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Election roadmap makes news – but not the potholes

REPORTS that Zimbabwe's coalition parties had reached some agreement on an election roadmap in line with the SADC Troika's recommendations made headlines in all the media during the Easter holidays.

The news added some freshness to a week dominated by reports of factional fighting in Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC party ahead of its national congress in Bulawayo this weekend.

While the media quoted negotiators from the three parties confirming that they had completed drafting the roadmap, which would be submitted to the coalition principals and the South African facilitation team in early May, they also revealed deep-seated differences among the negotiators over the nature and scope of the proposed electoral reforms (*The Herald*, *ZimOnline* and *NewsDay*, 22 and 26/4).

The official media basically reported the matter from a ZANU PF perspective.

ZBC (21/4, 8pm) and *The Herald* (22/4) quoted ZANU PF negotiator Patrick Chinamasa presenting the lifting of Western sanctions, completion of constitutional reforms and amendments to electoral laws as the only issues that needed to be addressed before elections could be held.

No effort was made to balance this position with that of the two MDC formations, especially as these media passively quoted Chinamasa dismissing some of the MDC's concerns. This included their disquiet over the existence of state sponsored violence and the active involvement of state security agents in ZANU PF party structures, and the need for the deployment of SADC election monitors six months before and after the polls to assess the pre- and post-electoral environment (ZBC 21/4, 8pm and *The Herald*, 22/4).

Neither did the official media view ZANU PF's acquiescence with the SADC demands for an electoral roadmap as representing a major climb-down by the party as it is on record dismissing its relevance, insisting the Global Political Agreement was an electoral roadmap in itself (*The Herald* and *Sunday Mail*, 24/2, 23/3 and 2, 3, 6 & 10/4).

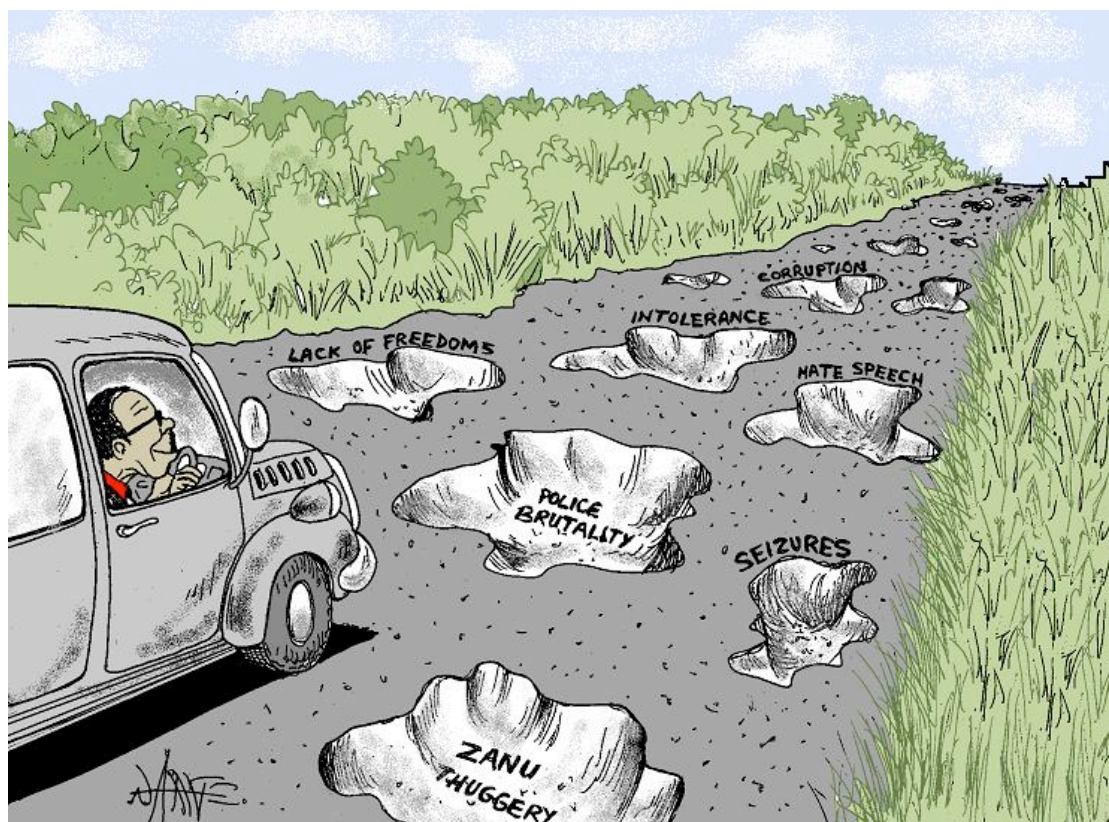
The private media picked this up. *The Standard* (24/4), for example, argued that the roadmap, crafted after **“several months of stubborn resistance by President Mugabe and hardliners in his party”**, was a sign that regional pressure was finally **“beginning to bear fruit”**.

The private media also discussed issues raised by the two MDC formations in detail. These included their demands to reconstitute the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, to put an end to the partisan interference of Zimbabwe’s security forces in the country’s politics, and the need to amend the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) so that it was not susceptible to abuse (*ZimOnline* and *NewsDay*, 22 & 26/4).

The private media also quoted all the coalition parties and political commentators expressing their views on the electoral roadmap and arguing that issues that were raised in the roadmap, especially the removal of sanctions, made it virtually impossible for Zimbabwe to hold elections this year as demanded by ZANU PF (*Radio VoP* and *The Standard*, 24/4).

The official media insisted it was possible to hold the polls but provided little evidence to support this unlikely scenario.

SADC ROADMAP



State media still feasting on

MDC-T factionalism

THE outbreak of more violence between factions of the MDC-T in Bulawayo, in which 12 party youths were arrested leading to another postponement of the party's provincial elections, received widespread publicity in the official media.

It was used to further underline the MDC-T as violent, **“faction-riddled”**, **“strife-torn”** and **“in shambles”** and whose in-house fighting had spiralled out of control (the *Chronicle*, *Sunday News*, *Sunday Mail* and *The Herald*, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27 & 28/4 and ZBC, 22/4, 8pm).

The MDC-T's Bulawayo faction fighting formed the major focus of the 20 stories the official media carried on the party's activities, especially preparations for its congress, scheduled for Bulawayo this weekend. All of the stories portrayed the party in a negative light.

The government media also published three pictures (*Sunday News* 24/4) and two cartoons (*The Sunday Mail* 24/4 and *The Herald* 27/4) illustrating the in-fighting in the MDC-T.

ZANU PF's political activities received coverage in 81 state media reports, all of them positive, while the Welshman Ncube-led MDC formation hardly received any publicity (one story).

Although the official media prominently reported divisions 'rocking' the MDC-T and presenting political violence as the exclusive preserve of the party, they censored similar problems in ZANU PF, which were reported in the private media.

In one case, Radio VoP (20/4) reported suspected members of a ZANU PF faction in Masvingo, allegedly led by Politburo member Dzikamai Mavhaire, as having petrol-bombed a house belonging to Chiredzi North MP Ronald Ndava, who belongs to a rival group led by former Masvingo provincial governor Josiah Hungwe.

In another, *The Financial Gazette* (21/4) reported **“fresh squabbles”** in ZANU PF's Mashonaland West province following the death of its acting provincial chairman Robert Sikanyika.

These two cases were among the 38 stories the private media carried on the political activities of Zimbabwe's coalition parties. Twenty-five of them were on the MDC-T's congress preparations, while 12 reported ZANU PF's campaign activities. The remaining one was on the smaller MDC formation.

Mugabe attacks Catholic bishops in new ZANU religious campaign

POLITICAL campaigns by senior ZANU PF officials and several church leaders at different religious congregations across the country attracted significant attention in the official media.

These media widely quoted President Mugabe launching an unprecedented attack on senior members of the Catholic Church and members of his party promoting ZANU PF's policies and vilifying the party's critics at religious occasions without questioning the morality of using such platforms (*The Herald*, 22 & 26/4).

While they quoted some religious leaders openly using church gatherings to promote ZANU PF's political ideology, they failed to reconcile this with incidents in which the ZANU PF arm of government and the police have victimized church leaders and members of the public for criticizing ZANU PF at religious gatherings.

In one Easter Good Friday news story reporting Mugabe's attack on Catholic bishops, *The Herald* summarized Mugabe's comments vilifying members of the Catholic Bishops Conference for being ***"still inclined to serve the interests of the country's former colonizers"*** and for developing ***"a nauseating habit of unnecessarily attacking his person and government over unsubstantiated allegations"***.

Mugabe himself was quoted telling thousands of members of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) at Mbungu Estates in Masvingo, ***"See what these bishops do to me every year? They are after me...year-in and year-out – and government too... They say government is oppressing the people. But the truth is they do not understand our interests, the interests of the majority of the black people."***

That evening, ZTV (8pm) quoted leaders of the African Apostolic Church making partisan political statements at another church conference in Masvingo.

One of them, prophet Daniel Mateba said: ***"If you (follow the MDC) the country will go...(and) the blood of Zimbabweans who died for this country...will rise up against you. ...It was spilt for you to be free, not to return the country to (former colonizers)"***.

The government media did not question Mugabe's offer of a farm to the ZCC to build a university in Mashonaland West, nor the decision by the Family of God leader, Andrew Wutaunashe, to lead his followers in signing ZANU PF's anti-sanctions petition during a church service in Harare (*The Herald*, 22 & 26/4).

The private media concentrated on exposing the selective application of the law when it comes to the state security agents' treatment of religious leaders who expressed thoughts different to those of ZANU PF.

NewsDay (26/4), for instance, quoted Matabeleland North police commissioner Edmore Veterai dismissing claims that Roman Catholic priest Marko Mnkandla was conducting a religious service and was tortured by the police after his arrest in Lupane for allegedly holding a political rally disguised as a church service for Gukurahundi victims and survivors.

It quoted Veterai saying: ***"Isn't it you heard the President saying Catholic priests should desist from politics? He (Mnkandla) is lying, he is a politician. We never do such things (torture detainees) at our stations"***.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

WHILE the official media and the police gave the impression that the MDC-T was responsible for most cases of political violence, the private media recorded ZANU PF, war veterans and state security agents as being mainly to blame.

The official media publicized two incidents of human rights violations emanating from internal MDC-T clashes, while the private media recorded 14 incidents.

Of these, 12 identified ZANU PF and state security agents as the offenders. The remaining two reported the MDC-T clashes.

Among the incidents were:

- The alleged assault of an MDC-T supporter, Shadreck Malunga, by a group of soldiers at Chipadze Stadium in Bindura for refusing to contribute towards Independence Day celebrations in Mashonaland Central and the coercion of villagers in Hwedza to attend Independence Day celebrations (SW Radio Africa, 20/4).
- Reports that war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda threatened Masvingo villagers with death if they did not vote for ZANU PF in the next election (SW Radio Africa, 20/4).
- The summoning of *NewsDay* senior reporter Verenanda Langa by senior army officials over a story alleging that ZDF commander Constantine Chiwenga was ill and had been airlifted to China for medical treatment (Radio VoP and Studio 7, 19 & 20/4), and
- The alleged invasion of land belonging to suspected MDC supporters in Epworth by a gang of suspected ZANU PF supporters with the help of soldiers. The invaders allegedly threatened the MDC supporters with death and told them that they were no longer allowed to own land in the area (SW Radio Africa & *NewsDay*, 20/4).

WHAT THEY SAID...

“President, I want to tell you that some people in my constituency have rebelled and they voted against you in 2008. They are now supporting the puppet party MDC. But I want to say that we will fish them out and deal with them until they come back...and do things our way... We have a very forceful and vigorous youth wing and our members of the armed forces who will make sure that no one loses direction again like what happened three years ago. Those who did will be punished severely by our active young men and women who know the importance of keeping our leader in power” – ZANU PF Masvingo North MP and Higher Education Minister Stan Mudenge speaking at the commissioning of the Zion Christian Church conference centre in Masvingo (Radio VOP, 22/4).

“If we are talking about human rights we say President Mugabe is right 100%. He is the person who defends democracy and he is the person who observes human rights. Because we are the ones who declared to (Britain’s) Queen Elizabeth that whether you like it or not we will rule this country, that is to declare we will take it by force. Now, to all those who listen to MDC, I feel sorry for you because you are completely lost” – Thomas Benhura, an African Apostolic Church evangelist (ZTV 22/4, 6pm).

Ends/

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