

The return of Saitoti, Murungi

The reinstatement to the Cabinet of Kajiado North MP George Saitoti and his Imenti South counterpart, Mr Kiraitu Murungi, who had been sidelined over corruption allegations, is an unwise move by the Government. It's obvious that the President is making a political statement by bringing back to government some of his staunchest allies.

As much as many of us believe that President Kibaki, at 75, is too old to seek re-election next year, he seems to be setting the stage for just that with

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this latest reshuffle of his government. Clearly, President Kibaki would not want to enter our history books as the first President to rule Kenya for only one five-year term. After all, his predecessor was at the helm for 24 years and founding President Jomo Kenyatta, for 15 years. By giving the two men their old jobs, President Kibaki is probably trying to send a signal to the donors that they were not involved in corruption. And that contrary to claims in certain quarters, his government isn't dirty either.

The second possibility is that the President is telling the opposition that as much as they condemn his government, he's still the Head of State and can do anything within his powers. That

includes reappointing Prof Saitoti and Mr Murungi to the Cabinet.

The last possibility is that President Kibaki is preparing for next year's elections. By reappointing Mr Murungi, he is trying to appease the Meru community, which has always supported him politically. Remember, before he made the decision, Meru elders had called on him at State House, Nairobi, to urge him to take back Mr Murungi.

The Head of State is also reaching out to Prof Saitoti's Maasai community. We can't ignore the fact that President Kibaki has got a way of rewarding those who support him.

We saw it after last November's constitution referendum campaigns. The MPs who campaigned for the Banana group were appointed to the Government.

Now, a similar thing is happening. Two new Narc-Kenya MPs and others allied to the new party have been appointed as assistant ministers. This shows where the President's heart is and what to expect next year.

So, does the return of Prof Saitoti and Mr Murungi mean that the war against graft has been lost? What about the increasing burden on the taxpayer?

President Kibaki's cabinet is the largest since independence. There are 32 ministers and 48 assistants, the election pledge of a lean government notwithstanding.

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