



GONO REAPPOINTMENT ANGERS MDC

Opposition says extension of central banker's term breaches deal on unity government.

By Jabu Shoko in Harare

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai this week said the reappointment of Gideon Gono to the post of central bank governor was the most recent sign of lack of good faith by Robert Mugabe in the stalled power-sharing arrangements.

Last week, the president rewarded Gono, who has presided over one of the world's highest inflation rates, with another five-year term as head of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, RBZ, with effect from December 1.

The re-appointment was announced on state television on November 25, much to the chagrin of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, and ordinary Zimbabweans who are battling to survive in a country where inflation is officially at 231 million per cent and unofficially over five billion per cent. On December 1,



Credit: Lazele

Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono and President Robert Mugabe stand for the national anthem during the launch of the monetary policy statement in Harare. Picture taken 30/07/08

The reappointment of Gono to the post of central bank governor is the most recent sign of lack of good faith by Robert Mugabe in the stalled power-sharing arrangements — opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai

Gono introduced new high denomination currency.

Tsvangirai, leader of the main faction of the MDC, said in a statement to IWPR, "This individual has been the architect of Zimbabwe's economic collapse and has blatantly plundered the national treasury to fund ZANU-PF and its elite.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has said that there was "no cholera" in his country, contradicting reports from international health officials of a rising death toll.

Mugabe said in a speech broadcast on national television that doctors in Zimbabwe had overcome the disease.

"I am happy we are being assisted by others and we have arrested cholera," the president said in his December 11 address, in which he also dismissed western pressure on him to leave office.

"Now that there is no cholera there is no case for war," he said.

However, the World Health Organisation, WHO, reported on December 10 that the disease was continuing to spread.

According to WHO, 774 people have died and 15,000 are believed to be infected.

Meanwhile, a High Court judge has ordered police to search for a human rights campaigner who was reportedly abducted from her home last week.

Police have denied holding Jestina Mukoko, director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project, who disappeared on December 3.

Her colleagues Broderick Takawira and Pascal Gonzo were also abducted in a separate incident.

Opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, said that 18 party activists have been abducted by unknown gunmen in the last few weeks.

South African party the African National Congress, ANC, has voiced its concern about the reports of the abductions of the human rights workers.

"Every effort should be made to establish where these individuals are, and that they are safe," said ANC spokesperson Jessie Duarte.

“Surely, if Mr Mugabe was genuine in his desire to address the problems facing the country he would not breach the [power-sharing] agreement by making any senior appointments unilaterally.”

If Mr Mugabe was genuine in his desire to address the problems facing the country, he would not breach the power-sharing agreement by making any senior appointments unilaterally — Tsvangirai

The MDC leader said since his party has been allocated the finance portfolio in the envisaged coalition government, he expected Mugabe to consult the opposition in the appointment of a governor for the central bank, which the MDC blames for the prevailing banking crisis in Zimbabwe.

The controversial Gono, appointed governor of the RBZ in 2003 when the country first experienced severe cash shortages, stands accused by the opposition of fuelling the rampant inflation by wantonly printing money to fund Mugabe's ZANU-PF government and to finance quasi-fiscal activities in aid of the regime.

Some of the foreign currency bought by the central bank from illegal foreign currency dealers has allegedly been channelled towards financing Mugabe's state security agents who, since the emergence of the MDC, have been accused of gross human rights abuses against opposition supporters.

Gono is also claimed to have used proceeds from printing money to buy US dollars to fund, among other projects, Mugabe's controversial land reforms. More than 400 million US

dollars has reportedly been spent by Gono to procure tractors and other farming implements from China for doling out to ZANU-PF supporters.

Political analyst Mutumwa Mawere, living in exile in South Africa after his Zimbabwean business empire was forcibly seized by Mugabe, said it was unfortunate that Zimbabweans would have to endure another five years of the political manipulation at which Gono has proved to be a master.

“During his term, he has successfully been able to divert attention from the core source of the political and economic crisis by manufacturing enemies of the state. His tenure has witnessed the centralisation of executive power and the emergence of the RBZ as the super state,” said Mawere.

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Mawere charged that Gono was a man preoccupied with blaming others and yet through his own actions Zimbabwe has had to endure the worst economic policies and programmes imaginable.

On November 26, barely a day after his re-appointment, Gono issued an acceptance speech in which he pledged to refocus the RBZ by sticking to the mandate of the central bank.

Gono said he would no longer dabble in quasi-financial activists, nor finance ZANU-PF. The central bank would

concentrate on its main function of inflation control and financial sector stability with effect from January 2009.

“As I accept this extended call for national duty, I pledge to maintain a very tight monetary policy stance, anchored on the comprehensive realignment and streamlining of the reserve bank's functions in a manner that leaves monetary authorities with core responsibilities of inflation targeting, management of the national payment systems and safeguarding financial sector stability,” he said.

Gono is the best man for the job. We feel he knows what he is doing — hence the extension of his term. He has done great service to the nation, especially the financing of government projects such as land reform — Finance Minister Samuel Mbengegwi

Finance Minister Samuel Mbengegwi, who announced Gono's re-appointment, said, “He is the best man for the job. We feel he knows what he is doing — hence the extension of his term. He has done great service to the nation, especially the financing of government projects such as land reform.”

Mbengegwi said it was unfair to blame Gono for all Zimbabwe's woes, “The problems of this country are not because of the governor but it is the sanctions imposed by America, the British and the West. Gono has been very innovative to beat the sanctions. He has done an excellent job as far as ZANU-PF and government are concerned.”

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

MUGABE ALLIES SQUASH SUCCESSION RUMOURS

Party dismisses suggestions of leadership change at upcoming annual conference, as succession battle heats up.

By Jabu Shoko in Harare

ZANU-PF has sought to weaken a party faction opposed to President Robert Mugabe and his heir apparent in the run up to its annual conference.

But ruling party officials have told IWPR that the succession issue will not be on the agenda of next week's event.

In six of the country's ten provinces, the party leadership has been completely overhauled, with those opposed to 84-year-old Mugabe's continued rule or the faction headed by his chosen successor facing expulsion or being sidelined.

Ruling party officials say that the succession issue will not be on the agenda at ZANU-PF's annual conference

Emmerson Mnangagwa, minister of housing and amenities as well as the party's secretary for legal affairs, is touted as Mugabe's heir apparent in the event that the ageing Zimbabwean leader decides to call it quits.

The conference is an "annual talk shop that will be characterised by wining and dining while the rest of the country is facing a severe humanitarian crisis coupled by the cholera epidemic", said Useni Sibanda, coordinator of the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe.



Credit: Lazele

ZANU-PF secretary for legal affairs Emmerson Mnangagwa at a local hotel in Harare. Picture taken 1/1/2007

"We don't expect much except the usual praise singing in which leaders declare their loyalty to Mugabe so that he rules them forever until amen."

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The conference, from December 10 to 13, will be held in Bindura, a district in which a number of opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, supporters were killed in the run-up to the controversial March presidential election and presidential run-off in June.

Ernest Mudzengi, a Harare-based political analyst, described the event as a yearly ZANU-PF routine for party fanatics to endorse the continued misrule of the country and party by geriatrics. "I don't expect anyone to stand up and say Mugabe must go.

We don't expect much except the usual praise-singing in which leaders declare their loyalty to Mugabe so that he rules them forever until amen — Useni Sibanda, coordinator of the Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe

They are happy to continue the misery of the country. It will be the usual gigantic feast that has come to be associated with ZANU-PF," said Mudzengi.

ZANU-PF is not known to spare costs in feeding its party faithful, he added.

Several million US dollars has allegedly been budgeted for the conference, while recipients of farms doled out by Mugabe under his controversial land reform programme have donated livestock, grain and cash to feed about 10,000 people drawn from the country's 10 provinces. About 200 cattle are set for slaughter.

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Previous ZANU-PF gatherings have in the past been dogged by allegations of delegates stealing food. Relief agencies estimate that more than 5.1 million Zimbabweans out of a population of 12 million people are in urgent need of food handouts.

The situation has been compounded by a cholera epidemic which independent health officials say has killed at least 3,000. There are also fears of a grim harvest next year due to the country's ill preparedness for the 2008/09 planting season, owing to shortages of fertiliser, seeds and farming inputs.

Party insiders said the leadership was not worried about the humanitarian crisis as it had its eyes firmly on the conference. They said the restructuring of the party's provincial leadership in elections prior to the conference was critical.

There has been an ongoing fight for political turf in ZANU-PF as the Mnangagwa faction and those backing retired army general Solomon Mujuru, husband of Vice-President Joice Mujuru, battle to succeed Mugabe.

For instance, in Masvingo provincial elections held last week, office bearers suspected to be linked to the Mujuru camp were routed in what insiders claim was a bid to strategically position politicians with connections to Mnangagwa.

Mnangagwa is credited with masterminding Mugabe's violent re-election in June this year in a one-man presidential run-off after opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai opted out, citing the horrendous violence which killed more than 100 MDC supporters.

ZANU-PF has also completed restructuring in the Midlands, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Manicaland provinces, where pro-Mnangagwa people have been elevated to powerful and influential positions.

However, in Mashonaland East, Ray Kaukonde, a wealthy ZANU-PF politician perceived to be aligned to the Mujuru camp and suspected to be behind moves to oust Mugabe, has retained his party chairmanship, despite spirited efforts by the Mnangagwa camp to oust him.

In Manicaland, Mike Madiro has made a dramatic comeback after nearly four years in the political wilderness, clinching the chairmanship in the province, which was won by the MDC in the March 2008 elections.

Madiro was suspended in 2004 over what has come to be known as the Tsholotsho Debacle, when politicians, including Madiro and then-information minister (now independent member of parliament) Jonathan Moyo called a meeting to change the party's rules, by having provincial chairpersons elect the party leader who would become the country's president.

In Mashonaland Central, former government minister Chen Chimutengwende, seen as pro-Mujuru, has made way for politician Dick Mafios, believed to be pro-Mnangagwa, as provincial chairperson.

Elections in the faction-riddled Bulawayo province have been complicated by an attempt by most of the provincial executive to revive PF ZAPU, a liberation movement swallowed by ZANU-PF in the 1980s. Current chairperson McCloud Tshawe will not be seeking re-election. Politicians in Bulawayo heavily linked to war veteran leader Jabulani Sibanda, who is also thought to be close to Mnangagwa, are expected to sweep to victory.

The conference will run under the theme, 'Let us stand united in defence of the party and our revolution' — Ephraim Masawi, ZANU-PF deputy secretary for information

In Matabeleland South, elections are expected at the weekend after being cancelled last week because of the deadly cholera outbreak sweeping the country.

There is wild speculation of a change of leadership at the conference in Bindura, but Ephraim Masawi, the ZANU-PF deputy secretary for information, who confirmed the agenda for the annual gathering has been set, dismissed the reports, alleging mere media speculation.

Masawi said the election of new leaders was the preserve of the party's National People's Congress, which is only held every five years; the next one is due in 2010.

"The ZANU-PF annual national conference is not going to tackle a change of leadership in the party. The issue of the succession is not on the agenda," he said. The conference will run under the theme "Let us stand united in defence of the party and our revolution".

Jabu Shoko is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

SOLDIERS' PROTESTS ROCK HARARE

Military experts warn riots precursor to mutiny, while pro-government analysts insist they're simply indiscipline within ranks.

By Chipo Sithole in Harare

Zimbabwe is facing widespread protests by discontented soldiers feeling the heat of the country's collapsing economy.

Some analysts are forecasting that continuing army revolts and economic instability could force President Robert Mugabe to share power with the opposition, putting the country's shattered economy on the road to recovery.

The rising groundswell of anger within the army over poor salaries and cash shortages poses a serious threat to Mugabe, who has traditionally relied on the loyalty of the army to keep the opposition in check.

Dozens of soldiers have been taking to the streets of Harare since November 27, clashing with anti-riot and military police deployed in the city centre to counter the protests. There have been sporadic exchanges of gunfire in the capital as dissident soldiers and military police clash.

Army protests hit a crescendo on December 1 when over 100 soldiers, dressed in full military fatigues, emerged from banking halls in the city centre empty-handed after cash had run out due to rationing.

They first attacked the Market Square bus terminus in downtown Harare, which is notorious for illegal foreign currency dealings, assaulting foreign currency dealers and seizing cash from them to demand "our money".

Then they swept across the city, looting and vandalising shops.

The detachment of troops was from Cranborne Barracks and accused the street foreign currency dealers of consorting with the central bank to vandalise the economy.

Zimbabwe's bankrupt central bank regularly raises foreign currency from the black market and relies on an informal network of street traders.

The riots on December 1 were repulsed by the military police, resulting in the death of "two miscreants", according to the army.

Security sources say Zimbabwe's army is seriously considering a curfew and has maintained a heavy deployment of military police in the city centre.

"We need to take appropriate measures to counter their actions effectively," said a military spokesman.

Army protests hit a crescendo in December when over 100 soldiers emerged from banking halls in the city centre empty-handed after cash had run out due to rationing

A pact signed by the military and Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono in November set up a scheme where soldiers could access cash weekly from army barracks. However, soldiers say the facility is being abused by top generals, who are making hefty withdrawals daily, leaving the rank-and-file in the army with nothing.

Government regulations only permit withdrawals from banks of 500,000 Zimbabwe dollars a day, hardly enough for a single fare on public transport.

Military experts are warning the riots are a precursor to mutiny, while pro-government analysts say the disturbances were just a simple case of indiscipline within the ranks.

Army sources said the military courts are currently overwhelmed with cases related to indiscipline in the rank-and-file of the army as rebellious troops protest against mounting hardships. The troops on December 1 were also objecting to appalling conditions in the army barracks, where they complain of being forced to subsist on a diet of the staple sadza (a maize meal mush) and beans only.

Dozens of anti-riot and military police have taken up positions around the city centre after fresh threats by labour leaders to march to the central bank to demand the complete removal of withdrawal limits, imposed to ration scarce cash supplies.

Tensions are mounting as civilians supporting the soldiers' demands join the demonstrations; many hurled rocks at anti-riot and military police troops during the December 1 protests.

The scene then was reminiscent of acts of civil disobedience in 1999 in Zimbabwe's capital sparked by food shortages that spread like wildfire through this impoverished nation of 11.8 million people.

Zimbabwe, once a breadbasket of southern Africa, is now among the poorest countries in the region, and has been struggling to establish democracy since disputed elections held in March.

The bloody rebellion of soldiers could lead to Mugabe's ousting, warned Harare-based political commentator Ronald Shumba.

"It's a situation becoming rapidly explosive," he said. "This is a sign of a deep-seated problem in the army — in Mugabe's regime, in fact."

An official police spokesman tried to downplay the near mutiny, claiming it was a simple case of “theft and robbery”.

Some analysts said the protests herald the beginning of the end for Mugabe, 84, who is beginning to lose the support of powerful factions in his own party and the increasingly disaffected army, police and security forces.

Mugabe, who has been in power for 28 years, has ruled with fear and patronage. But now a combination of an unprecedented economic collapse and growing opposition within his security forces and the ruling ZANU-PF party present the clearest threats to his rule.

There is palpable anger in the police and army over low salaries and the fast-track promotions of ZANU-PF loyalists and veterans of the guerrilla war that ended white rule in 1980, according to a private in the army.

“Morale in the army has hit rock bottom,” he said. “Everyone is complaining about the increasing hardships. It would seem the majority are blaming President Mugabe himself for causing the hardships.

“They think it’s better for him to share power with the opposition to rescue the economy.”

He was unwilling to be identified for fear of reprisal.

Hyperinflation is spreading poverty, as even basic goods become unaffordable. Supermarket trolleys lie idle as few can afford to buy more than a handful of goods.

Zimbabwe’s official inflation rate was 231 million per cent in July but independent economists and retailers say it is now above quintillion per cent and picking up speed.

I think it’s the end-game. Things have reached a critical point — a banking analyst

The crisis has hit soldiers hard, who earn an equivalent of 3 US dollars per month.

Small-scale mutinies have been reported, but despite Mugabe’s precarious support in the army and police, analysts say a military coup or widespread revolt are unlikely.

Professor Jonathan Moyo, Mugabe’s former information minister and currently an independent member of parliament, dismissed suggestions that the revolt in the security forces opened the possibility of a coup.

He said it was just a symptom of Mugabe’s failure to reward the soldiers with privileges, including generous payouts, as the economy collapses that is responsible for the protests.

“He is fast losing the support of his most reliable supporters, but suggesting it’s a precursor to a coup is pie in the sky,” he said.

However, Professor Heneri Dzinotiwei, an opposition deputy who is also a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, said Mugabe faced trouble from his army, which used to be considered solidly loyal to the president.

“I think to a large extent it is an indication of the intensity of frustration in the army,” he said. “As to what might happen? It depends on how the banking community in collaboration with armed forces are able to contain this. But you can’t blame the soldiers.”

A banking analyst who declined to be named said Mugabe was committing regime change himself through his disastrous economic policies, now manifested in the military protests.

“I think it’s the end-game,” he said. “Things have reached a critical point.”

Chipo Sithole is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist 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 —

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