

...Just election talk and blah blah!

Jambo, I'm still here, but leaving soon, though it's become embarrassing to repeatedly say goodbye to people, receive their good wishes for my future trip, then meet them again... and again, so maybe I'll now stay in hiding till I actually step on the plane!

Well, what an exciting week, with election fever both here and in the U.K. but predictably, (and depressingly as far as I'm concerned) Blair is back for a third term of office, albeit with a greatly reduced majority, and the lowest share of winning votes in modern British political times.

Headlines in the press have read, "A bitter victory for Blair... Blair might be out by Christmas... Blair limps back... Blair gets a bloody nose, and more restrained from the British Guardian newspaper, "a joyless victory".

Earlier in the week, thousands of miles from England, in a vast country called Tanzania, (which many U.K. voters will never have heard of) the mood was far from restrained, as the deadline approached for the CCM Congress to reveal their choice to vie for the Union leadership in October, which almost amounts to choosing the next president.

Everywhere I went on the day this was underway, the atmosphere was electric, like that of a World Cup match, with everyone excited and involved, in marked contrast to the general apathy of most voters in Western countries.

It's surprising to learn that many Africans not only followed the U.K. elections, but did so armed with more knowledge and analytical prowess about the event, than many British voters themselves.

Worthy of a little analysis also, are remarks made by some of the aspiring candidates here, to show their suitability for the job, and reported in the local

START THE WEEK

With Cynthia Stacey



press.

Mr. Malecelas' choice of a Kiswahili proverb, which rather unfortunately translates as, "I am the cow that leads the herd of calves", was appropriate, though he's possibly viewed more as a respected old bull.

Sure of himself and his experience, Sumaye was quoted as remarking, "As Mkapas close assistant, I deserve the seat"...others obviously didn't think likewise.

Ever the perfect diplomat, Dr. Salim stated, "I will not resent anybody, if I'm not selected"... but alarmingly, next to a photo of Mwandosya in one paper, were the words "I have constrained myself from doing the prohibited," which conjured up all manner of scary (or rude) possibilities.

However, this was misleading, as it merely referred to him keeping a low profile during the sponsorship exercise.

...and trump card winner Jakaya Kikwete, simply said, "I will fight corruption without tolerance." Ah, well, the young bucks usually have a battling spirit, let's hope he retains it... though haven't we heard someone else, give the same promise, somewhere, sometime?!

As the decision making was hotting up, and presidential hopefuls being eliminated, an English friend commenting on the appearance of the final 'trinity', Kikwete, Mwandosya

and Salim, said, "We don't have politicians in Britain who look that good"...and she's right.

I'm not suggesting we should have 'personality politics' here as in the U.S. and elsewhere, but for those in public office, appearance plays a part, and being photogenic and 'telegenic', can be a major professional asset.

Watching distinguished looking Prof. Mwandosya making a speech at a party to mark Zimbabwe Independence Day a few weeks ago, I thought what a commanding presence he has. This applies to Dr. Salim also, as appealing now, as when I first met him years ago, and like Kikwete, has the same relaxed manner which puts all they meet instantly at ease.

I was just thinking, though, we're all delighted at Jakaya's success, we all experienced the feel-good factor, as he's a great guy... but, there might be a price to pay. Kikwete is CCM's most powerful weapon, the human equivalent of a military tank... a veritable political nuclear warhead, which whilst not signaling the demise of the opposition, could perhaps seriously dent it. Although he's ultimately a product of their grooming, if the ruling party pedagogues, had put in their own requirements to God for such a 'weapon', they probably couldn't have done any better than the Minister for Foreign Affairs.!

Anyway, the same Machiavellian machinations



It's nearly over! Jubilant but probably tired CCM presidential aspirants Jakaya Kikwete, Mark Mwandosya, and Salim Ahmed Salim, make an appealing trio, as they enter the Chimwoga Hall in Dodoma last week.

and back biting will have gone on behind the scenes at the U.K. elections, that will soon occur here in October, and have partially already done so. In both countries, citizens might feel that the interests of the nation and its peoples, often seem subordinate to party policies, ideology, and power playing.

The Citizen newspaper of 6th May, said, "What sealed

Kikwete's victory, aside from his popularity with the delegates, was the fact that the losers and his rivals did not have sufficient time to conspire against him"...is my point made?

O.K. let's end this blah blah, with something appropriate and sensible. I've carried around in my bag for three years, a now fragile newspaper cutting, from the British

Guardian of May 2nd 2002. Defending anti globalisation protestors, usually vilified by the western press, a reader wrote.

"Political scientist Samuel Huntingdon said, we are suffering from an excess of democracy, upon which desirable limits to its extension should be set. We live in a representative democracy, where our

participation is only called upon once every four years or so. Beyond allowing strangers to embody our hopes and concerns in the body politic, we have no role, and no access in framing or enacting the policies which impact on our lives, and our communities, neither in the actions undertaken in our name across the globe, or the environment we share. Those

protestors who take to the streets, understand this, and try to do something about it."

We're all ultimately pawns in the political game, just election fodder, but come October, Tanzanians can take to the streets, and to use a current phrase... 'empower themselves' by voting...but have the opposition got time to 'create a weapon'!?