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Guessing game in Tanzania

By Barry Shlachter

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania (AP) — Along with power blackouts and shortages of light bulbs and sugar, a main topic of conversation these days is who will succeed Julius Nyerere when he steps down as president after nearly 24 years in power.

The guessing game monopolises discussion in this East African country, particularly over cups of coffee at sleepy cafes along Samora Machel Avenue, a main thoroughfare in the Tanzanian capital. And it generates endless speculation on the diplomatic cocktail circuit.

The reason for guessing stems from a car crash in April 1984 that took the life of Nyerere's heir apparent, Prime Minister Edward Sokoine.

When Nyerere steps down in October he will be only the third post-colonial black African leader to peacefully relinquish the top government post. The cerebral, 63-year-old former biology teacher has dominated the political scene here since before independence from Britain in 1961 and has engineered a degree of stability rare on the continent.

When giving up the presidency, he will retain his role as chairman of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Revolutionary Party), the country's sole legal political party which constitutionally is supreme over the government.

"People are now asking whether he will still rule through the party chairmanship or retreat as a sort of philosopher-king," said a senior Western diplomat, who spoke on condition he not be identified as his comments might be viewed as interference in Tanzania's internal affairs.

"I think he genuinely wants to step back, be the father of the country, to ensure a peaceful and orderly transition and survival of his vision of Tanzania," he said.

Few except any shift in the Non-Aligned foreign policy, no matter who takes over. But Tanzanians are wondering whether changes might be in store for Nyerere's brand of "African Socialism," which some see as contributing to the serious drops in agricultural output and real wages during the past decade.

Party members identified the three main contenders as Prime Minister Salim A. Salim, vice presi-

dent Ali Hassan Mwinyi and party secretary-general Rashidi Kawawa.

Salim is considered the front-runner because he is viewed as the personal choice of Nyerere, who is likely to have a strong say on his successor, they added. Nyerere has made clear he wants a 'new generation' leader to follow him, a description that better fits the 43-year-old Salim than Mwinyi or Kawawa, both more than a decade older.

But unlike the others, Salim, who has spent much of his career abroad as a diplomat, has no domestic political base.

Even with Nyerere's backing, he would still have to gain rank-and-file support at a party nominating conference in August. Its recommendation is then passed to the CCM's National Executive Council for endorsement. Voters can accept or reject the single presidential candidate in October following a month-long campaign.

All three contenders are Muslim. Tanzania's 20 million population is about evenly into Muslims, Christians and Animists, followers of indigenous African religions.

Two — Salim and Mwinyi — are from Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous island state where there has been agitation against the 21-year relationship with the Tanzanian mainland, formerly Tanganyika, 48 kilometres away. Should either replace Nyerere, few observers expect serious future questioning of the union.

"They won't say it but mainlanders don't want a bloody Zanzibari as president," said a party member who spoke frankly in exchange for anonymity. "Salim Salim is seen as a bright upstart.

"But in a one-party state like this, the one who will be president will be the one whom Nyerere wants," he went on. "I think Nyerere is torn between Salim and Ali Hassan Mwinyi. I think he wants to throw a carrot to the Zanzibaris to make them feel more comfortable within



Julius Nyerere

the union."

Mwinyi, 54, who is concurrently Zanzibar's president, earned himself a reputation previously as a quietly efficient Tanzanian Minister of Home Affairs and Tourism. This past year, he successfully defused anti-union feeling in Zanzibar and made once scarce consumer goods available again through trade liberalisation — a step later copied by the mainland government.

But Mwinyi, a former school teacher, lacks Salim's dynamism and was publicly admonished last year by Nyerere for being too timid.

The strongest political connections are enjoyed by Kawawa, 56, who served as Prime Minister — then the highest government post — shortly after independence when Nyerere took temporary leave to rebuild the party. He was defence Minister during the costly 1979 war

against Idi Amin's Uganda.

An actor in three popular Swahili films which made his face a familiar one during the late colonial period, Kawawa was closely associated with several controversial post-independence policies.

These included ousting British officials to 'Africanise' the civil service and starting up the sometimes involuntary 'villagisation' of the rural peasantry into theoretically self-supporting communities.

"Kawawa has a public image as a party 'apparatchik' and people are quick to dismiss him, overlooking his inmate shrewdness and political experience," said the diplomatic source. "But in his heart of hearts, he must see himself as a compromise candidate."

Salim was sent to Egypt as Zanzibar's ambassador at the age of 22, later served as the Tanzanian envoy to India, China, and North Korea before becoming its representative at the United Nations. During his diplomatic assignments, he studied at Delhi University in India and Columbia University in New York.

American opposition kept Salim from succeeding Kurt Waldheim as UN Secretary-General in 1980, and Western diplomats say Washington apparently hopes he doesn't bear a grudge.

While starting out as a committed Marxist, Salim is now viewed as pragmatic and worldly wise. As Prime Minister, he has deftly handled government business without steamrolling legislation through parliament, dealing sensitively with backbenchers.

But Salim's elevation is far from a certainty, one Western analyst asserted.

"A lot of people are assuming that Salim is the choice as successor," he said. "The party is not all that comfortable with him and Nyerere would not act against the party's wishes."