

The intelligence agency's findings, the product of an elaborate surveillance, painstakingly sketch how Ms Among used Parliament to build a war chest

BY MONITOR REPORTER

A confidential dossier pieced together by covert intelligence shows that State actors put Anita Among under surveillance as early as 2021, when she was Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

The voluminous collection of documents, a copy of which *Weekend Monitor* has seen, discloses that "a reliable asset" of one of Uganda's intelligence agencies, covertly deployed, had Ms Among within eyesight when, with his strength rapidly receding, it became apparent that Jacob Oulanyah would never again regain good health.

The intelligence agency's findings, the product of an elaborate surveillance, painstakingly sketch how Ms Among used Parliament to build a war chest. The dossier delivers a sweeping rebuke of Parliament's financial imprudence, pointing out how the legislative branch of government needed little invitation to inflate costs of its big-ticket projects.

In a May 17 statement, Ms Among made clear that she "pledges(s) to continue cooperating with all ongoing investigations as initiated by the relevant organs of the State to get to the root of all the allegations raised," Caleb Alaka, her lawyer, opted not to clarify the position when contacted on Thursday.

One of the big-ticket projects that attracts red flags in the dossier is the parliamentary chamber still under construction. Two items around the new chamber come up for mention in the dossier on account of an alleged exponential increase in costs. Last month, chairing her penultimate plenary session in the 11th Parliament, Ms Among spoke to concerns around the big-ticket project that was started under the speakership of Rebecca Kadaga.

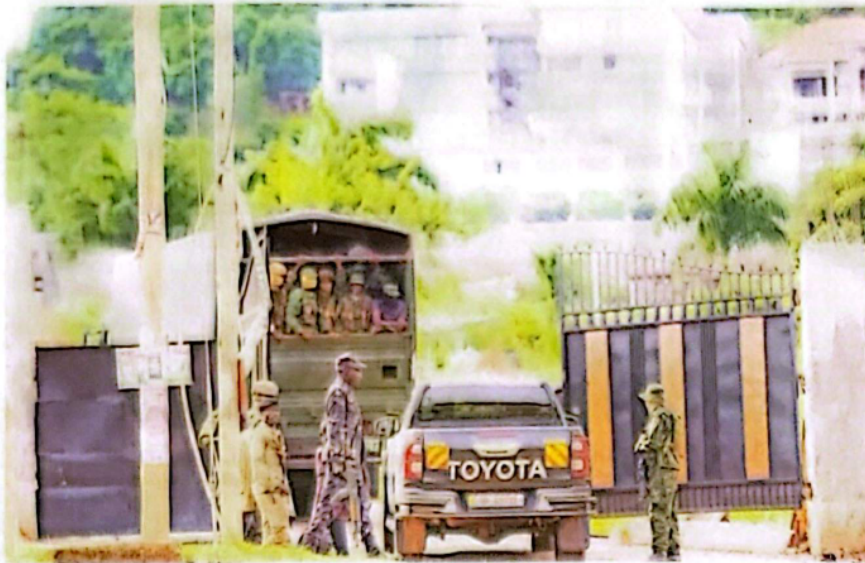
"There was a change of design, and, in that change of design, because of the bomb blast, which took place here, we said we needed a bomb blast-resistant glass. So when that change of design came in, [the Finance Ministry] and [the Parliamentary] Commission agreed to pay directly to the suppliers of [the construction materials]. As we speak today, money is not paid directly to Roko [Construction Company Ltd]. The money is given to suppliers," Ms Among disclosed.

Inflated costs?

Aside from the attendant procurement concerns around the construction of the new parliamentary chamber, intelligence operatives were able to, per the dossier, document a steady stream of other cases where costs were likely inflated. By the backend of 2022, with Ms Among now the substantive Speaker of the 11th Parliament, colossal amounts of money were being moved via accounts of parliamentary staff.

In November of that year, President Museveni was furnished with details of 14 suspicious accounts. He shared the granular details with the State House Anti-Corruption Unit (SHACU) and the

Secret document shows how intelligence surveilled Among



Security personnel arrive at the home of outgoing Speaker of Parliament Anita Among in Kigo on May 18. Security forces have raised several of the former Speaker's homes in an ongoing probe into alleged corruption and abuse of office. PHOTO/FILE

Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA), sanctioning a probe in the process. Investigations are still ongoing, and Ms Among has previously denied any wrongdoing.

"The investigation confirmed that 12 private accounts of parliamentary staff with strong connections to the Speaker had on various occasions received huge sums of money and the said money would be withdrawn in lump sums immediately," the dossier discloses.

The dossier also shines a spotlight on how "between September 6, 2023, and January 29, 2024, a Parliament leader allegedly received a total of Shs2,658,250,000 for alleged travels abroad on official duty, whereas no such travels ever took place." The trips called into question were to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates or UAE (once); Nairobi, Kenya (thrice); Johannesburg, South Africa (once); and Kigali, Rwanda (once).

Procurement fraud?

A significant body of work in the dossier illuminates procurement and logistics fraud purportedly on the watch of Parliament's top brass.

"Procurement of advertising services for Parliamentary Commission from [a local radio station] for a period of two years at a cost of Shs3,135,480,000, which translates into Shs130,645,000 per month," the dossier reveals, "[A national tv] which is considered to have the highest national viewership and coverage throughout the country, receives only Shs130,000,000 per year from Parliament for advertising and promotions services compared to the locally-based [FM radio], which is owned by a Parliament official. This may also be compared with the entire media of Uganda Breweries Limited for promoting its products across the country for a year, which stands at Shs7,000,000,000."

The investigation also unearthed

Issue.
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evidence from a "reliable source in Parliament" that a top Parliament official "receives a commission of \$100 (about Shs3,800) on every ticket" issued by a company alleged to have received a contract for air ticketing for Parliament fall "without any bidding process."

The high-level document also makes a sweeping accusation about alleged "irregular recruitment of staff at Parliament [that] is in contravention of human resource recruitment procedures of the Government of Uganda."

"Relatives of leaders of Parliament and government have placed their relatives on the parliamentary payroll without following the due process of recruitment," the dossier states, adding: "According to a reliable source in Parliament, some illegally recruited staff are not reflected on the payroll for salary to avoid detection of a bloated workforce but are rather concealed in the payment for emoluments that include housing allowance, responsibility allowance, breakfast and lunch. This is done with the full knowledge of [top Parliament leaders]."

Pulling no punches

The Parliamentary Commission was spared no criticism, with the Shs1.7b that was splurged on so-called service awards after a sitting

on May 6, 2022, labelled "a suspicious payment intended to influence the commissioners to rubber-stamp the [a top Parliament official's] personal schemes of looting public funds."

The secret document also discloses that a top Parliament official purportedly used illegal recruitments to not only curry favour with but also "to 'capture' other arms of government", pointing to jobs "offered" to the family and relations of big shots in the Judiciary.

The covert intelligence warns that while the overlap of procurement fraud, inflated costs and illegal recruitments is part of a wider strategy of self-aggrandisement, a senior House official's perceived underhanded activities are not without consequences.

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The portrait of the intelligence effort sketches of the said official is of a rising force that threatens to do more than just hold a powerful grip on the national discourse. The vulnerability that the official managed to create took on different forms, with, for one, "anti-corruption agencies other than SHACU [...] unwilling to take on the leadership of Parliament due to the fear of suffering budget cuts during appropriation in Parliament."

The official is also portrayed as an overbearing figure who centralised power and surrounded themselves with sycophants, freebooters, hangers-on who were not afraid of abusing taxpayers' money.

Search and seizure orders

Most, if not all, of the contents of the

dossier are what law enforcement officers appear to be relying on to underpin their confidence as the sensational raid on Ms Among's properties brings twists and turns each passing day. On Friday, the operations moved to the Speaker Emeritus's palatial countryside home in Bulkedda District.

Top-of-the-line cars have featured heavily in the search and seizure orders that law enforcement officers effected for the better part of this week. Among the four ultra-luxury cars that have been seized are a Rolls-Royce Cullinan, the aftermath of whose purchase appears to have cracked the veneer of Ms Among's invincibility in the office of House Speaker.

"Following the demise of the late Rt Hon Jacob Oulanyah in March 2022, and the subsequent election of the Rt Hon Anita Annet Amoo, as the Speaker deputised by the Rt Hon Thomas Tayebwa, as early as June 2022, the public raised concerns over procurement of two seventh generation \$500 Mercedes Benzes at a cost of Shs2.8 billion from a British company (Alberty Limited) that lacked manufacturer's authorisation, did not issue any warrant and did not provide any bid security," the dossier notes.

Since Ms Among's headlong fall, Jacob Markons Oboth, alias Oboth-Oboth, the West Budama South lawmaker, has emerged as a stronger contender to assume the speakership in the 12th Parliament. Mr Norbert Mao, the Democratic Party president, who is also the Laro-Pece lawmaker, confirmed this week that he remains in the race and wants the top decision-making organ of the ruling party to consider his candidature.

In a May 19 letter to President Museveni, Mr Mao wrote thus: "In particular, I request an opportunity to meet you urgently to discuss this matter further. I also beg your indulgence in the spirit of 1986 and the NRM-DP Cooperation to allow my candidature to be considered by the NRM Central Executive Committee and the NRM Parliamentary Caucus alongside that of the other candidates who have expressed interest."

He adds: "A proper ranking of the strength of each candidate by the Caucus will be a clear indication of the support each candidate enjoys and the candidate most highly rated will then be the one to face the full Parliament. I pledge to abide by the decision of the Caucus."

The leading Opposition party, the National Unity Platform, on Friday unveiled Paul Mwiru as its candidate in the speakership race that culminates with a vote on Monday. Mr Mwiru said his candidature is "a response to a call for new beginnings at the Parliament of Uganda." He added that it is "a call for a more responsive, accountable, people-centred, and exemplary leadership of the national Legislature."

In her May 17 statement, Ms Among said she will rally behind whoever the ruling NRM party endorses. "I pledge my total support to the candidates who will be endorsed by the President and the Party, and Implore all colleague MPs of the 12th Parliament to do the same."