

Machiavellian Mugabe Odds On for Re-election

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Endorsement as ZANU-PF presidential candidate means he seems almost certain to win another term in office.

Zimbabwe's Machiavellian president Robert Mugabe has been endorsed as the sole presidential candidate next year without raising ructions in the ruling ZANU-PF party, but analysts warn a Mugabe victory in the March elections spells doom for the country.

They say while it is almost certain that ZANU-PF and its leader will triumph in the joint parliamentary and presidential poll, given the leadership deficit and divided state of the opposition, Mugabe and his followers do not have anything new to offer the country.

Emmerson Mnangagwa, the ruling party's secretary for legal affairs, has said that a ZANU-PF special congress later this month would not be looking for a new presidential candidate; the party's constitution stated clearly that the first secretary of the party, Mugabe, was automatically its candidate. He made this announcement following the party's separate central committee and politburo meetings last week to set the agenda for the special congress.

The agenda doesn't mention the issue of a presidential candidate.

Mnangagwa did not explain why, if the critical issue of a presidential candidate had been sorted out in the party constitution, the party needed a special congress just ahead of the harmonised presidential, parliamentary and local government elections.

ZANU-PF secretary for information and publicity Nathan Shamuyarira two weeks ago told the party mouthpiece, *The Voice*, that all the posts in the presidium would be open to contest at the special congress. Vice-President Joseph Msika supported this view, saying "no one has been endorsed" as the presidential candidate in the party, thus suggesting there might be vacancies for the ambitious.

But insiders said Shamuyarira could have deliberately caused confusion on the issue as part of Mugabe's plan to "smoke out" those who wanted to challenge him. "In a way it goes to show you just how ill-informed this country is," said a ZANU-PF official who refused to be named. "The party constitution is clear on the selection of a presidential candidate, yet people seek to alter the rules just because they no longer want the incumbent. Mugabe was therefore able to expose their folly and neutralise them before they could spread confusion in the party structures."

But analysts said although Mugabe had avoided a storm in his own party, it was bad news for the nation.

"If anything, Mugabe has become a huge liability to both the party that has endorsed him as its presidential candidate and the country he wishes to lead," said a political analyst in the capital Harare.

"Both Mugabe himself and his party no longer have a vision for leading the nation. Leadership is all about a vision for the future, not simply occupying the highest office in government.

“In Mugabe’s case the situation is bound to be worse if he wins next year’s election. He not only lacks the vision but has lost the goodwill of his own people, who have suffered for 27 years under his rule. He has alienated the international community by his lack of respect for the law and property rights.”

The analyst noted that the leader in any organisation provides the “emotional anchor” upon which that organisation is judged.

“In our case Mugabe’s name evokes the worst memories of any leader. That means with him at the helm we have no chance to reconnect with other nations, we have no chance to normalise relations, which can only mean more suffering for the people of Zimbabwe,” he said.

Zimbabwe has experienced a precipitous economic decline since 2000, when the government started seizing white commercial farms. Since then, unemployment has run riot at nearly 85 per cent, with the world’s highest inflation of more than 8,000 per cent.

This has given rise to a vocal opposition. The Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, in 2000 narrowly lost to ZANU-PF when it won 57 seats against the ruling party’s 63 seats in parliament.

However, the MDC suffered a major split in 2005 over whether the party should participate in the election of members of the revived second house of parliament, the Senate. It has lately been convulsed by further internal strife after the party leadership dissolved the influential Women’s Assembly, led by Lucia Matibenga, replacing her with the wife of a colleague of Tsvangirai.

Analysts accuse the MDC of lacking strategic thinkers despite the many failures by Mugabe and his ruling party.

Government spokesmen have denied media reports that Mugabe rejected overtures by the Elders Group for him to step down before next year’s watershed election. The group includes former South African president Nelson Mandela, Britain’s billionaire businessman Richard Branson, and former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, among other eminent statesman.

The spokesperson said there had never been such an approach by Mandela or anyone else because everyone is “behind the Thabo Mbeki mediation effort”. Mbeki was in March mandated by the Southern African Development Community, SADC, to facilitate talks between ZANU-PF and the MDC. Mandela’s spokeswoman in Johannesburg also denied the claims, saying Mandela had retired from active engagements in August 2004 and in any case would not be found trying to undermine his successor.

A political analyst at the University of Zimbabwe, UZ, said Mugabe was “too arrogant” to accept a suggestion to step down because it would suggest that he had failed. He said Mugabe had in fact been emboldened by the current squabbles in the MDC and would want to prove detractors wrong for saying he was afraid to face the electorate.

The UZ academic said what happened to the country thereafter depended on the choice of candidate parliament made in the event that Mugabe retires. Depending on the outcome of the elections, the two main parties could settle for a compromise candidate acceptable to the international community.

“The harmonised elections will work well for Mugabe because aspiring MPs are also forced to campaign for him,” said the analyst. “Once his party wins, he can opt to retire as a victor, and scoff at those who believed he was no longer popular.

“Mugabe is too arrogant to take anything which suggests that he was enticed into retirement. His impact on the economy is something else. Once he has triumphed over his enemies in the party and outside he can then retire as a hero.”

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