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MBC fights against KCC's appointment of new FBC board of directors

MBC's union members say they will not accept the administration's takeover of public broadcasting



Choi Si-jung, a commissioner of the Korean Communications Commission, heads for the conference room to participate in a meeting in which members of KCC will decide on the new board of directors for the Foundation for Broadcasting Culture, July 31.

Tensions are on the rise within MBC, following Korea Communications Commission's (KCC) announcement of new board member for the Foundation for Broadcast Culture (FBC), MBC's largest stock holder. It appears media and society will remain in a storm as the Lee Myung-bak government has made another move to takeover media.

The situation is tenser than ever at MBC in anticipation of an attempt by the new board of directors to overhaul the organization. The MBC union says it will not accept appointments of incompetent individuals to director positions.

MBC union issued a statement and criticized the KCC by saying, "We are concerned that individuals who represent the perspective of conservative newspapers (Chosun Ilbo, Joongang Ilbo, Dong-A Ilbo), like Kim Woo-ryong of Hanyang University, have been appointed as board members in order to cancel MBC's critical current affairs programming." The union added, "The newly appointed members should resign unless they announce their will to protect public broadcasting."

MBC union's chairman, Lee Geun-heng, says that KCC's election results will run into strong opposition from members of MBC and the entire Korean society. He said the MBC union will first ask unqualified directors to step down voluntarily, and if that does not work, the union has other measures in mind. In other words, it seems the union is willing to go as far as launching a campaign to stop inappropriate people from directing the organization.

Meanwhile, a company official said MBC President Ohm Ki-young and MBC management share the opinion that even if the FBC, which has the power to keep or sack them, sympathized with the union's position, they were not in a position to express their will. He said they felt as if all they could do is stand by and watch as the fire rages through their home.

Industry analysts are saying the new Lee administration-dominated FBC may begin a full-scale attempt to "recover the identity" of MBC when the board members begin their term on Aug 9, as mentioned repeatedly by KCC Chairman Choi See-joong. In the meanwhile, rather than ignite a debate over the privatization of MBC, it is highly likely the ruling camp will attempt to "tame" the broadcaster, using the same methods afforded them last year by the KBS board of directors. Choi Sang-jae, head of the

National Union of Media Workers, predicts the ruling camp will first focus on strengthening internal control of MBC by placing people in the management team. Observers are saying the replacement of President Ohm may occur in the first stage of MBC's takeover. Yang Mun-seok, the secretary-general of the People's Coalition for Media Reform, worries that the administration and ruling party may attempt to have Ohm replaced by February, two years after he was named MBC president and in line with the schedule of next June's regional elections.

Please direct questions or comments to [englishhani@hani.co.kr]