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A daily compilation of local, national and international articles dealing with labour related issues

South African workers

Cosatu: Save the jobs

Ntsakisi Maswanganyi, The Times/Bloomberg, 5 July 2016

South Africa lost 15,000 jobs in the formal sector in the first quarter of this year as the economy continued to flounder, Statistics SA said yesterday.

But the economy overall shed 355,000 jobs, including those in agriculture and households, in the first quarter, according to an earlier report, the Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

Statistics SA's Quarterly Employment Statistics survey published yesterday shows that employment fell in all industries except for community services, construction and electricity-related work.

The jobs bloodbath comes at a time when South Africa is fighting to avoid the downgrading of its sovereign credit rating, which is hovering precariously one notch above junk status. The rating is up for review in six months.

With the labour market on its knees, Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan is working to avoid a ratings downgrade later this year and has called for joint efforts by labour, business and the government to kick-start the economy.

In an effort to help turn the tide on unemployment and continuing job losses, labour federation Cosatu has called on the unions affiliated to it to tread carefully when negotiating pay increases.

For the first time, Cosatu is calling for restraint. It says there should be a balance between wage demands and the preservation of jobs.

Sizwe Pamla, Cosatu's national spokesman, said yesterday that the call to affiliates was to "negotiate with a view to preserving jobs".

Pamla said that, as the economy continued to shed jobs, it was important that wage negotiations were well managed.

"We have called on our affiliates not to over-promise and demand wages that will lead to workers losing their jobs down the line.

"What we are saying is that workers should not be misled and promised increases that will affect their jobs. We are approaching a recession and if this economy collapses it will affect all of us. We are all in danger," said Pamla.

Cosatu general secretary Bheki Ntshalintshali called for a rethink by unionists involved in salary negotiations.

"You don't want to get an increase and then thereafter people are retrenched and only a few remain to enjoy the benefits of that increase."

Cosatu said it would advise its affiliates to push for above-inflation increases for those at the bottom of the pay scale.

It said better-paid workers would negotiate for increases in line with inflation, which was at 6.1% in May.

Ntshalintshali said that under the present economic conditions excessive executive pay would make it difficult for unions to reduce demands or accept lower increases.

"How can a single person get a R71-million a year salary and yet somebody else cannot survive,' they will say. There needs to be a change in attitude.

"For the lower grades it really has to be inflation-plus. We don't determine how much above inflation [the demand should be] but it can't be at inflation level, it can't be below inflation."

Platinum workers in a union not affiliated to Cosatu, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, went on strike for five months in 2014, demanding monthly pay of R12,500 - but the pay of the CEOs of the three biggest platinum producers ranged between R7.5-million and R18.5-million per annum.

Cosatu affiliates will be involved in pay negotiations this year on behalf of platinum miners, teachers and health workers.

Cosatu affiliate the SA Transport and Allied Workers' Union began wage talks last week, and the Food and Allied Workers' Union, also an affiliate, plans to end its wage talks this month.

The talks come at a time when Africa's most industrialised economy is projected to grow at its slowest since the 2009 recession with unemployment at about 27%.

Cosatu, which is a member of the tripartite alliance led by the ANC, plans to encourage its negotiators to develop policies that will guide their long-term approach to pay talks so multi-year deals can be reached to create stability, he said.

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2016/07/05/Cosatu-Save-the-jobs>

Pravin Gordhan jumped the gun on labour reforms, says Cosatu's Sdumo Dlamini

Sam Mkokeli, Amogelang Mbatha & Arabile Gumede, Business Day, 5 July 2016

THE Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) says Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan's statement that the government is close to announcing labour legislation reforms was premature.

Negotiations on the minimum wage were at a "delicate stage," Cosatu president Sdumo Dlamini said by phone on Monday. Talks on other labour reforms, including prestrike balloting, were "nowhere near closure", said the leader of the federation, whose member unions represent 1.9-million workers.

Gordhan said in an interview with London's Financial Times published on Sunday that the government was close to announcing a series of reforms to the labour market. These would be "on the minimum wage, on balloting before strikes, on compulsory arbitration, so that strikes don't last for ever", he said.

With the economy having contracted 1.2% in the first quarter and local government elections looming in August, Gordhan has to work on economic reforms to appease credit-rating companies without alienating labour unions allied to the ANC.

S&P Global Ratings kept SA's credit assessment at BBB-, one level above junk, on June 3, warning that it could cut the nation's debt evaluation unless more was done to foster growth and combat political and labour instability.

Treasury spokeswoman Phumza Macanda could not immediately respond to questions by phone and e-mail on Monday.

'State capture'

Ratings companies never spoke in the interest of workers and contributed to delays in agreements on issues like a national minimum wage, Dlamini said in an interview at Bloomberg's Johannesburg offices on June 30.

"What is that, if it's not another form of state capture and keeping in a stranglehold the government?" Dlamini said. "Sometimes the role of the ratings agencies is also a

challenge when they simply do not allow us to build our own country the way we see it in SA."

S&P Global Ratings is due to announce its next rating assessment in December. Fitch also kept its evaluation of SA's debt at one level above junk in June and Moody's Investors Service left the nation at two levels above noninvestment grade in May.

The fact that SA avoided a downgrade to junk in June did not allow for any level of complacency and rating companies were very clear in their reports on the progress they needed to see to keep the nation's debt on investment-grade level, Reserve Bank Deputy Governor Daniel Mminele said in an interview at Bloomberg's offices in Johannesburg on July 1.

"It's important to accept that ratings are used by international investors," he said. "We run twin deficits, a budget deficit and a current-account deficit, we depend on dipping into other people's savings, so they are very, very important because they drive decisions in terms of investment flows as such, but I don't think one could say they capture countries."

<http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/labour/2016/07/05/pravin-gordhan-jumped-the-gun-on-labour-reforms-says-cosatus-sdumo-dlamini>

SA's political dysfunction is nothing compared to Britain's, says defiant Pravin Gordhan

David Pilling & Joseph Cotterill, Financial Times, 3 July 2016

LONDON — SA will defy market expectations a second time by avoiding a ratings downgrade to junk this year, according to Pravin Gordhan, the embattled finance minister, who is racing to turn the flagging economy around against a backdrop of political turmoil.

SA has been losing the confidence of many investors anxious at the direction of the ANC government under President Jacob Zuma as the country slides from prolonged stagnation towards recession.

The economy shrank 1.2% in the first three months of the year as output dropped in the struggling mining sector, drought hit farming and unemployment stayed chronically high.

Still, a defiant Gordhan told the Financial Times that the government would deliver on promises made to the rating agencies to stabilise the economy and make structural reforms, including in the highly regulated labour market, to improve the country's growth potential."

This will be another test that we will pass," Mr Gordhan said of the ratings decision, expected in December.

"You've got to remain hopeful. There's a general recognition in the country that we've won six months, and during that six months, both for our own sake and for the sake of our ratings, we need to get on with the job." Standard & Poor's decided last month to keep its rating for South Africa's foreign debt one notch above junk, although with a negative outlook.

A downgrade would make it more expensive for SA to borrow and would further undermine investor confidence in the ability of Zuma's government to stop the rot.

The rand, already weak after the president suddenly sacked a respected finance minister last December and replaced him with an unknown backbencher, sank again in the market turmoil triggered by last week's decision by Britain to leave the EU.

Gordhan, who previously served as finance minister from 2009-14, was appointed after the December debacle to steady the ship.

Razia Khan, chief economist for Africa at Standard Chartered Bank, said SA had become a "proxy for emerging market weakness."

Gordhan, who said SA's political dysfunction was nothing compared to Britain's, said the government was close to announcing a series of reforms to the labour market.

These would be "on the minimum wage, on balloting before strikes, on compulsory arbitration, so that strikes don't last for ever," he said.

Many economists argue that strong and politically influential unions, which have traditionally enjoyed the unconditional support of the ANC, have put off investors by complicating labour relations and by keeping wages artificially high in a country with 26.7% unemployment.

Gordhan said it was essential for the economy to get more people into work in order to boost demand.

The finance minister, who has been the subject of personal and political attacks, denied that the country was undergoing an institutional crisis.

The Treasury has been in a bitter struggle with Zuma and his allies over what have been seen as attempts by the president to undermine the independence of one of the country's strongest institutions.

He denied the ANC had lost its legitimacy, saying talk of losses in coming elections were a normal part of the political process."

The ANC today remains a force for stability, it remains a force for progress, and it remains a force for cohesion, notwithstanding some of the aberrations that we're seeing at the moment," he said.

SA was "a state in formation."

"We have a responsibility to the country, and to this and future generations to ensure that important institutions like the Treasury remain on a sustainable path and serve their purpose," he said. "This is still Mandela's miracle at work."

<http://www.bdlive.co.za/economy/2016/07/03/sas-political-dysfunction-is-nothing-compared-to-britains-says-defiant-pravin-gordhan>

SABC

SABC is like Hlaudi Motsoeneng's spaza shop, says Mwasu

Penwell Dlamini, Business Day, 5 July 2016

THE Media Workers Association of SA (Mwasu) says SABC chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng is a law unto himself at the public broadcaster.

Daniel Malatji, national organiser of Mwasu, told a meeting to plan a series of protests against the SABC that Motsoeneng had to be brought down to earth.

"It is like SABC is his home or spaza shop. He is everything ... the CEO, board, minister, he is everything," Malatji said.

"We had a strike certificate last month. He intimidated our members saying whoever goes on strike must not come back to the building. We have over 120 members who have been fired without any disciplinary hearings. We are at CCMA trying to get them reinstated," he said, referring to the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.

On Monday, ANC spokesman Zizi Kodwa said the party wanted Communications Minister Faith Muthambi to investigate whether Motsoeneng was abusing his power.

This follows a string of protests by the public, after the suspension of SABC journalists and the resignation of the broadcaster's acting CEO, Jimi Matthews.

Mwasu represents about 700 workers at the SABC.

Malatji said Motsoeneng was scheduled to meet the union and other groups at noon on Monday but cancelled just 15 minutes beforehand without giving any reason.

"So long as Hlaudi is still in that building, whatever you are doing will be fruitless. He even boasts to say that it is only the president that can remove him. He says there is no court in this world that can remove him," said Malatji.

The campaign to oust Motsoeneng and address the crisis at the SABC is gaining momentum.

The task team of civil society groups, ordinary citizens and unions plans to call on companies to pull advertising from the public broadcaster.

The task team also wants to organise a national day on which citizens will be encouraged to switch off their radios and television sets during peak broadcasting periods to demonstrate their unhappiness with the SABC.

These and other suggestion were tabled during Monday's meeting in Newtown.

Events planned for this week include:

- a picket outside the SABC studios on Wednesday;
- a protest on Thursday outside the offices of the Independent Communications Authority of SA (Icasa) before it makes its judgment on the SABC's decision not to air protests where infrastructure is being vandalised; and
- a demonstration outside ANC headquarters Luthuli House on Friday.

Already on board for the campaign are the Save Our SABC Coalition (SOS), Mwasa, Right2Know and Outa.

"We want all South Africans to work with us in saving the SABC," said Sekoetlane Phamodi, co-ordinator at SOS.

<http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/media/2016/07/05/sabc-is-like-hlaudi-motsoenengs-spaza-shop-says-mwasa>

'SABC must be freed from dictatorship by current leaders'

Dineo Bendile, EWN, 5 July 2016

Zwelinzima Vavi says problems at the SABC must be addressed before the August elections.

JOHANNESBURG - Civil society leaders say problems at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) need to be addressed before August to ensure free and fair municipal elections.

Since the SABC made a decision earlier this year not to broadcast violent images during protests, calls have been made for urgent intervention at the broadcaster.

The broadcaster has also been accused of silencing journalist and threatening the objectivity of its news content.

Zwelinzima Vavi says the SABC must be freed from what he says is a dictatorship by current leaders, to ensure free and fair elections in August.

"The SABC must be freed. The fairness of our elections hinges on us succeeding [in freeing the SABC]."

Civil society leaders say, like the IEC, the SABC can't afford to have its impartiality threatened.

Today, a delegation that was due to meet COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng to discuss censorship at the SABC was barred from entering the premises.

Now civil society leaders say they will forge ahead with a plan of mass action.

At the same time, the SABC has now charged TV journalist Lukhanyo Calata with contravening its rules after he publicly spoke out about the “disturbing direction” taken by the public broadcaster.

Calata was also one of a number of journalists who picketed outside the SABC's Sea Point office on Friday against censorship and the undermining of editorial ethics at the national broadcaster.

Earlier, three staffers were suspended for querying a decision not to cover a protest, while three others were charged for publicly voicing concern about a “climate of fear” and low staff morale in their newsrooms.

<http://ewn.co.za/2016/07/04/SABC-must-be-freed-from-dictatorship-by-current-leaders>

SABC censored ANC too - Gwede Mantashe

Lizeka Tandwa, News24, 5 July 2016

Johannesburg - ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe claims the ANC has also been a victim of censorship at the SABC.

"We are saying the SABC sometimes censors us as the ANC and nobody speaks. It doesn't report on our activities and yet nobody comments. Censorship is a bad thing generally," Mantashe told News24 on Monday.

Mantashe's comments come on the heels of SABC chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng's controversial decision to stop airing footage of violent protests. It has led to an outcry from the public, civil society, and the media industry.

Mantashe said SABC acting CEO Jimi Matthews was acting “holier-than-thou”. He resigned last Monday due to the “corrosive” atmosphere at the broadcaster.

"Nobody has asked Jimi Matthews why he has been a senior person for years and only now he is crying foul for decisions he took. They have been censoring everybody, including the ANC, for years," Mantashe added.

He denied the ANC's involvement in editorial decisions at the public broadcaster.

"Matthews says somebody in the ANC was controlling them. Who are these persons?" he asked.

In an interview with eNCA on Sunday, Matthews said the public broadcaster made sure the EFF received “limited coverage” at Motsoeneng's behest.

On Friday morning, journalists from several media outlets picketed outside the SABC's offices in Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town in support of three journalists who were served with disciplinary letters last week, and against Motsoeneng's censorship of the news.

The three journalists had disagreed with an instruction during a diary conference not to cover the Right2Know campaign's protest against censorship at the public broadcaster earlier that week.

This followed the suspension of three other employees at the broadcaster.

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/sabc-censored-anc-too-gwede-mantashe-20160705>

We've never asked SABC for any favours - ANC's Jackson Mthembu

News24, 6 July 2016

Jackson Mthembu, chairperson of the ANC National Executive Committee's sub-committee on communications, on Tuesday refuted claims that the SABC had favoured the ruling party in its broadcasts. Watch.

Speaking at a press briefing at Luthuli House in Johannesburg, Mthembu said: "If the SABC has disadvantaged other (political) parties to the benefit of the ANC, as the ANC we are saying let there be an inquiry."

"I don't think there has been any bias ... in favour of any one party in particular.

He added that the ruling party had been subject to the "terrible working rate" in relation to their recent advert and had not received any favouritism.

This follows news of censorship at the broadcaster under the authority of chief operating officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, and utterances by former acting CEO Jimi Matthews that the EFF had been sidelined.

Mthembu said they will be meeting Communications Minister Faith Muthambi and the SABC board on Monday to discuss the matter of censorship.

<http://www.news24.com/Video/SouthAfrica/News/weve-never-asked-sabc-for-any-favours-ancs-jackson-mthembu-20160706>

My hell at the SABC

Vuyo Mvoko, The Star, 6 July 2016

SABC contributing editor and specialist anchor Vuyo Mvoko speaks out about Hlaudi Motsoneng and Jimi Matthews.

Johannesburg - The SABC has never been a paragon of a great anything. It has been a work-in-progress, with degrees of success as generations of well-meaning

South Africans tackled the extraordinarily and complex task of undoing decades of apartheid misuse of this national asset.

Of course not everyone covered themselves in glory at it - including former news tsar Snuki Zikalala, a comical Ali of not insignificant proportions. He did for president Thabo Mbeki at the time, what Motsoeneng is doing for President Jacob Zuma now - singlehandedly arrogated unto himself the right to speak for and do in the name of.

In the SABC newsroom at the time, it was Zikalala's way or the highway - just like Motsoeneng told staff last week that you "go left while we going right, you are out".

While the two men are extreme, the SABC has over the years also produced a different kind of leader, the one myself and my colleagues discovered a few years ago in Jimi Matthews, who resigned last week.

The way Matthews ended the careers of some of the best people we had, only a mercenary would. As Motsoeneng reminded all last week, after the collaboration with Matthews ended, it was the SABC's own journalists and editors who would go to him as chief operating officer, complaining of just how useless a leader Matthews was.

Of course none of that prevented Motsoeneng from making Matthews the acting group chief executive, while showing his disrespect for him at every turn, even mocking his sartorial shortcomings.

Now Matthews is gone, leaving a few confessions and mea culpas in his wake.

But no one is impressed with his "Hlaudi-made-me-do-it" and "to-the-extent-that-I-was-complicit-I'm-sorry" resignation letter.

I speak from bitter personal experience. I went from being able to walk into his office any time, any day, to discuss work, to a point where I don't remember us speaking over the past year at all.

Muthambi, SABC board summoned to Luthuli House

Even on the day he issued the instruction to can the On the Record show I presented, he did it via somebody else.

Apparently he - or was it his minder - could not stand watching Public Protector Thuli Madonsela being on the programme that evening.

And I made it worse by announcing that the next day I would be discussing state capture. I was summarily informed there would be no next show.

The next day, Matthews wanted a disciplinary process initiated against me for tweeting that there would be no show that evening.

The one time I finally got an opportunity to ask Motsoeneng about the decision - at a workshop in the Vaal - his reply was that it was a corporate decision, and if my

immediate superiors didn't approve or couldn't explain it, then they don't deserve to lead the newsroom.

I couldn't stay for the last day of the workshop as I had to dash back to Joburg for our first election debate.

No sooner had I finished my first recording for the day that the news came that there had been a bloodbath.

The top three editors, who were all acting in positions above their own, had all been returned to their normal positions and a completely new head of news had been appointed in an acting capacity.

I still can't tell whether Motsoeneng is just another, probably more extreme, version of Zikalala.

As one chief executive once remarked about Zikalala - his heart was in the right place, he just hadn't brought his mind along. Many believe that Motsoeneng, like Zikalala, is the pawn of powerful people.

What cannot and should not be pawned, though, is the SABC. It's too important an institution for its integrity to be impugned, and for the intelligence of everyone associated with it or the public that's supposed to be benefiting from it to be undermined.

What we are dealing with here is not a choice between 90 percent local content and the starvation of our musicians.

The current source of conflict between the chief operating officer and the corporation's senior journalists is not about making a choice between showing violent images of arsonists versus showing the good story of schools and bridges that are being built, and water and other services that are being delivered.

The editorial conferences where my colleagues expressed their views that led to their suspension are where any news leadership discuss and debate daily.

While fundamental differences may arise, there are procedures and laws to be followed.

And when journalists say no to censorship, they are also referring to self-censorship, and are by no means implying there's no censorship in other news organisations, but rather speaking out of a desire to see the SABC leading in journalistic excellence.

We are saying there's no point in doing the right thing by promoting women to leadership positions - only to reduce them to policing duties, or walking around with their cellphones glued to their ears as they take arbitrary instructions on who to put on air.

I'm sure there are many people who think, correctly, that there are a lot of opportunists out there who have hijacked the SABC and want to use it for all sorts of agendas.

And there are surely lots of others who will want to use the current crisis for their own ends.

But this gulf of mutual incomprehension is not reason enough to abandon our collective wisdom and our ambition to correct the wrongs we are witnessing.

Nor is it too late for the party that once stood for good to show its leadership and say #NotInOurName.

Vuyo Mvoko is the SABC's contributing editor and specialist anchor, and formerly its group political editor

The views expressed here are not necessarily those of Independent Media.

<http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/my-hell-at-the-sabc-2042183>

South Africa

Duarte calls on ANC members to 'behave'

Simnikiwe Hlatshaneni, The Citizen, 5 July 2016

Her comment follows ANC Gauteng chairperson Paul Mashatile's call to ANC members to stop fighting over candidate lists.

The ruling party's deputy secretary-general, Jessie Duarte, has called on the party's members to "behave" in the lead-up to the elections, following faction-fuelled violent protests in Tshwane, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town last month over candidate lists.

The ANC has blamed the violence on numerous factors, including 'thuggery taking over politics', tribalism and even the media, insisting that the party itself was not to blame.

Speaking to The Citizen, Duarte said they were calling on their members to resist being tempted by the media to act out violently.

"We unconditionally condemn any form of violence and intimidation and ANC members must not allow themselves to be drawn into violence the media or anyone else. They must resist any forms of temptation by journalists to become excitable because that is not who we are, we are. We want a peaceful election."

Duarte's comment follows the ANC's Gauteng chairperson, Paul Mashatile's call to ANC members to stop fighting over candidate lists.

Speaking at the election manifesto for Ekurhuleni last week Thursday, Mashatile called on members to "relax" and trust the internal democratic processes of the ANC.

This message was echoed by several speakers at the event, including Duarte and Ekurhuleni mayoral candidate Mzwandile Masina.

Five SACP members were suspended in connection with the Tshwane unrest as the party took the moral high ground, saying that while they would not attempt to interfere in how the ANC dealt with their internal issues, they would not allow their own members to be party to the violence.

The ANC's alliance partner has, in the same breath, called on the ruling party to investigate the roots of factionalism and tribalism in their Tshwane branches, which they say can be traced back to 2011.

Meanwhile, the ANC has suspended one of its members implicated in a violent protest that broke out on Borchers Quarry road and led to the torching of two buses on the N2 last week.

<http://citizen.co.za/1189865/duarte-calls-on-anc-members-to-behave/>

SA abstains on key UN vote to end discrimination against gays

Rejul Bejoy, GroundUp/ News24, 5 July 2016

Johannesburg - In a vote that surprised many, South Africa abstained in a key vote in the UN Human Rights Council to appoint an independent watchdog on sexual orientation.

The resolution passed with 23 votes for, 18 against, and 6 abstentions last Thursday. No African country voted in favour of it.

It establishes an independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity for the next three years.

The expert will report annually to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly on best practices to minimise sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination. It will work with states, UN agencies, and other organisations. Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, and Brazil introduced and spoke for the resolution.

Other abstentions included Botswana, Ghana and Namibia.

Of the African countries included in the vote, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Morocco voted against.

Previous progressive leadership

In 1996, SA became the first country to enshrine gay rights in its Constitution. The Constitutional Court has consistently ruled that any form of discrimination based on sexual identity, whether by the government or a private entity, is unconstitutional. Consequently, SA is viewed as the most progressive African country on gay issues.

Internationally, SA has taken leadership in calling for global acceptance of gay rights. In 2011, its leadership was considered critical to passing a Human Rights Council resolution to recognise gay rights as human rights.

SA has often faced serious criticism from other African bloc countries for its vocal support of gay rights. In response to its 2011 resolution, the Nigerian delegation said SA was “breaking in tradition of African group”.

In 2014, SA again led similar initiatives to recognise and study sexual orientation and gender identity initiatives.

The permanent representative to the UN at the time, ambassador Abdul Samad Minty, said SA was required by the “supreme law of our country to support a resolution that seeks to reduce discrimination and violence on any basis, including in this case, on the basis of sexual orientation or gendered identities”.

On March 5 2016, the SA Human Rights Commission hosted the first regional African seminar to address violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

Justice Minister Michael Masutha called on all African communities to take more action to end such violence and discrimination.

The seminar resulted in the Ekurhuleni Declaration, which the South African government was a party to. The declaration calls for states to ensure that they not perpetuate such “violence and discrimination directly or indirectly, through omission and commission”.

South Africa’s lack of support

Many saw the resolution passed on June 30 as the next step in the process South Africa started in 2011.

Before the official vote, South Africa’s delegate ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko stated that while SA believed no person should be discriminated against on any ground, the resolution itself was too divisive, unnecessary, and an “arrogant approach”.

Mxakato-Diseko told the council: “We learned from our struggle against apartheid that if we are clear about the end goal, which for us is the end of violence and discrimination against the LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-sexual and intersexed] persons, a better approach is building maximum consensus. This could have been achieved but for the arrogant and confrontational approach adopted [by the sponsors]... Grandstanding, recklessness, brinksmanship and point scoring will take us nowhere.”

It is unclear what exactly makes this resolution any more divisive than the previous resolutions SA pursued.

Over the past few months, activists have grown increasingly concerned that the South African government has backed down from speaking out for LGBTI rights on the international stage. They fear that continued abstentions and silence will strengthen the position of other African bloc countries, such as Uganda and Nigeria, who blatantly discriminate against gays.

In its abstention, SA is joined by Botswana, Ghana, India, Maldives, and the Philippines. Many countries that abstained or voted against the resolution cited concerns of national sovereignty and cultural differences.

'Regrettable lapse'

Matthew Clayton, the research, advocacy and policy manager for the Triangle Project, a gay human rights organisation in SA, said he was unsure why the government had decided to abstain on the resolution.

This was especially given its leadership and previous support of similar resolutions, and very recent domestic legislation to improve gay rights. He felt that the abstention went against the constitutional provisions and state agreements such as the Ekurhuleni declaration.

However, he did not see the abstention as part of a trend. He said the South African government was still working closely with local organisations and other interested parties to develop stronger hate crimes legislation.

He said SA had to tread a careful line to effectively use its diplomatic clout, but believed that abstaining from the vote was a "very regrettable lapse" for a country that should be championing all forms of human rights.

"It sends a very confusing message, and our actions in these international settings still do have regional implications and effects."

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/sa-abstains-on-key-un-vote-to-end-discrimination-against-gays-20160705>

International

Zimbabwe's doctors and teachers on strike

MacDonald Dzirutwe, Independent Media/Reuters, 6 July 2016

Harare - Teachers, doctors and nurses in Zimbabwe began a strike over unpaid salaries on Tuesday, a day after police used force against protesting taxi drivers in the capital Harare amid a deteriorating economic situation.

Zimbabwe is battling its worst drought in a quarter of a century, while the economy is beset by cash shortages, prompting small, spontaneous protests over the past month. Monday's protests were the first to turn violent since 2005.

President Robert Mugabe has used the police to keep a lid on the protests, but Amnesty International said their response on Monday amounted to a violation of Zimbabweans' human rights.

Police deployed again on Tuesday in two of the townships that saw violence on Monday but the situation was calmer.

At Zimbabwe's two largest state hospitals, Parirenyatwa and Harare Central, non-critical patients were told to come back next week because junior doctors and nurses were on strike, leaving only senior staff to work, Reuters witnesses said.

"The issue is that doctors cannot come to work because they have not been paid. It looks like this (strike) will go on until July 14," the head of the Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors' Association, Fortune Nyamande, said.

The government has said it will pay doctors and nurses their June salaries on July 14 and the teachers on July 7. It has also delayed paying the June salaries of the army and security services by two weeks.

At most state schools around Harare, students could be seen playing at sports fields in the morning because teachers did not come to work. School heads, who are not allowed to strike under Zimbabwe's labour laws, reported for duty.

Acting Labour Minister Supa Mandiwanzira said workers had not notified the government about the strike action but added the state was ready to talk to them about their grievances.

Without balance of payment support from the International Monetary Fund or foreign credit from traditional Western donors, Harare runs a hand-to-mouth budget, spending 82 percent of its revenue on wages, which it is struggling to pay.

Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa said in London on Monday he hoped multilateral lenders would sign a deal for Zimbabwe to clear its arrears by December, opening the door to possible new funding, the first since 1999.

A social movement called #ThisFlag, launched in April by a young pastor in Harare, has called for a national stay-away day on Wednesday "to shut down the country" in protest against alleged government failures.

<http://www.iol.co.za/business/international/zimbabwes-doctors-and-teachers-on-strike-2042193>

Zimbabweans are hungry for change, but Mugabe still thinks it's his turn to eat

Simon Allison, Daily Maverick, 6 July 2016

Most revolutions are about food, not politics, so it comes as no surprise that the recent political unrest in Zimbabwe comes on the heels of food and cash shortages.

“Zimbabwe is on the brink of implosion,” reported Independent Group’s foreign editor Shannon Ebrahim in a breathless recap of the recent political unrest in our northern neighbour. Maybe, maybe not: for now, at least, President Robert Mugabe still appears to command the loyalties of the all-important security services.

But make no mistake, these are trying times for the world’s oldest president. The troubles began on Friday, when traders marched on the Beit Bridge border post, furious at the government’s recently imposed restrictions on the import of South African goods. The burning warehouse – torched by the angry protesters – signalled that this was more than just a run-of-the-mill demonstration. This protest was designed to be inflammatory, in the most literal sense.

Then to Harare, where more protesters gathered on Monday, this time in advance of the planned civil service strike on Tuesday. Most of Zimbabwe’s civil servants have not been paid for June, and they’re not particularly happy. Holding signs that said “We say no to slave wages”, the protesters were met by riot police with truncheons and tear gas; 57 people were arrested. There is video of unarmed protesters being beaten brutally by police – a reminder of just how dangerous it is to be on the wrong side of the regime.

The strike went ahead on Tuesday, according to the BBC, who reported that the scene in Harare resembled a quiet Sunday afternoon.

“Teachers and the rest of the civil servants are declaring their incapacity to go to work. Government departments were operating without some of their staff who stayed at home,” said Zimbabwe Teachers’ Union president Richard Gundani.

On Wednesday, an even bigger stayaway is planned. Pastor Evan Mawarire’s #ThisFlag movement has called for a national shutdown, and if Twitter activity is anything to go by they just might get it. This will, however, be the big test of how much #ThisFlag’s potent digital activist can translate into physical resistance.

For the first time in years, Mugabe’s government is facing serious popular resistance. So what’s changed?

As Bill Clinton’s campaign strategist famously observed: “It’s the economy, stupid,” and Zimbabwe’s is not doing very well. Specifically, the country – which no longer produces its own currency – is running out of US dollars. Without US dollars, it can’t keep importing the vast majority of products on the shelves, as well as essentials like maize and petrol. Without US dollars, it can’t pay civil servants on time. Without US dollars, ordinary citizens can’t access their money in the bank, or pay for goods themselves, and are increasingly resorting to barter arrangements.

This, coupled with one of the most severe droughts in southern African history, means that food is in increasingly short supply. The food shortage, perhaps more than anything else, represents an existential threat to the regime.

As Joshua Keating observed in an excellent article on the link between revolution and grain prices: “Food, of course, is never the sole driver of instability or uprising. Corruption, a lack of democracy, ethnic tension – these better known factors may be critical, but food is often the difference between an unhappy but quiescent population and one in revolt.”

Unfortunately for Mugabe, no one in his government seems to have any idea how to solve this problem. An attempt to introduce a new Zimbabwean currency through the back door – via so-called “bond notes” to be given as an incentive to exporters – was met with universal condemnation amid fears of a repeat of the disastrous hyperinflation which caused the original Zimbabwean dollar to be scrapped.

Another idea, to restrict South African imports in order to keep US dollars from leaving the country to pay for those imports, was met with those angry protests at Beit Bridge. Besides, the South Africa-Zimbabwe border is so notoriously porous that the restrictions would be impossible to enforce.

Just how desperate the regime has become was evident in its decision last month to delay payment to the army. The first rule of any successful dictatorship is always to pay the men with the guns: when this stops happening, trouble is never far away. For now, the government has been careful to pay the most important military units on time, while sending unpaid units on leave to prevent a rebellion, but this is clearly a stop-gap solution.

There is one easy fix, of course. A change of government – even one stuffed with Mugabe loyalists – would probably persuade the international community to lift sanctions and reopen the debt taps, allowing for an influx of desperately needed foreign currency and humanitarian assistance. This is, however, the one solution that the ruling elite is not yet ready to contemplate. Zimbabweans may be hungry for change, but Mugabe still thinks that it’s his turn to eat.

<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-07-06-analysis-zimbabweans-are-hungry-for-change-but-mugabe-still-thinks-its-his-turn-to-eat/#.V3zGdU3lrIU>

Comment and analysis

Rural South Africa is on a Precipice

Mbongiseni Buthelezi & Stha Yeni, Daily Maverick, 6 July 2016

On 22 March 2016 Sikhosiphi “Bazooka” Rhadebe, chair of the Amadiba Crisis Committee on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape, was murdered. His murder marks the explosion of a crisis that has been brewing for over two decades around land and chiefs in rural black South Africa.

A raft of laws passed since the advent of democracy has been progressively giving power over land and people to traditional leaders. An initial delay of almost 10 years

after the first democratic elections of 1994 in defining the roles and powers of chiefs created a vacuum into which some ambitious chiefs shoved their agenda of being local despotic sovereigns like many were in Bantustans.

The laws that have been passed starting with the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 have failed simultaneously to create sufficient mechanisms for rural citizens to hold their chiefs to account. With the discovery of minerals on land that was considered of little value under apartheid and to which black South Africans were consigned by laws such as the Group Areas Act, things have gone from bad to worse for ordinary citizens.

Many chiefs are scrambling to push themselves to the forefront of empowerment companies for self-enrichment from mining deals. This is the case in Xolobeni. It is the case in the North West province where Premier Supra Mahumapelo signed an order earlier this year deposing Chief Nyalala Pilane of the BaKgatla following years of autocratic rule and refusal to account for mining revenue that should have been used to benefit communities in the Pilanesberg area. It is the case in KwaZulu-Natal where in Mtubatuba and Melmoth people are being intimidated for objecting to the destruction of their land and the contamination of their drinking water.

The countryside is sliding into ever more increasing violent confrontations between ordinary people and their supposed customary leaders. The government just keeps making things worse. This has become obvious around landholding and decision making about communal land in recent years.

Land restitution for people who were dispossessed of their land under previous racially discriminatory laws began with the opening of the land claims process in 1994. The window to submit claims closed 1998. The Communal Property Association Act of 1996 creates a mechanism for people who successfully submitted restitution claims to hold their restitution land communally and make decisions collectively.

Vociferous objections to this arrangement by chiefs has seen chiefs allocate restitution land to people that belongs to CPAs, claiming that the land is historically theirs. The consequences for some CPAs have been devastating. In Ekuthuleni near Melmoth, KZN the houses of members of the CPA were burned by the chief's supporters in September 2014.

Land claims were reopened when the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act was promulgated in 2014. The government's proposed solution to the tensions between chiefs and CPAs is that land in black rural areas should vest in traditional councils and do away with CPAs. This proposal is contained in the draft Communal Land Tenure Policy of 2014. What is alarming is that these traditional councils are undemocratic institutions in which women are even legally meant to have insignificant representation.

According to the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (TLGFA) of 2003, the old apartheid tribal authorities were meant to be reformed, with 40% elected representation while the other 60% is selected by the royal family. 30% of council members were supposed to be women. Across the country the mechanism has been a desperate failure with hardly any council meeting the composition requirement. Yet government sees these dysfunctional councils as the solution.

What becomes clear is that in the first ten years of democratic rule little was done to clarify the roles, functions and power of traditional leaders and to fully integrate the former bantustans into the constitutional order. By the time the TLGFA appeared in 2003 the horse had bolted. Chiefs focused on advancing their own interests at the head of mining deals and such had occupied the vacuum in ways that would shape rural politics to their advantage. They clamoured loudly for the state to recognise their vision of rural governance as a return to African ways that were destroyed by colonialism and apartheid.

The state has capitulated. Ruling elites in rural areas have captured the state in their own ways, often working in tandem with capital and representatives of political parties at local, regional and national levels. The consequences are devastating for ordinary citizens: crumbling houses due to mining on their doorsteps to which they have never consented, revenue that should be going into community development funding lavish lifestyles for a few, and much more. Those who call for accountability pay the price.

Bazooka Rhadebe is dead. As things are unfolding, it seems there'll be many more Bazookas before things change. Too much money is at stake for a few and those who get in the way will be removed. It didn't have to come to this. Things could already been done differently a long time ago. Things must be done differently now before rural South Africa ignites in flames. Bazooka's death must not be in vain.

<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-07-06-op-ed-rural-south-africa-is-on-a-precipice/#.V3zFRk3lrIU>
