

SABC reporters vs Govin Reddy: heated debate rages on

The criticism levelled against SABC reporters and newsreaders by board shortlist nominee Gov Reddy last week in Cape Town continues to generate a [heated debate](#) as several voices of reason enter the fray, which they believe is critical for the survival of the public broadcaster.

 Bylssa Sikiti da Silva 25 Jan 2011



Reddy last week branded SABC reporters "pathetic" and lacking the cutting edge, and alleged that SABC newsreaders are not trained and do not always understand what they are reading.

Echoed Reddy's sentiments

William Bird, head of the Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), this week echoed Reddy's sentiments, saying that some SABC reporters are indeed pathetic and ill-prepared. Nevertheless, he said the public broadcaster continues to employ some outstanding reporters, producers and presenters.

"I imagine Reddy was referring to broader credibility issues, as well as morale and news quality issues, which all clearly need urgent and critical attention," Bird said. "Similar criticism could be levelled at some of our print media. The difference, however, is that this is our public broadcaster, and as such should be the standard to aspire to.

"The numerous crises and impact on staff morale, as well as lack of clear knowledge and vision in the SABC as a whole, has resulted in a deterioration of news quality. But with over 18 services, to say all are pathetic is an indication of the scale of the challenge for the SABC in rebuilding its credibility," Bird stressed.

Reddy, an academic and board member of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper who, alongside 14 candidates is vying for the four positions of SABC board members, appeared in the parliamentary 'dock' on Friday, 21 January 2011, to be interviewed by the Portfolio Committee on Communications. The committee, which interviewed the last six candidates on Friday, including Reddy, was chaired by M Magazi of the ruling ANC according to the Parliamentary Monitoring Group.

Slammed for becoming a cheap brand

The outspoken Reddy also slammed SAfm - the radio station he founded in 1995 - for becoming a cheap brand. "It was supposed to be a quality station talk show catering for all South Africans. I wanted to have good documentaries and features, etc. Now it is a cheap talk show similar to 702," he was quoted as telling the committee.

While some observers believe he hit the right tones by telling it as it is, others, however, say he might have gone a bit too far, and perhaps he has jeopardised his chances to be chosen by the committee, whose recruitment and interviews processes are closely watched by the ruling ANC.

Critics constantly argue that the public broadcaster, which many observers believe has an 'incurable disease', has over the years become an ANC propaganda machine. Reddy, who likened the SABC to a patient with multiple organ failure, was also quoted as saying: "There is no point fixing kidneys when the lungs have also gone."

"Hard to know where to begin"

Bird explained: "It is hard to know where to begin. It is a series of interlinked structural, financial, people-based, vision-based and censorship-based, as well as managerial based issues and problems, that must be addressed for the others to operate."

"To place too much emphasis in any single one will not save the public broadcaster. Rather we need, as many candidates pointed out, a diverse series and set of skills in the board. We then need Government, Parliament, civil society and critically ICASA to all play their oversight roles and then we will really make big strides."

"Placing too much hope in the board alone will only deepen the crises. We need all those I listed, as well as all staff at SABC, to okay their role."

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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