

Naspers says it won't force MultiChoice to take ANN7 off air

The Naspers Board has released a statement announcing that they will not interfere and force MultiChoice to take the ANN7 news channel off the air... The statement reads as follows:



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There seems to be persistent baiting of Naspers to intervene in the affairs of MultiChoice. While some reporting is no doubt driven by an honourable wish to expose corruption, some of it is clearly intended to apply pressure on Naspers to force MultiChoice to take the news channel ANN7 off the air.

That channel is closely associated with the Gupta family and, given the recent exposure of corruption linked to them, it is felt inappropriate that they should have a voice on television and that MultiChoice should facilitate that. A wide variety of issues, complaints and allegations have recently been made.

A few notes about that:

- Some allegations are even at face value spurious or even malicious, for example reports that the Guptas have a stake in Takealot. Or that a public meeting of the top executives of MultiChoice and the SABC to negotiate satellite and DTT channel carriage - which was called by the SABC, conducted at their main premises, attended by their top echelon and duly minuted - was somehow clandestine and illegal.
- Some allegations need more time to check thoroughly. We operate many businesses in 120 countries and need to respect the autonomy of our operating companies, where we have separate independent boards, plus partners or other shareholders. The responsibility for dealing with these allegations lies with the MultiChoice board. We have confidence in them handling the matter, following their governance procedures. Naspers is committed to strong governance and requires the same of its subsidiaries. Of course, once they've done that properly, they will report back to the Naspers board and the public.
- A suggestion by ex-communications minister Yunus Carrim that Koos Bekker once met with him regarding encryption is perfectly accurate. Here are the facts: this meeting took place in Pretoria and was for the full duration also attended by Minister Pravin Gordhan, whom we greatly respect. Minister Gordhan can attest to the content of the meeting and whether any Gupta-related or any other illegal matter was discussed.

- For the record, neither of Ton Vosloo, previous chair of Naspers, Koos Bekker, present chair, or Bob van Dijk, CEO, had to their best recollection ever in any country met any member of the Gupta family at any but public functions, never discussed anything with them, never even received written communications or a single telephone call from them.
- We understand the frustration some people feel that a channel associated with corruption is still being broadcast. But the nature of a satellite platform is to provide the largest number and the most diverse voices for the public to choose from. The public decides what to watch. Media freedom and diversity are values worth protecting in an open democracy. We do not think it wise to terminate a channel that participates in the debate about ANC succession barely two weeks before the elective conference.

So, in conclusion, while we understand the frustration, we also suggest that further baiting of Naspers to override MultiChoice in this matter is not conducive to an open democracy.

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