

Storm Over Ministerial Demotion

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Removal of key communication portfolio from MDC minister is another blow to the fragile unity government.

A number of ministers in the two-month-old coalition government are reportedly threatening to quit following President Robert Mugabe's recent unilateral move to curb the ministerial mandate of Nelson Chamisa, the minister of information and communication technology and Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, party spokesman.

Mugabe's office announced via its mouthpiece, *The Herald*, on April 10 that the communication technology portion of Chamisa's portfolio had been transferred to Nicholas Goche, minister of transport and infrastructural development and Mugabe's point man during the protracted negotiations that led to the formation of the inclusive government.

The move returns key parastatals such as Tel One, Zim Post and Net One to ZANU-PF and gives Goche control of the provisions of the controversial Interception of Communications Act, which has been used by ZANU-PF in the past to spy on the opposition and on perceived enemies of the state.

Sources in government say Mugabe and hardliners in ZANU-PF were unhappy about Chamisa being in charge of spying equipment.

An MDC insider, who described the change as "null and void", told IWPR that tensions in Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's camp were running high, with some ministers threatening to quit the coalition government if Mugabe fails to reverse what they say is an illegal trimming of Chamisa's ministerial mandate.

Analysts were quick to interpret the latest controversy as yet another dent in the power-sharing deal signed in September last year after nearly a decade of political violence and economic stagnation in Zimbabwe.

They say the clash over Chamisa's portfolio further threatened the already fragile coalition government of Mugabe, Tsvangirai and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara, formed on February 13 this year.

Phillip Pasirayi, coordinator of the Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe, CCDZ, said the move indicated that the road to economic and political stability would be long and bumpy and that "the trimming of Minister Chamisa's powers could be an indication that President Mugabe is not prepared to genuinely share power with Prime Minister Tsvangirai.

"It is time for Tsvangirai to show real leadership and refuse to give in to demands which run contrary to people's expectations. Tsvangirai must demand that all the outstanding issues, including the appointment of governors, permanent secretaries and ambassadors, be concluded within two weeks if the coalition government is to work properly.

"The MDC formations cannot continue to be held to ransom by ZANU-PF, which unilaterally continues to make changes and appointments without consultation."

Pasirayi suggested that the latest impasse and all other outstanding issues be referred to the Southern African Development Community and the African Union, the guarantors of the Global Political Agreement, GPA, which set up the coalition government.

Fambai Ngirandi, spokesman for the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, says Mugabe's "unilateralism" proved that neither he nor ZANU-PF were genuinely interested in sharing power.

"Just as it has been over the past 29 years, so it remains that only members of ZANU-PF are entitled to oversee the functions of the country's strategic interests and enterprises, notwithstanding the fact that they are primarily culpable for the sorry state that the nation currently finds itself in," Ngirandi said.

The provisions of the GPA, Ngirandi said, did not include a "clear remedy" for "President Mugabe's unfortunate actions". As long as too much power was invested in the president as executive head of state, enabling him to act with little or no accountability, similar moves could be expected throughout the life of the inclusive government, he said.

In a statement to the media, Tsvangirai says the changes were a violation of both the letter and spirit of the GPA and were illegal.

The allocation of ministries, the premier added, had been negotiated by all three parties to the GPA and no one party could unilaterally alter the decision.

Such "blatant violations of the GPA to suit individuals", he said, were a cause for grave concern, as they had the effect of derailing the course of restoration and reconstruction.

Jabu Shoko is the pseudonym of an IWPR-trained reporter in Zimbabwe.

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