Aga Khan announces sale of its Nation Media Group shares

The transaction is expected to conclude within four months, subject to obtaining regulatory approvals.

BY WASHINGTON GIKUNJU

The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development SA (AKFED) has agreed to sell its shareholding in the Nation Media Group PLC (NMG) to Taarifa Ltd, a company owned by Tanzanian businessman Rostam Azizi.

Mr Azizi has vast business interests across multiple sectors, including media, mining, telecommunications, agriculture, real estate, port facilities, energy, and construction.

AKFED, in a statement released on Tuesday, announced that it had entered into an agreement to sell its 100 percent shareholding in NPRT Holdings Africa Limited (NPRT) to Taarifa Ltd. NPRT holds a 54.08 percent shareholding in the Nation Media Group.

The transaction marks the conclusion of AKFED's 66-year association with NMG, which began in 1959.

"NMG is now poised to expand its impact through further investment in its digital transformation. Taarifa Ltd is committed to supporting this transition and accelerating NMG's digital growth, enabling the group to strengthen its connection with customers and build on its long-standing tradition of public-interest journalism," said Akfed and Taarifa Ltd in a joint statement.

The transaction is expected to conclude within three to four months, subject to obtaining regulatory approvals.



New NMG majority shareholder Rostam Azizi. PHOTO/COURTESY

Taarifa Ltd has confirmed that it does not plan to buy out the remaining NMG shares or to delist on any of the other three securities exchanges where it is cross-listed. NMG shares are listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) as well as the Uganda Securities Exchange, the Dar es Salaam Stock Exchange, and the Rwanda Securities Exchange.

His Highness the Aga Khan IV founded NMG with the vision of providing Kenya with a free, independent press to help in promoting democratic governance at independence. It began as a modest Kiswahili-language newspaper called *Taifa Leo*, intended to give a voice to the African majority in the penultimate years of the colonial rule.

NMG has grown over the past six decades into a multi-platform media conglomerate of over 30 brands, spanning four countries, reaching over 62 million digital users, and employing more than one thousand professionals across the region. The first issue of the *Daily Nation* was published on March 20, 1960.

The group was among the first media companies in Africa to list on a securities exchange, with its shares trading on the NSE since 1973. Throughout its history, NMG has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to editorial independence. The group has played a pivotal role in Kenya's democratic development, including its coverage of the multiparty transition in the 1990s.

"AKFED is proud of its contribution to building one of Africa's most respected media institutions," said AKFED Director Sultan Allana. "We are confident NMG will continue to uphold the values of independent journalism and service to the public that have defined it for over six decades."

Mr Azizi, the new majority shareholder of NMG, is a renowned entrepreneur with vast business interests across East Africa. He was a co-founder and shareholder of Mwananchi Communications Limited from 2000 to 2006, where he initiated the establishment of *Mwananchi*, *The Citizen*, and *Mwanaspoti* newspapers that were subsequently acquired by NMG. He currently holds interests in Habari Corporation, a media house in Tanzania. "We are honoured and deeply committed to becoming the majority shareholder of Nation Media Group," said Mr Azizi. "NMG is an institution of profound importance to East Africa, and we will uphold its editorial independence while investing in its continued success as the region's leading independent media organisation."

Nation Media Group CEO Geoffrey Odundo said operations would continue uninterrupted during the ownership transition period. "Our work will continue with the same focus and responsibility that have defined the Nation for decades. The board and management will continue to oversee the company, while our teams across the region will remain committed to delivering credible journalism and content that empowers and influences the societies we serve," Mr Odundo said yesterday.

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