

ional Governance Executive Director Sarah Bireete: "She (former Speaker Anita) is changing public participation in the legislation, even when the law and rules of procedure mandate for 45 days of public participation. She would pass laws in three days!"



Cartoon. Vipers SC have been crowned champions of the 2025/26 StarTimes Uganda Premier League



Mao and the war nobody wanted to fight

The unfolding speakership drama is no longer merely about who occupies the top chair of Parliament. It has become a revealing portrait of how power operates in Uganda: cautiously, indirectly, and often through proxies.

The sudden emergence of Democratic Party (DP) president general Norbert Mao in this tense political drama has raised a fascinating possibility: perhaps his role was never to win the speakership, but to challenge a political dominance many insiders appeared unwilling to confront themselves.

At the dusk of the 11th Parliament, it appeared almost impossible that anyone would unseat or even seriously challenge former Speaker of Parliament Anita Annet Among. Over time, she had accumulated immense political and financial influence, strong enough to intimidate potential rivals.

She had cultivated alliances across regional political blocs and traversed the country alongside President Museveni during the 2026 presidential campaigns. All this positioned her as a powerful pillar within the ruling party.

With this growing perception of inevitability, the National Resistance Movement's Central Executive Committee, and its leaning pressure group, Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), initially endorsed her candidature. Among seemed destined to lead Parliament for a decade, much like some of her predecessors. Yet, only months later, both political entities dramatically withdrew their support.

Even then, she appeared to have no equally formidable challenger from within the NRM. When the President publicly annulled her sole candidature during the Kyankwazi retreat for newly elected NRM Members of Parliament, the political atmosphere

Mao's presence normalised public scrutiny of a figure many had previously treated as politically unassailable.

Rogers Magala
Speakership race



shifted dramatically. The announcement suddenly breathed life into Mao's speakership ambitions.

Museveni's directive effectively closed what had satirically been treated as a "bedroom debate" between the two contenders, Mao and Among. It increasingly appeared that Mao's growing presence in the conversation carried a political purpose that would gradually unfold. His role seemed designed not necessarily to secure the speakership, but to puncture the aura of inevitability that had begun to surround Among.

Looking at how dramatically the speakership race later twisted, with Among, once viewed as the dominant frontrunner, eventually bowing out while facing investigations into alleged corruption, illicit enrichment, and money laundering, one begins to understand why some observers believe sections of the State had become increasingly uncomfortable with the scale of her public image and political influence.

But who would bell the cat? Mao's invitation into what Among described as the NRM "bedroom" did not appear acciden-

tal. Mao is outspoken, legally trained, media-savvy, and politically fearless. He has manoeuvred through some of the DP's most turbulent internal battles and survived the political storm which accompanied the emergence of the National Unity Platform (NUP), which ended the careers of many politicians, especially in Buganda.

Unlike many figures within the NRM, Mao arguably had less to lose socially by openly unsettling entrenched power centres. Over the years, he has developed a thick skin against public criticism and ridicule. At one point, he even branded himself "a one-man army" against NUP Robert Kyagulanyi's "foot soldiers." His sudden proximity to the speakership race instantly disrupted the assumption that Among's position was politically untouchable.

But Mao's candidature may also have represented something deeper: a signal from unseen power brokers. In Ugandan politics, names are often floated not necessarily to win positions, but to send messages. Mao's sudden mention in the speakership conversation may therefore have reflected growing dissatisfaction with Among within sections of the NRM, without those factions directly confronting her themselves.

Ugandan politics has long relied on indirect warfare. Politically sensitive confrontations have often been fought through intermediaries, factions, and strategic alliances rather than direct combat.

Whether Mao truly sought the speakership may ultimately matter less than the role he played in the unfolding drama itself. His presence normalised public scrutiny of a figure many had previously treated as politically unassailable.

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