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Mugabe Eager for Blair's Exit

Harare — Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe said Harare's diplomatic impasse with former colonial ruler Britain could end when his pet hate, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, stepped down, a daily newspaper reported on Saturday.

Mugabe, who once famously asked Blair to keep his "little pink nose" out of Zimbabwe's affairs, said the British premier behaved like an "old-fashioned headmaster" and ordered Zimbabwe around, the state-run Herald reported.

"But we are hoping that with the departure of Blair there will be a better situation there and they can be talked to," said Mugabe.

"The Blair government is a queer government and Blair, of course, behaves like a headmaster, old fashioned. Do it or if you don't do it, you remain punished and an outcast."

Zimbabwe's relations with Britain, from which it gained independence in 1980, have nose-dived after Harare began seizing white-owned farms seven years ago.

Many of the farms were owned by white Zimbabweans who also held British citizenship.

The southern African nation is in the grip of an eight-year-old recession which has seen inflation soar to nearly 1,593.6% and the economy shrink by more than a third.

Mugabe blames the country's problems on the imposition of targeted sanctions on himself and his coterie.

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