

JOHANNESBURG: After nine years in South African prisons -- six of the years without trial -- Robert Sobukwe now lives in the small town of Kimberley.

As the former leader of the banned Pan-Africanist Congress -- the organization whose campaign against "passes" in 1960 ended on the first day when police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators at Sharpeville -- Sobukwe is probably the most widely respected African leader in the country.

But now he leads a quiet existence. He has to, because the Government has imposed a wide-ranging series of banning orders on him which effectively cut him off from all but the most casual of contacts with people.

The orders were served on him when he was released last May from Robben Island Prison where he had been detained for six years without trial, after first completing a court sentence of three years' jail for incitement for organizing the anti-pass campaign.

The banning orders confine him to the Kimberley magisterial district; he is not allowed to leave his home between sunset and sunrise; he is not allowed to receive any visitors at his home except designated members of his family; he is not allowed to attend any gatherings of any kind. In effect, in his social relations, he cannot be with more than one person at a time. ~~xxxxxxx~~ A former school teacher and university lecturer, he is prohibited from teaching or even entering any school premises; he is prohibited from entering any factory or any compound where workers are housed; he may not go to the magistrate's courts unless it is for the purpose of seeing a magistrate about an aspect of his banning.

And nothing he says or writes can be quoted or published in South Africa.

To ensure that Mr Sobukwe does not infringe any of these restrictions -- which could earn him up to several years in jail -- the Security Police keep a careful eye on him, as I discovered when I visited him last weekend.

Apart from the restriction on visitors to his home, he lives in an African township, entry to which is forbidden to Whites except by special permit (which is not available to me). This being South Africa, he could not, in turn, visit me at my hotel; nor could we go to any cafe for a meal or for tea.

Instead, we drove around the attractive little town, chatting all the while, with a store of sandwiches, sweets and soft drinks for sustenance.

But soon after we had started out together on Saturday morning, a large green American car began to take on a familiar appearance in the rear view mirror. Perhaps I was feeling over-sensitive, I thought. Perhaps there really were two White men also driving aimlessly around as we were, and it was just coincidence that they were always a block or so behind us.

A swift bit of acceleration and rapid turning of corners, and the green car was lost. Mr Sobukwe and I drove to the outskirts of the town and parked for a while in the shade of some trees.

Later, returning to the town, there was green car again. This time, they didn't bother to pretend, and stayed a few feet behind us all the time. When we parked, they parked, bumpers almost touching. When we drove off, they were right behind us.

At one stage, irritated by their presence, I made use of a robot to lose them again.-- only to discover that a large grey car was also involved. Another car, another two men. Later, we discovered yet another car. Three cars and six men.

That evening, my wife and I strolled to the local cinema. There was one of the cars again, wheeling around the streets, seeing us safely into the cinema.

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On Sunday morning, they were at it again: two of them sitting stolidly in their car outside the hotel while my wife and I took turns in speaking to Mr Sebukwe.

Three cars and six men, spending a good part of the weekend wandering around the streets of Kimberley. It seems a colossal waste of manpower. But at least the South African Police have convincing evidence that Robert Sebukwe did nothing illegal last weekend.

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