

Is Zimbabwe preparing its own version of apartheid?

It may all be rhetoric and bluster. But after Robert Mugabe won last week's contested election in a 'landslide,' his circle is talking takeovers of foreign-owned banks and businesses.

By Aislinn Laing, Correspondent

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HARARE, ZIMBABWE

Less than a week after Zimbabwe's strong man Robert Mugabe got reelected to five more years as president, his ministers and party officials are claiming a "mandate" to redistribute wealth, take over foreign-owned mines and banks with a value of some \$9 billion, and to innovate a new stock market open only to black-owned businesses.

The new plans, which at least rhetorically flow from campaign promises Mr. Mugabe made this spring, are buzzing through Harare, and largely supplanting opposition voices that claim the July 31 election was fraudulent.



Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe speaks during a press conference at State House in Harare. Federal prosecutors in Chicago on Tuesday, Aug. 6, 2013, charged two Chicago men with allegedly violating US law by agreeing to help Mugabe get sanctions against his country lifted.

Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi/AP/File

In Harare, full-page newspaper ads taken out by Mugabe's party speak of a five-year plan that will move Zimbabwe toward "a unique wealth transfer model that will see ordinary people take charge of the economy."

Critics called the new parallel black-owned stock market a "half-baked" idea and a form of "apartheid in the stock exchange," even as shares in the actual stock market plummeted 11 percent on Monday and 2 percent on Tuesday.

To be sure, whether the government will do to banks, mines, and other businesses what it did to white farmers 10 years ago, is unclear.

The central issue is the "indigenization" policy that Mugabe engineered, also known as "land reform," which was designed to redress advantages in wealth and property, mostly farms, owned by

whites. In practice, it forced a huge exodus of the white rural population as lush farms were confiscated.

Questions and fears about the extent of action Mugabe will now take has put on hold any more liberal and open direction for the nation and its business and society— and squelched the desires of some of the 4 million Zimbabwe exiles and expats to return home, analysts say.

One Zimbabwe economist, John Robertson, interviewed by the Guardian, speaking of the proposed "black" stock market, stated: "We are introducing apartheid in the stock exchange business. They [the government] are trying to capture assets that belong to whites. They want to make sure they take them to a marketplace where they cannot then be re-bought by the people from whom they were confiscated. They are being incredibly racist in their approach."

On Monday, Monitor correspondent Aislinn Laing wrote this:

Zimbabweans returned to work today in this subdued and overcast capital city as the row over Robert Mugabe's big win in last week's elections continued to simmer – and amid assertions by some in Mr. Mugabe's inner circle that the elections are a mandate to take over foreign-owned banks and businesses.

Mugabe was returned to power for his seventh term with 61 percent of the vote, while his ZANU PF party won two-thirds of parliamentary seats.

At Mugabe party headquarters, the jostling has begun for key positions in the government vacated by members of the MDC, which has been in a fractious coalition with the ruling party for the past five years as part of a deal brokered after violent and disputed elections in 2008.

A senior minister in Mugabe's government said they would be pressing ahead with plans to take control of foreign-owned firms in the country, including banks and mining houses, in the wake of their massive election win.

Saviour Kasukuwere, the youth development, indigenization, and empowerment minister, said the takeover of government by those in Mugabe circles was a "focused response" to Western sanctions that remain on Mugabe and his coterie, and which have blocked Harare from accessing international bank loans.

With the Western powers now lining up to condemn the conduct of the elections, there is scant indication that these sanctions will be lifted anytime soon.

"We will not do it as a response to what people are saying about our elections but have decided on this [takeover] policy because it's the only way forward regardless of any move on sanctions," Mr. Kasukuwere said.

"We have a new mandate given to our party by the people. We are creating the capacity for people to do things for themselves and creating jobs. Taking a majority share in foreign companies will create those jobs."

He dismissed suggestions that having led its campaign with "indigenization," a practice of redistribution of land, mostly infamous as a takeover of white- owned farms, as a key pledge during the elections – that ZANU PF would now ease off on its plans to expand the policy for the sake of economic stability.

"We are not implementing indigenization to destabilize our economy but to grow our economy and develop our nation. Whatever critics say about it doesn't bother us – we now must work hard to develop our country, create jobs, and help our people," he said.

Asked about reports that he was previously warned off taking over foreign banks by the head of Zimbabwe's reserve bank, Gideon Gono, he said: "Our manifesto clearly states that this policy covers all the sectors of our economy. There will be no exceptions."

Given the brutal backlash against opposition supporters in past elections, some analysts are saying that a mere threat is now sufficient to dampen any revolutionary fervor.

There is evidence that retribution against those who backed the MDC has begun. At the MDC's downtown headquarters on Sunday night, some 15 party activists gathered for safety after allegedly being driven out of one of the city's oldest townships by ZANU PF supporters.

Outside Harvest House, the MDC headquarters, riot police with helmets, shields, and batons sat in a flatbed truck monitoring the situation.

"The ZANU PF guys came to our houses chanting their slogans and said we should all go or they would kill us," said Steven Mutsipa, a party worker.

"They have guns, machetes and sticks," said his friend, who gave his name only as Simon. "The police won't help us because they're ZANU PF. We've been beaten so many times before, so we just go."

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