

Guptas sue Sunday Times for R500m

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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Atul Gupta, the MD of Sahara Holdings and executive chairman of TNA Holdings, owners of the New Age newspaper, has issued summons through the North Gauteng High Court against the editor of the Sunday Times and the newspaper's management, demanding defamation damages to the tune of half a billion rands.

The lawsuit is in response to a story in the Sunday Times published on 17 March this year and headlined "Guptas try to 'buy' SAA boss."

Defamatory

According to the summons, the Gupta family feels that the article was "wrongful and defamatory" with regard to charges, among others, that the Guptas:

- Tried to bribe a senior official of SAA
- That they were "shady dealers"
- That they hosted a meeting in Johannesburg during October 2012 during which a R100,000 bribe was offered
- That they hosted another meeting at their Johannesburg home during which a bribe of R500,000 was offered to a senior SAA official
- That they are known as a "corrupt family"
- And that "the family is known to wield so much power that they would summon cabinet ministers and senior government officials to their home allegedly to conduct further unlawful and inappropriate business dealings."

At the time of writing, the Sunday Times had not yet received any summons from the High Court.

Enter an ombud

In an interesting sideline to the story that appeared in the Sunday Times, it was picked up and part of it included in an investigative article on SAA published in the Mail & Guardian after which the M & G's own Ombudsman, Franz Kruger, commented that in "newspaper stories, as in life, sometimes there are more questions than answers. But here, the effect is simply vague and tantalising, leaving this reader, at least, frustrated. It reads a bit like a fishing expedition."

The issuing of a summons follows an offer, according to the summons itself, that the Sunday Times was given the opportunity to retract the article but chose not to do so.

Quite how far this game of legal brinkmanship is going to go is anyone's guess but it does seem that the Gupta family has

taken about as much as it can stand from newspapers that are in direct competition with the New Age. On the other hand, the Sunday Times is no stranger to litigation and has a reputation of standing its ground and punching back.

It is going to be a fascinating battle and one that will give media watchers something a lot more interesting than the now incredibly boring SABC saga and Top-TV's plaintive cries for porn.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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