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Singapore Court Rejects Castel Chief Executive’s Appeal Over Board Suspension

The ruling weakens Grégory Clerc in a cross-border fight for control of the French-African drinks group’s holding companies.

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A Singapore court has dealt another setback to the chief executive of Castel, the French-African wine and beverages group, in a widening family and governance dispute that is now stretching across several countries and touching one of the biggest privately held drinks businesses linked to Bordeaux.

In a ruling issued Thursday, the High Court of Singapore rejected an appeal by Grégory Clerc, Castel's chief executive, against the suspension of his role as a director of Investment Beverage Business Management, or IBBM, a Singapore company that is one of the group's main holding entities. The decision follows an earlier provisional ruling in February that upheld his suspension days after an IBBM shareholder vote removed him from that board.

Clerc had challenged the validity of that shareholder vote. A person close to Romy Castel, the only daughter of founder Pierre Castel, told Agence France-Presse that a decision on the merits of the case could come by late October. The same person said the latest ruling was encouraging for her side.

The dispute has become one of the most serious internal crises in recent years for Castel, a major producer and distributor of wine, beer and soft drinks in Africa and France. The group owns or controls brands and businesses including Baron de Lestac, Listel, Kriter and Maison Nicolas. It employs about 40,000 people and reported revenue of €6.5 billion in 2024.

At the center of the conflict is a struggle over control of a complex corporate structure built around multiple holding companies. Castel's operating structure ultimately leads to Luxembourg-based DF Holding, which is run by Clerc and oversees the group's three main divisions: Castel Vins, Castel Afrique and the agro-industrial subsidiary Somdia.

Romy Castel has aligned herself with Alain Castel, a nephew of the founder and chief executive of the historic wine unit Castel Vins. Together they accuse Clerc of trying to seize control of the group. In their view, his removal from IBBM should lead automatically to a broader series of dismissals from mandates he holds across the company he has led since 2023.

Castel's communications team has pushed back on that interpretation. According to the group's side, Thursday's ruling does not affect the central legal question still before the Singapore court: whether certain resolutions were in fact adopted during an extraordinary general meeting of IBBM in early February.

That means the governance battle is far from settled. Even so, the Singapore ruling matters because it weakens Clerc’s position in one part of the group’s holding structure at a time when both camps are trying to establish legitimacy before courts and boards in several jurisdictions.

The fight has already spread beyond Singapore. In late June, management moved against Romy and Alain Castel by removing them from the board of Castel Vins. At the same time, both sides have launched legal actions in Switzerland and Luxembourg.

Clerc is facing a complaint filed in Geneva by Romy Castel for alleged disloyal management and money laundering tied to the period when he served as her personal tax lawyer, according to a person close to her. Another complaint was filed against him in Luxembourg alleging misuse of corporate assets related to his compensation package, including a golden parachute estimated at €36 million if he leaves the group. Last week, Luxembourg prosecutors confirmed to AFP that they had received that complaint and would analyze it.

Clerc has also gone on offense. At his request, Romy Castel, who lives in Switzerland, has been placed under formal investigation in Geneva on allegations involving forgery and use of forged documents. He accuses her of using her father’s signature without authorization on a power of attorney. She denies that accusation.

Pierre Castel, now 99, founded the business that grew into one of the largest drinks groups operating between France and Africa. Because so much of its activity is tied to wine production, beer distribution and beverage sales networks, any prolonged instability at the top could have wider effects on suppliers, distributors and brand strategy across those markets, even if day-to-day operations continue for now.

The legal pressure on the group does not stop with the family dispute. Castel Vins has said the company also faces a possible tax reassessment in France that could reach as much as €1 billion at the high end. That separate risk adds another layer of uncertainty for a company whose scale gives it an important place in wine and beverage trade flows between Europe and Africa.

For now, the latest development from Singapore is procedural rather than final. But it marks another loss for Clerc in a case that has become a test of who will control key holding entities inside Castel’s corporate system. With a substantive ruling potentially months away and parallel cases active in Geneva and Luxembourg, the struggle over leadership at one of the drinks sector’s largest groups appears set to continue.