

## **Zimbabwe's President suspects Grace Mugabe faction behind explosion on his campaign rally**

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### **Medics attend to people injured in an explosion during a rally by Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe June 23, 2018. (Source: Reuters)**

Zimbabwe's president says he suspects a political faction supporting former first lady Grace Mugabe of being behind the deadly attack on his campaign rally on Saturday. President Emmerson Mnangagwa spoke to the BBC as he prepared to hold his first rally on Wednesday since the explosion at a stadium in Bulawayo. Two people died of their injuries.

Mnangagwa did not say the former first lady was involved in what state media called an assassination attempt. He said he expects that arrests will be made soon. Dramatic footage on Saturday showed him walking off the stage and into a crowded tent where the blast occurred seconds later, sending up smoke as people screamed and ran for cover.

Mnangagwa has called the attack a "cowardly act of terrorism." He also pointed out he's had numerous attempts on his life in the past, saying he was used to them by now. His rally on Wednesday was in Hwange, an opposition stronghold like Bulawayo. The stadium was under tight security, with soldiers and police searching everyone who entered. Unlike at previous rallies, supporters were not allowed close to the VIP tent.

Mnangagwa was fired as longtime leader Robert Mugabe's deputy in November after he became a target of the first lady's G40 political faction. The military responded by stepping in and Mugabe resigned, ending 37 years in power.

Zimbabwe now faces a historic July 30 election, the first without Mugabe since independence from white minority rule in 1980. Mnangagwa is under pressure to deliver a credible vote that Western countries see as key to lifting international sanctions. He has invited election observers from the United States, the European Union and elsewhere for the first time in 16 years. Mugabe rejected Western observers, accusing them of bias.

A record 23 people have filed to run for president in the election. This week one of Zimbabwe's two vice presidents, Constantino Chiwenga, said that if any candidate is now "afraid and scared, we will give them security." Zimbabwe's presidential candidates are not normally provided with security by the government.

- AP