Zimbabwe could be a very good country - it could be prosperous and a good spot to live.
But it has had very bad leaders for some years, they ruined the country!
(The good people needed help and did not get it.)
Corruption or bad leaders really hurt

Letters to the Editor

Corruption Confounds Africa’s Economic Goal

Belarus
Luka the bad
Oct 2004

Minsk:
The president is set to consolidate his hold on power in a sham referendum

Congo
Things fall apart?
Aug 2004

Democratic Republic of Congo
Congo’s power-sharing government starts to crumble

Nepal
Bombs on the tennis courts; no petrol in the pumps
Aug 2004

 Maoist Rebels

China

Corruption in China

Shooting the messenger
Aug 2004

Uruguay’s Dirty Little Secret
They were hit by bad forces
Zimbabwe
Police burn shacks of urban poor

Harare — Police torched six miles of shacks and kiosks in an opposition stronghold near Victoria Falls on Monday during an ongoing operation critics say is aimed at scapegoating street traders for Zimbabwe's near-emergency economic crisis.

The burnings were just the latest sign of economic chaos in the southern African nation — once the regional breadbasket. In the last week, the government dramatically boosted staple food prices, devalued its currency by 45 percent and warned 4 million of its people may face famine.

Thousands of street traders have been arrested and their wares seized or destroyed since the crackdown began May 19, and police using torches, sledgehammers and bulldozers have burned and demolished kiosks and homes of the urban poor in shantytowns around the country. The campaign has left thousands sleeping in the open, government opponents say.

May 2005

Terrible

May 2005

9 PM

May 2005

28 DAILY CAMERA

Zimbabwe: Stories, 2005 and 2004
Zimbabwe, Long Destitute, Now Teeters Toward Ruin

May 21, 2005

Starved for foreign currency to import crucial supplies, the government now requires all businesses to trade 25 percent of their foreign income at the official exchange rate. That hits businesses with a double whammy: they have less foreign money to buy imported raw materials, and they must raise prices to make up their currency losses.

If that seems a formula for more shortages and more inflation, few business managers here would disagree.

Tony Rowland, the chief executive of Bulawayo-based Zimpow, employs 400 people to make animal-drawn plows from steel rolled at one of Zimbabwe’s few domestic mills.

To hedge against the constantly rising price of domestic steel, he reinvests his profits in something that rises with inflation: nuts and bolts.

“I’ve become a steel dealer,” he said. “I’ve had to expand my business to things beyond my core business to keep going.” Where he forced to buy and sell at the official exchange rate, he said, “I’d be dead in the water.”

Mr. Rowland and others say that even partial devaluations of the currency by the government will not revive the economy or save businesses and that an economic overhaul that reflected reality would impose unacceptable suffering on ordinary citizens who already undergo too many hardships.

“Something’s got to give,” said another Bulawayo manufacturer, a major exporter. “The problem is that the decisions to be made are so radical, and would affect the average man so badly, that they’ll never be made. Not under the current environment, anyway.”

So Zimbabweans muddle through. In Harare, the chief of a major consumer products company said recently that he had junked his accounting software until programmers could adapt a Turkish version to his requirements. "The problem: the Zimbabwe spreadsheets cannot accommodate the flood of zeros required for transactions that now run into the billions — even the trillions — of Zimbabwean dollars."

“We’ve run out of noughts,” he said.

In Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, hundreds of people waited yesterday for transportation as a gasoline shortage made space on the buses scarce.

— the nation needs 50,000, and has fewer than 400 working ones — to irrigation suppliers.

Thai only deepened the export tailspin: Zimbabwean tobacco production is down two-thirds in five years, for instance, and the quality, once world renowned, is so poor that buyers are scarce.

Falling exports made foreign currency more expensive, causing exchange rates to rocket. But the government has generally chosen to print more money instead of readjusting the value of its currency; Zimbabwe’s money supply rose 226 percent in 2004.

The result has been hyperinflation and a thriving black market in money and goods. Hyperinflation and the artificial exchange rate, in turn, have crippled gold mining, Zimbabwe’s other big export industry. Production fell 18 percent in the first quarter of 2005.

THE GOVERNMENT’S LATEST DEVALUATION of the Zimbabwe dollar sets special, higher exchange rates for exports of gold and cotton, two major industries facing collapse in the current crisis. The loss of either would crimp foreign-currency receipts even more; a collapse in cotton would pull Zimbabwe’s textile industry down as well.

[The higher exchange rates effectively are subsidies, costing the government the equivalent of scores of millions of American dollars. Asked how the government would get the money to subsidize the two industries, the economist, Mr. Robertson, said, “My feeling is that they’ll print it.”

The government said Friday that it would also budget more money to import grain, hoping to avert what some experts say is a looming famine when the harvest that ends in May — by all accounts a dismal failure — has been consumed.

Zimbabwe needs about 1.6 million tons of grain a year, and officials say they intend to purchase 1.2 million tons. But corn imports from South Africa, Zimbabwe’s only supplier of note, totaled a bare 37,500 tons in the last month, far short of demand. It is unclear where the government will find the foreign currency it needs to buy grain abroad.

Bulawayo is Zimbabwe’s second largest city and a regional capital.

end
Zimbabwe, Long Destitute, Teeters Toward Ruin

May 21, 2005

BY MICHAEL WINES

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe — In the weeks before parliamentary elections in March, the leaders of this threadbare nation threw open the national larder, wooing voters with stocks of normally scarce gasoline and corn and a flood of freshly printed money.

It may have helped: the ruling party, President Robert G. Mugabe’s ZANU-PF, was installed for another five years. But Zimbabwe’s Potemkin prosperity has evaporated since the elections, replaced by penury and mounting signs of economic collapse.

"Here in the second largest city, lines of cars stretch a quarter mile and more at fuel-parcished service stations, and drivers spend the night in their cars’ back seats lest they lose their place in line. Milk, cooking oil and, most of all, corn, the national staple, are a distant memory at most stores. At one downtown grocery, tubs of much-prized American toothpaste are kept in a locked case. Zimbabwe’s currency, which traded on the black market at 120 to the dollar in April 2002, went for 6,200 to the dollar last December, 12,000 on April 1, and 17,000 in early May. By mid-May a single American dollar brought as much as 25,000 Zimbabwe dollars, though the rate has since steadied at about 20,000."

[Zimbabwe’s government steadfastly maintained an official exchange rate of about 6,100 Zimbabwe dollars per American dollar until Thursday, when the nation’s reserve bank announced a devaluation. But business managers here say the new official rate — 9,000 per American dollar — is unlikely to have more than a brief impact on the economy.]

Continued From Page A1

turning point. Zimbabwe’s main economic problems — capital flight, a dire shortage of foreign exchange with which to buy imports, and turbocharged inflation — are now so severe that they are eroding what remains of the industrial and agricultural base. Manufacturing has slowed to a trickle, hamstrings by shortages of fuel and imported components. Businesses have been driven to barter and the black market, adding to the inflation. Appeals for government help are mostly fruitless. The government is all but broke.

"There are scarcities now coming from manufacturers who can’t deliver enough to retailers to fill their shelves," Mr. Robertson said in an interview in Harare, the capital. Initially the problem was that manufacturers could not cobble together enough supplies to make their products. "Now that there are more critical shortages in things like fuel," he said, "it’s almost academic whether they can get the material, because they can’t deliver the products anyway. The end result of the shortages is that prices are rising.”

In Harare in the second week of May, rumors that a shipment of sugar had arrived created a line half a mile long outside one suburban supermarket. Yet the problem, Mr. Robertson said, was not so much a shortage of sugar as a shortage of the imported polyethylene bags that hold it.

Coca-Cola is being rationed because the gas used for carbonation is in short supply and the local bottler cannot find foreign currency to buy the imported syrup. Virtually any product made of steel is hard to find, because most rolled steel is imported from South Africa, and South African steel mills are demanding cash up front from Zimbabwean customers.

"It’s what I call a chain-link economy," said one Bulawayo maker of a basic steel commodity. "Company A manufactures parts for Company B, and Company B manufactures a part for Company C, and so on until company F makes the finished product. What’s happening is that the links are falling apart.”

That manufacturer offers a line of 25 products. Only four are being made, because he cannot find paint, abrasives and braces to make the others. "They’re all imported," he said of the materials, "and if there’s no foreign currency, then my supplier can’t buy them to sell to me."

Zimbabwe’s immediate problem is that it has run out of foreign currency. But that is only one domino in a long chain that threatens to bury the economy.

Agricultural exports were an economic mainstay. But in the last five years, Zimbabwe’s parcelling out of 5,000 commercial farms among squatters and peasants has caused the collapse of commercial farming. That has destroyed the businesses that supported it, from tractor sales
Zimbabwe 'cleanup' destroys homes, jobs

300,000 WITHOUT SHELTER AFTER GOVERNMENT RAZES HOUSES, SHOPS

By Ryan Truscott
Contributor to The Christian Science Monitor

HARARE, ZIMBABWE — In a dark and dusty churchyard, scores of Zimbabwean families are quietly trying to come to terms with losing their homes.

Small groups huddle around fires. Their possessions are piled high around them — the sofas and bedsteads, dressers and wardrobes that they managed to save when police destroyed their homes as part of a controversial city "cleanup" campaign.

The township of Tafara, which means "we are happy" in the local Shona language, is now a place of devastation.

Zimbabwean police launched "Operation Murambatsvina," or "drive out trash," more than a month ago. It started with the destruction of flea-market stalls, moved to squatter camps, and then swept through poor suburbs of Zimbabwe's towns and cities.

Tuesday the government extended the demolitions to urban gardens that many residents relied on for food.

Zimbabwean authorities say the operation is meant to restore the glow to urban areas, long-blighted by unplanned developments such as sprawling shanties and informal markets. The size of football fields. But critics, including the US, say the crackdown is politically motivated, designed to strengthen even further Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's already iron grip on the country.

At least 300,000 people have been made homeless across the troubled Southern African country, according to the Combined Harare Ratepayers' Association.

With foreign aid organizations relegated to the sidelines due to recent government threats, the humanitarian crisis is stretching churches like Mr. Mupandasekwa's at the limit. They are providing shelter, clothing, and transport to the homeless.

Mr. Mugabe told senior ruling party officials last month that the operation would create "a whole new and salubrious urban environment." But the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) says the motives are much more sinister. The party says the government is punishing urban supporters for voting against it in parliamentary elections in March.

Mugabe's party, the Zimbabwe African National Union — Patriotic Front, won the election, taking 78 seats to just 41 for the MDC. But the ruling party failed to win back parliamentary seats in cities and towns, which have been in the hands of the MDC since 2000.

Says Timothy Mubawu, the MDC member of parliament for Tafara: "You clean out a house that has pests in it. That's how the government views MDC supporters in urban areas." Mr. Mubawu says 20,000 people have been displaced in his constituency alone.

"Operation Murambatsvina" has been condemned by Britain, the US, and the European Union. So concerned is UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that he has appointed an envoy to travel to Zimbabwe soon to measure the "humanitarian impact" of the evictions, a spokesperson announced on Monday.

An unidentified boy goes through the rubble of a demolished small to medium business center in Chitungwiza, 9 kilometers (5 miles) south of Harare, Zimbabwe Wednesday. The Zimbabwean government has intensified its operations amid at destroying "illegal" structures in the country. The operation has left thousands of people jobless and homeless. [AFP Photo]

Zimbabwe's government said a general election would be held on March 31st. A group of 20 South African trade union leaders, allied to South Africa's ruling African National Congress, arrived in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, hoping to check if conditions existed for a fair poll. They were promptly deported.
Zimbabwe ignores U.N., continues with evictions

Country's leaders confident China will protect them from censure

By Michael Hartnack
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Riot police turned an urban township into a ghost town Wednesday, rounding up the last residents in defiance of a U.N. call to halt a demolition campaign that has left 700,000 without homes or jobs.

After emptying the Porta Farm township — where some 30,000 people lived just days ago — earth-movers were seen lumbering into the area to finish clearing debris from destroyed homes, cabins and shacks as part of what the government calls Operation Drive Out Trash. Police armed with batons and riot shields barred aid workers and residents from entering.

The latest demolitions came as President Robert Mugabe paid a state visit to China, which is building a track record of willingness to do business with African leaders others shun.

Mugabe is confident China will use its veto power in the U.N. Security Council to protect Zimbabwe from any U.N. censure following the U.N. report denouncing the campaign as a violation of international law, a state-owned Harare newspaper, the Herald, reported Wednesday.

China, which has expanded business and diplomatic contacts in African trouble spots like Congo and Sudan, has not joined Western condemnation of Zimbabwe's human rights record.

Opposition leaders claim Operation Drive Out Trash is intended to break up their strongholds among the urban poor and drive their supporters into rural areas, where they can be more easily controlled by government-allied chiefs.

Zimbabwe's government argues the campaign is aimed at reducing crime and restoring order in overcrowded slums and illegal markets, and has pledged to build new homes for those uprooted. But independent economists argue the government cannot afford the $325 million it has promised for reconstruction.

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- The bad leaders wrecked many houses.
  - So 700,000 are without homes or jobs.

- The people can not protect themselves against such evil leaders.

- Who will help them? Probably no one.

Page 5c
Farmers run out of Zimbabwe are seeds of hope

Nigeria among those cultivating them for jobs and know-how

By Daniel Balint-Kurti
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHONGA, Nigeria — Riding through a Nigerian forest on motorbikes, four white Zimbabwean farmers are checking the land they’ll soon settle on, hoping to start a new life here after being chased off their farms by government-backed thugs back home.

Uprooted by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe’s land redistribution program, scores of farmers already have been welcomed by the country’s immediate neighbors for the jobs and economic growth they promise to create. But Nigeria, 2,500 miles northwest of Zimbabwe, represents a new phase of a budding exodus.

The four men visiting Shonga are an advance party for 15 farmers planning to move here next month along with families, 50 black Zimbabwean farmhands and 2,000 cattle.

“Everybody is enthusiastic for the project to get going,” says Alan Jack, 46, whose farm was grabbed five years ago by about 50 youths armed with clubs and machetes.

Mugabe has encouraged the land seizures as a means of redressing wealth inequalities rooted in British colonial times. But the policy has been widely criticized for its brutality and has made Zimbabwe, once a food exporter, dependent on food aid to save nearly half its 12.5 million people from starvation.

Since 2000, some of the thousands of farmers forced off their land have moved to neighboring Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia.

Few, if any, have moved to West Africa, but governments here — Ghana and Senegal as well as Nigeria — are lining up to host them, according to the farmers.

It’s an endeavor that requires tact, if only because all these countries bear the legacy of white colonial rule. Zambia has publicly warned its newcomers not to form white “cliques” or set up “elitist” white country clubs, to stay out of politics and not to get involved in supporting opposition groups as they did in Zimbabwe.

There are also fears in Nigeria that the farmers’ arrival will raise unrealistic expectations among the low-income farmers already working in the Shonga area, 200 miles north of Nigeria’s main city, Lagos.

But the Nigerian government, which initiated the white migration, remains gung-ho. Olajumoke Aje, an aide to the governor of Kwara, Shonga’s state, says the farmers could turn the area “into the food basket of the West African sub-region.”

Jack said he was attracted to Shonga because of good rainfall and firm, deep soil in which “just about any crop will grow.”

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country with 126 million inhabitants, also offers a huge domestic market. If things go well, more white Zimbabweans could move in next year, he said.

Mugabe’s government refuses to comment on the farmers’ emigration but continues to insist the land seizures are the way forward.

The farmers will hire hundreds of Nigerian workers who, along with the Zimbabwean farmhands, will clear an allotted 37,000 acres of trees and building termite mounds to make way for maize, rice, soybeans, and dairy and poultry farms.

Nigerian farmers here tend small plots growing staples such as cassava and corn without machines or fertilizer. The Zimbabweans are offering technical know-how and advice on cost-effective techniques for improving yields, such as better crop spacing. The government has promised to fund a 16th farm for training purposes, run by a Zimbabwean farmer.

But people here are wary. High state-run projects here usually are gutted by corrupt managers. Near Shonga, harvesters roared over open fields, left over from a project that collapsed in the 1990s.

“We have a vision, and I am trying to share that faith with the people,” says Hassana Yabaya, the emir of mainly Muslim Shonga, but “people say we hope we are not being taken for a ride.”

As well as signing an agreement with the local government, legal owner of Kwara’s land, the farmers also needed to negotiate with the emir, who also holds land rights under local custom.

The 7,000-plus villagers of the area, who have virtually no health care or primary education, are very high expectations.

Jibril Muazu, the chief of Ogodu, a village bordering the Zimbabweans’ future farmland, wants new roads, electricity, drinking water, hospitals and schools.

If the commercial farmers are going to benefit from our land, these are the ways we should benefit from them,” he says.

Aje, the governor’s aide, insists all these demands will be met by a trust fund financed by a one percent levy on the newcomers’ turnover.

The four Zimbabweans, constantly joking like old friends, seem undaunted by the challenge of rebuilding a social life far from home.

“In Zimbabwe, we did everything together as farmers. We’ll just do the same here,” Jack said.

Farmer Alan Jack leads fellow Zimbabweans in exploring farmland in Shonga, Nigeria. White farmers, ousted under the land policy of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, are relocating to nations where they are valued.
Good and bad neighbours

West African leaders speak up for democracy; southern African leaders stay mute

Income per head in Zimbabwe is about half what it was in 1980, the year Robert Mugabe came to power. But this statistic gives a misleadingly rosy impression of what a quarter-century of immurerate despotism does to a country. Zimbabweans have not only grown poorer under Mr Mugabe; they are also hungrier, more fearful and far less likely to reach the age of 40. There are no reliable opinion polls in Zimbabwe, not least because suspected dissidents are liable to see their houses torched. But it is fair to assume that most Zimbabweans would love to kick out their tyrant and the gangsters who make up the country's ruling party, ZANU-PF.

At a parliamentary election on March 31st, Zimbabwean voters have, in theory, a chance to express their frustrations. In practice, their voices are unlikely to be heard. Mr Mugabe is wily enough to know he is unpopular, which is why he took the precaution of rigging the last parliamentary election, five years ago, as well as the presidential ballot of 2002. All the signs are that next month's vote will be even more systematically rigged. Independent media outlets have been shut down, most poll monitors have been barred from the country and opposition candidates have been violently prevented from campaigning. The voters' roll (parts of which are kept secret) is packed with the names of dead or fictitious people who, on past form, will probably vote for ZANU. Flesh-and-blood voters will remember that villages that voted for the opposition last time were deliberately deprived of food aid. And so on.

Democracy might stand a chance in Zimbabwe if its neighbours applied a little pressure on Mr Mugabe to respect the will of his people. But most southern African governments seem inclined to side with the oppressor. South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, whose envoys endorsed the past two electoral travesties in Zimbabwe, seems determined to see no evil this time, either (see page 45). Benjamin Mkapa, Tanzania's president, last week dismissed the idea that Zimbabwe's problems might have something to do with bad governance. Instead he blamed the opposition, noting with disgust that its leaders were seeking to get into the presidential mansion "by hook or by crook". Perish the thought.

The contrast with recent events in West Africa is revealing. Earlier this month, following the death of the long-serving ruler of Togo, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, the Togolese army mounted a coup. It installed Mr Eyadéma's son, Faure Gnassingbé, as president, and let it be known that he would hold that post at least until 2008. Twenty years ago, Togo's neighbours would merely have shrugged. But this time, they clubbed together and insisted that the putsch would not stand.

West Africa's admirable intolerance for tyranny

The Economic Community of West African States, the main regional grouping, suspended Togo's membership, imposed an arms embargo and barred the country's leaders from traveling in the region. Blunt condemnation of Togo's coup by heavyweights such as Nigeria's president, Olusegun Obasanjo, appears to have had an effect. Mr Gnassingbé said he would call an election within 60 days, and Togo's parliament reversed the hasty changes it had made to the constitution that had retroactively "legalised" the putsch. That is still not good enough; Mr Gnassingbé should stand down immediately. But it seems that intervention by Togo's neighbours has increased the chance that voters there will be able to pick a government they want. Nothing of the sort could be said of Zimbabwe and its neighbours.

Apologists for southern Africa's deferential approach to Mr Mugabe will protest that Zimbabwe and Togo are different. The latter has suffered a blatant coup; the former has seen merely a series of elections with, ahem, irregularities. Loud criticism of Mr Mugabe, says Mr Mbeki, will make it impossible to influence him for the good. The flaw in this argument is that after several years, Mr Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy" has achieved nothing. One cannot shake the suspicion that southern Africa's club of veterans of the struggle against white colonialism, who still rule the most significant countries south of Congo, just don't want to see their comrades voted out of office. Such an attitude bodes ill for the whole region.
Zimbabwe

Mugabe’s bogus ballot

JOHANNESBURG

The ruling party prepares to steal another election

Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s cricket-loving president, celebrated his 81st birthday last weekend. He took the opportunity amid state-funded festivities, to dismiss his opponents as stooges of Britain’s prime minister, Tony Blair, and to predict that his party, ZANU-PF, would scoop two-thirds of the seats at a parliamentary election on March 31st. Given that half his people depend on food aid, this might seem rashly optimistic. But Mr Mugabe has a knack of winning elections regardless of the wishes of voters.

At the last parliamentary poll, in 2000, a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), won about half of the vote despite widespread fraud and intimidation in ZANU’s favour. But thanks to gerrymandering and Mr Mugabe’s power to name a fifth of MPs, it ended up with only 57 seats out of 150. The MDC filed 37 lawsuits to overturn the results from constituencies where the rigging was most blatant, but none of these challenges has yet reached a final judgment, and in a month they will be moot.

Since 2000, which was the first time Mr Mugabe faced a serious electoral threat, he has sharpened his rigging tools. At a presidential election in 2002, he broke enough heads and stuffed enough ballot-boxes to ensure victory, but still somehow managed to persuade many of his fellow African presidents, including, crucially, South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki, that the vote was legitimate. Next month, he looks set to repeat that triumph. The voters’ roll is thought to list large numbers of dead people, and the names of many ZANU supporters are thought to appear more than once. It is hard to check, though, because officials will not make the entire roll public.

The MDC is finding it hard to campaign. Last week, police arrested Ian Makone, its electoral chief, for organizing an “illegal gathering” in Harare, the capital. That is, he was meeting the party’s 120 candidates. This week, three MDC candidates were beaten up by soldiers while travelling from their constituencies. Since Mr Mugabe has recruited and trained a youth militia to flog and torture dissidents, there are large areas of the country where MDC activists fear to tread. Most MDC members of parliament have been arrested or assaulted at some point in the past five years.

The ruling party controls all broadcast media, and critical print journalism is all but banned. Three of the last Zimbabwean journalists writing for foreign outlets were rounded out of the country last week. Election observers from countries that harp on about democracy, such as Britain and America, are banned. Few Zimbabweans will be allowed to monitor the polls, either. Responsibility for organizing the election rests with a commission whose members Mr Mugabe appoints.

Many, perhaps millions of would-be MDC voters have moved abroad in search of jobs, food or freedom. They will not be allowed to vote, unless they work for the Zimbabwean government. Those who remain, often the old and the very young, are easier to intimidate or bribe with handouts of maize flour. Civil-rights groups that receive foreign funding may not dabble in politics by, for example, teaching people that the ballot ought to be secret.

ZANU is far from united: several of Mr Mugabe’s lieutenants are jostling to succeed him when he eventually leaves office. But with an election near, they are mostly shrewd enough to pull together to keep out the MDC, and Mr Mugabe is quick to crush any crony who gets above himself.

At the weekend, for example, he sacked his information minister, Jonathan Moyo, the man responsible for criminalising honest journalism in Zimbabwe. He had also impressed Mr Mugabe with his ability to invent and broadcast conspiracies involving the MDC, the British government and white homosexuals bent on bringing back colonial rule. He was fitted, in ZANU circles, for his hilarious puns linking Tony Blair with a local make of toilet. But then he made the mistake of opposing Mr Mugabe’s choice of vice-president, so Mr Mugabe flushed him away.

Zimbabwe’s neighbours are preparing to applaud another ZANU “victory”. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), the main regional block, has drawn up a list of democratic standards that Zimbabwe must obey or face its neighbours’ displeasure. The MDC worries that the election will flunk most of them but that SADC will do no more than tut.

Last week, Tanzania’s President Benjamin Mkapa denied that Zimbabwe was ill-governed, blamed the MDC for the “trouble” there and suggested that westerners only criticise Mr Mugabe because he has seized white-owned land and given it to blacks. South Africa’s Mr Mbeki, meanwhile, in an interview with the Financial Times, admitted that some of Mr Mugabe’s policies were “incorrect”. But he repeated the ludicrous canard that Zimbabwe’s present conflict is between blacks and whites. In fact, it is between a large black majority who want a fair election, and a small, predatory minority who wish to deny them one.
Zimbabwe

Divided we rule

HARARE
Dissent grows within the ruling party as it prepares to steal another election

With a general election due by late March, President Robert Mugabe’s Zanu-PF party is in trouble. If Zimbabweans could vote freely, they would kick it out of office. Against heavy odds, the opposition nearly won the last poll, five years ago. Now the country is a lot poorer, hungrier, more divided and violent. Newspapers this week reported that maize meal, the staple food, had run out. The next harvest will be grim, thanks to a dearth of seed and fertiliser in the soil. Mr Mugabe has become unpopular even in the rural areas where his promise of land and food handouts retained at least a residue of support, though few Zimbabweans—wherever they may be—risk badmouthing him in public, for fear of arrest by secret police for making threats “against the state”.

Mr Mugabe usually responds to critics by getting thugs to beat them up. The so-called Chipangano gang in Harare, the capital, breaks up opposition rallies, smashes windows and punches, kicks and stabs anyone who seems loth to cheer the president. Campaigners for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition, say that last year was quieter than the one before, but at least half a dozen of its supporters were murdered by gangsters, while seven of its MPs and hundreds of followers were beaten, abducted, raped or tortured.

But it may be getting harder for Mr Mugabe to use such tactics. First, he wants to persuade his fellow southern African leaders that the coming election will be fair; last year in Mauritius they all agreed that Zimbabwe should uphold certain electoral standards. On this score, he particularly needs to placate South Africa’s president, Thabo Mbeki, who has given him unstinting moral support but now, in return, wants Mr Mugabe to treat the opposition rather better.

Mr Mugabe’s second problem is disunity in his own party. This week he told a crowd of placard-waving protesters in Harare that “the party is not dead, it is standing strong”. But in the past few months, vicious infighting has broken out, mainly between candidates (and their coteries) vying to succeed the president, who turns 81 next month. A faction dubbed the Young Turks last month tried to push forward parliament’s speaker, Emmerson Mnangagwa, a former security-services head, as vice-president and leader-in-waiting. Mr Mugabe, who had other ideas, responded ruthlessly, sparking several rows.

The information minister, Jonathan Moyo, who has spent the past few years singing Mr Mugabe’s praises to the rest of the world, was identified as a Young Turk ringleader. For his pains, he has been sacked from the party’s politburo and told not to stand in the March election. Other Young Turks, including Zimbabwe’s ambassador to Mozambique and a top Zanu-PF-connected businessman, have been accused of “swinging for a foreign power”.

Mr Mugabe instead tapped an old ally, Joyce Mujuru (“Comrade Spillblood” in her days as a guerrilla) as a vice-president and heir apparent. This prompted other party factions to accuse the president of being a high-handed tribalist. Mrs Mujuru (whose husband was head of the armed forces) is from Mr Mugabe’s own Zezuru sub-group of Zimbabwe’s dominant Shona people, as is Joseph Msika, the other (longer-serving) vice-president, and many others in plum jobs. Zimbabweans hailing from the other two biggest Shona sub-groups, the Karanga and the Manyika, may now join the long-disaffected Ndebele in the south-west, as well as the vast majority of Zimbabwe’s dwindling number of whites (perhaps now down to 20,000), in their hostility to Mr Mugabe.

Does the MDC have a chance of winning? After much hesititation, it now says it will contest the poll in March, provided that Mr Mugabe reduces violence and lets foreign observers and journalists monitor the proceedings. But the opposition is fractious too. Many MDC backers complain that Morgan Tsvangirai, their leader, is indecisive. Many pro-MDC Zimbabweans have emigrated; constituencies have been redrawn to favour Zanu-PF; new laws make opposition rallies and campaigns all but illegal. Even if the MDC does well, says Welshman Ncube, one of its leaders, Mr Mugabe will always play another trick to keep it out of power. The voters’ roll, he says, includes names of 500,000-odd dead people or fake names that could yet be used to fiddle the result.
Zimbabwe
Where have all the people gone?

BULAWAYO
Perhaps a quarter of the Zimbabwean population has gone missing

Two or three million Zimbabweans are missing. Out of a population of less than 12m, that seems rather a lot. For various reasons, President Robert Mugabe's regime refuses to publish the results of a national census carried out in 2002 but The Economist has obtained a detailed summary. If the population had continued to grow as expected after the last census, in 1992, there would have been about 14m people in the country. But there were only 11.6m. What happened to the rest?

Some have died of AIDS, which has slashed the average life expectancy from 61 years in 1990 to 34. The disease also makes women less fertile, thus reducing the birth rate, which is further depressed, at least in the cities, by chronic food shortages. "I'd love to have more children," says a father of one, "but how would I feed them?"

Probably the biggest factor, however, is emigration. Since Mr Mugabe started grabbing white farms—farming is Zimbabwe's largest industry—and giving them to his supporters, the economy has collapsed. Between 1999 and last year, it shrank by more than two-fifths, and it is expected to plunge another 8% this year. With no jobs at home, young men, especially, are trying their luck in South Africa. Its government says that as many as 3m Zimbabweans now live there, though this is a guess.

Southern Zimbabwe, meanwhile, is ghostly quiet. Your correspondent sped along empty roads last week: few drivers, except the police, can afford or find fuel. Some hospitals are said to be using donkey carts in place of ambulances. The restaurants, lodges and shops that remain open are mostly empty. Roadside stalls once crowded with stone sculptures for tourists lie abandoned. David Coltart, an opposition MP in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city, says his legal practice is one-third of its old size; most partners have emigrated.

Women now far outnumber men in Zimbabwe, and the very young and very old outnumber adults of working age. In a typical household in Pumula South, a township of Bulawayo, ten children gobble maize paste from plastic plates under a hot tin roof. Their various parents have been "out" for several months, says their grandmother.

That is, they are in Johannesburg, flipping steaks or working illegally in shops. Sometimes they send back a bag of flour with a few folded banknotes hidden inside. But only sometimes. In other townships, the story is the same. "Almost all my friends are in South Africa and my relatives are in Britain," says a man in Nkulumane, also on the edge of Bulawayo.

The brain and brawn drain has thrown Zimbabwe's once-excellent public services into disarray. Teachers face classes of over 80 children. Clinics are nurseless. The rubbish in Bulawayo is rarely collected, grumble residents. "If you throw a stone now, you hit a rat," says one. It takes three months' salary to buy a bicycle. Pensions are nearly worthless, at about $2 a month.

Even the lucky few who got free land under Mr Mugabe's land-reform programme are disgruntled, as even fewer can afford the means to farm. A used tractor, which cost Z$800,000 two years ago, now sells for Z$70m. Farmers who somehow manage to grow food find it hard to sell, because the government maintains a rigid monopoly on the distribution of grain, to make sure its own supporters are fed and dissidents are not. Anyone caught moving more than a couple of bags of maize is liable to be arrested.

Will anything change? The economic slump cannot last for ever. Investment in platinum mining may even spur a little growth next year. But without a legitimate government, serious trade and aid will not resume, nor will elections return. A general election is due in March, but it is sure to be rigged, like the past two national polls.

It is a fair bet that most of those millions of émigrés would like to oust the ruling party, but Mr Mugabe has made sure that they will not be allowed to vote. The opposition is barred from all broadcast media; most independent papers have been shut. Secret police terrify peasants into not talking politics and threaten to break up public gatherings of more than five people. A proposed electoral commission will be under Mr Mugabe's thumb.

The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, may not even contest the election. "What can the MDC bring?" asks a man in Nkulumane. "Most of its members are gone, arrested, dead, or they are in South Africa. There is no hope." He then begs not to be named, for fear the police would come knocking on his door.

Get me out of here
draining away to developing economies, but the creation of an entirely new watershed that is inexorably eroding opportunities from even the most highly educated of our domestic workforce. The direct and indirect implications are far-reaching: If I and my colleagues can no longer afford to send our daughters to Brandeis, Prof. Reich may find himself out of a job as well.

Thom A. Shulok
San Diego

Brutality in Zimbabwe

The excellent article by Roger Thurow on Zimbabwe's decline in agriculture ("Rapid Reversal," Dec. 24) did not tell the full story. Twenty years ago, when I was on the staff of the World Bank, I worked on several projects in Zimbabwe, including visits to large farms. The untold story is that white farmers did a lot to develop their local staffs and local farmers, including training, establishing schools and internships. When large farms were taken over by Mugabe supporters, these trained locals were also thrown off the land and sometimes killed.

Robert Youker
Bethesda, Md.

The leader has done terrible things to the country.

- Zimbabwe teens tell of kidnaps and beatings
- Only tell good news (May 2003) Spiral down
- Strike succeeds; street protests are cruelly crushed (June 2003)
- Zimbabwe newspaper silenced (Sep 2003)
- Shut up unless you fawn (on the bad leader), Sep 03
- The victims: the can expect little help from the outside --- sad, sad (April 2003)
- Mugabe's dirty tricks -- A doctored video (Mar 2002)
- Zimbabwe's spiral into chaos (Dec 2001)
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.
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 ever 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 legality,” 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 Patagonia 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 protesters. All of this makes 15th-century Florentine politics seem rule-bound and orderly. In such unpromising 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 50% are now poor.

What is worse, Mr Kirchner has little political capital to
A strike succeeds, but street protests are cruelly crushed

ON THE first day of this week's national strike, in the township of Kuwadzana, soldiers went from door to door, pulling strikers out of their homes, force-marching them to the commuter train, and ordering them to go to work. As strike-busting tactics go, this was not particularly effective. When the workers arrived in the centre of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, they found it nearly deserted, apart from the armoured cars patrolling the streets, so they quietly slipped back home.

It could almost be a metaphor for the way Robert Mugabe runs Zimbabwe. Brute force is his answer to most problems. That is largely why Zimbabwe has grown so much poorer under his rule, and why his subjects are so desperate to get rid of him. But it is also the main reason they have not yet succeeded.

This week, the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), promised a “final push” to liberate the country. There were to be huge demonstrations, and a week-long general strike. The strike has been a triumph: businesses in major cities have almost all closed. But the demonstrations have been less successful, because although Zimbabweans do not believe much that their government says, they trust its promise to beat the hell out of them if they take to the streets.

Before the rallies were due to begin, the police arrested the MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. He was charged with contempt of court, for failing to call off the demonstrations, as a judge recently appointed by Mr Mugabe had ordered him to do. He was then released, but still faces separate charges of treason relating to an implausible plot to kill Mr Mugabe.

A few thousand demonstrators tried to march in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimba-
Zimbabwe newspaper silenced

Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Zimbabwe's only independent daily newspaper failed to publish Saturday after armed police raided its offices and the Supreme Court declared the publication in violation of a new media law.

The closure of the Daily News comes amid a government crackdown on dissent as Zimbabwe struggles with an economic collapse and international isolation. President Robert Mugabe pushed through a passage of severe new security laws last year allowing the government to ban public gatherings, and his opponents have been attacked and arrested.

Iden Wetherell, editor of the weekly Zimbabwe Independent, called the crackdown on the paper part of a "program of repression."

"The whole country is threatened by Mugabe and his minions as they attempt to cover the trail of their misrule," Wetherell said.

The government acted late Friday within hours of winning a case against the Daily News' owner, Associated Newspapers Zimbabwe, in the recently reconstituted Supreme Court, which is now dominated by pro-government judges.

Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku, a former minister, ruled that the publication had not registered under a 2002 media law, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Act stipulates that a government license is required to publish.

Editor in chief Francis Mdlongwa said the group applied for accreditation immediately on hearing Chidyausiku's ruling.
Zimbabwe's continuing descent

Shut up, unless you fawn

Bad leader

HARARE
Gloom in Mugabeland

Most Zimbabwean papers either fawn over the regime or severely censor their criticism. The Daily News was an exception: recently it dared to report that Robert Mugabe was building himself a palace outside Harare. But on September 12th, the police marched into the newspaper's offices, chased out the staff at gunpoint and tried to arrest the editor, who had refused to register under a draconian media law passed last year. After a judge, known to be friend of Mr Mugabe's, ruled last week that the law is constitutional, the police pounced.

The Daily News has been closed down, and its editor has resigned. It may eventually return, but bruised and weaker. It kept going after its printing presses were blown up three years ago, even though its distributors have been regularly beaten. But the owners now say they will register under the new law. Nobody expects the same robust criticism.

Mr Mugabe faces a price, of sorts: this latest attack on the press has scuppered his plan to attend a meeting of Commonwealth leaders in Nigeria in December. Zimbabwe has been suspended since its rigged presidential election in March 2002, but African leaders had hoped to bring it back into the club. South Africa's Thabo Mbeki had wanted Mr Mugabe rewarded for allowing limited talks about the constitution with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. But this week, the head of the Commonwealth secretariat said Mr Mugabe would not be welcome.

In truth, there are many other reasons why Commonwealth and European Union sanctions should stay. A show trial continues of the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, who is accused of treason and could face the death penalty. Police torture goes on: a recent report by a Zimbabwean lobby, Human Rights Forum, lists 390 cases of physical abuse and 473 cases of unlawful arrest in the first seven months of this year.

Even Mr Mugabe's own former secretary, Charles Utete, has produced an (unpublished) audit of the land reform programme that shows corruption and misrule. It apparently names ministers who have snatched farms illegally, and notes that far fewer peasant workers were resettled than was first claimed.

Such misrule means Zimbabwe will remain isolated, without investment, aid or loans. Its economy will continue to collapse; its GDP has shrunk by a third in the past three years; inflation has now surged over 420%; and 70% of the population live in poverty. According to Unicef, at least 5,000 street children roam Harare, rummaging in rubbish and begging.

Economic activity is spluttering to a halt. Every roadside trader in Harare complains that business has evaporated. Lack of bank notes stifles what little trade there might be, and forces people to spend several hours a day hunting for ways to settle bills and buy goods. After hours trying, the only way your correspondent could exchange money was with a group of young toughs in a grimy alley in a run-down corner of the city. Some people are resorting to barter: one Harare office-worker described the hours he spent exchanging 100 bags of sugar for 50 litres of paint.

All this creates anger and private grumbling. Newspapers used to be something of a safety valve. Bits of graffiti appear on the streets, declaring Zawwana (enough), though there are not, as yet, many signs of wider public protest. Mr Mugabe's grip is tight. About 100 people were arrested in Harare on September 17th, after marching for a new constitution and against the closing of the Daily News.
Zimbabwe

Bringing down Mugabe

Zimbabweans have little option but to take to the streets

April 5, 2003

* The Economist

P13

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 real-

They will get little help from the outside

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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14 Leaders

Its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was so confident that he would win the presidential election last year that he appears 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

18
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 Ndadzeyo 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 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 Madson, 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 sturdily vows that he will stay.

I was framed, says Tsvangirai

March 2, 2002
The Economist
Page 46
Zimbabwe's maddening spiral into chaos

While the attention of the world is focused on the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, half a world away in Zimbabwe, state-sponsored repression threatens to plunge one of southern Africa's most prosperous countries into a vortex of political violence and social chaos. The crisis in Zimbabwe has been building for years. President Robert Mugabe has turned his country into an economic and political basket case. The decline has been marked by government mismanagement, economic collapse, and rising ethnic and racial tensions. As Mr. Mugabe, once a popular leader, has fallen from hero to hanger-on, his efforts to cling to power have become increasingly desperate.

In mid-November, to cite one recent example, Mr. Mugabe issued a decree allowing his government to dispossess white Zimbabwean farmers of their land before a judicial appeal is completed. This was the latest strategy in what is known as the "fast track land resettlement program," in which Mr. Mugabe cynically hopes to win the votes in next year's elections for president by confiscating white-owned farmland and redistributing it to poor black farmers. Thus, Mr. Mugabe seeks to further inflame and politicize the legitimate need to correct the post-colonial patterns of land ownership in Zimbabwe in which whites, who make up less than 1 percent of the population, control the majority of the country's most attractive farmland.

Seeking to stem the maddening spiral into chaos in Zimbabwe, the government of Zimbabwe sent war veterans to right the land imbalance. But violence continues to be used as a tool not only against white farmers but also against the government's black political opponents. According to Amnesty International and local Zimbabwean human rights groups, the violence is carried out by government-sponsored partisans. The most notorious are the "war veterans," who regularly threaten and beat political opponents. In the past 18 months, the "war veterans" have forced up to 70,000 black farm workers to leave their homes.

In addition, journalists, judges and human-rights activists who have asserted their professional independence have been arrested, threatened and harassed by the government. The leading independent daily newspaper, the Daily News, has had its printing press bombed. And just last month its editor, Geoff Nyarota, was arrested on unspecified charges and later released, as part of an ongoing pattern of government harassment.

Members of the main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), have also been attacked, beaten and even killed by ruling party partisans. Earlier this year, Zimbabwean victims of political violence filed a landmark case in the United States against Mr. Mugabe. A U.S. judge ruled recently that although Mr. Mugabe, as head of state, enjoyed immunity, he could be held liable for party-sponsored violence in his capacity as head of his country's ruling party.

But violence and government repression are only part of the story. The country's once-vibrant economy, which depends heavily on agriculture, has collapsed. In addition, erratic rainfall, steep rises in the price of staple foods, high unemployment and disruption of the commercial farming sector have contributed to the specter of famine. The United Nations has agreed to provide emergency food assistance to the 500,000 Zimbabweans who are at risk of starvation. Even with this impending humanitarian disaster, Mr. Mugabe's government is seeking to take political advantage by monopolizing the distribution of food aid.

With elections nearing, the government of Zimbabwe is counting on international community attention being diverted elsewhere. Speaking about the party's political opponents, a ruling party official was quoted in the government-controlled press as saying, "If they [government opponents] are looking for a blood bath they will certainly get it."
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 RJ0288)

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<td>Apr 2003</td>
<td>The opposition tries to get rid of Mugabe.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• But Mugabe has all the guns.</td>
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<td>Jan 2003</td>
<td>Zimbabwe is hitting bottom in every way possible.</td>
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<td>Mar 2002</td>
<td>Mugabe elected again.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• But he had rigged the election.</td>
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<td>Mar 2002</td>
<td>Zimbabwe was once a hopeful country.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The African countries did not help.</td>
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<td>Jul 2002</td>
<td>Zimbabwe is on brink of starvation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Terrible farm policies and drought</td>
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<td>Aug 2002</td>
<td>Farmers in Zimbabwe await fate.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mugabe ruins the farmers, the people who work for farmers, and the food supply.</td>
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<td>Nov 2002</td>
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<td>• In 1965 Rhodesia became independent.</td>
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Roy Jenne
June 2003