

Is this the new age?



By Ashraf Garda: @ashrafgarda1

28 Jul 2010

New age, new era, turning over a new page? All those thoughts came to me at the launch of [The New Age](#) newspaper a week back. A few days later, I was left wondering about this new age the South African media are entering into...



Both the chief funder Atul Gupta and the paper's editor Vuyo Mvoko were my guests on the Media@SAfm show on Sunday, 25 July 2010. They said a lot - but it's also what they didn't say that left me puzzled.

First, Gupta was rather irritated by my line of questions: Is the South African government funding the paper, or co-funding it? What about business spin-offs for a boldly pro-government daily? Gupta went on the attack, asking me why I was battling to understand what he had already said, that he alone was the funder.

Missed a golden rule

He may own a piece of the media but Gupta missed a golden rule in media: ask questions, twice or thrice, until the answer is clear. And don't show you're irritated when being interviewed, even if you are. You will lose the sympathy vote.

I had to remind him that I needed to ask the questions but he didn't have to answer. "Is this newspaper Government backed?" "NO!" "Is it not pro-government in the hope of securing government deals?" "No, we have not done any business with Government!"

The New Age's front man then took a back seat, but not before irritating a few SAfm listeners, who called him arrogant and defensive and not a man they would want to buy a newspaper from.

Vuyo Mvoko then stepped in to the hot seat and answered most questions with confidence, "Yes, we will look for the positive stories. Yes, we will be critical. Yes, it's been done successfully in other countries. Yes, nobody questioned Tokyo Sexwale and Saki Macozuma's stakes in the media."

Left puzzled

Mvoko sold the newspaper well until I asked him to name some of the contributors. I was left puzzled when he said he couldn't - he would do so at a later date. Just three days earlier, the selfsame Mvoko and Gupta, together with former minister Essop Pahad, had addressed the press conference where these names were rattled off without reservation.

The editor explained that it was only fair he does so when all the contributors were finalised. Did it really matter if he had only few contributors thus far? Of course not, the launch issue was more than a month away.

The editor stood his ground and kept his potential readers in the dark, so I blurted out three names that came to mind: political analysts Shadrack Gutto, Adam Habib and SA's cricket captain Graeme Smith- all three highly respected with great followings.

Listeners felt short-changed

Once again, the SAfm listeners felt short-changed. "Why the PR own goal?" I wondered.

We promised to talk again just hours before the before *The New Age* really comes of age, by which time we'll all see the positive side of Gupta's Golden Egg

At just R3.50, I cannot imagine being short-changed, but I do wish these media bosses would understand that telling all is all positive, too.

ABOUT ASHRAF GARDA: @ASHRAFGARDA1

I host the Special Assignment Investigative Journalismshow Thursday 9.30pm on SABC3 - and I present the Media@safmshow - Sundays 9-11am as well as Afternoon Talk on SAfmRadio weekdays 2-4 pm.

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