



MACHIAVELLIAN MUGABE ODDS ON FOR RE-ELECTION

Endorsement as ZANU-PF presidential candidate means he seems almost certain to win another term in office.

By Joseph Sithole in Harare

Zimbabwe's Machiavellian president Robert Mugabe has been endorsed as the sole presidential candidate next year without raising ructions in the ruling ZANU-PF party, but analysts warn a Mugabe victory in the March elections spells doom for the country.

They say while it is almost certain that ZANU-PF and its leader will triumph in the joint parliamentary and presidential poll, given the opposition's divided state and lack of leaders, Mugabe and his followers do not have anything new to offer the country.

Emmerson Mnangagwa, the ruling party's secretary for legal affairs, has said that a ZANU-PF special congress later this month would not be looking



Credit: Lazele

South African president Thabo Mbeki (right) with Robert Mugabe at Harare International Airport following a round of talks on the mediation effort. Picture taken November 22.

for a new presidential candidate as the party's constitution stated clearly that its first secretary was automatically nominated for the post. He made this announcement following separate central committee and politburo meetings to set the agenda for the full special congress.

The agenda for the upcoming meeting does not even mention the issue of a presidential candidate.

Mnangagwa did not explain why, if the critical issue of a presidential candidate had been resolved by the party's constitution, it needed to hold

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ Seeking to blame Britain for the repeated criticism he was forced to endure at the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon, President Robert Mugabe dismissed as "Gordon's gang of four" a quartet of European leaders who lined up at the event to attack his misrule. British prime minister Gordon Brown did not attend the summit because Mugabe was present.

■ Archbishop Desmond Tutu on December 10 slammed human

rights violations in Zimbabwe, while the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, cut up his clerical collar at the weekend, saying he would not replace it until Mugabe was out of power.

■ The Southern African Development Community Tribunal will this week convene in Windhoek, Namibia, to hear a case in which a white Zimbabwean farmer is contesting the compulsory acquisition of his farm by the government.

■ The National Constitutional Assembly civic group on December 7 held a demonstration in central Harare to demand a new, democratic constitution for Zimbabwe. Police moved in and forcibly dispersed the protesters.

■ The opposition Movement for Democratic Change has threatened to boycott next year's election over what it says is gerrymandering, claiming that newly-created constituencies favour Mugabe strongholds in rural areas.

an extraordinary congress just ahead of the synchronous presidential, parliamentary and local government elections.

ZANU-PF secretary for information and publicity Nathan Shamuyarira told the party mouthpiece, *The Voice*, in late November that all the posts in the presidium would be open to contest at the special congress.

Vice-President Joseph Msika supported this view, saying “no one has been endorsed” as the presidential candidate in the party, thus suggesting there might be vacancies for the ambitious.

But insiders said Shamuyarira might have been deliberately sowing confusion on the issue as part of Mugabe’s plan to “smoke out” those who wanted to challenge him.

“In a way, it goes to show you just how ill-informed this country is,” said a ZANU-PF official who refused to be named. “The party constitution is clear on the selection of a presidential candidate, yet people seek to alter the rules just because they no longer want the incumbent. Mugabe was therefore able to expose their folly and neutralise them before they could spread confusion in the party structures.”

Analysts said although Mugabe had avoided a storm in his own party, it was bad news for the nation.

“If anything, Mugabe has become a huge liability to both the party that has endorsed him as its presidential candidate and the country he wishes to lead,” said a political analyst in the capital Harare.

“Both Mugabe himself and his party no longer have a vision for leading the nation. Leadership is all about a vision for the future, not simply occupying the highest office in government.

“In Mugabe’s case, the situation is bound to be worse if he wins next year’s election. He not only lacks the vision but has lost the good will of his own people, who have suffered for 27 years under his rule. He has alienated

the international community by his lack of respect for the law and property rights.”

The analyst noted that the leader in any organisation provides the “emotional anchor” upon which that organisation is judged.

“In our case Mugabe’s name evokes the worst memories of any leader. That means with him at the helm we have no chance to reconnect with other nations, we have no chance to normalise relations, which can only mean more suffering for the people of Zimbabwe,” he said.

Zimbabwe has experienced a precipitous economic decline since 2000, when the government started seizing white commercial farms. Since then, unemployment has run riot at nearly 85 per cent, with the world’s highest inflation of more than 8,000 per cent.

This has given rise to a vocal opposition. The Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, in 2000 narrowly lost to ZANU-PF when it won 57 seats against the ruling party’s 63 seats in parliament.

However, the MDC suffered a major split in 2005 over whether the party should participate in the election of members of the revived second house of parliament, the Senate. It has lately been convulsed by further internal strife after the party leadership dissolved the influential Women’s Assembly, led by Lucia Matibenga, replacing her with the wife of a colleague of Tsvangirai.

Analysts accuse the MDC of lacking strategic thinkers despite the many failures by Mugabe and his ruling party.

Government spokesmen have denied media reports that Mugabe rejected overtures by the Elders Group for him to step down before next year’s watershed election. The group includes former South African president Nelson Mandela, Britain’s billionaire businessman Richard Branson, and former United Nations

secretary-general Kofi Annan, among other eminent statesman.

The spokesperson said there had never been such an approach by Mandela or anyone else because everyone is “behind the Thabo Mbeki mediation effort”.

The South African president was in March mandated by the Southern African Development Community, SADC, to facilitate talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC. Mandela’s spokeswoman in Johannesburg also denied the claims, saying Mandela had retired from active engagements in August 2004 and in any case would not be found trying to undermine his successor.

A political analyst at the University of Zimbabwe said Mugabe was “too arrogant” to accept a suggestion to step down because it would suggest that he had failed. He said Mugabe had in fact been emboldened by the current squabbles in the MDC and would want to prove detractors wrong for saying he was afraid to face the electorate.

The academic said the future now on depended on the choice of candidate that parliament would make in the event that Mugabe retires after he is elected. Depending on the outcome of the elections, the two main parties could settle for a compromise candidate acceptable to the international community.

“The harmonised elections will work well for Mugabe because aspiring MPs are also forced to campaign for him,” said the analyst. “Once his party wins, he can opt to retire as a victor, and scoff at those who believed he was no longer popular.

“Mugabe is too arrogant to take anything which suggests that he was enticed into retirement. His impact on the economy is something else. Once he has triumphed over his enemies in the party and outside, he can then retire as a hero.”

Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

CRISIS TALKS STALLING

Ruling party reluctant to concede to key opposition demand for electoral law reform.

By Joseph Sithole in Harare

The talks between the ruling ZANU-PF party and both factions of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, aimed at resolving the country's political and economic crisis seem to be stalling. The MDC is driving a hard bargain but President Robert Mugabe's negotiators are not giving in.

The fractured opposition party is demanding that the country's repressive electoral laws be repealed, or at least amended, ahead of next year's harmonised presidential, legislative and local government elections.

The party is also demanding an end to politically motivated violence against its supporters as it seeks to make the most of the ongoing negotiations with ZANU-PF, being mediated by South African president Thabo Mbeki. It has also called for a new constitution to replace the Lancaster House Constitution, hammered out at independence and amended 18 times in the past 27 years. But Zimbabwe's autocratic 83-year old leader has rejected a new constitution outright.

Analysts say the process of amending or repealing repressive legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act or the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act would require an exhaustive lobbying of the ruling party's members of parliament, and would lead to a postponement of the elections — something that Mugabe is against.

A political commentator in the capital Harare said this process was almost impossible now, given that Mugabe



Credit: Lazele

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai addresses journalists at party headquarters in Harare. Picture taken April 5.

could dissolve parliament at any time in preparation for the launch of election campaigning. The commentator noted that the MDC had not launched its own campaign and was sending out conflicting signals about whether it would participate in the elections.

The MDC is demanding that repressive electoral laws be repealed, or at least amended.

"The ideal thing would have been to repeal all the repressive laws in the country to even the electoral playing field," said the commentator. "But that is almost impossible from both a logistical point of view and from a political strategy. There simply is not enough time now for the negotiators to begin a process that will need to be debated by parliament and passed into law before March next year. Remember we are talking about an election only four months away.

"And while ZANU-PF is keen to secure a legitimate victory this time around, it will not throw away all the laws that give it advantage overnight."

He noted that in Mugabe's address to ZANU-PF supporters who marched last week in support of his candidacy in next year's elections, the president referred to the "road to March" at least three times, a sign that he did not contemplate a postponement of the polls to allow for amendments.

However, said the commentator, Mugabe talked about an election free of violence, so that he could demonstrate to his detractors that he was still popular.

"Short of an amendment to these [electoral] laws," he said, "the MDC will have to make do with whatever comes its way. While a boycott of the elections may sound appealing, its impact on the nation would be devastating. It will deny Mugabe's regime the legitimacy it desperately needs but the nation cannot afford another five years of this destructive stand-off with the international community.

"Yet on the other hand, that decision might be a ploy by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai to look for a dignified exit because another electoral loss, no matter how flawed the process, will mark an end for him as a credible leader of his party."

"The MDC will have to make do with whatever comes its way. While a boycott of the elections may sound appealing, its impact on the nation would be devastating" — commentator.

He said while it was good for the opposition to keep its options open, its obsession with electoral law reform was not helpful to its cause. The decisive factors concerning the outcome of the election were institutions such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and the Command Centre, which he said were pro-establishment.

The Registrar-General's office, which is in charge of the voters' roll, was badly compromised, he noted, having been used in the past to manipulate the voters' roll and electoral boundaries. It is headed by Tobaiwa Mudede, a staunch Mugabe loyalist. The MDC itself complained last week that the

voters' roll was "full of dead and ghost voters" and that it was flawed.

"The best that the MDC can demand at the talks is that it be involved at every stage of the election process," he said. "They need to closely monitor the ballots; they need to have unhindered access to the polling stations and they need to be there when the counting is done," said the analyst.

The analyst also noted that the electoral machinery needs to be completely "demilitarised" to gain credibility. He referred to the Command Centre, which announces results of elections, and which he said was manned by personnel from the army, the Central Intelligence Organisation and the police.

"As long as the outcome can be manipulated at the point where the results are announced, all would have been in vain."

"It is here that the results will be decided if the MDC is not careful," said the analyst. "They can have all the electoral laws repealed today but as long as the outcome can be manipulated at the point where the

results are announced, all would have been in vain."

One opposition member of parliament said he hoped the chief negotiators, Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube for the MDC and Legal Affairs Minister Patrick Chinamasa and Labour Minister Nicholas Goche for ZANU-PF, were not focusing too much on legal technicalities.

Negotiations should focus on the law as it exists on paper and how the police interpret it — opposition member of parliament.

"I don't know exactly what the thrust of the negotiations is," said the MP, "but I hope they will come up with meaningful changes. For instance, even POSA [Public Order and Security Act] in its current form only requires that we inform the police if we want to hold a rally. But its application by the police is as if we need their permission before we can hold a meeting. These are the substantive issues that need to be clarified: what is on paper and what the police can do."

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MUGABE STOKES DIPLOMATIC WAR

President says his western critics will not be invited to monitor upcoming elections.

By Obert Marufu in Harare

President Robert Mugabe has upped the stakes in his diplomatic war with the United States and Britain after he declared in a televised national address that only “friendly and objective members of the international community” would be invited to observe the country’s harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for March next year.

In his state-of-the-nation address on December 4, he repeated his message to what government officials claim was a million war veterans and other party supporters who marched in Harare on November 30 to support the endorsement of Mugabe as the ruling ZANU- PF sole presidential candidate.

Mugabe told the “Million Man/Woman” marchers at Zimbabwe Grounds in the poor suburb of Highfield that the government would not tolerate any form of violence during next year’s elections.

He said only friendly countries would be invited to observe the polls, pitting his ZANU-PF against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC.

The MDC, currently engaged in protracted negotiations with the ruling party on how to level the electoral playing field and end the country’s eight-year political stalemate and economic decline, has made the issue of international observers a key demand.

Unfortunately, the MDC is viewed with suspicion among leaders of African and many Third World countries and



Credit: Lazele

ZANU-PF members gathered at Zimbabwe Grounds, Harare, to hear President Mugabe speak. Picture taken November 30.

appears to enjoy unqualified support only from Europe and the US — which Mugabe accuses of trying to oust his regime to install their puppets.

South African president Thabo Mbeki, who was mandated by the Southern African Development Community, SADC, in March to mediate in the talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC, has pledged free and fair elections.

During his state-of-the-nation address, Mugabe gave special praise to Mbeki for the ongoing talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC, which he said “have ushered in the dawn of a new era of constructive engagement across the political divide”. He said this had been achieved despite “sustained manipulation and arm-twisting manoeuvres cunningly spearheaded by Britain”.

In a speech largely devoted to a soul-searching admission of the country’s myriad problems, such as shortages of fuel and power, rural poverty and low productivity on newly-resettled farms, the brain-drain and lack of capacity-utilisation, Mugabe also had a few telling comments for his western “detractors”.

He said a sinister campaign by Britain to isolate Zimbabwe, “including the recent attempt to bar us from attending the European Union-Africa summit” in Portugal, was disintegrating, allowing the country an opportunity for “fruitful engagement with other nations”.

Portugal invited Zimbabwe to attend the December 8-9 summit to discuss “trade, peace and security, climate change, development aid and governance” in the face of protests by Britain. Prime Minister Gordon Brown did not attend because Mugabe was to be present.

Mugabe also appeared to have been angered by remarks attributed to the new US ambassador to Zimbabwe, James McGee, that the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act limiting the US’s dealings with the southern African nation mainly to humanitarian assistance would not be scrapped even if Mugabe won “free and fair elections”.

McGee said last week, “United States policy on Zimbabwe is not about free and fair elections alone. That is only one of the principles

outlined in the law. There is a need to address all the principles before the law can be repealed, such as human rights and the restoration of the rule of law.”

“United States policy on Zimbabwe is not about free and fair elections alone” — US ambassador.

In what analysts said was a rebuke aimed at the US ambassador, Mugabe last week said that as Zimbabwe heads towards harmonised elections in 2008, “Let the message ring clearly to our detractors that as a sovereign nation we will not brook any interference in our domestic affairs. We will hold our elections guided by our constitution and laws as we have always done”.

He added, “As is our tradition, we will invite friendly nations and objective members of the international community to observe the elections. Those of our people who wish to go about campaigning should do so in an atmosphere of peace and shun activities that may leave behind a

bitter aftertaste. Government has at its disposal the means to deal firmly with anyone seeking to engage in acts of violence.”

A political analyst in Harare said it was difficult to trust Mugabe, given the electoral violence that characterised past elections. But he added that those calling for free and fair elections were opening themselves up to attacks of hypocrisy by raising concerns that are not aired with regard to other countries in the region where the electoral process is overtly flawed and violence is endemic, such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC.

“Let the message ring clearly to our detractors that... we will not brook any interference in our domestic affairs” — Mugabe.

“Why is nobody talking about sanctions against Nigeria and the DRC despite their clearly flawed recent elections, yet they have been left to forge ahead the best they can?” he asked.

“We need to watch closely what happens as we move towards the elections; whether Mugabe’s supporters act according to what he is saying regarding violence.”

Election campaigners should work “in an atmosphere of peace and shun activities that may leave behind a bitter aftertaste”.

He predicted a prolonged standoff between Britain and the US on the one hand and most African countries on the other over the elections.

“Most African nations will endorse whatever outcome emerges,” said the analyst. “But Britain and the US will find themselves standing alone because they have already indicated by their remarks the outcome they want — something Africans and other Third World nations will obviously resist.”

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