

Miller to head new electoral reforms team

POLLS Focus turns to the House which has to approve names of the nine officials

BY MWAURA KIMANI

Efforts to push through electoral reforms gained fresh impetus yesterday after the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Constitution picked members of a body meant to spearhead the transformation.

Nairobi lawyer Cecil Miller was appointed chairman of a nine-member Interim Independent Electoral Commission, which replaces the Electoral Commission of Kenya. Focus now shifts to Parliament, which has to approve names of officials before the team can begin its work.

The first task will be to establish an efficient and effective secretariat and conduct fresh registration of voters, as well as creation of a new voters' register.

"We will make the selection of the eight members of the IIEC later this afternoon and hopefully table our report in Parliament tomorrow morning," said PSC chairman Abdikadir Mohamed yesterday.

The new commission will also have to handle the expected by-elections in Bomachoge and several other civic seats, which fell vacant for different reasons. The speaker of the National Assembly cannot issue writs to set the stage for the by-elections since there is no electoral body to communicate to.

ECK was accused of fiddling with the 2007 election. The appointments end a month of jostling which saw 43 people express interest in the position of chair to the new electoral body.

Over 2,000 people had applied to be members of the team, but only 60 were shortlisted. Analysts said the new commission will face its biggest test in restoring institutional legitimacy and public confidence in Kenya's electoral system, which has been deeply eroded due to the flawed December elections.

"Kenynes have lost confidence in institutions of government and this is one thing that

the commission must endeavour to change," said Tiberius Barasa, a political analyst with the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR).

"The team will have to contend with public scepticism to succeed in its mandate since Kenyans want the reforms."

A new report on the performance of the grand coalition Government casts doubt on the commitment of the establishment in pushing for reforms.

"So far, there has been minimal progress on a number of issues. It's noteworthy that public perception of Government commitment to implementing reforms is as low as 30 per cent,"

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says the survey by South Consulting firm.

The survey was commissioned by the Panel of Eminent African Personalities chaired by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who brokered a peace deal in February last year.

The formation of the commission could also see the High Court lift the suspension of election petitions which were put aside in January as they could not be heard without electoral officials, following the disbandment of ECK.

Some 39 petitions were filed soon after the December 27, 2007 General Election. However, more than 20 petitions have already been disposed, some through technicalities. The establishment of the new electoral commission was a key recommendation by the Kriegler Commission, which called for a raft of electoral reforms.

Parliament sealed the fate of ECK — which was headed by Samuel Kivuitu — last year by voting for the Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Bill 2008 that sought to replace it with the IIEC.

The Kriegler Commission called for constitutional and other legal amendments before the next polls to avoid a repeat of the orgy of violence that engulfed the country last year.

Museveni sacks minister, hires wife

BY JACK KIMBALL
REUTERS

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni fired his finance minister and moved the energy minister in a cabinet reshuffle announced yesterday that brought on board his wife and kept key loyalists.

Uganda is gearing up for presidential elections in 2011. Museveni is expected to stand again and the former cattle herder turned student activist and rebel leader is seeking to bolster support within his ruling

party. Museveni replaced Finance minister Ezra Suruma with Sydda Bbumba and appointed his wife, Janet, as state minister for the Karamoja region, the Ugandan government said in an email showing the reshuffled cabinet which was received on Tuesday.

Land scandal

Suruma, who became a senior adviser on economic affairs, had been under pressure over a multi-million-dollar land scandal involving Uganda's largest indigenous inves-

tor. One analyst said the reshuffle would not herald much change, with Museveni still very much in charge. "I don't think when you change the personalities it makes much difference. This is a system that depends on one-man rule," said Paul Omach, a political scientist at Makerere University.

While the former guerrilla leader has been praised for the nation's strong growth, the opposition accuses him of turning into just the kind of power hungry "Big Man" African leader he lambasted as a fresh-faced rebel in the 1980s.

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