

A million cheer Kibaki
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News24

Nairobi - A million jubilant Kenyans turned out in a Nairobi park on Monday to witness the inauguration of President Mwai Kibaki, voicing hopes that decades of rampant corruption, cronyism and grinding poverty could soon be a thing of the past.

Many streamed into Uhuru ("freedom" in Swahili) park, wearing paper hats or T-shirts bearing Kibaki's portrait, or brandishing green branches signifying peace and a new beginning.

Others arrived in packed buses, clinging to the doors and waving the two-finger salute of Kibaki's opposition alliance, the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc), which routed the long-ruling Kenya National African Union (Kanu) in Friday's general elections.

But the multitude also showed hostility to outgoing president Daniel arap Moi, who had been in power since 1978.

Moi's motorcade was pelted with clumps of mud as he arrived for the ceremony and his final speech was marred by hostile heckles as aides tried to prevent more missiles hitting the former leader.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and his Tanzanian counterpart Benjamin Mkapa were also jeered when they made flattering remarks about Moi.

'Moi must go'

Some in the crowd shouted "Thief!" and "Moi must go!" as Moi was driven into Nairobi's Uhuru park. "Everything is possible without Moi," others sang.

One man carried a stick topped by a the head of a cockerel, Kanu's emblem.

Dozens of people were stretchered into ambulances when they fainted after standing for hours in the heat. Others were struck by stones aimed at the police.

In the coastal city of Mombasa where residents followed the investiture on television, businesses closed as people rushed to watch the event which was carried live by the state broadcaster.

Other shopkeepers decided to pull down their shutters, fearing that the jubilation might turn to looting.

The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation appealed to the public to return a ladder stolen from its outside broadcast unit deployed in the park.

The park itself was packed tight, with many sitting atop trees or standing on the roofs of nearby buildings to get a better view.

A group of about a dozen Narc supporters lined up in a semblance of a military formation, marching on the spot and saluting: a heartfelt guard of honour for Kibaki.

Kibaki's arrival was considerably delayed by the throng.

A day to celebrate

All those who spoke to AFP felt that a page of Kenya's history was being turned.

"This is a day to celebrate the end of a very, very long struggle, of bad governance and everything evil," said Richard Rukwaro, a vision therapist.

Like other candidates in the election, Kibaki focussed his campaign on ending the pervasive corruption and mismanagement that have dragged Kenya's economy into the doldrums in recent years.

"Now we are waiting for change. We have confidence the new government will bring this about," he added.

"We are witnessing a physical transformation from dictatorship to democracy," he added.

"Kenyans are completely happy because Moi has gone. The enemy is out. No more looting," said civil servant William Onyango.

"Now Kenya is independent at last. Kenyans are free at last. Things have to change very quickly now," he said.

Like others in the crowd, he appealed to developed Western nations to resume aid flows, frozen in recent years mainly over concerns about corruption and lack of reform.

'The difference is the unity of the people'

"We thank God who has given us a government to be proud of," said businessman Jack Githau.

Farmer Andrew Githenge said he was very hopeful for change for the better, even though he had been bitterly disappointed by new governments in the past, first when Jomo Kenyatta became Kenya's first president in 1963 - after a struggle that cost Githenge's father his life - and again when Moi came to power on Kenyatta's death in 1978.

"We have been promised good things for 40 years and seen nothing. We have confidence in the new government that we will finally see the fruits of our sweat," he said.

"The difference is the unity of the people. See how people are flocking here. I myself travelled 250km to be here today," he said.

Kibaki "has a good team behind of very experienced professionals him," he added.

Nairobi shopkeeper Jitesh Upadhyay was a little more cautious.

"We've got the government in, now we want to see the results. (Kibaki's pledges) sound good on paper, but whether he can deliver is another matter," he said. - Sapa-AFP