

Journalists simply focus on scandalising the ANC governments says Muthambi

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The measure of a journalist is in "how ruthless their reporting can be about" the African National Congress (ANC) government, Communications Minister Faith Muthambi says.

She used her budget vote speech on Friday to hit out at the media for focusing on "scandalising government even if that means not getting all the facts right".



"To some media houses their main mission is simply to paint this government as corrupt, hapless and inept, it has now become common cause that the independence and professionalism of many journalists are now measured on how ruthless their reporting can be about this ANC-led government," she said.

The ANC has said previously that media should be regulated and could not be allowed to do as they pleased.

The party has been pushing for the establishment of a media appeals tribunal, arguing that self-regulation is not enough to hold the media accountable. At its national general council last year, the party resuscitated the idea of forming a

media appeals tribunal - a decision initially taken at the party's Polokwane conference in 2007.

"There is a huge disconnect between the expectations of both government and media on what exactly the role of the media should be. On the one hand government has taken a view that media is a partner and consequently lined up a whole strategy and delivery mechanism on this false premise," Muthambi said.

She said every fortnight since President Jacob Zuma took office in 2009, the government has held post-Cabinet briefings with video conferencing facilities to link up both Cape Town and Pretoria.

"At any given media briefings, the Cabinet statements are generally no less than 10 pages of insightful content that covers current affairs, Cabinet decisions, Presidential engagements, national achievements, conferences and commitments of ministers both locally and internationally.

"The release also contains pertinent details of progress reports in terms of the outcomes as per the delivery contracts between the President and ministers.

"Notwithstanding these, our media would rather focus on scandalising government even if that means not getting all the facts right. It could also be argued that racist tendencies also play a role in the unrelenting attempts aimed at stigmatising a black government led by the ANC."

Muthambi said print media transformation was her department's flagship project for the 2016-17 financial year.

The department sought to address not only print media ownership, but also the ownership of printing press, the measurement of circulation, distribution channels and the assessment of regulatory instruments to regulate the affairs of media practitioners.



Faith Muthambi

"We will during the second quarter of the financial year host a colloquium on print media transformation with all role players including the public," said Muthambi.

'Pressure at polls'

Democratic Alliance (DA) MP and communications spokeswoman Phumzile van Damme said because the ANC was under pressure at the polls and stood to lose support in a number of major municipalities, "it now, like the government before it, seeks total control over SA's public print and broadcast media".

"Over the last year, Faith Muthambi, the Minister of Communications, or rather, the minister of propaganda has embarked on a state capture project to once again ensure that government has total control over public broadcasting, in particular," said Van Damme, citing among others the Broadcasting Amendment Bill removing Parliament's role in the appointment of the SABC's nonexecutive board members, and giving the minister and the president, members of the executive, the power to do so.

Digital migration

Muthambi also provided an update on the digital migration project. SA already lags behind much of Africa on migration and missed last year's June International Telecommunications Union deadline to switch its broadcast signal to digital. Muthambi said the government would announce the analogue signal switch-off date when more than 80% of the TV households have been migrated to digital TV.

"To make digital migration a success, we will work with the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services and the National Treasury to come up with a mechanism on how (state-owned signal distributor) Sentech can be assisted in maintaining two networks system (dual illumination) costs (of both analogue and digital signals)."

Muthambi, however, bemoaned the lack of funding for some of the digital migration projects such as education and awareness campaigns.

The department's total budget for the 2016-17 financial year amounts to just more than R1.3bn, of which R899m comprises transfers to the entities.

"As indicated to the portfolio committee, this skewed allocation is a clear indication that the department is not adequately funded to fully discharge its mandate as pronounced by President Jacob Zuma in May 2014," said Muthambi.

Source: BDpro

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