Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday June 13th – Sunday June 19th 2011
Weekly Media Review 2011-24

State media blame Biti for civil servants' plight

THE continued failure by Zimbabwe's cash-strapped coalition to fulfil President Mugabe's directive to raise the salaries of the country's underpaid public service workers by June this year took centre stage in the official media as the month drew to a close.

These media and the ZANU PF arm of government merely turned this national fiasco into a personal propaganda crusade against MDC-T Finance Minister Tendai Biti, whom they have long accused of sabotaging the interests of the inclusive government.

The campaign gathered momentum this week when the government media widely reported some civil servants' unions "blasting" Biti for ***"disregarding directives from Mugabe"*** to increase civil servants' salaries and threatening to embark on a strike (*The Herald* and *Chronicle* 20/6).

The state media also carried opinion pieces, including editorial intrusions in their news stories, accusing Biti of defying advice from Mugabe, Cabinet and the Public Service Commission (PSC) to do so. They portrayed this as a strategy by the finance minister to incite civil servants to rebel against government and achieve "illegal" regime change.

This was reflected in the 36 stories the government media carried over a 10-day period beginning June 9th to June 19th.

The stories, in violation of professional journalistic practice, never even attempted to give a balanced perspective of the problem. Neither did they provide any insight into the economic performance of the country and whether it could afford the pay rises despite Mugabe's instruction.

Further, Biti was not adequately given the chance to explain the state of the country's finances. The only report that quoted him referring to the matter was exclusively in the context of statements he made at an MDC-T rally in Gweru where *The Herald* (20/6) reported him as having said civil servants' salaries would only be reviewed after completion of an audit of government workers.

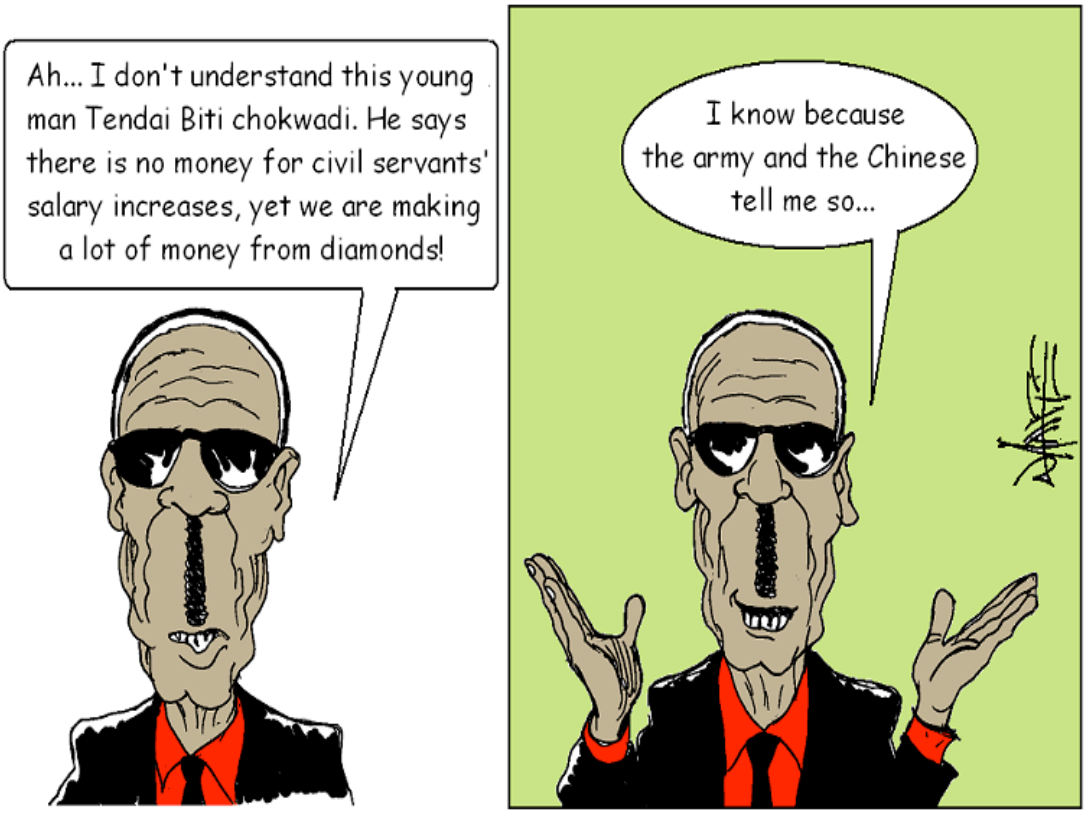
Even then, it was within the framework of discrediting his explanations, accusing him of dithering and prevaricating.

The Herald (20/6), for example, quoted Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation chairman Godwills Masimirembwa disputing Biti's revelations that he could not increase civil servants salaries because his ministry ***"had not received anything from diamond proceeds since January this year"***. Masimirembwa alleged the diamond sector was ***"contributing a fair share to Treasury"***, while ***"Treasury officials"*** reportedly advised the PSC that it was ***"feasible to increase civil servants' salaries"***.

In other stories, the government media quoted Mugabe and his party castigating Biti for refusing to campaign for the lifting of sanctions on Zimbabwe and reviewing traditional leaders' allowances; procuring vehicles for MPs without following procedure; behaving like a ***"super minister"***; ***"frustrating people-centred programmes"*** and ***"trying to usurp"*** presidential powers and the role of Parliament (*The Herald*, 3, 4, 7, 16 & 20/6 and ZBC 13, 14, 15 & 16/6, 6 & 8pm).

The private media generally viewed growing criticism of Biti by ZANU PF and the state media as politically motivated in 12 of their 28 stories.

However, *The Financial Gazette* (16/6) quoted political commentators accusing both ZANU PF and MDC-T of ***"playing political games at the expense of the suffering public workers"*** and speculating that this ***"political posturing"*** could be an attempt to ***"downgrade each other"*** ahead of general elections.



Private media counter ZANU PF SADC summit propaganda

MORE information about what transpired at the SADC Summit in South Africa continued to attract attention in the private media, which contradicted absurd claims by ZANU PF and the public media that the regional body had “rejected” the resolutions of its earlier March Livingstone Troika meeting.

For example, the “exclusive” lead story in the *Zimbabwe Independent* (17/6), *SADC teaches Mugabe lesson*, provided some insight into the deliberations at the summit, reporting them as being far from amenable to ZANU PF as the party had claimed.

Based on ***“unimpeachable information”*** the paper claims to have obtained ***“exclusively”*** during the summit, the story gives a detailed overview of proceedings. This included the ***“measured encounters”*** to avoid ***“stormy outbursts”*** particularly between President Mugabe and South African President Jacob Zuma over the Livingstone report, which the meeting reportedly refused to reject.

It also reported Mugabe’s ***“unprecedented diplomatic gaffe when he called Zuma, (Nelson) Mandela, much to the dismay of SADC leaders”***, a development confirmed by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai at a party rally in Gweru (*NewsDay* and *Daily News* 20/6).

The *Zimbabwe Independent* report reinforced the sentiments of the rest of the private media on the matter.

The state media made no effort to independently investigate what really took place at the SADC summit. They continued amplifying the ZANU PF arm of government’s perspective that the meeting had ***“consigned to the dustbin of history”*** the Livingstone report, which they presented as the official position of the Zimbabwean government.

ZTV (15/6, 8pm) and *The Herald* (16/6) accused the MDC formations and some sections of the private media of ***“trying to mislead the nation”*** on the summit’s outcome.

The report was based on Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi’s remarks soon after ***“briefing”*** ambassadors of Non-Aligned Movement states, SADC, Russia and China on the outcome of the SADC summit. Mumbengegwi ***“emphasized”*** that the Livingstone report was ***“only noted”*** but not endorsed, as it was ***“based on one report done by the MDC-T”***. The paper reported Mumbengegwi’s remarks as having ***“put to rest confusion that was being created by other parties”*** after the summit.

ZTV (16 and 17/6, 7am & 8pm) also embarked on a propaganda crusade aimed at distorting the outcome of the SADC summit. It quoted ZANU PF apologists Tafataona Mahoso, Gabriel Chaibva, Christopher Mutsvangwa and Martin Dinha, masquerading as “political analysts”, arguing that SADC had ***“exposed”*** and ***“whipped the MDC-T back into line”*** by ***“clearly spelling out”*** that Zimbabweans should ***“take charge of their own affairs”***. These “analysts” claimed that this made the MDC-T ***“the biggest losers”***, as the party ***“has always sought to involve external elements”***.

This report was among the 48 stories the government media carried on the issue.

Fresh controversy hits Copac

AS this report was being compiled, the media reported that one of the army’s most ardent ZANU PF zealots, Brigadier General Douglas Nyikayaramba, had been “booted out” out of the country’s constitutional reform exercise.

Reasons for his dismissal as technical adviser in the thematic area of elections remained a source of contention in the media.

The official media gave prominence to unproven claims that the brigadier-general was ***“booted out”*** of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac) at the ***“behest of donors battling to control the constitution-making process”*** (*The Herald* and *Chronicle* 22/6).

Citing unnamed insiders, the papers claimed that donors had ***“threatened to withdraw funding”*** of the constitutional process if Nyikayaramba was not removed. They also reported Nyikayaramba projecting his removal from Copac as ***“meant to smuggle issues into the new constitution that threatened national security***”.

Official but contradictory views from Copac co-chairs Douglas Mwonzora (MDC-T) and ZANU PF’s Paul Mangwana on his dismissal were subordinated to these claims. Only the private dailies, *NewsDay* and *Daily News* (22/6), gave clear coverage of the development.

Reportedly, Mwonzora presented Nyikayaramba’s dismissal as based on a management committee resolution that barred serving state security agents from taking part in the constitution-making process, while Mangwana said it was taken after the committee resolved not to renew the brigadier-general’s contract after it had expired.

The latest development came amid news that the Thematic Committee stage of the constitutional reform exercise had again stalled due to continued differences between the coalition partners over data analysis methods, with ZANU PF insisting on the use of the quantitative approach and MDC-T demanding the qualitative method (SW Radio Africa, Studio 7 and *New Zimbabwe.com*, 14, 15 & 20/6).

PRIVATE MEDIA REPORT RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

WHILE the government media continued to deny the existence of human rights violations in Zimbabwe, the private media reported the problem as still prevalent and dampening hopes for free and fair elections in the country.

Twelve of the 13 incidents the media recorded appeared in the private media.

They included:

- The expulsion of a police officer for having a sexual relationship with MDC-T MP Marvellous Khumalo (*The Herald* and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 19/6)
- Invasion of a white owned conservancy, Longville Ranch, by ZANU PF supporters, led by Senator Japhet Ncube, in Gwanda (Radio VoP, 16/6).
- Raid on offices belonging to a privately owned weekly newspaper, *Masvingo Mirror*, and houses suspected to be harbouring WOZA activists in Bulawayo by suspected state security agents (SW Radio Africa and Radio VoP, 13, 16 & 20/6), and
- Death threats against MDC-T supporters by controversial war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda while addressing a ZANU PF rally in Masvingo. And the assault of five MDC-T youths by ZANU PF activists in Zvimba (*The Zimbabwean On Thursday* and Studio 7, 16 & 17/6).

WHAT THEY SAID

"What some of us would not do is to give legitimacy to individual party programmes. The sanctions issue is a ZANU-PF programme just like MDC has its own party programme. I will not sign any petition that belongs to any political party…" – Finance Minister Tendai Biti explaining why he refused to sign ZANU PF's anti-sanctions petition form (ZTV, 15/6, 7am).

"We are the ones who are suffering and as you have just seen, he *(Biti)* ***was just having a meeting with the same people*** *(IMF and World bank officials)* ***who are making us suffer. We are tired of Biti's lies, it's high time we stand united against him"*** - Fanuel Mutasa, chairman of an obscure, pro-ZANU PF youth organization, Anti-Sanctions Trust (*The Herald*, 16/6).

"Every sector is crying because of** (Finance Minister Tendai) **Biti, be it farmers, civil servants and ordinary people, but we see him bailing out friends with banks who have messed up instead of helping the general public" – Mutasa (*The Herald*, 16/6).

"I was with the President** (Mugabe) **recently and I asked him whether Biti was government or a mere minister? I argued that there is no money for civil servants and that Biti, as young as he is, cannot be wealthy enough to pay civil servants money from his personal purse… " – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (*The Herald*, 20/6).

"SADC** (summit) **was a victory for Zimbabwe because whereas the prophets of doom were predicting a fight, embarrassment for the president of Zimbabwe and for ZANU-PF, we see frustration by the opposition… The summit was an ordinary session as usual which showed solidarity with Zimbabwe…" – ZANU PF's Mashonaland Central Governor Martin Dinha (ZTV, 16/6, 8pm).

WEEKLY MEDIA REVIEWS COME TO AN END

MMPZ will be discontinuing its present Weekly Media Review series after the first week of July. But we will be publishing a regular fortnightly commentary on news presentation in the media and matters affecting Zimbabwe's media environment, especially those relating to media reforms promised under the Global Political Agreement. Our focus will be on matters affecting constitutional reforms, the referendum and national elections and the conduct of the media in addressing these important national issues.

However, readers are still encouraged to comment on our work and can send their comments either by email to: monitors@mmpz.org.zw or by sms on our dedicated cell phone hotline: 0774-432-509.

Ends/

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