

Mwanawasa wins 2006 elections

door Zarina Geloo

Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa has secured a second term of office with almost 60 percent of the population having rejected him.

The results

Mwanawasa managed to get about 1,177,000 votes. His closest rival Patriotic Front's Michael Sata managed to get about 805,000 while the United Democratic alliance (UDA) managed to get around 694,000.

About 2.7m out of a population representing 70.77 of 3.9million registered voters actually voted. 48.800 of the votes were rejected. Fifty one percent of the voters were women. These elections are the third since multi party politics was established in Zambia in 1991.

Free and fair?

Though international monitors have declared the 2006 elections free and fair, they have pointed out that there was a lot more things that the government and the electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) could have done to make them logistically better and more transparent.

The local monitoring groups however have acknowledged that there were some anomalies and received the results with great reservations. The groups have urged government to look into complaints of rigging and corruption which marred the election as it did on a larger scale in the last elections in 2001.

PF and UDA are disunited in their defeat, both alleging the votes were rigged, and bringing forth evidence but are not speaking with one voice, fragmenting the effect of their claims.

As forecasted by the opinion polls, Mwanawasa won the elections, although by a lesser margin than they had predicted. While the polls also state that his win was because the MMD was still a popular party, voting patterns and the tone of the campaigns in which Sata kept shooting himself in the foot, tell a different story.

Sata's campaign

The urban votes went to Sata – in the Copperbelt province which had the most registered voters, he won as a result of the discontent in the towns over the botched MMD privatization programme which saw the mines the mainstay of the economy get privatized with the inevitable job losses. There have been no new industries since then and people have generally become poorer.

In Lusaka, the capital city, MMD has traditionally never won over the people most of whom are employed and resent the high tax regimen and the lack of support for the business community in the MMD policies.

The Bemba speaking Luapula and Northern provinces are Sata's home ground, the PF leader merely tugged at the tribal vote. He also reminded them that Mwanawasa was prosecuting for corruption one of their own, Second president Frederick Chiluba and a group of Bemba speakers.

While Sata was hoping that his immense popularity in the three provinces, would translate into overwhelming votes, this did not happen for several reasons, mainly because of his belligerent and abrasive manner which scared many people about his capacity as a ruler.

Sata talked of improved housing, better health facilities and free education issues that resonated with people in the urban areas. He also spent an inordinate time disparaging Mwanawasa – about his suspiciously flagging health, his failure to revive the economy, to reduce unemployment and provide social services for the people. This message he took the people in the urban areas feeding their resentment against a government that had failed to improve their lives.

People blame the MMD government for most of their ills, Sata has served in both regimes, but he managed to convince people that he did his best while he was in government and could do more if he were president.

Sata attempted to use his de facto number two Guy Scott a white Zambian, to woo the immigrant population vote, which failed. They voted for Mwanawasa apparently scared by Sata's statements on investors and deportations.

Sata's biggest mistake

The biggest mistake was when Chiluba publicly endorsed Sata for president and the PF adopted disgruntled ex MMD candidates. Coupled with his statements that he would stop the prosecution of Chiluba and others accused of plunder, Sata attracted flak that he was condoning corruption and plunder. Many people in rural areas blame the Chiluba administration for their poverty. Apart from the botched privatization, the change from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy and the loss of free services and agricultural services, many in rural areas believe that Chiluba's administration was not only corrupt but its policies caused their poverty.

However, Sata played into Mwanawasa's hands when he riled the Chinese for his open support of Taiwan and for including them as some of the investors that would be deported because they did not build new infrastructure, spend their profits in the country and paid their workers poor wages. He talked of a review of the tax incentives given to

investors which sent shivers through investors. A diplomatic row with China ensued which Mwanawasa made a great show of repairing. He also made much ado about reassuring the donor community from which most foreign investment comes, that a government under Sata would be disaster and lobbied their support. He also pointed out that Sata had praised the regime of Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe who is not seen as the most democratic of leaders, alluding that Sata was not a safe pair of hands.

Mwanawasa won rural votes

The MMD still has party structures on the ground which Mwanawasa used to great effect, visiting some constituencies more than once. His message that he had set the foundation for development in the last five years, now the people should give him the mandate to build on the foundation. It appeared to work, because it is from the rural vote that he managed to get one over Sata.

Whereas Sata appeared to be a one man show and could not travel to all the other provinces, Mwanawasa, ran the gamut, using the party's grass root structures he toured the country with the same message of fighting corruption and good economic policies.

Mwanawasa made use of the state machinery in spite of the electoral code of conduct which forbid this. He used government vehicles and offices and in most cases, the state secret service was employed to help him campaign. If the arithmetic was added up Mwanawasa should have spent about USD2.5m for his campaign. The MMD say this was raised through legitimate fund raising dinners and others. But there is also the First Lady's, Maureen Mwanawasa's Community Initiative (MMCI) which received donations on behalf of her husband's campaign.

Hichilema won 25%

The spoiler in the race 45 year old Hikainde Hichilema of the UDA (he won 25 percent of the votes) was very much alone, he did not get flak from any of his opponents who considered him a young, new comer posing no threat.

He appealed to the middle class, the youth and business people talking about creating investment opportunities, and encouraging entrepreneurship as a vehicle to improve peoples lives. An economist and successful businessman he brought a breath of fresh air in the staid political environment surfeit with old politicians

He also took advantage of the fact that he was heading a party UPND which already had strong structures and had two provinces in its pockets.

No petition

Even though local monitors say the opposition have justification for crying foul, there is very little interest in pursuing a petition. The lessons from the 2001 presidential petition have taught parties that it is a time consuming and often unfulfilling exercise. While UDA and PF have called for a verification of the votes, (PF claims it won the election by 200,000 votes which were suppressed,) it is unlikely that the MMD or Mwanawasa will allow a situation that reverses the initial results.

Sata who has been in politics for over 20 years knows this and has gone on an offensive. Knowing that at 68 years of age, this was his last chance at the presidency, he now wants to leave a legacy.

His PF party has the most members of parliament in the opposition, as well as in the local government.

He has made it clear that with this scenario, he is able to run the government from 'inside and outside parliament and the local councils'. He wants to go ahead with his development programmes and silence critics who said his plans were not feasible.

Rewarded for loyalty and support

Mwanawasa has appointed a cabinet in which as usual he has appointed all his female members of parliament to the posts of deputy minister or in a few cases, full ministers. He said quite clearly when he appointed his cabinet that he was rewarding some for their loyalty and support, like his newly appointed vice president Rupiah Banda, a former opposition UNIP stalwart who evidently changed parties and helped the MMD win votes in the Eastern province, a former UNIP enclave.

Sata wants to show Mwanawasa that while he talked about the countries limitations, the PF would show the MMD how things could still be achieved within limitations. Whether the MMD will give PF the latitude to do this remains to be seen. But it will lend itself to very interesting politics.