

## Violence in Zimbabwe continues amid arrests

Post-election violence in Zimbabwe continued unabated Sunday as the country headed for a presidential run-off, with more than 50 opposition members arrested in the past days for allegedly burning property at a farm belong to the country's top cop.

Police in Mashonaland Central province confirmed the arrests of 56 members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) for rioting and destroying property at a farm in Shamva - about 100 km northeast of Harare.

The MDC lawyer and officials are saying the alleged crime occurred at a farm belonging to police chief Augustine Chihuri.

'We have arrested 56 MDC supporters for violence and arson in Shamva. They will appear in court soon,' said a police official in Bindura - the Mashonaland Central province capital, under which Shamva falls.

Alec Muchadehama, the MDC lawyer said the arrests lasted from Tuesday to Friday and the suspects are still in custody.

'We were told that the magistrate for the area is on leave so a relief will come either Tuesday or Thursday next week,' said Muchadehama.

Zimbabwe has been plagued by violence since the March 29 poll in which MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai trounced President Robert Mugabe. The MDC claims that it has lost at least 30 supporters to violence by government-backed militias and soldiers.

Tsvangirai has been out of the country for about five weeks now and is expected to return in the next few days ahead of a presidential run-off, the date of which has yet to be announced.

The state-run weekly, The Sunday Mail quotes the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) chairman George Chiweshe as ruling out the run-off in 21 days as required by the law and as demanded by the MDC Saturday.

'It is likely that will extend the period. We want to make it clear that we intend to hold the election at the earliest possible date,' the paper quotes Chiweshe. The paper said there were 'necessary logistics' that includes funds that needed to be available for the election to be held.

Meanwhile, the state-run weekly, The Sunday Mail, reports that London and Washington are persuading former Mozambique president Joachim Chissano and former UN secretary general Kofi Annan to entice Mugabe to accept a government of national unity with Tsvangirai.

The paper quotes unnamed diplomatic sources as saying the two most powerful nations had first sought to ask former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda to take up the mediation role.

( © IANS / India eNews)