

wrote about the race for Speaker of the 12th Parliament in March this year, arguing that it could be a bumpy ride for Annet Anita Among. As it has turned out, this was an understatement.

The race has turned out to be probably the most tense and dramatic since 1996. Interestingly, Jacob Marksons Oboth-Oboth, a man who was not in the picture at all since he had not expressed interest in the position, has eventually taken over as the Speaker of the 12th Parliament.

The circumstances under which Among, the flamboyant legislator from Bukedea, "withdrew" her bid for re-election remain murky. But it is clear she didn't withdraw out of her own volition. Among has since been out of public view and Police have been conducting searches at her palatial residences and have seized a number of her personal cars.

The manner in which Among was torpedoed was surprising, a very senior National Resistance Movement (NRM) leader treated as a political leper. It is notable that Among did not feature at all at the

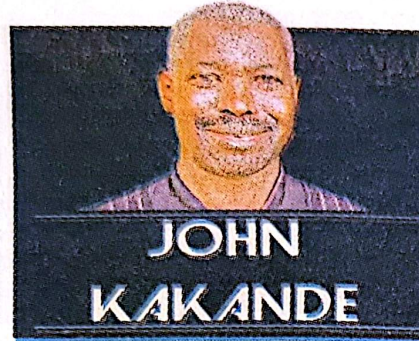
The daunting tasks ahead for the new Speaker

election of her successor and she was never mentioned. There are many unanswered questions.

Certainly, the speakership is not a bed of roses. Since 1996, there hasn't been anyone who has occupied the office and has had a smooth ride or left the office out of his/her own choice. James Wapakhabulo, the first Speaker under the 1995 Constitution, was prematurely removed and given a cabinet position, which many believed was a demotion.

Wapakhabulo had emerged as a political force, having successfully presided over the Constituent Assembly and Parliament. On his watch, Parliament censured then education minister, a bush-war general, Jim Muhwezi; a powerful political and military figure, allegedly over "accumulation of unexplained wealth".

Edward Ssekandi and her deputy Rebecca Kadaga didn't enjoy a harmonious relationship. Kadaga



alleged she was marginalised. Though Ssekandi wanted to get another term after his two terms and reportedly had the backing of the President, Kadaga vowed to oust him if he didn't give way voluntarily. To avoid an explosive showdown, President Museveni appointed Ssekandi to the position of vice-president.

Kadaga and her deputy Jacob Oulanyah were equally sworn enemies. After Kadaga had served

her two terms, she defied her party's position to step aside for Oulanyah to take over. She believed she had all the cards to defeat Oulanyah in an election. Kadaga stood as an independent but grudgingly lost. Probably to avoid a split in the NRM, Museveni appointed Kadaga to Cabinet but in a junior position. Throughout the past five years, Kadaga has rarely attended parliamentary proceedings.

No doubt, the President this time wanted to avoid another showdown over the speakership. Among, according to reports, was determined to stand as an independent (like Kadaga) after her endorsement was withdrawn.

She had to be stopped at all costs. Given her lavish lifestyle and corruption allegations, Among was vulnerable. She had been persistently accused of corruption but she arrogantly ignored the accusations because she believed she had the

trust of her boss, the President. It was a monumental blunder she will live to regret.

The new Speaker, Oboth-Oboth, has a daunting task to restore the battered image of Parliament, which is now perceived as the epicentre of corruption. The new Speaker and MPs must avoid temptation to increase their emoluments. It may be prudent for them to review their budget and remove wasteful expenditure. The NRM Parliamentary Caucus ought to advise their chairperson to stop giving them cash gifts such as the recent shroom announced in Kyankwanzi. These cash gifts undermine Parliament's image.

The bigger challenge for the new leadership is restoring institutional autonomy. Parliament is seen as a rubberstamp merely doing the bidding of the Executive.

The writer is a journalist