

TNA CEO calls for media transformation debate

Parliament's portfolio committee on communications should host a debate on transformation and ownership in the media industry, The New Age (TNA) CEO Nazeem Howa said in an editorial yesterday.



The meeting should include chief executives and editors of South African media houses, he said.

"The portfolio committee has representation across the various political parties so we are happy to subject ourselves to any review," Howa wrote.

"But by the same token, we would wish to ask probing questions about the industry, its structure, and willingness to open itself to new competitors."

He was responding to a report in the City Press on Sunday that Telkom invested R34m in advertising in TNA newspaper from December 2011 to November 2012.

Part of an on-going narrative?

"It's similar to the patronising and racist mindset of some of [the] opposition politicians who imply that the senior executives like Pinky Moholi at Telkom, Brian Molefe at Transnet, Brian Dames at Eskom, and others who run parastatals don't know what they are doing and do not apply their minds when they spend their budgets," Howa was quoted as saying in a front page article in TNA.

"By implication, City Press is saying these CEOs and their management teams are incompetent and corrupt.

"In my view, City Press's story is part of an ongoing and sustained narrative that says since black people (read the ANC) have taken over the running of our government, major corporations, and parastatals, those involved are inherently corrupt."

In the same article, City Press editor Ferial Haffejee said: "I believe The New Age has been a breath of fresh air to the media landscape and sharpened all our acts with regard to the coverage of provinces."

"In addition, the [TNA business] briefings are a smart idea and the top six post-Mangaung briefing was a scoop.

"We follow public money because that's in the public interest and it's noteworthy that public money has, in the main, funded The New Age, though I do not believe that the Infogate comparison is apposite or relevant."

Cameras and notebooks are at the ready

She said a request to interview Howa went unanswered.

"He said he'd get back to me and we are still waiting, cameras and notebooks at the ready."

On Sunday, The City Press reported that the most recent Nielsen Adex report revealed that Telkom, which is 40% owned by government, was the TNA's top advertiser between December 2011 and November 2012.

It was responsible for a third of the newspaper's advertising revenue.

It was previously reported that Telkom sponsored 12 business breakfasts for TNA to the tune of R12m in the 2012/13 financial year.

The African National Congress resolved at its national conference in Mangaung in December that Parliament should continue to investigate the feasibility of the proposed media appeals tribunal.

The party said this needed to be done within the framework of the country's Constitution.

"The ANC remains committed to a media climate that is free from vested political and commercial interests," it said in its resolution.

The ANC has also resolved that the Competition Commission should focus on anti-competitive practices in the sector. It also held that the advertising industry needed to be transformed to ensure it contributed to media diversity.

At its conference in Polokwane in 2007, the ANC resolved that there was a need for the tribunal because it was unhappy with the state of the media and its level of transformation.

Source: Sapa, via I-Net Bridge

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