

Zanu Relaunch After Mugabe – This Year?

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A Zanu (PF) Politburo member, Simba Makoni, reportedly said President Robert Mugabe's days are numbered and that he may be out of office by end of this year, according to a report in Moneyweb. The former SADC Executive Secretary and Minister of Finance was speaking on the sidelines of a World Economic Forum debate on Africa in Cape Town on Thursday. He was widely expected to abandon the sinking ship, but he is staying in.

The Zimbabwe government and Zanu (PF) refused to send official delegates to the meeting, but Makoni, a sometime heir-apparent to Mugabe, was spotted by a BBC journalist in the audience and agreed to give his views. Makoni said Zimbabwe was on the "threshold" of change whereby the Zimbabwean leadership was going to "relaunch" itself, which was not explained in the Moneyweb article. But Makoni was also quoted saying that there is "an engagement in the whole nation" that the state of affairs cannot go on, must not be allowed to go on and must be reversed, in the BBC interview to be broadcast later this month. Zanu (PF) member Ibbo Mandaza, who was deposed as publisher of the Mirror which has since collapsed, was also at the World Economic Forum. He predicted that Mugabe would no longer be president next year, adding that nothing would start to happen positively on the economic front until the succession issue was resolved, hopefully by the end of this year. "Then we can talk about the way forward," he said. Arthur Mutambara, who heads a splinter group of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change was also in Cape Town where South African opposition Democratic Alliance politician Peter Leon, suggested that an exit package needed to be negotiated with Mugabe, otherwise he would stay in office and ruin the country around him. But Mandaza said he did not believe Mugabe would accept an exit package. "What is possible and what we are all hoping is he will retire at the end of 2007 as he indicated last year." Mutambara, famous for suggesting that Wi-Fi (wireless Internet) held prospects for improving life in Zimbabwe, said Zimbabweans desired more than economic recovery - they wanted to be a "globally competitive economy" like Malaysia, but its prospects were being hindered by lack of "leadership and strategic vision". More down to earth was trade unionist Collen Gwiyo who took a swipe at South African President Thabo Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy", saying it was not appropriate where human rights have been grossly violated. "This time President Mbeki should take the bull by the horns. He has been quiet for too long," said Gwiyo. The South African government declined to participate in the debate on Zimbabwe in which some delegates said it was possible to transform Zimbabwe's economy but Mandaza insisted that only Zimbabweans - starting from within the ranks of Zanu (PF), could fix the economy. Bulawayo-based economist Eric Bloch scoffed at suggestions that the removal of President Mugabe from power would automatically result in massive inflows of foreign aid and solve the country's economic problems. "There are people who have argued that there would be a turnaround of the country's economy if Mugabe retires, because international aid would start flowing in. That is not the case because the world will first wait and see whether the political changes are effective or not through the correct policies before aid starts flowing in."