

**T**HE independent press in Lesotho continues to suffer as a result of the crisis which engulfed the country in September. However, they have not been cowed into silence and continue to publish despite many obstacles. Lesotho's six independent newspapers, who were all affected by the looting and burning which followed the virtual invasion by South African and Botswanan troops into the country, are caught in a vicious cycle of mounting losses and unforeseen expenses. MISA reports.

Two of Lesotho's worst affected newspapers, MoAfrika and the Sun/Thebe, whose offices were both burnt down, have been able to relocate to other offices but now face the prospect of prohibitive rent. Southern Star, whose offices were also completely burnt down, has to date not found new office space.

Candi Ratabane Ramainoane, the editor of MoAfrika, told MISA that following the destruction of numerous buildings in the Maseru city centre, the lack of available space had resulted in a considerable hike in rent costs. Both MoAfrika and the Sun have only missed publication of one or two issues, while Thebe, the SeSotho-language sister newspaper of the Sun, has not been published yet since September due to lack of advertising. Both newspapers, however, are still having to work with an alarming lack of equipment, most of which was also destroyed during the burning and looting.

Both newspapers, along with another independent newspaper, Public Eye, are operating without any computers. In addition, these and other newspapers such as Mopheme and the Mirror, have had all their phone lines destroyed. The Lesotho Chapter of MISA, MILES, which escaped the ravages of the mob, is providing some relief by making its equipment available to needy publications. The Director of MILES, Bethuel Thai, reports that at least four newspapers, MoAfrika, Public Eye, the Mirror and Mopheme, continue to use the MILES offices for access to computers, telephones, fax and e-mail.

The lack of advertising and losses stemming from unpaid advertising bills continue to affect all the independent papers. Keketso Lawrance, the managing editor of Mopheme, told MISA that businesses which had advertised in his paper but which had subsequently been destroyed were unable to settle their bills, while several destroyed businesses had also booked space but obviously could not proceed with their commitments. This scenario was echoed by other newspapers. Two senior journalists from the Mirror interviewed by MISA reported that their newspaper had lost at least R15 000 due to advertising losses alone. The losses are compounded by a standing government directive to its ministries and parastatals not to advertise in certain papers considered to be critical of the ruling party.

While having to contend with this harsh economic environment, the current political situation in Lesotho is also proving very harsh for free media activity. Both government and independent journalists are faced

with the prospects of attacks or intimidation when seen at the wrong place or reporting on certain matters.

And Government journalists are still reeling from the 7 October instruction by the Minister of Telecommunications Nyane Mphafi that all state-employed journalists who "were seen at the opposition demonstrations" should write letters of resignation or face summary dismissal. The editor of the government-owned weekly Lentsoe La Basotho, Khahliso Lesenyane, informed MISA that while nothing further had transpired following the minister's threat, it had effectively scared off state-employed journalists from covering opposition rallies and events. A senior journalist from the state-owned Lesotho News Agency (LENA), speaking on condition of anonymity, told MISA that journalists at LENA had been informed that they could not report on anything relating to the political situation except for official statements from government.

Independent journalists and publications, on the other hand face a wide range of obstacles. Ramainoane reports that in recent months there has been an alarming increase in violence and intolerance from political parties in Lesotho, and particularly from the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) party. "Generally there is a lot of self-censorship and restraint because of fear. Many rallies, either by the ruling party or the opposition, are not being covered because of the fear of not being seen in a particular place," reports Ramainoane. He told MISA further that one of his reporters had been beaten up at an LCD rally between the 10th and 17th of August this year, while this same reporter had also been beaten up at a police roadblock simply because he was a reporter for MoAfrika.

Other journalists interviewed by MISA said that reporting on military and security matters was very difficult because they had to go through numerous security checks before reaching an official spokesperson. Women journalists also felt particularly threatened in investigating matters involving the South African and Botswanan invasion forces because of numerous allegations of rape involving these troops. In addition, Lesenyane of the government weekly told MISA that any reports on the allegations of atrocities committed by the invading forces had to be passed by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information first.

A flicker of hope for greater media freedom and equitable reporting on political matters in Lesotho lies perhaps in the newly introduced Interim Political Authority Bill. The Bill, which was introduced for discussion in the Lesotho Parliament on 30 October, stemmed from mediated talks between the government and opposition parties. It makes provision for an Interim Political Authority with executive powers and which will exist alongside the current government until fresh elections are held in 18

► continued on page 47

**The current political situation in Lesotho and the sudden predicament of a "pre-election" period begs for urgent intervention and support for the independent media in Lesotho.**

# Reeling

## from the crisis



**YFM: A STATE OF MIND**

► continued from page 33

"I think that the IBA has licensed radio stations which play music for which there will never be a substantial audience in this country — such as jazz and classical music. As such, they won't attract advertisers and will thus never be financially viable. They should have first licensed the successful format stations and then later, once these had proved viable, the niche stations. The failure of these niche stations may have a spillover effect on to the more successful stations in that advertisers won't differentiate and they'll simply say that 'radio is no good'. They will then put their advertising into other media."

The problem is further compounded, according to Abrahams, by the local content quotas imposed on radio stations by the IBA.

"YFM is in the fortunate position of being able to achieve a 40% local content. This is because the dominant local music that is exploding at the moment provides the staple of our play lists. However, if you take the other local major radio stations, they are all based on adult contemporary music and there just aren't enough local artists in this category for them to make the IBA quota. The only way around this problem is for these stations to get into partnership with record producers and retail outlets so that more local South African adult contemporary artists are recorded and promoted."

This leads Abrahams to discuss another issue of concern to him — the general lack, in South Africa, of co-operation between the record producers, radio stations and retail outlets. This is especially critical when it comes to the promotion of local music.

"You have to have record companies spending money to drive the process to bring out good product regularly, you have to have radio stations that support the music and you've got to have retail support so that when a kid hears the record on the radio he can go into a store and get it.

In SA you're lost before you begin. Sometimes radio picks up on good records but to get retail to stock them and to push them it only happens in the case of the big stars. Because the stores are doing OK they don't feel they have to try any harder."

Abrahams is also critical of the lack of professionalism of popular music production in South Africa, especially the lack of what are known in the music industry of artist and repertoire (A&R) people.

"The A&R people are concerned with the relationship between artists, songwriters, producers, image-makers, video producers. For example, you may have a great band but they have a terrible singer or bass player. It's up to the A&R person to recognise this and see what can be done. Alternatively, you may have a great band, but they can't write great songs. It's then up to the A&R person to find a songwriter. If one is only dealing with a singer, you need to decide what musicians you'll use to back him/her. The A&R person needs to have a good knowledge of the market and where their particular acts fit into this market. This strategic thinking and knowledge of relationships in popular music is crucial to the success of artists. Unfortunately artists seldom have all of this knowledge — that's why the role of the A&R person is so crucial.

"Jerry Wexler, for example, recognised that Aretha Franklin had been incorrectly promoted by Columbia Records. They didn't recognise her potential as a soul singer. Wexler surrounded her with great soul musicians, got in good soul music writers and in the process turned Franklin into the major female soul singer in America and transformed the face of American popular music. If we don't develop this area of expertise South African music will never move forward."

*Larry Strelitz is a songwriter and singer who teaches media studies in the Rhodes Department of Journalism and Media Studies.*



**REACHING OUT TO OUR COMMUNITY**

**MURRAY & ROBERTS**  
PO Box 1000 • Bedfordview • 2008 • South Africa

Tel: (011) 455-1410  
Fax: (011) 455-2222

**LESOTHO JOURNALISTS  
NEED URGENT SUPPORT**

► continued from page 6

months time. The authority will be tasked, among others, with "creating and promoting conditions conducive to the holding of free and fair elections; eliminating any impediments to legitimate political activity; [and] ensuring equal treatment of all political parties and candidates by all governmental institutions and in particular by all government-owned media, prior to and during the elections".

Government media representatives interviewed by MISA welcomed the introduction of the Bill, saying it would free them of the ruling-party stranglehold on their media allowing them to give greater coverage to all the political players in the country. They were also confident that they would live up to the expectation of providing fair and equitable coverage on political matters in the run up to the election.

The independent journalists interviewed by MISA, however, were not so confident about this. "Similar laws as those contained in the current Bill requiring fair and equitable treatment of political parties was contained in the previous Electoral Act, yet this was not carried out. Opposition parties and candidates were given minimal space in the government media," said Ramainoane.

The current political situation in Lesotho and the sudden predicament of a "pre-election" period begs for urgent intervention and support for the independent media in Lesotho. The government continues to enjoy a monopoly over the airwaves and despite several radio licences having been issued by the Ministry of Information in 1998, none of these stations is on air. If the harsh economic environment facing independent publications in Lesotho persists, and in the absence of any outside support, some of these publications may face closure, thus striking a blow to the information needs of the Lesotho people, while also reducing the chances of more vigorous reporting on political matters and parties in the run-up to the elections.