

ZANU PF steps up campaign against private media

AS this report was being compiled, SW Radio Africa and *NewsDay* (29 & 30/6) reported the arrest of journalists Nevanji Madanhire (editor) and Patience Nyangove (senior reporter) and company representative Loud Ramakgapola from the private weekly, *The Standard*, over a story the paper published on June 19th about the arrest and detention of MDC-T Minister Jameson Timba.

Reportedly, the three were charged with criminal defamation under Section 31 (A) (iii) and 96 of the Criminal Law (Codification) and Reform Act, after its front-page report: *MDC-T fears for missing Timba's life*, claimed Timba had been arrested by police officers, including **"the notorious Crispin Makedenge"**, when Makedenge was allegedly **"not present and involved in the arrest"**. The section criminalizes **"publication of false statements prejudicial to the State"** and that **"undermines public confidence in law enforcement agencies"**.

The arrests came barely two days after the *Daily News* (28/6) reported an imminent crackdown on private media journalists, allegedly to discourage them from criticizing President Mugabe and his ZANU PF party, at the instigation of an unnamed ZANU PF politburo member, presumed to be Jonathan Moyo. These also came in the wake of a sustained propaganda campaign by Moyo, mostly on the national broadcaster, ZBC, and the official weekly, *The Sunday Mail*, depicting journalists working for the private media as having been recruited by Britain to effect illegal regime change in Zimbabwe.

This was reflected in 11 stories the government media carried from June 19th to June 26th.

ZTV gave this "news" excessive prominence in their evening bulletins over four consecutive nights (21, 22, 23 & 24/6, 6 & 8pm) alleging that the Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Office was **"in possession of more than £3m"** to **"fund operations on the private media in tarnishing the image and person of President Mugabe"** under the supervision of Jameson Timba, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's office.

It quoted Moyo: **"We know that it is Jameson Timba who is doing that coordination...This idea that we can have people behaving in this manner...has gone too far (and) is unacceptable and we must confront it"**.

The latest developments pose a major threat to renewed hopes for genuine media reforms, reflected in revelations that some senior ZANU PF officials now backed the reforms. Among these is ZANU PF Chivi South MP Irvine Dzvingirai who urged government to **“legalize”** the operations of **“pirate”** radio stations such as SW Radio Africa and Studio 7, as they were **“a vital source of information”** (Radio VoP and *NewsDay*, 18 & 28/6).

Earlier, SW Radio Africa and *ZimOnline* (22 & 23/6) reported that the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Information, Media and Communication Technology had called for a review of Zimbabwe’s broadcasting laws and an end to ZBC’s monopoly of the airwaves, as it was **“incompatible”** with Zimbabweans’ right to freedom of expression, in its report about the state of the media in the country.

COMMENT – GET RID OF THESE OFFENSIVE LAWS

MMPZ condemns in the strongest terms this selective, arbitrary and repressive crackdown on the private media. Such attacks on these media – and indeed against Jameson Timba’s right to free expression – graphically illustrates the urgent need for media reforms that strike from the statute books all those laws that suffocate freedom of expression by affording certain elites within the public sphere an unwarranted protection from scrutiny with the threat of criminal penalties. Chief among these is the Criminal Law (Codification) and Reform Act, which has become the weapon of choice by those authorities under the control of ZANU PF in their efforts to silence dissent and the public exposure of repressive government behaviour.

But the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act also unnecessarily restricts journalistic activity with criminal offences that carry excessive penalties for offenders, including jail terms and the closure of media institutions. This is the law that is certain to be used again to shut down private media institutions found to have offended related laws that unreasonably gag Zimbabweans’ right to free expression. There can be no meaningful media reforms without the repeal of these offensive laws.

Fresh crackdown on MDC-T destabilizes coalition

THE controversial arrest and weekend detention of Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Jameson Timba, for allegedly breaching section 33 of the Criminal Law (Codification) and Reform Act that criminalises statements deemed to undermine or insult the authority of the President, made headlines at the weekend.

This coincided with a sustained campaign in the public media earlier in the week by ZANU PF politburo member Jonathan Moyo to have Timba arrested soon after a top South African weekly, *The Sunday Times* (19/6), reported him disputing President Mugabe and ZANU PF officials' version of what transpired at a SADC meeting on Zimbabwe held in South Africa.

In statements attributed to him, the paper reported the MDC-T official as having accused the ZANU PF officials of being "liars" after they painted a different picture of the outcome of the meeting from that depicted by their MDC coalition partners and SADC officials.

While the government media's coverage of Timba's arrest and his subsequent court appearance were balanced, there was nothing professional in their coverage of Moyo's campaign for Timba's arrest, including that of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, who was reported to have committed the same offence while addressing party supporters in Gweru (*The Herald*, 20/6 and ZTV, 21/6, 6pm).

These media recklessly reported on Moyo's allegations without due regard to the journalistic tenets of fairness, balance and accuracy, especially given the controversial nature of the matter and its possible ramifications.

For example, none of Moyo's accusations were balanced with responses from the MDC-T. Neither did the official media assess the credibility of Moyo's claims, and subsequently, the basis for the police charges against Timba, considering the fact that *The Sunday Times* did not directly quote Timba describing Mugabe as a "liar".

It simply interpreted Timba's dismissal of ZANU PF's claims that the SADC summit had **"rejected"** the resolutions of its Livingstone Troika meeting as having exposed Mugabe and his colleagues as **"liars"**. The paper quoted Timba: **"The distortions of the outcome of the extraordinary summit being peddled by some in ZANU PF and the public media have reached dishonest proportions which border on insanity"**.

In addition, none of the state media viewed the arrest as an abuse of the police by ZANU PF officials in their bid to muzzle the truth about the outcome of the SADC summit and exposed the police's unprofessional conduct.

Similarly, the public media gave one-sided coverage of a demonstration by war veterans against MDC-T Finance Minister Tendai Biti, demanding that he **"stop taking instructions from the IMF"** and grant immediate salary increases to civil servants (ZTV, 27/6, 8pm and *The Herald*, 28/6).

The private media viewed the onslaught against senior MDC-T officials as vindictive, politically motivated and destabilizing government.

They also reported South African President Jacob Zuma as having expressed concern at this latest turn of events (*Daily News*, 26/6).

However, the tone of some of these reports, especially in the *Daily News*, bordered on the hysterical and overstated its implications. In one of its stories, littered with editorial intrusions: *PM to confront Mugabe*, the paper reported that Prime Minister Tsvangirai was planning “**to demand**” from President Mugabe why Timba had been arrested. It went on to claim, without providing a shred of evidence, that SADC was likely to “**convene an emergency meeting**” to consider the new crisis.

Military's threats split the media



THIS week saw renewed media debate over the role of state security forces in the country's politics following calls by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai for the army to remain apolitical, in line with the country's constitutional provisions.

Tsvangirai was reacting to yet another military declaration of allegiance to ZANU PF and President Mugabe, this time by Brigadier-General Douglas Nyikayaramba in comments made in the media the previous week.

The government media did not try to balance competing points of view in the ensuing debate so that their audiences could judge for themselves. They simply defended the security service chief and the ZANU PF arm of government's position portraying the army as professional in defence of the country's sovereignty.

Instead of examining Tsvangirai's concerns that Zimbabwe's security forces were partisan, they limited themselves to reporting senior ZANU PF officials such as Didymus Mutasa and Emmerson Mnangagwa and retired senior army officers such as Tshinga Dube, Felix Muchemwa and Max Mkhandla of the Mthwakazi Liberation Front, and running editorials, **"scoffing"** and **"lashing out"** at such claims (ZTV, 24/6, 8pm and *The Herald* and *Chronicle*, 21, 22 & 25/6).

Brigadier-General Nyikayaramba was given even greater freedom to amplify his loyalty to ZANU PF without interrogating the soundness of his philosophy and its implications on the army as an institution outside politics.

The Herald and *Chronicle* (23/6) quoted him describing Tsvangirai as a **"national security threat"** and declaring that Zimbabwe's security forces were **"justified to participate in politics to defend the country"** as the **"the current situation required them to deal with it in uniform"**.

Nyikayaramba, recently booted out of the constitution-making process allegedly because he was still a serving member of the army, claimed **"security forces and ZANU PF were inseparable"** and reiterated that the security forces **"would never serve under the leadership of anyone who did not have liberation war credentials"**. For this reason, he added, the security forces would **"do anything possible to make sure President Mugabe remained in power until they felt the threat is over"** because the MDC-T **"was not home-grown"**.

Tsvangirai's calls for state security officers to stop interfering in national politics while addressing party supporters in Gweru was reported more soberly in the private media (*News Day* and *Daily News*, 20/6).

Besides, quoting the Prime Minister and his MDC party calling for security sector reforms, said to be part of the Global Political Agreement, the private media also reported political commentators and civic groups insisting that Zimbabwe's security forces were wrong to interfere in the country's politics.

They were quoted arguing that such interference was unconstitutional and created instability in the country and violated the provisions of the GPA.

RIGHTS ABUSES PERSIST

THE endless disputes between Zimbabwe's coalition parties remain a major source of human rights violations.

Among the latest victims of such hostilities were Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jameson Timba and Finance Minister Tendai Biti.

Notably, the incidents coincided with denials by Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri that the police were partisan and violated people's rights while addressing a pass-out parade at Morris Depot in Harare (*The Herald*, 24/6). He dismissed such concerns as **"baseless", "frivolous" and "cheap propaganda", "bent on discrediting the impeccable image of the ZRP"**.

The media recorded 15 new incidents of rights violations. Twelve of these appeared in the private media, while the remaining three featured in both.

They included:

- Reports that ZANU PF supporters were setting up 'terror bases' in Mashonaland provinces and that MDC-T official Tendai Chinyama had been abducted by state security agents in Harare (Studio 7 and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 21, 24 & 26/6).
- Death threats against three Chivi chiefs (Masunda, Madyamombe, Madyangove) by ZANU-PF Politburo member Josiah Hungwe and Chivi North legislator Tranos Huruva for not being loyal to them (Radio VOP, 24/6), and
- The barring of a faction of the Anglican church led by Bishop Chad Gandiya from attending a pilgrimage at the Bernard Mizeki shrine in Marondera (*NewsDay*, 27/6).

WHAT THEY SAID

"The Attorney-General should look into this (comments by Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jameson Timba) because it seems there was an intention to tarnish the President's name...If this is not addressed it will send a wrong precedent, where we can have Cabinet ministers not respecting the President. It is unacceptable for a Cabinet minister to call his boss a liar, whether from ZANU PF, MDC or from the moon" – ZANU PF Politburo member Jonathan Moyo (*The Herald*, 20/6).

"If you (service chiefs) want politics remove the uniform and we will show you what politics is. It is not guns. Stop intimidating people – convince Zimbabweans to vote for you" – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai speaking at a rally at Mkoba Stadium, Gweru (*Daily News*, 20/6).

"Tsvangirai doesn't pose a political threat in any way in Zimbabwe, but is a major security threat. He takes instructions from foreigners who seek to effect illegal regime change in Zimbabwe" - Nyikayaramba (*The Herald* and *ZimOnline*, 23 & 24/6).

“In terms of expertise, someone who can say things without thinking, I am the right man. I have been involved in elections for a very long time...There is nothing wrong in being a military person, besides the military can be involved in government departments because of our knowledge” – Nyikayaramba justifying his role in Zimbabwe’s constitution making process (*The Herald*, 23/6).

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.

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