

This is the fifth 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

LOVEMORE MADHUKU - IT IS ALREADY RIGGED: "Mugabe is not facing a serious threat. The electoral situation is so defective and the ruling regime has a grip on the process in such a way that, despite the uncertainty felt by most of the electorate, he will still win. His opponents say that at the least there will be a run-off. They are wrong. The regime is confident the methods they have put in place will ensure the result they need." (Financial Times, 16 March)

MUGABE - ON OPPOSITION WINNING ELECTION: "It will never happen as long as we are still alive -- those (of us) who planned the liberation struggle," Mugabe told thousands of supporters at his first rally in the capital since hitting the campaign trail last month. (yahoo news, 23 March)

ICG – ON ELECTIONS: "We do not expect a free and fair election," said Andebrhan Giorgis, senior adviser for the International Crisis Group's Africa program. "We're hoping for the best, but that's hope against hope." (Wall Street Journal, 22 March)

MAKONI - ON MAKONI: There are two storylines. One is that I'm a Mugabe stooge, a plant. The second, which Mugabe uses, is that I'm a stooge of the West, of Britain and America. (News Week, 22 March)

WHERE ARE THE HOUSES? "Let us remember the suffering we endured in 2005 when they (Mugabe's government) felt the city was dirty and needed a clean-up," Makoni told a rally in Epworth ahead of the March 29 elections. "But when we all thought they would collect the garbage accumulating on the street corners, they held people at gun point, ordering them to demolish their own houses. Just imagine the severity of the cruelty. Zimbabwe does not deserve an oppressive government," he told supporters at the rally held under a tree on the side road of this semi-urban slum, some 15 kilometres (10 miles) southeast of the capital Harare. "It was just as good as telling a person in tatters to take off his clothes promising to buy him new ones, but only in years to come. Where are the houses we were promised after Murambatsvina?" said Makoni. (yahoo news, 21 March)

TENDAI BITI - GONO IS A TERRORIST WHO SHOULD BE SHOT: "There are some wounds which are difficult to heal. There shall be gnashing of teeth. There is going to be reason for panic and fear for those who looted public funds and aided Zanu PF terror. We ask Gono, where are you going to be when we come asking for you? Will your name be there in the book? We will come knocking at the doors of those that killed thousands in the Midlands and Matabeleland. These are scars and wounds that are difficult to heal without a Justice Commission." ... "Gono is an economic saboteur, terrorist and number one Al Qaeda who deserves to be shot by a firing squad". (New Zimbabwe, 18 March)

MBUDZI - REMOVE MUGABE BY A CAESARIAN: "In 1998 it was clear that the old man was frothing at the mouth, he was tired," Mbudzi said amid applause from the over 3 000 people who converged on Mucheke Stadium. "But he deliberately declined to pass on the relay baton to young blood as suggested by the late veteran politician Eddison Zvobgo. Instead, the grandfather ran away with the baton into the bush." "After the opposition MDC failed to remove Mugabe in 2002 we came up with the Makoni project - a surgical operation. Ours is a caesarian operation to dump the old man Mugabe. If

we don't remove Mugabe, the old man intends to outlive us all. He is '90' and life expectancy in this country is 37. We will all die and leave him to continue ruling this country." (Zim Independent, 20 March)

CHAMISA - A BABOON IS A BABOON: The MDC spokesperson, Nelson Chamisa, said the Makoni project was doomed from the onset. "What renewal is Makoni talking about with Tekere-Two-boy, and Dongo and our bleating cousin Mbudzi (goat)? A baboon is a baboon even if you apply skin-lightening cream to it. It will remain a baboon even if you replace an old one (Mugabe) with a young one (Makoni)". (Zim Independent, 20 March)

MASUNUNGURE – HE IS NOT DEAD YET: "But it really is too early to write Mugabe's political obituary. That would be wishful thinking. There are many who think what is happening is the calm before the storm." (The Times, 16 March)

GADHAFI - LEAVE US DICTATORS IN POWER! "Mugabe and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni should stay in power until they have solved all the problems in their countries or die while still in power.".... "They should not be disturbed by elections because former colonial states want Africa to adopt their system of governance which is not viable here." (International Herald Tribune, 17 March)

MUGABE – ON BRITISH FOOLS: "We had hoped for a repair of relations but Blair and Brown are both blooming fools. They have already rejected our elections and prejudged the process, these devilish liars" said Mugabe. (Reuters, 21 March)

MUGABE - ON BRITISH COMPANIES: "They still have companies which are still here and we did nothing to them... 400 British companies and so they must take care, after elections," he said. (yahoo news, 23 March)

ELECTORAL PLAYING FIELD

- **THE PARTISAN STATE**

ARMY SHOULD NOT BE PARTISAN: "The ANC urges all institutions of state in Zimbabwe, and in particular the security forces, to remain non-partisan and to respect the outcome of the elections," the ANC said in a statement. Last week, South Africa's deputy foreign affairs minister, Aziz Pahad, said Zimbabwe could not afford yet another disputed election, as this would only prolong the country's political and economic crisis. But even as South Africa raised concerns over the threats by the security forces, ZEC chairman George Chiweshe - himself an ex-army officer - said the commission would not condemn these utterances because speaking out "would be going beyond the mandate of ZEC." (FinGaz, 20 March)

A CONSTITUTIONAL COUP: spokesmen for Zimbabwean presidential candidates Morgan Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni returned fire Saturday at Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri. Spokesman Denford Magora for independent candidate Makoni said Zimbabwe is not a military state and that the army and police must obey the will of the people. Spokesman Nelson Chamisa of Tsvangirai's formation of the MDC told reporter Blessing Zulu of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that Chihuri's statements amounted to what he called a "constitutional coup." Independent candidate Langton Towungana described the statements by Chihuri and similar remarks by other security service chiefs as "inflammatory." (VOA, 15 March)

ARMY TO COUNT PRESIDENTIAL VOTE? Zimbabwe's main opposition on Thursday expressed fear ZEC might push to have votes for the presidential election counted at a national command centre in Harare, which could make it easier to manipulate the ballot. MDC party leader Morgan Tsvangirai said his party would go to the courts to force the election authority to have votes counted at polling stations. Tsvangirai, who says President Robert Mugabe cheated him of victory in the 2002 presidential election,

fears that having ballots counted at one central venue would make it easier to cheat. "I will not participate in the election if counting of presidential ballot papers is done at the so-called command centre. It is against the law," said Tsvangirai, who together with former finance minister Simba Makoni is hoping to end President Robert Mugabe's nearly three-decade rule. The election commission has said counting of votes and announcing of results of council, Senate and House of Assembly elections will be done at polling stations while ballots for the presidential race will be tallied and results announced at a national command centre in Harare. ZEC chairman George Chiweshe said his commission would wait for Tsvangirai to formally raise his concerns with the commission or alternatively take his grievances to court. (Zim Online, 21 March)

POLICE IN POLLING BOOTHS AFTER ALL: Civics have reacted with outrage to President Robert Mugabe's last minute tweaking of electoral laws just days ahead of elections. The changes allow police officers access into polling booths, from where they had been banned under laws agreed with the opposition. The police will help the physically handicapped to cast their votes, under regulations made by President Mugabe through the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) (Amendment of Electoral Act) (No. 2) Regulations, 2008 on Monday. Government opponents and critics see the changes as a negation of the SADC guidelines and principles for conducting democratic elections in the region. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), an independent election monitoring body, says the last minute change to electoral laws severely undermines the credibility of the polls. ZESN chairperson Noel Kututwa said the changes were made unilaterally without consultation and agreement of other parties. Kututwa said: "The recent announcement that the electoral regulations have been unilaterally changed to require police officers to be inside polling stations could undermine public confidence that their vote is their secret. "Further, voters requiring assistance to cast their ballots should be able to designate a person of their choice to help them mark their ballot. This announcement effectively reverses important electoral reforms that were only gazetted in January 2008 ". Observers say the decision to have police officers based 100 metres away from polling stations would have been an important measure to enhance public confidence in the secrecy of their vote. (FinGaz, 20 March)

ABUSING THE STATE: Political analysts watching the approach to high-stakes elections in Zimbabwe March 29, President Robert Mugabe has turned the machinery of state to his advantage. Critics of Mugabe, 84, say he has recruited the army, the police, state television and radio, and even the nominally nonpartisan ZEC to bolster his position against opposition presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai and former finance minister Simba Makoni, who launched an upstart campaign in February. (VOA, 14 March)

- **OBSERVING THE OBSERVERS**

SADC AGREEMENT OVERRULED BY MUGABE- AGAIN : an electoral amendment, passed by Robert Mugabe on Monday, sparked renewed fears that Zanu PF is determined to rig the March 29 election. State radio announced Tuesday that Mugabe amended electoral laws to allow policemen into polling stations to 'assist' illiterate people to vote. The opposition immediately slammed the amendment saying it violated agreements reached at the SADC brokered talks. Policemen were barred from being within 100 metres of a polling station because it was felt they would intimidate voters. Mugabe has however disregarded those concerns and declared that section 59 of the Electoral Act has been amended to 'allow two electoral officers and a police officer on duty to assist semi- literate voters.' (SWRadio, 19 March)

SADC WILL CHECK IT OUT: election observers in Zimbabwe would have to check the amendments made by President Robert Mugabe to the electoral laws, allowing police officers into polling stations, SA delegation head Kingsley Mamabolo said on Wednesday. Speaking on the eve of the departure of the last group of South Africans who will monitor the March 29 election in Zimbabwe under the Southern African Development Community mandate, Mamabolo said the observer would have to establish how this would influence voting. "The perception could be that police will intimidate voters, we'll have to check that," he said. He said the observer mission would only pass judgement on the move by Mugabe

once it had established all the facts. "I have heard this and find it very interesting and we'll have to check this -- we can only pass judgement once we have received explanations," he said. (Citizen, 19 March)

WE ONLY NEED THREE DAYS OF OBSERVING – SADC: Miranda, who is also head of SADC's organ on politics, defence and security, said in Harare this week the regional body would have 120 observers on the ground by next week. Fifty SADC observers are already on the ground. But there are concerns that SADC will arrive too late and will not have sufficient opportunity to observe the pre-election conduct of the various parties, in particular Zanu-PF supporters who have been involved in acts of intimidation against the opposition. Miranda, however, insisted that SADC could still effectively observe the electoral process even with only two weeks of campaigning left before the March 29 election date. "The number of observers is enough to cover all constituencies. We think we have enough time to observe this election. Even if we had two, three days, it would still be sufficient to complete the mission," Miranda said on Wednesday. "We need to believe in the capacity of the mission to do the job." (Mail and Guardian, 15 March)

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE NATION? With just twelve days to go before the crucial general elections on the 29th March, none of the observer missions in the country have left the Harare area. Professor Elphas Mukonoweshuro, secretary for International Affairs in the Tsvangirai led MDC, said the only mission they have seen so far was the one from SADC, which was based in the capital Harare. 'They've not been visible anyway else from all over the country. They seem to be concentrating on top class hotels and then making short distance forays into the country around Harare,' Mukonoweshuro said. He added; 'I guess when they said they are inviting those from friendly countries this is what they meant, people who turn deaf and blind the moment they step foot into the country.' (SWRadio, 17 March) **THE TIME IS NOW:** "The moment is right to hold elections, the climate is right to hold elections," head of SADC's electoral observer mission Jose Marcos Barrica said at a news conference in Harare. "What should be done is being done. The time is right to hold elections." He noted concerns over the delay in the publication of the voters' roll and unequal media coverage. "The voters roll should have been published last week, but we are told this was only published yesterday," Barrica said, adding that it was an "irregularity". "There were some concerns in inequality of media time given to different candidates by the state mass media. We say that the situation should be changed. They should think about it to have an equal share." (Yahoo news, 19 March)

SA OBSERVERS HERE: an advance observer group of 10 South Africans left for Zimbabwe on March 8. The rest of the 54-member team will be deployed next Thursday and return on April 1. It will be composed of 21 government officials, 15 MPs from various political parties, 15 civil society members as well as representatives of SA's Independent Electoral Commission. About 200 SADC observers will be distributed in all 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. It is understood that at least 50 members from Tanzania, SA, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola have already arrived to start monitoring the conditions on the ground as political parties there continue to campaign ahead of the March 29 elections.

OBEY SADC: South African MPs deployed in Zimbabwe under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) observer mission have been warned against issuing independent statements that could contradict or bring into disrepute the spirit of the Angolan-led delegation. He said that unlike in the past when the government sent its own observer mission, the South African MPs had to accept the fact that they were going to Zimbabwe as representatives of the SADC mission, and not as individuals. (Business Day, 20 March)

SADC OBSERVERS: Angola, as the leader of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, is being supported by Tanzania. Swaziland, also a member of the SADC organ, has not been able to assume its position in the SADC observer team. As a result, Zambia and SA have stepped in. SA is expected to take over from Zambia the chairmanship of the SADC next year, hence their involvement in the team. SA's special envoy to the Great Lakes region and former high commissioner to Zimbabwe, Kingsley Mamabolo, is leading the South African group. Andries Nel of the African National Congress (ANC) is leading the MPs. The parliamentary group is expected to be composed of nine ANC MPs, two

from the Democratic Alliance, and one MP each from the Inkatha Freedom Party, the United Democratic Movement, the Azanian People's Organisation and the African Christian Democratic Party. (Business Day, 14 March)

CIVICS MEET SADC: representatives of Zimbabwean civil society groups met on Friday with South African election observers to express concerns about the electoral process just over a week before March 29 elections that some analysts are already calling compromised. Civic groups represented at the meeting at a Harare hotel included the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, the National Association of Non-governmental Organizations and the Zimbabwe Peace Project, among others. Issues discussed ranged from the election environment, which has seen intimidation of and violence against opposition candidates and supporters by alleged militants of the ruling ZANU-PF party, a lack of transparency in postal balloting, and the proposed counting of presidential ballots at a national command center in Harare. Around 30 South African observers were present including members of South Africa's ruling African National Congress, opposition members, and parliamentarians. Board Member John Chitekuteku of the National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations told reporter Patience Rusere that the responses by the observers to their comments and concerns ranged from sympathetic to skeptical. (VOA, 21 March)

- **OBSERVING ZIMBABWE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (ZEC)**

ZEC IS CIO INFILTRATED: Zimbabwe's central intelligence organization stands accused of working in collaboration with external forces to rig the March 29 polls. A key advisor to presidential candidate Simba Makoni alleges that seven CIO operatives have been deployed with the Zimbabwe electoral commission to do what he calls the dirty job. (SABC, 20 March)

NEW JUDGES FOR COURT: the Zimbabwe government on Monday announced the appointment of new Electoral Court judges following a 2005 Supreme Court ruling that the court was not properly constituted, and its decisions null and void. The new Electoral Court is made up of Harare justices Antonia Guvava and Tendai Uchena and in Bulawayo, Nicholas Ndou. The Registrar of the High Court, Charles Nyatanga, will double up as the registrar of the electoral court. (New Zimbabwe, 18 March)

NO TEACHERS FOR ZEC; the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission has meanwhile also announced that teachers for the first time will not be used as polling officers during the election. ZEC Chairman George Chiweshe says they will be using selected individuals from several local and public bodies. The move drew criticism from teachers unions who charged that the move suggests the commission has something to hide and wants to carefully control the voting process. (SWRadio, 19 March) ZANU

ZANU COUNCILLORS WORK FOR ZEC: despite the announcement this week by the chairman of ZEC, George Chiweshe, that teachers would not be used as polling officers during the elections, it has been discovered that several headmasters will be acting as polling officers in the Lowveld area. But that is because many of them are actually ZANU-PF councillors. Chiredzi farmer and activist Gerry Whitehead has exposed the fact that at least three councillors are serving as presiding officers in the Chiredzi area. He said these ZANU-PF officials have all, in the past, received benefits from the ruling party, including farms and vehicles. They still have access to scarce fuel and food supplies from the government's Grain Marketing Board.. In the Chiredzi South Constituency there is a headmaster named Mugwadia at Sengwe Secondary School, who is also a ZANU PF councillor for Ward 15. Boli Secondary School's headmaster is named Ndebele, and he is the ZANU PF councillor for Ward 12. Then there is Amos Ndirowe, headmaster at Malisanga Primary School and a former ZANU PF councillor. Whitehead believes that close scrutiny of the people that THE ZEC has hired would reveal that this is happening countrywide. (SWRadio, 21 March)

ZEC IS SUPINE: President Mugabe has driven a coach and horses through those [SADC] reforms by unilaterally declaring the election date on March 29 and now restoring the role of the police in "assisting" infirm voters by way of an edict. The ZEC has proved supine in safeguarding its independence. It has allowed the government to arrogate to itself the right to accredit observers and

foreign journalists for the election. It has made only belated attempts to secure access for opposition parties to the public media. And it has proved unable to comment on statements made by service chiefs which appear to intimidate the electorate. Justice George Chiweshe who was boasting of the ZEC's independence only a few weeks ago now says it is not within the electoral supervisory body's jurisdiction to comment on such statements. This makes a mockery of the inter-party agreement on electoral reform and demonstrates the insincerity of the ruling party which has portrayed its agreement to the amended Act, together with changes to Posa and Aippa, as indicative of its willingness to establish a national consensus. President Thabo Mbeki who has been active in this project will now be able to see the limitations of his diplomacy. But regional observers are already expressing their determination to approve the electoral process despite the all-too-visible gaping holes. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

OMNIBUS POLLING STATIONS: Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission (ZEC) has rejected charges it put few polling stations in cities, saying each station in an urban area will have several voting centres allowing more people to be processed. Independent election monitoring groups last week raised alarm that thousands of voters in urban areas, where the opposition has strongest support, could fail to vote because ZEC had put few polling stations there. The MDC party said allocating fewer polling stations in cities was an attempt by the ZEC to sway the March 29 elections in favour of President Robert Mugabe's government. ZEC deputy elections director Utoile Silaigwana said the commission - that put more polling stations in the government's rural strongholds - had made sure voters in cities would have a fair chance to cast their ballots by putting about seven voting centres at each polling station in an urban area. "In one polling station, there would be several voting centres. For example, at a school advertised as one polling centre, there would instead be about seven voting centres," Silaigwana said at the weekend. "In the case of Harare for example, the truth of the matter is that the actual number of polling centres is 722 because there would be about seven voting centres at all the advertised 390 polling stations," he added. (Zim Online, 17 March)

PUBLISH POLLING INFO: The ZEC list of polling stations for the 29 March harmonised elections gives fewer polling stations in Bulawayo and Harare. But such information is critical for it to be published on just a few occasions. It should be published repeatedly until 29 March in order to ensure voters have adequate information. Most of the district offices where such information should be available by now don't have it, while ZEC voter educators have not covered anything like enough people to prepare them for Election. Limiting publication of the information on polling stations in constituencies and wards can only be preparing ourselves for failure. (Zim Std, 16 March)

- **THE VOTE**

107,000 POLLING OFFICERS TO LOSE VOTES?: the increase in the number of polling stations and polling officers might disenfranchise the majority of civil servants and some employees of quasi-governmental institutions as they will be polling officers. If 107 000 polling officers are needed to conduct the elections on 29 March 2008, this number will represent an average of four constituencies, and this figure is almost the same margin by which the opposition candidate lost to the ruling party during the 2002 presidential election. ZEC needs to come up with a system that allows polling officers a chance to vote. Our elections maybe ward-based but ZEC should allow the polling officers to cast their votes first. (Zim Std, letter, 16 March)

ONE DEAD MAN, ONE VOTE: Zimbabwe has the highest proportion of elderly voters in the world, according to the voters' roll being used for elections next week. A glance at one page of the roll yesterday for a ward in the Mount Pleasant suburb of Harare turned up a Fodias Kunyepa, who was born in 1901. Over the page was Rebecca Armstrong, born 1900. Somewhat younger was Desmond Lardner-Burke, born 1909, who was the notorious Minister for Justice in the rebel Rhodesian Government and responsible for the harassment, arrest and detention without trial of tens of thousands of black nationalists, including President Mugabe, fighting against white rule in the 1960s and 1970s. Mr Lardner-Burke left the country soon after the demise of the illegally constituted Rhodesian state in 1980, and the establishment of Zimbabwe's independence. He died soon after, in South Africa. Mr Kunyepa and Mrs Armstrong are also long dead. Opposition campaign workers say that the voters' roll is stuffed

with the names of the dead, of non-existent people, of those with fake identity numbers and with names repeated numerous times in different constituencies, sometimes in the same ward. "It also means that when they stuff the ballot boxes, a huge majority will not appear unreasonable," said one campaigner.

LARDNER-BURKE WOULD LAUGH: Mr Lardner-Burke, who was reputed to have a sense of irony, would be amused at the idea of posthumously helping Mr Mugabe, born in 1924, to win presidential elections and go on for another five years. "There's one [person at least 100 years old] on nearly every page of the voters' roll for Mount Pleasant," said Trudy Stevenson, parliamentary candidate for one of the two factions of the MDC. The roll has 212 pages with 55 names on each. (The Times, 18 March)

TWO DEAD MEN, TWO VOTES: Welshman Ncube, secretary-general for the other MDC party faction said he had discovered that at least two people in every house in his constituency in a suburb of Bulawayo, who were listed on the voters roll were dead. He said the voters roll was massively inflated. In previous elections, investigators for the opposition claimed that ZANU-PF had used the overstatement of voters to rig the polls during announcement of results. (VOA, 21 March)

POSTAL BALLOTS IN JEOPARDY: Zimbabwe's uniformed forces, fearing internal vote rigging and being forced to vote for the ruling Zanu-PF, fear their that their commanders and police chiefs will throw away their postal ballots cast for the opposition when they are forwarded to the country's electoral body for national counting. OhmyNews learnt morale has hit rock bottom among the uniformed forces ahead of the March 29 elections over allegations that the postal voting process is pre-determined as the ballots will be sifted before being forwarded to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). "Vote rigging is not on 29 March. It starts with the postal voting process. The ballots are not forwarded to ZEC as they will be first sifted by the commanders and the police chiefs and then re-sealed. Postal votes forwarded to ZEC are not a true reflection of voting patterns," said one of the disgruntled police officers at Borrowdale police station. (OhmyNews, 21 March)

POSTAL VOTE OVER ALREADY: over 75 000 members of the country's security forces have already cast their votes, in an exercise that has been a closely guarded secret, according to information received by the MDC. In Bulawayo most police officers were allegedly forced to vote several times, while in Mutare soldiers were ordered to write their force numbers on the back of their ballot papers. Eddie Cross, the MDC's policy advisor for the Tsvangirai formation and their parliamentary candidate for Bulawayo South, told us on Thursday that the issue of postal votes would be as controversial as the 2002 presidential elections. 'The Zimbabwe Election Commission has said only the police force has requested 8000 postal votes. To our surprise, we have information that postal votes, cast and sealed, are over. (SWRadio, 20 March)

POSTAL BALLOT HAD NO OBSERVERS: members of the non-governmental Zimbabwe Election Support Network and the opposition MDC said they have been denied monitoring access to the country's postal balloting system ahead of elections on March 29. ZESN Chairman Noel Kututwa said that although his group has been accredited to observe the elections, it has been denied access to the postal ballot process, which was set in motion late last week. An estimated 77,000 civil servants, including police officers, soldiers, diplomats and members of the security forces have started to send in postal ballots. (VOA, 17 March)

TEN TIMES TOO MANY POSTAL VOTES: MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai claimed on Thursday that the ZEC ordered between 600 000 and 900 000 postal votes to be printed by Fidelity Printers. This a far larger number than the total of the country's armed forces, whose strength is army 35,000, police 40,000, airforce 4,000 and the prisons service 3,000. Diplomats posted outside the country account for another 200. Out of these 82,000 members of the armed forces and diplomats only about 20,000 are eligible to use the postal votes. (SWR 20 March)

FIFTY PERCENT TOO MANY POLLING PAPERS: Tsvangirai also said that the mint had been ordered to print nine million ordinary ballot papers, when there were 5,9-million people on the voters roll. "What for?" he asked. (Mail and Guardian, 21 March)

MYSTERY VOTERS: The voter lists for at least 27 of 70 constituencies civic groups have examined show discrepancies between what the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) has declared as the number of voters and those on the roll, reflecting variations as high as 31 percent. For instance, Goromonzi South constituency in the ruling party's stronghold Mashonaland East province has 19 422 registered voters yet ZEC declared that 28086 were registered. Other affected constituencies include Bulawayo Central, Gokwe-Nembudziya, Chikomba East, Bubi and Chipinge East. (Afrik.com, France, 22 March)

675,000 FAKE VOTERS? Tsvangirai described the voters' roll as "a shambles", and said investigations had revealed irregularities where football fields and empty housing lots were used as addresses for fictional voters. He also cited an analysis by a local research body of the number of voters in 28 constituencies which showed that the total number of voters claimed in the constituencies by the ZEC, was 90 000 more than were on the actual roll. "With 210 [parliamentary] constituencies, you can imagine the total number of people that don't exist." (Mail and Guardian, 21 March)

DIASPORA EXCLUDED: "We are very concerned that while the election process itself has been very uneven from the start, millions of Zimbabweans in the diaspora are unable to come and vote," Tapera Kapuya, spokesman for the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum, a coalition of several associations, told AFP after a media briefing. Bishop Paul Verry of Johannesburg's Central Methodist Church which harbours hundreds of Zimbabwean refugees said the country was "at war with itself" by alienating its citizens from voting and excluding them from rebuilding the country. "One would have hoped that they (refugees) will be taken back to be part of the reconstruction process. But citizens who are supposed to help reconstruct Zimbabwe are being alienated, ostracised, victimised when they go back," said the cleric. "Elections are not free and fair when other people still fear for their lives." (Yahoo News, 21 March)

ONLY GOD IS WATCHING (WE HOPE): Zimbabwean churches under the umbrella of the Christian Alliance civic group have begun a campaign to encourage Christians to vote in the elections and assure them that their vote next week would be secret. "We have heard stories where people are afraid to vote because they fear that they will be watched by the police when they cast their vote and that is the reason why we have embarked on the campaign. "We have fliers with the message – 'Go and Vote - God is the only one watching'. We are urging Christians to go and vote without any fear," said Sibanda. (Zim Online, 21 March)

- **VIOLENCE**

SUPPORTERS FLEE: MDC claims several of its supporters have fled their homes in Mashonaland Central for urban areas because Zanu PF youth militia have launched a reign of terror against them. The youths are said to have threatened to kill the opposition supporters and burn down their homes if they continued to campaign for the MDC. The victimisation and threats were most pronounced in Bindura and Shamva, MDC officials said. "Our supporters are fleeing to Bindura and Shamva. Our aspiring councillor, John Tore Kawara fled to Bindura after the youths threatened to burn down his home," Chimombe said. "For a number of days some were not sleeping in their houses." The Shamva North constituency candidate complained that MDC posters were being pulled down by known Zanu PF youths in broad daylight. Chimombe claimed police at Madziwa police station had done nothing although the MDC had made several reports of intimidation and harassment of its supporters. Goche, the MP for Shamva, is reportedly distributing free maize whenever he addresses a rally. The MDC alleges this is tantamount to vote-buying. (Zim Std, 16 March)

NYANGA A NO-GO AREA: "It has become evidently clear that some parts of the country remain no go areas for mostly opposition political parties although exceptions have been noted in Nyanga where

Chief Mezani is reported to have allowed the MDC-Tsvangirai to hold a rally in his village," said the Zesn report. The observers reported that the Central Intelligence Organisation has since started to victimise Mezani through continuous harassment and threats to withdraw his benefits if he continues to give equal access to his area to all contesting political parties. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

VIOLENCE CONTINUES: officials of both groupings of Zimbabwe's MDC said members of their party were severely assaulted today in Harare, the country's capital, and provincial Bindura, by alleged ruling party youth militants. Spokesman Gabriel Chaibva of the MDC formation led by Arthur Mutambara said three members of the opposition wing were assaulted in Mbare, Harare, by a criminal gang of youths known to locals as "Chipangano" and aligned with the ruling party. Elections Director Dennis Murira of the MDC formation led by presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai said three members of his grouping were badly beaten by at least 85 ZANU-PF youths in Bindura and were receiving medical attention. Elsewhere, the homes of three opposition members were said to have been torched at Manga Farm, Bindura, where Minister Without Portfolio and ZANU-PF Commissar Elliot Manyika is seeking re-election to parliament. (VOA, 18 March)

YOUTH CLUBS FOR MILITIA: Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU PF party is setting up camps across the country for its youth militia, a development that sources said could see a rise in politically motivated violence and human rights abuses. The sources said a ZANU PF-linked private consultancy firm had been hired to market the camps (commonly called bases) as youth centres or clubs. This was to mask the camps' real function as operational bases for militia deployed to campaign for President Robert Mugabe's party and drive out the opposition from its rural strongholds. "The bases would be disguised as youth clubs. Their mandate is to make sure that ZANU PF wins these tricky elections," said a source, who spoke on condition he was not named. The militia will intensify pressure on the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, quickly establishing "no go areas" for the opposition in rural districts as happened in general and presidential elections in 2000 and 2002, said our source who sits on a ZANU PF committee overseeing the deployment of the youths. Our sources said Shamuyarira's committee met on March 4 and agreed to establish youth camps to drum up support for ZANU PF throughout the country. Kasukuwere and Zhuwawo are said to have told the meeting that there was need to ensure youths were permanently based in constituencies to campaign for ZANU PF. It was agreed that at least 2 000 camps would have to be established which works out to a camp for each of the country's 2 000 wards. At least five youths will man each base which comes up to 10 000 youths for all the camps. Most youths to be used to campaign for ZANU PF will be drawn from the government's controversial national service youth training programme and from ZANU PF cell, branch and district youth groups. (Zim Online, 18 March)

CHRA BANNED: Police in Harare have stopped the Combined Harare Residents Association from holding public meetings with the contesting election candidates in the capital. Mfundo Mlilo, spokesman for CHRA, told us Wednesday that the officer commanding Southerton police district had banned 16 of their planned 'meet the candidate public meetings' in all low and high-density suburbs south of the capital. 'The Association has thus been incapacitated and unlawfully prevented from affording residents a platform to meet their potential leaders and engage them on manifestos. The refusal to grant clearances is a direct assault to democracy and the association's right to freedom of assembly, freedom of association and expression,' Mlilo said. According to CHRA, police alleged they intended to use the platforms to motivate residents to be violent should the opposition lose the elections. They also allege that they do not have sufficient manpower for political rallies and civic programs. Instead police urged CHRA to motivate its members to attend party political platforms, if they want to listen to manifestoes. (SWRadio, 19 March)

WOZA ARRESTED: Eight members of WOZA, Women of Zimbabwe Arise, were arrested in Pumula this morning while putting up election posters in the high-density suburb. The group of women were putting up posters encouraging Zimbabweans to stand up for their child and vote in next week's elections. They were taken to Pumula Police Station and questioned for 30 minutes before being released without charge. Questions included why they were wearing T-shirts telling people to vote and what

Stand Up for Your Child, which is inscribed on the T-shirts meant. They were finally told to stop encouraging people to vote and to leave that to the politicians and released. (zimbabwejournalists.com, 21 March)

FOUR PROTESTS GO AHEAD: members of WOZA and MOZA held four community-based protests in Harare and Chitungwiza, taking to the streets of Domboromwari, Glen View, Kuwadzana and Makoni Shopping Centre in Chitungwiza. In Domboromwari, 100 women and men marched from the main water point to the shopping centre, carrying balloons that read 'Stand Up for Your Child' and handing out flyers urging people to vote in the coming elections. The group chanted slogans in the shopping centre for some time before dispersing without incident. The peaceful protests were to urge people to 'Stand up for your Child' and to encourage Zimbabweans to vote and to vote wisely for candidates that will deliver a future for the children. WOZA has taken a position to mobilise Zimbabweans to vote for any candidate that they feel will deliver social justice rather than follow blindly party loyalties. The Zimbabwe Republic Police in clear contravention of their powers under the new Public Order Security Act (POSA), banned toyi-toying yet did not seem to pay too much undue notice to the peaceful WOZA demonstrations. (SWRadio, 17 March)

ZVIMBA VIOLENCE: An opposition election candidate for Zvimba West constituency has fled his home, fearing for his life after suspected ruling ZANU PF party militants attacked his homestead and damaged his house. Knox Danda of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change party led by Morgan Tsvangirai said about 20 youths raided his home last Monday night and broke down doors and windows to his house, as well as part of the roof. He was not injured because he was not at home at the time of attack. Danda is contesting against Nelson Samkange of ZANU PF for the Zvimba West seat. Zvimba is President Robert Mugabe home district and has long been a no go area for the opposition. (Zim Online, 21 March)

DANGEROUS DREAM: Zimbabwe state security agents on Wednesday arrested and detained a local film-maker, O'brian Mudyiwenyama, for several hours for allegedly filming campaign posters of presidential aspirant Simba Makoni. Mudyiwenyama was arrested in central Harare while filming pictures for an oncoming movie, Super Patriots and Morons. The movie is adapted from a stage play of the same title that was banned about five years ago on the grounds that the play was a direct attack on President Robert Mugabe's administration. "The officers accused me of siding with Makoni and said I was merely dreaming if I ever thought Makoni would be president of Zimbabwe one day," said Mudyiwenyama. The film-maker said state agents also accused him of being an enemy of the state adding that his actions to film Makoni's campaign posters were punishable by death. (Zim Online, 22 March)

VIOLENCE IN MATABELELAND: Political violence ahead of the March 29 election shows no sign of abating, and a housing complex on a gold mine near Bulawayo, has played host to the latest round of Zanu PF thuggery. After an MDC meeting on Wednesday that lasted about 3 hours the home of the district organising secretary was destroyed by youths and war vets. The violence took place on the housing complex for employees of How Mine. The house looked like it had been struck by an earthquake with shattered windows and broken down doors. The MDC leader, whose first name is Professor, and his family escaped without any harm. The Zanu PF mob shouted obscenities as they stoned the house and accused Professor of bringing MDC supporters to a 'Zanu PF mine'. In Bulawayo urban itself 3 MDC activists wearing party t-shirts were beaten up at Renkini Bus Terminus by a group of Zanu PF thugs that included a member of the Crime Prevention Unit in the police force. The thugs took away the MDC t-shirts and tore them up in front of bemused bus travellers. Magnet House, which serves as the CIO headquarters in Bulawayo, was also the scene of more harassment and intimidation. MDC youths Tapiwa Chinhome, Shingirai Gomba, and Mtokozisi Mlilo were locked inside the building and made to eat the campaign posters they were posting around the city. Saungweme says despite the presence of Mugabe and Makoni posters outside, officers there are detaining anyone who tries to put up a Tsvangirai poster at Magnet House. (SWRadio, 21 March)

REMEMBER 11 MARCH: a year after their attack by the police on 11 March 2007, opposition, civic leaders and activists who survived the ordeal last week remembered the trauma they went through with chilling accounts of police brutality. The MDC on Tuesday commemorated last year's beatings at a lecture series it hosted where constitutional expert Lovemore Madhuku and MDC secretary for policy and research Sekai Holland remembered how the police battered them. On 11 March last year, police blocked a scheduled prayer meeting organised by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign and arrested scores of activists and civic leaders. In the commotion, the police shot and killed NCA activist Gift Tandare. (Zim Std, 16 March)

SEKAI HOLLAND ARRESTED: Today, the police accused Holland of supplying them with the wrong address on 11 March 2007. The police also asked her the whereabouts of Grace Kwinje, another MDC national executive member who was also brutally assaulted together with other party leaders last year. Kwinje is now in South Africa. The police released Holland after harassing her for more than five hours. The arrest of Holland shows that once again, the police have become complicit with the regime in intimidating members of the MDC ahead of the watershed polls on 29 March 2008. (MDC, 14 March)

PRO MDC POLICE JAILED: Five police officers based in Masvingo, southern Zimbabwe, are serving a 14-day prison term after being convicted of breaching the Police Act. Four police officers from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) based at Zaka district police station - including the deputy officer in charge, Assistant Inspector Denis Ngwabi - are serving sentences at Fair Bridge police prison in Bulawayo after they were seen boarding the motor vehicle of local MDC parliamentary candidate Harrison Mudzuri. The officers were said to have been offered a lift, but colleagues in Masvingo later accused them of actively participating in politics and they appeared before a police disciplinary hearing - reportedly without legal representation - which gave them the 14-day sentences. Another police officer, who is based at Renco Mine police base in south Masvingo, is serving the same sentence after he too was convicted of actively participating in politics. The officer reportedly waved an open hand - a symbol synonymous with the MDC. The commanding office of the police in Masvingo province, Assistant Commissioner Mhekia Tanyanyiwa, confirmed the developments. "The officers concerned were seen moving around in MDC vehicles while another one was seen chanting an MDC slogan." "We do not want police officers to be involved in politics but instead they should serve the people." However, several police officers have been seen boarding Zanu-PF vehicles without being punished. (BBC, 21 March)

FOOTBALL BANNED: in a letter addressed to Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) boss, Henrietta Rushwaya that was seen by ZimOnline, the police said they were banning all football matches around the country "due to security concerns." "We would like to advise that due to the forthcoming harmonized elections, it has been decided that all PSL matches be postponed until elections are held. "This measure has been necessitated by security concerns," said the letter that was signed by Senior Assistant Commissioner Faustino Mazango. PSL fixtures secretary Godfrey Japajapa refused to comment on the letter referring questions to Rushwaya who could not be reached for comment. A senior official at ZIFA however told ZimOnline that there were fears within the police that the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party was using football grounds as platforms to campaign for the elections. The official said the directive to ban all league matches appeared to have been triggered by last weekend's events at Mucheke Stadium when MDC youths staged a "rally" at the stadium chanting the party's slogans. (Zim Online, 20 March)

PLEASE NO RALLIES AT SCHOOLS: Raymond Majongwe, the secretary general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) said the militant teachers' organization has wrote to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), calling on it to ban the holding of rallies at schools to ensure the protection and safety of teachers. "We wrote to ZEC asking it to ban the use of schools as campaign bases. Schools used as campaign bases in the past lost valuable school furniture and other material. Schools were used as springboards of violence against teachers suspected to be aligned to the opposition parties," said Majongwe yesterday. (Zimbabwean, 20 March)

- FREE AND FAIR SO FAR?

NOT FREE AND FAIR: leading civil society organisations in Malawi have expressed deep concern about the conduct of the electoral process in Zimbabwe, ahead of harmonised elections on March 29. The NGOs raised the concerns when they held discussions with British High Commissioner to Malawi, Richard Wildash at his official residence. "Zimbabwe is in dire straits and the situation on the ground is not conducive to the holding of free and fair elections. The political leadership bars Zimbabweans from enjoying their civil and political liberties; civil society and opposition parties are prevented from operating freely", said Billy Banda, Executive Director of Malawi Watch Human Rights. (Nyasa Times, Malawi, 19 March)

NOT FREE AND FAIR: The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) has threatened to "make noise" if Zimbabwe did not resolve issues that will lead to elections that are not "free and fair", Cosatu's secretary-general says. Briefing the media at Cosatu House, Johannesburg, Zwelinzima Vavi and Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions secretary-general Wellington Chibebe criticised the voter registration and the voters roll as being in shambles. "There is a lot of confusion in which wards people are expected to vote in. "Having a comprehensive and accurate voters' roll should be considered as a prerequisite for free and fair elections," Chibebe said. Other matters discussed were the delimitation commission, the "arrogance" of President Robert Mugabe after he announced the election date and the Zimbabwe elections support network being barred from conducting voter education. (News24, 17 March)

FALLING INTO MUGABE'S TRAP: Foreign Secretary Milliband has called for international monitoring of Zimbabwe's 2008 elections, saying conditions for the poll are 'far from free and fair'. But Britain should be the last to speak out and it should desist from prejudging the forthcoming elections publicly because this is exactly what Mugabe wants Britain to do. Already, Mugabe has said his party's 2008 election campaign will focus on resisting Britain's regime change agenda in Zimbabwe. Mugabe has set his anti-colonial trap for Britain and if Milliband's comments are anything to go by, Britain is walking into it once again. Britain would better serve the struggle for democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe by taking a back seat in the country's elections next month because it has no moral authority in Southern Africa. (Nehanda Radio, 18 March)

PREPARE FOR A CONTESTED OUTCOME: The results are likely to be heatedly disputed. Though the playing field is far from even, and efforts to create a united opposition have failed, ex-ZANU-PF politburo member Simba Makoni is seriously challenging Robert Mugabe's re-election. The 84-year-old president probably has the means to manipulate the process sufficiently to retain his office, though possibly only after a violent run-off, but there is little prospect of a government emerging that is capable of ending the crisis. If the situation deteriorates, the African Union (AU) needs to be ready to offer prompt mediation for a power-sharing agreement between presidential contenders and creation of a transitional government with a reform agenda. (International Crisis Group, 20 March)

REJECT THE OUTCOME IF THERE IS FRAUD: Makoni's late entry and limited grassroots support, as well as the opaque nature of his establishment backing work against him, but his challenge has thrown ZANU-PF into turmoil and left Mugabe unsure of his allies. Influential actors within the security apparatus are quietly lining up behind Makoni. Mugabe, however, is likely prepared to do whatever is necessary to defeat him, quite possibly including escalation of violence in the event of a run-off, even at the risk of sparking bloody factional fighting within ZANU-PF. Only "friendly" countries and institutions have been invited to observe the polls, and it is critical that the AU and SADC judge the overall electoral environment and preparations, not just conduct on election day itself, in strict accordance with their regional principles. In the event ZEC, which he appears to dominate, declares Mugabe the winner in the face of massive abuse and manipulation of the overall process, the outcome should be rejected. While the national circumstances are different, if the situation deteriorates the AU should have contingency plans in place to offer emergency diplomatic assistance to the parties as it did recently to defuse the Kenya crisis. (International Crisis Group, 20 March)

OUTCOME TO BE CONTESTED: political analyst Brian Raftopoulos says: "Well if Mugabe wins it is simple, conditions will continue to deteriorate," he said. "This would not be an election that is widely

recognized, there will be no recovery, the Mugabe regime will be further isolated. The economy will continue to deteriorate, with Mugabe and his regime having no policy to bring Zimbabwe out of the current crisis, and therefore, all-round the conditions will get worse." (VOA, 16 March)

THE MEDIA

SADC – DON'T EUPHEMISE PLEASE! Reporters Without Borders urges the Southern African Development Community observer mission to resist the temptation to minimise the importance of the government's and ruling party's control over the media in the 29 March general elections. The SADC yesterday said "the climate is right to hold elections" even if there were "concerns" about "inequality of media time given to different candidates" and other "irregularities." "The euphemisms being used by the SADC observers contrast with the appeals for help from Zimbabwean civil society and independent journalists," Reporters Without Borders said. "Even if there is a logic to not confronting President Robert Mugabe and his government head on if you hope for change, you cannot act as if the conditions are in place for these elections to be free and fair." The press freedom organisation added : "There are real, structural anomalies behind these 'irregularities' - including in the news media - that will not be changed by prudence and discretion. The SADC's final judgment should be based on the principles and rules which it decreed in 2004 for all its members, without exception." (Reporters without Borders, 21 March)

SADC MEETS THE MEDIA: the advance team of the SADC observer mission to the Zimbabwe election has already met the state-owned media to discuss the problems raised by the opposition parties about their lack of access to it and exposure to the public. This intervention is regarded as part of the mandate of the Angolan-led team to attend to the complaints by participants on a variety of issues covered by the SADC principles and guidelines for electoral processes. The reason for meeting the media first was the fact that ZEC has also published guidelines for election coverage by the media, which are required to be fair and objective in their news reports. However, the details of the meeting have not been revealed. (Business Day, 14 March)

JOURNOS ARE SPIES: the Zimbabwean government is screening foreign journalists before letting them into the country before this month's elections, amid suspicion that some may be spying for hostile Western nations, the official media reported Sunday. At least 300 foreign journalists have applied for accreditation under Zimbabwe's sweeping media laws, the state Sunday Mail said. Priority is being given to journalists from Africa and other developing nations that are sending election monitors, it said. Zimbabwe's government has barred Western observers from monitoring the March 29 vote. Western media organizations, including The Associated Press, have received no word on accreditation requests submitted weeks ago. "We have a team drawn from (the ministries) of information, foreign affairs and the security arms that are examining each and every application," government spokesman George Charamba told the paper, a government mouthpiece. "We are mindful of attempts to turn journalists into observers and security personnel from hostile countries," he said. "Those will be flushed out." Critics have accused Zimbabwe of trying to keep out Western reporters by delaying them from making travel bookings and other planning arrangements. Leading hotels have said provisional bookings by some media organizations have been canceled on Foreign Ministry orders, saying rooms were needed for invited observers from Africa and mainly developing countries regarded as friendly toward Zimbabwe. (International Herald Tribune, 16 March)

JOURNOS WAITING FOR WAR: "It is as if Zimbabwe is a war about to start," Charamba was quoted as saying. "There is an expectation of blood in the streets, which explains the deployment of war correspondents and cameramen. It's a way to psyche the world against the results to justify the continuation of sanctions." Charamba also alleged there was "a strange alliance" between competing Western media networks over Zimbabwe. "What this suggests is a shared objective. The story from Zimbabwe has to be uniformly echoed for propaganda purposes," he said. (International Herald Tribune, 16 March)

ZIM JOURNOS BLACKLISTED: state-run Media and Information Commission (MIC) has allegedly blacklisted several journalists and asked ZEC to bar them from covering next Saturday's elections. The existence of the blacklist emerged last week when a local freelance reporter Hopewell Chin'ono was denied accreditation by the ZEC to cover the polls. According to Chin'ono's lawyers, Mtetwa & Nyambirai, the journalist was denied accreditation on March 11 and was told that he was blacklisted by the MIC. "Your offices advised our client that he was on the blacklist provided by the MIC for journalists who were not accredited to cover the elections," the lawyers stated in a letter dated March 14 and addressed to the ZEC chairperson, Justice George Chiweshe. "When our client enquired the legal basis of such blacklisting, and which provisions in the country's electoral laws allowed the MIC to direct ZEC on who to accredit, he was advised that the ZEC was merely relying on information provided by the now legally defunct MIC." His lawyers said the law did not give room for the MIC to interfere with the duties of the ZEC. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

ENEMY OF THE INTERNET: the Paris-based media rights watchdog, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), has listed Zimbabwe among 15 countries in the world that are bent on suppressing freedom of expression on the internet. In a report released this week, the RSF said Zimbabwe had been added on to the list of "enemies of the internet" as internet users in the southern African country were being kept under constant surveillance by state security agents. (Zim Online, 20 March)

SUDDEN BELATED REFORM: 'The national public broadcaster now behaves as if it is ZANU PF's own private radio and television station in flagrant violation of electoral and broadcasting laws,' said the MMPZ. The state broadcaster has a monopoly of the airwaves here, with four radio stations and one television channel. Zimbabwe's only two dailies, the Herald and the Bulawayo-based Chronicle, are also state-controlled. Radio listeners and TV viewers noted a big difference last weekend when opposition parties suddenly started receiving more coverage. The change coincided with the arrival of dozens of election observers from the regional SADC grouping. (VOA, 14 March)

EMBEDDED AGITATORS: Zimbabwe's government has threatened to arrest western journalists - a Guardian reporter among them - whom it accuses of spying on behalf of "hostile" countries ahead of next week's presidential election. President Robert Mugabe's spokesman, George Chiramba, told the state-run press the government would "flush out" reporters he described as "agitators embedded in journalism". The statement appeared to be a move to justify barring journalists from Britain and other countries during the March 29 election after a blanket ban on election monitors from western nations, including all EU countries and the US. Chiramba specifically threatened reporters who have entered the country without prior press accreditation after this was refused under draconian media laws used to shut down opposition newspapers and detain reporters critical of the government. "We are also aware of journalists from western countries who have sneaked into the country, for example one from the British Guardian newspaper, and our security personnel are on the spoor. (Guardian, 17 March)

SPIES IN INDUSTRIAL QUANTITIES: "What is Chris McGreal of the British Guardian up to? Does he for once think that he has got the better of the system? He is a British establishment man and allows us some insight into its mind," the column said. "Do they have to deploy spies masquerading as journalists and tourists in such industrial quantities?" (Guardian, 17 March)

WE ARE WATCHING YOU! President Robert Mugabe's press secretary on Wednesday summoned and read the riot act to journalists working for foreign publications over coverage of the March 29 elections. George Charamba summoned 12 journalists from Zambia's Post newspaper, China's Xianua, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Al Jazeera, Reuters and AFP for the meeting which lasted an hour. A scribe who attended the meeting said Charamba told them that all journalists have been placed under surveillance to ensure that they do not harbour unaccredited foreign journalists. "He said the country's security agents were on high alert and journalists were under surveillance." Charamba, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity, also revealed that two weeks ago, journalists from a European television station, France 24, "sneaked" into the country to cover the polls but were arrested and deported. The journalist added: "Charamba said if we entertained any foreign

journalists, our accreditation would be revoked." (New Zimbabwe, 20 March)

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT! Makoni for his part has introduced an innovative method of campaigning in which he is spending more time interacting with voters in small groups and talking directly to a receptive mind and not partisan crowds. This is different from Zanu PF's door-to-door campaign in which thought police and in some cases hoodlums are dispatched to straighten voters and not necessarily to win them through persuasion. Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC is situating itself as a mass party ready to take Zanu PF head on. Like Zanu PF, it has designed party regalia and made its own jingles. At rallies, melodic chants, accompanied by whistling and ecstatic cheers precede speeches executed with precision apparently hewn from pages of tele-evangelist manuals. The speeches are accompanied by play-acting and dance. Even Tsvangirai now displays amazing agility of feet and fronts many party songs. He has become an entertainer! Makoni toyi-toyed on stage for a good 90 seconds before addressing his rally in Mucheke perhaps to demonstrate his relative youth and vitality compared to Mugabe. Mugabe on the other hand is neither dancing nor singing. He is "chanting slackness" as Rastafarians would say. In Mvurwi last Friday, he upped the tempo of insults to say "hure rekuMbare (the whore from Mbare)" is better than Makoni. At the moment, I am not interested in Makoni's jogging, or Tsvangirai's singing Chinja yakauya zvishoma nezvishoma, or Mugabe's current fascination with Mbare's nocturnal girls. There is enough of all this on television and in pop music. What does inflation, a worthless currency, hunger, deprivation, drug shortages, dry taps have to do with hure rekuMbare? Inspired by the dark nights with no electricity perhaps? (Zim Independent, 20 March)

POLL HARD TO CALL: just over a week to go before Zimbabwe's critical presidential election, polls show President Robert Mugabe is trailing main opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and latecomer Simba Makoni is a potential surprise winner. A survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute shows that last week Tsvangirai was leading by 28,3%, while Mugabe was behind with 20,3% of the vote. Makoni had 8,6% but could emerge as a shock winner because there is a huge pool of voters who refused to reveal their choices. Most of the undecided voters are likely to be Makoni's supporters, the survey says. (Business Day, 19 March)

NO RALLY YET: The three presidential hopefuls, however, have not yet said anything on another aspirant, little known Langton Towungana. Towungana's campaign is still a matter of conjecture as he is yet to hold a rally. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

DISPLAY MUGABE OR ELSE: in a desperate move to lure supporters Zanu PF youths in Mberengwa in the Midlands Province are going around ordering shop owners and school headmasters in the district to display President Robert Mugabe's portraits inside their shops, on shop windows and on school gates. This comes after similar incidents were reported in Harare last week where supporters of the ruling party in the capital were forcing commuter omnibus operators to display the 84 year old geriatric leader's portraits in their omnibuses. Mberengwa is known to be a no go area for most opposition parties since Independence as it always records highest number of Zanu PF voters in every election in the country after Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe in Mashonaland East Province. "All shop operators here are being forced by Zanu PF youths to display the president's portrait and we are being threatened that if we don't do this Zanu PF will take over our shops or force us to close. So we don't have any option but to do what they want" said the shop owner who spoke on condition of anonymity. (Zimbabwean, 19 March)

WE ARE WATCHING YOU: Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans' Association (ZNLWA) chairman Jabulani Sibanda has threatened "extraordinary measures" against veterans not showing commitment in the re-election campaign for President Robert Mugabe. Sibanda's threats follow news of former Home Affairs minister Dumiso Dabengwa's defection to independent presidential candidate Simba Makoni's camp. This has rekindled the turf war pitting factions of the war veterans association that marred Mugabe's campaign for endorsement last year. "In the light of the confusion caused by some

figures in and out of the party," Sibanda said, "we will step up our campaign and enhance our closeness to the people. "Let me also indicate that we will take decisions, for example, on those who come late for rallies or leave early before the end of proceedings." Asked to elaborate on these threats during a recent address at the Bulawayo Press Club, Sibanda said there was no need for those outside Zanu PF to know what he meant as the instructions were directed at war veterans. (Zim Std, 16 March)

WAR VETS IN MATABELELAND REBEL: war veterans' sources told The Standard Sibanda was directing his threats at war vets who had dumped Mugabe. They said Zanu PF structures in the Matabeleland provinces, dominated by the former Zipra cadres, had virtually collapsed with war veterans openly campaigning for Makoni. All this started after Dabengwa openly declared his support for Makoni at a rally in Bulawayo. Dabengwa was flanked by former Zipra commanders when he made the dramatic announcement. Among war vets campaigning for Makoni are those from a faction led by Sibanda's rival, Andrew Ndlovu. This group, linked to the region's political heavyweights, petitioned Vice-President Joseph Msika against the solidarity marches led by Sibanda in the run-up to the December congress. Before ditching Mugabe two weeks ago, Dabengwa was one of the most senior Zipra commanders still commanding respect among war veterans. One war veteran close to the Zanu PF provincial executives in Matabeleland said: "When a commander (Dabengwa) tells his soldiers that we are now taking this course of action, as disciplined people, we follow the instruction. "As part of our strategy, we will not be leaving the party but will continue to campaign for Zanu PF candidates in the council, parliamentary and senatorial elections, but we are telling people that when it comes to the presidential election they must vote for Makoni because Mugabe has failed in the 27 years that he has led us." The shift in the war veterans' position was also laid bare at a recent campaign rally in Insiza district in Matabeleland South where the deputy president of the Senate, Naison Ndlovu, was told to "shut up" by war veteran Tennyson "Thambolenyoka" Ndlovu. Naison Ndlovu had told the meeting Dabengwa was "a sell-out" but Thambolenyoka reportedly told him to stop insulting Dabengwa, "my commander". (Zim Std, 16 March)

WE ARE WATCHING YOU IN SOUTH AFRICA TOO: State media in Zimbabwe on Friday accused prominent South Africa-based Mail & Guardian publisher Trevor Ncube of donating R300 000 to President Robert Mugabe's rival Simba Makoni two weeks ahead of scheduled parliamentary polls. Zimbabwe's government mouthpiece Herald newspaper said it had obtained documents showing that Ncube made the payment on February 26 through a South African bank in order to provide campaign materials for Makoni, Mugabe's former finance minister. It was unclear how the Herald obtained the documents. Ncube, a Zimbabwean who also publishes two of the country's only three remaining private newspapers the Standard and the Independent, denied the claims, the paper reported. Zimbabwe's electoral laws make it an offence for parties to receive foreign funding. The newspaper said another man believed to be a South African national made a payment of R20 000 to the Makoni campaign on the same day. (Mail and Guardian, 14 March)

PEACEFUL, FANTASTIC ZIMBABWE: Zimbabwe's ambassador to South Africa today criticised the MDC for claiming that President Thabo Mbeki had not been an "honest broker". Mbeki had undertaken mediation efforts between the MDC and the ruling Zanu-PF to the best of his abilities and his efforts had been "courageous and fruitful", Simon Khaya Moyo told Parliament's portfolio committee on foreign affairs. He was briefing the committee ahead of his country's March 29 elections. "It now comes as more of a shocker than anything else, in fact amounting to arrogance and disrespect, for the MDC to make the trip to South Africa to announce that President Mbeki has not been an honest broker." Referring to the state of campaigning in the country, Moyo said it was "so peaceful, so beautiful, it's fantastic". (SABC, 17 March)

WHO CAN HE TRUST? President Robert Mugabe is seriously worried about his security reportedly following the discovery by his handlers of the latest plans to eliminate or oust him by some of his colleagues in Zanu (PF) and government structures. The troubled geriatric leader has taken extra-measures to beef up his security and investigations have revealed that his wife and kids are spending much of their time away from their official residence and mansion in the capital at some "safe"

locations, including their plot in Gweru. Intelligence and government sources revealed to this paper that Mugabe has been constantly shuffling the presidential guard team providing security for him and his family following yet another tip-off from his spies within the system that his enemies within and around the axis of power are hoping for an opportunity "to get rid of Mugabe by any means possible in order to save the country from his plans to cling onto power despite burning the country to ashes". (Zimbabwean, 19 March)

RURAL RALLIES: "It is unimaginable that we could have come to this place [before]," Mr Tsvangirai said in an exclusive interview after leaving St Boniface's Catholic mission in Urungwe district, where about 2,000 people responded joyously to his promise. "Bit by bit the rooster is going to be served up," a reference to Mr Mugabe's symbol, the cockerel. Mr Mugabe, by contrast, has been securing large numbers at rallies but by dragooning children and "rent-a-crowd" contingents, watched over by soldiers with automatic rifles and secret police. On Wednesday, after he held a rally 44 miles south of Karoi in his home town of Chinhoyi, I counted 11 heavy lorries, each laden with about 100 people, on the way back to the towns - some as far as 60 miles away - where they had been picked up. (Times, 21 March)

ZANU IS FINISHED: About 18 miles outside Karoi a farmer said that Zanu (PF) had to call off a meeting with local officials on Sunday because only ten people turned up - in an area dominated by ruling party settlers occupying former white-owned land. "Zanu (PF) is finished," he said. In Magunje, a business centre near Karoi, Mr Mugabe cut short a rally last week after first the local electricity supply grid and then two diesel generators failed to power the public address system. "People at the back were shouting at him: 'Can you see what is happening to the country?'," said one man who attended. Sources there said that two technicians of the national electricity utility were arrested on suspicion of switching off the power. (The Times, 21 March)

IN THE DARK: in the darkened provincial hall, the audience of 40-50 Zimbabweans could hardly see the man on the stage who was claiming to have come to liberate them from President Robert Mugabe's autocratic rule. Moments before he was due to speak, one of Zimbabwe's rolling power cuts had hit the region. Nervous spectators speculated it had been timed to undermine the appearance of the speaker, Simba Makoni, a former finance minister and one-time stalwart of the ruling Zanu-PF party. But as he finished his introductory denunciation of his former boss they threw caution aside and peppered him with questions. "Businessmen cannot buy goods from wholesalers without giving a kickback," said the first to his feet, a haggard man in a tatty safari suit. "To drive I have to bribe a policeman. To get water I have to bribe someone from the city council. Such is the state of corruption in our country. Once in power how will you remove this?" "Foreign investors are afraid of investing in this country," said a second. "If you are elected, how will you attract foreign business? How do you envisage engaging international countries so we become again part of the global village?" "I'm coming to say let's join together, let's get Zimbabwe working again," Mr Makoni told them to shouts of Simba, which in the language of the majority Shona tribe means power. "People in rural areas still have the idea that there is a hidden camera in the ballot box. Those of you who live in towns, go home and tell your rural relations they are free to vote." (Financial Times, 16 March)

DONOR FOOD AVOIDING ELECTION WEEK: the World Food Programme, determined to prevent food aid in Zimbabwe from being used to influence voters in this month's national elections, is speeding up the delivery of its food supplies to avoid overlap with the run-up to polling on March 29. The WFP, a United Nations agency, said in a statement issued on Thursday that it aimed to provide all 2.6 million beneficiaries with their food aid by the end of this week. It noted that there were two "entirely separate food pipelines" in Zimbabwe: that in which the government supplied subsidised food for sale through the country's Grain Marketing Board; and the free food supplies which the WFP and its partners handed out to "the most vulnerable people based solely on need." The WFP said that in February it and its partner NGOs had distributed about 39,000 metric tons of food - including maize, beans, and cooking oil - to 2.4 million Zimbabweans in the rural areas worst affected by drought and last year's poor harvest. (allAfrica.com, 20 March)

VOTE ZANU OR STARVE: in Tsholotsho, some traditional leaders said that they were threatened by Zanu (PF) Chairman John Nkomo and his party's deputy national commissar, Richard Ndlovu, who visited the district. "They held a meeting with us on March 12 in the offices of the Tsholotsho Rural district council, where they said we should ensure that Jonathan Moyo [independent Tsholotsho MP] loses to Zanu (PF) this time. They threatened to withdraw government support from the district, saying that they would close the GMB depot that is serving us and also deal with us if we betray them," said a headman who requested not to be named for fear of reprisals. Chiefs in Matobo also confirmed last week that they had been told by Zanu officials to rally villagers behind their candidates. (Zimbabwean, 20 March)

STILL WAITING FOR THAT ZAMBIAN MAIZE...: Grain Marketing Board (GMB) has ordered all millers in that country to organise their own transport to collect maize from Zambia in an effort to avert imminent starvation. According to the Zimbabwe Guardian of yesterday, in an effort to speed up the process, the ruling ZANU-PF had dispatched youths to Lusaka to help in the loading of the maize onto Zimbabwe-bound trucks. Most parts of Zimbabwe have run out of maize stocks, with the little available stocks being sold on the black market. According to the paper, in Bulawayo, a 10-kilogramme bag of maize was now fetching Z\$200 million instead of the stipulated Z\$10 million. Zimbabwe's Minister of Agriculture, Rugare Gumbo confirmed the government had dispatched manpower to Zambia to help quicken the delivery of maize. "We have paid for the maize and we have to quicken the loading. We have an urgent case here and we can't just fold our arms." (Zambia Daily Mail, 15 March)

COSTLY DELAY: delays in delivery of the maize forced Zimbabwe to pay another US\$18 million to South Africa for the importation of maize estimated to be between 100 000 and 130 000 tonnes for the GMB to boost the country's low maize stocks. Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor Gideon Gono told President Mugabe at a function last Saturday that the country would not have imported maize from South Africa had Zambia delivered the consignment on time. "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," Mr Gono said. (Zambia Daily Mail, 15 March)

VOTE ZANU FOR SCOTCH CART – BUT NO DONKEYS: on Monday the Herald carried a picture of a "Zanu PF supporter" who had benefited from phase 3 of the government's farm mechanisation programme in Bindura. The supporter was given a scotch cart and he was "pulling it" home. Quite tellingly, he had wrapped himself all over his upper body with "Vote Zanu PF" posters. What further evidence of vote-buying can one look for? But like all things that are not properly planned, somebody forgot to give him donkeys to pull the cart. (Muckraker, Zim Ind, 20 March)

NO CARS, NO FUEL, NO PRINTING: in further efforts to frustrate the Makoni bid, two car retailers have been instructed to halt all sales until after the elections, so that the challenger's campaign team cannot acquire vehicles. Fuel supplies have been earmarked for ZANU-PF campaigners. All printing companies have been booked up by ZANU-PF so that the opposition cannot get material published. The MDC has had to get its election literature printed in South Africa. (IWPR, 14 March)

KEEPING THE ELITE FED: Malawi President Bingu Mutharika whose country is facing acute food shortages is illegally sending food stuffs to the neighbouring Zimbabwe, a country facing serious economic hardships, Nyasa Times can reveal. The food stuffs are meant for his Zimbabwean counterpart Robert Mugabe and relatives of the former deceased First Lady, Ethel Mutharika. The late First Lady was a Zimbabwean national and because of this, Mutharika and Mugabe have developed close ties. These weekly food stuff supplies being undertaken by Mutharika are being paid for from Malawi's state coffers. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world. Our sources say that there is a standing agreement between President Mutharika and President Mugabe to supply him with food stuffs almost every week. Because of this agreement, Mutharika has also decided to support relatives of his late wife through the arrangement. Our State House sources say the trips to deliver food stuffs in Zimbabwe are done every weekend on Saturdays/Sundays and drivers and security personnel from State House do

shifts on these arrangements.

MALAWI STARVES AS ZANU USES THEIR MAIZE TO BUY VOTES: as President Mutharika is feeding Mugabe, Malawians are suffering through the hunger that has gripped the nation after another 400,000 metric tonnes of the country's strategic maize reserves were also sold to Zimbabwe mid last year. Now, in almost all state owned Admarc selling depots, there are long queues of people waiting to buy the country's staple food, which is now in scarcity. As a result of these shortages, government is rationing the maize only selling 25 Kilograms per family or in some situations even 15 Kilograms. (Nyasa Times 17 March)

SALUTE OR GO TO JAIL: four Zimbabwe army soldiers are in prison pending disciplinary action today for failing to salute President Robert Mugabe, military sources told ZimOnline. The soldiers from the army's 1.2 infantry battalion were arrested last Thursday at the battalion's home at Magunje, about 240 km north-west of Harare, because they did not salute Mugabe when he landed with his helicopter. Mugabe, who is Commander-in-Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces that comprise the army and air force, was in Magunje to address an election campaign rally at a nearby rural businesses centre. (Zim Online, 17 March)

CALL TO REBEL: "You have heard your commanders declare that they would not support and salute anyone other than the current president, But it is this president and his elite that have made the lives of you, your families and all of us a daily misery. Go against the orders of your commanders, lay down your arms and rally behind the people of Zimbabwe to foster reconstruction and development. It is not too late to refuse to be used as pawns by those who hold no allegiance to you and your families and whose only interest is in their own personal greed and ambition," (NCA, 21 March)

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER: "If Tsvangirai and his (MDC) group have such plans[for Kenyan style violence], they must stand warned," Mugabe told about 20,000 cheering supporters in his rural home area of Zvimba, 100 km north-west of Harare. "That will never happen here, never, never. We will never allow it. We have enough security forces to handle that." (Reuters, 21 March)

MUGABE AVOIDS WHITE CITY STADIUM: embattled President Mugabe, reeling from waning support and a restive urban population ahead of next week's harmonised elections, tests his support in Bulawayo this weekend where he is scheduled to address three rallies. At the time of going to press there were doubts that the rallies would go ahead because of poor planning and haphazard mobilisation by party officials. President Mugabe, who has been on a whirlwind tour of rural areas since he launched his election campaign last month, will hold his first star rally at Mandwandwe Secondary School in Nkulumane before proceeding to Stanley Square and Inkanyezi Primary School in Lobengula. In the past President Mugabe has held election rallies at White City Stadium which can take in 13 000 supporters on the stands and on the main turf. Stanley Square in Makokoba is estimated to take in a maximum of 5 000 people when packed. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

CIO BOSS A MAKONI MAN? CIO director-general, retired Major-General Happyton Bonyongwe, is facing removal from the state security agency after a major fallout with President Robert Mugabe over the Simba Makoni issue which has divided the spy outfit. It has also caused ructions in Zanu PF and government. The sources said it was almost certain Bonyongwe would be forced to leave because he allegedly failed to keep Mugabe briefed when Makoni was about to challenge him in the presidential election next week. The only way, the sources said, Bonyongwe could survive is if Makoni wins the election. Bonyongwe last weekend took the unusual step of talking to the state media in a bid to dispel speculation about his links to Makoni. While admitting it was uncommon for a CIO boss to talk to the press, he nonetheless went ahead to do so. Bonyongwe denied links to Makoni, saying: "I have no association whatsoever with the Makoni group." In the lengthy denial -- which only served to heighten speculation about his future - Bonyongwe was at pains to pledge his loyalty to Mugabe, declaring: "I serve one master and the master is the president." (Zim Independent, 20 March)

COLD FEET? Zvinavashe, Mavhaire and other senior Zanu PF politburo members were believed to be backing the ex-Finance minister's presidential bid and had been expected to abandon President Robert Mugabe. Zvinavashe and Mavhaire were expected to attend Makoni's rally at Mucheke Stadium, Masvingo, last Saturday, but did not turn up amid reports they were no longer party to the former Sadc executive secretary's ambitious project. The sources said Makoni and his election mobilisation department head, retired army Major Kudzai Mbudzi, went twice to Zvinavashe's Tynwald home in Harare recently to find out when the Gutu Senator would quit Zanu PF and join them. "Zvinavashe refused to meet them," one of the sources said. "He has made it clear that he was no longer interested in Makoni's presidential ambitions even though he is of the opinion that Mugabe should not be the Zanu PF presidential candidate." The source said Mbudzi approached Mavhaire in Masvingo and was told point blank that he was not interested in the Makoni plot. "Mavhaire was upset when approached by Mbudzi," the source said. "He told Mbudzi that he was bent on destroying his political career. He said he didn't want to hear anything to do with Makoni." (Zim Independent, 20 March)

MUJURU THERE BY PROXY: The sources said during the Makoni rally in Masvingo, Mujuru was represented by one of his confidants (name supplied). The confidant, one of the sources said, had attended most of Makoni's meetings and rallies since the former finance minister announced his presidential ambitions on February 5. "The confidant briefs Mujuru on our meetings and rallies. We have been assured that the general (Mujuru) will go public soon," the source said. Apart from the commanders, sources said, despite their denials and exhibition of allegiance to Mugabe, Vice-presidents Joice Mujuru and Joseph Msika and party chairperson John Nkomo maintained close links to Makoni's camp. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

WHO MURDERED THESE MEN? :This is an unpleasant and disturbing story. If you have a sensitive nature you might be well advised to skip it. It concerns the unidentified corpses of 20 murder victims which have lain, unknown and unclaimed, on the slabs of a Zimbabwe mortuary for six years. The slain are believed to have met their fate at the hands of the CIO during the 2002 election. Today frantic efforts are being made to get them buried before they become a scandalous issue in the current election. The victims were all supporters of the MDC, and were from the Lupane district. After the murders, and to cover their tracks, the CIO had the bodies transferred to neighbouring Nyaki, where they were dumped in the local morgue. And there they remained. In Zimbabwe any burial requires an order from the police, who cannot issue the order before investigating the death. But the Nyaki police were reluctant to begin inquiries, partly because of the scale of the task, and partly because they feared they would put themselves in danger. Refrigeration has failed. And those 20 bodies are now in an advanced state of decomposition. The morgue is part of the hospital complex, and near Nkayi business centre. Nkayi Rural District Council, who are responsible for the morgue, have finally lost patience. They have written to the appropriate ministries demanding explanations and action. And as a result, the Provincial Medical Director for Matabeleland North, Dr. Irene Ndiweni, has been spending days at Nkayi lately, cobbling together the necessary paperwork to get the bodies buried, and thereby forgotten. By the time you read this she may have succeeded, certainly in getting the corpses underground. The human stench may be gone. But the stench of violence, corruption and murder from an election six years ago will remain. And it will hang over this election in a thick and noxious cloud. (Zimbabwe Today, 14 March)

COME HOME AND VOTE: Zimbabwe's Christian Alliance group says it plans to transport some of the multitude of Zimbabwean immigrants living in South Africa back home to vote in elections in about two weeks time. The Alliance said it was looking to move about 50 000 Zimbabweans across the Limpopo River separating the two countries, adding it was "working out the logistics" of how best to move such a huge number of people across the Beitbridge border post that is the busiest in southern Africa. "We are organising transport for potential Zimbabwean voters in South Africa to travel home and vote. We are only working on logistics to see how we can do it best," Christian Alliance spokesman Useni Sibanda told Zimonline on Monday. The Alliance brings together opposition political parties and major civic society organisations campaigning for a democratic solution to Zimbabwe's eight-year old social, economic and political crisis. But Sibanda said political parties were not part to the plan to bring South African-based Zimbabweans home to vote. (Zim Online, 18 March)

COME HOME AND VOTE: "The situation back home is unfolding, therefore I appeal to them to cross the Limpopo and come and cast their votes," Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) Secretary General Wellington Chibebe told Talk Radio 702. An estimated three million Zimbabweans live and work in South Africa, out of a total Zimbabwean population of about 12-million. (702, 16 March)

WISHY WASHY: Mr Makoni's refusal so far either to attack his old party outright or to put much flesh on his broadly sensible but vague policy ideas has made him look amiable but wishy-washy. His allies are a mix of old left-wing ideologues, displaced rivals of Mr Mugabe, disenchanted ZANU-PF people who want a younger man at the helm, and businessmen, many of whom would not dismantle the present system of crony capitalism but want to make it more efficient, notably by ending the global isolation wrought by Mr Mugabe. (The Economist, 19 March)

ERRATIC AND NOT ASTUTE: almost no one disputes Mr Tsvangirai's courage and resilience, but many doubt whether he is astute enough to lead the country and heal its wounds. "How can you expect to unify the country when you can't unify your party?" was a telling question at one of his meetings. For his MDC has been riven with factional feuding. He is an erratic tactician with authoritarian tendencies. In his negotiations with Mr Mugabe's representatives under the aegis of the SADC he has been serially outwitted. In his early days he made the big mistake of letting himself look as if he were being bankrolled and even manipulated by Zimbabwe's aggrieved white farmers. (the Economist, 19 March)

WILL MAKONI ERODE TSVANGIRAI VOTE? Tsvangirai dismissed suggestions that Makoni has been chipping away at his traditional urban support. He said this week that he merely saw Makoni as a faction of Zanu-PF, and that voters, too, would see the new challenger as such. "To me this is a split in Zanu-PF. It has nothing to do with the MDC. You have two candidates that I am contesting with from Zanu-PF; Robert Mugabe's faction and Simba Makoni's faction. That's what I can read and for me that is where it ends," Tsvangirai said. But analysts believe Makoni will feed on the disillusionment among urban voters over Tsvangirai's failure to lead a united opposition into the election. Mugabe himself will be watching the urban count more closely than he would normally. Mugabe will be hoping that Makoni and Tsvangirai split the urban vote and leave his rural support intact. "As long as Makoni is fishing from the same pond as Tsvangirai, there is no chance of a run-off," said analyst Gordon Moyo. Supporters of Tsvangirai believe Makoni is likely to attract much of his support from traditional Zanu-PF supporters, who still back the ruling party but are angry at Mugabe's refusal to hand over power to a younger leadership. Mugabe is yet to hold an urban rally, and at all his rallies in rural areas, he has largely ignored Tsvangirai, pouring most of his vitriol on Makoni and those he believes are opposed to his continued hold on the party. (Mail and Guardian, 15 March)

NO MORE PADDOCKS: but the challenger has so far refused to become involved in a public slanging match. Makoni vowed to clamp down on anyone who had made illegal gains in the Mugabe years. "If people have amassed wealth crookedly then the law will be brought to bear on them," he said. But if elected, he said he would form a government of national unity reflecting the composition of parliament and comprising members of both Zanu-PF and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. "Today it is in a state of fear, a nation of stress and mistrust," he said. "My vision is of a country where you are not partitioned into little paddocks because you have the wrong card in your pocket...or because a relative supports the wrong party," he added. (Sapa-AFP, 17 March)

GONO HEADS TERROR MACHINE: opposition MDC warned Sunday that it would investigate central bank governor Gideon Gono through a Truth and Justice Commission for allegedly abetting human rights violations if it wins elections on March 29. MDC secretary general Tendai Biti told thousands of supporters gathered at a football stadium in Masvingo that Gono was the "epicentre of Zanu PF's terror machine". "We will definitely investigate Gono," Biti said. "When our leadership and pro-democracy activists were bludgeoned, brutalised and Gift Tandare died on March 11, Gono was financing the police. He bought them food from Nandos everyday and gave them \$1 million each during this bloody operation. "On March 26, 2007, when Last Maingahama was abducted by the CIO operatives during the memorial of Tandare at the Northside Community Church in Borrowdale, Gono was a willing partner. He bought 12 Triton cars for the CIO, two which were used to snatch

Maingahama. "Gono financed Operation Murambatsvina in 2005. Now two weeks before the election, he is aiding Zanu PF to buy votes through the distribution of tractors and farm implements. (New Zimbabwe, 18 March)

DEBTS WILL NOT BE HONoured: Zimbabwe's opposition has said it would not honour what it described as "illegitimate debts" incurred by President Robert Mugabe's government to fund partisan projects that did not benefit the country. Tendai Biti, secretary general of the larger faction of the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party led by Morgan Tsvangirai, said if elected into power the party would order audit to establish which debts were for the good of the nation. "Our government will not be bound to repay debts inherited from the current government which were not geared to promote national development," said Biti. (Zim Online, 21 March)

UNITY PLEASE: I am embarrassed by those in the MDC who still believe that instead of focusing on winning the elections, they need to demonstrate which is the "real" MDC. Then what happens after the opposition "loses" again? The reason I am writing on this subject is because I believe there is still a chance for those who have put themselves forward to lead this nation to come together if they are sincere in their calls for change. I am pessimistic about the chances of a divided opposition winning against the ruling Zanu PF and President Robert Mugabe, just like I have reservations about those so optimistic about victory that they have closed their ears to any other ideas. Divisions only serve to show that our suffering is taken as no more than a campaign tool, not something which calls for immediate relief. The single-candidate principle was the best idea the MDC ever came up with since the "split" of 2005. Zanu PF can afford to be divided and take whatever gamble they want. They have been in existence for nearly four decades and have been in power for 28 years. Zanu PF has access to state resources... The opposition and civic society will be among the first to tell the "international community" about how the vote was "rigged" while they play innocent victim of an evil regime. That is not what the people of Zimbabwe want. They are not interested in Kenya-style threats of violence, and definitely are not interested in more sanctions on Zimbabwe. They are desperate for a leader who has a vision; one who can find an end to their toil. I have doubts that a divided opposition can deliver that. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

YOU DON'T LEAD BY EXAMPLE: What I find most intriguing is that the same politicians who tell us they want to give us a united Zimbabwe are unable to work together. So what constitutes unity if leaders cannot see the need to lead by example? What is its value? To me this is not the stuff national leaders are made of, not even if they win elections. We saw it at Independence in 1980. The template hasn't changed. In the shallow, angry campaign speeches even noble ideals such as a better education and improved health sound like epithets - one does not feel the sincere heart, generous spirit or noble mind behind the words. It's a disaster for the nation that, faced with the current economic ruin, President Mugabe still stands a chance of winning elections because opposition leaders are too arrogant to accommodate each other and work as a team. (Zim Ind, 20 March)

SUBJECT TO THE LAW: Simba Makoni, the former Zimbabwe finance minister and now presidential challenger, has said that if Robert Mugabe is defeated in this month's presidential elections he can retire to his village but will remain subject to the "law of the land". "He is an elderly man who has a special place in our history but who also has a lot to answer for," Mr Makoni told the Financial Times. "There will be no retribution, no rancour. He will retire to his village if he wants to. He can write his memoirs as he once said he wanted to." Asked whether Mr Mugabe would be investigated over the Matabeleland massacres of the 1980s when security forces killed up to 20,000 supporters of his one-time rival liberation leader, Joshua Nkomo, Mr Makoni said the president would be liable to "the law of the land". His ambiguous response reflects the difficulties he faces honing his message. A former senior official of the ruling Zanu-PF party the 57-year-old hopes to gain the support of traditional Mugabe supporters by presenting himself as an "in-house" successor, but he also needs to tap into public discontent at the veteran autocrat's mismanagement of the economy. (Financial Times, 16 March)

REFORM BY CONSULTATION: Mr Makoni's ties with the Zanu-PF elite have reinforced suspicions that he would not oversee the reforms of the political and business regimes that are widely deemed necessary in the wake of the increasingly kleptocratic rule of Mr Mugabe. If elected he would, he said, form a government of national unity reflecting the composition of parliament and so comprising members of both Zanu-PF and the MDC. Only after consulting his new allies would he announce his policies to reverse Zimbabwe's economic implosion. He was outspoken about conditions in Zimbabwe. "Today it is in a state of fear, a nation of stress and mistrust. My vision is of a country where you are not partitioned into little paddocks because you have the wrong card in your pocket ... or because a relative supports the wrong party. "If people have amassed wealth crookedly then the law will be brought to bear on them," he said. In spite of calling for an end to "disorderly" and "unfair" land reform, he indicated that land forcibly taken from several thousand white commercial farmers would not be returned. (Financial Times, 16 March)

ZANU REMEMBERED FOR SEWERAGE: Zanu PF's major weakness is the failure to renew its leadership, says Fay Chung, a former minister under President Robert Mugabe who, she says, may now be remembered only for the "sewage" that litters the streets and the "endless nights" without electricity. Chung, a parliamentary candidate under Simba Makoni's Mavambo formation, is widely acclaimed for her role in reforming the educational system after independence. In comments highlighting her disappointment with the performance of her erstwhile comrades in Zanu PF, she said they had "run down the country". She said there was evidence everywhere for everyone to see that the country lacked leadership. "Even in the streets, you see pipes spewing out raw sewage, everywhere there is corruption, GMB (Grain Marketing Board) has no seeds, ZESA (Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority) has no electricity, there is general neglect. It's clear Zimbabwe is like a plane without a pilot," she said in an interview with The Standard. "Unless you have a moral leader like a Pope or a Queen, it is wrong for any country or organisation not to renew its leadership. You need renewal; it's 28 years and there has been no renewal," Chung added, in a specific attack on Mugabe's leadership. (Zim Std, 16 March)

CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD NOT BACK POLITICIANS: what I witnessed recently at the People's Convention dismayed me. Dr Lovemore Madhuku's attempt to sway those gathered to vote for Morgan Tsvangirai was in bad taste. He should have used other underhand tactics but not to openly tell people not to vote for Dr Simba Makoni or President Robert Mugabe. It was my understanding that the convention was a gathering of people from various civic and political formations but with progressive minds. But not everyone who attends such meetings is like a robot. Certainly, we are not like the youths he called out to toyi-toyi around the tent in support of his views. Thank God, we still have other voices of reason. Thanks to Munyaradzi Gwisai, Jenni Williams, Lovemore Matombo and Raymond Majongwe, among others, for promptly rebuking Madhuku for such blatant lack of respect for others because we were not gathered as Madhuku's people. Since when did civil society formations start advocating for specific individuals? We respect an individual's right to associate with whoever they so wish. We are all political animals, but our own views should not supercede those of the umbrella body. Madhuku called his National Constitutional Assembly members outside the tent and we saw them toyi-toying. Only half-baked activists allow themselves to be abused like that. (Zim Std, letter, 16 March)

RECLAIMING THE RECLAIMED: Simba Makoni has threatened to take over land from multiple farm owners and those who did not deserve the farms given to them under the government's land reform fiasco. Makoni, one of the four presidential candidates in the 29 March harmonised elections, spoke to 5 000 supporters at Mkoba Stadium in Gweru during his presidential campaign. The Gweru rally was part of a campaign trail that also took the Mavambo formation to Silobela and Kwekwe, where officials described the turnout as "excellent". (Zim Std, 16 March)

I WANT TO VOTE NOW!: the women sat in the rural way; on the ground, with their legs stretched out straight in front of them, under an enormous old tree. The men sat in a group apart from them, all listening to Zimbabwe's newest opposition leader, Simba Makoni. They had been ordered by the chief of the area not to attend, but they came anyway. They did not move when two policemen approached to

watch the meeting, nor were they distracted by a campaign meeting, 200 metres away, of the ruling Zanu (PF) party, even with its large heap of food-for-votes grain bags ready for distribution to the faithful. Mr Makoni, President Mugabe's former Finance Minister, left the party a month ago to challenge him for the presidency in the March 29 elections. When he made a joke of Mr Mugabe's totem, he got loud, derisive laughs. They clapped and cheered when he scorned the situation where a box of matches now costs Z\$2 million. Their shouts became angry ones when he told them that the members of Mr Mugabe's politburo had sent their own children to schools in Australia and Malaysia "after they have destroyed our education system". One woman cried out: "I want to vote now!" This is in the heart of Zanu (PF) territory, in the rough and inhospitable province of Masvingo in the south of the country, an area that Zanu (PF) proudly claims is a "one-party province". In the last presidential election a meeting like this would have brought the villagers a lesson from the party youth, of bloodied heads and houses razed to the ground. "This could never have happened here, not even two months ago," said a retired civil servant, who gave his name as Albert. "Anything can happen in this election now. We cannot continue suffering." (The Times, 16 March)

RURAL VOTERS NOT IDIOTS: wherever I went, people spoke the forbidden word, "change". In the blink of an eye, something has happened to Zimbabwe's rural people, after nearly 30 years under Mr Mugabe's absolute rule, where the ruling party card is the key to receiving famine relief when you are starving, while dissent has meant death for hundreds. The rural areas have, by a policy of brutal subjection and deliberate impoverishment, been made a reliable reservoir of votes for Zanu (PF) that Mr Mugabe, 84, has used to stay in power since he was first challenged in 2000. But suddenly the web of fear and silence appears to be dissolving. Last week in the Gutu area, another Mugabe fortress about 30 miles (50km) north of here, one of the factions of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was able not just to hold rallies and draw thousands of villagers, but to see village headmen - the bailiffs of Zanu (PF)'s rural rule - denouncing Mr Mugabe and declaring allegiance to the MDC. "We gave Mugabe a chance and they failed," said a headman, Tapurai Gudo. "Now they are asking for our support. This is the time to show that rural people are not idiots." (The Times, 16 March)

I AM ZANU – AND MDC: the obvious working premise for Makoni's camp is that the popular consensus within Zanu PF is that Mugabe must, indeed, go. Their major objective, therefore, is to wrestle the pith of the former national liberation movement from Mugabe and the coterie of radicals that he has surrounded himself with. It is for this reason that Makoni and his backers continue publicly to profess their allegiance to Zanu PF. However, Makoni also calculates that his cross-party appeal will sweep opposition voters from under Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC's feet. His endorsement by Arthur Mutambara's MDC faction goes a long way in realising this goal - it delivers the Matabeleland vote. (New Zimbabwe, 14 March)

MORE THAN GOODWILL NEEDED: Makoni must, therefore, explain clearly what it is about Zanu PF that he remains proud to be associated with, and whether or not he has ambitions to lead a reformed version of it. Dispelling the scepticism of urban voters is crucial for Makoni to win over the anti-Zanu PF vote and gain the edge over Tsvangirai. Analysts in Zimbabwe do not expect an outright victory by any one of the candidates and predict a run-off poll to decide the winner. It is widely regarded as a foregone conclusion that Mugabe will be a participant in any run-off (that is assuming he fails to rig the whole thing in the first instance). Makoni's novelty is likely to be the decisive factor in a run-off poll, whoever he faces. In the final analysis, Makoni has massive goodwill going for him. He has generally enjoyed a good press throughout his career and is respected as a man of integrity, capable of exercising rational, competent and conciliatory national leadership. However, his reliance on his Zanu PF heavyweight friends to haul in the vote for him could be his undoing if they should decide to stick with Mugabe after all, as vice-president Joice Mujuru has done. (New Zimbabwe, 14 March)

THE FIST: In a response to Mugabe's "vote for the fist" campaign, Tsvangirai's MDC said in a newspaper advert: "The war is over. We cannot feed people with clenched fists". The other challenger, Makoni, has been even more direct. "Don't vote for the fist. The fist has become a hammer smashing the country." (Reuters, 20 March)

BATTLE FOR MATABELELAND: as the campaign for this month end's elections gathered pace last week, Matabeleland emerged as the major battle ground in the presidential race with the three main contenders fighting to show they enjoy majority support in the restive region. President Robert Mugabe and his major challengers, independent candidate Simba Makoni and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader, Morgan Tsvangirai made a staggering 16 campaign stops in the last five days up to Tuesday last week as they drummed up support for their causes. Analysts say the interest in the region, a hotbed of opposition politics since independence was motivated by two major political developments this year. One was the failure by the two MDC factions to re-unite, and the other the decision by former Zanu PF heavyweight Dumiso Dabengwa to dump Mugabe for Makoni. Mugabe, bidding for a sixth consecutive term in office, used his four poorly-attended "star" rallies in the provinces to lash out at Dabengwa, describing his defection as a great betrayal. (Zim Std, 16 March)

WIN MATABELELAND TO MAKE RUN-OFF: Matebeleland has three of the country's 10 provinces (30 per cent of the voting provinces). A candidate who wins in 30 per cent of the provinces, by whatever margin, is also likely to achieve the 33.3 per cent threshold, unless he fails dismally in all the other provinces; which is an unlikely scenario. This, in turn, implies that whoever wins Matebeleland will most likely proceed to the second round of voting. (Zimbabwean, 19 March)

MATABELELAND A KEY CONSTITUENCY: Everyone who did not see the free beer and free buses now believes that Morgan is the most popular leader in Matebeleland. This gives him an unstoppable momentum which could easily turn into votes. His biggest let-down, though, is the lack of a local hero in his ranks. Thokozani Khupe and Lovemore Moyo hardly define what it really means to be a 'real' Matebele leader, and whether they will deliver the vote remains to be seen. On the other hand, Simba Makoni decided to rope in a local hero, Dumiso Dabengwa, to win the heart and soul of this region. Dumiso is the man who spent five years in prison, fighting for his people. Even in 2000, when they voted for the MDC, they openly told him: "We love you Dumiso, but we do not like the Mugabe jacket that you are wearing." Now he has come back to say: "I have removed that jacket." Simba has also been endorsed by Welshman Ncube, et al; the self proclaimed or assumed new leaders of Matebeleland. As for uncle Bob, he already knows that Matebeleland is a lost battle. He will concentrate on the rural areas of Mashonaland where he is busy sharpening his rigging mechanisms. In the end, Bob is likely to win the rural vote in Mashonaland by hook or by crook, and he is likely to face a run-off against whoever wins Matebeleland (Zimbabwean, 19 March)

MATABELELAND REBELS: Senior Zanu (PF) politicians who secretly back Makoni are waiting until a few days before election to reveal their hands, The Zimbabwean learnt this week. Politburo member Dumiso Dabengwa, a respected former ZIPRA commander and intelligence supremo, has already sided with independent presidential candidate and former finance minister Simba Makoni. Ruling party sources in Bulawayo, however, this week revealed that some senior politicians had not yet declared their support for Makoni in a bid to "direct things from within" and would only announce their allegiance to the former minister a few days before elections. Very few, who include Obert Mpofu and Andrew Langa, are still showing support for Mugabe. "Most of the party members who are openly campaigning against Mugabe are said to be in Matabeleland North." Mpofu gave the names of these candidates to the President and said that they needed to be investigated, as they were not committed to preserving the country's unity and sovereignty," said another source. "We do not know what will happen to those members, as the President took the names but made no mention of any measures." Mpofu confirmed that some party supporters were de-campaigning Mugabe, but would not reveal their names to The Zimbabwean. "I cannot reveal their names, but I know them and I have been told most of the bad things they are saying," he said. (Zimbabwean, 15 March)

URBAN VOTE WILL COUNT: New voter statistics out in Zimbabwe this week showed the urban centres will be a major battleground in the elections in two weeks' time. Harare and Bulawayo, the two largest urban centres in the country, now account for a combined 20% of the total voter count of 3,5-million. In previous elections, the share of urban voters was lower, allowing Mugabe to throw all his resources into the rural areas to secure his rule. This time he might have to do better if he is to fend off his two challengers, Morgan Tsvangirai and Simba Makoni. After a weekend in which both candidates

attracted large crowds to their rallies in Bulawayo and the Midlands -- areas already largely pro-opposition -- there are questions about how the urban vote might be split between the two, and whether the split will be enough for Mugabe to retain control. Ibbo Mandaza, a senior Makoni adviser, said on Tuesday that whoever does well in Harare and Bulawayo this time has a good chance of going all the way. (Mail and Guardian, 15 March)

MUGABE ASKS BRITS FOR PUBLICITY: As the country's economy collapses with record inflation, shortages of essential commodities, fuel and water it has emerged that Mugabe's regime wanted to pour money on a PR campaign, run by a British company. International public relations firm Bell Pottinger is reported to have declined a contract to represent the Zimbabwean government and help build its international image. An article on the 'PR Weekly' website said company Chairman Peter Bingle made the admission to a UK parliamentary committee inquiry into the lobbying industry. Bingle says they were approached to 'advise Zimbabwe' but that they declined the offer. Explaining how they operate, Bingle told the committee that every time the agency is approached by an overseas client 'we would talk to the foreign office, take a view, look at whether we would want to work for that type of country or company.' (SWRadio, 18 March)

ASYLUM EXCLUSIONS TO RESUME: ministers are preparing to expel hundreds of failed asylum-seekers back to the brutal regime of Robert Mugabe, seriously undermining Gordon Brown's publicly declared tough stance on Zimbabwe. The Government has started a mass removal programme that could affect more than 1,000 Zimbabweans who have enjoyed protection in the UK under a moratorium on deportations. Letters sent by the Home Office to failed asylum-seekers last week inform the recipients that they are at "no general risk" in Zimbabwe and encourage them to leave the UK voluntarily. One of the letters, seen by The Independent on Sunday, says: "Your claim for asylum has been refused... I am now writing to make sure that you know that the Border & Immigration Agency [BIA] is expecting shortly to be able to enforce returns to Zimbabwe. The Asylum and Immigration Tribunal [AIT] has now found that there is no general risk on return for failed asylum-seekers." It adds: "You have exhausted your rights of appeal and have no other basis of stay in the UK. You should now make plans to return home." (Independent, 16 March)

I WILL ARREST THOSE DEPORTED: President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has said that an unspecified number of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in Britain will be arrested and imprisoned when they are deported from that country. The government-controlled Herald in Harare reported that Mugabe had "castigated those who tried to tarnish his name alleging political persecution when they were mere criminals fleeing the law, saying they should come back to atone for their ruinous actions" (World Press, 21 March)

THE ECONOMY

ARMY GRILLS BUSINESSES ON MAKONI: the Zimbabwean authorities are cracking down on businesses they suspect of backing Simba Makoni, the former finance minister who has emerged as a serious challenger to President Robert Mugabe in this month's elections. The crackdown is seen as a sign of how seriously Mugabe and his allies in the ruling ZANU-PF party take the newcomer. Last month, Makoni shocked the party - of which he was a member - by announcing he would stand against the incumbent. He was summarily kicked out of the party and pilloried in speeches by the president. In the latest example of the regime's determination to keep itself in power, IWPR has learned that retailers and other top businesspeople who supply basic commodities were summoned to a meeting on February 4 at the offices of Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono. On arrival, however, they were informed that the meeting had been convened not by the central bank, but by the Joint Operations Command, JOC, a powerful body chaired by Zimbabwean army commander-in-chief General Constantine Chiwenga and consisting of military, police, intelligence and prison system chiefs. The JOC coordinates military and security affairs and many observers believe it carries more real clout than the cabinet. (IWPR, 14 March)

WE HAVE BEEN WATCHING YOU: in a sign of what the meeting was going to be about, the head of

the National Incomes and Pricing Commission, Godwills Masimirembwa, was also in attendance. According to a source at the central bank, the hostility and tension in the room was palpable as the business leaders walked in. JOC members were waiting in full military uniform. The officials proceeded to berate the business chiefs for defying the price controls that Mugabe ordered last June in what proved to be an unsuccessful bid to check the country's galloping inflation. This time, however, the JOC's allegations were that the businesses were involved in more than flouting price controls. The principal accusation was that they were allocating funds to support Makoni's election campaign. Chiwenga sat with files of bank statements, deposit slips and surveillance reports piled in front of him. IWPR's source said all the businessmen summoned to the March 4 meeting were directly or indirectly accused of sponsoring the Makoni candidacy. Subtle threats were made that they should stop financing Makoni or face big problems. The JOC made it clear it suspected that by maintaining shortages and covertly hiking prices, businesses were pursuing a political agenda of ensuring Mugabe and ZANU-PF lost the presidential and parliamentary elections. "This was the highest level of intimidation to stop funding of Simba Makoni," said a top executive. "It has always been obvious that Simba had the support of the local businesspeople and it seems that they want to end that. ZANU-PF desperately wants to win, and losing is not an option. They want to make sure that in the period before the elections there is bread at reasonable prices and other foodstuffs that are currently in short supply." (IWPR, 14 March)

JAIL FOR BUSINESS MEN: Authorities in Zimbabwe want to impose mandatory jail terms on business people who flout price controls, news reports said on Wednesday. The recommendation was made recently by a special committee chaired by the acting attorney general Bharat Patel, the state-controlled Herald daily said. "On price control, it was recommended that the existing legislation should be harmonised and rationalised," Patel was quoted as saying. "It was also agreed that the offence of overcharging should be visited with the possibility of imprisonment as well as a monetary fine," he said. The statement came as it was announced on Wednesday that two more business executives had been arrested. David Muchinguri, the general manager of Bakers Inn - one of Harare's top bakeries - has been arrested for charging too much for a loaf of bread, the Herald said in a separate report. Another city executive was arrested for overcharging on bags of cement. Earlier in March two executives from two of Zimbabwe's major milling firms were arrested for charging too much for flour. In 2007 more than 23 000 company officials and business owners were arrested for flouting price controls imposed by President Robert Mugabe's government in a desperate bid to curb inflation. (IOL, 19 March)

680 TRILLION PRINTED FOR ELECTION: President Robert Mugabe's government printed Z\$680 trillion to meet massive salary increments to restive civil servants this month and to fund its bid to win tricky elections next week, authoritative sources told ZimOnline. The sources, who are senior figures at the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), said the government ordered the central bank to provide \$166 trillion to quell a teachers' strike for more pay that was threatening to spread to include other equally disgruntled state workers and in the process overshadow the government's campaign to remain in office. The administration requested another \$514 trillion to purchase buses, tractors, motor cycles, combine harvesters, generators, small farm implements and cows that Mugabe has distributed to beneficiaries in recent weeks, in what analysts have said was a clear attempt to buy support ahead of elections. "As of February 29, the central bank had advanced \$514 trillion to the government for the farm mechanization programme and its recurrent expenditure," said an RBZ official who declined to be named for professional reasons. (Zim Online, 20 March)

ECONOMY PILLAGED TO BUY VOTES: Zimbabwe's ailing economy will crash further after the March 29 polls because of government's populist policies that are designed to win hearts ahead of the elections, analysts have said. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) has been forced to print trillions of dollars to fund Zanu PF's campaign ahead of the synchronised elections. Although some of the policies might sound genuine in nature, their timing is curious. The central bank was last week forced to print trillions to fund civil servants' salaries which government was forced to review for fear of losing the elections. There were fears in government circles that the discontent among soldiers, police, teachers and other civil servants would translate into votes for the opposition. Inflation will skyrocket and industry which is operating at 20% of capacity will continue to collapse because there is no foreign currency to

import critical raw materials. The warning signs are already flashing. Last week domestic debt reached \$1,4 quadrillion. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

400,000 % INFLATION AHEAD: "The government is broke but whoever wins whether it's Tsvangirai, Makoni or Mugabe will have to face a worse situation. The February inflation figures are not yet out but I wouldn't be surprised if it comes to 300 000% because of government actions," said Hawkins. Hawkins said inflation is likely to reach 400 000% by May this year. "Right now they are damaging the economy further but I don't think they care because all they want is to win votes." The real impact is that there will be very little foreign currency coming into Zimbabwe after the elections because the key earners have been destroyed. Their revival will need more foreign currency and time... Zimbabwe's biggest gold mine, Metallon, has not received its foreign currency from the central bank since December. Operations at the company's five mines that produce 51% of Zimbabwe's gold have ground to a halt. Some exporters have not received their foreign currency for the past four months. Applications from companies that require foreign currency to import raw materials for production have not been processed for the past three months. A number of companies were this week considering closing until after the elections because they don't have raw materials. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

MEDICAL AID SCHEMES COLLAPSE: medical aid providers will this month fail to provide health cover for their clients after the National Incomes and Pricing Commission (NIPC) barred them from increasing service fees. Private doctors now charge between \$100 million and \$240 million for consultation, fees that are way above those currently covered by medical aid societies. One of the country's leading medical aid societies, Medical Aid Society of Central Africa (Masca), last week wrote to its members notifying them that they would experience huge shortfalls as what they are contributing could not cover their health bills. "We have now been informed that, after the March 12 meeting, the National Incomes and Pricing Commission would not approve any increases," wrote Masca. "This then means that the January tariff would be used to pay any claims despite the fact that some service providers were granted approval to increase their tariff by 800% back-dated to January 2008! This decision will only see the members facing even larger shortfalls." (Zim Independent, 20 March)

NGOS DENIED THEIR OWN FOREX: more than 400 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are facing imminent closure after failing to get their foreign currency from the RBZ. The central bank has failed to release foreign currency belonging to the NGO sector for the past three months. The RBZ is now in charge of all foreign currency accounts in the country while commercial banks are only allowed to hold mirror accounts showing balances. The delay in the release of the funds has forced most organisations to scale down operations. Others are now contemplating shutting down until the central bank releases their monies which they urgently need to carry out projects. Humanitarian and civic organisations are the most affected. Among those affected are organisations that distribute anti-retro viral drugs to the poor. There are also organisations that were carrying out voter education for the upcoming elections.

MONEY MEANT FOR ARVS BUYING ICE CREAM MACHINES? Some Aids organisations have reduced the number of beneficiaries on their schemes because of the crisis. "We are in a fix. Aids medicines must be taken consistently but at the moment we are finding it difficult to do that because the RBZ has not released our money," said a programme coordinator with a local non-governmental organisation. Speculation in the market is that the central bank could have used the money to prepare for the elections. There are also unconfirmed allegations that the foreign currency was used to import equipment for the farm mechanisation programme. The central bank recently announced that it was going to distribute machines for making ice cream, shampoo, soap and pop corn as part of government's economic empowerment programme. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

FUEL AT \$50 MILLION A LITRE: Although the inflation figures for February have not yet been officially released a number of companies are estimating it to be more than 160 000%. The Zimbabwean dollar has been on a major slide against major currencies over the past two months. This has pushed the price of fuel, the key cost in production, to \$50 million a litre. With the parallel market now being the

major source of foreign currency, it means companies have to adjust their prices according to the black market rate in order to remain viable. Manufacturers this week reviewed their prices by between 200 and 260%. A survey conducted this week showed that most shops increased prices by more than 240% in the past two weeks. A two litre bottle of cooking oil now costs about \$220 million from \$70 million at the beginning of the month. A 2kg packet of rice now costs about \$80 million, up from between \$38 and \$40 last week. A bar of washing soap is going for \$45 million from \$22 million while a two litre bottle of Mazoe Orange Crush costs more than \$55 million, up from \$25 million. Carbonated drinks now cost \$10 million from \$4,6 million. Delta this week increased the price of beer from \$8 million a pint to \$20 million. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

MONEY SUPPLY GROWTH OVER 50,000 %: the parallel exchange rate of US\$1 was \$1 900 000 at the beginning of the year. This rate was \$40 million on Wednesday this week. Money supply (M3) growth continued on an upward trend increasing to a new record of 51 768,8% in November last year from 24 463,6% the previous month as government continues to print money to fund operations. Money supply is the total supply of money in circulation in a given country's economy at a given time. It is considered an important instrument for controlling inflation. "Annual broad money growth recorded a 51 768,8% growth during the month of November 2007. Largely contributing to the increase in broad money growth were increases in credit to the private sector of 125 348,4% and credit to public enterprises 12 425,3%," said the Reserve Bank this week. (Zim Independent, 20 March)

MONEY SUPPLY TO REACH QUADRILLION ? Dealers and analysts said the money market remained a recipient of huge cash injections during the week on the back of intensifying government spending spurred in part by a looming election and inflationary pressure. "Chances of (the) money market surplus position breaching the unimaginable \$1 quad-trillion mark have been drawn closer during the week, ignited by enormous volumes of cash flowing into the market," an analyst with Kingdom Stockbrokers said in a note to investors. (FinGaz, 20 March)

EMPTY SHELVES AHEAD: "We are certainly going back to last June's scenario. There is likely to be nothing more in store within the next week or two as many people will resort to panic buying," says economist John Robertson. Robertson does not believe businesses are to blame. "We cannot blame businesses because they have to source foreign currency from the black market and that is what determines how much they charge for their goods and services," says Robertson. It has taken months for businesses to replenish supplies following last year's crackdown by government. (SABC, 20 March)

"ELECT MUGABE BANK": what is really worrying - and even embarrassing - is how Gono has transformed the RBZ into an "Elect Mugabe Bank", with departments to supply farming equipment and rural transportation. The RBZ is directly involved in funding and active distribution of tractors, ploughs, scorch carts and other implements under a project called the Farm Mechanisation Programme. It's a project specially designed and timely introduced to begin at the same time as President Robert Mugabe is seeking a sixth term in office. Last week, in an interview with The Financial Gazette, one could feel the glee in Gono's words as he proudly enumerated the thousands of tractors, ploughs harrows and other implements the programme is offering to farmers. Ironically, Zimbabwe has an agricultural bank, but nothing is heard of it in the programme which should really be within its mandate. But the Reserve Bank, together with its governor, has become a personal tool of Mugabe's and no prizes for guessing who will benefit from the implements. (Southern African, 17 March)

THE PAIN OF REFORM: "They will have to do some amazingly difficult things, because most of ZANU-PF policies over the last decade or more have been policies designed to avoid pain, avoid the difficulties they should have accepted front on," he said. "A new leader would have to fix those very quickly and [that] would be very much more painful than a politician trying to win popular support." "We need to be treated as a disaster zone in desperate need of assistance much as if we had suffered an earthquake or a flood," he explained. "If the country tried to recover with its own resources, it would take far, far too long, so the assistance we would need would be mainly to recapitalize the country to give people the resources needed to hit the ground running in every industry, especially in agriculture."

Robertson suggests that a new leader will have to respond to market forces and drastically cut the size of the civil service. He also notes that companies or individuals in debt at the time of a transition to a new political dispensation would struggle to survive a stable Zimbabwe dollar and real interest rates. (VOA, 16 March)

BEST STOCK MARKET ON EARTH: A few people have made fortunes out of Zimbabwe's political and economic chaos. With the plummeting value of the currency, the few who have cash invest it in the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, the only viable option to preserve or grow its value. The economically perverse consequence of this is that in 2007 the ZSE was the best performing stock market in the world. "These companies are probably operating at less than 20 percent capacity, they have got assets which are real, the assets are there, so should circumstances change here the upside potential is huge." Munyukwi says he is an optimist and believes that there could be a recovery reasonably fast if there is a new political leadership. "When you look what's happening on the ground, most of our problems are political," he said. "Once the political situation is resolved, it cascades down. The executives running the companies in Zimbabwe are going through a very difficult time, even producing in some instances good results under very, very trying circumstances. Now if the playing field is level - this is the potential I am talking about - people will start making money." (VOA, 16 March)

CURRENCY IS LITTER: Gideon Gono's papers are littering our landscape. I want to raise my concern over the bearer cheques, ranging from the 1c to the \$10 000 (in reality \$10 000 000) which seem to be competing with litter in polluting street corners, the landscape and even the forests. Gono was quoted as saying just under half of the cash he put into circulation was still in circulation. He believes that so-called cash barons are holding the rest of the cash. I am in total disagreement with this because the truth is that the rest of the cash is polluting the street corners and the rest of the country. (Zim Std, letter, 16 March)

GET RID OF RBZ: as Zimbabwe faces up to the pain and ridicule of cumulative hyperinflation of 3,5-million percent since 1998, a leading world economist, Steve Hanke, suggests a rather controversial solution: get rid of their central bank. Hanke, a previous economic adviser to Ronald Reagan and now professor of applied economics at the prestigious Johns Hopkins University, has published a report, Zimbabwe: Hyperinflation to growth, in which he explains his observations and solutions to the mess. He draws parallels between the Zimbabwean hyperinflation and the plot followed by the German mark during the great German hyperinflation of the 1920s. This leads him to say that "worse is yet to come". He says the root cause of hyperinflation is that government policies have forced the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), headed by Gideon Gono, to print money. "From January 2005 to May 2007, the RBZ issued currency at a rate that even exceeded that of Germany's central bank from January 1921 to May 1923, the ramp-up phase of the great German hyperinflation," he said. He says that replacing the central bank with a new monetary regime is therefore the best way to stop hyperinflation as it signals a "clean break" with the practices that have created hyperinflation. "It would give Zimbabweans reliable assurances that inflation will henceforth be controlled." (Business Day, 14 March)

DOLLARISE: three options exist: official "dollarisation", adopt free banking; and introduce a currency board. "None of these options requires preconditions prior to their implementation and any one of them would establish stability and restore economic growth," Hanke says. He points out that Panama, Ecuador and El Salvador are no less sovereign after adopting the dollar. "Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina are no less sovereign for having currency board or currency board-like systems." (Business Day, 14 March).

IRAN KEEPS 55% STAKE IN TRACTOR DEAL: the first major investment deal to be signed in Zimbabwe since the president signed into law the Indigenisation and Empowerment Bill was between Zimbabwe's Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the Iran Tractor Manufacturing Company. The deal itself was not as noteworthy as its shareholding structure - Zimbabwe's IDC will hold a 45% stake in the company, while the foreign investor will have 55%. This flies in the face of the new law, signed by President Robert Mugabe just 10 days ago, which states that foreign companies operating in Zimbabwe must cede 51% of their shareholdings to indigenous Zimbabweans. The deal underlines the

concern that many had about the legislation in the first place: that it is not based on the principle of local empowerment as much as on political expedience (read the March 29 election). In fact it is probably a safe bet that, as the Iran example suggests, pressure to cede ownership stakes will be applied only to investors from countries that Zimbabwe's government feels "threatened" by. This now includes SA, given that it is under pressure to solve the Zimbabwean problem. It is thus likely that the government's new friends, such as the Chinese and other nations prepared to invest in Mugabe's Zimbabwe, will have exceptions made for them. (Business Day, 17 March)

FROM CHELSEA TO HWANGE: Chelsea football Club owner and Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich has opened talks over buying Hwange Colliery Mine - Zimbabwe's biggest coal producer located in the remote western tip of the country. Abramovich took a helicopter ride to the mine on Tuesday last week after checking himself into the Elephant Hills hotel in nearby Victoria Falls, local media reported. The oil magnate, considered the 15th richest man in the world with a personal fortune of about US\$23,5 billion (£11,75 billion), was accompanied by an entourage of 15 bodyguards after flying into Zimbabwe on his private jet. A take-over of the coal mine will see Abramovich also gaining control of Hwange Football Club which was relegated from Zimbabwe's top division last year. In 2004, Hwange failed to open its new Main Underground Mine due to a shortage of funds. The opening of the new underground mine - with a life span of 25 years - had been planned for June 2004 but was suspended when the company failed to raise US\$25 million. If Abramovich can take control of the Colliery Company, the recapitalisation could help the company meet its production capacity. Currently, the company is only meeting 52 percent of the national demand. (New Zimbabwe, 18 March)

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU: it was with great interest that I read in your pages on 14th March of the announcements made by Gideon Gono as reported in the Financial Gazette. In this it was reported that Mr Gono said that "The bio-diesel plant now produces as much as 25 000 tonnes of the product per month. As much as 100 000 tonnes of diesel are here today, perhaps a small step forward but a giant forward leap for our economy." Assuming that the statement was correctly reported by Fingaz, then Mr Gono is either very badly advised or else is just distorting the truth. The plant has a capacity of 100 million litres of product per year which is a little under 100,000 tons. So I don't understand how the plant is already producing diesel at three times its design capacity. After all 25,000 tons per month is equivalent to over 300 million litres! Or put another way about 30% of the country's entire requirement for diesel. Further, in the same article it states that new farmers have put 10,000 hectares into jatropa production out of a target of 40,000 hectares. The problem here is that close to 60,000 hectares of jatropa would be required, in optimal conditions, to support 100 million litres of production. So about 180,000 hectares of jatropa production employing around 50,000 workers to produce enough raw material to produce 25,000 tons of diesel in a month even if the plant could produce this much -which it can't. So, as mentioned above, one can only conclude that this statement by Mr Gono is at best erroneous or, more likely, wishful thinking - or maybe even just pre-election hype. Yours faithfully Richard Marshall, France (Zimbabwe-situation.com, 18 March)

POWER CUTS COSTLY: the Zimbabwean economy is losing trillions of dollars through power outages, which intensified this week and could reach alarming levels in the next few months, industry players and commentators said. The country plunged into a near-national blackout last week, hardly two months after two nationwide blackouts hit the country in January after systems disturbances on common electricity grid linking most of southern African countries. The systems disturbance had also plunged Zambia and parts of Botswana into darkness. However, Zimbabwe's electricity woes have been more pronounced than those of its neighbours, including South Africa, which recently introduced load shedding due to increasing power demand spurred by a growing economy. Industry experts said at least 20 hours of production time was being lost every week due to power outages since January. (FinGaz)

MINING UNDERMINED: recent financial results from mining sector companies gave an indication of the quantum of losses mining companies were picking up as a result of power supply cuts to operations. During the nine months to June 2007, Falgold reported that ZESA downtime totalled 763 hours, an equivalent of production losses of over 700 ounces, or revenue amounting to US\$443 000. Zimbabwe's

mining industry is valued at more than US\$20 billion. A spokesman for a leading retail chain, Denford Mutashu, said the losses that retailers incurred as a result of the power cuts were huge. "The effects have been felt more on those products that depend on refrigeration," he said. (FinGaz, 20 March)

NO WHEAT: the country will have to cough out US\$120 million to import about 300,000 tonnes of wheat needed to take it to the next harvest around November, a senior National Bakers Association (NBA) official revealed this week. David Govere, the NBA official and Employers Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ) senior vice-president said the country has run out of wheat, resulting in serious bread shortages hitting the market. "At a consumption rate of about 40 000 tonnes of wheat per month Zimbabwe needs just over 300 000 tonnes of wheat to the next harvest, which will cost about \$120 million United States dollars while simultaneously pursuing an aggressive wheat farming programme that will see the country producing the 500 000 tonnes required annually. "Without this strategy the bread shortage problem will persist," said Govere. Players in the milling and baking industries started alerting authorities round about mid December 2007 that based on the current consumption of 7500 tonnes of wheat per week or 30 000 tonnes per month the wheat stocks would last up to March. Meanwhile the year's wheat planting season starts in May and the harvest only comes in mid November, but will require drying and transportation to result in flour being delivered to the bakeries in the first week of December. (FinGaz, 20 March)

PLAN TO GROW WHEAT (ONCE MORE) DOOMED: Zimbabwe has targeted 70 000 hectares for wheat production in a desperate bid to end chronic bread shortages. Agriculture Minister Rugare Gumbo told The Financial Gazette this week that the government would plant 70 000 hectares of wheat, which will be put under irrigation, during the winter planting season. "We are targeting to put 70 000 hectares of wheat this season," said Gumbo. The new target is a reduction from last year's ambitious target of 76 000 hectares. The country failed to meet the crop target and ended up planting 45 000 hectares, almost half the targeted hectareage, because of a myriad of problems among them frequent power cuts, poor planning and inputs shortages. Because of the reduced hectareage, Zimbabwe only harvested 144 000 metric tonnes of wheat, its tiniest crop harvest since independence. This output was against projections of 400 000 metric tonnes required to meet the country's annual domestic consumption. Critics this week warned that the targeted plant hectareage remained unattainable owing to the same problems dogging farming operations in the country. (FinGaz, 20 March)

STRIKE OVER: thousands of teachers in Zimbabwe's state schools have ended a three-week strike after being awarded a 754% salary increase by the government, their union said on Friday. "We urge teachers to return to work," said Raymond Majongwe, secretary general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, calling the salary increase a victory for teachers and the nation. "We should remain organised for action. We have new demands for the second quarter - April to June 2008. Our demand for the second quarter is Z\$10 750 600 (officially about US\$325 000 but a mere US\$300 on the widely used parallel market). "Whichever party shall form the next government after the March elections should brace for more strike action from teachers because we are still not happy with the increments," said Majongwe. (AFP, 14 March)

SO WHERE IS OUR INCREASE? cash-strapped Zimbabwe government which approved a hefty salary hike for striking teachers two weeks ago failed to pay the new salaries as civil servants got their pay on Wednesday, union officials said. Raymond Majongwe, secretary general of the more militant Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) said teachers were shocked to discover that government had paid old salaries instead of the promised windfall. Majongwe said: "After the announcement of a new salary structure by government, teachers were expecting a salary increment this payday. Teachers got paid today (Tuesday) and they are crying foul. They did not get the promised salaries." (New Zimbabwe, 19 March)

DAILY LIFE

PROSECUTE THE TORTURERS: the National Prosecuting Authority has been asked to arrest and charge high-ranking Zimbabwean police and government officials involved in human rights abuses,

should they ever again set foot on South African soil. The NPA was given a dossier detailing acts of torture allegedly committed by President Robert Mugabe's security agents against leading members of the opposition MDC. The document, submitted by the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, contains 30 sworn statements from, among others, lawyers, medical experts and the victims themselves. NPA spokesman Tlali Tlali confirmed that the authority was considering the centre's request to act on the torture allegations. Thirteen police officials who allegedly carried out the torture, and five senior police and government officials - including a Zimbabwean Cabinet minister - who bore full knowledge of police actions have been named in the dossier. Several of the accused regularly visit South Africa either on official business, or to receive medical care or do their shopping, the centre said this week. The litigation centre's request for legal action by South Africa is based on an international law whereby a country can prosecute foreigners implicated in human rights abuses committed outside its borders. South Africa's implementation of the Rome Act is broader than in other countries, making it the best option for bringing such a case. (The Times, RSA, 15 March)

MAKING SPACE IN THE JAILS: jails have been emptied of about 1 000 prisoners in anticipation of the arrest of people in connection with the 29 March elections, prison sources told The Standard. But the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs yesterday denied that Harare prisoners had been moved to other cities and towns for this specific purpose. Patrick Chinamasa said prisons have "finite space" and if they had problems with space they would build more prisons. "This is nonsense," he said of the reports of prisoners being relocated from Harare jails. "The political atmosphere is very peaceful these days. Zimbabwe is not Kenya." Harare is a stronghold of the opposition MDC and other opposition groups. But prison sources insisted that prisoners were driven out of Harare to Bulawayo, Masvingo, Gweru and Mutare where the jail population is lower. Ironically, the sources identified Chinamasa as behind the plan. They said the movement of prisoners started last month but was at one time hampered by the current shortage of fuel "A lot of arrests are expected in Harare prior, during and after the elections, especially if the elections are disputed. It's the minister who came up with the idea," said a source. (Zim Std, 16 March)

POLICE UNDER PAID: Junior officers in Bulawayo have accused their superiors of cheating them out of allowances they should get for policing the forthcoming elections. The police officers, who all spoke on condition of anonymity, claimed they had been promised a paltry Z\$15m a day - not even enough to buy a meal - for working during the elections. The allowance would add up to Z\$150m for the 10 days that most of them will be deployed. "Staff from other ministries have been promised Z\$300m a day, but we have been told that we will only get Z\$15m a day for our part, yet we will be doing all the donkey work. (Zimbabwean, 14 March)

FOOD AID: Australia will provide an additional \$2 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for food aid to meet an urgent and growing need for humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe. The WFP is currently feeding about 2.7 million Zimbabweans, targeting the neediest such as children and those affected by HIV. This further contribution underlines Australia's determination to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Zimbabwe. Australia's latest assistance is in addition to our contribution of \$3.5 million to the WFP in August last year for use in Zimbabwe. It also adds to \$3.75 million in support for international humanitarian relief efforts in Zimbabwe in 2006-07, much of which was for food aid which Australia provided for the Zimbabwean people. (Government of Australia, 15 March)

DIRTY WATER: A company manufacturing water-purification chemicals has threatened to cut off supplies to the state-owned Zimbabwe National Water Authority (Zinwa) over a \$6.5 trillion debt, sources told Standard Business last week. The ban could compromise the quality and supply of clean water countrywide, the sources said. Senior managers from Zinwa and the Zimbabwe Phosphate Industries are reported to have met two weeks ago to thrash out an agreement under which Zinwa would pay Zimphos \$5 billion every day until the debt is cleared. "Zinwa has failed to honour the arrangement and the debt is mounting," said one source. "Zimphos has now threatened not to supply the parastatal

with the chemical, which would be disastrous in terms of the health and safety of the population." Water experts said the absence of enough water treatment chemicals could trigger an outbreak of water-borne diseases, among them cholera and dysentery in urban centres. Cholera has killed 15 people countrywide in the past month, four of them in Shamva last week. Last year, cholera claimed 14 lives and over 800 people received treatment at various health centres countrywide. (Zim Std, 16 March)

WHY TEST, IF YOU WONT OFFER ARVS?: as the Zimbabwe HIV and Aids Activist Union (ZHAAU), we are concerned that many of our members are getting tested by various service providers but are later unable to access the Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) or the treatment against opportunistic infections. This incomplete service being given by the service providers to people living with HIV and Aids (PLWAs) is our main concern. When a service provider tests someone and finds them HIV-positive and in need of ARVs, that service provider should be able to give them follow-up services, or if they cannot, refer that person to an organisation that can assist them to obtain these drugs. We believe that it's unfair to expose people to their HIV-positive status, only to abandon them. PLWAs believe that revealing someone's HIV status and later failing to provide treatment is like handing them a death sentence. We are also concerned about people who buy drugs on their own with prescriptions from private doctors, but have very little information on how to administer the drugs. The result is that some people do not take the medication as regularly as prescribed, skipping dosages for days because they have no money to buy the drugs. (Zim Std, letter, 16 March)

HOPPING AND SKIPPING OVER SEWERAGE: to get to Sinikiwe MaKhumalo's doorstep in Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo, visitors have to step on a thin plank perched precariously over a trench that prevents sewage from flowing into her house. The 57-year-old grandmother has endured this arrangement to access her home in the city's Old Magwegwe working class suburb for the past five months after a sewer burst close to her residence. Service delivery has collapsed in Bulawayo, after local authorities recently announced that the municipality was insolvent and unable to cater to the needs of its almost two million residents. MaKhumalo's neighbour, Ingrid Mayobodo, fearful that her two children would contract communicable water-borne diseases, sent them to live with her sister in another suburb. "I could not stand them playing 'hop-skip-and-jump' over pools of sewage effluent to get into the house from the street." She feared her children risked contracting diseases in such an unhealthy environment. "Mosquitoes are a menace at night. We keep doors and windows shut at all times, living like we are in prison to avoid mosquitoes getting indoors." (IRIN, 14 March).

JOKING ABOUT POVERTY: When some women say they are preparing "full chicken" for supper, they are actually cooking the quellea (a tiny bird) found in wheat plantations in the lowveld. The animals are trapped by villagers along the Save river at night, when they roost. They are an extremely popular replacement for impossibly scarce chicken. Amid ongoing shortages of water, residents of many urban centers now refer to gathering rainfall from their roofs as "gathering manna from Heaven". Most suburbs go for days without having a single drop of water from the taps. Many say - thanks to the rainy season - they now rely on downpours for drinking water and laundry. Additionally, housewives make a cheap dish of cabbage more appetizing by referring to it as a cow's head or a pig's head, while green vegetables are referred to as "green meat". (VOA, 14 March)

URBAN MISERY: "They promised to build us better shelter," Rukuni told AFP pointing to shacks around Hatcliffe extension. "You can't forgive people who lie and make empty promises to you. We are going to show them at the elections we are tired of this suffering," said the father of three who runs a cycle repair shop at home to supplement his salary. "Things are just not working. We are paying school fees for our children and yet the teachers are on strike every two months. We don't have running water and we are forced to have several jobs to be able to buy basic goods like cooking oil." (aficasia.com, 20 March)

70% LOSS OF SENIOR MEDICAL STAFF: a new report on staffing levels within Zimbabwe's crumbling healthcare system paints a dire picture of the impact of the brain drain, with vacancy rates for crucial skills in hospitals as high as 70 percent. More than 3 500 nurses and 969 doctors had left

government health institutions by September 2007 after the health professionals intensified their hunt for better opportunities in the region and abroad, a report prepared by the Nurses Council of Zimbabwe (NCZ) says. Statistics in the report show there were 3 502 vacancies for nurses and 969 vacant posts for doctors at the end of last year. The NCZ document, prepared by the Directorate of Human Resources and entitled "Programme Performance 2008", shows an escalating crisis that has not only weighed heavily on service delivery in state health institutions, but has compromised the quality of health professionals graduating from training institutions. "Out of a total of 1 761 doctors on the whole approved establishment, 792 were in post as at September 2007, reflecting a vacancy rate of 46 percent," the report says.

WHO WILL TRAIN OUR DOCTORS? However, crucially, most of this existing staff consists of trainees. "It should be noted, as in most categories, that the figures of those in post are significantly boosted by the medical cadet. Head of departments and consultants show high vacancy rates of 74 percent and 73 percent respectively." The report says the positions of department heads and consultants are critical, "as they are also responsible for the training of other doctors. With such vacancy rates, the quality of the graduating trainee could be jeopardized." (FinGaz, 20 March)

CRITICAL STAFF SHORTAGE IN THE COURTS: The Attorney General (AG)'s office faces a critical staff shortage and has 100 vacancies for the prosecutors to fill, a report by government's law office said this week. The report explains the circumstances surrounding the postponement of a number of cases that include the murder case involving Jephias Mavangira, husband to High Court judge, Justice Susan Mavangira. "As earlier indicated in this report, there is a critical shortage of staff, which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. "Right now there are 100 vacancies for law officers and prosecutors in the office," the report says. (FinGaz, 20 March)