



Trouble in Paradise: Maize, Succession Politics and Anger in William Ruto's Kalenjin Backyard

By Dauti Kahura



KKS 2019

With a spring in his walk, an upright lanky physique, reminiscent of the world famous marathon runners from the idyllic town of Iten, in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Paul Kimaiyo Kimuge aka “Sirikwa” looks ageless, making it difficult to estimate his age.

At 77-years-old, Kimuge would easily pass for a 50-something year old man: he has a medium sized body, head full of hair and a beguiling moustache that makes his smile wearily sly. “Since I stopped drinking several years ago, I’ve been on natural honey which I make at my farm,” said Kimuge. “I’m a beekeeper with lots of beehives and harvest honey and I used to make local brew from the honey.”

But, I had not travelled 340km from Nairobi to Iten, 32km east of Eldoret town, to discuss bee keeping with Kimuge, but rather his other major preoccupation, which he has done all his life: maize farming - and the politics surrounding it. “Maize farming in North Rift has been infiltrated by politics and the farmer has found himself trapped in this unfortunate conundrum,” said a calm Kimuge. “He now cannot sell his maize to the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), because the board says its silos are full. And we don’t know from which maize farmers.”

The mzee told me he was a “small time” maize farmer. The maize from his 20 acres in Bogar, seven kilometers from Iten on the road to Kapsowar, was stuck in his barns. “I’ve just come from spraying them so that they are not attacked by stalk borers and maize weevils. I don’t know when the Board will buy my maize, if at all it will.” Kimuge said Bogar cooperative farmers had visited the Board offices in Eldoret town, but no official wanted to talk to them. “They locked themselves inside their offices and pretended to look busy.”

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I asked Kimuge how is it that now there was a lot of hue and cry from North Rift maize farmers and what precisely was the mystery behind the current maize saga. “Maize has been politicised and has become a weapon to fight the Deputy President William Ruto. I refuse to believe that it is Ruto and his henchmen who are behind this maize ordeal. I’ve heard that talk of blaming Ruto and I’ve decided I’ll not be part of it. It is true we’re suffering, but we are suffering because of the government, not because of one person. Is Ruto in charge of the national maize policy? Is it Ruto who fixes the maize prices?”

Kimuge, a Keiyo, said the story about the alleged maize “importation” by some Kalenjin political elites was inconsequential. It was the work of the government to rein in on the culprits and ensure the farmer sells his maize to NCPB. “The President (Uhuru Kenyatta) recently said the Board will buy our maize at KSh2500, we are waiting to see if it will heed his orders. The truth is, even after the President commanded the Board to buy the maize from us, they are yet to do so. It looks like we are in for a long suffering.”

Kimuge’s views were sharply contradicted by another maize farmer, I spoke to in Kitale, in Trans Nzoia County who identifies as a Marakwet. The farmer, who asked me not to reveal his identity, openly stated that the maize scandal was the alleged handiwork of Ruto and his close associates. “Ruto and Kipchumba Murkomen, the Elgeyo Marakwet Senator purportedly ‘imported maize from Mexico’ but the truth of the matter is that that maize was bought from NCPB and the neighbouring Uganda,” alleged the farmer. “The maize bought from NCPB was later resold to the Board by the DP and his henchmen for a killing. That is why the Board cannot buy anymore maize, because the crux of the matter is, it has nowhere to store any extra maize, because they already have more than enough maize to handle.”

The farmer reminded me how maize used to be stolen at NCPB in the 1990s during the reign of President Moi: “Influential and powerful men linked to the president would hire trucks and drive to NCPB stores. With the collusion of the Ministry of Agriculture and NCPB bosses, they would load the maize into the awaiting trucks. The truck would drive away, only to return to sell the same maize to NCPB.”

The Kitale farmer said this is the reason why embittered farmers at the Senate ad hoc committee on Maize and Agriculture Committee held at the Uasin Gishu Hall in Eldoret town in September 2018, told senator Murkomen to his face, that he and his colleagues were behind the cartel that was bringing grief to the North Rift maize farmer. “Those making us suffer are from our own region. It is not (James) Orengo or (Moses) Wetangula making us suffer. We know them,” said some of the angry farmers, pointing a finger at Murkomen.

A Senate Ad hoc Committee on Maize and Agriculture Committee public hearing on maize issues in Eldoret, 2018. Source: Daily Nation

Jesse Mais, the former MP of Eldoret South, which was split into two constituencies -Kesses and Kapseret -, was among the farmers at the meeting. Mais, who is a large scale farmer in Mlango, next to Moi International Airport, told Murkomen that it was him and his hideous cartel that were behind the “maize heist” that was now causing untold suffering among the Kalenjin farmers.

“The politics behind the maize saga and the North Rift farmers’ grievances is now intertwined with the succession politics of 2022 and that is why, however much the farmers may feel aggrieved and, however much they may want to accuse their own leaders of being behind their suffering, they will not,” said the Kitale farmer. “The farmers know the people behind the maize cartel, it is their leaders, but ethnic politics of ‘this is our man,’ supersedes any suffering inflicted by the same leader(s).”

“*Ngosamis murya kobo kot nebo,*” said the farmer. It is a Kalenjin saying which the farmer translated to mean; however bad a situation is, your tribesman will always remain to be your tribesman.

The farmer shared the example of the intended fertilizer factory at Cheptiret on the Eldoret-Nairobi highway, that was supposed to be up and running, “but look it’s a shell of a building, with no fertilizer, the farmers were obviously cheated, yet Deputy William Ruto had promised it would be functional, but as you see, no Kalenjin will dare put Ruto to task over that factory.”

On January 31, 2019, Noah Wekesa the chairman of the Strategic Food Reserves (SFT) made a pronouncement in Eldoret at the NPCB offices, that the government would not subsidize fertilizer products this year, making an already bad situation worse, said the farmer. “The farmer cannot afford the fertilizer’s market price. And if the government insists on not importing the fertilizer, the farmer will be stuck and of course, this will certainly impact heavily on the local politics. The farmers are agitated that in the wake of all these happenings, William Ruto is quiet.”

Maize farming is the economic backbone of the North Rift, the bedrock of Ruto’s political fanatical support and vote rich backyard, and the base, is wallowing in angst and this suppressed anger is threatening to spillover, said the farmer. “A bag of maize is currently, at best, selling at KSh1400-1500 (forget what the President said). And this is if you get a buyer.”

The farmers’ barns themselves are packed with their own maize, because they have no one to sell to. “Eventually, the maize will rot.” He said the millers are not buying any maize from the farmers, but buying from the government, which has all the ‘imported’ maize. “Even if they were to sell their maize, they would sell it at a loss; the production cost is anything above KSh2200 per bag, whichever way for the farmer, he is screwed,” said the farmer.

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In Ziwa, 42km north of Eldoret town and Ruto’s staunchest political stronghold, Chief Elijah Serem of Segero location told me the government had allocated only 80 bags to be sold to NCPB. “An entire location, you allocate only 80 bags? The government should reconsider this particular allocation. Segero is a location of very serious maize farmers...all their barns are full....” Apparently to deal with the maize crisis, NCPB is allocating maize quotas to locations in North Rift and has come up with a raft of conditions for the farmers to fulfill, in respect to the maize they are supposed to deliver to the Board. Besides stating that the government would not import fertilizer, Noah Wekesa also announced that the government would buy only two million bags of maize from the farmers,

ostensibly because the government has enough maize for strategic reserves.

Ziwa is populated by the Nandi people. It all used to be part of the Eldoret North constituency, which was one time William Ruto's huge constituency when he served as the MP between 1997-2007. It was split into two constituencies: Soy and Turbo. In Soy, Mzee Julius arap Nabei lamented, "we're not happy at all...there are some people in the government who are now engaging in some political mischief...why are they emasculating Ruto's powers now? Please let it be known we are not amused with the ongoings in Jubilee Party." I sensed the agitation among the Nandi of Ziwa was beginning to be audible. *Samus murya ku nyengung*, even if the rat (in the house) is smelly it is still yours, grumbled the mzee.

In Turbo, where the bulk of the Kikuyu people in Uasin Gishu County used to live, a retired Kalenjin senior chief said, "let us not kid ourselves; the bull has been dehorned and this a very unsettling situation here. (The bull in reference to William Ruto). We were going to take some time to observe the on goings at the party, but it looks like, we the Kalenjin elders, would sooner than later 'recall' William Ruto to candidly tell us what exactly is going on in Nairobi."

A recent executive order issued by the President to the Cabinet Secretaries, delegating supervision of the government's development work to them, has been interpreted by the ordinary Kalenjin man to mean a clipping off Deputy President's powers. The work, according to the order, is to be overseen by Fred Matiang'i the CS for Interior and Coordination of National Government.

"What the executive order has done is to galvanize the Kalenjin community into fully rallying behind Ruto," a senior journalist from the Kalenjin community told me: "They will now not see him as the man behind their maize woes, but as a victim of state machinations. Their argument is, 'we the Kalenjin are under (external) attack, we should close in on our ranks and face the common enemy, we can deal with our internal issues later.'"

The Kalenjin community largely farm and rear livestock. "But the main crops that we rely on, have been politicized - maize has been the most affected - but even tea might soon become a political crop," opined the Kitale farmer. He pointed out that Kalenjin farmers from North Rift were tottering on the brink of confusion and despair. "The farmer knows the scandal has been allegedly perpetrated by Ruto and his henchmen and now he is being told that if he is tired of maize, he can opt for Avocado. It is very demeaning and hurtful. *Anatwambia tupande parachichi...hiyo ndio kitu gani...hiyo ndio italisha watoto wetu?* He's telling us to grow avocados...what's that...is that what we'll use to raise our children?"

The farmer told me North Rift farmers had huge farms, that they had been farming for eons and come to understand and anticipate the seasons, learned how to predict the rains, that are heavy and good for maize farming. "What does Ruto mean when he says we should diversify and start growing other crops like Avocado?" The Kalenjin, the farmer said, had taken this pronouncement by Ruto to mean that they should vacate maize farming so that he can be the sole importer and distributor of all the maize in the country, for as long as it was lucrative. "Ruto does not care whether our children starve to death or not, whether we educate them or not, all he is interested in is, more money and the powerful presidential seat."

The maize scandal has become an explosive matter and that is why Ruto is quiet and cannot do anything about it, observed the farmer. "He cannot do anything about the mess because he is the one behind this humongous scandal alongside his boys." Yet the problem of the Kalenjin farmer does not now even end with the apparent lack of a market and price distortion of their chief crop: "These Ruto henchmen also have been messing about with the flow and quality of fertilizer in the country," alleged the farmer.

The government imports genuine fertilizer for the farmers, but Ruto and his friends allegedly have been in turn, buying these fertilizer in bulk, repackaging it by mixing it with low grade fertilizer, which they then sell to the farmers at market prices, just like the real quality fertilizer would fetch, said the farmer. "The net result of this has been farmers' maize output has witnessed a dip, because the yield per hectare is low, because of the low grade fertilizer. The North Rift Kalenjin farmer has been suffering quietly, but bitterly, knowing very well that the pain he is undergoing, has been inflicted by his tribesman." *Ngosamis murya kobo kot nebo*. North Rift is largely made of the Keiyo, Marakwet and Nandi people.

Kimuge told me it is true he is a Ruto diehard: *huyo ni kijana yetu*, that's our boy. "In 2013 and 2017, we the Kalenjin elders campaigned really hard for both Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto. In 2012, when both of them were in trouble with the ICC (International Criminal Court), they came to us elders and begged for our support. Uhuru told us if he became President, he would serve for a maximum 10 years and then he would make sure Ruto serves his own 10 years. '*Mimi mwenyewe, nitampigia Ruto debe*,' I'll personally campaign for Ruto. The mzee remembers Uhuru telling them as much. This was a public promise made during the day. What are these stories we are now hearing about?"

The elder recalled that when Uhuru and Ruto decided to work together, the Kalenjin were relieved that the two most politically powerful antagonistic communities in Kenya had decided to bury the hatchet and co-exist peacefully. "That's why we told our people, they must vote for the duo to secure development, peace and harmony. I'm now shocked that the Kikuyu seem to want to walk back on that promise." They are many Kikuyus in the larger Rift Valley region engaged in varied businesses and farming, said Kimuge, "I'd really be shocked if they are now choosing death and destruction of their property over peace, security and stability."

Kimuge said the Kalenjin elders have been watching President Uhuru and his close associates very carefully, since he shook hands with Raila Odinga. "It is true in 2007, we supported that Luo man, but he is a trouble maker and we don't know what he is up to now. Still, President Uhuru is a puzzle to us: Even if he wants to now fight Ruto, did he have to use Raila to fix him?" The farmer said the Kalenjin elders were yet to respond to the March 2018 handshake, the May 2018 [kutangatanga](#) (roaming about) statement and, lately David Murathe's 'absurd' remarks about Deputy President. "We're biding our time, closely observing the unfolding political happenings as we head to 2022, we've also not engaged our counterparts the Kikuyu elders, maybe we'll in days to come by, but at an appropriate time, the Kalenjin elders may find it necessary to speak their mind."

The mzee stated that if it was Raila causing havoc and friction within the Jubilee fraternity, then it is incumbent upon President Uhuru to rethink the political value of the handshake, else it may not augur well in the North Rift. "In 2007, we saw how Kikuyus lost lives and their property destroyed, especially in Uasin Gishu, we don't want that scenario repeated, yet I'll reiterate this: It is always important to honour a promise you've made with someone."

If Kimuge, a Keiyo from Iten was implicit about his political feelings, sometimes struggling to hide them and sound unduly polite, despite being DP's fanatical loyalist, Reuben Cheruiyot a Kipsigis from Bomet County was explicit about the current Jubilee Party turf wars being waged between President Uhuru and his Deputy's respective camps.

Cheruiyot, is in his late 30s and has a cool mien, a suppressed easy laughter, with a knack for wisecracks and an unrepentant roving eye. He speaks with a soft voice, almost inaudible and repeats his sentences for emphasis sake. With his crimson suits worn without a tie, Cheruiyot could easily pass for the city of Nairobi's wheeler-dealers, or tenderpreneurs, who are always on the lookout to strike deals with hungry middle cadre government bureaucrats.

Born and bred on the outskirts of Bomet town, Cheruiyot is well-heelled politically and properly ingratiated with the political networks of the Kalenjin nation. He is a member of the Kalenjin Professional Forum, Governor Joyce Laboso's and Senator Christopher Langat's inner networks, both of Bomet County, among his various political liaisons within the Kalenjin political elite circles and, keeps tabs with the inner sanctum of some of Ruto's close associates.

"We've been keeping a close watch on President Uhuru's actions and utterances since the maiden handshake with Raila Odinga and I can tell you he is treading on a misguided trajectory," said Cheruiyot. In a move that took Kenyans by complete surprise, President Uhuru Kenyatta on the mid-morning of March 9, 2018, on the steps of Harambee House, shook hands with his greatest political nemesis Raila Odinga, leader of the Opposition outfit, National Super Alliance (NASA).

Deputy President William Ruto was not part of the handshake. Four months later, on July 8, 2018, in an interview at his Karen residence, with the NTV crew, he downplayed the significance of the handshake, argued that he had been fully aware of it. "In any case, the President doesn't have to consult me in everything he does," Ruto posited nonchalantly. But those who know Ruto says he was still rattled and startled, even as he invited NTV TV crew to his stately compound.

To state that Ruto was ambushed by the handshake is an understatement: "It could never have occurred in his wildest dreams that Uhuru Kenyatta - a man he had practically shared the presidency with, in their first term - would close ranks with his greatest political antagonist. But President Uhuru had just done that four months after he and Ruto had fought tooth and nail to stop Raila, by any means necessary, from snatching the presidential powers from them. As President Uhuru began his 'legacy and last term', Deputy President knew he had it all wrapped up. All that he needed to do was to lay a strategy that would ostensibly consign Raila Odinga into political oblivion. And that is what he had started working on when the handshake saga took place," a Ruto confidante narrated.

"Uhuru and Ruto had spared no epithets and expletives, the worst kind they could ever find to label Raila. Uhuru was not bluffing when he described him as *kimundu giki*, (this ogre) and *mundu muguruki* (mad man), who needed to be stopped in his tracks by whatever schemes that could be assembled. They had sworn he would never rule the country - whether by might or right. Only now for Uhuru to turn around and become buddy buddy with *kimundu giki*".

"That path Uhuru is taking is ill-informed and hurried," said Cheruiyot, striking a pensive mood. "Before he goes off tangent, it is wise for Uhuru to pose and recall why in the first place he had teamed up with Ruto in 2012. It was because of two major things: to fend off the ICC cases and ease off the tensions in Rift Valley region. Let us be clear about one fact: it's because of their teaming up that there is peace in Rift Valley and when I talk about peace, I mean peaceful co-existence between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin."

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"We'd anticipated there would be frictions within Jubilee Party in Uhuru's second term - that is normal in coalition governments - but not of this nature," observed Cheruiyot. "President Uhuru's

recent utterances on Ruto and his apparent dramatic change of body language have been creating palpable tension in the Rift Valley. When he refers to Ruto as this 'young man' and they are separated by only five years, what exactly does he mean? If the President thinks he is ostracizing Ruto, he's grossly mistaken, he is ostracizing the Kikuyus in the Rift Valley."

"President Uhuru is at liberty to pursue his legacy", said Cheruiyot, "but he does not have to demean Ruto. It is a fact that Uhuru's agenda of securing a legacy and William Ruto's presidential pursuits of 2022 are at cross-purposes. It was bound to happen, nothing unusual about this. So, the president feels he needs to assert himself and craves his deputy's support, but the DP is busy with 2022 and therefore, the President is jittery." Edging closer to me, Cheruiyot whispered: "You know the President has always felt inadequate in the presence of William Ruto. He fears Ruto."

For two people who had acted like bosom buddies in the first term, Uhuru's recent dramatic change of behaviour is strange indeed, mused Cheruiyot. "The question we must fundamentally keep asking now is this: "Just when did President Uhuru discover corruption in his government? Are Kalenjins the only corrupt people in Jubilee? It is not a coincidence that this pending talk about lifestyle audit and demeaning of Ruto is happening at the same time. It is careless and unhelpful," said Cheruiyot raising his voice. "It will boomerang on President Uhuru. If there is any lifestyle audit to be done in this country, it must begin with the Kenyatta family and should start in 1963. *Mtego wa panya huingia waliomo na wasiokuwemo.*" The literal translation of this Kiswahili idiom is: oftentimes a trap set to ensnare mice ends up trapping other (unintended) rodents. Translated figuratively, it means; you may set out to lay a trap to catch a (unsuspecting) foe, only for the trap to end up catching your (closest) friends or even ensnaring yourself. The narrative of, "if there must be any lifestyle audit to be done, it must begin with the Kenyatta family," has spread across Kalenjin land like bush fire.

Cheruiyot told me Gideon Moi, son to Daniel arap Moi was being used by forces that want to frustrate and scuttle Ruto's path to the presidency. "We know them: it is the deep state and Kikuyu hegemonists," he said. Ruto learnt valuable political tricks from the grand master and 'professor' of Politics, but the DP's relationship with Daniel arap Moi is bad: there's no love lost between the two, but in May 2018, he had to go and see him, observed Cheruiyot. "They may not be friends, but Moi is our (political) father." Cheruiyot said the May 3, 2018 visit was scurried by Gideon Moi, the Baringo Senator and last born son to the ageing Moi. "You think Ruto is foolish to just happen on (senior) Moi's Kabarak home without prior arrangement?"

"Gideon thinks he's cunning? He's a spoilt brat, he'll soon know, who between him and Ruto is more cunning." Accompanied by Charles Keter, (Cabinet Secretary for Energy) among others, Ruto landed with a Kenya Pipeline Company (KPC) helicopter on the Kabarak lawns in the hope of shaking Moi's hand. To Ruto's fury, Moi snubbed him. In response the Rift Valley MPs allied to Ruto lashed out at Gideon, accusing him of behaving like the gatekeeper to the ex-President's Nakuru home.

At the Kerio View Hotel in Iten and seated overlooking the breathtaking picturesque Kerio valley, Kibiwott Koross pointing yonder across the valley towards Baringo County, shared similar sentiments about Gideon: "We know which forces are cheating Gideon that he can be president of this country. He's never going to be anything other than what he already is - a senator - which he got out of respect for senior Moi by the Baringo people. He says he still pondering whether to run in 2022 or not. Gideon is a snob and joker. Maybe one day he will vie for the presidency, but certainly not in the next general election." Koross, a journalist, was a features writer at the *Star* newspaper, where I had once worked.

"Gideon was elected senator courtesy of Uhuru Kenyatta and his wife Zahra," said another source, who is knowledgeable on the subject matter of Baringo politics, and who requested anonymity.

“Uhuru came to Baringo pleaded with the people to vote for Gideon, because the people were reluctant. It had to take the intervention of the President himself - but more fundamentally, his wife.” My source alleged it was Zahra who distributed cash to women’s groups, the youth and voters around the county, canvassing for her husband. “Gideon is so mean, he only knows how to surround himself with menacing bodyguards...,” said the source. Here, he is referred to as GMO,” a pun that likened Gideon Moi to artificial (read fake) nature of GMO (genetically modified organisms) food.

“One of the great lessons that Ruto took to heart from Moi was to be generous and stay close to the people,” said Koross. “Ruto has been an excellent student of President Moi: he’s generous and social. Even though Gideon is his father’s son, he’s learned nothing - he’s a miser and anti-people.”

But a close associate of Gideon Moi told me this talk of booking an appointment by Ruto men, is all a fabrication. “Neither Ruto, nor his henchmen booked any appointment, he just arrived unannounced. You just don’t do that, yet, he knew what he was doing,” said the associate. “Ruto had a sinister agenda - he wanted to score with this trip - he knew whatever the outcome, he was going to make news and come out as the winner.” The associate said the DP in a me-too moment, decided he should also visit the Kabarak Home and not be seen to have been left behind, after Raila Odinga, had visited the former president on April 12, 2018. “He wanted to send a message to his Kalenjin base that he can also see Moi at will, and if he cannot, then, they will know who is working against their interests in capturing the presidency in 2022.” When Moi snubbed him, Ruto supporters turned the venom on the younger Moi, tongue lashed and accused him of being jealous of Ruto’s presidential ambitions.

“William Ruto has been looking for an opportunity to trip Gideon so that he can tackle him in a duel by dragging him through the mud and finishing him completely,” said Gideon’s confidante. “But Gideon has refused to swallow the bait, choosing not to engage Ruto in whatever storm he and his people create.” Even though Ruto was an “A” student of Moi’s school of politics, there are some crucial lessons he seems to have skipped, said the associate. “Moi was very patient, very obedient and totally loyal to his boss. He never did anything that would have been interpreted to mean he was undermining Kenyatta for all the time he was his Vice President. Ruto seems to want to take the battle to his boss’s corner.”

During the 2017 presidential campaigns, Ruto’s point men in the Rift Valley region would assure their supporters that the DP was as good as on the driver’s seat, “since the President himself is always busy enjoying (read drinking) himself, all the time,” a Ruto loyalist confided in me in Eldoret town. “Let us vote for Uhuru: while he will be drinking, the DP will be the one calling the shots. Look at the number of our sons and daughters in parastatal positions...*sisi ndio serikali*...we are the government.”

Once back in Nairobi, I asked a friend of President Uhuru whether this was true - about these allegations made by the DP’s men in 2017 campaigns. “Well, as you can now see for yourself: you can enjoy yourself and be equally tough”, he said in jest.

Cheruiyot mused loudly that they (the Kalenjin) always knew the Kikuyu would betray them, “Even Ruto has always known that, so nothing new there, but this current overt machinations is something we’ll have to deal with as the situation demands and unfolds.” If President Uhuru chooses to be dishonest towards Ruto, that is really up to him, said Cheruiyot. “It just goes to strengthen the political stereotype among Kenyans, about Kikuyus not keeping their word.” It was an observation that Brenda also from Bomet reiterated: “So, the Kikuyu (leadership) has decided to betray the Kalenjin? Kikuyus have always been like that. But, that’s all well and good. But this time round, they will have to countenance with a man who is ready to take the battle to their yard. *Huyu mwanaume yuko tayari kupambana nao, yeye sio kijana yao*. This man (Ruto) is all too ready to face them (the Kikuyus) and therefore, he is not their boy.”

The stereotype notwithstanding, Cheruiyot mentioned to me that the first round of the Jubilee factional wars in 2018 had resulted in Ruto camp's win: "The calling of both camps' troops to order was a result of a temporary truce called by the leaders of the respective camps: Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto." On June 29, 2018, President Uhuru and his deputy held a "crisis" meeting to "iron out" and "streamline" differences that had given the impression that Jubilee Party was wrought with infighting and on the verge of collapsing. After that meeting, Ruto asked his foot soldiers to observe the cessation and cease throwing brickbats towards their counterparts, the Central Kenya MPs, and instead talk about development.

"There wasn't a cessation of anything and everybody knew it," said Cheruiyot. "This is a protracted battle and we're ready for it, *sisi hatuogopi*, we are not afraid." He reveled in the fact that the Ruto camp's strategy had worked: "the dragging of Uhuru's younger brother Muhoho Kenyatta into the murky waters of the supposedly war on corruption was too much to bear on Uhuru Kenyatta's camp and particularly, the larger Kenyatta family, which has always kept their social affairs very private and away from the prying eyes of Kenyans."

As President Uhuru maintained that the war on graft was unrelenting and as the fight against it reached its zenith, Muhoho was fingered by Aldai constituency MP Cornelly Serem on June 26, 2018, as being one of the people who had imported contraband sugar, through his company Protech Investment. It forced the President to state publicly that if his brother was guilty of any corruption offences, he should not be spared and should equally face the law. It was a strained statement made in the heat of the battle for supremacy between Uhuru's faction and his deputy's.

"The David Murathe's 2019 new year anti-Ruto [utterances](#) were not wholly unexpected," said Koross. What shocked the Kalenjin people was his brazen and naked attacks on Ruto. *Makibarjin tarit kwangoi*." Translated the Kalenjin proverb means - you do not show the bird the arrow. "If a hunter identifies a bird he want to bring down, he does not directly point the arrow to the bird, because it will fly away, you must catch it by surprise."

The Deputy President has cautioned against verbal retaliation, "Some of the Kalenjin MPs were furious with Murathe's statement, still the DP cautioned patience: 'we should not be confrontational,'" he said. "*Ongemuite amu 2022?*" Now we just shut up because of 2022?" posed the MPs.

An Eldoret businessman who described Murathe as an attack dog said the President's silence in the face of Murathe's attack on Ruto was ominous, "but we can live with that, still, he should have cautioned and controlled the dog not to bark uncontrollably." The businessman said, "the Kalenjin are happy, the attack dog-in-chief had yelped this early and exposed his master's scheme soon enough: we now know how to take the battle to their doorstep."

The businessman said since the *kutangatanga* snide remark by the President, last year, the Kalenjin community has been keenly observing the President's body language. "It's from that time that we noticed his handlers started scripting statements that had a different tone from the one we were used to from Uhuru." The businessman said the narrative of linking all state sleaze on Ruto by President Uhuru Kenyatta camp had succeeded insofar as the elites are concerned: "Wanjiku and Cherop are not bothered by this narrative, they really would care less." He said the Kalenjin were fully aware of how President Uhuru's camp was working overtime on crafting a narrative of that links state corruption to Ruto.

The businessman was categorical that Ruto's campaign team does not need President Uhuru's endorsement or support. "We can fight our own battle - leadership is earned and fought for - not handed over. Ruto is not Kalonzo (Musyoka) or (Musalia) Mudavadi who have been waiting to be

endorsed by being declared *'Tosha'*, so we are not afraid of our enemies, we can take on them on any front, any day."

Amid this apparent chest thumping by the Rift Valley elites, the ethnic Kalenjin base from which Deputy President William Ruto hopes to launch his biggest political project ever, is restless, and now, has been exposed by the emerging turbulent and choppy waters of succession politics. At the heart of this state of uneasiness, is their food economy that is facing a meltdown, hence affecting their livelihood, the ever-precarious land ownership in the Rift Valley region and a destiny beholden to the personality cult.

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