



NEWS IN BRIEF

- ZANU-PF's Central Committee on March 30 endorsed President Robert Mugabe as its candidate for the election to be held early next year. Mugabe will run for a five-year term.
- Leaders of the Southern African Development Community held a meeting on the crisis in Zimbabwe in Dar es Salaam on March 28-29 and chose South African president Thabo Mbeki as mediator in the Zimbabwean conflict. Western observers say the African leaders did not go far enough in censuring Mugabe.
- The spate of petrol bombings continued with an attack on a supermarket in Harare on March 24. The shop belongs to a ZANU-PF legislator, and the government accused the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, of masterminding the bombings. The MDC has distanced itself from the violence.
- More allegations of police abuse emerged in relation to detained MDC members accused of being behind the petrol bombings. Among those who alleged they were assaulted in police custody was Ian Mokone, a member of the MDC's national executive.
- Nine opposition activists were abducted from hospital late on April 1, allegedly by state security agents. The nine were admitted to hospital the previous day after being injured in an encounter with police. An MDC lawyer said no one knew where they had been taken.
- The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions launched a two-day nationwide "stay home" strike on April 3. The union said there would be no marches as boycotters feared police retaliation.

REBUILDING ZIMBABWEAN PRIDE



Credit: Lazele

People line up for cooking oil at a Harare supermarket. Queues are now a common sight in Harare due to shortages of basic commodities. (Picture taken September 2006)

A one-time admirer of Robert Mugabe reflects on the harm the president has inflicted on Zimbabwe — and what can be done to reverse the damage

By Trevor Ncube in Johannesburg

Robert Mugabe used to be my hero. At university, where I was a member of the student council, I remember how proud I was when he came to visit us. I lined up to shake his hand, and it was a moment I cherished.

Here was an African leader whom I looked up to. I admired the way he spoke, his manner of thought, his vision. I looked forward to when he addressed the nation, and marvelled at how he fired such strong sentiments of patriotism and nationalism.

As I travelled the world, I was proud to be Zimbabwean, and especially proud that Robert Mugabe was my president.

Zimbabwe was African, independent and free, and Robert Mugabe was my man.

How things have changed.

Zimbabwe, the former breadbasket of the region, is now an economic basket case. Life expectancy is plummeting, and more and more people are abandoning the country.

The constitution, the legislature and all other vital institutions have been distorted solely in the service of one man. He has made the police, army and security services his own and rendered parliament useless.

A man who could have been a Nelson Mandela — a figurehead for Africa — has instead destroyed people's lives

and dreams. He has devastated a jewel of a nation.

In pursuit of personal benefit, of his desire to stay in power, he has become a monster who clings on to power only because he can.

The recent beating of opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai is thus not only a traumatic event for the opposition leader, but also a symbol of what has happened to the entire country.

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When I reflect on recent events, I remind myself that this could have been me.

I have not suffered one per cent of what Tsvangirai has. But I have been thrown into a cell with 15 other people.

A few years ago, when I was visiting Bulawayo for my brother's wedding, my passport was seized. I was essentially a prisoner in my own country, and I had to go to court to get my documents back.

More recently, the government tried to revoke my citizenship, and for three months I was a stateless person.

My mother is Zimbabwean, I was born in Zimbabwe, and I lived there for the first four decades of my life. In 1994, I received an award as Zimbabwean editor of the year.

But the government said that because my father was born in Zambia, I was not Zimbabwean.

The real reason, however, was that Mugabe regarded me as one of his enemies because I run the only two remaining independent newspapers left in the country.

Fortunately, I was able to win the case.

But I ask, why did Zimbabwe lose its respect for humanity?

We have a society in which the government decides who qualifies as patriotic. If you do not agree with us, you are an enemy of the state and have no rights.

This lack of mutual respect is the deepest tragedy, the most fundamental distortion of a long period of misrule.

Robert Mugabe has poisoned our national pride, and it will take us a long time to get back to where we were at independence in 1980.

I am often asked what more the international community could do. Are they, and especially Britain as the former colonial power, to blame?

In all fairness, I believe that the international powers have been outplayed by a very wily fox, and it is very hard to hold them responsible for the situation inside the country. Mugabe has made it impossible for anyone to do anything meaningful, apart from marching on Harare.

However, I personally do judge Thabo Mbeki, the president of South Africa, very harshly.

South Africa is the regional powerhouse, and if Mbeki had condemned the elections that were stolen in 2000, then the rest of the continent, and the international community too, would have been able to take a much stronger position, and much bloodshed might have been spared.

Now, however, South Africa is engaging more constructively in the current crisis. The situation has got worse, and they are serious concerned that their neighbour might collapse completely.

Through various regional structures, several African leaders are playing a more active role, trying diplomatically to open the way for Mugabe's departure and the establishment of a new government in Zimbabwe.

We do not know how all this will play out, and there have been false dawns before.

Yet all these factors make the current crisis a moment of hope as well as fear.

We are exactly 50 years from the beginning of the post-colonial experience in Africa, and it may be that we have now come full circle.

Even at this worrying moment, if African leaders can come together to resolve the crisis, we could be seeing a rebirth not only of Zimbabwe but of the continent as a whole.

Clearly, we have learned some lessons from the last half-century, and one of them is that the days are gone when we can blame everything on colonialism. What Africans, and especially Zimbabweans, have to do now is assume responsibility for the crisis themselves and find their own solutions to it.

The scale of the challenge is enormous, and international support and expertise will be vital in tackling it — re-establishing democratic institutions and rebuilding a devastated economy.

The international powers have been outplayed by a very wily fox

But the biggest and most long-term challenge will be recreating a sense of mutual respect and in fact rebuilding society. We will have to cleanse people's minds, and rebuild their respect for life, dignity, and property, and for each other.

Then it will be up to Africa to ensure that Robert Mugabe is the last strongman of the continent. Never again must one man hold the hopes and dreams of a nation to ransom.

Trevor Ncube, a native Zimbabwean, is chief executive of South Africa's Mail & Guardian, owner of Zimbabwe's Independent and Standard newspapers, and chairman of the Africa division of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting. ■

ZIMBABWEAN LEADER GETS HIS WAY

Battling for survival at regional as well as national level, the president has secured his party's backing and at least outward endorsement from neighbouring states

By Hativagone Mushonga in Harare

President Robert Mugabe scored two victories last week. In a slap in the face to his critics, opposition politicians and the Zimbabwean population, southern African leaders backed Mugabe at a crisis meeting of the Southern African Development Community, SADC, on March 28-29.

A day later, in another triumph for Africa's longest-serving ruler, the Central Committee of the ruling ZANU-PF endorsed him as the party's candidate for the 2008 presidential election.

The Central Committee's backing, which has to be formally approved by a party congress in July, dealt a huge blow to the ZANU-PF heavyweights who have been jostling for the top post since Mugabe announced in 2004 that he would not seek re-election.

The "100 per cent" support voiced by SADC leaders, plus ZANU-PF's endorsement of Mugabe's increasingly autocratic, came as a shock to Zimbabweans who had hoped the tide was finally turning against the octogenarian president.

In recent months, Mugabe had been backtracking on his earlier promise to retire after the expiry of his term of office in 2008, saying he would not leave while ZANU-PF was still divided.

Strong indications that Mugabe was unwilling to hand over power emerged just before the ZANU-PF conference in December, when he announced that there was no vacancy for his post. This was bolstered by a recent tele-



ZANU-PF supporters gather outside party headquarter waiting to hear Mugabe speak. (Picture taken 30/03/2007)

vised interview marking his 83rd birthday when, in a seemingly joking remark, he asked what Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, would say if he, Mugabe, stood for election in 2008 and still beat him.

The Central Committee's backing dealt a huge blow to the ZANU-PF heavyweights who have been jostling for the top post

Mugabe is currently presiding over a 1,730 per cent inflation rate, shortages of basic commodities, crumbling health and education facilities, and mass unemployment. Some three million Zimbabweans have emigrated to neighbouring southern African countries.

He has also received widespread international condemnation over the arrests of, and assaults on, dozens of opposition activists earlier this month,

including Tsvangirai and his spokesperson Nelson Chamisa.

Zimbabweans had expected ZANU-PF party heavyweights - retired Army General Solomon Mujuru and Rural Housing Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa - to block Mugabe's nomination as the official candidate for the election.

A clearly disappointed Mujuru, whose wife was at one time tipped to take over the presidential seat, shook his head in dismay at the end of the Central Committee meeting in Harare. Mujuru had thought he had won the fight to raise his wife, currently vice president, to the highest post in the land after outmaneuvering Mnangagwa, who was also in the running for the post.

Top officials in Mujuru's camp feel that allowing Mugabe to stand in 2008 and continue as president for another five years will plunge the country deeper into the economic crisis it is experiencing and thereby ruin any chance for ZANU-PF retaining power once he finally leaves office.

Credit: Lazele



Credit: Lazele

MDC party spokesperson, Nelson Chamisa, lies in bed at Avenues Clinic in Harare after he was attacked by unknown assailants at Harare International Airport on March 18, 2007. (Picture taken 20/03/2007)

That is what happened in a number of countries including Zambia, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where long-serving parties failed to stay in power after the departure of their veteran leaders.

A clearly disappointed Solomon Mujuru shook his head in dismay at the end of the Central Committee meeting

A top official in Mujuru's camp told IWPR after the meeting that they had tried their best to block Mugabe's candidature, but all the work they had done over the past three years to promote Vice-President Joice Mujuru for the top job had come to naught.

Mugabe's bid to run again was backed by loyalists in the ZANU-PF Women's League and Youth League.

To maintain his hold on power, President Mugabe has over the years perfected the tactics of divide and rule, fuelling factionalism within ZANU-PF. He has been switching support among the presidential contenders,

who included the vice president, Mnangagwa, and Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono.

The official said the tactic once again worked for Mugabe, as the two main factions could otherwise have united to block his candidature for the elections.

"With a united front, we might have made the Central Committee count and we might have been able to force Mugabe to honour his promise to retire in 2008. Because of a lack of trust in each other, we were not able to do that," he said.

President Mugabe perfected the tactics of divide and rule, fuelling factionalism in ZANU-PF

The Central Committee also endorsed moving the parliamentary election set for 2010 forward to 2008, so that presidential and legislative ballots can be held simultaneously. This was an indirect rebuff to the president's earlier proposal to shift the presidential vote back to 2010 to coincide with the

general election - giving him two extra years in office. Mugabe effectively acknowledged that his plan was unworkable in an interview for the Southern Times newspaper in early March, indicating that both votes would take place next year

On threats by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change to boycott elections if major reforms are not undertaken, ZANU-PF spokesperson Nathan Shamuyarira said his party would go ahead with them regardless.

Members of the powerful ZANU-PF Politburo tried to have the issue debated when it convened two days before the Central Committee meeting, but they were brushed off by Mugabe.

With a united front, we might have... been able to force Mugabe to honour his promise to retire in 2008

ZANU-PF sources said Simon Khaya Moyo, the country's ambassador to South Africa, asked Mugabe to clarify press reports that he now wanted the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2008 and that he wanted to stand, "so that we are guided accordingly".

An angry Mugabe is said to have told Moyo that this was "none of the Politburo's business, but a matter for the Central Committee".

At this point, ZANU-PF Women's League chair Oppah Muchinguri intervened, shouting, "We want you for life, Mr Mugabe."

Muchinguri had previously threatened to undress in public if Mugabe was not endorsed as party candidate.

At the suggestion that Zimbabwe should have a president for life, former cabinet minister Dumiso Dabengwa snapped back at Muchinguri, "Where have you heard such a thing?"

Hativagone Mushonga is a pseudonym used by a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

MUGABE'S SELF-BELIEF NOT MATCHED BY RESULTS

Everyone agrees that what Zimbabwe needs is competent administration, but few would concur with Robert Mugabe that only he has those skills

By Joseph Sithole in Harare

When Zimbabwe began its steep slide into economic and political crisis, President Robert Mugabe declared that nobody could have managed the economy better than he had done.

He might as well have said nobody had ruled Zimbabwe better than he had - if only because he has been its sole leader for the 27 years since the end of settler rule in 1980. Thus, responsibility for the disastrous state of the economy has to rest squarely with him.

President Mugabe appears to believe his leadership is essential to the country's economic and political well-being. At the national assembly of the Women's League of the ruling ZANU-PF on March 24, he asserted that it was Britain that set up the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, in order "to protect their interests that were threatened by the land reclamation exercise". For that reason, he said, the MDC would never rule Zimbabwe as long as he was alive.

"We fought for this country and its resources will remain ours forever... I have 83 years of struggle, experience and resilience and I cannot be pushed over, and I have seen it all. It is my country that I fought and struggled for, and here I shall die," he declared to wild applause.

A political analyst who teaches at a Zimbabwean university commented, "If we didn't know Mugabe well



Credit: Lazele

Mugabe addresses ZANU-PF supporters at party headquarters after the Central Committee meeting that endorsed him as the candidate for the 2008 presidential election. (Picture taken 30/3/2007)

enough, we would accept the views of those who say these are the empty words of an old man. Unfortunately, Mugabe believes every word he says. He believes he is qualified to rule until death. He sees it as an entitlement."

He seems to believe that in the armed struggle of the Seventies, it was he who single-handedly liberated his country from colonial bondage. Without his presence at the helm, he believes Zimbabwe would slide back into colonial hands.

And just as he sees himself as indispensable, he is dismissive of those around him, including his own ZANU-PF. Just last year he said he would not leave the presidency as long as the party was "a shambles".

The other point is that anyone in ZANU-PF who has designs on the leadership must wait until the day the party regains stability and Mugabe can finally relinquish power. This is a

ploy the president used as early as 2002, when he said he would leave office as soon as land reform was complete.

But this position of strength looks as if might be coming to an end, as resistance begins to stiffen inside the ruling party as well as outside it. His disastrous management of the economy has helped to build that opposition.

The late Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere described Zimbabwe as a "jewel of Africa". At independence, Mugabe inherited a country with a strong currency, yet today it takes more than 20,000 Zimbabwean dollars to buy one US dollar. Annual inflation is 1,700 per cent and rising, unemployment is around 80 per cent, and average life expectancy had plummeted from around 60 years at independence to about 35.

Seven years ago, Zimbabwe was able to feed itself and still export

surplus maize to the region. Today there are clinics with no medicine, and pupils are dropping out of school either because parents can't afford the fees or because the children are starving.

Yet it was Mugabe who as prime minister expanded primary education and made it free for everyone, and opened health clinics in every district. But it is evident now that these good intentions were not backed up by a concern for managerial competence in his administration.

“What is needed for new leaders to emerge is an orderly transition and transfer of power” - Zimbabwe-based analyst

After independence, ZANU-PF soon forgot about its socialist “Leadership Code”, according to which senior party officials were expected to declare their assets and income sources. Mugabe allowed corruption to flourish by failing to ensure officials were prosecuted even when they were named in official investigations.

The same happened with ill-planned and violently executed land revolution launched in 2000, which highlighted the fact that astute management was not a feature of Mugabe's political projects. Experienced commercial farmers

were chased out of their flourishing enterprises, to be replaced by party cronies who saw the farm seizures as an opportunity to become fabulously wealthy without breaking a sweat.

Despite ordering seven land audits so far to see who owns what property, Mugabe has not acted on their findings, which reveal that ministers, local officials and members of the security forces acquired more than one farm each, in breach of the policy's stated goal of fair land re-distribution.

Similarly, Mugabe has proved unwilling or incapable of acting against senior officials who have been accused of illegally dealing in precious minerals. There are police reports showing that the president knows who is involved, but beyond empty threats, he has done nothing.

“The evidence is there that Mugabe is a poor manager,” said another analyst based in the country. “If he had left office in 1990, when the economy and education were still functioning, his legacy would be unrivalled.

“Unfortunately, he allowed power to go to his head and believes nobody can do better. The result is a disaster that will take decades to repair.”

The analyst said it was difficult for anybody within the system to openly challenge Mugabe for the presidency, because all potential leaders are his creations and are therefore compromised.

Most senior ZANU-PF officials are beneficiaries of Mugabe's patronage. He made them who they are,” he said.

The analyst said there were nevertheless officials who would be able to work in collaboration with current opposition members so secure the transition.

“There are many people who can do better, but we have to get Mugabe out of the way first. After all, at independence nobody had any experience in governance. What is needed for new leaders to emerge is an orderly transition and transfer of power,” he said.

Mugabe allowed corruption to flourish by failing to ensure officials were prosecuted

“What is the point of the opposition starting all over again when there is a lot of talent to tap into? “We need the best [people] for the leader to succeed.

“Mugabe believes he is the best. And the results are there for all to see.”

Joseph Sithole is a pseudonym used by a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa's Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components — information provision, capacity building and dissemination and distribution.

The key purpose is to increase awareness in the Southern African region of the Zimbabwean situation and the implications for regional peace, security and economic development.

It also contributes to the development of regional policy, promotes dialogue and builds bridges within the region. It also raises the Africa wide and international profile of Zimbabwe in the context of the region.

Importantly it also builds the skills and capacity of the media to reliably and accurately report political transition, governance and human rights issues.

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