

Retrenched MBC employees turn to government

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Woes for 300 employees retrenched when the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) merged with Malawi Television are still far from over.

Earlier this week, retrenched employees conducted peaceful protests at the premises of the state broadcaster in Blantyre. Two months ago, MBC new director general, Benson Tembo met the former workers and promised to resolve their long standing pension matter by September 2012. The former employees are now demanding for government intervention after the date passed without any new development.

Protesters were seen displaying placards bearing president Joyce Banda's face, asking her to intervene. One of the placard read: "Are you defying the President by not paying us off?"

Spokesperson for the former employees, Richard Bande told Bizcommunity that they were holding peaceful protests since Monday to force management give them their benefits.

"The director general told us that management has got a commitment from government to give the retrenched workers their salaries and pensions and assured," he said.

On the pension issue, Banda said the director general told them that come 1 September they would be getting all their pensions.

"But here we are, we have got none and all we are asking is for them to give us the money and off we will go," he said.

Besides being retrenched, some of the workers were deployed to some government departments and most of these were also sent back saying their deployment was unprocedural.

MBC public relations officer, Ruth Gama confirmed that the director general, who is also the broadcaster's CEO, met and assured the retrenched workers on their salaries and pension.

"With the financial hardships that the corporation is currently going through, it is kind of hard, but they just have to bear with the management," she said.

She said management will soon be meeting officials from Statutory Corporation, the Rationalization Unit, Treasury and officials of the Information Ministry in Lilongwe.

MBC established under a Parliamentary Act was adopted the name MBC for both services after the merger which was still being considered illegal until parliament intervened.

Malawi parliament passed a bill that effectively dissolved TVM on 4 June 2012 which information minister Moses Kunkuyu said this was the piece of legislation that was part of the process of legal formalisation of MBC operations.

"The MBC Act is the law that established the public broadcaster and already provided for the operation of both a radio and television station," he said.

He said the bill sought to provide dissolution of TVM and to transfer any of its property, assets, funds, liabilities, obligations, agreements and other arrangements to MBC.

The retrenched workers rushed to the court to challenge the merger but in June, the High Court dismissed an application for judicial review on the merger where presiding judge Justice Healy Potani dismissed the application in his draft ruling describing it as "incompetent".

Potani ruled that the issues raised are purely employment matters suitable for the Industrial Relations Court.

"The matter in its entirety, that is both on the relevant law and the facts, tends to show that while the applicants may be entitled to complain about the effect of the merger on the respective employments with the first respondent [MBC], they have no standing to question the procedure leading to the merger," he said.

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