Political temperatures in Rwanda are currently rising as countdown to the July 15 presidential and parliamentary polls nears. This will be the fourth democratic general election for the east African nation in a space of 30 years.

The first democratic elections took place in 2003 after the country had enacted the Constitution and breathed life into institutions that had suffered a huge blow during tyranny regimes that masterminded and executed the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

President Paul Kagame, Chairman of the ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won the previous election with 98.7% while independent candidate Philippe Mpayimana and leader of Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR), Frank Habineza tailed with barely one per cent.

Now, there is widespread opinion that RPF will win both presidential and parliamentary polls come July. The opinion is grounded in gains from RPF-Inkotanyi led government in accordance to the seven-year National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) adopted in 2017. The Government set out plans for achieving Vision 2050 for economic development based on lessons learned, successes and challenges met in the 2010-2017 medium-term development strategies.

Despite RPF's clean record in the socio-economic transformation, the opposition continues to put dents in Kagame's administration citing continued breach of democracy.

Habineza who started DGPR in 2009 told reporters in a presser that after his nomination as a flagbearer in the upcoming election that stifling of fundamental human rights including free media has characterized the ruling party. The party's congress nominated Habineza unopposed last May.

"We will continue our struggle for democracy, freedom of speech, free media, and human rights," remarked Habineza.

Victoire Ingabire, leader of Dalfa Umurinzi, one of a dozen of unrecognized political parties ran to the High Court in Kigali early this year to request be exonerated and cleared in order to restore all her rights as a citizen.

Commenting on her latest move, Ingabire said that she will face Kagame in the upcoming polls if court positively considers her petition. She remains under the judicial eye and illegible for any public office following her criminal record.

“If the court decision is positive then I will consider my participation in the elections this year,” she said.

Court’s ruling is due March 13, 2024.

Ingabire was arrested in 2010, and sentenced to eight years in jail, stretched to 15 years after appeal. She walked out of prison in September 2018 after a presidential pardon with over 2,000 other prisoners, and has determination to swim against turbulent political tides.

A glance at the out-going 7-year term

Political pundits contend that the RPF envisaged victory will ride on the back of gains registered in the last three decades it has been in power. More vividly, the seven-year term ending soon has some concrete evidence the party will have a soft landing in coming elections.

NST1 (2017-2024) laid down goals in the spheres of economic transformation; social transformation and transformational governance that the government has been implementing in the last seven years.

At least 91 per cent of the medium-term development strategies have successfully been implemented, a credit that may win support for the current government in the upcoming elections.

According to Prime Minister Édouard Ngirente, winding NST1 has not been all roses as the Rwandan governement like others globally encountered unforeseen problems including Covid-19, climate change, natural catastrophes altogether leading to economic downturn that led to deleterious economic effects.

While addressing the 19th National Dialogue known locally as Umushyikirano this last January, Ngirente blamed the inadequacy in achievements on global challenges that were beyond their control, and reiterated government’s commitment to continue implementing the rest of the strategies until targets are met.

Economy revived following slump

In spite of the global challenges alluded to such as COVID-19, the government of Rwanda launched several measures with focus on mitigating particularly the adverse economic effects linked to the pandemic, which included supporting key sectors like manufacturing, agro-processing and real estate.

Owing to the pandemic, the country's economy sank from 8 per cent to -3.4.

Between 2021-2023, government implemented a two-year Manufacture and Build to Recover Programme (MBRP) to boost economic recovery efforts, which extended the time it was set to close. Through MBRP, investments were mobilized totaling $1.75 billion and created over 36,000 jobs as of 2022 exceeding the targets by 150% and 132% respectively.

With such interventions the country maintained economic growth of 6,9 per cent from 2017 up to the third quarter of 2023.

To mitigate effects of rising commodity prices on the international markets caused by high prices of petroleum, government provided subsidies on petroleum products and public transport alongside subsidizing industrial fertilizers.

Relatedly, government purchased 200 buses, 100 of them arrived recently to address the shortage of buses that affected public transport, and the programme that started in the City of Kigali will roll out to provinces revealed Ngirente.

Agriculture

The last seven years have seen Rwanda invest massively in Agriculture, the main economic activity to larger proportion of the population. And, it will be far-reaching to uplift the living standards of her people without directing ample resources into the sector.

To this effect, cultivatable land increased to 71,000ha up from 48,000ha in 2017. Investments in commercial modern farming like Gabiro Agribusiness Hub, Nasho and Mpanga irrigation schemes in the Eastern Province are some of the initiatives that account for the rise in arable land.

The amount of fertilizers used per hectare annually rose in the last seven years to 70.3Kgs up from 32Kgs in 2017, and the rise translated in increase in productivity per unit of land, placing Rwanda in the lead in Sub-Saharan Africa where 25Kgs are used per hectare annually.

The fertilizer blending plant in Bugesera with a capacity of producing 100,000 tons complements other fertilizers' factories in ensuring sustainable supply, and the country stopped importing hybrid seeds in 2021.

Efforts meant to fight soil erosion were heightened during the seven-year term leading to completion of terraces covering 1,147,434 hectares. The shortage in milk production was substantively narrowed and currently more than one million liters up from some 700,000 in 2017, and a milk processing plant with a 650,000 litre capacity per day was constructed due to open.

Infrastructure development

To boost the movement of goods and people, the Infrastructure Ministry presided over the construction over 1,600Kms of roads connecting provinces. In addition, some 237Kms of new roads were constructed in the City of Kigali and secondary cities.

About 3,700 Kms of feeder roads, above the target of 3,000Kms, were constructed to help mostly farmers access markets across the country. While floodlights were installed along more than 2,160Kms of roads in cities falling below the target of 2,400Kms but the programme is ongoing, the Premier told over 1,500 delegates at Umushyikirano.

During the implementation of NST1, over 1.5 million new households accessed electricity increasing accessibility by household from 34.4% to 74%. And, in effort to increase to safe and clean water, seven processing plants were constructed including Nzove Kanzenze, Gihira, Kanyonyomba, Mwoya, Nkombo and Nyankora which nearly doubled water supply.

Meanwhile, access to internet services increased following an increase in the kilometres of Fiber optic cable from 3,300 Kms in 2017 to 15,000.

Other key sectors that registered milestones in the last seven years include Health, Education and Manufacturing.

By and large, the RPF-Inkotanyi led government is likely to ride on the back of the gains it recorded in nearly all the key sectors between 2017 to 2024 in its drive to cause socio-economic transformation.

Relatedly, Rwanda's President and liberator Paul Kagame has always maintained his

political stance that utterly differs from the mode of democracy the West upholds, by putting home-grown solutions on course. Kagame’s leadership style is hugely dictated by the country’s bad past and a replica of Western democracy has not solved problems in poor countries even in nations where they follow it to the letter.

The resilient nation enacted the 2003 Constitution giving new life to institutions that had suffered a huge blow during the genocide regimes that perpetuated the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

More than one million Tutsi were brutally killed by the government backed militias known locally as Interahamwe and Hutu extremists in the space of 100 days, and the economy was left in shambles. This genocide was stopped by Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) under Kagame’s command.