Zimbabwe Has A Very Bad Government

- What is the situation in April 2003?

- The chief stole the election last year.
  - Now he tries his rival for treason.

- He ruined the farm system.
  - Now people are hungry.

- The economy is in terrible shape.
  - Down 30% in past 3 years.  (In April 2003)
  - Inflation is at 220%.
  - Unemployment is perhaps 70%.

- They have feared to protest.
  - The chief would likely kill them.

- No one in the world takes action to help the people.
  - The UK has tried some (words).
  - African countries, UN, etc., not helpful.

- But with a thug for president, who will help the people?

- This text has 25 pages, ready June 2003 (Doc RJO288)
  (See these stories from the news sources.)

Roy Jenne
June 2003
Some News About Zimbabwe

1. Jun 2003 Zimbabwe troops beat protesters

2. Apr 2003 The opposition tries to get rid of Mugabe
   • But Mugabe has all the guns.

3. Jan 2003 Zimbabwe is hitting bottom in every way possible

   • But he had rigged the election.

5. Mar 2002 Zimbabwe was once a hopeful country
   • The African countries did not help.

6. Jul 2002 Zimbabwe is on brink of starvation.
   • Terrible farm policies and drought

7. Aug 2002 Farmers in Zimbabwe await fate
   • Mugabe ruins the farmers, the people who work for farmers, and the food supply.

8. Nov 2002 Inflation is 144% and predicted to get worse

   • In 1965 Rhodesia became independent.
   • Now a very bad government.

    • Zimbabwe has a bad government

Roy Jenne
June 2003
Zimbabwe is in crisis: The president is a tyrant.

Falling Into Crisis

Zimbabwe: As President Bush prepared for his trip to Africa, he did not forget the troubles in the former Rhodesia even as Liberia dominates the headlines.

The administration has been increasingly vocal about the landlocked African nation that adjoins South Africa. In late June, Bush declared the “freedom and dignity of a nation is under assault” there and urged “all nations, including the nations of Africa, to encourage a return to democracy in Zimbabwe.”

Robert Mugabe, sole ruler of Zimbabwe for 23 years, is a tyrant who responded to the deteriorating situation and the public’s demand for new leadership by stealing the 2002 presidential election from the rightful winner, opposition leader and former trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai.

He also hauled Tsvangirai into court for two treason trials. Tsvangirai faces death by hanging in both.

Recently Tsvangirai landed in jail after calling for a labor strike. Mugabe’s response was to order mass beatings.

As BBC News correspondent Tim Butcher reported from the city of Bulawayo: “Any time the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) even hints at calling a general strike, the response of the authorities is brutal. ‘Swish’ go the sjamboks, their heavy animal-hide whips, as the police beat anyone who get in their way, and ‘hiss’ go the tear gas canisters.”

Cathy Buckle, a white farmer and author of “African Tears” who writes weekly letters from Zimbabwe, described the recent attack on a farm manager and his wife, both in their 70s: They “were attacked by a mob of young men who beat, slapped and tortured them for five hours. When their son came to try and help them, his hands were tied with bark rope and wire and he was beaten on his back and legs with whips made from fan belts, chains and sticks.”

The violence takes place in the backdrop of an imploding economy. Inflation is running at 300%; eight in 10 live below the poverty line. The country is short of fuel and there are reports that Mugabe plans to mortgage strategic energy assets to Libya in return for oil.

This is not the worst. Thanks to Mugabe’s policy of resettlement, 4,500 of a total of 5,000 white-owned farms have been seized. That practice is destroying the nation’s agriculture and turning a country that once supplied food to southern Africa into one that must rely on handouts from the United Nations. Eight million Zimbabweans face starvation, U.N. agencies say.

Maybe while in Africa this week, Bush will stay with his hard line on Zimbabwe. He’s already asked Liberian President Charles Taylor to step down; it would be appropriate if he asked the same of Mugabe.

July 7, 2003

Inv Bus Daddy

Roy James

2b
Zimbabwean arrests
At the receiving end of Mugabe’s punch

Morgan Tsvangirai is now doubly charged with treason
HE MUST be getting used to it by now. On June 10th, Morgan Tsvangirai, Zimbabwe’s opposition leader, appeared in court to be formally charged with treason for a second time. This time, the charge relates to his having tried to organise demonstrations of the sort that the government recently made illegal without police permission, which is rarely granted. The judge ordered that he be held in one of Harare’s cells for a month, which will make it harder for him to organise peaceful expressions of popular discontent. His deputy, Welshman Ncube, was also arrested this week, but was released shortly after Mr Tsvangirai’s appearance in court.

Mr Tsvangirai is already part-way through another treason trial. One of President Robert Mugabe’s lavishly-paid agents claims that he plotted to assassinate the old man. Even Zimbabwe’s tainted legal system might have difficulty convicting Mr Tsvangirai on the basis of such evidence. He was released on bail, perhaps in the hope that he would skip the country. Instead, he stayed, and organised a series of general strikes, including one that shut down most of Zimbabwe’s remaining businesses last week.

He also tried to organise street protests, but these were greeted by hovering military helicopters and armoured vehicles with machineguns mounted on rotating turrets. Despite this show of force, several thousand people took to the streets, and were duly tear-gassed and beaten. More than 800 were arrested, according to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition party. Suspected ring-leaders were rounded up and tortured. At least two people died.

The government threatened that it would revoke the licences of businesses that observed the MDC’s call to shut down last week. Some shopkeepers pulled down their shutters because they feared that Mr Mugabe’s heavies would start shooting. Factory owners protest that they could hardly have kept the production lines humming when none of their employees arrived to man them. But cancelling the licences of people who do not support him might enable Mr Mugabe to award more licences to his cronies.

In the past, his arbitrary style of government has enriched many within the ruling party, ZANU-PF. Party bigwigs have used their contacts to exploit, the rigged exchange rate, or grabbed shares of farms and businesses confiscated from the regime’s opponents. But even some of the least scrupulous ZANU hacks are starting to worry that if things carry on this way, there will be no Zimbabwean economy left for them to plunder.

There are growing signs that rage at the regime could evolve into violent unrest. The half or so of the population who are short of food are, perhaps, too weak to revolt. But urban Zimbabweans, furious at the hasty erosion of their living standards, may not be cowed for ever. As Mr Mugabe finds it ever harder to pay his various and sometimes mutually antagonistic security forces (the army, the police and the irregular militia), the danger of a coup grows daily. Alternatively, Zimbabwe might simply collapse.

The government of South Africa, Zimbabwe’s powerful neighbour, does not want a failed state on its doorstep, so it is urging talks between the MDC and the government. The MDC insists that such negotiations can be useful only if they lead to a fresh round of elections, which, unlike last year’s presidential poll, would have to be free and fair.

Mr Mugabe, however, says that he cannot step down while his people are “disunited”. In a rare interview, he told South African state television this week that he is determined to battle on. “As long as there is that fight, I am for a fight. And I can still punch,” he said. Indeed.

June 14, 2003

- Mr Tsvangirai really won the election for president in March 2002 — but he lost.
- Now he is an opposition leader.
- The Mugabe government keeps huge pressure on him.
- The economy is in terrible shape. People are hungry.
- Tsvangirai is a brave man.
Zimbabwe troops beat protesters
Opposition seeks to oust Mugabe

By Angus Shaw
The Associated Press
June 3, 2003

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Government troops fired live ammunition and tear gas and beat demonstrators with clubs and rifle butts Monday as the opposition launched a week of strikes and protests aimed at forcing President Robert Mugabe to step down.

Police raids rounded up dozens of leaders and supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, which is seeking to make its most significant challenge yet to Mugabe’s autocratic rule.

Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai was arrested at his Harare home early Monday but was later released.

The opposition blames Mugabe for Zimbabwe’s worst economic crisis since independence, with record inflation of 269 percent and acute shortages of currency, gasoline, medicines and other essential imports and food.

Only international food aid has averted mass starvation.

The government, through the state media, has vowed to use the army, police and its governing-party militias to crush protests.

Armored vehicles with rotating machine-gun turrets patrolled the streets as demonstrations began in the capital, Harare, and the country’s second-largest city, Bulawayo, both considered opposition strongholds.

In downtown Harare, soldiers forced about 20 protesters to lie on the sidewalk where they beat them with rubber batons, witnesses said. Some cried out in pain, shouting, “What have we done?”

This week’s protests are also seen as a blow to the efforts of African leaders, headed by South African President Thabo Mbeki, to win backing from Western powers for an economic revival plan for Africa. That plan relies on an African promise to ensure good governance in Africa.

Tsvangirai, a former trade-union leader who now heads the main opposition, has become increasingly defiant in his calls for Zimbabweans to rise up against Mugabe and his policies.

He called five days of strikes and protests, beginning Monday, aimed at pushing Mugabe to step down and allow for new presidential elections. Zimbabwe’s High Court declared the demonstrations illegal, but the opposition filed an appeal Monday.
Zimbabwean teens tell of kidnapping, beatings

By Geoff Hill
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

JOHANNESBURG — Three teenagers from Zimbabwe living in exile in South Africa said two weeks ago that they had been kidnapped at gunpoint by men who said they represent the Zimbabwean government of President Robert Mugabe.

South African police and a physician who examined the young women said their story is credible.

A week earlier, the teenagers — Nozipo Moyo, 17, Normabuto Sibanda, 18, and Amanda Dube, 19 — had taken part in a march in Johannesburg to protest Mr. Mugabe's rule.

The teenagers said they were taken by six men in three vehicles to the Beit Bridge border post, 250 miles north of Johannesburg, where an attempt was made to smuggle them into Zimbabwe.

The teenagers said they were spotted by a security guard at the border who insisted on searching the car. They said they were released and turned back into South Africa because they did not have passports. According to the young women, the kidnappers were allowed to continue on to Zimbabwe.

"The men came to the apartment where we are living in Johannesburg on Wednesday night and accused us of being enemies of the Mugabe government," Miss Dube said on her return to Johannesburg. "They said we would now be taken back to Zimbabwe to be punished."

"They took us at gunpoint and forced us into the vehicles and drove us a short way out of Johannesburg, where we were handcuffed and blindfolded before being beaten with whips," she said.

The women were then forced back into the cars, and at another stop two of them, she said, were forced to perform oral sex on some of the men.

"When we got to the border, the security guard saw us on the floor as the vehicles drove to the immigration post," Miss Dube said. "I think he believed we were just trying our luck to cross without passports and told us to go back into South Africa. We were too terrified to say anything and so we walked to the nearest town and phoned friends who arranged lifts for us back to Johannesburg."

The three women were referred to a doctor who agreed to speak on the condition of anonymity.

"I can tell you that the marks and bruises on the three women's bodies are consistent with their story, and they are in serious pain," he said.

The South African police in the border town of Musina, six miles from Beit Bridge, confirmed the incident and said a file has been opened. The three teenagers plan to press charges against the men.

Jay Jay Sibanda, who leads a support group for the estimated 2 million Zimbabweans who have fled the Mugabe regime to South Africa, said it was the worst case of harassment against his members.

"We have had suspicious vehicles parked at our rallies, and all of us receive threatening phone calls from time to time, but this is kidnapping and a very serious crime," he said. "The problem is that when our people are harassed by agents of the Mugabe regime, they are often too scared to go to the police. Many Zimbabweans are living in South Africa illegally and fear being deported," he said.

2,000,000 have fled Zimbabwe to live in South Africa

P 4b
Bringing down Mugabe

Zimbabweans have little option but to take to the streets

It is always a bad idea to compare an adversary to Adolf Hitler. The comparison never rings true, and you end up sounding silly. But what do you do when the object of your disapproval compares himself to Hitler, as Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s president, did last week? In fact, he went further than that, describing himself as “Hitler tenfold”. Mr Mugabe’s critics, who probably include most of the people of Zimbabwe, may feel that he has stolen their thunder.

To be clear about this, despite what he says, and despite the two men’s similar racist rhetoric and moustaches, Mr Mugabe is no Führer. He may rig elections, goad his militia to torture dissidents and deny food aid to people suspected of supporting the opposition (see page 43), but he has not yet tried systematically to exterminate everyone he hates.

Mr Mugabe does not resemble the Nazi leader in the way he would like to think he does, either. He compared himself to Hitler because he sees himself as a nationalist strongman standing up to British imperialism. He argues that all Zimbabwe’s problems stem from Britain’s attempts to crush his regime. But the truth is that neither Britain nor any other western power has made more than token efforts to curb Mr Mugabe, because he poses no threat to their vital interests. If the people of Zimbabwe desire a change of regime (and it is obvious that they do), they can expect little outside help.

The main Zimbabwean opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), is at last waking up to this reality. Its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was so confident that he would win the presidential election last year that he appeared to have drawn up no plan B. Indeed, he would have won that vote had Mr Mugabe not cheated on such a heroic scale. Since then, the MDC has floundered, one day promising protests to unseat the illegitimate government, the next day backing down for fear that Mr Mugabe will massacre protesters.

In recent weeks, however, Mr Tsvangirai has stirred himself. A general strike last month brought cities to a standstill, and rattled the regime enough to prompt it to arrest more people than usual. Mr Tsvangirai gave Mr Mugabe an ultimatum. If, by March 31st, he did not make certain concessions, such as stopping the harassment of MDC supporters and the politicisation of food aid, he would face “mass action”. Predictably, Mr Mugabe ignored the deadline. What next?

Every option appeals

Mr Tsvangirai is pursuing a dangerous strategy. He may be more popular than Mr Mugabe, but the government has all the guns. If Mr Tsvangirai summons up big, angry crowds, Mr Mugabe’s men may simply shoot them. But if he does nothing, the regime will stay in place, the country will continue to grow poorer, and legions of Zimbabweans will continue to weaken from hunger and succumb to the diseases of poverty.

Outsiders could do more to help. The European Union, America and other western countries have slapped limp sanctions on leading members of the regime. They could increase the pressure by, for example, pursuing the ruling party’s business associates, especially those who have helped the Zimbabwean army to loot Congo, where it was sent in 1998 to prop up another despotic regime. But a wider trade embargo is out of the question, as it would hurt ordinary Zimbabweans, not their rulers.

South Africa’s president, Thabo Mbeki, has sought to push Zimbabwe’s opposition and ruling party into power-sharing talks, an approach he favours because it worked in South Africa a decade ago, and which he has urged, with some recent success, on warring parties in Congo. But it has failed in Zimbabwe because Mr Mugabe has no intention of sharing power. It would be helpful if his party could persuade him to retire. But it would be foolish to assume that it will even try. Foreigners should not, from a safe distance, be urging Zimbabweans to risk their lives. But if they protest loudly and peacefully, we should applaud.

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The Economist
Zimbabwe

Good news only, from now on

The last foreign correspondent is kicked out of Harare

LAST week’s illegal deportation of Andrew Meldrum, who reported from Zimbabwe for The Economist and the Guardian, sends that unfortunate country spiralling into even grimmer depths. For a start, it demonstrates Robert Mugabe’s complete disdain for due process. Zimbabwe joins other tyrannies where power is at the whim of the leader, unchecked by the rule of law. And now that the only remaining foreign correspondent has been evicted, the job of shedding light on what goes on will be left to local reporters, many of whom are brave but all of whom are vulnerable to the regime’s brutality.

Mr Meldrum, who has been reporting Zimbabwean affairs in an exceptionally fair-minded way since Mr Mugabe came to power in 1980, has permanent resident status which guarantees him, according to a High Court ruling issued last year, the right to remain in the country. As he was being bundled out on May 16th, his lawyer presented the authorities with a new High Court order that declared his eviction illegal and demanded that it be stopped. Nevertheless, he was forced on to an Air Zimbabwe flight to London. “This is not the action of a government confident of its legitimacy,” shouted Mr Meldrum, as he was manhandled by Mr Mugabe’s goons.

But even the goons now have doubts about their leader, some of them whispering to Mr Meldrum that they knew Mr Mugabe must go. His cruel ways, the crushing of the opposition, the fraudulence of the elections, may not offend them. But he has also reduced a country that once did well for itself to penury. Two out of three of Zimbabwe’s 12m people are dependent on food aid; unemployment is around 70%; and the shelves are bare of everything that people need to survive.

How to hasten his departure or, more improbably, to reform his ways? The bleak truth is that there is not that much that can be done outside Africa itself. One minor suggestion: the West could extend its targeted sanctions, which freeze the assets of, and ban travel by, Mr Mugabe and his cronies, to the business associates who bankroll his regime. But since stiffer general sanctions would make the lot of ordinary people even more wretched than it already is, the West’s most effective pressure is probably indirect: pressing Zimbabwe’s neighbours, above all South Africa, to press Zimbabwe.

Quiet diplomacy, which is South Africa’s way of dealing with its tragic and dangerous neighbour, can be a euphemism for doing damn all. Thabo Mbeki is now understood to be leaning less lightly on his fellow-president, even quietly calling on him to share power. Those who demand more robust persuasion—switching off the electricity supply, calling in bad debts—point out that there is no evidence of this softly-softly approach making an impact. But care is needed: Mr Mugabe’s defiance has made him a bit of a hero in some African quarters—though not in his own country, where Mr Meldrum tells us that even his secret policemen are fed up with him.

Argentina’s new president

Out of Patagonia

Néstor Kirchner will have to turn his weakness into a strength

WHAT is it about Argentina’s presidency? On May 25th, Néstor Kirchner, the previously obscure Peronist governor of a Patagonian province, takes up that ill-starred job having won a mere 22% of the vote in an election last month.

He was denied the popular mandate he so badly needs to govern a shattered country by the craven decision of his rival, Carlos Menem, himself a former president, to avoid overwhelming defeat by pulling out of a run-off ballot. Mr Kirchner duly, if in an unsatisfactorily hollow way, becomes the fifth man to hold the presidency since December 2001, when Fernando de la Rúa, a hapless Radical, resigned in the face of rioting protestors. All of this makes 19th-century Florentine politics seem rule-bound and orderly. In such unwinnable circumstances, can Mr Kirchner do better than his predecessors?

The portents look gloomy. The outgoing president, Eduardo Duhalde, a Peronist political boss, began the job of rescuing Argentina from its financial collapse of 2001-02. But he put off many of the tough decisions needed to turn a cash-driven recovery into sustainable growth. And despite Argentina’s default on $60 billion in bonds in 2001, Mr Duhalde issued (or announced) $27 billion in new debt, mainly to compensate banks for his mishandling of the currency’s devaluation. Procrastination and the writing of IOUs cannot be options for Mr Kirchner. He faces difficult negotiations, not just with the bondholders but with the IMF. A temporary accord which rolled over repayments to the Fund runs out in August; Argentina needs a multi-year agreement in its place.

Even with a substantial debt write-off, renewing Argentina’s access to foreign credit will demand fiscal austerity, raising the current target for the primary fiscal surplus (ie, before interest payments) from 2.5% of GDP to perhaps 4%. And there are other nettles Mr Duhalde preferred not to grasp, such as enabling privatised utility firms to increase their tariffs and letting banks seize the assets of debtors. All of this is doubly hard in a country where 59% are now poor.

What is worse, Mr Kirchner has little political capital to
Zimbabwe's situation has gone from dire to macabre. More than two-thirds of Zimbabwe’s population is on the verge of starvation, and many Zimbabweans can’t even cremate their dead, given a shortage of fuel. South Africa, the power broker for the region, would like to stay on the sidelines, gently nudging Zimbabwe’s president-by-fraud, Robert Mugabe, towards more reasonable policies. But circumstances have made South Africa a chief protagonist in this unfolding tragedy in a number of ways. South Africa may be forced to take a public stand on the Zimbabwean regime, given, in part, the contempt Mr. Mugabe and his cabal have demonstrated toward the people and government of South Africa.

Back in August, Zimbabwe’s Information minister, Jonathan Moyo, absurdly declared there was “no crisis in Zimbabwe” during a summit meeting with other officials from southern Africa. Mr. Moyo then attempted to divert attention on Zimbabwe by highlighting South Africa’s problems. “It is you people who have Mandela [squatter] camps all over the place, not us. In fact, the average black person in Zimbabwe is better off than the average black person in South Africa.”

South Africa quietly shrugged off Mr. Moyo’s delusional rant and has refused to publicly criticize the Mugabe regime, even while the international community has applied mounting pressure on the government to call out Mr. Mugabe’s abuses. But Zimbabwe’s latest harangue won’t be so easily ignored by South Africa.

South Africa’s Sunday Times recently published a scoop that is making waves across Africa. On Jan. 12, the Times said explains why Mr. Moyo fails to see a crisis in his native Zimbabwe. For ordinary Zimbabweans, the combination of a severe food shortage and price controls have made food extremely difficult to come by. The story, while highlighting the

Clearly, Zimbabwe is hitting bottom in every possible respect — diplomatically, socially, economically. Many observers expect a wave of food riots to rock Zimbabwe. It does appear Mr. Mugabe could be increasingly isolated, even inside Africa. And that could be the beginning of a new future for Zimbabwe.

Other possible outcomes are too chilling to consider.

Mr. Moyo spent nearly two weeks in Johannesburg around New Year’s time with his family. During his stay, Mr. Moyo bought (always accompanied by bodyguards) enough food and other goods to fill not only his Mercedes and his Pajero SUV and one other vehicle, but also a trailer. Perhaps this report

remarkable hypocrisy of Mr. Mugabe's associates, could have ended there. But Mr. Moyo felt compelled to lash out against South Africa and its government in reaction to the Times article. In a statement carried in the state-owned Harare newspaper the Herald, Mr. Moyo said, “I have always had a nagging feeling that for all their propensity for liberal values and civilized norms, these people [South Africans] are dirty. In fact, they are filthy and recklessly uncouth. Now the evidence is there for any decent person to see. [..] If these people, in the name of South Africa, believe they can lead an African renaissance, then God help them because they are joking. Their barbarism will never take root or find expression in Africa.” Mr. Moyo said his remarks have been twisted out of context.

In a telephone interview, a South African diplomat expressed the government’s escalating frustration with the Mugabe regime, saying the government was carefully weighing its response. But the government was tired of taking abuse from Zimbabwe and is considering “turning our backs” on Mr. Mugabe, he said. Meanwhile, a State Department official reported that the Bush administration could be poised to expand its current sanctions on the Zimbabwean regime to include an asset freeze on Mr. Mugabe & Co.

Clearly, Zimbabwe is hitting bottom in every possible respect — diplomatically, socially, economically. Many observers expect a wave of food riots to rock Zimbabwe. It does appear Mr. Mugabe could be increasingly isolated, even inside Africa. And that could be the beginning of a new future for Zimbabwe. Other possible outcomes are too chilling to consider.
Pressure Grows on Zimbabwe to Form Coalition Rule

BY ROBERT BLOCK
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is today a powerful but increasingly lonely figure, hated by many of his own people, unrecognized by Western Europe and the U.S., backed by only a handful of African leaders whose own democratic credentials are increasingly suspect.

Sworn in for a fifth term in a subdued inaugural ceremony Sunday after last week's controversial elections, Mr. Mugabe now faces the possibility of suspension from the Commonwealth group of countries, a new harsh regime of international sanctions and a three-day strike by unionized workers.

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo were in Zimbabwe yesterday to try to strike a deal between Mr. Mugabe and the defeated opposition challenger, Morgan Tsvangirai. They appeared to have failed to reach a compromise, but people close to the talks said the government agreed to drop pending treason charges against opposition members.

It appears Mr. Mugabe wasn't persuaded by appeals to form a government of national unity with his opposition rivals in the Movement for Democratic Change, or the MDC. For his part, MDC leader Mr. Tsvangirai has shunned a power-sharing arrangement with Mr. Mugabe. The MDC, along with U.S. and independent election observers, has condemned last week's elections as deeply flawed and unfairly structured to ensure Mr. Mugabe's re-election.

"This is a government of thieves and fraudsters and is therefore illegitimate and can't be joined by those who support a democratic process," said Welshman Ncube, the MDC's general secretary. According to Mr. Ncube, the only way forward now is to scrap the elections altogether and form a transitional government, with international supervision, will reform the country's electoral laws and lead the nation to a new ballot.

Increasing the pressure on Mr. Mugabe, Zimbabwe's main labor federation, the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions, yesterday called for a three-day shutdown beginning tomorrow to protest what it said was the postelection harassment of workers. New laws imposed by Mr. Mugabe over the past year have significantly curtailed the right of protest in Zimbabwe, and political analysts couldn't say immediately whether the strike would be legal.

Meantime, Mr. Mugabe's own party members have expressed fear over his next move. "We are very close to the edge [of authoritarian rule] and we hope nobody pushes us over," said a retired member of parliament from Mr. Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party.

Since last week, white farmers—who oppose Mr. Mugabe's controversial land-reform policies and who generally supported the MDC—have reported a surge in violence in farming districts. One white farmer was shot dead yesterday, the 10th killed since militants began often-violent occupations of white-owned land two years ago.

The Zimbabwean crisis looks set to provoke a wide debate on the purpose and future of the Commonwealth. Mr. Mbeki, together with Nigeria's Mr. Obasanjo and Australian Prime Minister John Howard, are to meet in London today to discuss possible sanctions against Zimbabwe.
In Zimbabwe, It’s Mugabe—Again

The opposition says the election was rigged, and the U.S. calls the outcome ‘flawed’

By Jon Jeter
Washington Post Foreign Service

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HARARE, Zimbabwe—tate elections officials last
Wednesday declared President
Robert Mugabe the winner of a
ferociously contested election
that many international
observers described as deeply flawed. The
opposition’s candidate rejected the results,
saying the vote was
rigged.

In Washington,
President Bush said
the United States did not “recognize the
outcome of the election because we think
it’s flawed.” Speaking at a White House
news conference, Bush said: “We are dealing
with our friends to figure out how to deal
with this flawed election.”

Unofficial results showed the 78-year-old
Mugabe winning a fourth presidential term
in a landslide over Morgan Tsvangirai
Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).
With about 3.1 million of 5.6
million registered voters casting ballots,
officials say Mugabe won more than 1.6
million votes to Tsvangirai’s 1.2
million.

Several pre-election polls had showed
Mugabe losing, and the announcement of the
president’s wide margin of victory
drew complaints of fraud from the
opposition.

“The Movement for Democratic Change is
firmly of the view that the election results
do not reflect the true will of the people of
Zimbabwe and are consequently illegitimate
in the eyes of the people,” Tsvangirai told
reporters. “We therefore do not accept
them.”

Likewise, several election monitoring
groups cast doubt on the validity of the
vote, describing an electoral process disfig-
ured by violence, intimidation, mass arrests
and last-minute changes to election laws and
logistics that effectively disenfranchised
tens of thousands of voters. Monitors from
a handful of African nations, however,
declared the election free and fair.

As the results were announced,
Zimbabwe’s army put on “full alert” and
deployed in urban centers, where the MDC
draws its core support, to address any civil
unrest. Sporadic skirmishes between sup-
porters of the two candidates erupted
throughout the day here in Harare, the capital,
but none resulted in any serious injuries.

The election was widely regarded as the con-
tinent’s most pivotal since South Africans of all
races went to the polls eight years ago, ending
decades of oppressive white-minority rule.
Mugabe and his supporters here and abroad
described the election as a question of whether
Africans would retain political power in
Zimbabwe or hand it over to whites from the
West—who were among the supporters of
Tsvangirai’s candidacy—a generation after the
end of colonial rule.

David Nyekorach-Matsanga, a supporter of
Mugabe’s ruling party, the Zimbabwe African
National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF),
calls Mugabe’s victory a triumph against the
forces of colonialism and imperialism.

“The MDC represents the white man in
the United States and in Britain,” he says. “I say
that only Americans should decide the future of
their country: only the British should decide
the future of Britain. Well, I am Zimbabwean,
and only Zimbabweans should decide the future of this country.”

But the MDC’s African and White
supporters call the issues of race and colonial
rule a smoke screen for Mugabe and his party’s
misrule, corruption and mishandling of the
economy since leading Zimbabwe to indepen-
dence in 1980. Instead, they argue that this
election revolved around the issues of good
governance and whether Africans were willing
to let go of the colonial past and move toward mul-
tiparty democracy and economic growth
through global trade.

Tsvangirai said last week that the ZANU-PF
manipulated the results through a two-year
campaign of violence against opposition sup-
porters who were beaten and killed by mobs led
by veterans from the country’s independence war
and young militants recruited by the party.
MDC politicians were unable to campaign
in some areas because of widespread violence, poll
workers were abducted during a three-day
election period, and a reduction in the number
of polling stations in MDC strongholds prevent-
eds nearly 360,000 voters from casting ballots
before voting ended March 11, he said.

“This was done through state-sponsored ter-
rorism conducted by ZANU-PF militia, rogue
elements in the war veterans, ZANU-PF youths
and, in some instances, with the active or pas-
tive connivance of the police,” Tsvangirai says.
Zimbabwe was suspended on March 19 from the Commonwealth, a group comprised of mostly former British colonies, in the wake of a rigged election that returned President Robert Mugabe to power two weeks ago. The Commonwealth's decision came unexpectedly, at the hands of the same African neighbors who have watched Mr. Mugabe's campaign of violence and electoral fraud for some time without flinching. On March 18, South African President Thabo Mbeki and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo were still trying to get Mr. Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai to set up a national unity government. Like other African nations, they declared the results of the election legitimate.

By March 19, however, the two African leaders and Australian Prime Minister John Howard had handheld down the decision to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth, along with a lengthy statement refuting the idea that the elections had been free and fair. While the move to keep Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth's council meetings was a belated and superficial punishment, the fact that the impetus for the decision came from South Africa and Nigeria should send a strong message to Mr. Mugabe that he will be held accountable for his corrupt practices. Zimbabwe's southern neighbors, and whites and gives it to blacks, has likewise caused little outcry in the region. At a summit of southern African nations held shortly before the Zimbabwean balloting, Mr. Mugabe's neighbors gave him nothing more than friendly advice that he should hold free and fair elections. South Africa's observer team even gave high marks to Zimbabwe's election — which was marred by the killing of opposition members, the burning of the opposition's printing presses and office building, the expulsion of international monitors and the silencing of the media. Not to be forgotten are Mr. Mugabe's last-minute attempts before the election to retain power by making criticism of the government a crime and by drastically reducing the number of polling booths in areas where the opposition was popular. The South African monitors stated that the "conduct of the electorate, security forces, party agents as well as the closely followed rules of voting, counting and transparency procedures, all contribute to the relative peacefulness of the voting days," according to a report in South Africa's Business Day. Whatever safety the monitors were on, they were obviously far from the polls.

It is therefore appropriate that Mr. Mbeki should be one of the three leaders to make this decision on behalf of the Commonwealth and to state the truth about Zimbabwe. "The presidential election was marred by a high level of politically motivated violence and ... the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electorate," read the Commonwealth statement, which included comments from its observer group. It is too bad that South Africa and its neighbors did not have the boldness to speak the truth until now. As a result, Zimbabwe's people are stuck with the consequences.
Why it matters

More is at stake this weekend than the future of a once-hopeful country

Is the world right to make such a fuss about Zimbabwe's presidential election, which takes place this weekend? Although military rule and dictatorships have largely given way to multi-party elections in Africa, those elections are often imperfect—the polls in Zambia and Madagascar are two recent examples—yet elicit little more than tut-tutting in western capitals. So why get so steamed up about Zimbabwe? Is it just because some white farmers have been thrown off their land?

The land invasions that started in 2000 certainly brought President Robert Mugabe's behaviour to the attention of the popular press in Britain and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere, but the fate of Zimbabwe's white farmers is not the main cause for concern in this election. Rather it is the fate of all Africans, black and white, and not just in Zimbabwe.

Why? First, because Mr Mugabe is trying to establish a new concept of democracy in Africa, a concept so grotesque that it must not be allowed to take root as a standard for other countries. Had he chosen to hang on to power by coup d'état, everyone would have known that Zimbabwe was a dictatorship. But the 78-year-old Mr Mugabe wants both to be a dictator and to be considered legitimately elected. In this quest he has turned black against white. He has harried the press, persecuted the opposition and intimidated the voters. He has packed the courts with yes-men (even getting the Supreme Court to approve his manifestly unlawful land seizures) and driven independent judges from their posts (Ahmed Ebrahim, the sole dissenter in that case, has just announced he will leave the bench in May). He has vetoed some European election monitors, set impossible conditions for others, vetted their supposedly independent Zimbabwean counterparts and delayed their deployment. He has wonnowed the voters' roll and turned the administration of the election over to mili-

tary officers—whose impartiality may be judged by the army chief's hints that he would not let Morgan Tsvangirai, Mr Mugabe's opponent, take office even if he won.

Too bad, you may say, but nothing like as terrible as what has happened in Angola, or Sierra Leone, or Congo. And that is true. But those three countries have been on the ultra-sick list for decades; even before independence, their future looked problematic. Zimbabwe, by contrast, has for 20 of the past 22 years looked rather hopeful. It has the highest literacy rate in Africa (over 80%), an established black middle class, a lively press, vigorous civic organisations and, until recently, an independent judiciary and a relatively sophisticated, well-diversified economy. In little more than two years, though, Mr Mugabe has neutered the judiciary, plundered the treasury and beggared the economy. Even maize meal, the country's staple food, is now in short supply. And all this has been needless: the damage has been inflicted for a single reason only—one old man's desire to hang on to power.

If, by an impossibility, Mr Tsvangirai manages to win, he will face a huge rebuilding job. If he loses, Mr Mugabe, having sown the wind, may find himself unable to reap the whirlwind. Either way, Zimbabweans will suffer. But so too will other Africans. For Mr Mugabe's despoliation of Zimbabwe has taken place with little if any criticism from other African states, who lined up this week at the annual Commonwealth meeting to prevent even denunciation of its perpetrator, allowing only a promise to agree to consider suspending Zimbabwe if the Commonwealth's observers say the poll has been rigged. This comes dangerously close to declaring that African heads of government regard solidarity with doting tyrants more important than sound economic management, free elections and the rule of law—a grim message to be sending in a year when Africa is trying to present itself as newly serious, responsible and deserving of aid. If Mr Mugabe steals the election and the Commonwealth then refuses to take action, the message will be unambiguous (and the Commonwealth ripe for dissolution). For everyone's sake, except Mr Mugabe's, may Mr Tsvangirai somehow manage to pull it off this weekend.
Zimbabwe

Mugabe’s smash-and-grab

A coup by any other name

IN THE end, the strangest fact about Zimbabwe’s presidential election last weekend was not that Robert Mugabe stole it, but that he went to such extraordinary lengths to do so. How much simpler it would have been to cancel it and declare himself president for life. A coup of that kind would have had repercussions, but they would not have been so different from those that will follow from the drawn-out electoral sham through which the ageing autocrat has dragged his wretched country. The world must now decide how to respond to this coup by ballot-box, and in particular how to register its concern and disapproval without inflicting unnecessary suffering on the innocent majority of Zimbabweans who have just been robbed of their democratic choice.

That they have indeed been robbed should not be in doubt. The plot has involved seizing farms, intimidating supporters of the opposition party, charging its leaders with treason, harassing the press, arresting dissenters, disenfranchising citizens, expelling monitors, ignoring court rulings, obstructing voters and spreading violence throughout the land. And all that was before a vote count that would have been a credit to Enron’s auditors. No wonder independent observers, both Zimbabwean and foreign, have called the election neither free nor fair. Only African monitors whitewashed it: South Africa grotesquely declared it “legitimate” (see page 28).

The damage done

A smash-and-grab of this kind was bound to leave deep wounds on the body politic. Although commendably little violence has followed the election, the possibility of civil unrest remains high. Mr Mugabe’s ruling ZANU–PF party is intensely unpopular in urban areas, especially among unemployed school-leavers. It is also especially loathed in Matabeleland, where it is associated with the government troops who killed 10,000-20,000 people in the early 1980s in a vengeful campaign designed to drive home to the local Ndebele people that Mr Mugabe’s Shona-dominated party was now in charge. Against this backdrop, it scarcely matters that a central part of Mr Mugabe’s strategy for hanging on to power has been to turn black against white: unhappy whites will not turn violent, they will simply leave.

Their departure—and, even more, that of skilled blacks—can only further damage the economy, which has suffered enough. Inflation is in triple figures, GDP has shrunk almost every year since 1996, the value of the currency diminishes by the day and every industry—manufacturing, mining, tourism and agriculture—is in trouble. The chaos on the farms, compounded by drought, is so great that Zimbabwe, traditionally an exporter of grain, is now undergoing serious shortages, notably of maize, the staple food. Perhaps nothing has done more than this to undermine Mr Mugabe’s popularity, at least in rural areas where his support has always been strongest.

What should the world do about all this? If Morgan Tsvangirai, Mr Mugabe’s opponent, had won the election, it might have had some misgivings: Mr Tsvangirai, after all, is inexperienced in government and the movement he leads is an uncertain coalition united mainly by dislike of the president. Moreover, ZANU–PF would still have held power in parliament. Still, western governments, the World Bank, the IMF and other agencies would have been eager to help get Zimbabwe back on its feet. To do so now would look like a reward for Mr Mugabe that he ill deserves. But even if that were not so, or if it were judged a price worth paying to help decent Zimbabweans, it is now far from clear how it could be done.

The difficulty is that Mr Mugabe has shown that he values his own power, and that of his henchmen, far above competent management of the economy—never mind democracy or the rule of law. Had this been otherwise, it would have been possible for western donors, led by Britain, to lend financial support to an orderly land-reform programme, something that is still urgently needed. Mr Mugabe, however, is less interested in sensible land tenure than in rewarding cronies, which is why the land he seizes from white farmers so often goes not to peasant farmers but to people like the registrar-general, who has helped make such a mockery of the election, and the chief justice, who presides over a compromised judiciary. Similarly, while Zimbabweans in general are poorer than they have been for five decades, Mr Mugabe keeps his soldiers sweet by giving them pay rises (and allowing the generals to plunder Congo, where Zimbabwe has 10,000 troops). In his quest for booty and control, the president has almost completely elided the difference between party and state, stuffing Zimbabwe’s institutions with his friends and using them for his own interests. To lend money—or, worse, to give it—to a government led by such a man would be little short of criminal.

Humanitarian aid, however, is a different matter. Outsiders should no more turn their backs on hungry Zimbabweans than on hungry Afghans or North Koreans. Nor should rich countries forget that Zimbabwe has one of the world’s highest rates of infection for AIDS: probably 25% of the population has it or the virus that causes it. Whatever can be done to alleviate both hunger and sickness is worth doing, though every effort should be made to deliver the help through independent agencies, not those of the state.

Africa’s silence

What of more direct pressure? The clubs to which Zimbabwe belongs, such as the Commonwealth, should move to suspend it at once, if they have any pretensions to making respect for democracy one of their criteria for membership. Strangely, such censure might perturb Mr Mugabe, whose contempt for democracy coexists with a puzzling desire for respectability. But the pressure most likely to produce results would be from within Africa, and of that there has been dispiritingly little up to now. Africans may prefer to engage in private diplomacy. But unless they can point to some persuasive results, they had better speak up in condemnation. Otherwise the world will assume that they think elections are only held to be stolen, in Africa at least.
Zimbabwe subsisting at the brink of starvation

Drought, disastrous land program blamed for situation

By Ravi Nesson
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Long lines of people waiting for corn meal snake through the streets of a nation that was once the breadbasket of southern Africa. Some wait for days, sleeping in lines so they won't lose their place.

Girls 13 and younger are being married off for the bride price to buy expensive black-market food. Many people are getting one meal a day.

And Zimbabwe's hunger crisis is sure to get worse.

Drought, a crashing economy and a land reform program that has destroyed commercial farming have pushed millions of Zimbabweans to the brink of starvation.

Five other southern African countries are also facing severe hunger this year, but Zimbabwe is by far the worst off.

The U.N. World Food Program says nearly half of its 13 million people will need food aid. A country that used to export food to hungry neighbors will need to import a staggering 2 million tons of grain just to get through the year.

"This is unprecedented," said Andrew Timpson of Save the Children UK. "We're very worried indeed."

The harvest has just ended, and already the country is running out of corn, the staple food. It is about to use the last of its wheat, and supplies of cooking oil and animal feed are dwindling.

With no hard currency reserves and an economy shredded by political unrest, the government will almost certainly be unable to import enough grain to feed its people, even with hundreds of thousands of tons of donated food, economists and aid workers said.

Meanwhile, much of Zimbabwe’s most productive farmland lies fallow as the government continues its efforts to seize nearly all the land owned by the nation’s white commercial farmers, by far Zimbabwe’s most productive food producers, and redistribute it to landless blacks.

The government says it is rectifying a hated legacy of British colonial rule. But human rights activists accuse it of using the seizures to reward its supporters with land while punishing white farmers and their hundreds of thousands of farm workers, who are seen as opposition stalwarts.

The government is also accused of using hunger as a weapon, shipping state-subsidized grain only to strongholds of President Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party.

In some areas, people must show party membership cards to get food; in others, food is distributed at ruling party meetings, said Tawanda Honduras, chairman of Zimbabwe’s Human Rights Forum.

On at least one occasion, ruling party militants temporarily prevented Zimbabwe’s Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Commission from feeding hungry children and pregnant women.

“They wanted to do the distributions themselves,” said Tarcisius Zimbiti, the commission's acting director.

Zimbabweans increasingly have to buy corn on the black market for two to three times the price of state-subsidized corn in a country with 60 percent unemployment and 122 percent annual inflation.

“It is too tough to survive,” said William Marimo, 39, who lives in the rural slum of Porta Farm, 20 miles west of Harare, the capital.

A three-month drought at a crucial phase of the growing season is mainly to blame. But even Zimbabwean officials acknowledge the land seizures made things worse.

"It compounds, it exacerbates, but it is not the primary cause of the problem," Finance Minister Simba Makoni said.

Zimbabwe produced only about 480,000 metric tons of corn this year, about a fourth of what it grew two years ago.

Commercial farmers brought in 850,000 metric tons of their 2000 harvest on 400,000 acres.

This year, they planted about 40 percent of that area, harvesting only 185,400 metric tons.

The winter wheat on what remains of Vernon Nicolle’s farm is about knee-high now, right where it should be despite the weather, thanks to high-tech irrigation.

On nearby land his family used to own, there is nothing but weeds, he said.

Until recently, Nicolle, 58, and his extended family produced one-quarter of Zimbabwe’s wheat crop on their 12 huge farms.

Nine of those farms are gone now, seized by the government, and parts of the remaining three are occupied by armed ruling party militants and inaccessible to the farmers.

The Nicolle family was able to farm winter wheat on only one-fifth of the land it used to cultivate. Some of the settlers and militants on the other land planted wheat, but didn’t irrigate it, Nicolle said. Those seeds have not even sprouted.

Experts predict this year’s winter wheat crop will at best total only 150,000 metric tons, less than half the normal harvest.

But that was before the government ordered nearly all white farmers to stop working their fields by June 24.

Government officials did not return messages seeking comment. But they have defended their land policies, saying that after two decades of independence, many Zimbabweans were frustrated that whites, less than 1 percent of the population, controlled the country’s wealth, and that about 4,500 white commercial farmers owned one-third of the nation’s farmland while 7 million black farmers shared the rest.

After encouraging ruling party militants to occupy many of the commercial farms two years ago, Mugabe’s government targeted 95 percent of white-owned farmland for rapid seizure and redistribution.

Only use 20% of land

July 1, 2002
Daily Camera

Note: The government of Zimbabwe is very bad.
Mugabe blasts international criticism

Zimbabwean leader fires Cabinet months past deadline

By Angus Shaw
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — President Robert Mugabe complied with Zimbabwean law Friday by dissolving his Cabinet, state radio reported, although major changes are not expected when replacements are named Monday.

Mugabe should have appointed a new Cabinet within 30 days after his victory in the March 9-11 election, which was condemned by international and local observers as deeply flawed. Opposition officials have sharply criticized the increasingly authoritarian Mugabe for ignoring that and other laws.

Local analysts speculate that Mugabe was annoyed with several ministers and might seek to replace them. State radio said Mugabe would spend the weekend completing the new Cabinet appointments.

Also Friday, Mugabe accused Western nations of hypocrisy for criticizing his plans to seize white-owned farmland and give it to blacks, saying those nations have their own histories of racism, state radio reported.

Since March 2000, the government has targeted 95 percent of white-owned land for confiscation and redistribution to blacks. Critics say many prime farms have gone to politicians, military and police officers and government cronies, including Mugabe relatives.

Mugabe said countries with a record of “genocide when they exterminated whole communities” had double standards concerning human rights, the radio said.

The United States, Australia and New Zealand have called for further international action against Mugabe’s regime.

“Walter Kansteiner, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Africa, said this week American officials were working with countries near Zimbabwe on how to encourage Zimbabweans to force free and fair elections,” Kansteiner said.

“Tactics we can use to work with those inside Zimbabwe, as well as their neighbors, to encourage a more democratic outcome,” Kansteiner said.

Mugabe’s ruling party asked the government to demand that U.S. officials explain Kansteiner’s remarks.

“We are outraged by the cowboy tactics that (President) Bush’s men are trying to introduce into our country,” said a Thursday statement by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, the party’s deputy publicity secretary.

Each time America preaches about democracy and human rights Africans are reminded of the racist brutality that people of color have endured not only during slavery days but particularly under the Bush government following the tragic events of Sept. 11 now being used as a cover to assault and dehumanize Africans and others.”

The government’s campaign to take over white-owned farms has added to more than two years of political unrest, during which about 186 people — mostly opposition supporters — have been killed. The dead include 11 white farmers.

About 2,900 farmers — employing about 230,000 workers — were ordered off their land by Aug. 8, but 60 percent refused.

Nearly 200 farmers were arrested in the past week. The farmers, many contesting the legality of the eviction orders, face up to two years in jail and a fine.

The farm seizures and a drought have been blamed for widespread food shortages that relief groups say threaten half of the 12.5 million people in this southern African country.
Farmers in Zimbabwe await fate

Nearly 3,000 white families ignored eviction deadline set by government

ON THE WEB
- American ranch owner killed in midst of Zimbabwe turmoil.
  www.dailycamera.com

Violence,” lies on a rack by the toilet.

Outside, in the fields, “We’re working as normally as you can with a bunch of people rubbing their hands together nearby and saying, ‘You’re doing a nice job planting our corn,’” said Peter Rosenfels, 38, Max’s youngest son.

The Rosenfelses, descendants of Jewish German immigrants, have been farming in southwest Zimbabwe since 1894, when Peter’s great-grandparents arrived in an ox cart from South Africa. His grandmother opened the first livery stable and laundry in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe’s sleepy second city, and today all nine of her children and a handful of her grandchildren run farms in the rockstrawn sandy scrub plain that reaches to the Botswana border.

Max, 77, and his wife, Mary, 72, bought a 19,000-acre stretch of that ground in the 1960s and went to work carving a ranch out of the dry brush. For seven years they lived in a dirt-floored hut, raising their children, carrying water from a nearby river in pails, planting young trees and gradually building a cattle herd.

“There was nothing here when we moved in. I planted every tree,” said Mary Rosenfels, as she walked through the small brick farmhouse’s lush garden of hibiscus bushes, papaya trees and river cisterns. “My father gave me that tree as a sculling;” she said, pointing by a towering 40-foot jacaranda, its trunk thick and gnarled with age.

Making a living on remote Sandown North Farm has not been easy. A drought in 1992 forced the Rosenfelses to sell most of their 2,500 cattle. Max Rosenfels sank the money into miles of 8-foot game fence, imported kudu, impala and wildebeest and started a hunting lodge. When the soil proved too dry for corn, the family found a site for an irrigation dam and went to work growing tomatoes and eventually paprika for export.

Peter Rosenfels has started a business growing peppers and onions, and bottling his own line of pickles and relishes.

None of farming’s hardships, however, prepared them for Feb. 15, 2000, the day the squatters arrived.

Earlier that month, Zimbabweans had voted down a referendum that would have given longtime President Robert Mugabe and his ruling ZANU-PF party broad new powers, enraged at growing political opposition he feared threatened his 20-year lock on power, Mugabe allowed thousands of squatters to pour onto white-owned farms and launched a fast-track effort to seize the land for transfer to black owners.

The Rosenfelses had already lost one farm. In 1993, both Sandown North Farm and Kirby Block, an adjoining 10,000-acre farm they also owned, showed up on a list of properties the government planned to acquire to resetttle landless black farmers. After negotiations, the Rosenfelses agreed in 1997 to cede Kirby Block to the government for the right to hold on to Sandown North.

The deal didn’t hold. The settlers poured onto Sandown North in early 2000 and wanted it too.

As squatters set up camp at farms around the area, a neighbor, Martin Olds, was killed in a gunfight with an armed group of the invaders backed by a powerful local politician. The Rosenfelses, listening to the showdown on the radio and terrified that they might be next, spent two hours picking through 50 years of accumulated goods, stuffed what they could into a couple of pickups and fled to Bulawayo for three months.

When they returned, Mary Rosenfels found that her silver teaspoons collection had vanished, along with the German bedside clock she loved, the family’s plates, silverware and linens.

Settlers began poaching in the game reserve and in two years reduced a 2,000-strong herd of impala to 300 animals. The threat of violence dried up the hunting safari business, and settlers decided they could kill any of the Rosenfelses’ cattle they chose. The Police, called out to deal with the poaching threats, took reports but insisted the crimes were political and could not be prosecuted.

“All at once we had no rights. Nothing,” Peter Rosenfels said.

Today, dozens of thatched huts — some made of brick and fitted with plate-glass windows — line the long dirt driveway leading to the Rosenfelses home. Most of the settlers — the Rosenfelses jokingly call them “time share” residents — planted corn but saw it wither, a victim of the drought and the poor sandy soil. The farm’s abundant blue vervet monkeys and wild pigs also are quick to dig up unguarded crops.

“Even if you give these people all the fertilizer in the world they’re not going to grow any grain,” said Max Rosenfels, driving past the huts in his ancient white pickup. “The government says white farmers have all the best land. But this is Kalahari sand.”

The Rosenfelses, like most of Zimbabwe’s remaining 4,500 white farmers, cling to hope.

With a famine threatening half of the nation’s 13 million people, they think, Mugabe will have a change of heart and allow them to stay. Perhaps game farms, a source of desperately needed foreign exchange, will be exempted. Perhaps a new court decision, delaying the seizure of mortgaged farms, can somehow help those without mortgages as well.

The alternative is unthinkable. The government wants 95 percent of white farms, and across western Zimbabwe, every farm owned by every member of the extended Rosenfelses family is listed for seizure.

Max Rosenfels, a tall, serious man who grew up speaking Ndebele and is called by locals Madlala — the man who can run down a kudu — cannot imagine life away from the farm.

“This is my life’s work, and they can take it away from me just like that?” he said, sweeping a sun-weathered hand across his fields of just-harvested paprika. “I haven’t got savings. I haven’t got a pension. This farm is my pension.”
Ex-judge arrested; Mugabe defends land seizures at U.N.

By Angus Shaw
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Police on Friday arrested a recently retired judge who had tried to sentence the justice minister to prison, accusing him of bias against the government and irregularities in office.

In a continuing crackdown against alleged government critics — including judges, reporters and human rights workers — former High Court Judge Fergus Blackie, 65, was taken by police from his Harare home before dawn, his wife, Adrienne, said.

It was not immediately clear what criminal charges Blackie might face, but state television, on its nightly news, said Blackie was being investigated on suspicion of “defeating or obstructing the course of justice” when serving as a judge. The investigation related to his granting of an appeal and overturning a one-year jail sentence imposed on a white woman convicted of theft.

He was also being investigated for possible violations of prevention of corruption laws, the state television said.

Blackie’s lawyer Dipak Mehta said High Court Judge Ben Hlatshwayo granted an application late Friday ordering police to allow access to the former judge by lawyers and family members.

But police refused to accept the written ruling, government offices were closed and top state officials were said to be unavailable.

“We have not been able to serve it on any responsible authority. We have reached a dead end for today,” he said.

Police spokesman Bothwell Mugariri was not immediately available for comment and he did not answer his mobile phone.

“They are trying to make things difficult and give us the run-around until Monday,” forcing Blackie to spend the weekend in custody, Mehta said.

Arrests are often carried out on Fridays to force suspects to spend the weekend in overcrowded and filthy police cells before a court hearing can be held.

In July Blackie sentenced Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa to three months in jail on contempt of court charges after the minister repeatedly ignored a court summons.

Chinamasa ignored the ruling and police refused to arrest him in what was seen as further evidence of a breakdown of the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

Critics say the government ignores court rulings it dislikes while using sweeping new security and media laws to crack down on opponents, judges and the free press.

Twelve independent journalists were arrested and charged with violating draconian media laws this year. Most foreign correspondents have been refused permission to visit the country, and this week the government refused to renew the work permit of a U.S. citizen working for the French news agency Agence France-Presse.

The government has accused foreign reporters of fueling an international propaganda campaign led by Britain, the former colonial power, the European Union and the United States to discredit Zimbabwe and topple President Robert Mugabe.

Zimbabwe has been wracked by more than two years of political and economic turmoil, marked by a violent crackdown against the opposition and government seizures of white-owned farms for redistribution to blacks.

Mugabe defended the land redistribution in a speech before the U.N. General Assembly on Thursday.
Economics focus | The Zimbabwean model

A bad bad chief

The pros and cons of opting out of the global economy

Orthodox economists sometimes get it wrong. For example, when a government fixes the prices of various goods below what they cost to produce, and fails to provide the necessary subsidy to fill the gap, orthodox theory predicts that there will be empty shelves in the shops. But in Zimbabwe, this is not how things have turned out. Retailers have indeed run out of all manner of price-controlled goods. But for some reason they can still get hold of toilet paper. So, instead of empty shelves, Zimbabwean shoppers encounter aisle upon aisle of roll upon roll, where the bread, sugar and oil used to be.

Ignore, for a moment, the headlines about murder, torture and election-rigging. For an interesting economic experiment is being conducted in Zimbabwe. To the foes of globalisation, President Robert Mugabe’s views are unexceptional. He argues that “runaway market forces” are leading a “vicious, all-out assault on the poor”. He decries the modern trend of “banishing the state from the public sphere for the benefit of big business.” What sets him apart from other anti-globalisers, however, is that he has been able to put his ideas into practice.

In countries where the IMF calls the shots, governments have to balance their budgets on the backs of the poor. Having told the IMF to get stuffed, Mr Mugabe is free not to do this. The official estimate is that Zimbabwe’s budget deficit will be about 11% of GDP this year; the government is frantically borrowing and printing money to cover the shortfall. Inflation is now 144%, and it is predicted to top 500% next year.

Mr Mugabe argues that price rises are caused by greedy businessmen. His solution is price controls. For the past year or so, these applied only to everyday essentials, such as bread and maize meal. Shops were ordered to sell such goods at fixed, low prices. Unfortunately, Mr Mugabe was right about those greedy businessmen. Rather than lose money, they stocked their shelves with toilet paper, or tried to dodge price controls by modifying their products. For example, since bread was price-controlled, bakers added raisins to their dough and called it “raisin bread”, which was not on the list. Not to be outsmarted, on November 26th the government extended price controls to practically everything, from typewriters to babies’ nappies.

Some things have to be imported, however, and it is hard to prevent foreigners from profiteering. Mr Mugabe is anxious that petrol, for example, should be affordable; otherwise, people will not be able to get to work. A strong currency should help, so he has frozen the exchange rate for the past two years, and denounced as a “saboteur” anybody who suggests devaluation. Since Zimbabwe’s inflation is a tad higher than America’s, nobody wishes to surrender hard currency at the official rate of 55 Zimbabwe dollars to one American dollar. The black market rate is several hundreds to one; the government blames speculators.

To lay hands on foreign currency, Mr Mugabe has no choice but to rob exporters. Those whose products are bulky and hard to smuggle (tobacco farmers, for instance) must surrender half of their hard-currency proceeds to the government, which repays them in crisp new Zimbabwe dollars, at the official rate.

This is not nearly enough, however, to keep Zimbabwe supplied with petrol (the distribution of which is a state monopoly). So, this month, the finance minister announced a clampdown on the black market; all bureaux de change are to be shut. He also asked expatriate Zimbabweans to remit money home via the central bank, which will confiscate almost all of it. For some reason, they prefer informal channels, such as Internet-based firms that accept cash offshore and issue friends and relatives back in Zimbabwe with local currency or vouchers for supermarkets.

For most problems, a coercive solution can be found. The government’s debt-servicing costs are too high? Force financial institutions to buy treasury bills that yield far less than the rate of inflation. People are running out of food? Confiscate grain from those who have it (“hoarders”) and distribute it at an artificially low price through a state monopoly grain distributor. Ordinarily, this would somewhat dampen commercial farmers’ incentive to grow food. But since most of them have been driven off their land, what does it matter?

An example to us all

It would be nice to think that the rest of the world has nothing to learn from Zimbabwe. But Mr Mugabe has many admirers. His fellow Africans cheer his defiance of the old colonial powers. Namibia’s government has promised a similar land-grab. South Africa, showing comparable paranoia about currency speculators, recently conducted a pointless investigation into whether banks had conspired to undervalue the rand.

Globally, few policymakers favour going the full Mugabe, but many believe that a little bit of price-fixing won’t hurt. Price supports for EU farmers, for example, persist because their governments are rich enough to keep subsidising them, and because the costs are spread across the entire population, who are often unaware that they are being fleeced. Influential charities argue that poor countries should also be paid a “fair” price for their products. Oxfam, for example, contends that the price of coffee is “too low” because multinationals manipulate it. The charity is campaigning for it somehow to be raised.

It may seem harsh, when faced with the misery of an Ethiopian coffee farmer, to argue that it would be more efficient to let the price mechanism deliver its message (“Grow something else”) unmuffled. But greater efficiency leads to greater wealth, and vice versa, as Zimbabwe so harrowingly shows. Nowhere has withdrawn so swiftly from the global economy, nor seen such a thorough reversal of neo-liberal policies. The results—an economy that has contracted by 35% in five years, and half the population in need of food aid—are hard to paper over.
Condemning injustice in Zimbabwe

Shakespeare Maya, Zimbabwe’s leader of the opposition National Alliance for Good Governance, opined, “This land was stolen from our ancestors, and it follows that those who hold it now are thieves.”

It’s this vision that has prompted Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe to target 95 percent of white-owned farms for redistribution. His Land Acquisition Act calls for the eviction of more than 4,000 white farmers. More than 2,900 white farmers have already been evicted. Mr. Mugabe’s wife, Grace, has personally assisted in the country’s land reform by showing up on one 3,000-acre farm with her husband’s troops, declaring, “I’m taking over this farm.” The white owner was arrested, and black farmer workers were told to hit the road.

The late South African economist William Hutt, in his book “The Economics of the Color Bar,” argued that one of the supreme tragedies of the human condition is that those who have been the victims of injustices or oppression “can often be observed to be inflicting not dissimilar injustices upon other races.”

In 1895, with the military backing of the British government, Cecil Rhodes (namesake for the Rhodes Scholarship) confiscated land that had been settled and owned by the Ndebele and Matabele people. He established what was known as Rhodesia, a country that became the jewel of Africa, with its mining and agricultural riches. In a word, Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, became a net food exporter and the “bread basket” for wheat and corn for its own people and most of East Africa. By the 1960s, Rhodesia’s per capita income and education were one of Africa’s highest.

In 1965, Rhodesia won its independence and Robert Mugabe, a Marxist-socialist, became its leader. As Mr. Hutt might have predicted, Mr. Mugabe began his oppression of other peoples. Starting in 1983, he used his North Korean-trained 5th Brigade to brutally massacre thousands of Ndebele civilians, a brutality that included hacking to death and disembowelment. Later in the ‘80s, Mr. Mugabe started attacking rule of law, harassing and suppressing Zimbabwe’s free press and media, and arresting dissenters. Opposition party leaders are now imprisoned and faced with kangaroo-court trials.

One naturally asks where the Black Congressional Caucus, NAACP and other civil rights organizations — who in the 1960s were demonstrating and calling for the end of English rule — are. There’s a deafening silence, the same silence when Africa’s black tyrants elsewhere on the continent commit brutalities making those committed by former colonial masters pale in comparison.

Just recently, Mr. Mugabe ensured his president-for-life status by openly rigging national elections. Zimbabwe has come full circle. Mr. Mugabe has created a disaster for both black and white Zimbabweans in the name of reparations and land redistribution. He has outdone the injustices of Cecil Rhodes, who by the way, was an avowed racist. Members of his ZANU-PF party have torched at least 10 million acres of cropland.

emaciated children flashing across our television screens, and calls for food assistance. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) estimate that millions of Zimbabweans face imminent starvation. The politically correct cause of the Zimbabwe’s looming famine is drought. Yes, drought has been a problem, but Mr. Mugabe’s politics is a better explanation of why millions of his compatriots face starvation.

One naturally asks where the Black Congressional Caucus, NAACP and other civil rights organizations — who in the 1960s were demonstrating and calling for the end of English rule — are. There’s a deafening silence, the same silence when Africa’s black tyrants elsewhere on the continent commit brutalities making those committed by former colonial masters pale in comparison. Their positions don’t differ from one that holds that blacks are exempted from the civilized standards of conduct demanded from whites. Or might it be that America’s civil rights establishment feels brutalization of blacks by blacks doesn’t hurt as much?

Walter Williams is a nationally syndicated columnist.
There's Nothing Natural About Zimbabwe's Woes

By Claudia Rosett

NEW YORK—In the waiting room of Zimbabwe's mission to the United Nations, posters advertise the country's natural wonders, including wild elephants and the splendid Victoria Falls, with the caption “Africa's Paradise.”

Yet in today's Zimbabwe what looms large is not paradise but famine. “The situation is deteriorating fairly rapidly,” says Kevin Parrell, country director for the U.N.'s World Food Program, reached by phone in the Zimbabwean capital of Harare. He says that in any village right now, “you will see people clearly hungry.” The U.N. is appealing for $611 million worth of emergency aid for sub-Saharan Africa. Almost half of that is for Zimbabwe, the region's former breadbasket, where aid workers now predict that without massive help, hundreds of thousands may soon starve to death. But, as Rev. Jack Finucane of the U.S.-based Concern Worldwide, told me after his recent visit to Zimbabwe, “There's a problem about getting food into the country.”

There is nothing natural about this. True, Zimbabwe has had a drought. But in our modern world of swift transport and global markets—supplemented in a crisis by eager aid agencies—there is no way that famine can be chalked up to natural disaster. Given any reasonable degree of freedom, people will make mighty use of their own ingenuity to survive. It takes a lot of work, by determined tyrants, to starve human beings to death.

Stalin in the 1930s, Mao in the 1950s and '60s and North Korea's totalitarian Kim Jong Il today all belong on the list of rulers who have forced starvation on their own people in the course of consolidating their own power. Ethiopians starved in the 1980s under the brutal Marxist rule of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, who was finally ousted in 1991—and retired to luxury digs in Zimbabwe, where he still resides.

At Zimbabwe's U.N. mission hangs a portrait of the ruler who has enrolled this once-fruitful country in the axis of famine: “His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe”—Robert Gabriel Mugabe.

Mr. Mugabe peers out from behind big dark-rimmed spectacles, looking younger in this official portrait than his 78 years. He has ruled Zimbabwe since independence from Britain in 1980, tightening his grip over time. As some countries in Africa have begun to liberalize, Zimbabweans have been looking more urgently for change. Mr. Mugabe has responded with increasingly destructive tactics for keeping power—imposing price controls, nationalizing enterprises and turning loose gangs to brutalize opponents.

In March, Mr. Mugabe "won" re-election in a vote that the State Department said was "marred by disenfranchisement of urban voters, violent intimidation against opposition supporters, intimidation of the independent press and the judiciary and other irregularities."

Over the past two years, Mr. Mugabe's bid to boost his waning support has included a land "reform" in which his government ordered commercial farmers belonging to the 1% white minority to quit farming and surrender their land to be parcelled out to blacks. This was done in the name of redressing racial injustices of colonial times. But the huge farms and their economies of scale were the most productive source of the country's food. Their confiscation, carried out in many cases by violent mobs, has brought food production to a near halt. And though the drought ended months ago and many of the reservoirs are now full, Mr. Mugabe's "reform" means there is now almost no effective irrigation or new planting. The worst hit by these ruinous tactics are huge numbers of Zimbabwe's 12 million blacks.

Nor can people buy supplies on the open market. The government runs a Grain Marketing Board that has monopoly rights to import and deal in commodities such as corn—the staple food in Zimbabwe. Farmers are forced to sell exclusively to the state marketing board, at well below world price, which further reduces incentives for large-scale planting. According to the head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Andrew Natios, the grain board "has politicized the distribution of food," funneling grain toward Mugabe supporters and away from the opposition.

Mr. Mugabe's policies have also sent inflation into the triple digits, eroding the buying power of ordinary Zimbabweans. The official exchange rate is now about 1/16th the black-market rate, meaning that food prices are increasingly out of reach. The effect is a "mass destruction of the middle class," says Mr. Natios. In neighboring South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has warned that "Zimbabweans are now suffering the brunt of policies that could soon spill over into the entire region."

Aid donors are now trying to maneuver emergency rations through Mr. Mugabe's horrific political maze, which has included objections by Harare officials to the importation of genetically modified grains. The U.N. has issued a call for swifter relief to avert catastrophic starvation, and nongovernmental organizations have been petitioning officials in Harare for permission to ship in food. Mr. Mugabe, meanwhile, was off in Cuba last week, lauding what he calls his "fast track" land policy and hobnobbing with his old pal Fidel Castro—another septuagenarian believer in the power of rationing.

By phone from Zimbabwe last week, a relief worker described to me the scene in village after village, saying that though people still look healthy, they are now running through their last resources. They are selling off the cow or the goats, boiling roots for food, and waiting in mile-long queues at local offices of the state's Grain Marketing Board.
Zimbabwe

While you looked the other way

HARARE

Robert Mugabe's broken promises

A LEADING official of President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party was vehement. "We will stop at nothing to make sure that Mr Mugabe wins another term," he snarled to a startled European diplomat. "If it takes violence, then we will use violence. If you thought the parliamentary elections in June 2000 were violent, they will seem like nothing compared with the presidential elections." Though taken aback by the party leader's brutishness, the diplomat was not surprised by the message. In recent weeks it has become clear that Mr Mugabe, aged 77 and in power for 21 years, is preparing to use every trick in the book to get re-elected next year to another six-year term.

He has been an unintended beneficiary of the September 11th attacks on America. As international attention dwells on that crisis, the scrutiny of Mr Mugabe has diminished. The postponement of the Commonwealth heads-of-government meeting from October to March means that, by the time the rescheduled talks are held, his re-election plans will already be fully in place (the election has to be held by the end of March).

Mr Mugabe has taken advantage of this inattention. Forget the assurances he made to a group of Commonwealth foreign ministers, in an agreement reached in Nigeria on September 6th, that he would stop political violence and illegal land invasions. Forget, too, his promise, a few days later, to the leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that he would curb his thugs from intimidating the political opposition.

Since then, his supporters have carried out 30 new farm invasions, and violence has stopped work on some 700 farms during the planting season. The deaths of three people have been blamed on state-sponsored political violence. The by-election in Chikomba on September 22nd and 23rd was particularly violent. A school headmaster, accused of supporting the opposition MDC, was beaten to death. Other teachers in the region were tortured on the general suspicion that teachers are bound to be on the opposition's side.

It now seems clear that Mr Mugabe's new look Supreme Court will drape a veil of legality over all this. The new chief justice, Godfrey Chidyausiku, chose three newly appointed justices, all known to be government adherents, for a crucial land case. Reversing an earlier Supreme Court judgment, they ruled last week that the land seizures were legal, and directed the government to proceed with them.

Much is at stake in the courts. The Supreme Court is due to hear cases on political violence, electoral fraud, intimidation of the press and the government's intention to strip citizenship from scores of thousands of Zimbabweans, including those of British descent. But, laments a leading lawyer, "There is no longer an independent judiciary, there are just a few independent judges."

Yet, even with all this help, Mr Mugabe may have trouble getting himself re-elected, let alone credibly. In the Chikomba by-election, in a campaign rife with violence and intimidation in the Mashonaland heartland of ZANU-PF territory, the MDC still managed to win a quarter of the votes. A strong minority of the votes in rural areas will boost the manifest support the MDC has in the capital, Harare, and in other cities, as well as in the entire Mashonaland region. Economically, the country is a disaster, with inflation heading towards 100%. Price controls were imposed this week. Optimists note that last year the president unexpectedly lost a referendum on his proposed constitution.

Moreover, not all eyes are off Zimbabwe. Mr Mugabe's blatant flouting of the Commonwealth's and SADC's accords has affronted those organisations. SADC's leaders have ordered a ministerial team to investigate what is happening in the country, and the Commonwealth may follow suit. After the government ejected an American team preparing to monitor the approach to the election, and told a European Union delegation not to come, both America and the EU are considering selective sanctions. But attention, and pressure, need to be arduously maintained.
Zimbabwe

Normal times in an abnormal country

HARARE
The government's violent ways of preparing for next year's election

THE country has returned to normal after the two-day strike that more or less shut it down at the beginning of the month. But what passes for normal in Zimbabwe these days is pretty weird. Cars, queuing for petrol, snake slowly through the cities, Robert Mugabe's supporters threaten factories with violence and army units beat up people in Harare's townships. Farm occupations continue (more than 5,000 farms, representing over 90% of all white-owned farms, have now been designated for seizure), and farm owners and their workers continue to be attacked. Opposition activists are beaten, murdered or sometimes just disappear.

The strike was ostensibly a protest at the government's decision to raise the price of fuel by 73%. It was also a huge demonstration of the public's feelings towards Mr Mugabe and his regime. The question being asked everywhere is: "How can we get rid of Mugabe?"

With difficulty, is the answer. The strike, though successful in bringing everything to a stop, highlighted the limits of this sort of action: the regime was not directly threatened by workers staying home for two days. Now the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions says it will give the government one last chance to negotiate the fuel-price rise. If it does not respond favourably, say the unions, they will go on indefinite strike for a "final onslaught". Yet it seems highly improbable that the labour movement will be able to muster the strength to bring the government down.

The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), is criticised for not having a strategy to topple the regime. Comparing Zimbabwe to Serbia, dissidents speculate whether the Mугабе era could not be brought to an end by massing people in the streets of Harare as people were massed in the streets of Belgrade last year. But first there have to be elections. The MDC is determined that change should come about through constitutional means. The opposition has fixed its sights on the presidential election, due in April 2002, as the chance to defeat Mr Mугабе and restore democracy.

Mr Mугабе, too, has begun campaigning for the election. His "war veterans" roam cities and farms, meting out violence to anyone viewed as opposition. His police chief says he will dismiss any officer who backs the opposition. The intimidation of the MDC has increased, with raids, based on spurious charges, on homes and offices of opposition members of parliament. An MDC official, Paul Themba, says:

Go to 2

The Economist

July 14, 2001

• The country will need to import food.
• Over 5000 farms will be seized.
• The government uses violent methods.
Zimbabwe

Pressure now

If Zimbabwe is to have a fair election next year, the checking should start now

WHEN a president decides to destroy his country, it is hard to know how to stop him. President Robert Mugabe seems determined to take Zimbabwe over the precipice. He has ruined the economy, overridden the law and undermined its institutions, all so that he and his cronies can stay in power.

The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, managed to defeat a referendum to change the constitution last year but narrowly failed, four months later, to win a parliamentary majority in an election dominated by government violence and intimidation. Fearing that demonstrators would be shot, the MDC has decided against calling people out on to the streets. A national strike last week, though well-supported, has simply damaged the economy further without apparently hurting Mr Mugabe (see page 43).

Aid-giving countries, too, are in a quandary. They have cut off most of their assistance, but Mr Mugabe does not care. Rather, he has sought to turn Britain's strident criticism to his own advantage by portraying himself as an African patriot spitting in the eye of British imperialism, even though his "land-reform" programme is plainly directed as much at destroying the opposition and rewarding his supporters as it is at redistributing white farmland. And, at least elsewhere in Africa, his cries have found an echo. The foreign ministers of the Organisation of African Unity, meeting in Zambia last weekend, gave him all the backing he could have wished for, though the heads of government were more circumspect, perhaps influenced by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa.

Surprisingly, though, Mr Mugabe may have some chinks in his armour. Though 77 years old and in power for 21 years, he wants to be voted in again as president in an election that must be held before next April. He may be a dictator, but he wants to show he is a popular one. This gives the opposition a chance. It is urging Zimbabwe's friends to keep pressing the government to ensure that the election is fair and free of intimidation.

Mr Mugabe has a second weakness, which may make this possible: he also wants the approval of the Commonwealth. Earlier this year he angrily rejected a proposed visit by a team of Commonwealth foreign ministers, which is the organisation's polite way of rebuking undemocratic members. But he has now been persuaded by Mr Mbeki and others to accept a less formal meeting under the broad umbrella of the Commonwealth. If it goes ahead—nothing is certain—this could provide an opportunity for the Commonwealth to try to promote fair play in Zimbabwe: it should say that it will not be associated with the meeting unless it can at once start checking on the conduct of next year's election.

Why so soon? In too many devious tyrannies that hold elections, outside observers arrive as the polling stations open and never see the process of rigging, disqualification or intimidation that has already made a mockery of the voting. If that is not to happen next year in Zimbabwe, independent electoral monitoring organisations need to start gathering information now on all aspects of the election: the voters' roll, intimidation, the use of government funds and facilities, and so on. The constitution already gives the president an advantage in parliament by allowing him to appoint 20 of its 150 members (ten others go to traditional chiefs). That may, in the event, enable Mr Mugabe to hang on to power. But if he does so by stealing the election, outsiders must be ready to condemn it and reject the result. They should begin watching now. ■

Latin America's economies

Gloom over the River Plate

Argentine, and other, woes are dragging the region down

RARELY in the past decade have the prospects for Latin America's economies seemed so threatening. This week Argentina's shaky government struggled to sell treasury bills to a largely captive domestic debt market. Brazil's currency, the real, continues to sag: it has lost more than 22% of its value since January, despite interest-rate rises and intervention by the Central Bank. Chile's normally buoyant peso has slid against the dollar too, and the Andean countries have countless problems of their own. Even Mexico's economy is cooling fast, its exports hit by shrinking demand in the United States.

Between them, Argentina and Brazil account for about 40% of all emerging-market bonds. With investors fretting, too, about Turkey's commitment to its economic-reform programme, and renewed doubts about East Asia's economic prospects, once again there is talk of financial contagion spreading across all emerging markets, as in 1997-99.

Certainly, the exceptional strength of the dollar has hurt many emerging economies—and none more than Argentina, whose currency board pegs its peso at par to the greenback. But many of the difficulties in South America are home-grown. Take Brazil. Only months ago, it seemed set fair for several years of quickening growth, reward for the reforms pushed through by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

Enter the unexpected. First, Mr Cardoso's loose, four-party centre-right coalition frayed, partly because of corruption scandals. Second, an energy shortage obliged the government ▸
Mugabe is a bad leader of Zimbabwe

Mugabe’s dirty tricks
A doctored video in Zimbabwe

HARARE
Plots, sting operations and treason

ON VARIOUS occasions, Morgan Tsvangirai, Zimbabwe’s opposition leader, has been stoned, shot at and all-but thrown out of a high window by Robert Mugabe’s thugs. But this week it was Mr Tsvangirai who says he was charged with trying to assassinate Mr Mugabe.

This often happens to those who threaten the president’s hold on power. Joshua Nkomo, Mr. Mugabe’s chief rival in the 1980s, was charged with plotting a coup and forced, after several police raids on his home and bullets fired at his car, to flee the country. The Rev Ndabaningi Sithole, the founder of Mr Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party, who challenged him for the top job in 1996, was put on trial for allegedly trying to assassinate him with two landmines. He died with the charges still hanging over his head.

The latest plot provides juicy material for the state propaganda machine. Government newspapers fill their pages with it. The state broadcaster shows repeats of a grainy video in which Mr Tsvangirai can be heard saying that once Mr Mugabe has been “eliminated”, he can “proceed with the transition to democracy”. Mr Tsvangirai claims he has been framed, and that he

Go to 2

was talking about the president’s elimination through the ballot box.

Viewers are inclined to believe him. Partly, this is because the state broadcaster routinely peddles whoppers. But the main reason for the public’s scepticism is that the video, as shown in Zimbabwe, had obviously been doctored. Alert viewers pointed out that the time indicator in the corner of the screen showed that the footage was being shown out of sequence. The station blacked out the timer for subsequent transmissions.

Mr Tsvangirai is probably not a murderer, but he is clearly guilty of carelessness. The video was shot surreptitiously during a meeting in December with a Canadian political consultancy called Dickens and Madison, which Mr. Tsvangirai hired to lobby for him in America. If he had bothered to do a background check, he would have discovered that the firm already worked for Mr Mugabe, and that its director, Ari Ben-Menashe, is a former Israeli agent known for spinning colourful yarns. As it was, he says he suspected nothing until his new advisers started talking about putting Mr Mugabe in a coffin and bumping him off. He says he immediately left the room and cancelled the contract. Journalists who have seen the unedited tape say he stayed on, and did not object to Mr Ben-Menashe’s talk. A less naive man would not have entered the room, with those people, in the first place.

If tried and convicted, Mr Tsvangirai could, in theory, face the death penalty. Oddly, given the severity of the charge, he was freed without bail and no travel restrictions were imposed on him. It could be that Mr Mugabe, having seen recent

opinion polls suggesting that even massive cheating will not win him re-election on March 9th and 10th, and now frustrated by a Supreme Court ruling that strikes down some of his more oppressive electoral laws, is hoping to scare his opponent into fleeing before the poll. But Mr Tsvangirai staunchly vows that he will stay. 

I was framed, says Tsvangirai

March 2, 2002
The Economist

Page 46

An update:
. (June 2003) - Tsvangirai is still trying to cause good change
. He is a hero

P21b