

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday, May 10th – Sunday, May 16th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-18

Contents

1. Comment
2. The week's top stories
3. The most popular voices

COMMENT

Dispute exposes 'political' structure of ZMC

NEWS of disagreements within the new Zimbabwe Media Commission over the issue of resource persons for a "workshop" organized to facilitate the registration of new media operators exposes the politically compromised nature of an organization that is supposed to be free of political influence and bodes ill for the coalition government's media reform agenda.

While the latest news in *The Financial Gazette* (20/5) reported that the commission was expected to announce the successful applicants on the last day of what it described as a series of "board meetings" between May 24th and May 26th, *The Standard* (16/5) quoted "sources" within the ZMC saying the commissioners were "**deeply divided**" over the choice of facilitators, with commissioners aligned to ZANU PF allegedly insisting on Media, Information and Publicity Minister Webster Shamu, his permanent secretary George Charamba, and Attorney-General Johannes Tomana as the resource persons. Members of the commission who are not aligned to ZANU PF were reported to be opposed to the involvement of officials from the ZANU PF arm of government on the grounds that it would undermine the ZMC's independence.

To some extent this resistance to co-opt openly partisan facilitators is encouraging, though it remains to be seen who the ZMC eventually appoints as their "advisors". However, such petty political disputes should not even arise in an allegedly independent body and it will be instructive to note if the Commission declines any application for the registration of new media services – and if so, for what reason.

In its story reporting that successful applicants would be announced at the end of the Commission's deliberations next week, *The Financial Gazette* reported that it too, was planning to launch its own daily, *The Daily Gazette*, in addition to the expected return of *The Daily News*, while the Independent group of newspapers' has also applied to have its planned new daily, *NewsDay*, registered. If these new dailies are all duly registered without delay, this can only be good news for Zimbabweans whose choice of where they obtain news about Zimbabwe will be dramatically increased.

However, there is complete silence about the fate of new broadcasters. Indeed, while ZMC is also responsible for processing applications from these aspiring media operators, the fate of local broadcasters ultimately lies in the hands of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) whose responsibility it will be to allocate the successful applicants the wavebands on which to broadcast. BAZ though, is itself mired in a controversy that does not appear to

be anywhere near a conclusion. While Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai declared that its membership was irregularly appointed after Information Minister unilaterally announced its composition last year, there appears to have been no attempt to resolve this dispute.

Without some resolution to this stalemate there will be no new local broadcasters and Zimbabweans, especially those beyond the limited urban reach of the Press, will still need to tune in to the foreign-based Zimbabwean radio stations broadcasting into the country to escape ZBC's turgid programming.

It will, therefore, be constructive for the ZMC and the coalition partners to clarify the situation regarding new broadcasting initiatives without delay.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

THE acquittal of MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett on banditry and terrorism charges attracted most attention in the private media and reignited debate on the abuse of the justice delivery system by the ZANU PF half of government to persecute its political opponents.

Targeted Western sanctions against President Mugabe and his political allies, which the government-controlled media continued to exclusively view as the major cause of friction in the coalition, was top-billing in these media (See Fig. 1). The debate was renewed by the US's plans to amend its sanctions law against Zimbabwe. The UK elections, which failed to produce an outright winner, provided ammunition to the government media's propaganda machinery to justify Zimbabwe's discredited electoral system, including Mugabe's controversial re-election in the June 2008 presidential run-off.

Fig 1: Topical issues in the media

Media	Bennett's acquittal	Power sharing	Sanctions & conspiracies	UK elections	Human rights
Public media	33	27	37	19	6
Private media	49	40	10	6	31
Total	82	67	41	25	37

Bennett's acquittal sparks fresh wave of propaganda

DESPITE MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett's acquittal on banditry and terrorism charges by the High Court, which should have immediately resulted in his swearing-in as deputy agriculture minister, the government media launched a propaganda offensive against Bennett, depicting him as unsuitable for the post because of his alleged "unacceptable" Rhodesian history.

None of their reports referred to the fact that President Mugabe had promised to appoint Bennett as deputy agriculture minister if he was cleared of the charges, or questioned ZANU PF's authority in determining the suitability of its coalition partners' nominees for government positions.

The Sunday Mail's lead story (16/5), age headlined '*Bennett just can't. He's an insult to the struggle*', vilified Bennett as not only **"a former member of the notorious Selous Scouts"** but also **"an unrepentant Rhodie who even tried to undermine the country's independence in 1980"**, quoting war veterans and "political analysts" such as ZANU PF's prodigal son Jonathan Moyo.

Apart from failing to corroborate these claims, the paper buried a denial by MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa that Bennett was a former member of the Selous Scouts.

Earlier, ZTV (10/5/, 8pm) downplayed the MDC-T's view that Bennett's acquittal had cleared one of the hurdles under the power sharing agreement, paving the way for his swearing-in by quoting senior ZANU PF official Emmerson Mnangagwa refuting this on the grounds that the judgment was **"appealable"**.

In contrast, the private media gave Bennett space to articulate his views, quoted his lawyers, the MDC-T, analysts, and sections of the international community welcoming Bennett's acquittal and arguing that his prosecution was politically-motivated.

While *The Financial Gazette* (13/5) viewed the State's intention to appeal against the ruling as **"likely to perpetuate divisions"** in the fragile coalition, the *Independent* (14/5) published an article by MDC-T's Luke Tamborinyoka dismissing as invalid ZANU PF's refusal to swear-in Bennett on the basis of his former association with the Rhodesian government, as other people such as Philip Chiyangwa and Olivia Muchena had served in the Zimbabwe government despite having been members of the colonial administration. These media also widely accessed comments from lawyers and commentators condemning the state's appeal as clear evidence of persecution.

Spin-doctors feast on UK poll result

THE government-controlled media feasted on the failure of the British parliamentary elections to produce an outright winner to justify Zimbabwe's own controversial electoral system and the circumstances that led to the creation of Zimbabwe's coalition government.

However, the government media ignored glaring differences between the two cases. Among them were the absence of politically motivated violence; unprecedented delays in releasing the results; harassment of the media in their coverage of the elections; the willingness of former Prime Minister Gordon Brown to resign after his defeat; and the British parties' ability to conclude power-sharing talks within a week.

Radio Zimbabwe (11/5, 8pm) passively quoted Clerk of Parliament Austin Zvoma saying the outcome of Britain's polls was evidence that there was **"no perfect elections"** in the world, while *The Herald* (11/5) published an article by Peter Ganya urging Britain to stop meddling in Zimbabwe's political affairs and allow the country's coalition parties to iron out their differences on their own as Britain's political parties had done without **"outside...interference"**.

The private media, especially *Financial Gazette's* columnist Bornwell Chakaodza (13/5), argued that although the British elections were marred by minor irregularities, they helped to highlight how Zimbabwe's electoral system was among the worst in the world. They cited widespread political violence, harassment of the media, a shambolic voters' roll and a partisan electoral commission, as proof of this.

Censored and distorted

THE government media censored and distorted information about a number of newsworthy developments during the week. Among them were:

- News that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai had traveled to America to receive a human rights award from Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.
- Instead, *The Herald* (12/5) accused him of "missing" an opportunity to comply with the terms of the GPA by calling for the lifting of American sanctions.

Tsvangirai's comments blaming the government's failure to initiate democratic reforms on ZANU PF's alleged **"elitist and repressive"** attitude against opposition parties while speaking to Clinton (the *Independent*, 14/5)

- The boycott by ZANU PF ministers of the Council of Ministers meeting, chaired by Tsvangirai (SW Radio Africa & the *Independent*, 14/5)
- Allegations that Attorney-General Johannes Tomana was pressurized to appeal against the acquittal of MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett by senior ZANU PF officials (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, SW Radio Africa & *ZimOnline*, 12, 13, 14 & 16/5)
- Reports that Bennett's lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa, was considering suing the State over her client's missing passport (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa & *Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 13, 14 & 15/5).

THE MOST POPULAR VOICES

MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa was the most quoted individual in the official media.

He was quoted eight times followed by High Court Judge Chinembiri Bhunu (six) and two senior ZANU PF officials, Stan Mudenge (five) and Patrick Zhuwawo (four). Chamisa was quoted welcoming the acquittal of MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett and expressing his party's expectation that the acquittal should result in Bennett assuming his post as deputy agriculture minister. Zhuwawo and Mudenge were quoted criticizing the US for amending its sanctions law against Zimbabwe instead of scrapping it and expressing hope that the new British government would improve relations with Zimbabwe. Bhunu was heard delivering his ruling on Bennett.

Bennett's lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa (eight), was the most quoted in the private media.

Chamisa, Bhunu and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai closely followed. They were all quoted six times. Mtetwa and Chamisa were quoted describing Bennett's prosecution as politically motivated, while Bhunu was cited exonerating Bennett from banditry and terrorism charges. Tsvangirai was quoted describing Zimbabwe's coalition government as ***"uneasy but progressive"*** during his visit to the US.

Human rights violations

THE media published 10 incidents of human rights violations. Seven of them appeared in the private media and three in the official media.

Among them were:

- The assault of an airtime vendor, Washington Masuku, in Gweru by the police and a bus conductor whom the police suspected to be an illegal diamond panner in Chiadzwa (*The Manica Post & Chronicle*, 14 & 15/5).
- The alleged harassment of a resettled farmer, Wilfred Chagwedera, and disruption of his farming activities by a white commercial farmer Deon Theron in Beatrice (ZTV & Spot FM, 10/5, 7 & 8am).
- Abduction and assault of two MDC-T members, Juliet Dakacha and Moses Chirau, in Buhera (*The Zimbabwean*, 13/5).
- Police harassment of journalist Golden Maunganidze, who works for a Masvingo independent weekly paper, the *Mirror*, for allegedly defaming a senior ZANU PF official, Walter Mzembe (SW Radio Africa, *The Zimbabwean & Standard*, 10, 13 & 16/5).

What they said...

“Having carefully considered the above findings of fact and law, we came to the unanimous conclusion that the State has failed to prove a prima facie case against the accused on a balance of probabilities thereby entitling him to his acquittal at the close of the State's case” – High Court Judge Chinembiri Bhunu (The Herald, 11/5)

“He (Bennett) represents the unforgettable face of the brutality of Rhodesia, a regime that was provocative and insensitive to the majority. This guy is a well-known Rhodesian whose hands are dripping with the blood of innocent Zimbabweans. We are going to oppose him with all our ounces of energy and with all our imagination” – Jonathan Moyo (The Sunday Mail, 16/5)

“...The acquittal would have indeed moved the process of resolving outstanding issues forward. We are, however, still hopeful on the resolution of this issue and we will be engaging the government, particularly the ZANU PF side of it, on the Bennett issue” – Lindiwe Zulu, member of South African President Jacob Zuma's facilitation team (SW Radio Africa, 14/5)

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

Feel free to write to MMPZ. We may not be able to respond to everything but we will look at each message. For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>