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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-21



Security chief, ZANU PF express contempt for democracy

A STATEMENT by top military official Brigadier-General Douglas Nyikayaramba that “our father” President Mugabe should remain in office for life and that he would not recognize Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai if he won the next election made headlines in the private media at the weekend.

His remarks echoed previous utterances by senior Zimbabwe security force officials in the run-up to the 2008 elections and again exposed the partisan nature of the armed forces in favour of the ZANU PF arm of government and their reluctance to respect the will of the Zimbabwean people.

Nyikayaramba's inflammatory comments heightened tensions among the coalition partners in government and compounded the controversy surrounding Mugabe's own comments the previous week dismissing the need for security sector reforms envisaged in the Global Political Agreement. They also coincided with comments by other senior government officials ruling out reforms in other sectors, such as the media.

While the official media widely reported Mugabe's remarks, they censored Nyikayaramba's reckless comments, which appeared in the private weekly, the *Zimbabwe Independent* (27/5), and subsequently, most other private media.

Nyikayaramba, who expressed his support for ZANU PF, declared that President Mugabe **"cannot be removed"** from office because he was **"irreplaceable like a father in a family"** and that general elections, which he claimed ZANU PF would win, **"must be held this year to ensure political stability"** in Zimbabwe.

"Why do you want to force him (President Mugabe) to go? Where were you when he crossed into Mozambique (to fight in the liberation struggle) and why didn't you go?" asked Nyikayaramba.

State Security Minister Sydney Sekeramayi appeared to reinforce Mugabe and Nyikayaramba's views when he was quoted describing calls for security sector reforms as **"naïve"** and being fronted by agents of Western imperialism (*The Sunday Mail* (29/5), while Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa was reported saying **"those with no traceable liberation war credentials will not be allowed to rule the country as this would be tantamount to reversing the gains of independence"** (*Chronicle*, 30/5).

The private media viewed Nyikayaramba's remarks as evidence that Zimbabwe's security forces were heavily involved in the country's politics and vindicated concerns that they were the power behind Mugabe, strengthening the need for security sector reforms to be discussed at the forthcoming SADC summit (*Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard*, *Daily News*, Studio 7 and SW Radio Africa, 27, 28 & 29/5).

They also quoted Prime Minister Tsvangirai expressing concern over Nyikayaramba's comments at an event announcing the appointment of a 'Panel of Elders' in Harare (*Daily News*, 28/5).

Apart from this, the private media quoted other ZANU PF officials, such as presidential spokesman George Charamba and Acting Foreign Affairs Minister Herbert Murerwa, making controversial comments, which they argued, undermined efforts to restore democracy in Zimbabwe (*NewsDay* and *The Standard*, 26 & 29/5).

Here is what they said:

- ***“The (Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe) BAZ board is not appointed by ZANU PF, it is legally constituted and appointed by the Ministry of Information and Publicity. While I don’t know about the discussion between the President and the PM, I do know that the country is not bound by political discussions but by the law”*** - Charamba resisting the need to reconstitute BAZ (*The Standard*, 29/5).
- ***“The Internet and things like Twitter, Facebook are being used to destroy ... We from the older generation do not know anything about Facebook or Twitter. It’s (social media) being used for regime change and to make our youths revolt against their leaders”*** - Murerwa (*NewsDay*, 26/5).

State Press attacks Biti for attempting to rescue local bank

FINANCE Minister Tendai Biti’s recommendation for the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) to bail out troubled Renaissance Merchant Bank generated heated debate in the government papers and the private media this week.

The national broadcaster, ZBC, ignored these important national developments.

The official Press expressed concern over the move, which it viewed as having been motivated by personal interests, while the private media argued that it was an attempt save the bank – and possibly the banking sector – from collapse.

The state-run papers and the private media reported problems at Renaissance Bank as having started after its chief executive officer, Patterson Timba, failed to repay a US\$5 million loan he obtained from businessman Jayesh Shah purportedly as a cash injection into the financial institution.

The Sunday Mail (22/5) argued that Biti was motivated by the desire to save ***“his embattled friend”*** Timba, while *The Herald* (24/5) stressed the fact that the Renaissance boss was brother to Jameson Timba, the Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The Herald (24/5) quoted Affirmative Action Group president Phillip Chiyangwa fuming: ***“It appears there is a conspiracy here. There seems to be an MDC-T conspiracy considering that Minister Paurina Mpariwa (Labour and Social Welfare) belongs to MDC-T, Innocent Chagonda who usually represents the MDC-T is the NSSA board chairman and he is also a board member of one of Timba’s firms”***.

The Sunday Mail (29/5) reported the Renaissance Bank saga as having taken “**a dangerous twist**” following revelations that there were “**clandestine efforts**” to have whistleblower Shah “**deported or arrested in a bid to silence him**” without providing any proof. It discredited Biti’s intervention on the grounds that he might have made the decision “**before he brought the issue to the Council of Ministers and Cabinet**” and that one of the shareholders, Econet Wireless Zimbabwe Limited, was so “**incensed**” by his actions that “**it decided not to continue investing**” in companies falling under Renaissance Financial Holdings.

The official weekly also quoted analysts questioning why Biti was “**neck deep meddling in the affairs of a private bank instead of bailing out parastatals that are struggling to survive**”.

Although the private media admitted that Biti’s intervention had created tensions in the inclusive government, they reported him as working closely with Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and quoted analysts justifying efforts to rescue Renaissance, as its collapse was likely to have a domino effect on Zimbabwe’s financial sector.

PARTY CAMPAIGNS

ZANU PF hijacks Africa Day commemorations

ZANU PF continued to receive favourable coverage in the official media in the week, while the MDC formation led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, was portrayed as violent, unpatriotic and a destabilizing element in the inclusive government.

This was evident in 68 stories. Of these, 53 were on ZANU PF’s campaign activities, while 15 were on Tsvangirai’s MDC party. The smaller MDC group, led by Welshman Ncube, received no coverage.

Eighteen of ZANU PF’s campaign stories were based on Africa Day celebrations, where several ZANU PF officials were quoted castigating the MDC formations as agents of Western imperialism and ideologically bankrupt.

They also praised Mugabe and ZANU PF for having the interests of Zimbabweans at heart, citing as proof their alleged defence of Zimbabwe’s sovereignty and the black economic empowerment drive.

Among them was Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere, ZANU PF's deputy secretary for Finance Kantibal Patel, Harare provincial chairman Amos Midzi and youth chairman Jimu Kunaka, who claimed that the struggle for African independence was mostly fought to economically empower blacks; that the West imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe in retaliation against Mugabe's stance against imperialism, and that ZANU PF shared the same values of peace, unity and development, on which the then Organization of African Unity was formed (ZTV, 25/5, 8pm and *The Herald*, 26/5).

The remaining 35 stories were mostly on ZANU PF's anti-sanctions campaign, which was reportedly taken to the US this week, and the launch of a magazine, published by ZANU PF apologist Goodson Nguni, attempting to discredit the MDC-T as a violent organization (ZTV, 26 & 27/5, 8pm and *The Herald & Chronicle*, 30/5).

The magazine, titled: *Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T): The Culture of Violence* chronicled the alleged history of MDC-T violence since its inception in 1999. Nguni said the magazine, which also used discredited police records for much of its claims, was aimed at disproving MDC-T claims that ZANU PF was a violent party.

None of the official media's reports questioned the credibility of Nguni's claims or viewed it as part of an ongoing propaganda campaign by ZANU PF, the police and the state media to paint the MDC-T as responsible for most of the violence in Zimbabwe ahead of the SADC summit.

While the official media were preoccupied with attempting to disgrace the MDC-T, the private media gave coverage to all the coalition parties, especially their preparations for any forthcoming election.

They covered the parties' campaigns and restructuring activities, and quoted the two MDC formations complaining about the uneven political and electoral playing field. This was reflected in 26 stories. Of these, 14 were on ZANU PF's activities, while seven were on the main MDC group. The remaining five were on the Ncube-led MDC faction.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Police officer's killing sparks crackdown

THE killing of a senior police officer, Petros Mutedza, by suspected MDC-T activists in Harare's high-density suburb of Glen View last Sunday provided the state media and the police with another opportunity to paint the MDC-T as a violent political organization.

The official media reported Mutedza and another unidentified police officer as having been attacked after they had gone to investigate an illegal meeting, which MDC-T youths were allegedly holding at Glen View 3 Shopping Centre (ZTV, 29/5, 8pm and *The Herald*, 30/5).

The official media mostly relied on the police version of what transpired, while the private media based their reports on statements by senior MDC-T officials denying their party's supporters were to blame.

Although the media failed to provide clear circumstances behind the incident, they widely quoted the police threatening revenge (*The Herald*, *NewsDay* and *Daily News*, 30 & 31/5 and 1/6).

This incident provoked a massive police crackdown on MDC-T supporters and their families, with dozens of them being arrested (*Daily News & NewsDay*, 31/5).

It formed part of 14 incidents of human rights abuses the media carried this week, 13 of them in the private media, while the other one appeared in all media.

They included:

- Harassment of headmaster Edson Masango by war veterans in Odzi. This followed his decision to accept a school donation from that area's MDC-T senator (Radio VoP and *NewsDay*, 24/5).
- Invasion of two farms, one on the outskirts of Harare and another in Chipinge, by war veterans and members of the Johane Marange Church (SW Radio Africa, *NewsDay* and *Daily News*, 24, 25 & 26/5), and
- Eviction of 16 stallholders at Mbare's Mupedzanhamo market on suspicion that they were MDC-T supporters (*NewsDay*, 23/5).

WHAT THEY SAID...

“Those who wish to live by the sword must be prepared to die by the sword...The Zimbabwe Republic Police shall not...sit on its laurels while innocent citizens of this country, let alone police officers, are being decimated by uncouth opposition political elements in a naïve and imbecile attempt to make our country ungovernable” – police commissioner Charles Mfandaidza addressing mourners at a funeral parade for Inspector Petros Mutedza, who was killed by suspected MDC-T supporters (*The Herald*, 1/6).

“If you can change your father in your family, then we can do the same, but has anyone ever changed his or her father just because he is old? Until your father dies only then can you have a stepfather – that is that” – Brigadier-General Douglas Nyikayaramba (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 27/5).

“Truly speaking, I am ZANU PF and ZANU PF is in me and you can’t change that” – Nyikayaramba (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 27/5).

“The bottom line is that I will not salute someone like that (Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai) personally. I will resign if the political establishment accept it... Principle is indivisible – it is either yes or no...for me to wake up and say good morning sir, me, no, no, no!” - Nyikayaramba (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 27/5).

“Statements by service chiefs that they will not respect the expression of the people’s will, as well as statements in which a senior army officer is trying to determine the date of the election, only serve to confirm the uniqueness of our situation and the importance of vaccinating state organs from acting like political entities” – Prime Minister Tsvangirai criticizing Nyikayaramba and other military officials for meddling in the country’s civilian affairs (*Daily News*, 26/5).

“As a country we have been forced to walk the painful road of violence and hatred and we are not prepared to walk it again. We have lost relatives, houses and property. We have state agents actively engaging in shameful acts of violence and unbridled violation of the people’s rights and freedoms...(This) situation is being compounded by the war psychosis and the constant reference to Chimurenga and the war language associated with it puts the country into an unnecessary war mode” – Tsvangirai (*Radio VOP* 28/5).

THANKS FOR YOUR COMMENTS

FEEDBACK

MMPZ should continue urging the government media to give fair and equitable coverage to all political parties in Zimbabwe – *Chris*.

ZTV should desist from broadcasting old films, especially those produced during the colonial era, as they undermined the dignity of African actors – *Anonymous*.

I appreciate your weekly media review; please carry on the good work – *Bridget, Masvingo*.

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK

MMPZ is anxious to hear from our readers. We would love to get your feedback about our weekly media reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful to you? Are there issues that you think we overlook? If there is anything that you think we can do to improve our product, we would like to hear from you.

You can contact us either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or you can even sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number: 0774-432-509. Comments on the stories themselves are also welcome. We look forward to getting your feedback.

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