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**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-3**

Rising costs – and the fuel shortage mystery

REPORTS on resurgent fuel shortages, prevalent in Zimbabwe before the introduction of multi-currencies in early 2009, finally attracted the attention of the official and private media this week.

But did we get any clear, credible explanations from these media on the causes of the new fuel crisis, which began to make itself felt during the festive season and resulted in sharp increases in fuel and transport costs?

The Herald did actually carry one report about problems with diesel just before Christmas, but it took a national outcry from the public complaining about unscheduled increases in commodity prices and transport costs as they returned to work after the holiday season before the media paid attention.

ZBC carried nine stories on these issues this week, while the private electronic media carried five reports [private radios (two) and online agencies (three)].

The print media carried six stories. Five of them appeared in the private Press and the other in *The Herald*.

These all blamed the rising costs of fuel but still did not explain fully why there was a shortage.

Instead, the public was fed a hotch-potch of vague excuses in the media, some of them bordering on the comical...and most without a clear and logical explanation.

We list some of them:

“Another push factor is the increased demand for winter stocking in Europe. There is always a high demand for oil around this time from the European markets as they experience chilling conditions in winter” – an unidentified official at Redan Petroleum, one of Zimbabwe’s largest fuel suppliers (*The Herald*, 21/12/10).

“We have...experienced limited supplies from the onset of the cold spell in the Northern Hemisphere. But we have managed to get supplies to other parts of the country...” – Energy and Power Development Minister Elton Mangoma (*Newsday*, 20/1/11).

“Ships have been having problems in docking because of the water levels at Beira and this has caused problems...” - an unidentified Mozambican official attributing fuel shortages to low water levels at the Port of Beira in Mozambique, which allegedly made it difficult for oil tankers to dock and offload fuel (*The Herald*, 22/1/11).

“Given the low water levels, no captain could take the risk to dock because there was a high possibility that the vessels would be trapped in the mud” – another Redan Petroleum official (*The Herald*, 22/1/11).

“Rising water levels at the Mozambican port are making it difficult for ships to dock, resulting in delays in fuel delivery” – *PetrolPlaza* news (28/12/10).

“For the good part of December we didn’t have any ships coming to Beira and the only fuel that was coming into the country was from South Africa...South Africa did not have adequate supplies hence they also stopped supplying us. Then we had our own domestic affairs with \$35 million disappearing from Noczim (the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe), which was due to Zimra (the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority). Zimra garnished the account, which contained the debt redemption levy and the strategic reserve levy hence taking away everything from Noczim” – Minister Elton Mangoma (*NewsDay*, 21/1).

New propaganda song hits airwaves

ANYBODY who harboured dreams that the national broadcaster, ZBC, would finally come to its senses and treat Zimbabwe's three coalition parties as equal partners, in accordance with its public mandate and the terms of the Global Political Agreement, would have been rudely disabused of this delusional thinking during the week.

In its latest display of total scorn for the provisions of the GPA – and, indeed, any professional journalistic standards – the public broadcaster introduced yet another cheerful “continuity” ditty that turned out to be just another ZANU PF political promotion song. This piece of music, entitled *Mahwindi*, portrays President Mugabe as “**a man of the people**” and is part of a new 10-track album, *Simukai Tiverengane*, by the *Mbare Chimurenga Choir* of the *Nyatsoteerera* fame.

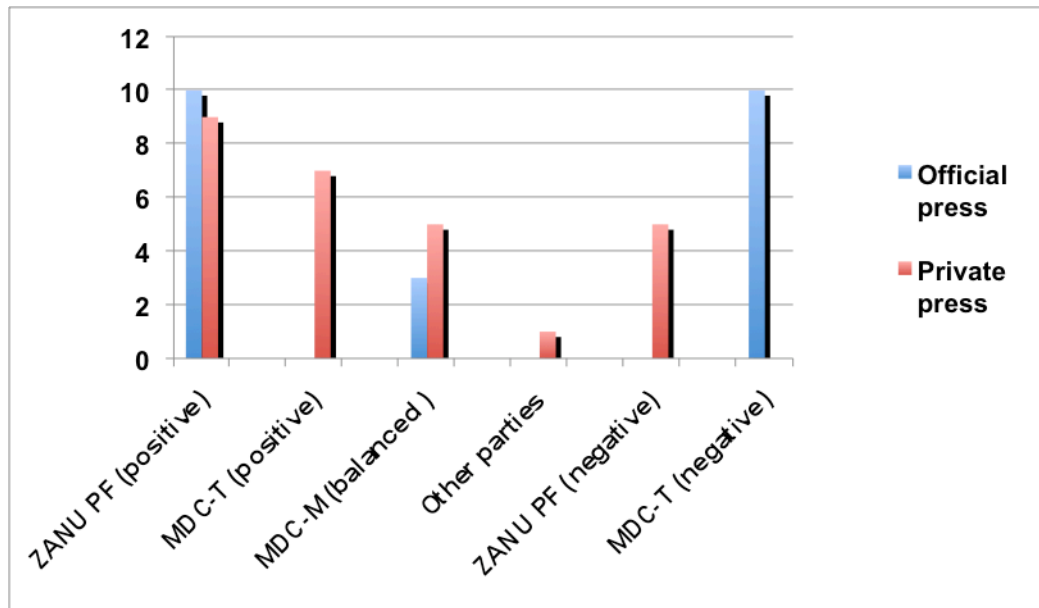
The song is now regularly featured as a continuity device to fill gaps in the station's news and current affairs programming, and joins a ballooning partisan programming by ZBC that includes the use of other songs from the *Mbare Chimurenga Choir* and the *Born Free Crew* that promote ZANU PF ideology.

Out of the 78 stories ZBC carried on the coalition parties' campaign activities, 63 of them (81%) were positive reports of ZANU PF business, while the MDC-T's activities were covered 10 times – all of them negative. The smaller MDC group's activities attracted five negative reports.

Private radio stations largely ignored the campaign activities of the political parties, except one news story speculating that Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was unlikely to be challenged at his party's congress in May (SW Radio Africa, 19/1).

Online agencies adopted the same attitude. They carried only two stories on the two MDC formations (one for each group).

Fig 2: Print media coverage of political parties' campaigns



State media used to dismiss truth

EARLIER this month *NewsDay* (6/1) reported alarming increases in the registration and accreditation fees for journalists. Among the increases was a hike in the accreditation fees for local journalists working for foreign media outlets from \$100 to \$400.

The paper reported that Information Minister Webster Shamu had **“announced”** these increases.

But the next day, *The Herald* published a story under the headline “Govt dismisses report on journalists’ fees hike”, giving the impression that *NewsDay*’s story was entirely **“false”**. Relying solely on a statement by Shamu objecting to being identified as being responsible for setting accreditation and registration fees, the paper allowed the minister to give the impression that there had been no increases. He belaboured the point that the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) was the constitutional body responsible for setting print media fees.

But the fact remains that the ZMC is a statutory body set up under the provisions of the notorious Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, whose administration falls under the Ministry of Information, which Shamu heads. Any change in the fees structure set by the ZMC must be given legal authority through a Government Gazette that could only be approved by Shamu’s ministry. The only problem with *NewsDay*’s story was that they did not make this clear, thus giving Shamu – and *The Herald* – the opportunity to misrepresent the truth.

CENSORED STORIES

- The official media censored widespread reports carried in the private and international media of President Mugabe's alleged ill health during his annual leave in Singapore. *The Herald* (24/1) only referred to the matter on the day the President returned home. Even then, it was in the context of a Press briefing the President held at Harare International Airport where he dismissed media speculation about his ill health. ***"Kondozvavanotauraka (That is what they always say)...those are the lies they always put across from year to year. Now it's something you expect each time I go on leave that they also go on their campaigns"***.
- The official media completely censored the visit to the country by the SADC facilitation team in the week to help the coalition partners thrash out an acceptable "roadmap" that would lead to the staging of credible elections. Only the private media reported the trip (*NewsDay* & *ZimOnline*, 19 & 20/1).

But *The Sunday Mail* did carry an "enlightening" opinion piece on the GPA in general where ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo stated: ***"The point must be made – and made in the strongest possible way...that no election in Zimbabwe will be set and conducted in Zimbabwe on the basis of any roadmap."*** He dismissed ***"this roadmap nonsense"*** as a failed American concept. Such a clear dismissal of SADC's efforts to put in place reforms that will guarantee a credible election by a senior ZANU PF official is evidently the reason why the ZANU PF-controlled media suffocated news of the visit by the SADC facilitators.

Political violence erupts in Harare

ALL media covered a resurgence in political violence and related rights abuses in Harare and outlying areas during the week.

This was epitomised by the well-organized assault on Harare City Council's offices by suspected ZANU PF youths allegedly demanding compensation for maize slashed in parts of Harare. They reportedly beat council officials and passers-by at random.

NewsDay (22/1) noted that the mob gathered at ZANU PF headquarters before moving on to attack Town House. But *The Herald* (22/1) insisted on giving the impression that it was a spontaneous protest by **"Harare residents and ratepayers"**. Despite reporting the violent attack, it was surprising that *The Herald* did not report any arrests.

The private media first reported the invasion of private boat clubs and tourist lodges around Lake Chivero at the weekend by a mob of about 200 ZANU PF supporters claiming to be war veterans. There was apparently no violence during the take-over of these properties, but the official media remained silent until Monday when *The Herald* (24/1) only reported the event in the context of quoting ZANU PF secretary for lands Ignatius Chombo denying that the invaders were members of his party. The paper even claimed that ZANU PF had said the invasion was **"a scheme hatched by MDC-T and it partners to tarnish the name of the party ahead of elections"**, although it never provided any proof of this.

These incidents formed part of the 14 cases of rights violations the media carried in the week. Of these, 12 were published in the private media and two in the government media. Most of the offenders were said to be ZANU PF supporters, while MDC supporters were mostly the victims.

These incidents included:

- The arrest of MDC-T activist Tsepiso Mpofu for allegedly assaulting another party member in Bulawayo, suspected to be a ZANU PF infiltrator (SW Radio, 18/1).
- The stoning of offices belonging to the MDC-T in Mbare (*NewsDay*, 22/1), and
- The arrest of Marondera Mayor Farai Nyandoro and councillor Carlos Mudondo – both of MDC-T – on allegations of assaulting a ZANU PF member they accused of **"behaving as if he owns the party"** (*The Herald*, 19/1).

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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