

LESOTHO TO PROSECUTE THIRD COMPANY

August 28, 2003

SAPA

Lesotho's attorney general said on Thursday he was preparing to prosecute a third multinational for alleged bribery in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Fine Maema said prosecutors hoped to secure an October trial date for the case of French construction company Spie Batagnolles. German engineering contractor Lahmeyer International was this week fined R10,6-million in the Lesotho High Court for bribery relating to the water project. Canadian construction and engineering company Acres International was earlier fined R15-million on similar charges. Lahmeyer, Acres and Spie Batagnolles were among several companies that were originally charged, together with former head of the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority **Masupha Sole**. After applications by the defendants the cases were separated. Maema said on Thursday they were "prepared to go all the way" with the prosecutions -- taking them head-on, one by one. This was despite the process being very taxing on the mountain kingdom's meagre resources. "It is very expensive for us, but the principle is the main issue here. "That is why we are determined to proceed," Maema said. In another related case, South African Michiel du Plooy is to be sentenced on September 10 and 11 in the Lesotho High Court. Du Plooy, from Ficksburg in the eastern Free State, pleaded guilty in June to acting as an intermediary in bribery payments to Sole. The payments were made through Du Plooy's Swiss bank account. He allegedly received more than US \$ 1-million, part of which reached Sole. The former chief executive is currently serving 15 years for accepting bribes from several international contractors and consultants. The bribes were to influence him to award lucrative contracts from 1992 to 1997 for the construction of the giant water project. The Lesotho government has been receiving much praise for proceeding with the extensive trials and investigations across international borders.