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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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COMMENT

ZMC must get to work on media reforms

MMPZ welcomes President Mugabe's remarks while addressing the media at Zimbabwe House last week that the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) should immediately start operating, as there was no reason for not doing so. *The Standard* (7/4) reported Mugabe as having said this in response to comments by Information Secretary George Charamba that it was ***"their understanding"*** that the ZMC commissioners ***"must be sworn in first before they can carry out their duties"***. The weekly viewed Mugabe's clarification that only commissioners for the Zimbabwe Human Right Commission (ZHRC) and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) needed to be sworn in before they started working as ***"an open rebuke"*** to Charamba, whom it accused of having been at the forefront in ***"frustrating"*** the licencing of new players in the print media sector.

According to *The Standard*, the approval comes at a time when the ZMC secretariat, inherited from the discredited Tafataona Mahoso-led Media and Information Commission (MIC) had been ***"turning away publishers trying to apply for new licences"***.

MMPZ hopes that the President's go-ahead will finally clear the way for the ZMC to start fulfilling its constitutional mandate to approve new media products that will bring an end to Zimbabwe's information wasteland without any further delay.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

NEWS stories emanating from President Mugabe's first briefing in years with senior local journalists on Thursday and his unilateral reassignment of ministerial functions, published in a government Gazette the same day, grabbed the attention of the media, which were again dominated by debate over sanctions and ZANU PF's indigenization plans. See Fig. 1.

Fig 1: Popular stories in the media

Media	Sanctions debate	Mugabe's press briefing	Indigenisation policy	Human rights issues	Constitutional reforms
Public media	80	12	30	1	14
Private media	32	7	30	28	5
Total	**112**	**19**	**60**	**29**	**19**

Election talk shifts the nation's priorities

THE most startling news of the week was President Mugabe's revelation that national elections are likely to be held early next year whether or not a new constitution is in place.

Although there is no legal limit to the lifespan of the Global Political Agreement, *The Herald* (5/3) passively reported Mugabe telling journalists at a rare briefing, ***"Constitution-making has been slow because of the problem of resources and the GPA expires in February next year."***

He was reported saying, ***"If the constitution-making process succeeds there will be an election and if it fails, that too, will lead to an election."***

But the paper made no effort to seek comment on Mugabe's remarks from the MDC formations, or even from the leaders of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC).

At the time of this report, none of the media have sought to analyze how Mugabe's "election talk" appears to have relegated the importance of the constitution-making process, or what he meant when he said, ***"national healing depends on how the parties conduct their campaigns and themselves."***

It also remains to be seen whether the media will analyze the fate of previous efforts to install constitutional guarantees for free and fair elections, although the private media were beginning to report that without them the public fears any fresh elections will again be characterized by violence.

Power grab strips MDC ministers

JUST AS the private media were reporting that the MDC-T formation had declared a deadlock over the coalition's "outstanding issues" and had resolved to refer the dispute to the GPA's sponsors, SADC, *The Herald* (6/3) passively reported another unilateral decision by Mugabe to reassign the ministerial administration of Acts of Parliament, which saw MDC ministers being stripped of much of their responsibilities.

The GPA states that such important decisions are made in full consultation with all parties to the agreement.

But instead of viewing the move as another blow to the coalition, *The Herald* celebrated the re-allocations, which saw the administration of the Posts and Telecommunications Act being formally reassigned to the Transport Ministry. The paper reported this news as having ***"put to rest"*** the ***"dispute"*** between Information and Communication Technology Minister Nelson Chamisa and Transport Minister Nicholas Goche over the management of the telecommunications industry.

Harare's only daily also ignored the MDC's indignation over the reassignment of ministerial responsibilities, which left four ministries under their control without any legislation to administer. Nor did it provide any dispassionate analysis of this clear act of bravado, which was interpreted by everybody outside ZANU PF as a tactic to weaken the MDC formations' authority in government.

The Herald's report the same day: *No rifts in Govt, says President,* reflected the official media's support for Mugabe's claims of unity in the alliance despite palpable evidence of conflict. It simply quoted him dismissing the existence of divisions in the coalition over numerous disputes that had crippled its progress as ***"politicking"***.

The private media however, turned a more critical eye on Mugabe's ministerial power-grab.

They gave space to the MDC's criticism of the unilateral and partisan nature of Mugabe's reallocation of ministerial responsibilities and quoted analysts arguing that the action could further strain already frosty relations in the coalition.

These media also reported concern over Mugabe's comment that he was not planning to quit any time soon and would, in fact, be prepared to stand in the next election if his party endorsed him. *The Standard* (7/3), for example, raised the possibility of a return to violence because Mugabe was well aware that he was unlikely to win a free and fair election.

Stock market tumbles

THE government media continued to defend ZANU PF's indigenization regulations, citing the ZANU PF arm of government and its allies, despite their negative effects on the economy.

This was reflected in 25 (83%) of their 30 stories on the issue. The remaining five reported the stock market as among the early casualties of the measures, while a ZTV current affairs programme, *Talking Business With Supa*, featured chief executive officer of African Banking Corporation (ABC) Douglas Munatsi arguing that the measures would not benefit ordinary Zimbabweans as they had no capacity to buy shares in foreign owned firms (ZTV, 4/3, 9pm).

Although *The Herald* (8/3) quoted Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere reiterating his party's hard-line position that the regulations would not be ***"reversed"***, it did not reconcile this with his more conciliatory remarks in the same report that ***"his ministry was open to any suggestions…"***

The private media continued to report economists and other commentators viewing the regulations as being harmful to the coalition's credibility and government's own efforts to revive the economy.

Studio 7 (2/3) reported the ***"drop in trade"*** on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange as evidence of this, while the *Independent* (5/3) reported that this had prompted Kasukuwere to arrange a meeting with the ZSE amid reports that government was contemplating some kind of ***"a reprieve"***. The paper reported a 20 percent drop in the value of shares and *The Financial Gazette's* 'Kingdom Market Report' (4/3) provided lucid details of the collapse in the equities market ***"across all sectors"***. It reported an unprecedented 9.8% drop in the industrial index in February and a further drop of nearly 6.9% in the first three days of March.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

THE media published six new incidents of human rights violations, five of them in the private media. They included:

- The burning of a home belonging to MDC-T activist Sarudzai Tavedzerwa in Mashonaland East by suspected ZANU PF supporters after she had allegedly refused to join the party (*The Zimbabwean*, 4/3);
- Arrest of John Rusthon, a senior manager at Fresh-Pro, for circulating an email allegedly insulting the person and office of the President (*The Herald*, 2/3);
- Arrest of journalist Andrison Manyere for filming alleged coup-plotters who were being led into Harare Magistrates' court by prison officers (SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean*, 2 & 4/3); and
- Further police raids on the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union (GAPWUZ) offices (*The Zimbabwean*, 4/3).

THE MOST QUOTED VOICES

ZANU PF remained the most quoted party in the public media, receiving nearly twice the attention of its coalition partners, despite Article X1X (d) of the GPA that demands the public media provide ***"balanced and fair coverage*** to the parties ***"for their legitimate political activities"*** (See Fig 2).

Fig 2: Most quoted groups in media

Media	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Alt	Business	Foreign diplomats
Public Media	66	33	7	28	4	25
Private Media	24	33	3	52	11	39

Individually, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and President Mugabe were the most quoted in the government media.
They were quoted 25 times each, followed by South African President Jacob Zuma (seven); ministers Saviour Kasukuwere (seven) and Welshman Ncube (four); and "analysts" Jonathan Kadzura (five), Margret Dongo (three) and Goodson Nguni (three).
Tsvangirai was quoted in the context of him urging the West to lift sanctions or addressing Zimbabweans at events to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of his wife, Susan. Mugabe was mostly quoted addressing journalists during the press briefing and commending Tsvangirai for having called for the lifting of sanctions. Kasukuwere was heard defending indigenization regulations as a correction of historical injustice and the solution to Zimbabwe's economic problems, while Kadzura, Dongo and Nguni were quoted urging the Prime Minister to ***"directly engage the West"*** over sanctions (ZTV, 4/3, 8pm).
Mugabe was the most quoted individual in the private media too (14 times). MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa came a close second (12), with Zuma in London (nine), Kasukuwere (seven) and US President Barak Obama extending the US's travel and asset sanctions (seven). Mugabe was quoted responding to questions by the media on various issues, while Chamisa expressed his party's anger with ZANU PF's unilateralism.

MISSING STORIES

- The acquittal of Beitbridge prosecutor Tarcisius Moyo on charges of criminal abuse of office. The charges emanated from him admitting to bail Hudson Mhlanga, accused of kidnapping and assault, when the Attorney-General's office believed the accused was not a suitable candidate (ZLHR's *Legal Monitor*, 8/3).
- The government media censored the MDC-T's national executive council and national council meetings, which declared a deadlock in the power-sharing talks and resolved to seek SADC mediation on the dispute (Studio 7, 4/3 & *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 7/3)
- They also censored Tsvangirai's response to Mugabe's suggestion that elections are likely to be held early next year whether or not a new constitution had been agreed. Tsvangirai suggested those elections would require the presence of an AU and SADC peacekeeping force to ensure they were free and fair (*New Zimbabwe.com*, 7/3).

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"If the Kimberley Process is unsatisfied with our efforts and wants to be difficult saying that we have failed to comply with their requirements …we will…pull out and not lose anything….The Kimberley Process does not own the diamond trade markets…" - Mines Minister Obert Mpofu (SW Radio Africa, 2/3).

"These British banks should change their attitudes, either they work to support our people or there is no need for them to be in First Street" - Indigenization Minister Kasukuwere ordering banks to start lending money to black businesses or stop operating in Zimbabwe **(***The Standard*, 7/3)

Ends/

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