

IDSA

Issue Brief

Tanzania's President John Magufuli – The Hero of the Hour

Debnath Shaw

January 22, 2016

S*ummary*

The largest country in East Africa with a substantial population of the Indian diaspora - about sixty to seventy thousand, has never evoked much interest in India, especially in the public discourse. Even the fact that India's trade with Tanzania at around USD 4 billion in 2014, much of it exports of Indian goods and services, is at par or even greater than that of our trade with Canada, does not usually ring a bell even among trade and commercial interests in the country, except in the odd office in Udyog Bhawan. Yet, a recent news report titled “Rawandaization of Tanzania”, highlighting the unusual measures taken by Dr. John Magufuli, the new President of Tanzania, has been circulating in the social media. What has evoked such social media interest in Tanzania and its new President, Dr. John Magufuli?

The largest country in East Africa with a substantial population of the Indian diaspora - about sixty to seventy thousand, has never evoked much interest in India, especially in the public discourse. Even the fact that India's trade with Tanzania at around USD 4 billion in 2014, much of it exports of Indian goods and services, is at par or even greater than that of our trade with Canada, does not usually ring a bell even among trade and commercial interests in the country, except in the odd office in Udyog Bhawan. Yet, a recent news report titled "Rawandaization of Tanzania", highlighting the unusual measures taken by Dr. John Magufuli, the new President of Tanzania, has been circulating in the social media. What has evoked such social media interest in Tanzania and its new President, Dr. John Magufuli?

Magufuli was sworn into office as the fifth President of the United Republic of Tanzania on 5th November 2015 at Dar es Salaam, soon after the Tanzanian delegation to IAFS-III had returned from Delhi. Magufuli was the official candidate of the ruling CCM party (founded by the iconic Julius Nyerere), which has been continuously in power since 1961, the longest ruling party in Africa. He won the presidential contest held on 25th October by a much reduced margin of 58 per cent against the combined opposition candidate's much improved showing of about 40 per cent of the votes polled. In effect, Magufuli represents a party on the decline in the Tanzanian people's perception, but one that could still prop up a winning candidate due to the candidate's clean image, the party's superior organizational structure, particularly in Tanzania's vast rural and semi-rural areas, and the not so clean image of Edward Lowasa, the challenger who had crossed over to the opposition after failing to win the CCM's nomination.

Domestic Agenda

Much like the Indian Prime Minister, President Magufuli started his Presidency on 5th November on a note different from that of any of his predecessors and in defiance of age old practices. While PM Modi revealed his master stroke in getting SAARC and neighbourhood leaders to attend his swearing in ceremony in May 2014, Magufuli swept away some of the pomp and pageantry surrounding the Tanzanian Presidency thereby effecting savings of precious resources to be used for more urgent public tasks. A few days after his swearing in, Magufuli showed up at the principal referral hospital in Dar es Salaam and found patients lying on the floor, in the absence of adequate beds, and key equipment dysfunctional. The director of the hospital was promptly removed and money sent to the hospital to get beds and equipment repaired. A visit to a department office revealed large scale absenteeism, which he promptly rectified. By these actions, the Tanzanian President signalled to the people that it was not going to be business as usual, particularly in the delivery of public services, a woe that afflicts the country seriously.

Magufuli opened the 11th Parliament (Bunge) located at Dodoma, which is the official capital of Tanzania, about 500 kms from Dar es Salaam, on 11th November. He did three things differently from his predecessor. He travelled by road to Dodoma from Dar es Salaam, which continues to host the State House or the office of the President and most ministries, and did not take the Presidential aircraft for

this and other official tours. His speech, though of about 90 minutes duration, was much shorter than that delivered earlier by his predecessors, and he cut down the budget allocated for the State Dinner that normally follows the inauguration of the new parliament by 90 per cent, and diverted the money thus saved, about Tsh 200 million or over USD 90,000 for hospital and healthcare augmentation facilities. In his inaugural speech, Magufuli said, "...it was now time for Tanzanians to walk the talk in the resolve to confront vices that he said were holding the nation back in uplifting millions from abject poverty."¹ Among the drawbacks listed by Magufuli are mega corruption, embezzlement of funds within local governments, poor management and sheer waste of resources, including natural wealth, bureaucracy in government offices, negative political competition, neglect of strategic infrastructure investments, and a culture that encouraged laziness or did not reward hard work. The President said that "...poverty and unemployment remained Tanzania's biggest challenges..."² He promised better education, water supply, healthcare delivery and expanded economic opportunities for all. The President told Parliament that his government will concentrate on improved railway, port and air infrastructure. Gas discovery will help the nation leap forward. Industrialization, particularly the manufacture of clothes, textiles, edible items and other agro-based industries, is a key to his plans. Magufuli said that he hoped manufacturing would account for 40 per cent of all new jobs by 2020.

According to same report, "The president warned that he will not hesitate to fire any of his ministers implicated in corruption..."³ A CNN report of 14 January 2016 is headlined "John Magufuli, the no frills President who declared war on waste."⁴ Among his first decisions after taking office was to ban the purchase of first and business class tickets for foreign travel by ministers and officials, except the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister. In general, he has asked senior functionaries to avoid foreign travel, get their work done through the ambassadors and high commissioners posted abroad and to visit rural areas more often to understand the problems of the people at the grassroots level. At the inaugural session of parliament, Magufuli gave a hint of the problem of waste, claiming that between 2013 and 2015, foreign trips cost the country a staggering Tsh 356.3 billion [USD 163 million approximately] in air tickets and allowances alone. "This money could build 400 kms of tarmac roads," he noted.⁵ [Magufuli was the Minister for Works from 2010 to 2015 under President Kikwete, and even in an earlier period, was responsible for road construction, which earned him the nickname '*the duckworth*' or 'The Bulldozer' for pursuing to completion what he started]. Government has banned official meetings and workshops to be held in hotels, which now must be held in government buildings. On the economic front, Magufuli ordered a review of all privatization contracts and businesses which

¹ "Tanzania: Magufuli - My Priorities," *The Citizen*, 21 November 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201511232005.html>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kieron Monks, "John Magufuli, the no-frills President who declared war on waste," 14 January 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/14/africa/tanzania-president-john-magufuli/>

⁵ "Tanzania: Magufuli - My Priorities".

private investors have failed to revive. As a start, recently, the government announced that it is repossessing five sisal estates that had been leased to private investors who have failed to keep them running. He promised to tackle Tanzania's endemic power shortage, end the ad hoc grant of tax holidays to businesses and projects, and increase the number of businesses that are paying taxes. On the education front, Magufuli promised more funds for free primary and secondary education and to concentrate on teachers' salary and housing problems, which have, in the recent past, brought the education sector to a standstill.

Magufuli wants to find a middle path for the political logjam in Zanzibar, the semi-autonomous coastal region, which merged with mainland Tanganyika in 1964 to form a unique federal structure styled as Tanzania. Elections to the presidency in Zanzibar were held at the same time as that of the Union presidency elections in October 2015. However, the election outcome remains suspended due to differences between the main political actors of the island about the election process that has not been resolved to this day. Magufuli also promised that Tanzania will play its part in enhancing regional integration in the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Significantly, Magufuli has been quoted as telling parliament that Tanzania will be "...constructively engaging with its *development partners* to keep the good record of his predecessor."⁶

Tanzania gained independence from British suzerainty on 9 December 1961. Each year this event is celebrated with great pomp including a mass parade and demonstration at the National Stadium in Dar es Salaam and a grand reception hosted by the President at the State House. Last year, Magufuli cancelled the Independence Day parade and reception and instead held a National Day of Cleanliness, on which day Magufuli himself wielded the broom, a la Modi. The budgeted expenditure of USD 1.9 million was instead diverted for expanding a congested road and for street cleaning.⁷

Magufuli's war against corruption and public waste has been relentless since he took charge of the fate of Tanzania over two months ago. A Cabinet was formed and announced only in early December 2015, a full month after his assumption of office, the delay perhaps caused by a drastic reduction in the number of ministers, from 30 in previous President Kikwete's Cabinet to only 19 this time, by merging and clubbing ministries. A low key CCM functionary was appointed as Prime Minister, in contrast to the expectation that a high profile politician well versed in party machinations would be appointed to take care of party-government relations, leaving Magufuli, who was not known earlier to have waded much in the party's internal matters, free to concentrate on governance issues. Only a handful of Kikwete's ministers could find place in the new cabinet selected by Magufuli, giving grist to the rumour mill that he wants to make a fresh start without interference from the previous regime. When the new PM visited the Dar es Salaam port, he found that over 300 containers had left the port premises without payment of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Tanzania president's reforms raise hopes of better African leaders," *News 24*, 14 January 2016, <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/tanzania-presidents-reforms-raise-hopes-of-better-african-leaders-20160114>

requisite duties and taxes. Magufuli promptly sacked the port authority head and suspended the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) chief. The head of the anti-corruption bureau was also given marching orders.

President Magufuli's "...radical reforms have the region in awe" -- so says the 'News 24' portal. According to CNN, the reformist President has inspired one of the country's most enduring and popular hashtags – #WhatWouldMagufuliDo. It has also inspired a new verb, 'Magufulify', defined as (i) to render or declare an action faster or cheaper, (ii) to deprive [public officials] of their capacity to enjoy life at taxpayers' expense; and (iii) to terrorize lazy and corrupt individuals in society.⁸ Within the EAC, Tanzania is often blamed as a slow starter in reforms, particularly economic reforms which will help integrate the region into a common economic entity. Magufuli's social and governance reforms have catapulted the country into a trend setter for the region and possibly all of sub-Saharan Africa to emulate and follow. Among the five EAC countries, three (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi) have broken the political code of not more than two consecutive terms for the incumbent Head of State, with drastic internal, regional and continental ramifications. Kenya is racked by political rift and violence often based on tribal fault lines. While Tanzania may still be carrying some past socialist baggage (nationalization of businesses and properties), on the matter of political stability, maturity and smooth transition of power it is the *numero uno* in the region, a fact it has been touting to attract foreign investment. Magufuli's unusual governance tactics may well give Rwanda's Kagame a run for his money on the issue of transparency and clean governance as well.

Foreign Policy

President Magufuli is not known to have much experience in foreign policy evolution and practices. As a Minister in the past two presidencies, his dealings with foreign countries and international entities seems to have been restricted to issues concerning his charge, as Minister for Works in utilizing foreign funds and expertise, particularly from international lending agencies like the World Bank (WB) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), for road building and other infrastructure projects, as well as from countries actively involved in this sector, like China, Japan and the European Union.

But he did state his foreign policy vision in his speech to the inaugural session of the Tanzanian parliament on 20 November 2015. There, he noted: "We want to see our diplomacy and our external foreign policy responding to our challenges such as employment, infrastructure, agro-marketing, industries, etc." In this regard, he stated that his government will "further the trend (diplomacy) by building on a strong foundation put in place by previous administrations". It will continue to be faithful to the East African Community (EAC) and fulfil commitments already made. It will continue to be a member of the SADC and will cooperate efficiently with countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)

⁸ Kieron Monks, "John Magufuli, the no-frills President who declared war on waste".

for peace, security and development of the region around Lake Victoria, which has been wracked by tribal and political strife and violence for decades. Magufuli places his faith in a united Africa as envisioned by Nyerere, a goal adopted subsequently by the African Union. Tanzania will nurture its cooperation and friendship with its Western, Far East and Middle East friends, and with the UN, Commonwealth Community and the WB, IMF and AfDB to build upon its economic relationships.

While India does not figure directly in Magufuli's statement, some of his actions such as the war against corruption and the cleanliness drive are undoubtedly inspired by similar campaigns here. Magufuli has credited Kikwete's administration with foreign policy successes, including its fruitful relationship with development partners. As an upcoming and substantial development partner of Tanzania, India's role in the form of increased training facilities, capacity building and projects funded by Government of India Lines of Credit, intensified during Kikwete's regime, is likely to be strengthened. India is among Tanzania's top trade and investment partners. President Magufuli has assessed that building up economic relationships with partner countries is among Tanzania's priorities. India needs to take advantage of its historically close and friendly ties with Tanzania and step up its ties with that country, perhaps by scheduling a visit of Prime Minister Modi at the earliest.

Conclusion

Are there lessons in Magufuli's tactics for India or should we merely be cheering him on from the sidelines. The BJP-led coalition headed by Modi has concentrated on waking up a lethargic, wasteful and sometimes corrupt bureaucracy, with mixed results. Tanzania's Magufuli's tactics tell us that our leaders need to walk the talk to cut down on wasteful public expenditure on ministers, parliamentarians and bureaucrats, to channel these savings to public services and tackle corruption, if necessary with sufficient powers to suspend, sack and prosecute those who indulge in such practices. At the same time, our leaders must also focus on strategic infrastructure investment, better delivery of public services and expanded economic opportunities for all. Tanzania and its neighbours are happy with Magufuli's bold initial steps to weed out corruption, waste and lethargy. He will probably be given more time on achieving concrete results on the twin tasks of tackling poverty and creating more employment. One can only hope he does not lose sight of this greater goal while attaining even more success in the war against corruption and waste. The 'Hero of the Hour' must remain a hero for all times to come.

About the Authors

Debnath Shaw is a former High Commissioner of India to Tanzania and served as Consultant for the Ministry of External Affairs for the Third India Africa Forum Summit held in New Delhi in October 2015.

The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or the Government of India.

© Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), 2015