After May 12: Political excitement and setbacks

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Ministers must be clearing their desks and preparing to vacate their offices as President Yoweri Museveni's tenure, which began in 2021, draws to a close. When he takes the oath on Tuesday, May 12, the mandate under which he appointed the ministers will expire. In effect, they will cease to be ministers and will wait to see whether they are part of the next Government. They may continue reporting to their offices, but they will have no authority.

Often, many people think that whoever is not included in the new government has been sacked. However, a dismissal would ordinarily happen before the expiry of the term. Sacking carries a connotation of failure to perform or meet expectations. Being retained until the end of the President's electoral term, however, suggests that one either performed well or was at least tolerated. Based on past trends, there is no guarantee that a minister from the previous team will return in the new Cabinet.

President Yoweri Museveni must endure the difficult exercise of deciding whom to reappoint and whom to leave out. He often springs surprises. In 2021, for example, he appointed Robinah Nabanja as Prime Minister, elevating her from the position of state minister of health in charge of general duties in the previous government.

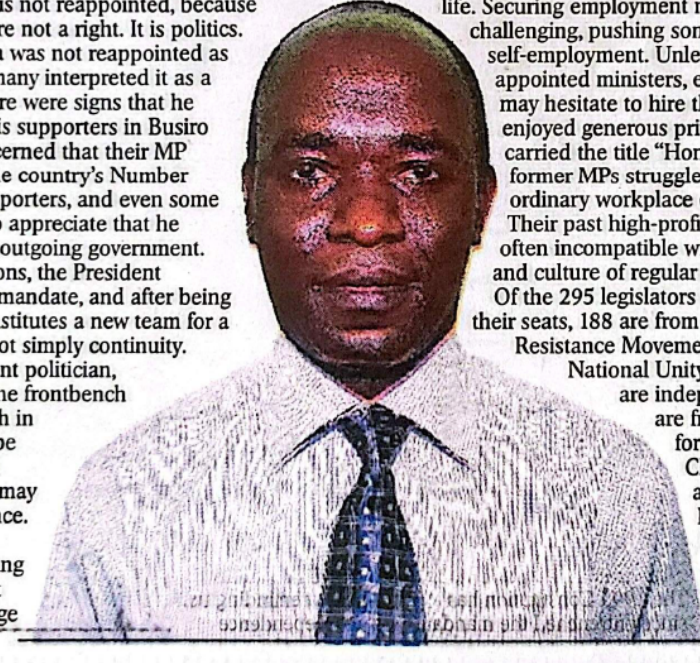
He also appointed Jessica Alupo as Vice-President despite her having contested as an independent candidate for the Katakwi District Woman MP seat in the 2021 elections. Previously, she had served as Minister of Education and Sports from 2011 to 2016, before moving to the backbench.

So how does President Yoweri Museveni handle such cases? In 2021, he probably could not reappoint Edward Ssekandi because he had lost his election. Yet Ssekandi himself had succeeded Gilbert Bukenya, who served as vice-president from 2003 to 2011. Bukenya won the Busiro North parliamentary seat on the NRM ticket in 2011, but he did not return as vice-president.

President Yoweri Museveni, as the appointing authority, has his own criteria for selecting his next team. Certainly, some outgoing ministers may be reappointed and continue serving. That is politics. A leader must be decisive and make hard choices, including letting a minister slide to the backbench. In politics, it is prudent not to begrudge the President if one is not reappointed, because such positions are not a right. It is politics.

When Bukenya was not reappointed as vice-president, many interpreted it as a sacking, and there were signs that he was unhappy. His supporters in Busiro North were concerned that their MP was no longer the country's Number Two. He, his supporters, and even some analysts failed to appreciate that he belonged to the outgoing government. Following elections, the President receives a fresh mandate, and after being sworn in, he constitutes a new team for a new term. It is not simply continuity.

For a flamboyant politician, dropping from the frontbench to the backbench in Parliament can be unbearable. It is tormenting and may affect performance. For the humble and understanding ones, however, it is simply a change of roles. They serve on the frontbench in Parliament and sit in Cabinet, chaired by the President, then later shift to the backbench as elected representatives of their constituents. However, the opposition often mocks them as having been "used and dumped". That, too, is politics. The opposition will do everything within the law to divide the ruling party and weaken the morale of its members, including those not reappointed as ministers.



After the swearing-in of President Yoweri Museveni on Tuesday, MPs will take their oath in phases from May 13 to 15 because of the large number of legislators, now totalling 529. This will mark the beginning of the five-year term of the 12th Parliament. However, some 295 MPs from the 11th Parliament will not be returning. Many will venture into different pursuits, while others may gradually fade from public attention.

Those for whom being an MP was their first major job or responsibility after school may find it especially difficult to adjust to a different life. Securing employment may also prove challenging, pushing some towards self-employment. Unless they are appointed ministers, employers may hesitate to hire them. Having enjoyed generous privileges and carried the title "Honourable," some former MPs struggle to fit into ordinary workplace environments. Their past high-profile status is often incompatible with the rules and culture of regular employment.

Of the 295 legislators who lost their seats, 188 are from the National Resistance Movement, 30 from the National Unity Platform, 42 are independents, 20 are from the Forum for Democratic Change, eight are from the Democratic Party, five are from the Uganda People's Congress, and one each from the People Progressive Party and JEEMA.

Some of the defeated politicians will refuse to leave the political stage and will immediately begin plotting a comeback in the next elections. Within the NRM, some may still secure political appointments, including ministerial posts, resident district commissioner positions, or other assignments, depending on how highly they are regarded.

After MPs are sworn in, they will convene for their first sitting with one major item on the agenda: the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament. Anita Annet Among and Thomas Tayebwa, the outgoing Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the 11th Parliament respectively, are both eligible for re-election and are considered strong contenders. The MPs, who are the voters, will decide through the ballot.

In the 2021 contest for Speaker of the 11th Parliament, then Speaker Rebecca Kadaga was defeated. Had she not subsequently been appointed First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of East African Community Affairs, she would have been headed for the backbench.

Once the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are elected, the 12th Parliament will be ready for business. Amongst its responsibilities will be vetting the vice-president, prime minister, and ministers.

The President is already known: Yoweri Museveni, who won the January 15 election with 71.65% of the vote. The remaining questions are: Who will be the next Speaker and Deputy Speaker? Who will become vice-president and prime minister? And who will be appointed ministers to serve in the new government? The coming weeks are to be filled with political excitement and setbacks.

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