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BUSINESS DAY, Thursday, March 27 2003

IFP struggling to retain control of KwaZulu-Natal

ANC plays the pied piper as politicians change their tune

Xolani Xundu

Political Correspondent

THE Zulu nationalist drum, which once had some people in KwaZulu-Natal dancing in unison as Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi played, is losing rhythm.

Six days into a period allowing MPs and MPLs to cross the floor without losing their seats, the party finds itself in a quandary as it struggles to retain its hold over the province and the coveted premiership.

Party members in the KwaZulu-Natal legislature have been made to sign pledges declaring their loyalty as the African National Congress (ANC) juggernaut leaves no stone unturned in its attempt to wrest control of the province from the IFP.

Following the defection of former IFP member and education MEC Gabriel Ndaba-

ndaba to the ANC, Omie Singh from the Democratic Alliance (DA) to the ANC, and the resignation of former IFP MPL Theresa Millen to form her own party, the balance of power in the province is tipped in favour of the ANC.

This leaves the IFP with 33 seats to the ANC's 34. The DA, which is a coalition partner of the IFP, has six; the United Democratic Movement has one and is likely to vote with the IFP.

The Minority Front and the New National Party, both ANC allies, have two and three seats respectively. The African Christian Democratic Party has two.

This means that the ANC needs only two defections to govern the province and indications are that the party is spending sleepless nights trying to lure IFP members.

IFP spokesman Reverend Musa Zondi says: "We've got proof that senior ANC leaders

... are talking to our members, something which is threatening to destroy our relations."

He says the IFP will "step aside" should the ANC take control of the province. The IFP will focus its energy on preparing for next year's general elections.

Political analyst Aubrey Matshiqi believes the change in the balance of power in the province will harm relations between the two parties at both national and provincial levels.

ANC spokesman Mtholephi Mthimkhulu refused to be drawn into whether the party would get the two members it required to take control of the province.

"The IFP is increasingly becoming irrelevant for progress in KwaZulu-Natal," he said. "The IFP has surely reached its sell-by-date. It is only a matter of time before it closes shop."

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INKATHA FREEDOM PARTY

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