

Zimbabwe bans bulk sales as shelves empty

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Zimbabwean authorities ordered businesses Thursday to stop selling basic goods in bulk to avert shortages after an official price freeze triggered a frenzied buying spree that has emptied most shop shelves.

Harare - President Robert Mugabe's government last week ordered businesses to roll back prices to June 18 levels after increases of up to 300% within a week following the plunge of the local currency on a thriving black market.

Spiraling prices have pushed inflation above 4,500%, the highest in the world, underscoring an eight-year economic recession that has ravaged urban workers the most and sparked foreign currency, fuel and food shortages.

"Wholesalers and retailers should desist from allowing bulk buying of basic commodities," said Obert Mpofu, the Minister of Industry and International Trade.

Mugabe denies charges he has presided over the country's worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1980. Instead, he says the West has sabotaged the economy to punish him for seizing white-owned commercial farms for blacks.

Over the past week, shoppers have been buying sugar, cooking oil, flour, salt and maize meal in bulk, leaving shelves empty.

And manufacturers have stopped producing. They say the price freeze is not viable given the price of other goods and raw materials continue to skyrocket.

Police had to be called in at a supermarket in central Harare Thursday to control a crowd that had jammed the shop after word quickly got round that sugar was available.

Some people have formed teams to trawl shops in the capital and buy whatever basic goods they can in bulk.

Mugabe has accused businesses of being drafted in a conspiracy by his Western foes to topple him from power by increasing prices without justification. He warned that his government could seize and nationalise the companies.

More than 200 business people - including a ruling party senator - have been arrested for defying the price freeze, which economic analysts say will only entrench the black market.

Police also said they had unearthed huge quantities of sugar, soap and cooking oil at a site in Harare and suspect they

were being hoarded to create artificial shortages in the market.

Article by courtesy [New Zimbabwe](#)

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