

Swazi editor sacked after democracy interviews

MBABANE, SWAZILAND: The chief editor of the *Swazi Observer* newspaper said on Tuesday, 17 January 2012, that he has been sacked after he published interviews with democrats on the future of Africa's last absolute monarchy.

Once a royal advisor to King Mswati III, Musa Ndlangamandla was named editor 12 years ago of the paper, which is owned by Tibiyo, a royal fund started with public money. The king holds the fund in trust for the nation.

"Yes, I attended a meeting with the board chairman but I can't divulge what was discussed as it is being handled at very high levels," Ndlangamandla told AFP, saying his retrenchment package was still being discussed.

Ndlangamandla stirred controversy in his Asikhulume (Let's Talk) column where he interviewed pro-democracy activists about the path that Swaziland should take.

But his biggest fall from grace was his newspaper's stories claiming that prime minister Barnabas Dlamini, a hardline royalist, had appropriated state land illegally.

An official probe was set up by parliament, but before the investigation was finalised the king intervened and ordered all parties to drop the matter.

Ndlangamandla was subsequently sidelined from covering the king's foreign trips and snubbed at all royal functions.

The paper is one of Swaziland's two dailies, along with the private *Times of Swaziland*.

Mswati has faced growing criticism and unprecedented public protests over the last year due to a financial crisis that has pushed the kingdom to the brink of bankruptcy.