

End in sight for SABC board?

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NEWSWATCH: The SABC's controversial board could be heading to a shameful early exit by September as the ANC in parliament pushes for a proposal to amend the Broadcasting Act that will make it 'legal' to fire the embattled group, according to Sapa and The Sunday Independent. But chairperson Khanyisiwe Mkhonza remains defiant and undeterred by the move, saying for now it is business as usual.

"It does not impact on the board's work," she told The Sunday Independent.

ANC caucus spokesperson Khotso Khumalo was quoted as saying: "The ANC wishes to endorse the memorandum of the portfolio committee... setting out the committee's legislative proposal to amend the Broadcasting Act."

If section 15 of the Act is indeed amended, it could lead to a premature end of Mkhonza and her acolytes' reign, to the delight of the board's group of enemies which include thrice-suspended CEO Dali Mpofu, countless demoralised employees and senior managers who signed a petition calling for the board to resign and sent a letter to the head of state, requesting him to fire the board.

The portfolio committee said its long-term goal is to free the board of political influence and have it selected by a judge and an independent panel of experts, according to The Sunday Independent.

"But for now, it wants the president to have the right to fire board members on the recommendation of MPs and for the National Assembly to be able to propose dissolving the board," the paper said.

Last night, an SABC top source told Bizcommunity.com: "Even though I cannot comment on the ANC's proposal as the party is fighting its own battle and we are fighting our own, our wish is to see this board go immediately and that position has not changed."

However, another top source was diplomatic when asked to comment: "The ANC caucus move is not only aimed at removing this board. It is about filling a legislative gap that exists in the statutes of the public broadcaster.

"Apart from the Broadcasting Act, the Company Act and articles and a memorandum of understanding, there was no founding document that enabled us to deal with some unforeseen issues.

"The fundamental aim is about creating a legislative environment and mechanisms that will help deal with all problems related to the ones that we are having now at the SABC."

Since its controversial appointment by president Thabo Mbeki in December, the board has had a tough time and has on several occasions come under a lot of criticism from analysts, civil society groups, independent media networks and the ANC's alliance partners allied to Jacob Zuma, Mbeki's archrival political enemy.

The board, which is set to spar against Mpofu in the Johannesburg High Court on Tuesday 1 July 2008, has refused to lift his suspension - a pre-condition set by the former CEO to start the mediation process as recommended by Judge Mohamed Jajbhay last week.

Meanwhile, sabcnews.com reports that minister of communications Ivy-Matsepe-Casaburi is said to be assembling a team of experts to assist in formulating recommendations for a turnaround strategy at the SABC.

The team will include broadcasters, corporate governance experts, financial managers, turnaround strategists and technological experts.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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