain Cut

The telephone line to Thaba-Bosiu which had been already out of order throughout 1999, has now virtually disappeared. Thaba-Bosiu will apparently be without telephones for the conceivable future.

Installation of microwave links and fibre optic cables has made certain of Lesotho's long distance telephone lines redundant, and these have been allowed to fall into disuse. Instead of

recovering the wire and poles and selling them for scrap, however, the Lesotho Telecommunications Corporation, for reasons best known to itself, left the wires in place. Thieves discovered that they could help themselves to wire from these lines with impunity. Having exhausted the redundant lines, the thieves then turned to other sources of income, namely lines still in service. The Thaba-Bosiu line was cut and mined for wire and by early 2000 it had been stripped of wire throughout its length.

The matter has economic implications. Amongst facilities at Thaba-Bosiu are a Tourist Information Office, a Hotel (Mmelesi Lodge), a High School, the Blue Cross Centre for Rehabilitating Alcoholics, and a Post Office. A 'Basotho Cultural Village' for Thaba-Bosiu is also being constructed. All of these are now only accessible using cell phones, which have numbers quite different from those in the *Lesotho Telephone Directory*. Interestingly, the largest house in Thaba-Bosiu is a modern mansion belonging to Mr Andy Moqhali, the Chief Executive of VCL, Lesotho's cellular telephone company. The lack of a fixed line is presumably not a serious matter in his case, unless he wants internet access.

Basotho Hat Reopens

The **Basotho Hat**, which was completely burned during the riots of September 1998, reopened for business in February 2000. Operations had continued during the interim in the nearby Basotho Shield, which had escaped the attention of the rioters. The cost of the reconstruction was borne by the Lesotho Government which allocated the sum of M3 900 000 for the work during the 1999/2000 financial year.