



ZANU-PF LEADERSHIP DIVISIONS MOUNT

Growing evidence of split in ruling party over its candidate for presidential election next year.

By Jacob Nhlanhla in Bulawayo

With ZANU-PF stalwarts distancing themselves from the intensive campaign by war veterans to ensure President Robert Mugabe holds onto power, all is clearly not well in the ruling party, say analysts.

The signs of division within the party over who should govern Zimbabwe come just two months before ZANU-PF meets to choose its presidential candidate for what many here see as a watershed poll next year.

The veteran president turns 84 next February, and has already indicated he is ready to stand for another term despite being in power since 1980 and presiding over the collapse of the country's once-model economy. He is one of Africa's longest-serving leaders.



Credit: Lazele

War veterans march through the streets of Harare in support of President Robert Mugabe. Picture taken September 1.

The war veterans, erstwhile heroes of Zimbabwe's 1970s war of liberation, are already planning what they have termed the "million-man march" in support of Mugabe staying on in power.

Since 2000, when the expropriation of white-owned commercial farms intensified, the war veterans have been Mugabe's most vociferous and violent supporters. Their support has become even more vocal in the wake of public spats within the ruling party's

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ A decision to dissolve the women's assembly of the Movement for Democratic Change faction led by Morgan Tsvangirai continued to cause internal strife and considerable public acrimony. Assembly leader Lucia Matibenga refused to accept her dismissal, and took the matter to court last week, after which the MDC held a congress of female members to decide who should be leader. Following rowdy scenes at the weekend meeting, Theresa Makone, the wife of Tsvangirai advisor Ian Makone, was picked as the new women's assembly leader.

■ The head of the government's price commission, Goodwills Masimirembwa, has warned that companies will face prosecution if they are caught using the black market to buy scarce foreign currency as a way of financing their imports, Reuters news agency reported, quoting local media.

■ After his summer onslaught on inflation which resulted in price cuts and — inadvertently — widespread shortages of basic commodities, President Robert Mugabe has launched an attack on a recent round of price hikes, the International Herald Tribune reported.

■ Water and infrastructure minister Munacho Mutezo announced on October 26 that water rates in the capital Harare will go up significantly following an increase in the cost of water-treatment chemicals. He said the national water company had no choice but to raise its prices, The Herald reported.

■ The last British Airways flight left Harare on October 28. BA was the last long-haul carrier running flights to Zimbabwe, but demand has collapsed as the political and economic situation deteriorates further.

ranks over who will take the party to the next generation.

The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, ZINLWA — a belligerent force that has been incorporated by the authorities into an official reserve army — began staging marches across the country two months ago, campaigning for Mugabe as sole ZANU-PF candidate.

The leader of the war veterans, Jabulani Sibanda, was suspended from ZANU-PF after his alleged participation in an attempted 2004 palace coup to oust Mugabe. However, he says he has now returned to the party fold.

When the veterans this month took their march to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, deep cracks within the ruling party emerged.

Situated in the heart of Matabeleland, Bulawayo is home to former members of ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union. ZAPU was crushed by Mugabe's military in the 1980s and its remnants swallowed up by ZANU-PF in the 1987 Unity Accord.

When Sibanda took his campaign to Bulawayo, local ZANU-PF heavyweights would have been expected to rally behind him in this stronghold of the Movement of Democratic Change, MDC. However, former ZAPU stalwarts ignored him.

Zimbabwean vice-president Joseph Msika, once a ZAPU member, has distanced himself from the veteran's marches and is one of several politicians to have criticised Sibanda's involvement in the pro-Mugabe campaign, although he still insists he is behind the president himself.

"Sibanda was expelled from the party a long time ago. He has no mandate to campaign for the party or its president. He has to stop," said Msika in early October after Sibanda led the Bulawayo march in support of Mugabe.

Msika is said to have been a confidant of the late Joshua Nkomo, the ZAPU

leader who forged the Unity Accord with Mugabe in 1987 and became Zimbabwean vice-president until his death in 1999.

In another sign that Sibanda has estranged Mugabe from his erstwhile comrades from ZAPU, these Matabeleland politicians have reportedly sought an audience with Mugabe "to remind him of the Unity Accord".

Mugabe increasingly seems to be sidelining the former ZAPU members whom he sees as an obstacle to his ambition to be the country's life president.

"The war veterans [are] throwing their weight behind Mugabe when everybody else seems to see the future of the country without him" — political commentator.

Though officials have tried to play down these reports, some Bulawayo-based war veterans have reportedly been asking how Sibanda can lead marches in support of Mugabe if he was expelled from ZANU-PF.

These differences have arisen against the backdrop of efforts by the Southern African Development Community to broker a resolution to the troubled nation's crisis.

Analysts insist the war veterans' pro-Mugabe campaign is further obstructing the negotiations between ZANU-PF and the MDC, in which the president's departure is already a sticking-point.

"We are in for a long wait in the solving of the crisis, with the war veterans throwing their weight behind Mugabe when everybody else seems to see the future of the country without him," a Bulawayo-based political commentator told IWPR.

"The divisions rocking ZANU-PF do not point to any reforms as long as the war veterans march across the country

supporting Mugabe, without... letting the party congress decide the party's [presidential] candidate."

It is generally believed that ZANU-PF members who formerly led ZAPU are fed up with Mugabe and would rather see another leader selected by the party's December congress. The indications are that they support the faction led by retired army commander General Solomon Mujuru in the internal ZANU-PF power struggle.

Mugabe says he is going to stand because he does not want the party to become divided over the succession issue. Yet the nationwide marches seeking to impose him as the candidate for next year's polls appear to be achieving just that.

"This is just what the country does not need," said a Jesuit priest who is a close observer of the political scene.

"If only people were left to choose their leaders, the marches [by war veterans] would not have any relevance. But then Zimbabwe offers many bad examples of how war veterans have been empowered by politicians who seek to pursue power for power's sake."

Zimbabwe's war veterans have in the past been accused of fomenting political violence ahead of elections, and their endorsement of Mugabe ahead of the ruling party's congress this December points to the possibility of another election marred by violence.

Already, human rights organisations say they have recorded an escalation in politically-motivated violence over recent months. One faction of the divided MDC has already indicated it could be pulling out of the South Africa-mediated talks with ZANU-PF if state-sponsored violence is not stopped.

Observers say that if war veterans can browbeat party officials as they did in Bulawayo, the average voter will be at their mercy as they press for Mugabe's re-election.

Jacob Nhlanhla is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

MDC RIVEN BY NEW DIVISIONS

As elections draw closer, the already divided opposition is stricken with internal strife.

By Joseph Sithole in Harare

October has not been a good month for Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, in the last couple of years.

In October 2005 the party split into warring entities, while this month two key groupings within the larger of the two factions have been dissolved under controversial circumstances.

The Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has also spent the month dealing with the fallout from its controversial decision to back constitutional amendments that, among other things, allow President Robert Mugabe to effectively hand-pick his successor.

Both MDC factions incurred the wrath of their civil society allies by voting with ZANU-PF to get constitutional amendments through parliament.

The MDC split in October 2005 badly weakened the party in its fight against the ruling ZANU-PF. The bigger faction, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, decided to boycott an election for the Senate, or upper house of parliament, fearing that the institution — newly reconstituted after a eight-year lapse — would simply be stuffed with supporters of President Robert Mugabe.

The other MDC, which took part in the Senate vote, is now led by Arthur Mutambara.



Credit: Lazele

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai at a rally held in a high-density suburb of Harare. Picture taken July 7.

Both factions have since tried to damp down their differences as they confronted an increasingly violent Mugabe administration, but in September they jointly incurred the wrath of their opposition allies when they took a tactical decision to back the constitutional bill, which went through both houses of parliament unopposed.

They are still struggling to mend the rift with their main civic society partners within the Save Zimbabwe Campaign, which accuse them of selling out. At a recent meeting in Bulawayo, non-government groups voted to reject the amendments and continue pressing for an all-new constitution.

Morgan Tsvangirai's faction of the MDC could be heading for implosion.

The MDC factions need to draw a line under this issue and start working towards crucial presidential and parliamentary elections in March next year.

But even as attempts are made to heal the rifts and form a united front, the Tsvangirai-led MDC has become embroiled in two internal conflicts of its own that could be leading to a messy implosion.

MDC women's assembly and British branch both dissolved amid controversy.

On October 10, the faction's influential women's assembly led by Lucia Matibenga was dissolved by the MDC's standing committee, on the grounds of poor performance.

"With the MDC's attack on its women's league, we are relegated once again to a second-class citizen position," said Grace Kwinjeh, one of the senior leaders of the dissolved women's assembly.

Matibenga disputed the legality of the move and took the matter to Zimbabwe's High Court, which ordered the party to hold a congress



Credit: Lazele

Lucia Matibenga, the ousted chairperson of the MDC's women assembly. Picture taken October 31.

of its female members to decide whether the assembly should be dissolved.

MDC Secretary General Tendai Biti rejected claims of unfair treatment, saying the party had run an internal inquiry into "disharmony" in the body and had acted on the basis of most of the evidence it had gathered. The decision did not reflect "patriarchy, chauvinism or contempt of the feminist movement", he said, in remarks quoted by the London-based SW Radio Africa.

"Zimbabweans have been deprived of a right to choose their leaders" — Ephraim Tapa, ousted as head of MDC's British branch.

Meanwhile, the Tsvangirai-led MDC branch for Britain and Ireland, led by Ephraim Tapa, was dissolved on October 13 at a meeting presided over by MDC national chairman, Lovemore Moyo.

Both disputes have stirred up furious infighting, with accusations of wrongdoing on both sides, and claims that people are being pushed out to

make way for friends and relatives of senior party leaders.

Opposition members "appear keener to destroy themselves than face ZANU-PF head on as a united party" — analyst.

"What happened today among Zimbabweans here is an assault on both democracy and human rights. Once again, Zimbabweans have been deprived of a right to choose their leaders," said Tapa the day he was removed. "The MDC... can never take us to the freedom that we are craving as Zimbabweans. The freedom I am talking about is the right to make decisions on who should lead us."

However, a senior party official, who declined to be named, defended Tsvangirai. He said they had information that the party had been infiltrated by the Zimbabwean security services — "hence the need to move with speed".

"This is a very sensitive issue, and for the president [Tsvangirai] to follow all

the constitutional processes at this critical time would have been remiss," he said. "He is fully aware of the constitutional requirements, hence he has already called for fresh elections this week. Those who have been suspended are free to contest," he said.

A political analyst in Harare said the internal strife and the accompanying allegations reflected badly on Tsvangirai's leadership skills.

"It doesn't augur well for a person who is fighting what is generally regarded as a dictator to be constantly accused of ignoring party rules and regulations. It gives you an ominous picture of the future when such a person wields real state power," said the analyst, who did not want to be identified.

He suggested the lack of unity and public conflict was bad news at a time when the MDC should really be focusing all its efforts on the elections.

"Tsvangirai keeps shooting himself in the foot," he said. "The party is already too weak to pose a serious threat to ZANU-PF in next year's election, and he provokes a new storm in the party when civic society partners are already ambivalent about his ability to lead.

MDC is "already too weak to pose a serious threat to ZANU-PF in next year's election" — political analyst.

"The MDC is being forced to fight on too many fronts, when it should be mobilising the limited resources it has for the big fight against ZANU-PF. I don't know what will happen next year, but they appear keener to destroy themselves than face ZANU-PF head on as a united party."

Joseph Sithole is the pseudonym of a reporter in Harare. ■

GOVERNMENT POLICIES BACKFIRE TIME AND AGAIN

No let-up in directives that alienate and demoralise the population.

By Hativagone Mushonga in Harare

The ZANU-PF-led government appears to be shooting itself in the foot with the policies it has implemented in the last few months. In addition to continuing farm seizures, these include the imposition of an import duty — payable in foreign currency — for items including clothing, footwear and electrical goods, thereby cutting the source of livelihood for cross-border traders; and the price slash in July that resulted in empty supermarket shelves, job losses, company closures and the arrests of company executives.

Some commodities are slowly starting to re-appear in the shops, but at unaffordable prices for ordinary Zimbabweans, whose salaries had also been frozen through a government directive. The prices of some items have now gone up by as much as 800 per cent.

"I simply cannot afford anything now. Some of the prices are now too high for small people like me. What this means is that the prices are going to be even worse on the black market," said Mary Chanakira, an administrator at a factory.

"I have to earn at least 100 million Zimbabwean dollars to live comfortably in Zimbabwe. At the moment, I earn five million a month. How many things can I buy? My salary is worth only five bars of one-kilogram washing soap."

The official exchange rate is currently one US dollar to 30,000 Zimbabwean dollars, ZWD, but on the black market it stands at around one million ZWD.



Shopper in a Harare supermarket looks at the price of soap, now a costly item. Picture taken October 31.

Credit: Lazele

"You tell me where we are now," said Chanakira. "I have never felt so helpless in my life and I never thought I would be forced to go hungry — this is not the reason why I went to school and university. When is change going to come?"

"My salary is worth only five bars of... washing soap" — factory administrator Mary Chanakira.

The few goods that have been delivered to supermarkets are quickly resold on the black market at double or treble the official price. Meanwhile, essentials like sugar, salt, maize meal, cooking oil and all meats including beef, chicken and pork are still in short supply.

As if that were not enough, Harare residents now have to fork out between five million and 24 million

ZWD for their water bills, despite the supply being erratic. The government has approved high water tariffs — a rise of between 3,000 and 8,000 per cent, depending on the area. At the same time, several suburbs of the capital are experiencing water cuts of more than four days and in some cases even one to two weeks.

The Zimbabwe National Water Authority, Zinwa, has started cutting supplies to residents who fail to pay the huge bills and has threatened to continue doing so.

In the leafy rich suburbs of Highlands, Borrowdale and Mandara, residents were shocked to receive bills of up to 24 million ZWD — twice the increased monthly salary teachers were awarded in an October pay settlement.

Pensioner Sekuru Murehwa, who looks after five orphaned grandchildren in the poor Harare suburb of Highfield, could believe it when two weeks ago he received an eight million ZWD water bill.

In previous months, he used to pay an average 250,000 ZWD. At first, he thought it was a mistake, only to be told that water charges had gone up by a huge percentage.

“We are suffering already and all blame falls on the government. Things have to change” — Harare pensioner Sekuru Murehwa.

“Where am I going to get eight million ZWD? I have never held that kind of money before. I am not the only one, everyone is crying about their water bills. I think they will have to cut us off if the government does not intervene because I know for a fact people in this area cannot afford to pay even a quarter of their bills,” he said.

“I know the water authority is looking for money to buy chemicals, but to do so this way is wrong. It is very cruel. How many ordinary Zimbabweans earn that kind of money? And even if they did, they also have to eat, go to work, educate their children and clothe them. We are suffering already and all blame falls on the government. Things have to change.”

At Harare International Airport, large crowds of people turn out to meet

Mugabe when he is arriving or departing. This does not, however, mean he and ZANU-PF still command huge support in Harare. Instead, the crowds are “borrowed” crowds from Harare’s largest vegetable market, Mbare Musika, and the nearby flea market at Mupedzanhamo.

IWPR spoke to some vendors at the two markets who have been forced to attend such events. “We are required to close the markets and we all have to go to the airport to welcome or bid the president farewell,” said one. “If we don’t go, we lose our space in the market. There will be people there taking a register of everyone. So my dear, you either attend or lose your source of livelihood.

“So we go, chant slogans, sing songs praising [Mugabe] but deep down in our hearts, we will be cursing him and normally by the time I leave, I am so angry because I know he is the same man that has impoverished me, the same man who is making my kids go to school on empty stomachs, the same man who is making me live in near-destitution.”

When asked about the campaign for joint presidential and parliamentary elections next year, an opposition legislator from Morgan Tsvangirai’s

faction of the Movement for Democratic Change said jokingly their electioneering was being done for them by the ruling party, through their bad policies.

“I am so angry because I know he is the same man that has impoverished me” — market trader.

“No need to campaign,” he said. “ZANU-PF is doing it for us. Whatever move they are making is convincing people why they should be out of power. So really, we are just watching ZANU-PF destroying itself. But still, with politics we have to be always on our toes and work hard to get the Zimbabwean vote.”

If the situation continues on its downward trend, as is likely, ZANU-PF will have its work cut out to convince the electorate that it should be allowed to run the country for another five years. If it does not succeed in doing so, it will have to employ the same tactics as it did in previous elections — violence, intimidation and vote-rigging.

Hativagone Mushonga is the pseudonym of an IWPR reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

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