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Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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ELECTION WATCH

ZANU PF steps up campaign

PRESIDENT Mugabe's ZANU PF party appears to have stepped up its elections campaign activities by joining the MDC-T in holding party promotional events throughout the country to woo the electorate ahead of potential national elections next year.

Up until now, ZANU PF's campaign activities had been largely limited to the use of music, where songs glorifying President Mugabe and his party's ideology are frequently and prominently played across all television and radio stations of the state broadcaster, ZBC (see section on ZANU PF abuses ZBC). Only Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC had appeared the most visible party on the ground, reportedly holding numerous rallies around the country over the past six months.

ZANU PF's on-the-ground campaign activities coincided with the party's preparations for its national conference, to be held in early December, to formally choose its presidential candidate for national elections.

These campaign activities formed most (51) of the 59 stories the government media carried on the activities of Zimbabwe's major political parties this week.

The remaining eight were on the MDC-T. The smaller MDC faction, led by Welshman Ncube was ignored.

All the reports on ZANU PF portrayed Mugabe as the most popular leader in Zimbabwe as evidenced by his endorsement by the party's structures and provinces (ZBC, 14, 16, 17 & 18/11, 8pm). These reports also presented ZANU PF as sensitive to the needs of Zimbabweans, as illustrated by its provision of farming inputs to disadvantaged farmers and its black economic empowerment drive (ZBC, 22/11, 8pm). Notably, the public media passively reported on this blur between government and ZANU PF party initiatives, presenting some of the coalition government's empowerment activities such as the black empowerment drive as an exclusively ZANU PF exercise.

The government media's coverage of the MDC-T was largely negative. This was typified by their speculative reports depicting Tsvangirai, among others, as a renegade who had allegedly visited Morocco to mobilize Western funding to effect "illegal" regime change, as well as presenting his party as in the process of setting up "**reaction teams**" to unleash violence that would create the excuse for Western military intervention (*The Sunday Mail*, *The Herald* and *Chronicle*, 20 & 21/11).

The private media carried 32 stories on the parties' activities: Thirteen on ZANU PF, MDC-T 15, and the remaining four on the smaller MDC faction. Of the private media's stories on ZANU PF activities, six were negative, while nine were neutral. MDC-T was given neutral coverage in five stories and portrayed positively in 10 stories. Three of the stories on the MDC-N were negative, while the remaining one was neutral.

Gay row overshadows constitutional reforms

NEWS that the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac) has finalised plans for the drafting of the new constitution, expected to start next week, was overshadowed in all the media by debate over gay rights.

The government media and ZANU PF continued to criticize Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party for allegedly advocating gay rights in the new constitution.

This was reflected in nine of the 11 stories the official media carried on the constitutional-making process. Only two of these gave the MDC-T the chance to respond to the “accusations”.

The remaining two stories reported on the United Nations Development Programme withdrawing funding for Copac’s Second All-Stakeholders Conference, scheduled for January next year, on the grounds that the event was likely to be marred by violence; and complaints by Bulawayo residents over delays in completing the constitution-making exercise (*Chronicle* and *The Herald*, 17 & 18/11).

The private media gave rounded coverage of Tsvangirai’s observations on gay rights, reporting not only on how he had come under fire from a variety of Zimbabweans, including some members of his party, but also highlighted the pitfalls of his remarks (*The Financial Gazette* and *ZimOnline*, 3, 15/11). In addition, these media suggested that the campaign against the Prime Minister by ZANU PF and its media allies over the issue was propaganda intended to discredit him ahead of elections.

The private media also extensively reported the MDC-T vehemently denying claims it was championing gay rights in the new constitution.

This was evident in seven of the 16 stories the private media carried on the country’s controversial constitutional reforms. *The Daily News On Sunday*, 20/11) even pointed out that the privacy of peoples’ sexual orientation was protected – ironically – under the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The remaining nine stories were mostly based on the advice of political commentators and civic organizations, warning the country’s coalition parties against holding elections in the absence of a new constitution and other essential reforms.

ZANU PF abuses ZBC

THE national public broadcaster, ZBC, continues to abuse its public mandate to provide fair, balanced and impartial programming by stepping up its propaganda campaign in support of ZANU PF with new and even more frequent “continuity” songs promoting the party and its leader, Robert Mugabe, than has been the case in previous months.

The latest in a long list of such songs includes one by urban youth outfit *The Born Free Crew* (according to Spot FM announcers), and another yet-to-be-identified female traditional group, apparently from Matabeleland. The two are frequently featured on ZTV, and ZBC’s four radio stations, and are sometimes used as signature tunes before the main evening news bulletins.

The Born Free Crew song features Mugabe singing about colonial injustices and the oppression of the black majority by the Rhodesian regime. The lyrics are based on excerpts of Mugabe’s speech at what appears to have been a government function.

The song by the Matabeleland traditional band praises Mugabe and his party for allegedly championing Zimbabweans’ rights through ‘people-oriented’ policies, such as black economic empowerment, and hero-worships Mugabe for his leadership skills and his popularity.

MMPZ condemns ZBC’s blatantly unprofessional, partisan behaviour, which gives unfair advantage to ZANU PF over its coalition partners, especially ahead of national elections.

By saturating the airwaves with ZANU PF praise songs, ZBC is also violating the letter and spirit of the Global Political Agreement (GPA). Article 19 (d) of this agreement compels the media to give all the parties ***“balanced and fair coverage for their legitimate political activities”***.

ZANU PF disowns Chipangano

PRIVATE media attempts to unmask the notorious Mbare-based militia group, Chipangano, by tracking its violent and criminal activities and links to ZANU PF since its inception in 2001 has provoked vehement denials from some party officials.

Chipangano recently came under the spotlight again following a new wave of violence in Harare and Chitungwiza, which Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC party and some political commentators attributed to this shadowy vigilante group.

The issue came to a head last weekend when the *Zimbabwe Independent* (11/11) linked ZANU PF politburo member Tendai Savanhu to this group. It reported some unidentified sources close to Chipangano alleging that Savanhu was the key person behind the group. They claimed that the ZANU PF businessman was behind the establishment of Chipangano and was bankrolling it, allegations Savanhu vehemently denied (the *Independent*, 11/11).

Savanhu followed this up by writing a strongly worded letter in *The Sunday Mail* (20/11) denying any knowledge of Chipangano or that it had links with ZANU PF. He described such allegations as ***"fictitious", "imaginary" and "a heap of rubbish that is meant to tarnish our party's image and waste our time"***. Savanhu warned the MDC-T and the ***"imperialist media"*** that he would resort to legal recourse if they continued to link him to this vigilante group.

Early this month, ZANU PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo also denied knowledge of Chipangano: ***"I must confess...I don't know who these Chipangano people are. Every time we try to enquire...they never come out. We have tried to find out about who is behind Chipangano and when we ask no one says anything"*** (*Independent*, 11/11).

Typhoid outbreak receives attention

ALL the media reported the outbreak of typhoid, a water-borne disease, first detected in Harare's high-density suburb of Dzivarasekwa early this month, but which has since spread to other areas such as Mabvuku and Kuwadzana.

They attributed the epidemic to perennial shortages of clean water in Harare and its satellite towns (ZTV, 14, 16, 21/11 and *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *Daily News* and *NewsDay*, 5, 17, 24/11).

The Herald (24/11) reported Harare City Council spokesman Leslie Gwindi saying the cases of typhoid had risen to more than 500, up from about 100 cases two weeks ago. The paper warned the disease was likely to spread if it remained unchecked and quoted unidentified sources indicating that city officials could be suppressing the true figures for fear of a government and public backlash.

All the media criticized City Fathers for failing to address the capital's long-running water crisis, such as the much-awaited construction of Kunzvi Dam (ZTV, 16/11, 8pm, SW Radio Arica and *NewsDay*, 15 & 20/11).

These reports were among 11 stories all media carried on the topic.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

A WEEK after Zimbabwe's coalition principals convened an indaba condemning political violence the media reported senior officials from the country's two main political parties making utterances that appeared to incite violence against their opponents.

One of them, ZANU PF's national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo, was reported telling party supporters in Gweru: ***"Let us desist from political violence and be peaceful. But if we are attacked, we are left with no choice but to retaliate. We cannot afford to watch them as they attack us. We will also fight back"*** (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 18/11).

Two senior MDC-T officials, national chairman Lovemore Moyo and Home Affairs co-Minister Theresa Makone were also reported issuing similar instructions to party supporters at a rally in Chitungwiza (*The Herald*, 21/11).

These utterances reflect the highly volatile political situation in Zimbabwe. During the week the private media carried news of six new incidents of rights abuses. The official media ignored them.

They included:

- The alleged harassment of Chitungwiza South MP Misheck Shoko (MDC-T) by suspected ZANU PF youths for allegedly supporting homosexuality (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 20/11), and
- The arrest of MDC-T Masvingo provincial chair Wilstaff Stemere and Mwenezi district secretary Fortune Makonzo for ferrying party youths to assault ZANU PF supporters (*Daily News*, 16/11).

However, *The Daily News* (18/11) also carried a false front-page lead story suggesting that an MDC-T activist, Albert Vhiriri, had been murdered in Glen View, Harare. It quoted relatives and the party suspecting ZANU PF supporters of being responsible. However, it later emerged that he died from a stroke, according to the post mortem (the *Chronicle* and *Herald*, 22 & 23/11).

Rushing into print with such uncorroborated evidence needlessly exacerbates political tensions and undermines the paper's credibility. MMPZ hopes the paper's editors will learn that such unprofessional conduct also undermines society's struggle for a truly free media environment.

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