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**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Anti-MDC-T propaganda dominates state media

THE propaganda blitz by ZANU PF and the media it controls against the MDC formation led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, assumed yet another new dimension during the week.

In previous weeks these media blamed the fresh wave of political violence, mostly in Harare, on MDC-T – linking it to statements made by Tsvangirai in an interview with an American news channel, *Fox News*, last month (See Weekly Media Reviews 2011-5/6).

This week they contrived yet another conspiracy by the MDC-T by misrepresenting attempts by some MDC-T-run ministries to instil accountability in some arms of government as designed to sabotage Zimbabwe's troubled coalition to please the party's perceived Western masters.

This was reflected in all the 42 stories that the government media carried on the subject and related developments during the week.

Major targets of the official media's misinformation campaign included Finance Minister Tendai Biti and Public Service Minister Eliphas Mukonoweshuro, savaged for trying to infuse transparency in the sale of controversial Chiadzwa diamonds and recruitment of civil servants respectively.

While professional journalistic practice dictates fair presentation of facts by giving both sides of the story, the MDC-T officials were barely given right of reply in these media. And in the few cases their comments were sought, these were either suffocated or dismissed out-of-hand.

Brick-bats for Biti's diamond audit

THE official media deliberately misconstrued Biti's order for an audit of Chiadzwa diamond revenue after Treasury reportedly received just US\$62.1m of the US\$174m that the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC) and Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe (MMCZ) claimed had been realised from the sale of the gems as a ploy to deny civil servants pay rises. This came in the wake of President Mugabe's recent promise to increase civil servants' salaries using proceeds from the diamonds following assurances from Mines Minister Obert Mpofu that his ministry had declared a large dividend to Treasury after conducting a third sale of the gemstones.

The official media simply reported the ZANU PF arm of government and its allies who were extensively quoted angrily accusing the finance minister of **"over-stepping his bounds"**, arguing that he had no authority to institute an investigation into another ministry (*The Herald* 18/2).

The logic of Biti's actions, including the crucial question of who was telling the truth between the two arms of government was never explored. In addition, Biti was barely given the platform to give his side of the story.

The Sunday Mail and *Sunday News* (20/2) passively quoted ZMDC chairman Godwill Masimirembwa "hitting back" at Biti, saying: **"It seems Biti is not interested in us selling our diamonds. His statements are political. He is trying to get an excuse for not paying civil servants. He should instead audit his own actions. He wants an insurrection so that we have another Egypt or Tunisia in Zimbabwe"**.

The Sunday Mail (20/2) reported ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo weaving similar conspiracies. He dismissed Biti and his MDC-T colleagues' calls for the auditing of some government departments as **"treacherous", "subversive", "bogus"**, bent on **"destabilizing"** government and proof that they did not **"deserve to be Cabinet ministers as they are no better than average hooligans in the streets"**.

No kudos for Mukonoweshuro's ghost-busting audit

The government media was equally dismissive of the findings of Public Service Minister Elphas Mukonoweshuro's audit on the recruitment of civil servants, which reportedly unearthed 75,000 ghost workers, bleeding the fiscus of around US\$20m a month.

The official media only focussed on alleged procedural shortcomings of the audit, accusing the minister of having **"completely ignored the terms of reference given by Cabinet"** when he undertook the forensic investigation to weed out ghost workers (*The Sunday Mail* 13/2). The paper also claimed the process was **"hijacked"** by a British operative Charles Heatly and that most of the civil servants who conducted the exercise were **"MDC-T functionaries' whose mandate was to use the audit to pursue their party's regime-change agenda."**

ZBC fêtes Mugabe

THE national broadcaster, ZBC, flooded its airwaves with information on President Mugabe's 87th birthday, celebrated yearly under the February 21st Movement.

This included 58 news reports, advertisements, praise songs and current affairs programmes.

ZTV alone devoted 43 minutes of the 3 hours of its main news bulletins (excluding Sport, Arts and Foreign news segments), from February 14th to February 23rd 2011, to publicising the birthday, celebrated in Harare on Saturday.

ZBC (all stations) also regularly disrupted normal programming to accommodate congratulatory messages and praise songs of Mugabe's leadership. The congratulatory messages mostly came from government departments and ZANU PF and its allies, while most of the praise songs played on the stations were from artists such as Zex Manatsa and The Born Free Crew.

In addition, ZBC's current affairs programmes such as ZTV's *Media Watch* (21/2), featured ZANU PF officials, such as Absalom Sikhosana, explaining the significance of Mugabe's birthday, the history of the 21st February Movement and praising Mugabe for allegedly emancipating and empowering Zimbabweans.

In a related development, ZBC has added to its growing playing list of ZANU PF propaganda songs, *Haagadzwe*, a tune by Steve Makoni, off his 2007 album *Ndada Ndada Ndada (Heart of the Rhythm)*.

The song, which has become the most frequently played on ZBC's four radio stations (*The Sunday Mail* 5/2), criticises the installation of puppet leaders and the shunning of local culture in favour of foreign practices, a perception that appears to fit ZANU PF's projection of the MDC-T as a Western creation.

The official print media paid less attention to Mugabe's birthday in their news pages, publishing only eight stories during the 10-day period.

But these papers carried supplements celebrating Mugabe's birthday and depicting him as "a man of the people". *The Herald* (21/2) carried a 12-page supplement comprising features and adverts, while the *Chronicle* (same day) contained a 16-page supplement.

The private media reported that most Zimbabweans had nothing to celebrate on Mugabe's birthday, as they did not have much to show for the 31 years he has been in power (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 20/2).

The following day, *NewsDay* (21/2) reported Mugabe's birthday as having brought "***misery***" to Zimbabweans, especially residents living in Harare's high-density suburb of Mbare. It reported that ZANU PF supporters had forced the residents, including market traders, to abandon their business to attend a rally to celebrate his birthday.

Sanctions extension agitates ZANU PF and the state media

THE European Union's decision to extend by another year sanctions against President Mugabe and all but 35 of his close associates blacklisted for their poor human rights record provoked anger from ZANU PF and the state media it controls.

They depicted the move as divisive, racist and an attempt to oust ZANU PF from power (ZBC all stations, 16/2, 8pm).

This was reflected in 56 reports the official media carried.

Instead of assessing the validity of the EU's reasons for extending the sanctions, these media blamed them for all the country's problems.

They accused the MDC-T of influencing the EU's decision by allegedly unleashing a wave of violence in Harare and its suburbs so as to give the EU an excuse for its decision (ZBC, 15 & 20/2, 8pm and *The Herald*, 16 & 17/2).

ZTV (16/2, 8pm) passively recorded Affirmative Action Group president Supa Mandiwanzira describing the EU's decision as ***"not surprising"***, as there was ***"an unfaithful partner"*** in government who ***"during the day calls for the lifting of sanctions, whilst at night campaigns for their retention"***. *The Herald* (17/2) quoted "political analysts" such as Godwine Mureriwa arguing that the move was ***"an attempt to rig elections expected later this year in favour of the MDC-T"***.

The private media insisted that EU's decision was justified, citing the recent upsurge in political violence.

VIOLENCE CLAIMS ANOTHER VICTIM

REPORTS that the current wave of political violence in Harare and its suburbs has claimed the life of a ZANU PF supporter made headlines in the official media but none in the privately owned news outlets, which completely ignored the incident. Such neglect exposes the level of polarization in Zimbabwe's mainstream media.

The Herald (21/2) reported ZANU PF member Andrew Zvidzai as having died following an attack by suspected MDC-T supporters in Harare's Mbare suburb. Although it reported the police confirming the incident, it did not quote them identifying the assailants as MDC-T supporters.

However, the government media either suffocated or censored cases of human rights violations that identified ZANU PF and state security agents as offenders.

The incident was among the 18 the media carried on rights violations: private media [eight] and official media [six]. The remaining four incidents appeared in both media.

They included:

- The arrest of former MDC MP Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organization, and 45 others on allegations of **"plotting to oust a constitutionally elected government in the Egyptian style"** (*The Herald*, 21/2).
- Arrest of two of Prime Minister Tsvangirai's drivers for having blue beacon lights on top of the PM's official vehicle. The State says only vehicles from the police and army or President Mugabe's escort can use such lights (*ZimOnline*, 16/2).
- Alleged abduction of five MDC-T youths in Gutu by **"unknown men"** for celebrating the ouster of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak (Radio VoP, 15/2), and
- Arrest of five MDC-T supporters in Chivi for holding an illegal meeting (*NewsDay*, 18/2).

What they said...

“As far as we are concerned, the violence that erupted in Harare was caused by the PM’s remarks that what happened in Tunisia and what is happening in Egypt right now should also happen in Zimbabwe... As ZANU PF we are surprised that a PM of a nation would wish for such to happen to a government which he is also part of...” – Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa (*The Herald*, 8/2).

“ZANU PF’s continued abuse of natural resources and national institutions to further party political agendas – their willingness to unleash violence against innocent Zimbabweans – and their stubborn refusal to allow audits, investigations or exposure of their misuse and mismanagement of government is evidence of the struggle that confronts all of us who are committed to delivering real, positive change to the people of Zimbabwe” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai speaking at a public meeting in Harare (*Zimbabwemetro.com*, 16/2).

“For a party that shouts so loud about the overwhelming success of the land reform programme, you would think that they would welcome an impartial audit into the beneficiaries, impact and fairness of such a scheme. And yet they shy away from any attempt to shine a light into the dark crevices of their past activities. Whether it be on land, diamonds or parastatals, ZANU PF does not want its record reviewed or exposed” – PM Tsvangirai (*Zimbabwemetro.com*, 16/2).

“If (President) Mugabe proceeds to announce an election without my agreement, that will be a unilateral action and we as MDC will not be party to that. I do not see elections this year, probably early next year, because it’s not just a question of holding elections, it is about creating the conditions for a free and fair election” - Tsvangirai (*NewsDay*, 18/2)

“We are now dealing with a lunatic who is (so) desperate his lunacy knows no bounds. I don’t know how anyone can respond to a lunatic. Zimbabwean politics has never sunk so low. This is the lowest that you can ever get, when an individual is so obsessed with a position and title that he is prepared to spin the highest ruse in Zimbabwe in his nakedness. He is showing everyone in Zimbabwe that he is now a raving lunatic” – MDC-M president Welshman Ncube criticizing his former boss, Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara for refusing to relinquish his government post (*The Zimbabwean*, 17/2).

Ends/

The MEDIA UPDATE was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project
Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail:
monitors@mmpz.org.zw

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