



Cyril Ramaphosa and his long walk to the Union Buildings

A new beginning had dawned on the southernmost tip of Africa and everyone was excited about it. But the challenges that remain after almost a decade of Zuma's misrule cannot be overstated.

By Oscar van Heerden

Mandela made bold post his presidency that Cyril Ramaphosa was in fact his first choice when it came to who should be his deputy president and ultimately his successor. So, why is it that others around Mandela at the time felt differently and convinced him into accepting Thabo Mbeki as his anointed successor?

It seems Mandela was overly concerned with the fact that the ANC

Presidency had had a Xhosa person at its helm for decades already and that others in the ANC would see this as unfair. But after consultation with many elders and in no small measure Mandela's mentor, Walter Sisulu, this X factor concern was put to rest, and hence Mandela agreed to Mbeki.

Cyril is the first Venda to occupy the West wing at the Union Building and this achievement speaks volumes with regards to the ANC's character

and principles. To elect a person to the highest office in the land that hails from the smallest tribe in the country sends a clear and powerful message that anyone, no matter what background, class status, gender or tribe can aspire to be President of this great country of ours.

President Cyril, like many of us, has multiple characters that define him. We can talk of Cyril the religious activist, Cyril the trade unionist, Cyril the

negotiator, Cyril the fly fisherman, Cyril the Nguni cattle farmer and, of course, Cyril the billionaire businessman.

Since his days at school Cyril Ramaphosa felt compelled to fight the Apartheid system and found his calling to do so in the Student Christian Movement (SCM). His activism in the SCM continued during his years at the University of the North or Turfloop as it is affectionately called. A bush college during the 1970s and '80s, it also served as a formidable political education training ground. It most certainly is where CR would have cut his teeth in Marxist ideology, historical and dialectical materialism, black consciousness and of course the congress movement traditions. For CR the trade union movement was an obvious choice since he had a passion for workers' rights and demonstrated such astute abilities in negotiations. This ability stood him in good stead when it came to negotiating the Constitution for the Republic in a hostile multi party environment.

It was only after the completion of the drafting and signing into law of the Constitution of the Republic that he decided to take a break from active politics and enter the business world in earnest. Here, the new legislation with regards black economic empowerment came in handy and he established an empowerment company called Shanduka. Being an astute negotiator and having made some strategic friends in the corporate sector, his business took off like wild fire. This also in part happened because at the time the predominately white private sector and captains of industry also understood that some black industrialists and entrepreneurs needed to be created to give some semblance of normality post 1994. This enabled Cyril to capitalise on the situation and indeed make billions of rands and create significant wealth. Shanduka played in various sectors such as mining, game farming, telecommunications and so much more.

Though Cyril has remained an ANC NEC member since 1997, his return to active politics must have come as a surprise to himself and many others, especially also because the one that was asking for his return was a rather

unsavoury character, Jacob Zuma.

But it seems clear now that a plan was put in place and that his long lost dream would be fulfilled, that of becoming the next President of South Africa.

But Zuma had other plans. For him Cyril was just someone who would legitimate Zuma and his cronies in the then ANC NEC and also a healthy distraction from the real plan.

Zuma from the very start had a plan surrounding his succession and Cyril was never part of it. Only two years after he became President, he insisted that his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma be forwarded as a candidate for the new African Union Chairperson. This was not necessarily her plan but once the party took the decision she had to adhere to it. Lots of money, campaigning and lobbying

“Cyril is the first Venda to occupy the West wing at the Union Building and this achievement speaks volumes with regards to the ANC’s character and principles.”

took place all over the continent to ensure that her candidacy succeeded. It is apparent now that Zuma wanted this in order to ready his ex-wife for the Presidency of the Republic come the 2017 December Conference of the ruling party.

But Cyril would have none of it. He served President Zuma with diligence and commitment and he served his party with distinction, so why now would they want to strip it away from him again? He readied himself for battle towards the national conference.

It was going to be the mother of all showdowns. It was about the leadership of the oldest liberation movement on the African continent, the century plus five years old African National Congress. For most this was to be a do or die moment in the history

of the ANC. Many had told themselves and others that if the Zuma faction wins, their support for the ANC will surely die. For the Zuma faction there was an attitude of good riddance if you do not want to be part of the ANC. Knives were out and the whole world's eyes were on the Nasrec conference scheduled to take place over five days.

To say tension was high would be an understatement; the whole country was on tenterhooks. Most people were glued to the television and watching just about every news channel in the hope of getting some information about what was going on behind the closed doors of the ANC conference. The Zuma people it seems have the upper hand, so the information would leak and the currency would respond, usually negatively. No wait, it seems the Cyril group is dominating the discussions and resolutions, a sigh of relieve from citizens on social media and the currency again responds, this time positively.

We are all told Conference has entered the election phase of the top six of the governing party now, and we shall await for the more than 5000 delegates to cast their respective votes and for the independent electoral commission to count and verify the ballots. All this, under the watchful eye of the Integrity Committee members of the ANC; these are the elders elected to oversee integrity matters.

It seemed the entire country was in limbo during those fateful few hours, some opting to go and sleep and get the news in the morning whilst others simply made more coffee and stayed up in order to get the results immediately after the verification process. In fact the results were only made available the next afternoon at about three o'clock.

There were reliable accounts of recounts upon recounts, the margins between some contenders were just too narrow to call, we were being told by pundits and journalists alike. Never before was the outcome of the ANC presidential election this intriguing. Markets were also playing their part as the currency and the Johannesburg stock exchange rose and fell depending on certain leaks from the corridors of the conference. Delegates were equally being bandied around and money to

buy votes was in plentiful supply. It seemed at some point that everyone had an interest in the outcome, from the various State Institutions to some private business people, but most of all, the citizens of South Africa.

Cyril throughout this period remained calm and focussed and in fact already carried himself like a President in waiting. Proxy wars were being fought daily and in the dead of night in the various hotels where delegates were sleeping. Caucus meetings took place until the wee hours of the mornings. At some point it seemed clear that Zuma's well laid plans were coming to fruition, but alas...

When the IEC announced the voting results, it was a stone-faced President Zuma who looked the most disappointed. His well laid plans backfired spectacularly. Suffice to say, there remain no honour amongst thieves for it was after all his own that betrayed him in the end. David Mabuza is the one that looked his master in the eyes and said I've got your back Baba, knowing full well that he intended to deliver the fatal blow into Zuma's back.

Cyril Ramaphosa, it was announced, was the new President of the governing party, the ANC and by extension come the 2019 election the next President of the Republic of South Africa. As we now know, he has had to occupy the position of the President of the country a little earlier than the 2019 elections.

The relief, the sense of satisfaction, gratification, consummation and contentment was immediately evident in South Africa, the Continent and around the world. A new beginning had dawned on the southernmost tip of Africa and everyone was excited about it.

But the challenges that remain after almost a decade of Zuma's misrule cannot be overstated.

The goal posts imposed by citizens have been constantly shifting for Cyril. First, if he and the ANC want support and votes in the upcoming 2019 general elections he had better win the Presidency of the ruling party in December. He did that successfully and then the goal posts shifted again. Now that he is President of the Party, he must get rid of Jacob Zuma or else

no vote. Cyril tried his diplomatic way but ultimately had to force Zuma's hand to get rid of him. President Zuma resigned on Valentine's Day 2018. Again the posts shifted: now that Zuma is gone, Cyril must get rid of Zuma's cronies and Gupta aligned members in the Executive branch of government. The reshuffle came, and ten Ministers were told to pack their bags and leave. Still this did not satisfy many in the country, they shift again and want to insist on the reduction of Ministries and Departments as stipulated in your State of the Nation address, Mr President. And finally the latest demand from certain quarters is that Cyril must deal effectively with the waning economy of South Africa.

With a looming general election I'm sure you would all agree that Cyril is in a very peculiar situation. He

“ Markets were also playing their part as the currency and the Johannesburg stock exchange rose and fell depending on certain leaks from the corridors of the conference.”

has already done so much in a short space of time but he also has to be careful about the divisions that still loom large in the ruling party. The former President's son, Duduzane and some of his Gupta mentors are 'on the run' from authorities, the hawks have begun a process of prosecutions involving State Capture, which will certainly implicate existing Ministers and some of their deputies. Individuals from State owned enterprises are also facing jail time.

And there is a situation brewing in KwaZulu Natal involving the Zulu King and his Ingonyama Trust. Basically, the Trust comprise of millions of hectares of communal and/or so-called tribal land over which the Monarch has final say as to who can get what land. This, according to the 'High Level Panel

on Assessment of Key Legislation and Acceleration of Fundamental Change', is unconstitutional and hence illegal. How he manages these contending priorities and juggles the political balls is the focus of everyone's attention.

Let us also not forget that the ethical and moral fibre of our society has been eroded by the collusionary practices of so many other Private sector players. Steinhoff comes to mind, where billions of rands of pension fund money has been lost because of reckless accounting and investment priorities. There has been collusion in a number of critical sectors, every time affecting the consumers negatively – the construction industry, the bread industry, the banks with their collusion on bank charges amongst others ... and the list continues. This too must remain an area of focus for the President because consumer confidence and trust in the private sector must be restored.

For people forget that he actually has TWO key strategic objectives: the one is the recovery effort of the country, the other the recovery of his own ruling party.

As for the country the challenges remain huge, unemployment is still ballooning, poverty levels remain stubbornly high and our society remains highly unequal. The economy simply does not want to grow and foreign direct investments remain ever elusive.

As for the ruling party, it is a broken ship, lost and drifting on the open seas of political uncertainties.

Its membership system is in tatters – they can hardly provide signed up members with a membership card, which they pay for. The electoral system is open to massive abuse and patronage politics, vote buying is common place. The political education of the cadres of the ANC is non-existent, resulting in poor quality cadres, who think that being involved in the party is for personal gain only. Political careerism is still scoffed at and young people coming into the party do not receive the necessary training to turn them into professional bureaucrats.

This is just a cursory look at these two key challenges and it certainly will take time for President Ramaphosa to

get on top of them.

Then there is still the matter of, 'Matters of State'. After all, he is the Chief Commander and President of the country. As for the Continent which for all intents and purposes did not receive President Zuma's full attention, what are Cyril's plans for the Continent? Not only did we desert the African Union when we took the decision for the Chairperson not to run for her second term but we also allowed the Chairpersonship to go to the smallest (and very corrupt) country on the Continent, which we all know is under the active control of France. How could we? This situation must be remedied immediately.

Old alliances will have to be rekindled and brave new strategies will have to come into play if we are to stem the re-emergence of colonial powers on the continent. Morocco has made a miraculous comeback into the AU and is already making demands about Western Sahara representations in the union. Trouble continues in South Sudan and we have troops in various hot spots on the continent; these need to be managed properly too.

If we turn to world affairs, how must we deal with US President Trump and his wayward tendencies? He calls us and other third world countries 'shitholes', demonstrates a repugnance towards immigrant communities and minorities and wants to massively reconfigure the trade and security architecture globally, which will most certainly negatively affect South Africa amongst others.

We also need to see through to the end decisions such as our withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, which is necessary. Also we not only want a reformed UN Security Council but we could position SA towards a permanent seat on it. Our continued participation in the BRICS formation and what ultimately we want to gain and benefit from such a grouping must also remain uppermost in our collective minds.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has a good opportunity as the incumbent Chairperson of the BRICS this year. This is the time to yet again put Africa high on the agenda. Collaboration between DIRCO and DTI in hosting

the next session of BRICS is required. In my opinion, the South African government should invite the two key economic powerhouses from each of the four regions on the continent as well as the third economy that show the most promise and growth in each of the regions as well. In other words, in Southern Africa, besides South Africa of course, Angola and the DRC should be invited and Botswana as a third participant. East Africa, I suggest Kenya and Ethiopia with perhaps Uganda as a third participant; West Africa, it would be Ghana and Nigeria and a third participant could be Côte d'Ivoire; and finally North Africa would be Egypt and Algeria with Tunisia as the third participant.

Now, these invitees should not just participate and have a seat at the table. Parallel to the BRICS summit, trade and investment sessions must be held with all the countries, in other words Brazil must sit with the African countries

“How he manages these contending priorities and juggles the political balls is the focus of everyone's attention.”

and hammer out a clear trade path. Similarly, China and India must follow suit and all this must take place under the guidance and direction of the South Africans.

Now I know a similar strategy was employed by China at the last BRICS summit, but what could be different with the South African chapter, is that the SA government should also invite the main Cities of these powerhouses. Yes, the Mayors and senior officials should be invited to run alongside the summit in much the same way the cities did it in Paris with the signing of the Paris accord on climate change. Everyone knows that the theatre where all the socio-economic challenges play out is in our cities and that's why they deserve a seat at the big table.

The Department of Trade and Industry must step up and co-ordinate all these sessions and DIRCO must

manage the necessary additional requirements. It is of critical importance that South Africa is clear about what it wants from all these countries, both BRICS partners and its Continental partners.

Cyril must be seen as leading the African delegation; and as such I propose that an African summit in preparation to the BRICS summit be organised by the South African government.

The challenges seem insurmountable, so many matters, so little time. President Ramaphosa has already borrowed from former US President John F Kennedy, when he said. "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country".

His State of the Nation address was such a clarion call. President Ramaphosa was basically saying I cannot do this alone; I need all the help I can get. Civil society, remain ever vigilant and yes do take my government to court if you feel strongly about a matter. Organised labour, do fulfil your duty towards your members but remain a guiding light in the affairs of the ruling party. The judiciary and indeed the Apex Court in the land, your continued contribution in defence of our democracy and constitution must never waiver; and finally, the legislature with all its opposition parties – please continue to represent your various constituencies to the best of your abilities and do hold me and my party to account. For the corner stone of our democracy is not only our constitution but also our multi party governance system.

All these contributions are the ingredients of what can only be described as a strong democracy. A democracy in which we all together say, "We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past, honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land, respect those who have worked to build and develop our country, and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity".

Cyril has come a long way to reach the Union Buildings – but remember we have journeyed the road with him; and it is as much our responsibility to see our country succeed. ■