

Minister fouls Mnangagwa's plans fouled by Owen Ncube

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Zimbabwe's efforts to attract much-needed investment are being undermined by a fatal combination of executive folly and policy inconsistencies - that have seen international investors being warned against trusting President Emmerson Mnangagwa's under-pressure government, the Daily News can report.

This comes as State Security minister Owen Ncube has caused a storm both in government and the ruling Zanu-PF - after he ill-advisedly directed a group of mine invaders led by a former MP, Vongai Mupereri, to resume operations at Gaika Gold Mine despite the High Court ruling against the marauders.

Gaika Mine is a joint venture between China Africa Investment, Development Co. Ltd (CAIDC) and Duration Gold Limited (DGL), who are said to have been "terrorised" by the machete-wielding invaders over the past one-and-a-half years.

At the same time, and in damaging revelations which are set to have far-reaching repercussions on Zimbabwe's re-engagement efforts with Western powers, scores of international investors who gathered in the United States capital, Washington, were told last week that some of Mnangagwa's close allies were notorious looters who were dispossessing investors of their businesses.

Well-known American economist and currency expert, Steve Hanke, said the invasion of Gaika Mine was an example of how property rights were being violated in Zimbabwe by top Zanu-PF and government officials.

"To get to a micro point, in February 2019, the Gaika Mine was invaded. This is a property rights issue.

"Again, these things are all property rights ... money, hard budget constraints and a political party that dominates ... and it's fundamentally a crime syndicate.

"If you look at this mine, it was invaded and taken over and the looting began.

"Then ... within the past two weeks, the mine was finally sealed and the trespassers were thrown out," Hanke said during an address at the famed Cato Institute, an American think tank.

"But that's not the end of the story, we have had 14 months since this particular mine in the Midlands was invaded ... over 80 people killed, at least US\$100 million has been looted from the

mine, maybe double that.

"Then the mine manager's home in Kwekwe was invaded by youth wielding machetes. The group, or shall we say the gang, is Al Shabaab and the leader of this crime syndicate is ... the current minister of State Security," Hanke said further in remarks that are sure to have embarrassed Mnangagwa to no end.

Mortifyingly, Hanke's address at Cato came at the same time Finance minister Mthuli Ncube was attending the International Monetary Fund's Spring meetings in Washington - rendering his mission there virtually useless.

And a few days after Hanke issued his damaging warnings, Ncube was thrown into the spotlight after he wrote a letter to Mupereri and his syndicate to resume mining at Gaika Mine - the High Court having found the invaders to be in contempt of court and ordering them to spend 90 days in prison.

"I acknowledge receipt of your letter ... regarding the closure of the Gaika syndicate.

"Be advised that the national Joint Operations Command (JOC) was never mandated or ordered to close the mine.

"I have checked with the relevant authority on this issue. By the way of this minute, the syndicate can resume its operations. Any queries regarding the matter should be raised with the undersigned," Ncube said injudiciously.

To the credit of Midlands Provincial Affairs minister Larry Mavhima, he has emphatically pooh-poohed Ncube's letter, saying pointedly that there was a group of Zanu-PF bigwigs which was abusing its alleged closeness to Mnangagwa to engage in "criminal and corrupt activities".

"My position is that the Gaika invasion remains illegal until a proper instruction from the Joint Operations Command (JOC) is directed to the provincial JOC.

"The provincial JOC should not be given instructions by individuals. That letter is directed to the syndicate, not the provincial JOC.

"The situation remains unchanged and the operations by the syndicate are illegal," a resolute Mavhima told the Daily News yesterday.

"They must follow the proper channels to acquire a proper permit from the ministry of Mines.

"Zanu-PF ... and the president have no role in Gaika Mine. People must not use the party and the president's name as well for their own benefit.

"We are talking about property rights which are being violated. We cannot watch that anarchy prevailing. It's not acceptable.

"Zimbabwe is open for business and so we want investors to come in freely. Property rights must not be violated," the clearly miffed Mavhima added.

The High Court issued an order last year prohibiting Mupereri and his syndicate from occupying Gaika Mine.

However, Mupereri ignored the court order leading to Chief Justice Luke Malaba recently ordering his arrest for contempt of court.

"Whereas an order was made ... by Justice Moyo on 19 July 2018 committing Vongai Mupereri of Stand 1232 Southwood, Masasa, to Connemara Prison until he shall have complied with the provisions of the interim terms of the provisional order issued on March 6, 2018 in the matter dealt in Case Number HC662/18 ... and that said Vongai Mupereri is still in contempt in failing to comply therewith, or sentencing to 90 days imprisonment for contempt.

"Now you are further required and directed that you take the said Vongai Mupereri if he be found in Zimbabwe and deliver him to the Keeper of Connemara Prison at Kwekwe together with a copy of this writ to be kept safely until further order of the High Court within 90 days from the date of delivery," read part of the writ which ordered police to deliver Mupereri to Connemara Prison.

Shockingly, Mupereri has not been arrested to this day - and without explanation.

Mnangagwa, who swept to power amid much hope among the generality of the country's citizens who had endured nearly four decades of hell under former president Robert Mugabe's ruinous rule, has been battling to re-build Zimbabwe's moribund economy.

But the tough task of rebuilding the country's shattered economy and lifting the quality of life of its long suffering people has so far proven to be a tad too onerous for him and his misfiring Cabinet team.

Zimbabwe remains in the vice grip of a growing economic crisis which has seen the devastating re-emergence of long fuel queues, worsening foreign currency shortages and shocking increases in the prices of basic goods.