

ELECTION UPDATE FOUR: 9 – 16 March 2008

This is the fourth 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

SK MOYO ON ELECTION OBSERVERS: "Our list of invitees excludes those countries with preconceived ideas who believe that the only free and fair election is where the opposition wins," he said. (Mail and Guardian, 10 March)

JOHANNESBURG STOCK EXCHANGE ON MORONIC NEIGHBOURS: "The Zimbabwe Stock Exchange would like to work much closer with us," Russell Loubser said at a press conference for the announcement of the JSE's annual results. "We are just extremely apprehensive while you've got that type of government in power because anything is possible ... We are very careful about doing something there while that type of moronic government is in place." (Mail and Guardian, 10 March).

POT CALLING THE KETTLE A STOOGEE... "We know that there are Western embassies behind the Makoni project. It is a false project that will fail and will not work," Tendai Biti, the Tsvangirai led MDC secretary general told a gathering of about 8000 supporters at the party's rally held in White City Stadium. (OhMyNews.com 10 March)

... AND A ZHING ZHONG: "Makoni is a zhing-zhong who is out to confuse the electorate and people must not be fooled," Biti added. (OhMyNews.com, 10 March)

ANGLICAN BISHOP KUNONGA ON THE ANOINTED ONE: 'As the church we see the President with different eyes. To us he is a prophet of God who was sent to deliver the people of Zimbabwe from bondage.' The former bishop, who received a farm from Mugabe's regime, wasted no time in talking about the controversial land reform programme. Referring to Mugabe Kunonga said, 'God raised him to acquire our land and distribute it to Zimbabweans; we call it democracy of the stomach. There is no Government without soil. As the church we are totally against sanctions for they are destroying our country.' (SWRadio, 10 March)

REV OBADIAH MSINDO ON OPPOSITION: "Tsvangirai and Makoni are being sponsored by gays and satanists to effect regime change in this country," said Musindo, who is leader of the Destiny for Afrika Network, a church organisation he founded. "True Zimbabweans will go back to the bush if President Mugabe loses the elections. We will have another chimurenga (war of liberation)." (Zim Online, 13 March)

ODINGA ON MUGABE: Kenyan opposition leader, Raila Odinga, has said Robert Mugabe is a disgrace to the African continent and that, 'time has really come for him to try to move on and let other people govern.' In a recent interview with the Mail and Guardian newspaper Odinga said he had little regard for Mugabe despite the fact the Zanu PF leader was once his hero. 'We parted ways once he began to use a big stick to deal with his political adversaries,' Odinga explained. 'I don't think its right for someone to hold a country hostage for generations. I think it is not right for Africa.' (SWRadio, 13 March)

JONATHON MOYO ON 29 MARCH: "You will witness unprecedented chaos from 7AM to 7PM on March 29 not because of any political mischief by Zanu PF, but purely on technical grounds. The state

is going to be stretched to the limit....We do not have enough human resources to run this election. There are no teachers for example. The teachers who used to be recruited as polling officers are just not there. They have left the country." (New Zimbabwe, 11 March)

I ADMIT YOU ARE HUNGRY: President Robert Mugabe has admitted for the first time that famine exists in his country.' There is hunger in the country and a shortage of food,' he was quoted as saying in the state-controlled weekly Sunday Mail. He was responding at a rally at the weekend in the arid district of Plumtree in western Zimbabwe to appeals from regional governor Angeline Masuku and local ruling party functionaries who, according to the newspaper, had 'pleaded' with Mugabe 'to ensure the speedy distribution of food in the province as people were running out of food.' Observers say the admission is unprecedented as Mugabe has previously dismissed reports of famine as 'Western propaganda.' (Monsters and Critics, 9 March)

DABENGWA ON GUKURAHUNDI: "Those two old men (Mugabe and Nkomo) joined hands and called for a truce and that should be respected. I will not support anyone who calls for Mugabe's prosecution regarding Gukurahundi (the code-name for the military campaign that left an estimated 20 000 ethnic Ndebeles dead)," said Dabengwa. (ZimOnline, 13 March)

ELECTORAL PLAYING FIELD

CHIHURI WILL NOT SALUTE PUPPETS: Zimbabwe's top police officer has joined the army commander and head of prison services in declaring he will not support a change of government in general elections on March 29. Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri said he would not allow "puppets" to rule Zimbabwe - reference to opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and independent candidate, Simba Makoni, who have both been labelled as such by President Robert Mugabe. Chihuri made the comments at Police General Headquarters in Harare on Thursday while seeing off nine police officers who are joining the United Nations peace-keeping mission in Liberia. "Most of us in here are truly owners of the land. This is the sovereignty we should defend at all costs because for us to get at this point others had to lose their lives. At this point our gains should never be reversed," Chihuri said. "This time we are wiser and we are determined, and this must serve as warning to puppets. we will not allow any puppets to take charge. I am happy that Zimbabweans are wise." (New Zimbabwe, 14 March)

VOTING IN NINE SECONDS: fears of administrative electoral chaos and vote rigging heightened this week as the country's urban areas, where the opposition enjoys support, were allocated fewer polling stations than rural areas, perceived ZANU-PF strongholds. So skewed is the distribution of voting stations that in some urban centres, each voter would have to spend a maximum of nine seconds in the polling booth if all registered voters are to be accommodated in the elections to be conducted inside a day. And yet unlike in previous polls, voters would need to spend more time on the March 29 ballot paper in view of the fact that the 18th Constitutional amendments railroaded through Parliament in September last year rolled the Presidential, Senatorial, House of Assembly and local government elections into one. (FinGaz, 13 March).

URBAN NINE SEC VOTE VERSUS RURAL ONE MINUTE VOTE: In one city district, it came down to nine seconds if all 4,600 registered voters showed up. In contrast, most rural polling stations would handle only about 600 voters each, the network said. The MDC wants at least 12 polling stations in each ward. In areas like Chitungwiza, some wards have just two polling stations. The party also wants to be informed and be present throughout the postal voting process by members of the armed forces, lawyers said. (New Zimbabwe, 13 March)

MORE POLLING STATIONS: the opposition MDC on Wednesday filed an urgent court application to compel the country's electoral body to increase the number of polling stations, a lawyer confirmed. "We are, among other issues, seeking an increase in the number of polling stations and the stationing of opposition members in the National Command Centre," a lawyer for the MDC at Harare law firm

Coghlan & Welsh, said. The MDC moved after an independent election monitoring group warned that thousands of voters in Zimbabwe's cities - strongholds of the opposition - may not have time to cast ballots in the March 29 elections because too few polling stations have been provided. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) said it feared a repeat of the 2002 presidential elections when tens of thousands of voters were turned away across the country after polls closed. A list of polling stations released by the Electoral Commission, whose members are appointed by President Robert Mugabe, showed "a significant discrepancy" that favoured the ruling party in its rural strongholds, the network said. (New Zimbabwe, 13 March)

WHO IS PRINTING THE BALLOTS? The Morgan Tsvangirai faction of the MDC has taken court action to challenge the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) on a range of provisions they believe will give President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party, destabilised by an internal rebellion, an advantage. The main opposition party has gone to court to compel the Commission to disclose the company that is printing the ballot papers, the number of ballot papers printed, as well as allow for an inspection and audit of all the printed ballots. (FinGaz, 13 March)

BEYOND OUR JURISDICTION: Zimbabwe's Electoral Court on Thursday turned down an opposition application seeking an order compelling election authorities to disclose information pertaining to ballot papers printed for month-end polls, saying it did not have jurisdiction over the matter. The opposition party - that according to sources believes that more ballots were printed to allow for easier manipulation of the vote - also wanted the court to order ZEC to disclose the identity of the firm contracted to print ballot papers and that the commission allows inspection and auditing of ballot papers. The MDC also wanted ZEC ordered to increase the number of polling stations in its stronghold urban areas. Analysts say fewer polling booths allocated in cities and towns could turn away voters. "The electoral court said it had no jurisdiction to hear the matter so we are going to launch the case with the High Court very soon," said a lawyer with Coghlan Welsh and Guest a law firm that is acting for the opposition party. MDC secretary general Tendai Biti said the court's refusal to deal with the matter that clearly fell under its ambit was a "reflection of the failure of the whole electoral system." "Its strange that a court set up to solve electoral disputes is refusing to do so," Biti said. "It's a reflection of the failure of the whole electoral system. We will make a fresh court application soon." (Zim Online, 13 March)

HOW MANY VOTES AT WHAT SPEED? The MDC also wants the court to compel ZEC to prove and put remedies in place that ensure that the voting process will not be slowed down as happened in the chaotic 2002 presidential elections, controversially won by the veteran Zimbabwean leader, who will be seeking a sixth-term on March 29. President Mugabe is facing a strong challenge from Tsvangirai and former finance minister Simba Makoni, who broke ranks with ZANU-PF on February 5. "There has to be a maximum number of minutes for a voter to be attended to and ZEC must not be overwhelmed by a high turn-out," said Tendai Biti, in a letter instructing his party's lawyers on the court action. "ZEC must disclose the minimum number of votes to be roughly cast at a given time and the time taken by each voter. Hence the need for ZEC to increase the number of polling stations in every ward and to this effect ZEC must be compelled to have at least 12 polling stations per ward. (FinGaz, 13 March)

NOT ENOUGH POLLING STATIONS IN URBAN CENTRES ...the average voter in Harare province will need to be processed in 22 seconds and some cases in as little as nine seconds (Chitungwiza Ward 2 - 9 281 registered voters and 2 polling stations). The average number of voters should be consistent by both constituency and ward." ZESN encouraged ZEC to increase the number of polling stations in Bulawayo and Harare provinces as well as other urban centres so that all Zimbabweans have a reasonable opportunity to vote on 29 March. In Gweru and Mutare, the average number of registered voters per polling station is also high at 1 234.8 and 1 277.3 respectively. (FinGaz, 13 March)

VOTERS DON'T KNOW WHERE TO VOTE: Moyo said he feared many voters could fail to cast their ballots because of the redrawing of constituency boundaries and new voting procedures. He added: "Very few people know that these elections will be ward-based. That knowledge is hardly known by the electorate. For example my constituency Tsholotsho was divided into two and new wards were created. People out there don't know where they will vote from." (New Zimbabwe, 11 March)

RUN OFF OR NO RUN OFF- ZEC MUST CLARIFY: Adding pressure on the ZEC this week was the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), which wrote seeking clarification on what it sees as inconsistencies in the Electoral Act regarding circumstances surrounding a Presidential run-off. The lawyers see inconsistency between sections 110 (3) of the Electoral Act and 3 (1) of the second schedule to the Electoral Act. Section 110(3) of the Electoral Act says where two or more candidates for President are nominated, and after no candidate receives a clear majority of the total number of valid votes cast, a second round shall be held within twenty-one days. However, section 3(1) of the schedule to the Electoral Act says that the candidate with the highest number of votes - and not necessarily a majority of the votes cast - should be declared the winner. "Clearly, this inconsistency has the potential to cause serious problems in the event of none of the Presidential candidates getting a majority of the votes cast. As such, we feel it necessary to bring it to your attention and ask what your view and position in respect of this inconsistency is. How do you hope to be able to handle it? It is trite that the electoral system should be certain and its integrity should be unimpeachable. As such, the certainty, which this inconsistency puts in the system is unacceptable," it added. ZLHR warned that failure to obtain clarity on the legislation would force it to take legal action against ZEC. (FinGaz, 13 March)

RUSE TO KEEP ELECTORAL ROLL UNUSABLE: Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai has resorted to Harare's High Court to try to get an electronic version of the voters' roll for the March 29 presidential and parliamentary elections so he can check that all voters are legitimate. In papers submitted to the court on Friday, Tsvangirai's lawyer Bryant Elliott said the version handed to Tsvangirai's elections director, Ian Makone, consisted of photographs of the voters roll in a format that cannot be easily read or used. "The compact discs provided are materially deficient in various respects. Each of the pages of the voters' rolls has been printed and then photocopied, with the electronic photograph copied on to a compact disc. This copying has been done using a type of software called JPEG image format or TIFF image format. To attempt to print the entire voters' roll using this method is an insurmountable task involving far more manpower than is available, and also involving numerous printing machines working continuously. Inevitably, there will be breakdowns of the machines and this is, in fact, what has happened." (Sunday Times, 9 March).

A FEW MINUTES' WORK: Elliott said that during court applications over the last disputed presidential polls in 2002, the state was able to produce the voters roll on five compact discs in a matter of minutes. Every constituency has been changed for the March 29 elections, as the number of contested parliamentary seats has increased from 120 to 210. In addition, four elections are being held simultaneously for the first time, including local government elections. The election laws state that people will only be allowed to vote at the polling station situated in the ward to which they have been allocated. With the huge redrafting of constituencies and wards, many people still have no idea what ward they are in, said Makone. He has demanded that the electronic version be made available to him within 24 hours of the application being heard. He has also demanded that the roll be controlled by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, and not left with Registrar-general Tobaiwa Mudede, who is seen as fanatically loyal to Robert Mugabe. This rule is also contained in the amendment to the Electoral Act. (Sunday Times, 9 March).

RULES FROM ZEC: ZEC last week published new regulations on the media's coverage of elections. The regulations say public broadcasters have an obligation to schedule interview programmes for all candidates as well as party presentations of manifestos. The regulations require election programmes to be transmitted during prime time, and stipulate that four hours should be set aside for political

advertisements. The advertisements must be allocated equitably and at discounted rates of 70 percent of current tariffs for commercial advertising. The regulations say presenters or television reporters must not express personal views, wear party regalia or colours, or accept gifts or favours from political players. In a statutory instrument, Electoral Amendment Regulations No 3, ZEC has revised the list of persons who must be present in a polling station when ballot boxes are opened and votes counted. ZEC says only presiding officers, the election agent of each candidate and accredited observers would be allowed. . (FinGaz, 13 March)

GENERATORS FOR ZEC of the disruptions power outages could cause during voting, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) is seeking trillions of dollars to buy generators to be used to power polling stations on election day. ZEC confirmed it was seeking funding for generators, but could not quantify the amount or number of units required. "ZEC is mobilising all the resources necessary, including generators," a Commission official, Utoile Silagwana said. Although he gave no details, sources said ZEC needs \$84 trillion for the generators to prevent disruption to voting and vote counting. (FinGaz, 13 March)

WESTERN MALICE - AGAIN: a "virulent and vicious" smear campaign is being waged against Zimbabwe over the list of observers invited to witness the country's elections on March 29, the country's ambassador to South Africa, Simon Moyo, said on Monday. The campaign is being driven by the West and certain sections of the South African media, he said in a statement. "Much of the recent criticism is certainly not out of ignorance of the facts, but out of sheer malice," Moyo said. The country's detractors are "trumpeting British falsehoods" about the election process. "It is therefore disheartening, but not surprising, that certain sections of the media, unfortunately including the South African Broadcasting Corporation, have chosen to ignore the facts ... on the ground. "We are now [aware] that whatever good and positive happens in Zimbabwe can never pass as newsworthy as long as such stories do not fit into the well-known and publicly acknowledged broad agenda of 'regime change'," Moyo said. (Mail and Guardian, 10 March).

INVITED AND ARRIVED: Southern African Development Community (SADC) executive secretary Tomaz Salomao is expected in Harare today to launch the regional bloc's observer mission to Zimbabwe's month end elections. The head of SADC election observer mission from Angola, which chairs the regional Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), is also expected in Harare. "We are here at the invitation of Zimbabwe but we will make our presence official during the launch to be held at 1600 hours at Rainbow Towers (a Harare hotel)," OPDS director Tanki Mothae who is already in the country facilitating accreditation of observers.

INVITED: Among other African organisations and institutions, Zimbabwe has accredited organisations such as the Pan African Parliament, the African Union Commission and the continent's five regional economic structures. The international institutions invited included the Non-Aligned Movement, the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific group of states, the Caribbean Community, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Community of Portuguese Speaking (Lusophone) countries and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. (Business Day, 11 March)

NOT INVITED SO FAR: "Regarding your question whether the SADC Parliamentary Forum has been invited to observe the harmonised elections in Zimbabwe, please be advised that we have not yet received an invitation," said Forum secretary general Kasuka Mutukwa. (Zim Online, 11 March)

FREE AND FAIR – WE HOPE: At a press conference in Harare Wednesday, SADC executive secretary Tomaz Salomao, said he was hopeful that the poll would be free and fair. "Zimbabwe has built in us, SADC citizens, a habit of peaceful Zimbabwe, tolerant Zimbabwe, and a welcoming Zimbabwe," Salomao said. " As we come and observe elections in Zimbabwe, we do so with confidence that the tradition of peace encapsulated in the unquestionable political maturity and tolerance shall once again, guide Zimbabweans as they go to the polls." (New Zimbabwe, 13 March)

DONE ACCORDING TO THE LAW? SADC's electoral observer mission is not in Zimbabwe to manage the electoral process, but to observe it objectively. This was the message from the head of the regional bloc's observer mission - Angolan Foreign Minister Joao Miranda - during the launch of the mission in Harare yesterday. Miranda told diplomats, reporters and the first 50-member team that the SADC electoral observer mission would be guided by the new laws agreed upon by the two main political parties and by the principles and guidelines of the regional bloc. "We are here to witness whether these elections are transparent and conform to the laws governing electoral processes and SADC guidelines," he said. Miranda stressed that if the parliamentary, council and presidential elections - to be held on March 29 - conform to these laws and principles, then everyone had to accept the outcome. "We must ensure that elections are based on a political consensus in terms of the electoral laws. All political parties contributed to these laws. they signed these laws. (Therefore) we expect them to accept these results." (Star, 13 March)

EU - NOT LIKELY TO BE FREE AND FAIR: The European Union raised concerns on Monday about the fairness of elections this month in Zimbabwe, noting that European observers had not been invited to monitor the vote. "The (EU) Council remains very concerned about the humanitarian, political and economic situation in Zimbabwe and conditions on the ground," it said in a statement agreed by foreign ministers at a meeting in Brussels. "(It) may endanger the holding of free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections," the statement said, urging veteran President Robert Mugabe to ensure the elections respect international standards. (Reuters, 10 March)

USA- NOT FREE AND FAIR SO FAR: The U.S. shares the concerns of many Zimbabweans and international observers about the pre-election environment," Paul Englestad, spokesman for the U.S. embassy in Harare, said in a statement. He cited "reports of inadequate election preparations, evidence of irregularities associated with registration and inspection of voters' rolls and concerns that the violence and human rights abuses of the past year will affect the campaign and election day voting". Given such concerns, it was vital that the international community field strong teams of election observers, said Englestad. "Unbiased observation of the elections is essential to ensuring that the voice of the Zimbabwean is heard." Last week, Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi announced that European Union member states and the United States have been excluded from a list of observers that would be invited to monitor joint parliamentary and presidential polls set for March 29. He said only diplomats permanently resident in Zimbabwe would be allowed to observe the elections. (nasdaq, 10 March).

STILL MISSING: an MDC election candidate in Rushinga has been missing since last month after he filed nomination papers to stand on the party's ticket in this month end's election. Edison Muwengwa, a council candidate for the Morgan Tsvangirai-led MDC, was last seen on February 15 when he went to file his nomination papers at Rushinga council offices where the nomination court was sitting. The MDC's director of information, Luke Tamborinyoka, told ZimOnline at the weekend that ruling ZANU PF party supporters in Rushinga had issued several death threats against Muwengwa for daring to stand for the opposition in the council elections. Rushinga, which lies on Zimbabwe's northern border with Mozambique, is a stronghold of President Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF party and has been declared a "no-go" area for the MDC by the ruling party. "Efforts by the Muwengwa family and the MDC leadership in the (Mashonaland Central) province to locate him have been in vain since last month. This has been worsened by the failure by the police to take action in following on the leads that have been provided by the family as well as the party." Three days before the nomination process last month, ZANU PF supporters, led by one Shingi Runhare, stormed Muwengwa's home and threatened his family over his decision to stand for the MDC. The ZANU PF supporters then came back at night and ransacked Muwengwa's house destroying property estimated to run into several millions of Zimbabwe dollars. (ZimOnline, 10 March)

JOINING THE ENEMY: a Zimbabwe traditional leader in Chipinge district could be stripped of his post for standing in month-end elections on an opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

party ticket, ZimOnline has learnt. Mukayi Joseph Rimbi, a sub-chief under Chief Musikavanhu, stunned the ruling ZANU PF party in Manicaland province when he filed his nomination papers to represent the Morgan Tsvangirai-led MDC in elections on 29 March. Sources within ZANU PF told ZimOnline that the party leadership in the province was so incensed with Rimbi's decision to stand in the polls and had sounded out President Robert Mugabe on the decision to strip him of his post. The sources said Manicaland governor, Tinaye Chigudu, told Mugabe at an election campaign rally at Checheche rural business centre last Tuesday that they could not just fold their hands and watch as a traditional leader "joined the enemy." (Zim Online, 11 March).

VIOLENCE AND ARRESTS: more than 100 members of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change were arrested or beaten up around the country this weekend in politically motivated incidents, MDC sources said Monday. In the province of Mashonaland Central alone, sources in the MDC grouping headed by Morgan Tsvangirai said some 100 activists including the formation's candidate for Bindura North, Peter Mabika, were arrested on their way to a rally. All were released except 13 who were expected to be arraigned soon. In Matabeleland South Province, suspected Central Intelligence Organization agents and youth militia of the ruling ZANU-PF party smashed the automobile of Insiza South parliamentary candidate Siyabonga Ncube late last week, MDC sources said. In Bulawayo, ZANU-PF supporters made a "citizens arrest" of MDC activist Duduzile Sibanda, saying she had defaced a poster of President Mugabe, seeking another term in the March 29 elections. She was released Monday after a weekend in jail. In a similar incident, the state-controlled Herald newspaper said Tichaona Sande of Epworth, a Harare high-density suburb, had been sentenced to a month in jail for tearing down a poster of President Mugabe. (VOA, 10 March)

MORE VIOLENCE: violence against officials and members of the opposition has intensified, despite the arrival of a regional observer team in Harare on Wednesday. At least 5 supporters of the Tsvangirai MDC were hospitalised on Wednesday after they were attacked by a gang of youths known to be ZANU-PF members in Mbare high-density suburb of Harare. One of the victims, Simba Maringwa, is reported to be in intensive care battling for his life. MDC spokesperson Nelson Chamisa said a group of about 200 ZANU-PF supporters, affiliated with the infamous Mbare gang called Chipangano, ambushed 20 MDC supporters as they were campaigning for MDC candidate Piniel Denga in Mbare. Tendai Savanhu, the ZANU-PF candidate for Mbare, has been implicated in this incident. Chamisa said he was seen driving around Mbare communicating with members of Chipangano on his mobile phone. Several MDC members were wounded seriously and were taken to the Avenues Clinic in Harare. (SWRadio, 13 March)

WOZA ARRESTS AND BEATINGS: Women Of Zimbabwe Arise report that 3 members were briefly detained and 50 had to receive medical attention after they were brutally assaulted by riot police during a march to commemorate International Women's Day on Saturday. They say about 1,000 members, including MOZA, took part in the event on the streets of Bulawayo. Eva Tanyanyiwa from Pumula, was beaten to the ground by two police officers. They dragged and pulled her towards a police vehicle where she fainted. Williams went to assist her, pleading with the police to release her since she was seriously injured. This led to her arrest. Coordinator Magodonga Mahlangu joined them in solidarity and was detained as well. The 3 were taken to Bulawayo Central Police Station where their details were recorded. A statement from WOZA said: "Eva has serious bruising on her upper arm and lower body. Another woman got stitches to her neck after she was pushed by a police officer into a stationery vehicle. Another was pushed into a pole by a police officer, receiving a deep cut across her forehead. Other injuries included a woman who developed a haematoma just above her kidneys as a result of being beaten and many others with deep tissue bruising from being beaten with baton sticks." (SWRadio, 10 March).

CANDIDATES ASSAULTED: Zimbabwean parliamentary candidate Rainos Tivatye of the United People's Party, who seeks the house seat for Zezegeza East, Harare Metropolitan Province, said he was assaulted on Tuesday by youth militants of the ruling ZANU-PF party. Now receiving medical care, Tivatye told reporter Carole Gombakomba of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that police briefly

detained the youths but released them without charges. In another incident of alleged political violence, parliamentary candidate Florence Machinga of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change grouping of Morgan Tsvangirai, running for the Uzumba, Mashonaland East, seat, said that known ZANU-PF supporters kidnapped and detained her for almost four hours. Machinga was returning from a meeting with Zimbabwe Electoral Commission officials at Mutawatawa Growth Point when a truck full of ruling party candidates pulled over and dragged her into the truck which then sped off. Machinga told reporter Jonga Kandemiiri of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that she was harassed and verbally abused for hours before her abductors handed her over to police, accusing her of tearing down ZANU-PF posters. But police did not charge her. (VOA, 13 March).

DISPLAY MUGABE'S POSTER – OR ELSE: Suspected ruling ZANU PF party youths are forcing public commuter bus operators to stick portraits of President Robert Mugabe on their vehicles, threatening unspecified but severe punishment to those who refuse to comply, ZimOnline has learnt. On Tuesday, minibuses plying routes between Harare's city centre and the suburban areas were suddenly seen driving around displaying colorful campaign posters emblazoned with the portrait of a stone-faced Mugabe waving his militant trademark fist. Harare is a stronghold of the opposition led by Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Initially it had appeared the commuter buses, sporting the presidential portraits, were merely isolated and restricted to a few eastern middle class suburban routes. But investigations by ZimOnline revealed on Wednesday the A3-size Mugabe posters were in fact appearing plastered on minibuses on nearly all city routes including the densely populated southern working class areas, where the veteran leader is loathed the most. (Zim Online, 13 March)

NO LEAVE FOR POLICE: Zimbabwe police chief Augustine Chihuri has cancelled leave for officers and recalled those already on vacation to beef up numbers, two weeks after telling the opposition they would be shot if they staged Kenyan-style violence after month-end elections. Chihuri - a supporter of President Robert Mugabe and whose officers are accused of human rights violations - has directed that police could go on vacation only after the March 29 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. (ZimOnline, 10 March).

THE MEDIA

FLAGRANTLY BIASED TELLY: Zimbabwe's only television station - which is government-controlled - gave the ruling party campaign more than 20 times the coverage the opposition got last month, independent media monitors said Thursday, accusing state controlled media of "flagrant violations" of laws meant to ensure March 29 general elections are free and fair. The Zimbabwe Media Monitoring Project group said that in February state television aired 202 minutes on the ruling ZANU PF party's election preparations compared to nine minutes on the opposition Movement for Democratic Change and 26 minutes on former ruling party loyalist and finance minister Simba Makoni's presidential challenge and his expulsion from the ruling party. (AP, 13 March)

WHY ISNT ZEC COMMENTING ON MEDIA BIAS? "For the month of February only, between the 5th February to the 29th February, [Zimbabwe TV] accorded a total of 3 hours 22 mins to the ruling party only," said Chikomo. "This is in addition to the 4 hours the ruling party got [for] the launch of their manifesto, which time was [given to nobody else]." "ZBC [even suspended] all programming to ensure they ran the ZANU-PF manifesto live, without any interruption. We believe there is no better indication of the bias, and inequality and unfairness of the reporting of elections than what we have seen already," he added. In addition, the project issued a stern rebuke to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission which it says has failed to fulfill its mandate to ensure that the public broadcaster is balanced and fair, in both content and time, toward all political parties and candidates. The chairman of the commission, Judge George Chiweshe, told VOA that the commission has set up its own monitoring body and began its work just this week. "So they started working in earnest this week really and we have not got a report from them, because it is only four days into the week. But what they will be doing is ensuring that the various requirements they are required to do respect of what

part of the election activities and so on [that they cover]; these are being adhered to," he said. (VOA, 13 March)

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

MDC LOSE THIRD MP CANDIDATE IN TWO WEEKS: The MDC MP for Redcliff in the Midlands province, Abedenico Malinga, has died. The legislator from the Mutambara faction died Thursday after he was involved in a car crash along the Gweru to Kwekwe highway. Malinga becomes the third parliamentary candidate and the second sitting MP from the faction to die in the space of three weeks. The Mutambara MDC first lost its candidate for Gwanda, Glory Makwatu a week after the nomination court, then a few days later their MP for Mpopoma, Milton Gwetu, died of a suspected heart failure. Professor Welshman Ncube said they were in 'total shock' over Malinga's untimely death. 'This is very, very painful. It's a sad experience and I'm completely at a loss of words to describe this tragic moment. We are all numb with shock,' Ncube said. Several other people, including the MDC MP for Mkoba in Gweru, Amos Chibaya, were in the same vehicle with Malinga when it veered off the road and hit a tree just as they were approaching KweKwe. Chibaya is believed to have sustained serious head injuries. He was admitted to a hospital in KweKwe. According to police Malinga, who was driving, tried to avoid a head-on collision and seemed to have lost control as the vehicle veered off the road and smashed into a tree. The MP survived the initial impact. He was rushed to hospital with multiple injuries but died an hour after being admitted. Ncube said Malinga's death has traumatised so many of their members that they still cannot believe he has died. 'The man was a hardworking, charming, disciplined and principled MP. As with the other two deaths we expect the Redcliff election to be postponed to a later date,' Ncube said. (SWRadio, 13 March)

A MATTER OF PERSONAL CHARISMA: the numbers game will be important in the battle for momentum over the next two weeks; each large crowd is designed to make a statement and prod the fence sitters. However, it is unclear just how much of these crowds will turn into votes. And in this fight over numbers, real issues are being ignored, giving way to arguments over which of the three personalities - three, because Langton Towungana says rallies are against his religion - has more personal charisma than the other. Is it President Mugabe and his British-bashing fist of fury, Tsvangirai and his drive to remain the "legitimate opposition" leader - at least according to Lovemore Madhuku last week - or Makoni and his centrist "let's-all-hug-each-other-and-sing-Kumbaya" campaign? (FinGaz, 13 March)

HOPELESS, BUT NOT MEANINGLESS: The candidacies of Messrs. Tsvangirai and Makoni might be hopeless, but they are not meaningless. A fraudulent election will further undermine Mr. Mugabe's legitimacy. It will energize the opposition's local structures and allow it some representation in Zimbabwe's parliament. Importantly, it will open the possibility of another five-year term for Zimbabwe's octogenarian leader and further economic decline. That prospect may force the more enlightened parliamentarians from the ZANU-PF, many of whom are quietly hoping for Mr. Makoni's victory, to jump ship and join the opposition. In the event of popular protests, the attitude of the army and the police will be crucial. Mr. Mugabe has spared no expense to buy the loyalties of the officer class, but the rank-and-file is poor, hungry and disillusioned. (Wall Street Journal, 14 March)

REDUNDANT BLUNDERERS: Under their current leadership, both Zanu PF and the MDC have become politically redundant organisations offering voters very little to choose between them. President Robert Mugabe has become a liability to the country, while the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai has proved to be a weak, indecisive leader who cannot be trusted with the delicate task of leading a nation. He has been making blunderous political decisions and serious errors of judgement since 2000. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

UNPREPARED: Makoni's success depends on the effectiveness of his campaign in a race that has already started to be dirty, vicious and tight. Regrettably, his campaign so far seems incapable of

rising to the occasion. His inexperienced team has underestimated the hurdles to be cleared in this race and clearly did not adequately prepare for the difficulty of running against a Mugabe team prepared to retain, and even mummify, him in office at all costs. All the obstacles that Makoni's team has encountered, such as transport and fuel procurement problems, printing of campaign material and even the difficulty in opening a bank account, could have been anticipated by a better organised outfit. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

35% UNDECIDED OR NOT SAYING WHO: A survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute shows as of this week Mugabe was sitting at 20,3% of the vote, Makoni 8,6%, and Tsvangirai at 28,3%. However, the Institute says a lot of votes are still up for grabs as a number of voters refused to disclose their choices. At least 23,5% said their vote was their secret, 7,5% had nothing to say, 5,4% will not vote, 4,4% said "I don't know", 1,9% were categorised as "other", and 1% will vote for Langton Towungana. The survey shows the levels of support for each of the candidates is likely to change as campaigns unfold towards voting day. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

VOTE ZANU PF FOR TRACTORS: Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has handed out millions of US dollars worth of imported brand new agricultural equipment, vehicles, generators and cattle in what critics said was a massive vote-buying exercise ahead of elections this month. On Saturday, according to the ruling party-run Sunday Mail, Mugabe presided over the distribution of 300 40-seater buses, 500 tractors, 20 combine harvesters and a range of other modern farming machinery, as well as 50,000 ox-drawn ploughs and thousands of other peasant farming implements, 5,000 electricity generators, 3,000 mills for grinding maize, 680 motorcycles and 100,000 litres of diesel. 'This has more to do with vote buying than with agricultural production,' economist John Robertson said. Local press watchdog the Media Monitoring Project Sunday referred to 'the now endemic ruling party donations' meant to influence voters into supporting Mugabe. (Monsters and Critics, 9 March)

EXPENSIVE PROTEST: A man has been jailed for a month for destroying an election poster of President Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's Herald newspaper reports. The report says Tichaona Sande tore up a poster of President Mugabe and threw the pieces on the floor after an argument at a Harare shop. He was arrested after witnesses reported him to the police. The magistrate said his behaviour could have provoked violence and jailed him until after the 29 March election. Mr Sande was found guilty of breaching a section of the electoral law which prohibits destroying or defacing campaign materials. (BBC, 10 March).

VOTE ZANU PF FOR BUSES AND COWS: The government also bought 304 buses under the District Transportation System Scheme with 35 buses being allocated to each province, while major hospitals and referral centres got 24 buses. Beneficiaries will also get 3 000 heifers with the two Matabeleland provinces - a cattle ranching region - getting 500 heifers each, while the remaining six geographical provinces got 350 heifers each. Mugabe said his government intended to focus on dams and irrigation facilities, but said he could only do this if the electorate rallied around him. His speech had marked references to Zanu PF's electoral campaign. "That must be an area of emphasis and I promise you, we will emphasise. But we must win the elections first and not lightly, but win them resoundingly so that the British can feel the heat," he said. Mugabe also said the farm mechanisation programme was "announcing with an irreversible finality that nyika yadzoka (the land is back)." (Zim Independent, 14 March)

VOTE ZANU OR STARVE: Both factions of the divided main opposition MDC party said politicization of food had become rampant in rural areas where in some cases entire communities rely on grain from the state-run Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Some villagers who spoke to ZimOnline said the GMB - the only firm permitted to trade in maize and wheat - had since campaigning for the March 29 elections started in earnest about three weeks ago distributed food through traditional leaders known for supporting Mugabe and his ruling ZANU PF party. "We have received reports from Manicaland province and in most rural areas that ZANU PF is using grain from the GMB as a campaign tool," said Nelson Chamisa, spokesman of the main grouping of the MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai. "ZANU PF should not use food to punish those who are seen to be in opposition and

rewarding those sympathetic to the ruling party. We say this is wrong," he added. ZANU PF spokesman Nathan Shamuyarira was not immediately available for comment on the matter. The ruling party has in the past denied using food to punish opposition supporters, insisting food is distributed to all hungry people regardless of political affiliation. Gabriel Chaibva, spokesman of the Arthur Mutambara-led MDC faction, described politicisation of food as an old habit that ZANU PF finds hard to drop. "Year after year and election after election, ZANU PF abuses food to punish its opponents and we are saying there is a need to develop counter strategies to deal with that," he said. (Zim Online, 11 March)

VOTE ZANU OR PAY MORE: Villagers in the southern Lupane rural district, one of the worst hit by hunger, said the GMB was selling cheaper-priced maize through traditional chiefs and village headmen who sold it to ZANU PF supporters. "The food is delivered almost daily but is sold by headmen and chiefs who give it to ZANU PF supporters and we are never given a chance to buy as they always have a list of known ZANU PF supporters," said one villager who preferred not to be named. The villager said the ZANU PF supporters re-sell maize at inflated prices. Other villagers said they had slept outside GMB offices in Lupane for days hoping to get maize but to no avail. (Zim Online, 11 March)

STILL WAITING FOR THAT ZAMBIAN MAIZE: "We paid US\$28 million for the importation of 150 000 tonnes of additional maize from Zambia. Only 36 000 tonnes were delivered. We paid US\$3 million for additional maize being delivered from South Africa. Last month we paid US\$15 million to South Africa," said Gono during the handover ceremony for farm equipment last week. Reliable sources said Zambia had delayed in delivering the maize because of a misunderstanding with the GMB on the labour needed to load an estimated 200 trucks carrying the maize to Zimbabwe. "Zambia insisted that Zimbabwe raise the foreign currency to pay for the labour that would load the trucks. GMB has been finding it difficult to raise the foreign currency and Zambia has been doing it at its own pace," said one RBZ source. GMB reportedly attempted to send some of its workers to Zambia to load the maize but they were turned back as they did not have the necessary travel documents. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

VOTE GOCHE FOR SUGAR: Consumers in Bindura, Zimbabwe, who spent Wednesday evening standing in line to buy sugar at the local TM supermarket went home empty-handed after Labor Minister Nicholas Goche swept in and purchased most of the consignment, apparently to sell to supporters of his ruling ZANU-PF party, sources in Bindura charged. Goche, seeking re-election to parliament for the Shamva North constituency, was said to have taken away some 200 two-kilogram packages of sugar as customers who had stood in line for the scarce commodity shouted disapproval. A package goes for Z\$7.5 million (US\$0.25) in the store, but fetches Z\$17million on the black market. (VOA, 13 March)

CLEAN UP TIME: Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has warned that his government will re-possess land from multiple farm owners after the joint March 29 elections in a bid to right the chaos that hit the farming sector after the land reform programme. "Those who have multiple farms, those quarrelling over a farm, we will address that after the elections as well as giving out leases to regularize what we have given out. We will do some cleaning up," Mugabe told a gathering of cheering supporters at a campaign rally in Inyathi yesterday. (OhMYnews, 13 March)

BULLET IN THE HEAD: Takavafina Zhou, president of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe, was arrested and tortured when he took part in a "Save our Education" protest in Harare last month. Labelling Mugabe a "crocodile liberator" and a "grasping kleptocrat", he said: "We were promised paradise in 1980. What we have managed to get is a bullet in the head and a diet of starvation." Zhou accused the regime of operating a policy of "systematic torture" against teachers for about eight years. As a result, the number of teachers has shrunk from 150 000 to 70 000. "Just last year, we lost 25 000 teachers and this year we have lost 8 000," he said. "Of those that remain,

they are 100% mentally resigned, although they physically remain in the classroom. That is a dangerous situation for any profession." (Mail and Guardian, 13 March)

OLD YOUTH ON THE ATTACK: the ZANU (PF) Commander-in-Chief is now 84 years old, his youngest foot soldiers (war veterans) are now 55 years old. What kind of insurgency are these generals proposing should ZANU (PF) and Mugabe lose the elections? Who are they going to fight? ZDF generals, their ZNA and AFZ subordinates now present a sufficient threat to the outcome of the forthcoming presidential elections. Their collective inflammatory statements are an act of self preservation designed to outflank the forces of democratic change. We must jointly counter attack with our votes. (zimbabwejournalists.com, 13 March)

MUJURU SUPPORTS MUGABE: Retired General Solomon Mujuru has finally spoken. According to President Robert Mugabe, the witty Mujuru visited him Monday and disowned Simba Makoni, the former government minister and Zanu PF politburo member, now running for president against Mugabe and MDC's founding President, Morgan Tsvangirai "He wanted to make it clear to me that he did not support Makoni at all. He said if he supported Makoni, imagine what the position of 'my wife', who is Mai Mujuru, would be? It would be untenable, so he said no. He said Makoni had an idea to form a new party, and he said: 'If you form a new party you would be dividing the party, you would be dividing Zanu-PF.' That's what he told me." (zimbabwejournalists.com, 13 March)

MUJURU NOT WITH MAKONI: This week, President Mugabe met retired army general Solomon Mujuru to discuss what he believes to be rebellion within the ruling party by figures secretly backing Makoni. "The President wanted to verify reports that more people would be joining Makoni. He said he did not want to be ambushed," a source said. Muuru is said to have told the President that he was not aware of any such plot. (FinGaz, 13 March)

MUJURU SUPPORTS MAKONI: Simba Makoni's presidential bid was the brainchild of former liberation war commanders and army generals who since March last year have been plotting leadership renewal in Zanu PF. Former members of the general staff during the war of Independence met twice in Harare last March and agreed to approach President Mugabe and tell him to quit politics at the end of his current term. Among the commanders, reportedly drawn from both Zanla and Zipra forces, were former army generals Solomon Mujuru and Vitalis Zvinavashe, Youth minister Ambrose Mutinhiri, suspended Attorney General Sobusa Gula-Ndebele, and ex-Home Affairs minister Dumiso Dabengwa. Makoni is also working openly with retired Major Kudzai Mbudzi and Colonel Moses Dendere. Apart from the commanders, sources said, Vice-Presidents Joice Mujuru and Joseph Msika and party chairman John Nkomo were in Makoni's camp despite their shrill denials and exhibitions of allegiance to Mugabe. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

MUJURU – SUPPORTING MAKONI: The sources said contrary to Mugabe's claims on Wednesday that Mujuru had distanced himself from Makoni, the former lawmaker for Chikomba was the chief architect of the project to oust the 84-year-old leader. Our sources insisted yesterday that Mujuru and other army generals were solidly behind Makoni and would soon come out in public backing the challenger. Despite Mugabe's claims Mujuru is yet to comment publicly on Makoni's candidacy. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

MUJURU- MAKONI'S STRATEGIST: Mujuru, the sources said, using his strong military and intelligence connections, was instrumental in coming up with Makoni's military campaign strategy. Under the strategy, there would be well-timed abandonment of Mugabe by Zanu PF bigwigs backing Makoni, roping in state security agents, especially army officers known as the "Boys on Leave" currently deployed in constituencies and wards throughout the country to mobilise support for Zanu PF. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

CIO BOSS SUPPORTS MAKONI? The head of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) Happyton Bonyongwe is said to be embroiled in bitter infighting with his deputy Maynard Muzariri,

over alleged support for Simba Makoni. A report by the ZimOnline news website says Bonyongwe supports Makoni's rebellion from Zanu PF, while Muzariri remains loyal to Mugabe. The friction has created a power struggle that has paralysed the CIO, with both chiefs spying on each other instead of carrying out their duties. It's alleged that in January CIO officials based in Harare submitted a report linking Bonyongwe and retired army general Solomon Mujuru to Makoni's project, but that State Security Minister Didymus Mutasa who received it withheld it from Mugabe. (SWRadio, 13 March)

PANIC MODE FOR MUGABE: Robert Mugabe is in panic mode due to the turmoil in his ruling Zanu PF and a surging tide of support for his main rivals ahead of the critical elections in two weeks' time, it became evident this week. Informed sources said Mugabe is panicking because of the growing fear that more senior members of his divided party would resign at a critical time. Furthermore, his campaign team is disjointed and incoherent, unrest is worsening among public servants, including soldiers and police, a groundswell of discontent is rising among villagers, and divisions rocking state security agencies are widening. Barely-veiled threats of a coup by army commanders if Mugabe's rivals win also reveal the depth of anxiety in the corridors of power, inside sources say. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

NO-ONE TO TRUST: Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe now trusts no-one and is sidelining his top army and intelligence officers whom he suspects of involvement in Simba Makoni's bid to oust him in the presidential election later this month, say senior ZANU-PF sources. The sources say that Mugabe is relying on junior officers or brigadiers to report to him instead of to army chiefs. Director-general of the Central Intelligence Organisation, CIO, Happyton Bonyongwe, and his deputies have not been spared, either. Their junior intelligence officers are now said to be reporting directly to Mugabe. Bonyongwe might face the axe because Mugabe is no longer sure where his allegiance lies, given his close links to former army commander General Solomon Mujuru, believed to be the chief architect of the Makoni project, say the sources. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

I CAN'T BELIEVE THEM: Sources said Mugabe was worried because he knew that all those denying involvement and attacking Makoni and Dabengwa in public were either involved or were sympathisers. These include co-Vice-Presidents Joseph Msika and Joice Mujuru. Msika said the Zanu PF presidium was seeking a meeting with Makoni and Dabengwa to discuss the issue, showing the levels of concern in the corridors of power. Dabengwa said he was prepared to attend such a meeting but would tell Mugabe to step down. (Zim Independent, 14 March).

CONVICTED CRIMINAL TO TAKE OVER CIO? CIO director Elias Kanengoni - convicted of the attempted murder of political activist Patrick Kombayi in 1990 - is tipped to take over from Bonyongwe. Kanengoni and his accomplice Kizito Chivamba were sentenced to seven years behind bars for shooting and injuring Kombayi, then the national organising secretary of the now-defunct Zimbabwe Unity Movement, ZUM. However, the pair never spent a minute behind bars as Mugabe immediately pardoned them. (IWPR, 13 March)

WHY DIDN'T MUGABE KNOW? A politburo member requesting anonymity told IWPR that if Makoni did not have the backing of Mugabe's top intelligence officers, his announcement would not have shocked Mugabe and ZANU-PF the way that it did. "Where was Mugabe's intelligence when the idea was mooted to front Makoni? Several meetings were held over a very long period with most of Mugabe's trusted comrades. What angers the old man is that he was being surrounded by people who were plotting to get rid of him. "I don't think many can truly stand up now and deny that they were never involved at one stage or the other. When Makoni's people are talking about having the backing of senior army and intelligence officers, this is not a figment of their imagination. "Truthfully, I don't think the old man trusts anybody. People know that now and that is why they are all rushing to denounce Makoni and distance themselves from him. I know that the ones doing so and making the most noise are the guilty ones and they feel the need to exonerate themselves fast before President Mugabe turns on each one of them." (IWPR, 13 March)

PRINT MORE MONEY: There is also a problem of funds. Zanu PF is said to be putting pressure on Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono to print more money on a large scale to bankroll its campaign. Gono was not available for comment as he was said to be in Abuja, Nigeria, for a meeting. Events within Zanu PF and on the campaign trail are said to have shaken Mugabe to the point where his advisors and campaign managers now fear that he is staring defeat in the face. Short of rigging, his rivals say, Mugabe is unable to win. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

LEAVE US ALONE: Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon likened Zimbabwe on Monday to North Korea or Myanmar, saying the southern African country wanted to be isolated. McKinnon, who steps down next month after eight years at the helm of the 53-nation group of mostly ex-British colonies, said the Commonwealth had done all it could over Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe left the Commonwealth in 2003 and calls the organisation a stooge of British neo-imperialism. He is standing for re-election on March 29, accused by rivals of wrecking Zimbabwe's economy. The United Nations, the World Bank, Britain and the United States had also done all they could over Zimbabwe, McKinnon said. "Everyone was limited by what Zimbabwe did or did not want to do," he told reporters at an event marking Commonwealth Day. "Regretfully, Zimbabwe, for many countries, has pushed themselves into this situation not dissimilar to Myanmar or North Korea where they just want to be isolated," he said. (Reuters, 10 March)

SING ZANU'S SONG FOR A BETTER LIFE: Just recently the ruling party held what it called the Patriotic Musicians' Workshop at its headquarters in Harare. The workshop was organised by the Zanu PF information department and held under the theme "Music as a tool for mobilising the people". Speaking at the workshop Zanu PF Secretary for Information and Publicity, Nathan Shamuyarira, said it was "our policy that workers who are patriotic have better lives and the media and artists should work towards the dissemination of information that promotes the development of the country." (freemuse.org, 10 March)

SHORT MEMORIES: Journalists of my generation at Ziana - between 1992 and 2000 - will agree that the best way to incur the wrath of the news agency's editors was to submit a story without background, cross-references or with figures that did not add up. We read that at almost every rally, Mugabe accuses Makoni and Tsvangirai of being funded by British and American businesses. The Herald even published names of companies alleged to be funding Makoni. The reporters doing these stories may be young and without much knowledge of what happened in the 1980s and 1990s, but their editors will definitely recall that every election before 2000, Mugabe received public financial donations (solicited and unsolicited) from mostly British individuals, companies and organisations. I recall vividly that in preparation of the 1996 presidential election, Mugabe dispatched the late Eddison Zvobgo to go and fundraise in London, no less. Zvobgo raised more than 1 Million Pounds from the likes of Tiny Rowland and others. (Southern African, 10 March)

JILTED LOVER: lately, Tsvangirai has ganged up with Mugabe in accusing Makoni of being funded by foreign "embassies" in Harare. This sounds to me like a jilted lover venting on a rival suitor. Was it not a few short years ago that Tsvangirai prided himself with being seen in the company of the same diplomats and even travelling to their countries to seek (and receive) endorsement and funding as the next president of Zimbabwe. Could it be that after failing to deliver in three attempts, his former backers have decided to pursue a new and perhaps more acceptable option and Tsvangirai is lashing out in bitterness? (Southern African, 10 March).

DOES IT ADD UP? then there is the issue of rally attendances. This weekend, it was Tsvangirai's turn and the range was 12,000 to 40,000. I covered many rallies and other functions at White City stadium and unless its carrying capacity was increased in the years that I have been away, I know that there is no way 20,000 people can fit into White City; let alone 30,000 or 40,000 which is the capacity for Barbourfields or Rufaro. These are just a few of many inadequacies I notice in reports from Zimbabwe and I wish someone could ensure that we get backgrounded and balanced news. Neglecting

these ground rules of good journalism is, in itself, an act of electoral fraud. (Southern African, 10 March).

WE FAILED: Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon has run up the white flag over Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. He tried but failed. All diplomatic avenues had been exhausted, he said: ``We did all we could ... but so did the UN, so did the UK and US'. Mr McKinnon's affable smile has masked the fact that he had a task comparable to that of Sisyphus. Armed with neither carrot nor stick he has had to fall back on good intentions and reason to try to restore sanity to Zimbabwe. But none of that matters to Mugabe. His riposte to the Commonwealth's decision to extend Zimbabwe's suspension was to abandon that body altogether, calling it an ``evil organisation' and a front for UK efforts to `enslave' his country. He also described Mr McKinnon as ``a progeny of criminal descent' whose ancestors had been deported by the British ``because they were robbers and murderers'. Mugabe's barminess cannot leaven the tragedy of Zimbabwe nor disguise the helplessness of the Commonwealth to prevent it. (Hawke's Bay Today, New Zealand, 11 March).

STUDENTS BEHIND MORGAN: As the intelligensia of the nation, students took their time to analyse all the pros and cons concerning this issue. Movement for Democratic Change(MDC), a labour party, was formed in September 1999 and have less than a decade in Zimbabwean politics. Their core value is social democracy and are against the dictatorial rule of the current ZANU-PF regime. Dr Makoni should have co-joined hands with other pro-democratic forces like them, to build a strong opposition. With such a background, students declared Dr Makoni's presidential candidature as null and void. Students declared to strongly rally behind Movement for Democratic Change in these coming elections. (The Zimbabwean, 10 March).

MUJURU NOT INVOLVED: the corruption case against Attorney General (AG) Sobusa Gula-Ndebele took a new twist this week when a top police officer alleged that the name of retired army general Solomon Mujuru had been dragged into the controversy by unnamed persons gunning for his prosecution. An affidavit seen by The Financial Gazette, signed by the investigating officer in the AG's case, deputy officer commanding CID Serious Fraud Section, Chief Superintendent Alison Nyamupaguma, claims that Mujuru and Gula-Ndebele met banker James Mushore and assured him that he would not be prosecuted. The allegation resulted in Gula-Ndebele's arrest and subsequent suspension for alleged abuse of office. A tribunal headed by High Court judge, Justice Chinembiri Bhunu is holding hearings on the matter. Now, sources tell The Financial Gazette that Nyamupaguma has informed his superiors that he was not aware of Mujuru's involvement in the matter and that he had no idea how the former army commander's name found its way into his affidavit. (FinGaz, 13 March)

SIMBA ACCOSTED: On Monday, war veterans in Filabusi, Matabeleland South, allegedly accosted Simba Makoni as he campaigned in the province. Makoni and his team proceeded to Zvishavane after the police intervened. "Makoni is not deterred by the actions of people who feel threatened by his candidature. We are having successful meetings across the country, even in the rural areas where people are consumed with fear," said Denford Magora, spokesman for the Makoni campaign. The Zimbabwe Peace Project alleged in its latest pre-election report that a headman in Muumbe communal lands in Chipinge South, only identified as Musindo, had been abducted and assaulted by suspected ZANU-PF supporters. Incidents of vote buying have been reported in Lupane with candidates from both the ruling party and MDC offering cash and scarce maize meal to voters. (FinGaz, 13 March)

GO HOME AND VOTE: millions of Zimbabweans, living in South Africa or seeking asylum here, are being called on to return home to vote in that country's upcoming election. As part of a pro-democracy campaign in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, hundreds of Zimbabwean election education volunteers have been hitting the streets to persuade their fellow citizens to vote. The non-political, pro-democracy organisation, the Peace and Democracy Project (PDP), on

Wednesday launched its Pretoria campaign outside the home affairs department offices in Marabastad. PDP aims to persuade all Zimbabweans living in South Africa to return home to vote. (IOL, 13 March)

300 ATTEND SHOW: The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC) pressure group yesterday hosted a musical show in Johannesburg, South Africa, to encourage millions of Zimbabweans to go back home and vote in the 29 March election. At least 300 exiled Zimbabweans attended the mid-day show that was held at Windbrow Theatre in Joubert Park as part of the civic group's voter education campaign ahead of the landmark elections at the end of this month. CZC media programme officer, Nixon Nyikadzino said, "I want to urge all of you here to go back home and vote. Use whatever you can, if you believe in prayer go and pray, if you believe in your ancestors, call on them to help rescue the country," said Nyikadzino. (ZimOnline, 10 March)

TSVANGIRAI NOT THE FIRST HERO NOR THE LAST: In recent times we have witnessed shocking trends towards the privatisation and patenting of the post-Independence struggle for democracy. Listening to speeches by leaders of opposition political parties and civil society organisations, one shudders at the realisation that we have moved full circle. A respectable leader of the Morgan Tsvangirai formation of the MDC was reported to have said his boss was the face of the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe. One could hear Madzikatire's voice substituting Tsvangirai for Mugabe. While Tsvangirai's role in the fight for democracy in independent Zimbabwe is not contested, it is regrettable that respectable people should emulate the much-criticised Zanu PF politburo in assigning to themselves the role of declaring some people more heroes than others and play gatekeeper to the struggle. (ZI, 14 March)

WHAT'S IN A NAME? When the MDC split ostensibly over the senate, there was haggling over the use of the name. For some time the two formations operated as anti-senate and pro-senate. Now that the anti-senate has embraced the senate, they felt compelled to find a suitable distinction from their nemesis without really changing their name. They came up with MDC Tsvangirai! Isn't this threatening a slide to Mugabe's "my party"? To name a "people's" party after a person, no matter how popular the person, is worse than being the face of the party. I know it is easy to dismiss these concerns as trivial and suggest that the name change is temporary and only meant to assist the voter on March 29. But those who thrust Mugabe to power in 1976 thought it was temporary as well. Today we see all Zanu PF supporters donning his portrait - the true face of the party! There is a possibility that March 29 may result in Tsvangirai emerging as president of the Republic of Zimbabwe and the MDC (Tsvangirai) becoming the ruling party. I am not convinced this is what the pro-democracy movement fought for. (ZI, 14 March)

THE WAR WAS A LONG TIME AGO: It is preposterous for Mugabe to believe that he can launder his contemptible record as a leader by telling the electorate that Tsvangirai was never close to the front during the liberation war. Voters at the moment are looking at Mugabe's record as a leader 28 years away from the warfront. What is more apparent with Mugabe today is his record of failure which he is very much aware of hence he scarcely mentions inflation and the embarrassing value of the Zimbabwe dollar. (ZI, 14 March)

MDC-T ADOPTS ZANU PROPAGANDA: As Makoni said this week, "ideas, not insults will take the people forward". "What is completely laughable about this warped political thinking is that before the emergence of Mavambo /Kusile/Dawn all the epithets that described this thinking were directed towards the MDC's Tsvangirai but now the same Tsvangirai has gone into the Zanu PF archive to pull out the same clichés and direct them at (Makoni.)" (ZI, 14 March)

I AM A HUMBLE (CONFUSED) MAN- WHO DOESN'T MIND THROWING INSULTS: "I am a humble foot-soldier in defence of the revolution and the leadership of President Mugabe," Chinamasa pathetically persisted. Then he proceeds to call Dabengwa "a liar, a charlatan, a tribalist, a turncoat

and a counter-revolutionary". Then that ultimate Zanu PF charge - that of "sowing confusion among our ranks". That has always been a problem confined to the ruling party. Apparently they are easily confused and it is a major offence to confuse them any further! (ZI, muckraker, 14 March)

PROPHETIC AFTER ALL- BUT OF WHOSE AGENDA?: A reader has sent us a full-page Herald ad for Zanu PF's March 2002 presidential election campaign. It warned of "Tsvangirai's bitter pill for Zimbabwe". We could expect the following from the MDC if Tsvangirai won, it warned back then in March 2002: "Cuts in electricity supply. Total blackout for the nation. Collapse of industry. Massive job losses. Isolation of Zimbabwe. Shortage of goods. Price hikes. Massive unemployment." Obviously Zanu PF stole the MDC's programme! (ZI 14 March)

THE RIGHT LEADER AT THE RIGHT TIME: Sometimes, we have to step back from emotional loyalty and look to the greater good. In this circumstance, I always think of the politics of post-World War II Britain. Winston Churchill had led them through the dark and difficult war years to success, yet in the first election afterwards he was voted right out. While Churchill's role was applauded and appreciated, the voting public also realised that he was not a peace-time leader and out he went. Despite that, 50 years later he still remains one of the most popular British leaders of all time. Not voting for someone is not necessarily being disloyal to that individual. People's contributions to a cause, does not bestow the entitlement of office or reward. We do what we do because it is the right thing, not because we expect high office. If Tsvangirai doesn't make it to the presidency, I will still respect and honour him. I just want to see my country begin the road to recovery. (ZI, 14 March).

LET IT BE: "If I have sealed my own fate, someone will also seal his fate very soon," Dabengwa said. "If I am going to be expelled from the party because I have proposed the replacement of Mugabe by another Zanu PF leader, then let it be."

INDIGENISATION ACT

THE PATH TO PROSPERITY: In its editorial, the state-owned Sunday Mail said that in gazetting the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, the ruling party had sent a "a clear message that its path to prosperity is through empowerment of the indigenous people of this country". The law provides that foreign-owned companies and those owned by people who were not disadvantaged during colonial times (whites and Asians) must sell 51 per cent of their shares to indigenous (black) Zimbabweans. (Financial Times, 9 March)

CHERRY PICKING: Lawyers say that as it stands, the legislation is full of holes and could be challenged in the courts. But they warn that because so many of the government's powers are discretionary rather than rule-based, it will be able "cherry-pick" which companies to take over. It could, for instance, decide against taking over ferrochrome manufacturer Zimasco, which is now Chinese-owned, while going ahead with takeovers of western-owned businesses such as Rio Tinto in mining, or Barclays, Standard Chartered and Stanbic in banking, or Old Mutual in insurance and asset management, or BAT in cigarette manufacture and tobacco processing. (Financial Times, 9 March)

A NEW PLUNGE: A new equity law passed by President Robert Mugabe to ensure the population gets a majority stake in public-owned firms will plunge Zimbabwe into deeper economic woes, analysts predicted on Monday. Last week, Mugabe, who is facing elections this month, passed the indigenisation and economic empowerment act which states that "indigenous Zimbabweans shall own at least 51 percent of the shares of every public company and other businesses". "It will entail the destruction of the economy," Harare-based economist Godfrey Kanyenze told AFP. "We should have learnt from the blunders of the land reforms where people who were not properly equipped rushed to grab farms. (Yahoo News, 11 March)

ECONOMIC TAILSPIN: The Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce chief executive officer Cain Mpofu warned the law was ill-timed. "The economy is in a tailspin, inflation is the highest in the world and world perception of property rights in Zimbabwe is at its lowest," Mpofu said in a paper submitted to parliament during debate on the law. "The possibility of further capital flight from Zimbabwe is not far-fetched. The real crisis facing this country is not about indigenisation but about the crippling shortages facing the people." But central bank chief Gideon Gono has already warned the law may be abused by individuals with government contacts. "We call upon the government to ensure that the empowerment drive is not derailed by a few well-connected individuals ... to amass wealth for themselves in a starkly greedy and irresponsible manner while the majority remain with nothing as happened in the past with respect to government empowerment schemes such as the lend reform programme," he said in a statement in October. (Yahoo News, 11 March)

RSA BUSINESSES AT RISK: South Africa's Democratic Alliance (DA) spokesman on foreign affairs, Tony Leon, says Pretoria should explain what it is doing to protect South African-owned firms from being expropriated in Zimbabwe. He said Dlamini-Zuma should also explain why President Thabo Mbeki's government had failed to conclude the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection (BIPA) agreement with Zimbabwe. "The nationalisation of foreign-owned businesses in Zimbabwe will not only have a negative impact on investment in the ailing Zimbabwean economy, it will also have especially negative consequences for South African companies with substantial mining interests in Zimbabwe, such as Impala Platinum Holdings and Anglo American," Leon said. (Zim Online, 11 March)

GAUGING THE RISK: The RSA government yesterday tried to reassure the domestic business sector likely to be affected by Zimbabwe's Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Bill. It said it would talk to its Zimbabwean counterparts to find an amicable way to avert possible negative effects on operations. The law has raised fears among foreign-owned companies in Zimbabwe that the government seeks to nationalise or take control of their business, in a manner reminiscent of the repossession and distribution of farm land a few years ago. "We are studying this bill more carefully and then we will initiate discussions with the South African business community, to get an understanding of how they interpret the bill and how we work together to protect, in the broad sense, South African interests in Zimbabwe," Pahad said. (Business Day, 13 March)

INDIGENISATION BOARD APPOINTED: the government this week began the process of selecting candidates for appointment to the National Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Board (NIEEB), following the enactment of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act last week. "The board will be tasked to appoint a chief executive officer (CEO) and set up (an empowerment) fund, which they will manage." "The board will also act as advisors to the minister on matters to do with indigenisation," he said. The Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act says the NIEEB shall consist of the CEO and not less than 11 members and not more than 15 members appointed by the minister after consultation with the President. (FinGaz, 13 March)

THE RIGHT PACE NEEDED: two heavyweight foreign mining companies said on Monday they would press ahead with operations in Zimbabwe despite a nationalisation law that analysts warned could deepen an economic crisis ravaging the country. The world's largest platinum miner, Anglo Platinum and Rio Tinto have said they will continue mining after President Robert Mugabe signed into law on Sunday a bill giving locals the right to take majority control of foreign companies, including mines and banks. "We will continue to engage Zimbabwe's government," Trevor Raymond, Angloplat's head of investor relations told Reuters. Nationalisation has not discouraged Rio Tinto, which has diamond interests in Zimbabwe. "Rio Tinto is supportive of the move towards indigenisation provided that it is done at the right pace and in a way that does not discourage much needed overseas investment in the Zimbabwe mining industry," it said in a statement. The world's second biggest platinum producer, Impala Platinum Holdings, is the foreign mining firm with the most operations in Zimbabwe. Its shares fell more than 5 percent on Monday on worries about the

nationalisation law as well as a fall in the platinum price. Larger rival Anglo Platinum lost 1.3%. The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) said the new law could also hurt manufacturing, which operates at less than a third of its capacity. (News24, 10 March).

NOT A GOOD IDEA: "The new law will slow down investment as it is a direct attack on property rights. It is not a good idea especially for a country desperately in need of investment. No sane investor would put their money where they feel it is not safe." "If you want to empower people, assist them in starting a company, not authorising them to take it from someone. "Government could have identified which companies need to be developed and make money available to promote competition," said Robertson. (ZI, 14 March)

FUNDING YOUR OWN DEMISE: Mugari: The Act states that companies will contribute to a fund whose proceeds will be used to assist blacks to take over some businesses. It sounds like government is forcing companies to fund their own takeover.

Mangwana: The nature of a tax is that it is never fair. In any case where do you want blacks to get the money when they have been suppressed for centuries? It is fair for those who have benefited from a wrong system for centuries to at least help.

Mugari: Still it does not sound right for companies to fund their own takeover. Why can't people just go to banks and borrow money to buy the shareholding? (ZI, 14 March)

FOREIGN CURRENCY IS OUT THERE SOMEWHERE

Mugari: The levy will raise Zimbabwean dollars but it requires foreign currency to buy the shareholding from foreign shareholders.

Mangwana: I admit that the levy will be in Zimbabwean dollars but I refuse to accept that there is no foreign currency in this country. Foreign currency is there somewhere.

Mugari: Are you serious?

Mangwana: Of course I am serious. In any case what does foreign currency mean? It just means money from another country. Kwachas are foreign currency.

Mugari: Minister you know what I am talking about when I say foreign currency. Zimbabwe is already struggling to raise enough to import fuel and pay for electricity yet you are talking about the Zambian Kwacha.

Mangwana: We are creating a law not for now but for posterity. There might be no foreign currency in this country but very soon there will be. Why do we have to stop what we want to do because there is no foreign currency? (ZI, 14 March)

THE ECONOMY

INFLATION 150,000% Zimbabwe's out of control inflation could hit a new record 150 000 percent, one of the country's biggest industrial conglomerates has said. The Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE)-listed Radar Holdings said in a commentary to its financial released at the weekend that inflation - which President Robert Mugabe has labeled the country's enemy number one - had continued surging in the month of February. "The monthly inflation rate from December 2007 to January 2008 was 120 percent. The forecast annualised inflation rate for February 2008 is 150 000 percent," said the ZSE. (Zim Online, 11 March).

QUADRILLION DOLLAR DEBT: domestic debt has burst through the quadrillion-dollar mark to reach an all-time high of nearly \$1.4 quadrillion, giving an unequivocal indicator of a worsening economic crisis this year, fuelled by intensifying spending by the cash-strapped government. The pressure on expenditure appears to have also been stoked by a hugely expensive election scheduled for the end of this month, which has forced the government to scramble for cash to placate a restive

electorate and civil service. Statistics on government domestic debt published by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), indicate that domestic debt surged from just over \$60.8 trillion on February 1 this year to \$1.353 quadrillion on February 29, the biggest jump ever in domestic debt stock in dollar terms since Independence in 1980. The debt had stood at \$21 trillion at the start of the year. (FinGaz, 13 March)

THE 15 MILLION DOLLAR LOAF – WHEN AVAILABLE: the country's troubled millers and bakers this week warned that a fresh wave of bread shortage might hit the market because of inadequate flour supplies and unviable prices, which are pushing businesses on the brink of closure. The two allied industries have sent an SOS to government, calling on it to urgently intervene through the state granary - the Grain Marketing Board - and the National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC), which has been disregarding their applications for price reviews. Last week, government intensified its crackdown on millers, accusing them of flouting price controls. Uncertainty has gripped both industries with a number of executives living under constant fear of arrest. NBA chairman Vincent Mangoma said the bread shortages were more pronounced in Bulawayo and would soon spread across the country. There is very little flour available on the market. There has been some knock-on effect on the production of bread and Bulawayo is already experiencing shortages. "The production costs for bread has really shot up and bakers are unable to recover the costs," said Mangoma. The few millers who were still supplying flour were reportedly pressing the NIPC for a retail price of \$6.5 billion per tonne to remain viable. Bakers were also reportedly pressing for a retail price of \$15 million per loaf, up from \$3.5 million, to recoup rising production costs. (FinGaz, 13 March)

USD AT 50 MILLION TO ONE? The USD is now trading as high as 46 million (46 billion at the old values) and some traders have stopped dealing as they hang onto forex to try and achieve the biggest advantage possible on the escalating rate. This puts further pressure on the supply as demand remains healthy despite weak production levels. The lowest paid Grade One worker is now moving into the executive tax bracket of 47,5% and this is a nightmare for employers who simply end up paying the tax man and not their productive workers who they wish to reward and protect from hyper inflation. (Sokwanele, 10 March)

PRICE SLASHING ARRESTS: Foods managing director Joseph Jeremy Brooke was arrested on Thursday afternoon on allegations his company inflated prices of flour it supplied to Lobels Bread while owners of a city supermarket face prosecution for charging fruit crushes above legal prices. Police spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Wayne Bvudzijena said Brooke was in police custody as investigations continue and was expected to appear in court soon on charges of contravening the National Incomes and Pricing Commission Act. He said allegations against National Foods arose on February 18 after it sold 22,5 tonnes of flour to Lobels Bread at \$900 million per tonne. The gazetted price of flour at that time was \$600 million per tonne. (The Harare Herald, 8 March)

“HIT LIST” FOR BUSINESS: the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) says it believes that the National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC) and government have a "hit list" of business leaders that they want arrested before the elections. CZI president, Callisto Jokonya said there were fears among CZI members that the NIPC and government could heighten the crackdown on business leaders it accuses of overcharging. "Zimbabwe is filled with so much confusion and chaos," said Jokonya. "Frankly speaking, our members fear more arrests after we heard of that list. Ask the NIPC, they should be able to tell you more on that." Two industry executives have been arrested over the past week but Jokonya said more arrests were possible "because there seems to be a new resolution at NIPC to deal with businesses". The two are Blue Ribbon Foods chief executive, Michael Manga and National Foods managing director, Joseph Brooke, who were arrested on charges of contravening the National Incomes and Pricing Act. "So far, those two have been arrested but with talk of that list, more could be arrested and that fear from industry is substantiated." (ZI, 14 March)

GONO ON JOB CREATION THROUGH LAND MECHANISATION: "It is important to note that the animal-drawn implements were all assembled locally, which created phenomenal job opportunities for our youth, women groups and other sections of our community. (FinGaz, 13 March)

AGRICULTURAL MIRACLE AHEAD: I strongly believe that the cumulative muscle we have injected into agriculture ushers in a new era for Zimbabwe's food production capacity. Starting this coming season, barring any unforeseen vagaries of nature, we should be able to produce enough food for our internal consumptive needs and for export. All this will directly deflate the inflation bubble. (FinGaz, 13 March)

BIODIESEL: an ambitious plan by the government to venture into bio-diesel production has begun to bear fruit after the plant produced 100 000 tonnes of fuel. Central bank Governor Gideon Gono last week reported that a bio-diesel plant set up as a joint venture with a South Korean firm was now producing up to 25 000 tonnes of diesel per month, which could help ease the country's acute fuel shortages. (FinGaz, 13 March)

IRANIAN TRACTORS: a top Iranian official said here at the weekend that the Middle Eastern country would invest in a tractor plant in Zimbabwe, and explore more areas for investment. Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki said Iran had made an initial investment of US\$4 million into the tractor plant, the first such facility in Zimbabwe. The plant, a joint venture between Iranian investors and a state-owned Zimbabwean company, will assemble tractors from parts from Iran. (lemali.fr, 11 March)

GIVE ZEC CHEAP HOTELS: Zimbabwe's hotels are threatened with huge losses after the National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC) ordered them to charge below market rates for hotel bookings to government institutions during the March 29 elections. The NIPC met hoteliers on Tuesday and ordered them to introduce a dual pricing structure, which would exempt government bodies such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), government departments and local authorities, from paying the same accommodation charges and other rates as tourists, business bodies, election observers, journalists and other officials who are expected to flock into the country to cover the elections. "These are vulnerable groups. ZEC has a fixed budget for the election. What we are simply saying is they (hotels) must charge (for) a return that is lower than other people who go to hotels for luxury. The charges will not be sub-economic," Masimirembwa said. But hoteliers this week warned that implementing a discriminatory cost structure at a time when they were already grappling with exorbitant costs and widespread shortages would plunge their businesses into bankruptcy. "How do we pay salaries, which are reviewed almost every month and other costs if we are to subsidise government?," said one hotelier, who asked not to be named. (FinGaz, 13 March)

MORE STRIKES: Junior doctors in Zimbabwean state hospitals in Harare and Bulawayo have gone on strike again demanding higher allowances for cars and public transport. Medical sources said nurses at the four main state hospitals in the two cities are also showing up for work irregularly due to the soaring cost of transport. (VOA, 10 March)

PAY INCREASES: President Robert Mugabe's government has awarded teachers hefty salary increments of over 750 percent as it moved to placate restless workers ahead of a key election at the end of the month. The new salary increases will see the lowest paid teacher earning Z\$3.9 billion, which officially translates to US\$130 000 but is a mere US\$100 on the widely used parallel market. The highest paid teacher now earns \$5.7 billion a month, up from the \$500 million they used to get before the government hiked the salaries. (ZimOnline, 13 March)

MORE PAY INCREASES? a pay increase is in the works for Zimbabwean civil servants, the state-run Bulawayo Chronicle newspaper reported on the weekend. Education Minister Aenias Chigwedere told the Chronicle that the government has approved salary increases following a meeting last week of an inter-ministerial task force. He said the panel made recommendations on how to prevent strikes and staunch brain drain of key professionals from the country. (VOA, 10 March).

DAILY LIFE

LESS MAIZE THAN LAST YEAR: Erratic weather is likely to hurt Zimbabwe's harvest this year, with the country ending up with an even higher maize deficit than in 2007, according to the latest report from the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS-NET). Heavy rainfall, with flooding in several districts, in December 2007 forced many farmers to scale down their planned crop area, as they were unable to prepare the land and apply fertiliser, FEWS-NET's Food Security Update for February 2008 commented. Zimbabwe had a grain deficit of about 891,000 tonnes in 2007 - almost 50 percent below the 2006 harvest - on account of adverse weather, severe economic constraints that led to shortages of key inputs, deteriorating infrastructure, especially in irrigation and, most importantly, financially unviable government-controlled prices, said a joint Crop and Food supply assessment mission by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). (IRIN, 13 March)

FOOD IMPORTS MEETING DEFICITS: the Zimbabwean government and humanitarian agencies have managed to move an adequate amount of cereal into the country, according to the FEWS-NET report, and an outstanding cereal deficit of about 278,000 tonnes is likely to be met. The government has brought in 239,827 tonnes of maize from Malawi, with the balance of 166,403 tonnes to come. The 2008/09 marketing year will start with low stocks. "While the outcome of this year's very wet season is not known, there will be localised deficits, and the country will again need to import a significant amount of cereal, likely to be more than was required ... [in 2007], to meet its needs." Accessibility to food has been affected by the inability of the state-controlled cereals agency, the Grain Marketing Board, to deal with transport and fuel shortages, exacerbated by further damage to the already poor state of the road network by heavy rains in the country since December 2007, the FEWS-NET report noted. (IRIN, 13 March)

FOOD UNAFFORDABLE: food security in urban areas remains critical, given the shortages and erratic supplies of basic commodities on the formal market, and inadequate humanitarian support in these areas. Inflation has reached more than 100,000 percent in Zimbabwe. "However, irrespective of the exact rate of increase, it is obvious that the nominal cost of living is rising at much faster rate than people's incomes and their purchasing power," Gunjal commented. Despite the government's imposition of price controls in 2007, the availability and supply of basic commodities on the formal market remained erratic. "A few commodities such as milk and bread have become more available in January 2008, though the selling prices are unaffordable to most poor households, and rapidly rising: the cost of a standard loaf of bread increased by over 300 percent from October 2007 to early January 2008." Other basic commodities such as sugar, cooking oil, maize meal and meat have remained scarce in the formal market but were available on the parallel market, where prices are still rocketing. The prices of white sugar, cooking oil and beef went up by between 60 percent and 250 percent from November 2007 to January 2008. (IRIN, 13 March)

LIFE ON THE EDGE: "I try not to eat too much so there is enough food for my children, but even if I ate nothing there wouldn't be enough," she said. "I didn't think it was possible that people could starve in Zimbabwe or just die because the hospital has nothing. That's what we thought happened in Angola and Mozambique." Chekani's home in Highfield, a crowded township on the edge of Harare, is bare. There are no chairs, only cloths on the floor. No bed, just a mattress for her and the two remaining children, boys of seven and eight. She has a gas hob but no oven, and the only decoration is a print of a Jesus Christ - a white man with a golden halo. There is almost nothing left in the house to sell, but Chekani gets by. Her latest acquisition is two litres of cooking oil which she sells at a pavement stall, five tablespoons at a time, in return for a handful of near worthless notes. Other women are selling bars of soap by the slice and flour by the cup. Dealing with cash is like a torrid game of pass the parcel. Everyone wants it but then unloads it as quickly as possible in exchange for something worth having. Chekani gets rid of the money from selling her oil by buying two eggs. Sometimes the police

and soldiers take the street hawkers' wares, claiming it is illegal to sell on the pavement. The women say it is another form of state looting. (Guardian, 10 March)

NO PREPAID PHONE CARDS: a shortage of Net*One and Telecel recharge cards has intensified, triggering an unsanctioned hike in prices for the few cards released on the market. Net*One, which has a 23 percent market share, is the country's second largest mobile telecommunications firm in terms of subscriber numbers after Econet Wireless, which has a 61 percent share of the market. Telcel is third with a 15 percent. The Financial Gazette can reveal that Net*One and Telecel recharge cards have disappeared from the market and the few cards that are still available are fetching more than their face value. The \$1 million recharge card for Net*One, for example, was selling at \$5 million this week. (FinGaz, 13 March)

COUP SUSPECTS: three more suspects have been arrested in connection with the foiled coup - two of them serving members of the armed forces and the other one a second year University of Zimbabwe (UZ) student. Elias Gapare and Charles Mupfudze, the soldiers, have been in detention at 2 Brigade Barracks in Cranborne since last June. Rangarirai Mazivofa - who is studying Agriculture at UZ - was also arrested last June and has been in detention since then after a brief court appearance last year during which they were denied bail. Mazivofa has appealed to the Supreme Court to be freed. This comes as a magistrate's court last week set the trial date for the six men originally accused of plotting to overthrow President Robert Mugabe last year. The trial is expected to commence on July 7 and the accused will remain in detention. Albert Matapo and his co-accused Nyasha Zivuku, Onemore Mudzurahona, Emmanuel Marara, Patson Mupfure and Shingirai Mutemachani, were arrested in May and have been in custody since then. (Zim Independent, 14 March)

FORCED REMOVALS TO RESUME? been brought to our attention that the Home Office may soon resume enforced removals of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe. We have been shown what appears to be a standard letter from the Border and Immigration Agency of the Home Office. The letter gives notice of impending enforcement action. It states in part that ".the Border and Immigration Agency is expecting shortly to be able to enforce returns to Zimbabwe". We understand that those who have made asylum claims are also receiving refusal letters with that standard statement. In effect of course, the majority of refusals, at least in the Zimbabwean context, should come with the right of an in-country appeal. If such an appeal is lodged in time, an individual cannot be removed until all the appeal rights have been exhausted. (New Zimbabwe, 11 March)