

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Zambia Summary 11 March 2019

Opposition United Party for National Development (UPND) leader Hakainde Hichilema claims that President Edgar Lungu (2015-present) attempted to assassinate him at a political rally in Sesheke on 8 February, but the government denies the allegations. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) suspends Lusaka-based private television station Prime TV for being too critical of the government. Finance minister Margaret Mwanakatwe says that Zambia plans to swap its China-held debt from United States dollars to Chinese yuan to ease foreign reserve pressure.

Assassination claim knocks prospects of political dialogue...

The government has denied the allegations of opposition **United Party for National Development (UPND)** leader **Hakainde Hichilema** that President **Edgar Lungu** (2015-present) attempted to assassinate him at a political rally in **Sesheke (Western Province)** on 8 February.¹ Hichilema's allegations illustrate the deteriorating relations between the government and opposition parties, which are unlikely to improve in the run up to the 2021 elections. The allegations stem from conflict between police and UPND supporters during a political rally in south-western **Zambia**, where both the ruling **Patriotic Front** and the UPND were campaigning for a parliamentary by-election in Sesheke. The clash reportedly arose from the government's objection to Hichilema holding a rally in Sesheke at the same time as Lungu.² UPND members alleged that police used live ammunition to disperse the crowd.³ The UPND released video footage of the events, which showed police driving through the area firing indiscriminately and people fleeing or hiding behind vehicles.⁴ One video reportedly shows UPND supporters treating a person with a bloody chest wound.⁵ The government claims the videos have been doctored and police deny using live ammunition.⁶

The altercation is similar to one in April 2017 when Hichilema and his supporters refused to give way to Lungu's motorcade, later resulting in a treason charge against Hichilema (see *ARC Briefing Zambia May 2017*). Hichilema was released in August 2017 after international intervention and the pledge of a roadmap to dialogue between Lungu and Hichilema. However, with only one meeting between the two since then (see *ARC Briefing Zambia December 2018*), future dialogue is becoming an increasingly dubious prospect. Justice minister **Given Lubinda** confirmed as much:

*"Do the people of Zambia expect that President Edgar Lungu, who has been called an assassin, will be willing to sit with his victim? What will they talk about? ... Do they really expect President Edgar Lungu to simply accept and say: 'Thank you for accusing me of attempting to assassinate you, now come, we have a cup of coffee?' That is expecting far too much."*⁷

Since the constitutional court ruling in December that Lungu can stand for a third term in 2021 (see *ARC Briefing Zambia December 2018*), the opposition has changed its tactics from trying to prevent Lungu from running to attempting to discredit him internationally. The opposition appears to be spurning dialogue, aiming instead to hurt both Lungu's image and that of the PF. Ten opposition

¹ Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

² Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

³ Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

⁴ Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

⁵ Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

⁶ Daily Maverick, 11 Feb 2019

⁷ News Diggers, 27 Feb 2019

figures stated on 21 February that they will report Lungu to the **International Criminal Court** for presiding over political violence.⁸ They claim that the PF has a state-funded militia whose main purpose is to kill political opponents.⁹ The opposition figures threatened to report home affairs minister **Stephen Kampyongo**, press secretary **Amos Chanda**, PF secretary-general **Davies Mwila**, and Lungu's political adviser, **Kaizar Zulu**, to the ICC.¹⁰ Zambia, as an ICC member state, is entitled to request an investigation into possible offences if there is reliable information.¹¹ However, the ICC will not begin an investigation into a sitting head of state. While the video shows soldiers firing in the air, there is no proof that Lungu had ordered the police into the area or that there were any deaths due to the firing.

Hichilema garnered significant local and international support after his treason trial but failed to maintain this momentum. He and the opposition parties have not pushed for policy changes and dialogue as Lungu and the PF consolidate their grip on power in Zambia. There is much to criticise in Zambia, but the opposition de-legitimises itself with its constant allegations of militias and assassination attempts. This is the seventh reported attempted assassination on Hichilema since 2011.¹² Getting into office in 2021 will require Hichilema to mobilise supporters and present sound policies rather than accusations of murder.

... as government suspends pro-opposition media

The **Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA)** suspended **Lusaka**-based private television station **Prime TV** for 30 days on 4 March for being too critical of the government.¹³ The suspension is a worrying sign that the government will continue to crack down on pro-opposition media and supporters. The IBA also recently suspended the licence of **Nyimba**-based radio station **Valley FM** for 60 days for “*unbalanced content*”.¹⁴ The IBA said that Prime TV had

*“... exhibited unprofessional elements in its broadcasting through unbalanced coverage, opinionated news and material likely to incite violence using derogatory language”.*¹⁵

PF secretary-general Davis Mwila had several weeks earlier lodged a complaint with the IBA over Prime TV's allegedly biased reporting of a parliamentary election that the UPND won.¹⁶ Information permanent secretary **Chanda Kasolo** said the suspensions are warnings to media houses that regulations would be enforced if stations exceeded the set boundaries. Kasolo said the ministry would set up a toll free number for the public to complain about unbalanced coverage.¹⁷ Kasolo also chairs the IBA board.¹⁸ Despite this apparent conflict of interest, Kasolo said there was no political interference and, if there was, he would resign.¹⁹

Prime TV director **Gerald Shawa** appealed the decision on 5 March, but Kasolo stated that he had no intention of lifting the suspension.²⁰ The **Media Liaison Committee, United Kingdom (UK)**-based non-governmental human rights organisation **Amnesty International**,²¹ and the **Zambia Congress of Trade Unions**²² have criticised the suspension saying that the IBA has taken the side of the PF secretary-general and failed to give the news media 14 days to respond to the complaint before suspending Prime TV.²³

⁸ Africanews, 21 Feb 2019

⁹ The Mast Online, 21 Feb 2019

¹⁰ Zambian Observer, 22 Feb 2019

¹¹ Africanews, 21 Feb 2019

¹² Zambia Reports, 24 Feb 2019

¹³ Citizen, 5 Mar 2019

¹⁴ Citizen, 5 Mar 2019

¹⁵ Citizen, 5 Mar 2019

¹⁶ Citizen, 5 Mar 2019

¹⁷ Citizen, 5 Mar 2019

¹⁸ Lusaka Times, 4 Mar 2019

¹⁹ Lusaka Times, 4 Mar 2019

²⁰ Lusaka Times, 8 Mar 2019

²¹ Zambia Reports, 5 Mar 2019

²² Lusaka Times, 5 Mar 2019

²³ Lusaka Times, 6 Mar 2019

The government's censoring of media is a disturbing sign of declining democratic rights and may cause other media houses to self-censor over fears of suspended or revoked licences. According to the **United States** embassy's public affairs officer, **Sean McIntosh**, the Zambian government still views private media as part of the opposition.²⁴ The suspension of private media signals the government's intention to shut down opposition to its policies. Rather than addressing criticism, the government seems set to continue repression of private media. Kasolo Chanda made no attempt to hide the undemocratic nature of the government's actions:

"It is difficult in our society because democracy does not come easy. We are a naturally dictatorial society [and] so to bring in this foreign system of democracy is a real challenge."²⁵

Zambia plans to swap debt from dollar to yuan

Finance minister **Margaret Mwanakatwe** said on 6 March that Zambia plans to swap its **China**-held debt from **United States** dollars to Chinese yuan to ease foreign reserve pressure.²⁶ The move will help to increase Zambia's foreign reserves, which dropped from \$3.1 billion in 2014 to \$1.57 billion at the end of 2018.²⁷ It will also boost Zambia's relationship with China, which is trying to push the yuan as a leading world currency.²⁸ Zambia will hold discussions with China in late March to determine the steps it will take to swap its debt.²⁹ Zambia's debt at the end of 2018 was \$9.7 billion, of which \$3.1 billion is owed to China.³⁰

Zambia's trade with China continues to increase. Zambian exports grew from \$2.36 billion in 2017 to \$5.07 billion in 2018.³¹ Mwanakatwe said the majority of Zambia's imports come from China:

"So it makes sense to look at ways and means as to how we can take advantage of this kwacha-yuan position. We have borrowed from China, we've borrowed in dollars. So our intention is to actually swap the dollar into yuan ... so that we can try and mitigate, somewhat, the exposure to the dollar and the movements of the dollar."³²

Planner

8-12 Apr 2019 **Livingstone (Zambia)** Commonwealth Law Conference (CLC)

11-13 Apr 2019 **Chisamba (Zambia)** Agritech Expo Zambia

5 May 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** Bank of Zambia (central bank) interest rate decision

13-14 Jun 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** Zambia International Mining and Energy Conference and Exhibition (ZIMEC)

26 Jun - 2 Jul 2019 **Ndola (Zambia)** Zambia International Trade Fair

12-13 Sep 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** Zambia E-commerce Expo and Conference

3-5 Oct 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** Africa Food Manufacturing and Safety Summit Southern Africa (AFMASS Zambia)

2021 **(Zambia)** Scheduled presidential elections;

²⁴ News Diggers, 9 Mar 2019

²⁵ News Diggers, 8 Mar 2019

²⁶ Standard Media, 7 Mar 2019

²⁷ News Diggers, 7 Mar 2019

²⁸ SCMP, 2 Oct 2018

²⁹ Standard Media, 7 Mar 2019

³⁰ Reuters, 6 Mar 2019

³¹ Lusaka Times, 9 Mar 2019

³² News Diggers, 7 Mar 2019

Chronology

- 6 Mar 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Kitco*. Finance minister **Margaret Mwanakatwe** announces plans to swap Zambia's **China**-held debt from dollars to yuan in late March to ease foreign reserve pressures;
- 5 Mar 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Times of Zambia*. The **Independent Broadcasting Authority** suspends the licences of three radio stations – **Valley FM**, **Ngoma Radio**, and **Kafue Radio** – for opinionated coverage;
- 5 Mar 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Citizen*. The information ministry sets up a toll-free line to receive complaints on 'opinionated' television and radio coverage, increasing concerns that more media licences will be suspended;
- 4 Mar 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *EWN*. The **Independent Broadcasting Authority** suspends pro-opposition television channel **Prime TV** for one month for bias;
- 4 Mar 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Daily Mail*. **China's** ambassador to **Zambia**, **Li Jie**, says that trade with Zambia reached \$5 billion in 2018;
- 26 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Zambia Reports*. Justice minister **Given Lubinda** says that constitutional amendments will proceed despite opposition parties' rejection of the roadmap;
- 22 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Bloomberg*. Energy minister **Matthew Nkhuwa** says that Zambia has reduced hydropower production at **Kariba Dam** due to declining water levels;
- 20 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *BBC*. Opposition parties threaten to report President **Edgar Lungu** and several governing party officials to the **International Criminal Court** for instigating political violence;
- 18 Feb 2019 **Lufwanyama (Zambia)** *IOL*. Mines minister **Richard Musuka** pledges support for the gemstone sector during a **Kagem Mine** emerald auction, promising a predictable fiscal regime;
- 12 Feb 2019 **London (United Kingdom)** *IOL*. The **Zambian** embassy denies that President **Edgar Lungu** tried to assassinate opposition leader **Hakainde Hichilema**;
- 12 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Lusaka Times*. **Southern African Resource Watch** executive director **Edward Lange** pleads with the government not to sell its 20% shareholding in **Kansanshi** mine;
- 11 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Mining Weekly*. **United Kingdom**-based mining company **Xtract Resources** concludes a memorandum of understanding to explore a small-scale copper and gold licence with an unnamed consortium;
- 11 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Daily Maverick*. Opposition **United Party for National Development** leader **Hakainde Hichilema** claims that President **Edgar Lungu** tried to assassinate him after police fired live ammunition at a rally on 8 February;
- 8 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Zambia Reports*. **Zambia Airways'** board appoints **Bruk Endeshaw Abebe** as CEO of the partially state-owned airline;
- 7 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Xinhua*. Government spokesperson **Dora Siliya** states that **Canada**-based mining company **First Quantum Minerals** has not officially approached the government with an offer for **Kansanshi** mine, despite previous reports;
- 5 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Mining Weekly*. State-owned mining investment company **ZCCM-IH** receives bids from **Canada**-based **First Quantum Minerals** and others for a 17% stake;
- 5 Feb 2019 **Lusaka (Zambia)** *Business Day*. The **Anti-Corruption Commission** arrests infrastructure and housing minister **Ronald Chitotela** for concealing property alleged to have been purchased with proceeds of crime;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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