

ZAMBIA FLASH NOTE

Background to the arrest of opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema

A few tidbits on last night's drama that set the stage for today's transparently political arrest of the UPND leader.

1) The police detachment that stormed HH's residence last night, after a preliminary salvo of tear-gas, was led by none other than Kaiser Zulu. With the title of special political advisor to Mr. Lungu, he caught the media spotlight last month when he attempted to force his way onto the presidential dais during the awards ceremony at the conclusion of the Africa Cup of Nations (under-20s) championship.

2) The precursor to the raid was a week-end traffic incident (sic) in which the presidential motorcade was clearly at fault.

While en route to a ceremony marking the climax of the annual Kuomboka ceremony in Limulunga (Western division), the presidential convoy realized that it was trailing a fleet of vehicles accompanying Hichilema and his running mate Geoffrey Mwemba to the same event. Mr. Lungu's handlers responded¹ by stepping on the gas so as **to overtake the 'rival' motorcade, get to the venue first and then deny the UPND convoy access to the grounds².**

3) When the UPND convoy arrived at Mongu stadium a few minutes later, they were advised that no more attendees were being admitted as the ceremony had already commenced.

Amid the commotion, however, sympathetic locals managed to smuggle both HH and GBM into the grounds, where **they were duly photographed, comfortably ensconced in one of the VIP pavilions.**



4) Worse still, from a presidential perspective, shortly before Mr. Lungu was expected to deliver an address, the two UPND leaders got up and left the stadium to resounding applause and shouts of "UPND – forward", from the crowd³.

This is the real backdrop to the capital charge of treason – i.e. 'obstructing the presidential motorcade' and 'endangering the president's life' – being brought against against Mr. Hichilema.

¹ One reason this will have distressed Lungu and his handlers is that the strong pro-opposition sympathies of the local community had been very much on display throughout his 3-day tour of the region.

² As will be recalled, the same strategy was employed to prevent HH from attending the U-20 final which Zambia won.

³ HH and GBM are still seeking judicial remedy redress for the fact that the Constitutional Court declined to hear their petition challenging the electoral victory awarded to Edgar Lungu last August. On this basis, they have declined to recognize his presidency.

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