

ELECTION UPDATE THREE: 4 – 9 March 2008

This is the third election update from the Solidarity Peace Trust, summarising into general categories the notable events and quotes of the last week, as Zimbabwe heads into a now highly fluid and unpredictable election. Sources are media articles from both government and independent media published within the dates of the summary, as well as statements from civic groups. All updates available on the website.

WHAT THEY SAID

JOHN NKOMO ON DABENGWA: his defection is a "non-event." "What happened at White City is good riddance. It is now clear that we have infiltrators among us," he said. "We are also not crying, as we believe there is freedom of choice. This is a passing phase, which people should not preoccupy themselves with." (FinGaz, 6 March).

MUTASA ON SELL OUTS: ZANU-PF secretary for administration Didymus Mutasa said Makoni and Dabengwa "should be ashamed of what they have done," the Sunday Mail said. "They are abandoning their leader for thirty pieces of silver." (Monsters and Critics, 2 March).

MUGABE ON DABENGWA: "Why should Cde Dabengwa have gone that divergent way? I can't understand what the real motivation is. What makes me feel rather upset is that Makoni was never in the limelight. Dumiso came from the grassroots. I can't understand why, he chose to follow a little man like Makoni." Yet Mugabe avoided attacking Dabengwa at rallies in Plumtree and Esibomvu Business Centre in Esigodini. (Standard, 9 March).

DABENGWA ON HIS DEFECTION: "I remain resolute, I have nothing to fear. I will not respond to whatever is being said about me." (FinGaz, 6 March)

.... ON THE POLITBURO: "I am normally invited when there is a politburo meeting. If I am in Bulawayo, I am sent a ticket. I do not expect one." (Zim Ind, 7 March)

.... AND ON UNITY: "To a larger extent, unity was achieved in an unbalanced and forced manner." Dabengwa said the accord was fundamentally flawed. "It was discussed under pressure and people were being killed. Very unfortunate compromises were made (by PF-Zapu) to avoid further suffering of our people." He said the two parties (PF-Zapu and Zanu PF) should put into force the accord agreed just before the Lancaster House Conference. "We need to go back to the real unity accord signed in blood in Mozambique," he said.

MAGAISA ON DABENGWA: "those that consider suffering under Mugabe a ticket for leadership may wish to stretch their memories further and consider that the suffering endured by those who have gallantly stood in opposition in the last eight years was preceded by unfortunate events which, in legal terms, will always be personified by the experiences of Dabengwa and his late colleague Lookout Masuku." (Standard, 9 March)

JONATHON MOYO: WE NEED A NEW BUS NOT A NEW DRIVER: "If Makoni had agreed to a united front we would have witnessed a similar wave to that when the MDC was formed in 1999.... Given Makoni's reputation, calibre and abilities we would have had a fantastic candidate, but it is unfortunate that this opportunity is being squandered. A President cannot be stand alone. A President should be a member of a group with formal structures, obligations and principles. It's different when you want to be an MP for a constituency like Tsholotsho... Makoni is not much of an alternative. He is leading another faction in Zanu PF. Makoni is the leader of Zanu PF-B and Mugabe is leading Zanu PF-A. Makoni's people have said they only want to change the bus driver. But Zimbabweans are

saying they want more than that. They want a new driver and a damn new bus and maybe even a new destination." (FinGaz, 6 March)

GUTU VOTERS ON MUGABE'S RALLY: "Is that what we came here for?" asked an elderly woman. "Travelling on foot and sacrificing our chores, only to be told what we already know? Who does not know about the liberation struggle? We wanted to hear how he would end our suffering, if he retains power." Mbuya Ruramai Mudzamiri said: "When we came here, we expected to hear something that would give us hope that the horrible life we are leading today would end soon. We can no longer afford to buy enough food as prices are rising every day and yet he comes here and tells us Zimbabwe ndeyeropa (the country was won after a bloody struggle) as if we eat ropa (blood)." (Standard, 9 March).

ARMY COMMANDER ON MUGABE: Commander Constantine Chiwenga said, "Elections are coming and the army will not support or salute sell-outs and agents of the West before, during and after the presidential elections. We will not support anyone other than President Mugabe who has sacrificed a lot for the country." Pressed to comment on the role of the army in a democracy, Chiwenga responded angrily: "Are you mad? What is wrong with the army supporting the President against the election of sellouts?" A woman then took over the conversation on the phone and said: "We can come and take you and deal with you." (Standard, 9 March).

MUCKRAKER ON DEFECTIONS: have you noticed how every time some party bigwig declares "we are all solidly behind President Mugabe" there is another defection? Mugabe must be becoming increasingly nervous of just who is "behind" him and what they are about to do from that vantage point! (Zim Ind, 7 March)

TSVANGIRAI MAKES PROMISES TO MATABELELAND: "It's time Mugabe went for a retirement package...Mugabe should be ashamed to be seeking re-election after almost 30 years of misrule," Tsvangirai told a cheering crowd in a packed stadium in the southern city of Bulawayo. Tsvangirai said his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) would speed up economic development in the region and compensate victims of a military crackdown on a five-year Matabeleland insurgency in the 1980s that left thousands dead. The region has long been an opposition stronghold. "We're going to set up a Matabeleland Reparations Fund to respond to those who were unfortunate to lose their dear ones, to make sure they are able to restore their lives again and be part of this society," Tsvangirai said. (Standard, 9 March).

ZLHR ON FAILURE OF HOPLEY FARM RESIDENTS TO REGISTER: "This is sad vindication of our warnings during the forced evictions that such disenfranchisement would occur due to the Operation. It begs the simple question - are the homeless disintitled from voting ... in which case creating homelessness as happened with Operation Murambatsvina amounts to deliberate disenfranchisement by the party in power." (6 March).

THE ELECTORAL PLAYING FIELD

WE WON'T TELL YOU WHO WON UNTIL WHO KNOWS WHEN: Zimbabwe authorities on Monday refused to say when they would announce election results, as non-governmental organisations said the state's electoral commission lacked capacity and could take up to a week to name poll winners. "The ZEC has no capacity and the logistics to handle this election so the results might take between four days and one week before they are announced," said ZESN chairman, Noel Kututwa. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) said it would not commit itself to a date when it would announce results of the March 29 polls for fear this could spark Kenyan-style post-election violence in the event it failed to keep the promise because of possible delays in the voting process. "We do not want to be accused of rigging elections if we release the results earlier or later than the

estimated dates . . . doing so might also spark post-election violence, similar to that experienced in Kenya," ZEC spokesman Shupikai Mashereni told ZimOnline by phone. (Zim Online, 4 March).

MDC TERRORIZED IN BUBI, UMGUZA: Zimbabwe's opposition on Wednesday said ruling ZANU PF activists were terrorising its supporters in two rural districts in the south of the country where it said scores of supporters had fled their homes fearing for their lives. The faction of the MDC party led by Arthur Mutambara said ZANU PF militants were especially targeting MDC supporters in Bubi and Umguza districts who signed nomination papers for electoral candidates for the opposition party. Party spokesman Abednico Bhebhe said the party had reported the harassment to the police and to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). "Our party supporters who signed the (nomination) forms are now living in fear while some have fled their homes as a result of the threats. We have lodged a report with ZEC and the police in the province," Bhebhe told ZimOnline. (6 March).

RUN OR BE SLAUGHTERED: Benjamin's story: "My mother and sisters are all here in Bulawayo with me. They've had to abandon their life in Umguza, leave everything. It was a case of run - or be slaughtered. Things came to a head last Friday. My two little sisters are in primary school. They're only 11 and 13. But outside school they were confronted by a gang of men armed with axes and clubs. The men told them that they would be killed, and their bodies burned to ashes. Terrified, they ran home. My mother was trying to calm them down when my older sister, who is in Form Four, came in, just as upset. The same men had confronted her, waving their axes in her face and threatening to kill her on the spot. They told her that anyone who belonged to the MDC faced death if they didn't run away. I myself went home. While I was there I listened to our local MP, Obert Mpofu, addressing his supporters. He told them, in my hearing, that 'sell-outs', as he called MDC supporters, must be driven out before the election, to stop them voting. So it's clear the threats of violence have official backing. And I don't need reminding that this is where Gloria Olds and her son were slain in cold blood by war veterans at the height of the land seizures in 2000." (Zim Today, 6 March)

VIOLENCE RISING: The branch of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change headed by presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai says police and state security agents have escalated violence and intimidation against their candidates and supporters in the approach to national elections set for the end of this month. The Tsvangirai formation on Tuesday appealed to Zimbabwe's high court for relief and filed a complaint with the Zimbabwe Election Commission's multi-party liaison committee alleging official harassment of its candidates and supporters. The Tsvangirai opposition formation said it has been receiving reports from all of the country's 10 provinces of mounting violence, intimidation and arrests. (VOA, 4 March)

NO BAIL FOR TEN ACTIVISTS: Marvelous Kumalo, the Tsvangirai MDC candidate for St Marys, plus 9 other MDC members are still in police custody after they were denied bail by a Harare magistrate on Tuesday. The group was arrested on Friday in Chitungwiza after an incident at the home of the ZANU-PF Acting Mayor of Chitungwiza Darlington Nota. There are two conflicting versions of what transpired at the time. What is known for sure is that Kumalo and 9 others are in police custody and one MDC member is fighting for his life with serious cuts to the skull.

- **VERSION ONE:** Police allege that Kumalo and the others were in possession of illegal weapons when they walked around the St Marys' area. It is also alleged that they threw stones at the home of the acting Mayor. What is puzzling is that no-one was injured and no property was damaged.
- **VERSION TWO:** Kumalo's lawyer, Alex Muchadehama, said the MDC members deny all the charges. They claim it the security guards at Nota's home fired 6 to 10 shots in the air when they saw the MDC people passing by. Muchadehama said there was an altercation and one of the guards hit an MDC member on the head with an axe. The victim is at the Avenues Clinic with serious head injuries. At that point Kumalo and his supporters retreated, but Nota had called the police, who arrested them. None of the staff at Nota's home were arrested. Muchadehama said the MDC members appeared in court on Tuesday and were denied bail by a magistrate who said that they might cause more violence if allowed to go free. The lawyer immediately filed an appeal in the High Court. He complained that his clients are in police custody yet there is no evidence of

any stone throwing such as injured victims, broken windows or damaged property. (SWRadio, 5 March)

BOMB SCARE FOR MAKONI: Simba Makoni has been rattled by a bomb scare which rocked a building where he was addressing his campaign team, renewing earlier fears that the intelligence services have made him their number one priority just a few weeks before Zimbabweans vote in crucial polls. The former Finance Minister was made to abort his meeting with his top officials on Monday when an alarm was triggered off at Old Mutual Centre in the morning. People who were queuing to pay for British and American visas were made to scurry in all directions when an alarm went off in the building, forcing the housekeeper to call for immediate evacuation of all people occupying the building at the time. Among the people who were forced to go nine floors below were Makoni and his election team who were in the middle of a "crucial" meeting, according to one of his officials. Retired Major Mbudzi said, "In the history of the building, we were told that it had never happened that alarms -- both fire and explosives -- could go off simultaneously. We were forced to abandon our meeting as everyone occupying the building was evacuated. "It is hard to ignore what has happened to us in the past few weeks and we have no doubts that this is the work of our enemies." A defiant Mbudzi said: "We won't be scared or cowed into submission by these terror tactics. Our candidate realises the battle we face to rescue Zimbabwe. He is up for that battle." (New Zimbabwe, 5 March)

POLICE HALT MAKONI RALLY, TURN AWAY SUPPORTERS: police abruptly called time on a campaign rally for independent presidential candidate Simba Makoni on Sunday, and turned away buses ferrying supporters to the Zimbabwe Grounds in Highfield, a working class suburb of Harare. Riot police in eight trucks closed off Willowvale Road, a major highway leading into the south western suburbs and ordered buses coming from the city centre to return passengers to their pick-up points. Despite the heavy police presence and intimidation, some 7 000 cheering supporters turned up -- many on foot -- to hear the former finance minister speak, a day after he kicked off his campaign in the second largest city of Bulawayo, an opposition stronghold. "I would like to thank all of you who managed to walk to this venue despite intimidation and threats by police," Makoni said in his keynote address. "Most of our supporters were turned away by the police but you have shown faith and bravery by walking to this venue. "We would like to remove fear from our lives. We cannot continue to fear the police, army and the CIO (Central Intelligence Organisation)." (Zim Today, 3 March)

VIOLENCE AGAINST MAKONI CANDIDATES: Simba Makoni's independent candidates for the 29 March elections yesterday reported two violent incidents against their members. The Hatfield house of their Harare South candidate in the House of Assembly, Joram Nago, was besieged by suspected Zanu PF youths in the morning. In the afternoon, while driving from Hopley Farm where he was scheduled to address a rally today, Nago and his driver were stopped by youths who accused them of trying to enter a "no-go" area. The police had cleared the rally. The Standard caught up with Nago as he made a report at Waterfalls police station. He told the police that after beating him, the youths took away his police clearance letter. A police officer acknowledged in the presence of The Standard they had cleared the rally. In the second incident, two officials in one of their vehicles were attacked while waiting to fill up at a service station along Samora Machel Avenue and Fourth Street in Harare. Never Mutamba, one of those assaulted, said they were saved by Police Support Unit officers passing by the service station. (Standard, 9 March)

ILLEGAL ARRESTS: In the Mashonaland West town of Karoi, 18 opposition members including Timothy Mutsunge, a candidate for parliament for the Magunje constituency, were arrested on Monday and charged with violating the Public Order and Security Act. Mutsunge and two others were released Thursday on bail of Z\$100 million apiece. An MDC source said 15 others remained in custody on Friday because it had not been possible to raise the Z\$100 million (US\$3) bail for all of them. (VOA, 8 March)

ABDUCTION: The MDC-T's parliamentary candidate for the Rushinga constituency of Mashonaland Central, Samuel Ndaradzi, said he and other MDC activists fear Edson Mumwengwa was abducted by ZANU-PF militants as he previously had received death threats. Ndaradzi said the man's whereabouts were unknown and police did not seem keen to investigate the matter despite three reports on the disappearance to local posts. (VOA, 8 March)

TORTURED TEACHER TALKS: Takavafira Zhou, a trade union activist, was seized by government police two weeks ago and, while imprisoned, did not know if he would make it out of the torture chamber alive. Beaten to within an inch of his life, Mr Zhou was told to repeat the slogan "Robert Mugabe is always right", and now he has come to Britain to preach the reverse. Two weeks ago the human rights activist was leading a group of teachers handing out leaflets in Harare to campaign against the country's crippled education system when he was taken by Zanu-PF militia. The leafleting had taken place dangerously close to the party's headquarters, and within minutes of being discovered all the teachers were dragged into an underground cellar. Teams of 15 men used logs and iron bars to beat them. Mr Zhou and his fellow campaigners were battered - and some of the women sexually abused - with the iron rods, until they were left motionless on the blood-stained floor. (Independent, UK, 8 March)

THERE ARE BETTER QUEUES TO STAND IN: "I am not going to celebrate the day or vote in the coming elections. I have not been impressed by the candidates. Even if I vote there won't be much differences. In 2002 I braved the long queue and sweltering heat to vote for my favourite candidate. I never made it because of the harassment I received from the policemen manning the queue. We were accused of voting twice and many people were beaten. I would rather stay home and watch people voting," lamented the woman who refused to be named. She added: "Even if I decide to vote will it make a difference? We have a winner before the actual elections. I would rather join a food queue and stock up cooking oil, mealie meal and sugar in my home. I am sure the prices will rise sharply soon after the elections." (zimbabwejournalists.com, 8 March)

SADC OBSERVERS TO ARRIVE: Election observers from the Southern African Development Community are scheduled to arrive in Harare on Sunday, a senior SADC official said on Tuesday. A pre-election assessment team has been in Harare working with the government and the Zimbabwe Electoral commission for two weeks, SADC and other sources said. Tanki Mothae, director of SADC's organ on politics, defense and security, said the regional group's observer mission will arrive in Harare on Sunday. Mothae, who will lead a separate delegation from the organization's secretariat, said SADC expects to field over 100 observers from various member states. Mothae holds the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Lesotho Defense Forces. Critics including civil society organizations have complained that SADC should already have deployed observers to assess pre-election conditions, including the registration of voters and public inspection of voter rolls, as well as the general environment. (VOA, 4 March)

WCC TO OBSERVE: The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Samuel Kobia, has told his U.N. counterpart, Ban Ki-moon, that the ecumenical body and its member churches in Africa are planning for the monitoring of elections scheduled in Zimbabwe on March 29. In a statement released after Ban met Kobia on March 3 at the invitation of the WCC leader, the world church body said that in private talks, the U.N. general secretary had said the WCC had played an important role in the democratization of his home country, Korea. (Ecumenical News International, Geneva, 5 March)

COALITION OF THE COMPLIANT: Britain, continental countries and others critical of Mr Mugabe will be banned from sending monitors to oversee the freedom and fairness of the poll. Sudan and Libya have been chosen "on the basis of objectivity and impartiality in their relationship with Zimbabwe", Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, the Foreign Minister, said. "Clearly, those who believe that

the only free and fair election is where the Opposition wins, have been excluded since the ruling party is poised to score yet another triumph," he said. Among the observer nations are Ethiopia, Nigeria, China, Iran, Venezuela and Kenya, where allegations of vote rigging sparked deadly ethnic violence in December. Mr Mumbengegwi said that there was "one European nation" among the list of invited countries, and named Russia, where there are concerns over the election of Dmitri Medvedev, President Putin's successor, as president last month. Mr Mumbengegwi advised Western ambassadors in Harare on Thursday that they would be allowed to deploy accredited members of staff already based here as observers. Yesterday a note dispatched from the Foreign Ministry added that only ten officials would be allowed per embassy. "It's the coalition of the compliant," said an envoy, who asked not to be named. (The Times, 8 March)

ZIMBABWE OBSERVER NAMES SUBMITTED: ZESN said Monday that it is submitting applications for election observers to the Ministry of Justice, which has taken the responsibility for clearing applications by domestic observers before they can be processed by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, nominally the authority in this domain. Though the commission issues observer permits, Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, senior negotiator for the ruling ZANU-PF party in the South African-mediated crisis resolution talks which dead-ended earlier this year, was quoted in the state-run Herald newspaper this weekend laying out the procedure for applications. The election support network said it will draw observers from its membership, which includes a number of civil society organizations. ZESN Chairman Noel Kututwa told reporter Jonga Kandemiiri that his organization will face major difficulties if its observer applications are rejected. (VOA, 3 March).

SOUTH AFRICANS WAITING FOR INVITATIONS: The South African-based Electoral Institution of Southern Africa has sought permission to send observers, but a spokesman for the group said it awaits a response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That ministry is also considering an application from the Parliamentary Forum of the Southern African Development Community, whose application to send observers to 2005 general elections was turned down. (VOA, 3 March).

COSATU TO PROTEST: The Congress of South African Trade Unions, and other civil society organisations, will march to the Zimbabwe embassy in Pretoria on Friday as part of a protest campaign to press for free and fair elections on the 29th March. COSATU spokesman Patrick Craven told us Wednesday that no one can claim not to know by now, that SADC is facing a serious problem, arising from the political and socio-economic crisis facing Zimbabwe. 'The world has at best lamented and at worst collaborated with the aggressor regime of Mugabe. This is why the new initiative, called the South African International Solidarity Front currently convened by COSATU, has taken the bold initiative to confront Zimbabwe and demand justice for the sister people of this country,' Craven said. He added; 'With the Zimbabwe elections to be held on 29th March, what stands out clear is that the conditions for elections militate against free and fair elections. We shall therefore be holding a march to the High Commission of Zimbabwe on Friday, 7 March 2008 in Tshwane (Pretoria), starting at 11am. This march will bring together all activists and organisations working for democracy and social justice,' Craven added. (SWRadio, 5 March).

LET IT BE FREE AND FAIR: Europe wants to see an election result that reflects the will of Zimbabweans in a March 29 poll, European Union trade chief Peter Mandelson said on Monday. "The EU wants an election that will produce the result that the (Zimbabwean) public wants and the people need. It's not for me or anyone else in the EU to say what the result should be, but it needs to be one that reflects the genuine will and mandate of the Zimbabwean people," Mandelson said. "Above all, we want the people of Zimbabwe to win politically, economically and socially because that's at stake," he told a news conference following a meeting with ministers from east and southern Africa to discuss trade issues. (Reuters, 3 March)

NOT A WESTERN STOOGES: The Law Society of Zimbabwe on Monday rejected the accusation by a minister that it is an opposition political body working with the West to bring down the government. The state-controlled Herald newspaper on the weekend reported charges by Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa to that effect. The pro-government Sunday Mail said the Law Society wants to observe the elections on behalf of the European Union. Law Society President Beatrice Mtetwa told reporter Patience Rusere of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that the government wants to divide its membership because it has been outspoken on the breakdown of the rule of law in the country. (VOA, 3 March).

LAW SOCIETY TO BE REPRESSED: the government is mulling draconian legislation to restrict the activities of the Law Society of Zimbabwe (LSZ) through the imposition of leadership sympathetic to the state. Currently, the legal profession is self-regulated, but the government is working on legislation that will give it control over the society. Last week, attacks on the LSZ and its president Beatrice Mtetwa, escalated with the government saying it now viewed the LSZ with suspicion for allegedly receiving British government funding. This week, the state claimed the LSZ had applied to observe elections on March 29 on behalf of the European Union (EU) and Britain. Both Mtetwa and the British embassy have issued statements denying these allegations. (FinGaz, 6 March).

ZANU IS BUYING VOTES: "We know there are government employees who woke up to see huge sums of money in their accounts which did not appear on their pay slips," Makoni told a rally of about 3,000 people. "We know there are civil servants who were embedded in (party) structures for campaigning to re-elect one party." (Reuters, 2 March)

HOPLEY FARM IS DIRE: Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) expresses its deep concern and anger at the continuing miserable state of affairs at Hopley Farm just outside Harare. The continued desperation of people residing there has become all the more acute in light of the upcoming elections. Hopley Farm is an area to which destitute and generally deprived people were taken in the wake of Operation Murambatsvina which caused alarming levels of economic, social and now political dislocation. The travails of this displaced community are many: the residents of Hopley Farm have experienced serious problems in being able to register to vote. Some were advised that they are aliens and therefore are barred from registering in continuing misinterpretation of Zimbabwe's citizenship laws. Others were told they needed as proof of residence a letter confirming their residency at Hopley Farm from the local authority on the ground. This local authority is the District Chairman of the local ZANU-PF Committee who gave his letter of authority with an arbitrariness which was generally linked to his position as an office-bearer for the ruling party. It was only after affected residents registered complaints with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that some were able to register. (ZLHR statement, 6 March)

DON'T LET THEM STEAL MY POLICE VOTE: police officers have been asked to submit their voting details. Not bad because they will be deployed out of their wards. The catch is that everyone would be forced, one way or the other, to vote for a particular candidate. You know who? How can you vote when there are ex-combatant officers seeing where you are putting your vote? That is rigging if you ask me. Last time some envelopes were opened and officers were victimised when it was seen that they had voted for the opposition. Please highlight this issue in your widely read newspaper so that our votes can count. Imagine all 30 000 police votes being stolen. That can steal a whole election in someone's favour. The time is now. (Letter to the Editor, FinGaz, 6 March)

REGISTERED VOTERS TO LOSE RIGHT TO VOTE: Zimbabweans with non-indigenous origins could be barred from voting on 29 March, even if they have known only Zimbabwe as their home and their names appear on the voters' roll. This could affect thousands of farm workers and urban voters. The likelihood of disenfranchisement emerged in a letter to ZEC from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). They wrote that some "aliens" whose names appear on the voters' roll had already been told they would not be allowed to vote. On checking the roll, Lewanika established he was indeed registered to vote in Mufakose constituency. But one of the officials at the inspection centre told him that, even with his name on the voters' roll, he would still not be able to vote because he was

an alien. With three weeks to go before the elections, ZLHR and other civic organisations fear more people could find themselves in Lewanika's predicament - registered to vote but unable to vote. GAPWUZ represents workers at all farms and plantations in the country, most of whose workers are descendants of Malawians, Zambians and Mozambicans. A GAPWUZ official said so far the union had identified more than 100 people in Mashonaland Central with such a status. The union was currently compiling a list of all those affected and once the list was completed, would mount a legal challenge. (Standard, 9 March).

ZESN DOUBTS POSTAL BALLOTS: The police and armed forces have currently been using this facility and concerns have been raised as to the credibility and transparency of the voting process where this facility has been used by the said government departments. Investigations have yielded that despite its extensive use among the said professionals, this internal postal voting exercise has not been supervised by party agents, contestants or their proxies. Neither has the voting exercise been subjected to observation by both local and international observers. Furthermore, the secrecy of the vote of the postal facility user is allegedly compromised in the uniformed forces as superiors are often tasked to supervise the voting process that involves their subordinates. Concerns have also been raised on the security of the ballots cast as this voting process is often conducted a month before the official polling day and no political party representative or candidates' agents take part in guarding the ballot boxes. Consequently, it is difficult for political parties to ascertain the number of ballots cast by members of the uniformed forces. It is also not possible for candidates to verify the authenticity of the ballots or the transparency of the voting system. (ZESN in Standard, 9 March)

NO POLICE ALLOWED IN POLLING STATIONS: despite statements to the contrary from other quarters, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission insisted on Thursday that police officers will remain at least 100 meters from polling stations on election day, March 29, dismissing reports that the country's Electoral Act has been amended by an executive order. Commission spokesman Utloile Salaigwana said the Electoral Act stands as amended by parliament and that under the provisions of the act police officers will not be allowed into polling places and will be obliged to remain 100 meters away. He was responding to reported statements by the deputy police commander of Victoria Falls, named Makhala, saying the law was amended by President Robert Mugabe. The officer was said to have told a meeting of political parties Tuesday in Victoria Falls that police would be allowed into polling stations based on a presidential amendment to the Electoral Act. (VOA, 7 March)

NO CARDBOARD BOXES: Zimbabwe confirmed Sunday it will use translucent ballot boxes in this month's polls, not opaque cardboard ones as had been rumoured. There have been persistent rumours that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) might approve the use of cardboard ballot boxes in the March 29 presidential, parliamentary and local government polls. But ZEC deputy chief elections officer Utoile Silaigwana said he had 'never seen' the cardboard boxes being referred to. 'We will not use them. We do not know anything about them. We have never seen these cardboard ballot boxes. We will use the translucent ballot boxes that voters have been using since 2005,' Silaigwana told the official Sunday Mail. (Monsters and critics, 2 March)

WHO PUT OUT THE WRONG INFO IN THE FIRST PLACE...? On Sunday the official press carried a statement by the ZEC saying it had come to their notice that "information is circulating that ZEC will use cardboard ballot boxes, that ZEC polling officers will demand proof of residence from voters and that ZRP officers would assist those voters who requested to be assisted". None of this is true, we now learn. And who was the source of all this misleading information? The ZEC, it turns out. "The information is contained in a pamphlet which ZEC has since withdrawn because of these factual errors." The ZEC will not use cardboard ballot boxes; it will use translucent ballot boxes. No proof of residence is required and only the presiding officer and two other electoral officers can assist voters. So, as we can see, all geared up for the big day! We particularly liked the way all this had "come to

the attention of the ZEC" when they were the source of the misleading information. How long did it take to come to their attention? (Muckraker, Zim Ind, 7 March)

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

NO ACCESS TO STATE MEDIA: the MDC party has accused the state-owned Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH) of imposing a blackout on its activities ahead of elections this month. The MDC said ZBH was seeking to prop up President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU PF party's campaign through favourable coverage, in what the opposition party said was a breach of regional guidelines that all political parties should receive equal coverage in the public media. "It is our view that ZBH has abused its privilege to give unfair advantage to ZANU PF and its candidate even though as a publicly funded broadcaster, you are expected to give equal coverage to all political players," MDC information director Luke Tamborinyoka wrote in a letter to ZBH boss, Henry Muradzikwa, dated February 27. (Zim Online, 3 March)

JOURNALISTS OUTRAGED AT THREATS FROM GOVERNMENT: Zimbabwe Journalists for Human Rights is outraged by the threats issued by the Information and Publicity Minister Sikhanyiso Ndlovu against the Financial Gazette over a story that appeared in the financial weekly on Thursday 21 February 2008. The Minister's threats arose after the Financial Gazette reported that several high-profile Zanu PF officials had been coerced to sign President Mugabe's nomination papers for the Presidency in the March 29 harmonised elections. We are curious to know why Ndlovu is so angry with the Financial Gazette on that story. Is there something else the story insinuates that the public does not know? According to the main 8pm news bulletin of the only state broadcaster the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH), Minister Ndlovu revealed that the government will resort to other means to ensure the Financial Gazette retracts its lead story on Mugabe. (ZJHR, 3 March).

WE WILL CONTINUE: As the nation braces for the March 29 harmonised elections, the media, particularly the private media should be mindful of the threats posed to their lives by the desperate regime that thrives on intimidation and harassment of the messengers of truth. The ZJHR continues to document all violations against the people in terms of their rights to information. The ZJHR is neither deterred nor intimidated by Minister Ndlovu's threats. We reject any further erosion of our freedoms as Zimbabwean journalists by curtailing our rights to tell the story as it is. Minister Ndlovu should demonstrate the same zeal when dealing with journalists in the employ of the government-controlled newspapers who daily pour scorn on the opposition leadership and other private citizens who oppose the regime's economic policies and political repression. (ZJHR, 3 March)

HUNGWE APPEALS HIS BANNING: a letter dated March 3, 2008, Hungwe's lawyer, Selby Hwacha, said the MIC's letter of February 26, 2008, notifying his client of a one-year ban from practicing journalism, is "clearly not lawful". Hungwe was banned for allegedly operating without accreditation. Hwacha wrote: "We request you to confirm urgently that the blanket ban on our client is ineffective and that there is no impediment to his practice as a journalist. The denial of means of sustenance is inherently urgent given especially that our client had been given to understand that the ban would be lifted. "Should we not hear from you by or before 10.00am on Wednesday 5th March 2008, we will have little choice other than take the matter to court urgently." In the case of a ban, a journalist should be notified in writing of the proposed action and be given an opportunity to show cause within a reasonable time why the intended disciplinary measures should not be taken. Thereafter, the commission must afford the journalist a fair hearing and consider representations made before taking action. In Hungwe's case, the mandatory disciplinary process was not complied with. It is further noted that the AIPPA Amendment Act, which came into law on January 11 2008, dissolved the MIC in whose place should now be the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). The ZMC is yet to be constituted. (FinGaz, 6 March).

BIASED ZEC WORKSHOP: The impartiality of ZEC was in doubt on Tuesday, when officials from the body barred journalists from the private media from attending an election-reporting workshop. The

one-day training workshop, held at the Bulawayo Rainbow Hotel, was titled The Role of the Media during Elections and was led by Kenya-born Ngugi wa Mirii. It was attended by 15 journalists from the State media, including reporters from The Chronicle, Sunday News, New Ziana and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). However, when journalists from The Zimbabwean and The Standard attempted to attend, ZEC officials said they were not welcome because the publications had been writing negative stories about the Commission's preparations for the March 29 elections. State journalists who attended the workshop said wa Mirii had urged attendees to be patriotic towards the Robert Mugabe-led Government. (Zim Ind, 7 March)

NO ACCESS TO STATE MEDIA: The MMPZ reported: "This week the public media continued to violate domestic and regional guidelines on fair and equitable election reporting by giving massive publicity to Zanu PF than all its opponents combined," said the MMPZ in its weekly report. "The extent to which programming has virtually collapsed at the ZBC was aptly demonstrated by the saturation of the airwaves with Zanu PF propaganda during President Mugabe 84th birthday celebrations."

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

MPOPOMA MP DIES: The Member of the House of Assembly for Mpopoma Mr Milton Milford Gwetu of the MDC-Mutambara faction has died. "Honourable Gwetu died sometime this morning. He has been unwell for sometime and was complaining of general tiredness but we never thought he would die. He was a strong person and we believed he would recover," said Mr Nyathi. "People in the party are devastated as you know his death comes a week after the death of (Mr) Glory Makwati (the faction's candidate for Gwanda South). We will miss him and as you know, there was never a moment when he was angry with anyone. He will be missed in the party." (Harare Herald, 3 March).

STAR RALLY IN BYO: the Morgan Tsvangirai-led MDC yesterday drew a huge crowd at a star rally addressed by its leader at White City Stadium in a major show of support in Matabeleland. The region is considered a stronghold of the Arthur Mutambara formation of the MDC. Makoni launched his presidential campaign at the same venue last Saturday and attracted a crowd of about 6 000, which almost equalled the number at the launch of the pro-Senate MDC campaign the following day. About 12 000 people attended Tsvangirai's rally. Most of them were bussed in from the city's high-density suburbs and tertiary institutions after the faction reportedly hired more than 40 commuter omnibuses. Tsvangirai promised his audience he would set up a Gukurahundi compensation fund and "end the policy" of marginalizing the region. "An MDC government will not allow a situation where this region will be treated as if it is not part of the country. "We must stop this policy of marginalization." (Standard, 9 March).

WHAT TO DO ABOUT DU: the Presidium, comprising President Robert Mugabe, his two deputies Joice Mujuru and Joseph Msika and national chairman John Nkomo, was choosing caution despite being pressed by some radical members of the party to take immediate and drastic action against the former ZIPRA intelligence chief, Dumiso Dabengwa. They are in a dilemma because the party's constitution and the standing rules formulated by the Central Committee - the supreme policy making-body of the party outside congress - are silent on how to deal with such a case. Mutasa told this paper yesterday "Why should we discuss with newspapers what we are going to do or are planning to do with him?" asked Mutasa. "You should be patient until we come to you to tell you what we have arrived at. What is the hurry to know what we plan to do as a party? We have our own internal procedures and these have nothing to do with newspapers." But the rules and regulations are silent on the circumstances pertaining to Dabengwa's actions. Dabengwa, who is not a candidate in the elections, declared his support for Makoni at two public meetings in Bulawayo last Saturday, less than 24-hours after Msika vouched for his loyalty to President Mugabe. Dabengwa's announcement would have therefore been a major embarrassment, while also casting doubt on the quality of the intelligence being passed on to members of the presidency. (FinGaz, 6 March)

TENSIONS RISING: Robert Mugabe launched into a round of rallies in eastern Manicaland Province on Tuesday. As Mr. Mugabe went on the road, tensions in his ruling party were escalating. ZANU-PF insiders said hardliners Didymus Mutasa, minister of state security, and Elliot Manyika, the party's political commissar, were pressing Mr. Mugabe to expel top officials including retired general Vitalis Zvinvashe, Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, party stalwart Dzikamai Mavhaire and Matebeleland North Governor Angeline Masuku for allegedly lining up in secret behind Makoni. Makoni's campaign Web site says Zvinvashe and Mavhaire have endorsed him, while avowed Makoni backer Dumiso Dabengwa says Masuku and Chinamasa were among ZANU-PF rebels who met in South Africa late last year to plot the political downfall of President Mugabe with an electoral challenge by Makoni. (VOA, 5 March)

DABENGWA TURNED DOWN VICE PRESIDENCY: Robert Mugabe on Friday said he was shocked at Dumiso Dabengwa's decision to back Simba Makoni's presidential ambitions, as reports surfaced that the ex-Zipra intelligence chief had turned down an offer to be Zanu PF vice-president. Under an unwritten covenant of the Unity Accord signed in 1987 between Mugabe and the late PF-Zapu leader, Joshua Nkomo, Zanu PF and the State would have two vice-presidents from the former parties. Joseph Msika holds the post on behalf of PF-Zapu, having succeeded Nkomo. He is due to retire after the 29 March elections. Reports say Dabengwa turned down the offer on the grounds that it had come too late. (Standard, 9 March).

CAMPAIGNING FROM THE INSIDE: the defection of Dabengwa has shocked the party's leadership, which is still battling to win support in Matabeleland, currently a stronghold of the Arthur Mutambara faction of the Movement for Democratic Change. But President Mugabe, despite his attacks on Dabengwa on Monday, is holding his fire and not taking any action before properly evaluating the full extent of internal opposition to his leadership. People in the Makoni camp claim that ZANU-PF officials working with the former finance minister were not "coming out" now because they were "utilising ruling party resources to campaign for Makoni" in their constituencies. "Of the 75 independent candidates that are standing under Makoni's banner in the polls, about three quarters are using ZANU-PF structures to reach the voters," said a source. Dabengwa's defection has created further discord in Matabeleland with several former ZIPRA and PF ZAPU officials jumping on the Makoni bandwagon. (FinGaz, 6 March)

MORE DEFECTIONS: Wilson Kumbula, president of the opposition Zimbabwe African National Union - Ndonga (ZANU-Ndonga), endorsed Makoni's candidature, while Edgar Tekere, a former minister in Mugabe's first cabinet, vowed to work with him. Makoni addressed a rally in Harare and said, "Our factories used to have 24-hour shifts, farmers used to produce day and night, foreign currency was available in abundance and one could simply walk into a bank and buy any currency," Makoni said. "Shops are full of dust because there is nothing on the shelves. Factories are working less than eight hours a day and workers have been reduced to vendors." (Yahoo news March 2)

MORE DEFECTIONS NEEDED: Only if other high-profile members of Zimbabwe's ruling party desert President Robert Mugabe might the scales tip against the veteran leader at this month's election. The defection of politburo member Dumiso Dabengwa at the weekend to join the presidential campaign of ex-finance minister Simba Makoni has certainly rocked Zanu PF. Eldred Masunungure, a political science professor at the University of Zimbabwe commented: "I think a really devastating blow would be the defection of several top officials, including those generals the (local) media have linked to Makoni," he said. Makoni has long said his campaign had the support of several senior Zanu PF officials, but they have not come out openly. In fact, many top officials have been at pains to make public their support for Mugabe. Mugabe, who has branded Makoni a political prostitute, has not yet publicly commented on Dabengwa's defection, but his spokesperson, George Charamba, dismissed it as insignificant. "What is Dabengwa worth by way of supporters? He brought none to Zanu PF and he takes none to the independent (Makoni)." (The Star, 5 March).

MORE DEFECTIONS COMING: Simba Makoni's camp is expecting more phased resignations of Zanu PF "big hitters" in the next two weeks in a bid to destabilise President Robert Mugabe, already unnerved by the defection of senior party members. The hidden strategy to win the forthcoming election was laid open to the elements this week as political campaigns intensify. Informed sources said Makoni's strategy included well-timed resignations by senior Zanu PF members who are part of an internal bid to dislodge Mugabe from power. The surge in resignations was calculated to shake Zanu PF to its foundations. Mugabe was quoted yesterday in the state media as saying he did not know where defections from his party would lead to, showing he feared more politburo members would quit. (Zim Ind, 7 March)

THE WHISPERING BOYS: Makoni's camp says it is mobilising voters through a "military strategy" and this should deliver to them 70% of the vote. It is said Makoni's group was using the "Boys on Leave" taskforces on the ground to coordinate its campaign. The "whispering campaign" by soldiers involves telling voters to cast their ballots for Zanu PF candidates in council, national assembly and senate elections, but not for Mugabe. People are told to vote for Makoni as president. This has been confirmed privately by Makoni's strategists. (Zim Ind, 7 March)

IT'S ABOUT WHO VOTES WITH WHOM IN PARLIAMENT: Gordon Moyo said constitutional amendment Number 18 had given powers to parliament to impeach the president or elect his successor. They argued that if someone won the presidency but did not control parliament, it could impeach him or her. "These elections are really about who controls parliament," Moyo said. "ZANU-PF has failed to resolve the leadership question, so it is taking this to parliament. It does not really matter therefore whether Makoni wins or not. What matters is how many of his sympathisers get into parliament. If they can gang up with the opposition and outnumber those loyal to (President) Mugabe, they can impeach him even if he wins the elections." The ZANU-PF insider concurred; adding that what made the whole thing more intriguing was that one did not have to cross the floor. One could simply vote with the opposition. "This is one of the reasons why Makoni and Dabengwa have publicly stated that they have not left ZANU-PF. They have not left the party but simply want to takeover the leadership," the insider said. He admitted that there were deep divisions within the party and this was one of the reasons why the party's campaign had been slow to take off. (FinGaz, 6 March)

MAKONI- SA IS NOT SUPPORTING ME: "South Africa has not offered any support, and I didn't ask for it," he said last week. His plans to campaign in rural areas were scuppered last week due to what sounded like an attempt to sabotage his campaign. In public, however, Makoni is very careful what he says about Mugabe and Zanu-PF. After all, he was in the heart of Zanu-PF all his adult life and says he criticised its failings at every opportunity within the party, a party he campaigned for as a student in Britain when he protested against minority white rule in Rhodesia. "The people who are supporting me in Zanu-PF and in other quarters, agree with me that the country is ripe for change at the highest level, that the country needs to take a different direction, a positive direction, and the country needs to re-engage with the region and the international community."

WE ARE NOT FUNDING MAKONI: Brewer SABMiller and Citigroup denied a report in a Zimbabwean newspaper on Tuesday that they were raising funds for one of President Robert Mugabe's election opponents. The Herald said the two were among international corporations raising funds for former finance minister Simba Makoni, who is taking on Mugabe in the March 29 vote. London-based SABMiller spokesman Nigel Fairbrass denied the report. "SABMiller would like to make it clear that it is not funding or supporting any political campaign in Zimbabwe and neither has this ever been under consideration," Fairbrass said. Citigroup's spokesman in London, Jonathan Woodier, dismissed the report as "absolute rubbish". "Citi does not support political causes and it would be inappropriate of us to do so," he said. (Reuters, 4 March).

MAKONI- I WILL REFINER LAND REFORM: "I want to take this opportunity to disabuse those who are maliciously misrepresenting me and saying Simba Makoni will give land back to the whites. "There is not going to be a reversal of land reform, there is going to be a refinement, there is going to be a return to the principles and policies that were initially put on the table by our government to guide acquisition, redistribution and utilisation, of land. "The land reform was meant to uplift the rural communities in Zimbabwe. That's what we will aim to achieve. "The people of Zimbabwe must be reassured, there will be equitable, fair and transparent land redistribution." (IOL, 2ND March)

TSVANGIRAI- LAND AUDIT ONLY: Presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change has accused President Robert Mugabe of propagandizing with a claim the MDC will roll back land reform by returning formerly white-owned farms. Mugabe said in launching his political manifesto late last week that white farmers were already trooping back into Zimbabwe in anticipation of an MDC victory. Tsvangirai said his manifesto calls only for an audit of land ownership to bar holdings of multiple farms - a number of Mr. Mugabe's ministers own more than one farm and vast tracts of formerly productive farmland are lying fallow across the country. Tsvangirai said the size of the plots allocated will depend on the region - i.e. that they will be larger in the drought-prone southern regions than in the temperate north. (VOA, 4 March).

UNBELIEVABLE: "I would not have believed it had I not seen him personally on television on Friday," Makoni told supporters at a campaign rally in Harare. "Had someone told me that Mugabe said I will return the land to whites, I would not have believed it. "But what he said is not true. When did I say it (that I would return farms to whites) and where did I make such pronouncements? I, Simba Makoni Nyathi (his totem) won't reverse agrarian reforms but will make sure that those with multiple farms are taken and given to deserving people. In short, I will give the farms to the deserving majority not a few politicians who have grabbed farming equipment and parade at their idle farms." (New Zimbabwe, 3 March).

THEY WILL GNASH THEIR TEETH: "I want to know when I said I would return the land to the enemy. I never said that," said Makoni. "Year after year he loses voice talking of multiple farm owners. Yet senior people in his Politburo have six or even more farms. Under a new dawn there will be a gnashing of teeth for those multiple farm owners which they grabbed for various reasons. We want land distributed fairly and equitably to rectify the chaos identified in the four different land commissions." (FinGaz, 6 March)

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS: Analysts said the election manifestos of the two opposition candidates were almost identical because of the issues facing the country, now in its ninth year of an economic recession. Both manifestos lacked a tangible programme of action that would act as the road map as the parties move to rescue the country's economy from the jaws of a ruthless recession. "They look the same to such an extent that they are meaningless," said economic consultant, Daniel Dlela. He said the challenge for voters in the forthcoming polls would be to judge the people behind the manifestos to ascertain their ability to deliver the country out of its current economic crisis. Ghana, he said, had consistently churned out economic blue prints that were more sophisticated and impressive than those of Malaysia, but the Asian country had managed to progress much faster than the African state because of its leadership. Ndlela said voters are simply going to rally behind an individual they feel could save them from a worsening economic crisis and are unlikely to scrutinise the election manifestos. "It's anyone who can deliver them from the evil one, and that evil is the (damaged) economy," said Ndlela. He said the current government was "totally unable to move forward and undo the damage it has made to the economy" (FinGaz, 6 March)

THE ZANU MANIFESTO – EVEN MORE WORDS THAN LAST TIME: ...about 20 pages are devoted to "What Zanu PF has done", 43 pages - about half the document - dwell on "West bashing".

Some analysts said the only difference between the 2005 election manifesto and the 2008 one is the former had 53 pages and the latter 93. (Standard, 9 March)

HOLLOW WORDS: The ZANU PF party is still offering the same unfulfilled promises it made in 2005 and previous elections. In 2005, Zanu PF said by 2008, the government would have built 1 250 000 houses. According to the manifesto, only 7 500 houses were completed under Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle. The party promised to stabilise the exchange rate and reduce inflation to single digits. At the time, inflation was 237.8%, but it is now 100 580.02%, a world record. The Zimbabwe dollar continues to tumble against major currencies. The manifesto says the party would assist the poor with school fees. Evidence on the ground is that the exact opposite is the case: state assistance to students at tertiary institutions has been slashed. As a result, many university students cannot fund their studies. (Standard, 9 March)

VOTE TO NEVER BE A COLONY AGAIN: ZANU-PF is inevitably fighting from the corner, and has anchored its "people's manifesto" around issues on which it thinks it has done well. It has established a theme around its battle to retain power: "Defending our land and national sovereignty: building prosperity through empowerment." "We are the champions of the national struggle against British colonialism, who delivered Independence in 1980, who have remained its stalwart defenders and whose pledge each day, as the sun rises and the sun sets, is 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again'," said President Mugabe in his message accompanying the ZANU-PF manifesto. The manifesto acknowledges people's suffering due to the current economic hardships, but places the blame on economic "sanctions and sustained Western attacks" on the incumbent regime. The British, the manifesto alleges, are sponsoring puppets to unseat the incumbent regime to make Zimbabwe a colony again. (FinGaz, 6 March).

VOTE ZANU FOR ZAMBIAN MAIZE- IF IT EVER GETS HERE: President Robert Mugabe on Wednesday said his government had paid for more than 400 tonnes of maize from Zambia and Malawi but blamed Lusaka's "lack of urgency" for slowing down efforts to fight off hunger. Addressing a campaign rally of about 6 000 supporters at Mahusekwa rural business centre, about 90km south-east of Harare, Mugabe said his government would dispatch a team of officials to Zambia to assist authorities there to speed up delivery of maize. "We are trying (to provide food) but our maize is still across the Zambezi (river between Zambia and Zimbabwe)," Mugabe said. "It seems they have no sense of urgency. They are working as if everything is normal. We have talked to the Zambian government and they have agreed to be assisted so we are sending our team there. We have set up an emergency team because of the high level of hunger," he said. "If you vote for him (Makoni) you are lost, this is the truth. You do not have to join a man of no principles," said Mugabe, who mocked his challenger as a dreamer who thinks he could just wake up as the new president of the country. (ZimOnline, 6 March)

SPOT THE HUNGRY VILLAGE – AND STARVE IT: poor harvests ahead of elections are always a godsend for Zanu-PF. Now Mugabe can distribute food aid and the grain his government has imported, mostly from South Africa and Malawi, in exchange for votes. A new ward-based voting system -- where voters can only vote within a small radius of their home -- will also make it easier for Mugabe to pick out which hungry villages voted against him. (Mail and Guardian, 3 March)

TRACTORS FOR THE FAITHFUL: President Robert Mugabe is loosening the purse strings by parcelling out farm machinery in a desperate bid to overcome the double threat from a former ally and an old foe who have promised to defeat him in elections at the month-end. The ageing Mugabe, still adored by some on the African continent but equally loathed by many over rights abuse charges, will at the weekend hand out tractors, motor cycles, combine harvesters, generators, small farm implements and cows to beneficiaries of his controversial land seizures. The farm equipment programme is being funded by Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe governor Gideon Gono, who is accused by critics of raiding the central bank's coffers to prop up an unpopular regime. "We will see again most of this equipment going down the drain as long as the sanctity of property rights is not addressed,"

economic consultant John Robertson said. "No matter how many tractors or generators we buy, if we do not address the issue of land as a free enterprise which can be freely traded using it as collateral, we will not achieve growth in the agriculture sector," he added. (FinGaz, 6 March).

WE CANNOT GUESS WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU – MUGABE TO TEACHERS: Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe on Wednesday urged striking teachers in public schools to return to work promising to address their demand for better salaries. "Teachers, we understand your concerns and we are addressing them," Mugabe, 84, said at a campaign rally in Mahusekwa, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) southeast of the capital Harare, ahead of general elections on March 29. "But we are against this idea of you going on strike. Children must attend school without disruption. We cannot guess what is bothering you, but you can make your recommendations to us. "Yours is the noblest profession. There is no engineer, doctor or nurse who just became what they are without passing through the hands of a teacher. You boycott your work like ordinary factory workers." (africasia.com, 6 March)

THINK NOT OF VIC FALLS, BUT OF TORTURE VICTIMS: think of Zimbabwe and you may have a vision of the majestic Victoria Falls, the breathtaking eastern highlands or the animals of the Hwange. But the more realistic image of Zimbabwe today is of dictator Robert Mugabe and the swollen, beaten faces of opposition leaders and supporters who dared to attend a peaceful democracy gathering last March and were nearly killed for it. Elections scheduled for March 29 are not likely to change this scene, despite the outward trappings of a democratic process. The fact the elections are called for March 29 gives a clue as to the absurdity of Mugabe's attempt to legitimise his brutal dictatorship. This date gives opposition parties scant time to organise and rally their forces, a task already made almost impossible due to crackdowns on media freedom and on public gatherings. To add crushing insult to considerable injury, the regime in the past few weeks has begun detaining opposition leaders and supporters across the country for acts that in democracies would be normal campaigning activities. This week, the police have banned door-to-door campaigning and political meetings held in the evening. Yet those of us in the opposition movement take some heart from these tactics. They confirm to us and to the world that Mugabe knows if free and fair elections were allowed, he would lose. (David Coltart, 3 March)

REMOVE THE DEAD HAND: Should Mugabe win the March election, it will confirm an election, again, has been shockingly rigged... Should the world community let this moment pass without ensuring the March 29 poll is sufficiently democratic, despots across the continent will understand that the will to remove their dead hand on African progress has again failed to emerge. The signs are not good, as few leaders have seen fit to censure Mugabe's ridiculous election timetable or to sufficiently engage the democracy movement in the country. (David Coltart, 3 March)

IN HOSPITALS, THE MORTUARIES ARE BUSIEST: Makoni said he wants the price control and stringent foreign currency relaxed. He made an attack on Zanu PF government for being hypocrites. "After they destroyed the education system they now send their children abroad to write exams which they tell us that they are for colonial masters," said Makoni. "In hospitals, the main functioning department is a mortuary. If a leader falls sick they go to Morningside Clinic, what about the entire populace?" He said: "Self-determination is not about reliance, even communal farmers must be able to buy their needs if the economy has life, in 1986, they used to feed the entire nation and have surplus for export but the nation is now relying on food handouts. Why? It is because we destroyed the nation. (zimbabwejournalists.com, 3 March).

MORE INSULTS FOR MAKONI: the octogenarian leader launched a scathing attack on his former minister by labelling him "a British stooge, political witch, charlatan and prostitute". (New Zimbabwe, 3 March).

MADHUKU ON MAKONI: Based on the values and beliefs of the movement I belong to, the Makoni "initiative/project" is fundamentally misconceived. It will fail. It has no grassroots support. It misunderstands the nature of the responses required to address our deepening political crisis. Until Zimbabweans put their energies together and push the current regime to embrace a genuine and people-driven reform process that leads to a democratic constitution, power will not change hands through a mere election. Participation in the elections on March 29 cannot be for the purpose of winning power. It can only be for any other good reasons... As these elections cannot deliver a change of government, the competition between Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni is, to be blunt, "for No. 2 position." President Mugabe's "No. 1 position" is secured by the absence of a free and fair election. He has no genuine support. However, the competition for the "No. 2 position" is serious business... Morgan Tsvangirai represents the route we have been following since 1997. He is, as a person, not the answer. He represents the answer and must be supported. A vote for Tsvangirai's presidential bid is a statement against a "reformed ZANU-PF" agenda. (FinGaz, 6 March)

WE WILL BE VIOLENT- IF ATTACKED: Zimbabwe's war veterans converge in Harare today for an emergency meeting to plot strategy to mobilise votes for President Robert Mugabe in a tricky election in three weeks' time. The veterans are hardliner supporters of Mugabe who have waged violence and terror against the opposition at every election to ensure victory for the Zimbabwean leader and his ruling ZANU PF party. However, Chinotimba ominously warned that the veterans - who he said wanted to rid ZANU PF of enemies working from within the party - would resort to violence if attacked. "In fact, we are urging our members to campaign peacefully and only to resort to violence when attacked only as an act of self-defence," added Chinotimba. (Zim Online, 4 March).

VEHICLES FOR WAR VETS: Zimbabwe war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda said the former fighters would today discuss strategy to galvanise support for President Robert Mugabe after spending yesterday deliberating on logistics such as provision of fuel and vehicles for the campaign programme. "We want to ensure that our president and the ruling ZANU PF party win peacefully and comfortably," Sibanda told ZimOnline after a meeting of the ex-combatants that lasted several hours at the ruling party headquarters in Harare. Sibanda disclosed that the former fighters of Zimbabwe's 1970's war of independence had received vehicles from ZANU PF to use during the campaign but did not say how many vehicles they got. (Zim Online, 6 March)

WAR VETS NOT UNITED BEHIND MUGABE: Nevertheless, insiders say the veterans, whose support is crucial for Mugabe, are no longer united behind the 84-year old President, citing former liberation war top commander Dumiso Dabengwa and retired army major Kudzai Mbudzi's defection to back Makoni as a sign of widening divisions among ex-combatants. (Zim Online, 4 March).

HOW ZANU SEES IT: WE AND VENEZUELA BOTH NEED TO RELAUNCH OUR REVOLUTIONS: For both Venezuela and Zimbabwe, there is the element of a more radical left, strong among the grassroots as well as among some major elements within the State - an element that wants to deepen the process of empowerment and to overcome corruption and bureaucratism - them being the two major impediments holding back the advance of the revolution. The reclamation of land by the masses of Zimbabwe was a major victory for the empowerment of poor people just like the agrarian and nationalisation projects have been for Venezuela. However, problems such as sanctions-induced suffering, a divided workers' movement, a divided ideological focus as well as a growing gap between rhetoric and reality - all have meant that these problems have only been exacerbated to the advantage of the imperialists and their teams of lap-dog politicians in both Zimbabwe and Venezuela. This has also meant that the rightwing element within each of the two countries' revolutions has somewhat gained momentum to the detriment of the revolution. In Venezuela they called for a "Yes" vote during the day yet they spent each night discouraging voting for the radical constitutional reforms that threatened their material interests. In Zimbabwe, some of them openly castigate Makoni as a renegade sellout by day yet they are spending each night encouraging people to sympathise with the

dissident former Politiburo member. This is why the revolution is calling for a comprehensive revision, rectification and relaunching. There are danger signs ahead and this is the only way to pre-empt the imperialist assaults lying ahead. (Harare Herald, 3 March)

BRITAIN AND USA

USA RENEWS SANCTIONS: Commenting on smart sanctions in force since 2003: Because the actions and policies of these persons continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States, the national emergency declared on March 6, 2003, and the measures adopted on that date and on November 22, 2005, to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond March 6, 2008. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency with respect to the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Zimbabwe and other persons to undermine Zimbabwe's democratic processes or institutions. This notice shall be published in the Federal Register and transmitted to the Congress. GEORGE W. BUSH, THE WHITE HOUSE

ITS JUST NOT CRICKET: The Prime Minister's spokesman has denied reports that Gordon Brown is considering a blanket ban on all Zimbabwean sportsmen who wish to enter the country. Instead, the Daily Telegraph understands that the government will use passport legislation to block Peter Chingoka, chairman of Zimbabwe Cricket, from attending the International Cricket Council's annual conference at Lord's in June. Visas could also be refused to Zimbabwe's players if Chingoka insists on pressing ahead with their scheduled tour of England in 2009. In public, the government is sticking to its standard position, which is to pass the buck on to the England and Wales Cricket Board. But at a meeting with the ICC last week, it was made clear that there is no appetite for Zimbabwe's tour. (Telegraph, 3 March).

CAMERON AGREES: The Conservative leader David Cameron today gave his backing to calls for an official ban on next year's planned tour of England by the Zimbabwe cricket team. Mr Cameron was responding to BBC reports - denied by Downing Street - that Prime Minister Gordon Brown is considering action to exclude all visits by sportsmen from the southern African country in order to isolate the regime of President Robert Mugabe. The Prime Minister's spokesman said No 10 was "surprised" by the BBC report, and insisted that it was a matter for the English cricket authorities whether the tour went ahead. "It is not the case that the Prime Minister is considering a blanket ban on Zimbabwe's sportsmen," Mr Brown's spokesman said.

ITS NOT ABOUT CRICKET: Shadow foreign secretary William Hague said: "Any action to highlight the dire situation in Zimbabwe and isolate the regime is to be welcomed. "But rather than posturing about sport, what is urgently needed is tougher sanctions from Europe and the rest of the world, and for Gordon Brown to deliver on his promises to turn the heat up on Mugabe. "Zimbabwe's leaders continue to go unpunished, and even Robert Mugabe was able freely to visit Europe just a few months ago." (The Independent, 3 March).

CRICKET MONEY TROUBLE: an audit being conducted by KPMG could prove one way out of the impasse between the UK government and world cricket over the Zimbabwe issue. Last July the International Cricket Council engaged the accountancy firm to review the financial affairs of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union amid allegations of embezzlement at the ZCU. One ICC paper said that elements of the Zimbabwe accounts had been "deliberately falsified" and if the allegations are proved the government hopes sanctions might be imposed by the ICC. (Guardian, 5 March)

THE BRITISH BLAMED AGAIN: At a rally in Bazely Bridge, also in Manicaland, Mugabe said that "the British had identified people within Zanu-PF to work with in causing divisions in the party because it realised the ruling party was a united revolutionary liberation movement that had to be destroyed from within," the Herald said. Mugabe handed out more than 200 computers to schools in

Manicaland and promised farm equipment and food because "food shortages are looming," the report said. (IOL, 4 March)

THE ECONOMY

ITS NOT INFLATION – ITS SABOTAGE: Zimbabwe's veteran President Robert Mugabe accused businesses Wednesday of hiking prices to turn voters against him ahead of presidential elections later this month. "They keep raising and raising prices, and we wonder whether they want to raise the prices until the prices reach heaven," Mugabe told thousands of villagers at a campaign rally in Mahusekwa, about 70 kilometers south-east of the capital Harare. "Some are doing it for the elections saying: 'Let's make life hard for the people so that they cry and blame it all on Mugabe's government. "Getting 1,000% profit. That's not profit. That's profiteering which is condemned in the bible.'" (Dow Jones Newswires, 5 March)

THE TWENTY KILOGRAM DOLLAR: The Zimbabwe currency tumbled to a record low of 25 million for a single U.S. dollar Wednesday, currency dealers said. With Zimbabwe dollars mostly available in bundles of 100,000 and 200,000 notes, **one US\$100 note bought nearly 20 kilograms (40 pounds) of local notes at the new market rate Wednesday.** Currency dealers said uncertainties ahead of elections scheduled March 29 and the world's highest inflation of 100,500 percent led holders of hard currency to hang on to their money at the same time as the state central bank pumped more local cash into the market for election costs. The price of the U.S. currency was also pushed up by central bank buying on the unofficial market to pay for power, gasoline and vehicle imports ahead of the polling, said one black market dealer who could not be identified out of fear of reprisals. In the economic meltdown, the black market exchange rate for the U.S. dollar broke the 1 million Zimbabwe dollar mark for the first time in late October. (International Herald Tribune, 5 March)

TRILLIONS AND TRILLIONS: the money market maintained its surplus position this week on intensifying electoral spending and quasi-fiscal activities. The market was up to the tune of \$525 trillion on Tuesday but eased marginally on statutory reserve payments to the central bank by financial institutions. The market opened \$433 trillion up yesterday, and was forecast to close the day almost unchanged. (FinGaz, 6 March)

ZIM HYPERINFLATION LIKE ANY OTHER: true hyperinflation episodes that lasted more than two months number 20 in 18 countries, with Zimbabwe being the latest addition to this infamous club. Zimbabwe officially ascended to hyperinflation status in March 2007 when month-on-month inflation reached 50.54 percent and year-on-year being 2 200 percent. The RBZ's departure from conventional economics is best encapsulated in a phrase in the 2007 Monetary Policy Statement: "... those who wrote economics textbooks never experienced Zimbabwe's land reform." The notion that Zimbabwe's hyperinflation is 'special', thus requires 'special solutions' which lie outside the realms of standard stabilisation programmes is misleading, as analysis of events since 1998 reveals that Zimbabwe's hyperinflation bears the same general roots with most hyperinflations. Currency changeovers have been natural experiments in most periods of hyperinflations. Serbia changed currencies four times within a space of four months between October 1993 and January 1994, but inflation remained elusive with prices increasing by 5 quadrillion percent during the period. The same experiments had been carried out earlier in Brazil with the same results between 1988 and 1992 when they changed currencies five times. In Zimbabwe's case, inflation increased from an average of 1017 percent in 2006 after Sunrise I to over 66,000 percent by December 2007. (Kairiza in FinGaz, 6 March)

MOTHER OF ALL SEASONS A DISASTER: Zimbabwe will need to import grain because only 14 percent of land targeted for maize had been planted by December, and much of this crop was adversely affected by fertiliser shortages, a report co-sponsored by the government says. Government had targeted two million hectares for maize this season. But the report says: "Early planted crop (by the end of November) is at the grain filling stage and constitutes 14 percent of the total area planted."

The bulk of the maize crop, or 86 percent, was only planted between December last year and January this year. "This crop ranges mostly from early vegetative stages to early reproductive stage and is showing signs of severe nitrogen shortage due to excessive leaching, compounded by the shortage of fertiliser." Fuel supply was inadequate in all provinces, the report said, and back up spares for farm machinery were also scarce. FG

NOT MUCH GOLD, PLENTY OF DAMAGE: gold panning activities resulted in the destruction of 2000 hectares of arable land in the Mazoe Valley in 2006 and many more thousands of hectares were believed to have been destroyed in other areas during that period, a senior government official said this week. Environmental Management Agency (EMA) director-general, Mutsa Chasi, said with no stringent controls on gold panning, the country's economy is losing most of the productive land. "This is just one valley, what about in 30 to 35 other districts where they are in operation? "They go into the ground and dig deep pits, use cyanide and other chemicals. All those chemicals will be washed down into our rivers and drainage systems. The land where the panning is taking place is no longer good for agriculture. Scientists estimate that more than 5 000 hectares were being destroyed every year in regions where gold and diamond panning is taking place. Chasi said EMA had fought losing battles against the "vicious" gold panners because of the escalating economic crisis in the country. (FinGaz, 6 March).

CHINESE TO INVEST: A Chinese business delegation that visited Zimbabwe late last month said companies from the Asian giant were keen to invest in the Southern African country's gold- and platinum-mining sector. "The visit has been very helpful; we have agreed to what the delegation has asked for from us. They want gold and platinum exploration and investment opportunities and we are willing, as government, to partner them because they are sincere investors," he said. (FinGaz, 6 March)

WORST TOURISM LIST: Zimbabwe is among the worst tourist destinations in the world, according to a report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) that was released on Tuesday. The troubled southern African country that is in the grip of a severe economic crisis came a distant 117 out of the 130 countries that were surveyed in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report for 2008. The report, the second after last year's inaugural report, lumped Zimbabwe among countries such as Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Lesotho and Chad, which anchored the rankings at number 130. The WEF report measures factors that make it attractive to develop the travel and tourism sectors looking at the regulatory framework, the business environment and infrastructure as well as human and natural resources. (Zim Online, 5 March).

REFORM WILL BE A BITTER PILL: Reviving Zimbabwe's moribund economy would require inflation-battered citizens to swallow the bitter pill of reduced state spending and higher interest rates to attract foreign cash, analysts say. "They would have to completely reverse the policies of the current government, drastically cut on expenditure and push up interest rates," said Anthony Hawkins, an economics professor at the University of Zimbabwe. "It's impossible to see a solution without some kind of foreign assistance, so whoever wins will have to go on their knees to ask for aid." (Mail and Guardian, 4 March).

ZIMBABWE'S SA CASUALTIES: one group of casualties has been South African workers, especially the poor and the unemployed. The meltdown of the Zimbabwe economy has led to declining exports from South Africa to that country. In practice this meant loss of jobs by South African workers whose companies were exporting to Zimbabwe. Secondly, due to repression and the meltdown, millions of poor Zimbabweans have fled to South Africa and have been compelled to live in South Africa's slums, thus putting further pressure on the limited resources South Africa's slum dwellers have access to. The third casualties were South African companies that, besides losing export markets, have lost their investment which became devalued in the meltdown. Many of the South

African companies invested in Zimbabwe are listed at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and several of their shareholders are ordinary South African workers whose pension savings are invested in these listed companies. South Africa's workers have thus taken a triple blow from Mugabe's attempt to impose his dictatorship. They have lost jobs; they have had to share meagre resources. (Moeletsi Mbeki, Cape Argus, 5 March)

PRICE SLASHES AGAIN: More than 11 company officials dealing in flour, maize meal and cement have been arrested in Zimbabwe for overcharging, a newspaper reported Sunday. The arrests comes as the state-appointed National Incomes and Pricing Commission steps up its campaign to weed out "devious business practices," said the state-controlled Sunday Mail. "I can say with respect to cement and flour, in Harare we have so far arrested five players," NIPC chairman Godwills Masimirembwa was quoted as saying. "With respect to (maize) meal, a number of millers have been picked up. I believe they are in excess of six." Commodities like cement, flour and the staple maize meal are strictly controlled by President Robert Mugabe's government. But in a country where inflation is currently running at more than 100,000 per cent, retailers say they have to hike their prices almost on a daily basis to remain in business. (Earth Times, 2 March)

HOTEL PRICES SLASHED: National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC) has launched a fresh crackdown on the country's troubled hoteliers after they unilaterally increased food and accommodation prices without the approval of the state-run pricing body. Some hotel operators had raised accommodation charges to between \$635 million and \$1.2 billion from the \$70 million last approved by the NIPC in November. The hoteliers had also increased meal prices to \$348 million up from \$30 million, citing rising prices of raw materials and other operating costs. But the pricing body on Tuesday ordered them to reverse the hikes. NIPC chairman, Godwills Masimirembwa, said the commission had instead granted the hoteliers a 400 percent price increase on accommodation rates and food and beverages, which should enable them to operate profitably. The 400 percent price increase now means that overnight accommodation at a five-star hotel now costs \$280 million down from \$1.2 billion effected by hoteliers at the beginning of the month. (FinGaz, 6 March).

CHOPPER FROM CHINA: President Robert Mugabe has purchased another helicopter for US\$3 million after the crash of his previous chopper last year, investigations by The Zimbabwean on Sunday have revealed. Sources confirmed that the geriatric leader has taken delivery of the new chopper from China, said to be model HM 036 manufactured by Shenzhen Zhangyang Technology. (Standard, 9 March).

WHITE FARMERS TO FILE CASE: A group of 70 Zimbabwe white farmers say they will later this month file a joint application at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Tribunal challenging the seizure of their farms by the government. The Windhoek-based Tribunal last December ruled that Harare should stop evicting a Zimbabwean white farmer, William Michael Campbell, from his farm in Chegutu pending final determination of the legality of the land reforms. Worswick said he expected more farmers to sign up for the 'group act' following last week's withdrawal of charges against a group of farmers in Chegutu who were being accused of resisting eviction from their properties. (Zim Online, 6 March)

MORE ON STRIKE: Workers at the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) have given the government two weeks to review salaries or they would join school teachers on strike, compounding problems for a cash-strapped administration that faces voters in month-end elections. Public school teachers went on strike last week to press for more pay saying recent increases that lifted salaries to more than Z\$500 million on average were overtaken by inflation, which at more than 100 000 percent is the highest in the world. In a letter dated March 3, the National Education Union of Zimbabwe (NUEZ) gave the Ministry of Labour 14 days to resolve the salary dispute or ZIMSEC workers would go on strike. "ZIMSEC employees cannot bear the position anymore. We are therefore

left with no option but to declare a dispute," NUEF secretary general Headman Mangwadu said. (FinGaz, 6 March).

SCHOOLS PARALYSED: education system was paralysed this week as a teachers' strike for better working conditions and remuneration intensified with no immediate solution in sight. The teachers embarked on industrial action last week to press for a monthly salary of \$1,7 billion and improved working conditions. According to information at hand, only headmasters and their deputies reported for duty. The country's largest teachers' union, Zimbabwe Teachers Association (Zimta), told the Zimbabwe Independent that the strike would continue until the government meets their demands. Peter Mabhande, the chief executive officer of Zimta, ruled out an immediate engagement with the government to end the strike. "The nation must know the truth, the strike is going to continue until our demands are met as teachers are finding it difficult to go to work because of the poor salaries they are getting," Mabhande said. "We are not negotiating with the government. They will have to consult among themselves as our employers and come up with a solution to this crisis." The Zimta boss said it was "unfortunate and regrettable" that pupils and parents were being made to suffer as a result of the industrial action. (Zim Ind, 7 March)

DAILY LIFE

A SEA OF SEWERAGE: Sherpard Madamombe, a parliamentary candidate for Mabvuku-Tafara in the Tsvangirai MDC, said he recently toured the area and was shocked to see how much sewerage was actually on the streets. He said some residents can no longer access their homes because human waste was flowing right into their houses. And people are dying from diarrhea and dysentery. Madamombe said desperate residents dug a borehole in order to have drinking water, but the well is located close to a huge pit to where sewerage is being re-directed. He thanked a non-governmental organisation called Doctors without Borders because they are providing chemicals to treat some of the drinking water. (SWRadio, 3 March).

WHAT DID PEOPLE USE BEFORE BALL POINT PENS? – COMPUTERS: As for electricity, Madamombe said areas like Chinjanje and Old Tafara have had no power for about 9 months now. Old Tafara is where the district office is located. The local officials used to use computers, but without power they now have to resort to ball point pens to record rent payments made by residents. (SWRadio, 3 March)

NO CLEAN WATER: At least 100 people in the Midlands town of Kwekwe have been hit by a severe bout of diarrhoea blamed on failure by local council authorities to provide clean and safe drinking water to residents. According to officials in the Kwekwe city council, diarrhoea cases that also showed cholera-like symptoms were recorded at local clinics in the town that like every urban area in Zimbabwe has to make do with broken down sewer systems and infrastructure as the country grapples economic recession. Kwekwe town clerk, Ngwenwa Musara, told ZimOnline yesterday that diarrhoea cases were on the rise due to frequent water cuts in the town that have forced residents to source water from unprotected wells. (Zim Online, 7 March)

NO CLEAN WATER: The Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) is pumping into the system for Harare and its metropolitan centres water that is 50% below ideal standards of cleanliness and purity due to lack of adequate chemicals, an expert has said. "The tests have shown that the quality and standard of water is below 50% of the levels safe for human consumption, meaning exposing the consumers to serious health risks," Makada said. "The assessments done at various stages show that almost all the vital chemicals are lacking from time to time and probably place to place." (Zimbabwean, 7 March).

STEALING THE FABRIC OF THE CITY: The public nuts and bolts, the cables and pipes, of this city of nearly three million people are literally vanishing alongside the flawed management of what

infrastructure remains. Think about this: People selling phone wires for food. (Globe and Mail, Canada, 7 March)

THE EXPLODING FRIDGES: in a suburb of Harare, more than 30 households lost electrical appliances, including television sets, decoders, radios, stoves and refrigerators after a sudden surge in voltage. "A bulb in the lounge exploded suddenly," said Mugoni, "followed by another one in a bedroom. After a few seconds, the TV blew up, producing smoke from the rear." Marvelous Sibanda was another resident whose household was hit by the spate of exploding appliances. She said she could not afford to replace her TV set and refrigerator. "For all these years, I have been working for these appliances, only to lose them in a minute," said Sibanda, a cross-border trader. For three days, Zesa officials said they did not have 10 litres of diesel to drive to Kambuzuma - less than seven kilometres away - to attend to the problem. The residents were told to buy the fuel and give it to Zesa for the trip to their suburb. A number of residents said they found this unusual, as Zesa, a cash-strapped parastatal, had spent several billions of dollars last month splashing advertisements in the government media to congratulate President Robert Mugabe on his 84th birthday. (Standard, 9 March)

RUNNING AWAY TO GET ARVS: Zimbabwean orphans Evans (13) and Edmond Mahlangu (8) crossed a mountain range on foot to get to Mozambique where they are slowly recovering on life-saving Aids drugs in short supply back home. "We walked for a day in the mountains. We had to keep quiet because of the guards," recounted the boys' 17-year-old sister, Emmaculate, who made the 10km journey with her HIV-positive siblings at the beginning of February "It was tough above all for my brothers. They had to walk alone because I was carrying bags." Orphaned in 2006, the children lived with their grandmother in Mutare on the Zimbabwean side of the border until she banished them in January. "My grandmother chased us away. She was afraid of the boys because they are sick. She was scared to touch them, even to cook for them," said Emmaculate. Evans and Edmond were put on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment as soon as they arrived in Mozambique. "I feel better now. It's not so bad as before," the elder boy said timidly, his body covered in a severe rash. The boys had been given ARVs once before, back home in Zimbabwe, but government-sponsored drugs are hard to come by and private sector prices are prohibitive. "We accommodate all patients without discriminating" Mozambican officials say Zimbabweans flock across the border to access ARVs. (M and G, 2 March)

PEOPLE STARVE WHILE DOGS EAT: Meals come only once a day for Helen Goremusandu, 67, and the six children she is raising. With prices for the most basic food products increasingly beyond her reach, that daily meal often consists of nothing more than boiled pumpkin leaves, washed down with water. About a mile away, a Zimbabwean government grain mill is churning out a new product: Doggy's Delight. Announced by its creators in January, the high-protein pet food is aimed at the lucrative export market, one of the dwindling sources of foreign exchange in a collapsing economy. "People are hungry," said Goremusandu, a widow with deep-set eyes and large, calloused hands. "They should not be prioritizing making dog food when people are hungry." (Washington Post, 3 March).

EATING ROTTEN STOCK FEED: David Shumba, whose farm is about 30 miles away on the outskirts of Harare, said he stopped raising thousands of chickens last year because feed had become too hard to find and is thinking about giving up pigs, too. Shumba said he bought 20 tons of water-damaged corn last year to feed them, but hungry farm workers already have stolen a ton of it. Reaching into a bag of dried corn kernels turning brown from rot, Shumba said, "Stuff like this, people eat now." (Washington Post, 3 March).

NO SANITARY WEAR: the cost of sanitary wear and cotton wool - like other basic commodities - continues to soar, most women now live with the almost perennial risk of contracting infections as they resort to unorthodox and unhealthy methods during menstruation. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) says most women are now exposed to infectious diseases because they use

materials such as newspapers, rags, tissues and soft fibre from trees to stem the flow of blood during menstruation. A gynaecologist at Parirenyatwa Hospital said it was dangerous to use tissues, rags or newspapers as they could cause infections, which might lead to cervical cancer. "They are not so good in absorbing blood and this can lead to vaginal infections. We urge women to use pads or cotton wool because they are made to absorb blood," she said. "The hospitals do not even have the medication to treat the infections. So you can imagine the magnitude of the crisis." (Standard, 9 March).

SHORTAGES TO CONTINUE: crop assessment report by the agriculture ministry and the Food and Agriculture Organization, obtained by Reuters on Tuesday, said farmers had only received up to 10 percent of required fertiliser during the current 2007/8 summer farming season. Producers had also failed to meet the targeted cropping area of 2 million hectares for the staple maize grain mainly due to shortages of fuel, which along with electricity, foreign currency and water shortages mark a devastating economic crisis gripping the country. "The total expected production from this season may not meet the expected targets," said the report, compiled after a crop assessment exercise carried out from Feb 3-11. "For this reason there is need to look into contingency plans for food imports," it said, adding that a final assessment would be conducted early next month. (Reuters, 4 March).

NO ZESA, NO WATER, NO MARKERS -> NO O LEVEL RESULTS: The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council "O" Level results, which were expected at the end of last month, will be released next week, Zimsec information and public relations manager Mr Ezekiel Pasipamire said yesterday. Mr Pasipamire said the results were delayed due to a number of problems, including power cuts, disruption of water supplies, low turnout of examiners and lack of staff motivation, because of the level of allowances. He said Zimsec was affected by constant power cuts from December 11 last year until January 9 this year. Zimsec also cited water cuts as another cause of the delay. "When there is little or no water, Zimsec is forced to either remain with skeleton staff that can be accommodated in the complex or has to completely shut down the place," he said. Mr Pasipamire said the "O" Level examinations were also affected by low examiner turnout which in some cases was as low as 50 percent of the expected number of markers. "Reasons advanced for the low turnout were largely to do with low remuneration and high transport costs, which saw marking being extended to the second week of January this year." he said. (Harare Herald, 5 March)

NO PASSPORTS: Passport-processing has stopped until after the election because of a lack of funds, The Zimbabwean on Sunday learnt this week. Staff at the Bulawayo passport office revealed that the office, which stopped the processing of new ordinary passports last year, has now extended that measure to even urgent passports, due to a shortage of funds for buying materials. "We used to process urgent passports only, but we have since been told that even applications for those should not be accepted until after the elections. We also no longer accept top-up fees from those people that are on the passport waiting list," said an official on Wednesday. (Zimbabwean, 7 March)

SAY IT WITH AN SMS: Savvy text messaging and cheeky ring tones are the new face of cost-effective political campaigning in Zimbabwe in the run up to the 29 March election, despite the creakiness of country's cell phone networks. "Call it an SMS [short message service] craze if you like ... It's a simple, inexpensive and effortless way of campaigning for candidates of one's choice," Aleck Ndlovu, a political activist, told IRIN. (5 March)

PROVOCATIVE RING TONE: Picture messages with Mugabe cartoons are a huge draw, but the most captivating novelty is an anti-Mugabe ringtone based on a local song, which asks in Shona: "How long will you vote for ZANU-PF?". The ringtone has become a hit, according to Alfred Sibanda, who runs a small electronic services café in Bulawayo. "We get at least 15 people per day who want the ringtone uploaded to their phones," he said. However, this may not always be wise. "Some people have returned to us, requesting that we remove it after clashing with government sympathisers," Sibanda commented. (IRIN, 5 March).

WORLD'S SECOND LARGEST DIASPORA: it should come as no surprise that Zimbabwe has the world's second highest per capita Diaspora, following only Palestine. (Coltart, 3 March).