

NCC rejects CTi News' license renewal

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 20 November 2020 05:33 -



National Communications Commission Chairman Chen Yaw-shyang in Taipei yesterday announces the commission's decision to reject CTi News' license renewal application.

Photo: Tu Chien-jung, Taipei Times

National Communications Commission (NCC) commissioners yesterday reached a unanimous decision to reject CTi News' (中視新聞) license renewal application on the grounds that the channel's frequent contraventions of media regulations showed that it has a malfunctioning internal control mechanism that cannot be rectified.

This was the first time since it was established in 2006 that the commission denied a license renewal to a news channel.

NCC Chairman Chen Yaw-shyang (陳耀興) announced the landmark decision at the commission's weekly media briefing.

The commission denied the renewal request because the news channel was fined a total of NT\$11.53 million (US\$400,932) for 25 breaches of media regulations between 2014 and this year — significantly more than other news channels, Chen said.

Last year, the commission received 962 consumer complaints regarding the channel's broadcasting content, which accounted for about 31 percent of all complaints received that year, he said.

Evidence the commission collected at an administrative hearing on Oct. 26, and a meeting between NCC commissioners and CTi News on Nov. 4 showed that the fundamental problem was that the channel's largest shareholder, Want Want China Times Media Group (旺旺中時媒體集團) founder Tsai Eng-ming (蔡英明), had directly and indirectly intervened in the news production process.

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The channel's management said it did not have a full-time managing director in the news department for five months in 2018, and that the post was then assumed by Chiu Chia-yu (邱家裕), who was Tsai's special assistant, Chen said, adding that during this time, the channel's breaches increased.

During the news conference, Chen was bombarded with questions from reporters, particularly by CTi News journalists.

They asked whether the commission was concerned that its ruling would leave the nation with only one political voice.

"Taiwan has freedom of the press, and it has never been reduced to one voice after it became a real democratic country and entered the digital era," Chen told them.

Asked if the commission is prepared to engage in a legal battle, Chen said that it respects CTi News' right to seek redress through the judicial system, adding that it is confident that the review process would hold up to scrutiny.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) yesterday extended sympathy to the employees of CTi News, but said that it does not believe the decision infringes on freedom of the press.

In a statement released after the NCC's decision, RSF said freedom of the press does not mean an absence of oversight.

The group also supported the legitimacy of the NCC's investigation, saying that a periodic licensure review by an independent agency is standard procedure in democracies.

It also called for the same standards to be applied to applications from media outlets of all political stripes.

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The government must take responsibility for the nation's past and current lack of journalistic ethics and editorial autonomy, the group added.

Reporters are working in an extremely polarized and profit-seeking environment, which affects the people's right to complete and undistorted information, it said.

No matter what party is in power, RSF called on the government to ensure journalistic integrity.

Additional reporting by Kayleigh Madjar

Source: [Taipei Times - 2020/11/20](#)