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BY AMBROSE MUSASIZI

For six years now, the winds from Lake Victoria have swept through the broken windows of Lukunyu Palace, whispering stories of a kingdom's unfinished chapter.

Grass has swallowed the once-busy compound; iron sheets hang loosely from ageing rooftops, and wooden frames, now eaten away by termites, lean as though burdened by years of waiting.

Kabaka Ronald Mutebi II has never set foot in Lukunyu Palace, located on Nangoma Island in Kyotera District, since his enthronement in 1993. Yet his presence is deeply felt here, spoken of in markets, remembered in songs, and longed for in the hearts of residents who believe the island still holds a place in Buganda's royal story.

Nangoma is a remote island situated south of the River Kagera on the Uganda-Tanzania border. On the Ugandan side, it is accessible only by boat or plane. It is a place of quiet resilience. The lake provides fish; the soil yields modest harvests of cassava and maize. Fishing boats dot the shoreline at dawn, and smoke rises from small homesteads at dusk. Life is simple, sometimes harsh, but always hopeful.

The palace structures standing today were once railway houses, believed to have been built in the early 1940s. When railway employees vacated them, the Kabaka purchased the buildings and designated the area a royal site. For years, they served as a symbolic palace, less grand than others in Buganda, but meaningful nonetheless.

Time, however, has not been kind. The buildings are visibly dilapidated and outdated, no longer befitting a king's residence. Walls are cracked, paint has peeled away, and parts of the compound are overgrown. Despite occasional cleaning efforts by kingdom loyalists, the structures tell a story of neglect.

In 2019, while touring the Masaka Sub-region, the Kabaka promised that

Lukunyu: Kabaka's abandoned palace



Buganda Kingdom loyalists stand in front of the dilapidated Lukunyu Palace on Nangoma Island in Kyotera District. PHOTO/AMBROSE MUSASIZI.

the palace, which has been in a sorry state for more than three decades, would be renovated and added to the list of tourist sites in the kingdom. To many, this was more than a remark; it was both a command and a promise. The pledge revived hope among residents, who had long desired renewed recognition from the kingdom.

Mr Jude Muleke, the Buddu County chief (Pokino), said preparations began immediately after the Kabaka's directive. "The King's word is not something to be taken lightly," he explained. "Plans were discussed, consultations were made, and groundwork began to ensure that Nangoma would once again reflect the dignity of Buganda."

Progress, however, has been slow. The island's remoteness presents logistical challenges, and resources must be carefully mobilised. Still, leaders insist the commitment remains firm.

Ms Edinah Kumanya, the Nangoma Sub-county chief, has witnessed both the frustration and determination of residents.

She said development slowed significantly after the reign of Ssekabaka Edward Muteesa II ended. Muteesa II was warmly welcomed in Nangoma and had initiated the construction of a bridge connecting the island to Kagera. That ambitious project stalled after he ceased being king, leaving residents isolated and struggling for progress.

"People long to see the Kabaka in Nangoma," Ms Kumanya said. "Though the area is dominated by Baziba, Bahaya, and Banyarwanda, many with cross-border ties to Tanzania, they respect and cherish the Buganda Kingdom. They follow its activities closely."

Indeed, Nangoma's identity is unique. While it has relatively few Baganda compared to other areas, loyalty to Bu-

BACKGROUND

Lukunyu Palace is one of the six palaces of the Buganda Kingdom. It sits on the shores of Lake Victoria at Lukunyu Landing Site in Nangoma Sub-county, Kyotera District.

The palace was one of Ssekabaka Muteesa II's favourite retreats. He purchased it in 1961 from Uganda's then-governor, Sir Frederick Crawford, before modifying it.

ganda remains strong.

In recent years, kingdom officials have installed parish chiefs (Abatongole) to strengthen administrative presence.

Ms Agnes Namusiitwa, the vice chairperson of Kyotera District and a kingdom loyalist in Kakuuto County, believes the emotional bond between Nangoma and the Kabaka runs deep.

"The people here follow Buganda's activities keenly," she says. "They are truly eager to host the Kabaka. I am certain that once he sets foot in Nangoma, the joy will be overwhelming. Many have

carried that hope for years."

For residents, renovating the palace is more than bricks and mortar. It represents recognition, unity, and belonging, an affirmation that even an island on the edge of the kingdom matters.

Buganda Kingdom spokesperson Israel Kazibwe said the kingdom's cabinet resolved to hand the project to the Minister of Culture, Mr Anthony Wamala, who confirmed that plans are being finalised to construct buildings befitting a Buganda palace.

"I will conduct further consultations across departments, but plans are underway to construct better buildings and give the palace a facelift," Mr Wamala said.

Momentum is now building. Community meetings have been held, and local leaders are mobilising residents to contribute labour and locally available materials. Fishermen have pledged a portion of their earnings to the reconstruction fund. Farmers are offering produce to feed workers who will participate in rebuilding efforts.

Senior officials within the Buganda Kingdom have expressed readiness to guide the project, offering architectural direction to ensure the renovated palace reflects both tradition and dignity. The vision goes beyond repairing old railway houses; it aims to establish a structure worthy of a royal visit, blending cultural heritage with modern functionality.

Plans under discussion include a modest yet symbolic palace complex: a main hall for royal functions, accommodation quarters, and a courtyard for community gatherings. The site could evolve into both a royal residence and a cultural tourism landmark, boosting Nangoma's economy.

As the sun sets over the lake, casting golden light on the worn walls of the old palace, one can almost imagine the transformation. Where silence now reigns, drums may soon echo. Where cracked walls stand, pillars of renewed pride may rise.

Nangoma has waited patiently. Its people have endured isolation and slow development, yet their loyalty has not faded. The palace may be abandoned, but hope remains alive.

Perhaps when Kabaka Mutebi II finally steps onto Nangoma's shores, he will find not ruins, but a community that rebuilt its palace with its own hands, guided by its leaders and strengthened by faith in the kingdom.