

# Violence hangs over S.Africa despite pact

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JOHANNESBURG, April 21 (Reuter) - A threat of political violence hangs vulture-like over South Africa, but the inclusion of the separatist Inkatha Freedom Party in next week's historic all-race elections has reduced fears of major bloodletting.

Despite Inkatha's about-turn, political unrest that has killed up to 20,000 people in four years of apartheid reform, is unlikely to fall substantially, although tensions have eased considerably in traditional flashpoints.

Analysts say Inkatha's 11th-hour switch lowered a threat of direct confrontation between its supporters and those of the African National Congress, similar to clashes which caused 53 deaths in Johannesburg and neighbouring townships on March 28.

But translating months, and in some cases years, of war-talk into peace in the killing fields of Natal and on the volatile East Rand is an awesome, perhaps impossible, task.

"It's one thing talking peace at the leadership level but that has to get through to the grassroots...more conflict should be expected in KwaZulu-Natal and on the East Rand," said Graeme Simpson, deputy director of the Johannesburg-based Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, referring to key flashpoints in a decade-long ANC-Inkatha turf war.

Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, beginning his election campaign in the KwaZulu capital Ulundi said on Wednesday tensions had been reduced, and "that could reduce the violence."

Bill Sass, from the independent Institute for Defence Policy, echoed Simpson's comments : "The threat of direct confrontation between groups has diminished, but I don't think political parties have (full) control of their supporters...then there are still vengeance killings, vendettas and the like," said Sass.

He said South Africa could only be plunged into "an Angola- like civil war" if political leaders believed they had been cheated in the elections ending three centuries of white domination in South Africa. But he doubted this would happen.

"If the leaders and the IEC (Independent Electoral Commission, supervising the polls) agree the election has been free and fair, this will not happen. If Nelson Mandela tells his supporters the ANC has lost in the Western Cape (where the

ruling National Party has a good chance of winning), that will be accepted,” said Sass.

All the mainstream parties taking part in the polls have pledged to accept the election result even if it went against them.

Waiting in the wings is the marginalised extreme white right, whose hardline champion Eugene Terre Blanche, said on Wednesday the deal leading to Inkatha’s participation in the April 26-28 elections would lead to more bloodshed.

“We are not at all surprised at the pathetic capitulation by the Zulu leadership to the Xhosa-led ANC...the Zulu and the Xhosa tribes will be at each others’ throats,” Terre Blanche’s Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) said in a statement.

Hedging its bets, the AWP said South Africa could expect to become another Rwanda even if it took “another 20 years”.

Simpson said the AWP, which had pledged to fight for the rights of Zulus, and other white extremists had been effectively “checkmated” by Inkatha’s move and the participation in the polls of General Constand Viljoen’s Freedom Front, which gave a political outlet to right-wing aspirations for a white homeland.

“While the AWP may still have political support it is now unlikely this will be translated into military action,” said Simpson.

He said, however, that the AWP and other extreme white rightwingers still had the capacity to carry out acts of sabotage and random acts of violence.

Both Sass and Simpson agreed that the extreme white right would become more of a threat if the probably ANC-led national unity government coming to power after the elections, tried to dismantle pro-apartheid town councils in right-wing political strongholds.

“They (the right) will probably sit back and see what happens after the elections...if they see the government acting against their councils they may act,” said Sass, a former South African army brigadier.

Political scientist Willie Breytenbach of Stellenbosch University said of the white right-wing : “Like the common cold, they’re with us for ever, and can be dangerous simply because they are so fanatical.”

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