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Zondo Commission – determination to forge ahead with digital migration was Carrim’s downfall

Former communications minister Yunus Carrim says his stance on the controversial digital migration led to personal attacks aimed at him by those who benefited from the current analogue broadcasting format. Before the Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture today, the ANC veteran listed media companies Naspers and Multichoice as the ones that went out of their way to destroy his name, and labelled antics used by Multichoice to influence government policy as “policy capture”.

Carrim told the commission that he met with Naspers head Koos Bekker in Cape Town – Bekker was also in Thabo Mbeki’s advisory panel at that time. He claims that Bekker told him that what’s good for Naspers is good for the country and added that the policy Carrim was pursuing was outdated and unnecessary; Bekker furthermore accused Carrim of “speaking the language of eTV”.

The former minister also said Bekker seemed to know a lot about what was going on during SABC and MultiChoice meetings that were supposed to be closed, and was trying to prevent possible competition because of market domination by Naspers and Multichoice. Had the digital migration process been completed it would have been easier to produce more channels and pay TV would have been cheaper.

Carrim emphasised that it was not a personal conflict between him and MultiChoice – which entered into a deal with the SABC in 2013 – but it was political as he was the minister at the time and the attacks would have been directed to anyone who was minister. “They had a team focusing specifically on me because they did not like the position I was pursuing regarding digital migration.”

Carrim also told the commission that he did not approach it to testify because he did not want to be accused of settling political scores or being bitter about not being reappointed as minister after the 2014 elections. “I was asked by numerous ANC ministers to approach the commission and talk about my experiences as minister of communications but I did not want to do that because I would have been accused of using the commission to settle political scores. I fully support the commission and commend the work it is doing.”

Commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo stressed that such reasoning may deny the commission the opportunity to do its work effectively. He said that those who discourage others from approaching the commission with information that falls within its terms of reference may be doing so out of fear that more revelations may threaten their territory.

“The less the commission knows, the better for certain individuals. Withholding information might also affect the findings of the commission so we have to try and just do the right thing,” said Zondo.

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