

Independent fires suspended editor

Former *Cape Times* editor Alide Dasnois has been dismissed by Independent News & Media SA (INMSA) on the grounds that she let her personal feelings against her employer guide her editorial decisions.

Dasnois was suspended on 6 December, the day after the death of former President Nelson Mandela, after she led the front page of the *Cape Times* with an article on the Public Protector's findings relating to Sekunjalo Investments. INMSA executive chairman Iqbal Survé is chairman of the Sekunjalo board.

The article told how Sekunjalo benefited from a R800m fishing patrol vessel tender that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries had been improperly awarded. Dasnois published a special wrap-around edition of the newspaper that had four pages devoted to Mandela.

She was immediately removed from her editorship and offered an alternative position to edit a yet-to-be created labour bulletin. She turned down the offer.

Dasnois took her case to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, and INMSA instituted disciplinary action against her.



Alide Dasnois: An editor recognised for her courage and integrity. (Image: IOL)

She remained on the company's payroll while the proceedings were conducted. Late last week the disciplinary hearing determined that Dasnois was guilty of six out of eight charges brought against her by the company.

Yesterday, Dasnois's legal representatives issued a statement about her dismissal.

In their statement they quoted the chairman of the hearing, Independent Newspapers director Takudzwa Hove, as saying: "It has also been demonstrated that the decision not to lead editorially with Mandela's death was most probably influenced by personal feelings against her new employer hence the publication of the public protector's report as a lead story on the day. It's been demonstrated in testimony that there was a deliberate attempt to tarnish Sekunjalo and your actions plus those of other senior members and reporters ... bring into question your integrity and that of some senior members of the Cape Times newsroom.

"This demonstrates lack of professional judgment and integrity in that you failed (to) put aside personal feelings ahead of the interests of the readers of the newspapers by not running the most newsworthy story of the day."

Alison Tilley of the Open Democracy Advice Centre said Dasnois would take her issue to the Labour Court and a fund had been set up to help pay her legal costs. "The dismissal of Dasnois, who has worked on five of INMSA's publications, three of them as editor, and who was awarded the 2014 Nat Nakasa award for courage and integrity in journalism, has created a chilling effect among the editors and journalists in the company."

Two weeks ago the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef) selected Dasnois as this year's recipient of the Nat Nakasa award for courageous journalism. When the award was presented, Dr Survé stormed out of the function as he expressed dissatisfaction with her winning.

A week later, Sanef deputy chairman Makhudu Sefara resigned as editor of another INMSA newspaper, *The Star*. INMSA deputy executive chairman Tony Howard said then that Sefara was leaving because he could not agree with the company on how best to use his talents.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>