



FOREIGN FLAVOURS: Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Indian Consul-General Primrose Sharma and Indian High Commissioner Shiv Mukherjee

Saris and samoosas as Houghton goes east

★ **TRANQUIL**, leafy Houghton — one of Joburg's poshest suburbs and home to Nelson Mandela, Tokyo Sexwale and the larniest businessmen in town — took on an Indian feel on Wednesday.

It was India's Independence Day and Consul-General Primrose Sharma's home echoed with the sounds of her homeland as dancers and musicians (with both Indian and African roots) entertained an eclectic crowd.

No one caught the synergy of our two countries better than the popular Primrose — the fabric of her sari had a leopard print design and she was rightly delighted with the Indo-African effect she'd created. This outfit should knock them dead in Rome when she's transferred there at the end of the year.

Guests' saris were a sight to behold with gorgeous shades of dark red and gold predominating. But I also fancied the cream Punjabi outfit worn by lovely Benoni choreographer and dancer Jayaspuri Moopen, who tells me it's fashionable for this style to be worn rather shorter than in the past.

I expected overkill in the Nehru suits department from the guys, but noticed only a few, with one on the back of Minister of

Home Affairs Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who seems to have lost a bit of weight recently. Newspaper publisher Govin Reddy claimed he was wearing Gucci. Lucky for him it was too dark to check properly. The Mail & Guardian can afford Gucci?

Primrose's garden had been turned into wonderland, with lights in the trees and braziers to protect us from a slight chill. Cleverly, the tennis court was used as the stage as dancers from the RK Academy of Dance and Music entertained.

How nice that our hosts gave us a programme as we arrived listing both the entertainment and the food.

The eats were splendid (best ever vegetarian samoosas) and I'm amused to see Indian chefs talk up their specialities as much as their local counterparts. How about "our chef's secret proportions of rice and lentils, etc"? Quite up to the prose standards of the Michael Broughtons and the Matthew Gordons of the profession.

Party people included Gauteng's favourite guest Welcome Msomi, actress and theatre director Fiona Ramsay, there with parents (and my dear friends) Raymond and Jean Louw, and struggle veteran Amina Cachalia, who still looks a bit frail after a recent illness.

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Moaning about Mugabe will not set Zimbabwe free

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SECOND OPINION

Dingilizwe
Ntuli

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WHEN the Ivory Coast's military strongman Robert Guei was ousted from power in a popular uprising last October, the move was widely translated to mean that Africa would no longer tolerate despots.

His ousting aroused particular interest in Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe is trying forcibly to resurrect his political fortunes.

Unlike Guei though, who came to power in a coup, Mugabe was democratically elected in 1980 following a bloody bush war and has — through a mixture of patronage, electoral manipulation and intimidation — managed to get himself re-elected several times since.

Rampant corruption, ruinous policies and the country's costly involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo have since eroded disposable incomes, leading to widespread anger at Mugabe.

It was the emergence of a formidable opposition party in Zimbabwe two years ago that really brought out Mugabe's tyrannical character. The president's response to what he saw as the biggest challenge to his 20-year rule was to label the Movement for Democratic Change and other dissenting voices as fronts for imperialist forces and to unleash violence on their supporters. His party

has also fanned racial hatred by launching attacks on white Zimbabweans.

Urban Zimbabweans, who bear the brunt of the economic crisis, have not been fooled by these tactics. They want Mugabe out. But they lack the will-power to do anything about it.

Despite their outrage, Zimbabweans have remained a largely apathetic lot, evidently incapable of standing up to the president. Instead, they depend on the goodwill of the international community to free them from Mugabe's chains.

They condemn Mugabe at home and among friends, but they are not willing to take to the streets. Anti-Mugabe demonstrations attract only a handful of people. Others stand on the sidelines, giving encouragement while shopping.

General strikes called by the country's labour movement have always been successful as most people are prepared to stay at home and treat these days as public holidays. The Mugabe regime, on the other hand, has been happy to ride out these strikes as they pose no immediate danger to its power. Their success, in any case, has largely been due to the solidarity shown by employers, who lock up their businesses in protest against Mugabe.

In the early 1990s, huge price

hikes on food brought people out onto the streets, but the violent nature of their protests elicited a brutal reaction from the security forces.

Only the student movement — driven by youthful exuberance — has been prepared to take to the streets. But, since its actions are isolated and led by young people, any revolt is easily crushed.

The National Constitutional Assembly, the biggest coalition of civil society groupings, believes Zimbabwe's problems stem from the fact that the constitution vests too much power in Mugabe. As a result, it is trying to engage the government in an all-embracing constitution-making process.

The National Constitutional Assembly believes that a nationwide demonstration should be called only if its constitutional proposals are rejected.

The real problem, though, with organising opposition to the president is that Zimbabwe's pro-democracy movement is led by middle-class blacks and "born-frees" (those born after 1980), who are beneficiaries of Mugabe's progressive education policies. These leaders see street protests as beneath them and something akin to the Middle East's suicide bombers.

Most urban Zimbabweans also sat out the liberation strug-

gle in the 1970s, waiting for their liberators to march across the borders from Mozambique and Zambia.

When asked why they complain but seek no recourse, they answer philosophically: "How many times have cowards stood in front of their huts pointing to graves of heroes?"

Urban Zimbabweans hope to vote Mugabe out of office in next year's election. This is unlikely. Zanu-PF has already begun a violent pre-election campaign to shut out other voices.

Zimbabweans must realise that the international community will step up the pressure against Mugabe only if they take the initiative.

Instead of blaming their woes on President Thabo Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy", they must remember the world took action against South Africa's apartheid government after people took to the streets.

They must realise the South African government felt the pressure when grassroots leaders began organising. In Zimbabwe, no leaders are emerging at a local level to provide direction to communities.

Until urban Zimbabweans lose their arrogant pride and do more than moan about misrule, their beloved country will continue to slide into chaos and tyranny.