

NEWS

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VIEWPOINT / ANALYSIS

## Zimbabwe needs a protest movement

**Just a year from now, Zimbabweans are expected to go to the national polls, which will become a test of the leadership of President Robert Mugabe (pictured) and his Zanu-PF party against the Movement for Democratic Change. Bhekinkosi Moyo, an academic, suggests that the opposition MDC should not contest the elections**

IS Mugabe weaker or stronger today than he was in 2000 or 2002? Many tend to think he is now stronger.

There is a school of opinion which believes Mugabe has used the time -between 2000 and today -- to mislead the South African government and the Southern African region into believing that he was negotiating with the opposition. But that all the while he was busy increasing his power and instilling fear in anyone harbouring ambitions to succeed him.

To a certain extent this is true, particularly if one considers the legislative and political environment currently prevailing in that country, with a number of draconian laws have been enacted that thwart the freedom of the country's citizens.

These include the Public Order and Security Act, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the recently amended Criminal and Procedure Evidence Act.

With these legislative pieces Mugabe has managed to censor not only the opposition but even those within the party who may be rebellious or concerned about the way things are in Zimbabwe.

The two recent arrests of Zanu-PF officials is an example of how far Mugabe will go in ensuring he remains untouchable. While it may be true that the arrest of Philip Chiyangwa and James Makamba are measures to rid corruption in the country, it boggles the mind to think that corruption has been the norm for ministers for a considerable number of years and yet there have not been any arrests.

Why now? It is clear that Mugabe has personal vendettas against the two individuals. Chiyangwa is known to have been very vocal in advocating for a young president when Mugabe encouraged people to debate the succession issue and Makamba's Joy TV was known for its liberal stance.

It then makes sense to say while corruption has been used to arrest the folks, the real issue is to deal with dissenting voices within the party. These arrests indicate the fear that has now gripped Mugabe.

He is afraid that a new revolution could be in the making, particularly within Zanu-PF. The two gentlemen have been used as an example for those who may have been thinking of publicly discussing the succession issue or advocating for an alternative voice.

Mugabe's fear is so immense that he has militarised society, particularly the youth and war veterans. His politicisation of the police force and the military are also indicative of his very vulnerable position.

He has thus not hesitated to adopt violence as a political weapon to stay in power. He has misused state machinery to castrate any powerful and dissenting voices in Zimbabwe, including that of his closest in the cabinet.

As a result, fear has gripped the nation. No one wants to correct the president. Members of the intelligence services have infiltrated all sectors of society.

The sad thing, however, is that the opposition has been weakened by a weakened Mugabe. The MDC is less strong than it was in 2000 and 2002. What we have in Zimbabwe now are two weak political parties posing as strong alternatives.

Hence with all the degrees in violence that Mugabe holds, it does not look likely that the MDC will win a considerable number of seats in the upcoming elections. It therefore does not make sense for opposition parties, particularly the MDC, to participate in the elections.

The MDC's energy must this year be spent on mobilising the populace to boycott elections and demand Mugabe relinquish power. The MDC should use this time to connect with the grassroots organisations, particularly in rural areas where Mugabe has often received most of his votes.

A major reconstruction of the opposition is needed. It is now difficult to distinguish between civil society and the opposition. This is a weakness that a number of civil society groups suffer from. Zanu-PF has maximised on this and demobilised these institutions.

A strong social movement is a pre-requisite in Zimbabwe now. A state of ungovernability needs to be created soon.

People of Zimbabwe have to stand up now and mobilise each other before the elections.

Something that I know for certain is: going to the polls next year will not be the answer. Flooding the streets to reclaim dignity, rule of law and demand the return of democratic rule is the answer.

Negotiations have failed. The MDC together with the Zimbabwean society must work on the volatility on the ground to demand regime change.

To save face and the lives of Zimbabweans, the MDC must avoid by all means contesting the elections.

Contesting the elections will not only be suicidal but it will be the highest display of an illogical reading of Mugabe's tactics.

**\* The writer is based at the department of political studies at Wits**