

Bloodless Coup in Zimbabwe

Why in news?

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- The military in Zimbabwe launched a coup on November 15.
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- The motive is claimed to target “criminals” surrounding long-time popular leader Robert Mugabe.
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Who is Robert Mugabe?

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- Mr. Robert Mugabe has been at the helm in Zimbabwe’s politics for 37 years, since its independence from British rule in 1980.
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- At 93, Mr. Mugabe is the world’s oldest head of state and also the last of Africa's generation of state founders who still wield power.
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- His lengthy rule has been marked by brutal repression of dissent, mass emigration, vote-rigging and economic collapse.
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- Despite this, he is popularity among the masses is relatively high and has seen him in wield near total control.
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- His poor health has fuelled a bitter succession battle as potential replacements jockey for position.
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What triggered the current stand-off?

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- Recently, Mr. Mugabe sacked long-time ally and Vice-President Emmerson

Mnangagwa.

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- Notably, he was widely expected to succeed the Mr.Mugabe and take control of the ruling ZANU-PF party.
- This move was seen as an attempt to install his Mr.Mugabe's wife Grace (52) for succeeding to the helm.
- Mr. Mnangagwa fled the country after his dismissal and many long term regime loyalists are said to have sided with him.
- Days later, the Army warned Mr. Mugabe to exhibit restraint in a series of political purges, which wasn't heeded to.

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What is the state of the Zimbabwean economy?

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- Mr.Mugabe's populist land reforms of 2000 saw black Africans seizing large tracts of agricultural land from the European settlers.
- These moves led to a production collapse in agriculture and eventually plunged the country into an economic crisis.
- Millions of economic refugees have streamed out of the country, mostly to neighbouring South Africa.
- Eventually in 2007-08, the country saw hyper-inflation that forced the abandonment of the local currency and a switch to dollars.
- In 2016, fears of economic downturn reappeared with inflation rating at around 50% for a month.
- Notably, the sacked vice-president Mr.Mnangagwa is said to have been planning to revitalise the economy through radical measures.
- He is even said to have vouched for rectifying the mistakes of the radical land reforms and patching up relations with the World Bank and IMF.

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Is it an actual military coup?

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- Though the action is in effect a bloodless coup, the Zimbabwean military chose to call it a bloodless political correction.
- Considering Mr.Mugabe's popularity with the masses, it is also not clear whether this military action would end to his reign.
- The main goal of the generals appears to be 'preventing Mugabe's 52-year-old wife Grace' from succeeding him.
- But irrespective of the outcome, it is likely to mark the end of the total dominance of the country by Mugabe.
- Notably, even the main opposition MDC party calling for civilian rule to be protected.

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What next?

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- Various countries have asked its nationals in Zimbabwe to stay cautious due to the prevalent uncertainty.
- Mr.Mnangagwa's promised return would be a major event.
- The actions of the ZANU-PF's party youth wing, which is aligned to Ms.Grace is also being closely watched.
- The army has promised to retreat as soon as its stated vision has been accomplished.
- Further actions of the military would decide the direction the current turmoil would take.

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Source: The Hindu, Business line

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