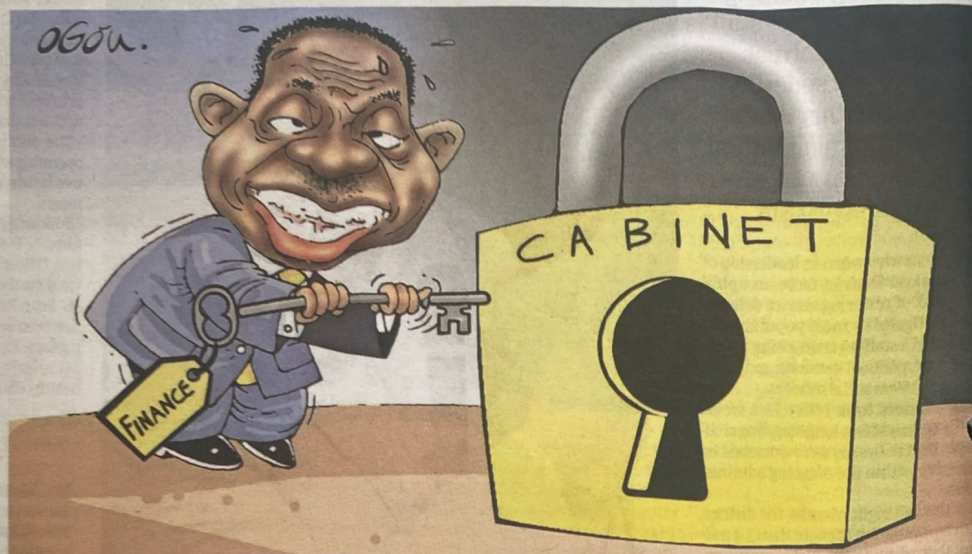


y General of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), Mr David Kabanda, on new Cabinet:
as PLU. Our members were largely demoted or literally put on *katebe*."



Cartoon. Among the notable persons dropped out of Cabinet is long-serving Finance minister Matia Kasaija.



West Nile has been left behind

Across the country, regional power blocs and interest groups have celebrated retention of key Cabinet positions, consolidation of influence, and their ability to safeguard hard-won political and developmental territory. But as the rest of Uganda is protecting its gains, one region—West Nile—is unmistakably losing.

For the first time in 40 years, West Nile has missed a full Cabinet position. The NRM government has historically balanced the national boat with considerable skill, yet our own cornerstone—the long-serving Second Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Gen Hon Moses Ali—has been dropped from the Cabinet. We recognise that he appeared tired, and his retirement from active Cabinet duty is not itself the deepest concern. The problem is the absence of any replacement from West Nile. For decades, Gen Moses Ali was not merely a minister; he was the senior Cabinet face of West Nile.

He carried the hope, the voice, and the representation of over 3.7 million Ugandans from Arua, Madi-Okollo, Terego, Koboko, Maracha, Yumbe, Moyo, Adjumani, Obongi, Pakwach, Nebbi, Zombo, and beyond. When Gen Ali sat in Cabinet, the sub-region had a heartbeat at the highest table of national decision-making. That heartbeat has now gone silent. With his departure, the arithmetic of representation became a national embarrassment. Several of our experienced State ministers have been dropped.

West Nile is not ungrateful for the new faces appointed. We acknowledge and welcome them. However, their appointment does not solve the problem of critical under-representation. The 3.7 million people, many of whom are voters, taxpayers, and patriots—cannot be reduced to only six junior ministers while other sub-regions with smaller populations have multiple full minister slots.

Consider the following uncomfortable truth: West Nile is the largest refugee-hosting region in East Africa. For decades, we

In Uganda's political arithmetic, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.

Anzo William Adiga
Regional balance



have opened our land, our water sources, our forests, and our health facilities to hundreds of thousands of refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bidibidi Refugee Settlement was once the largest refugee camp in the world. Even today, after reconfigurations, it remains among the largest. The hospitality of the West Nile people is legendary.

We have shared our meagre resources with the displaced, often while our own schools remained underfunded, our own roads unpaved, and our own health centres lacking essential medicines.

Yet, despite this unmatched humanitarian burden, not a single State minister for Disaster Preparedness or Refugees has been appointed from West Nile. Is that not a strange reward for hospitality?

West Nile has been left behind for over four decades. 40 years later, the goal of equitable distribution of power and resources remains incomplete. Here is a staggering fact: in 40 years of the NRM government, West Nile has never produced a single Permanent Secretary. In Uganda's political arithmetic, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.

Today, West Nile competes with Karamoja for the worst position on nearly every human development index. We are at the bottom in poverty rates, maternal mortality, child malnutrition, access to clean water, and secondary school completion rates.

This is not because the West Nile lacks potential. We have fertile land, cross-border trade opportunities with DRC, South Sudan, and CAR, abundant minerals, and a hard-working population. The problem is political exclusion.

In the early 1970s, West Nile and Northern Uganda were home to some of the best schools in East Africa. These were centres of academic excellence. Those gains have been systematically reversed. Today, they have dilapidated infrastructure, poorly motivated teachers, and poor examination results.

Dear Mr President, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are fast approaching. We are only a few years away from the target date. On most health indicators—maternal mortality, neonatal mortality, immunisation coverage, skilled birth attendance—West Nile is where Uganda was in 2010. We are a full decade and a half behind the rest of the country.

I would humbly propose a structural solution: the creation of a State minister for West Nile Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister. This minister would have a singular mandate—to unlock the untapped potential of West Nile. Our natural resources, including gold, limestone, and other minerals, remain largely unexploited.

Our agricultural potential, from cocoa, coffee and groundnuts to rice and livestock, is barely half-realised. Zombo has some of the world's finest quality coffee, and Zoka Forest remains home to wild coffee that is drought resistant.

Our cross-border trade with the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic is hampered by poor roads and bureaucratic bottlenecks.

I write this not as an enemy of the government or the President. We ask only for what is fair—representation that reflects our population, our contribution to national peace, our hospitality to refugees, and our potential to drive Uganda's next phase of growth.

Anzo William Adiga, medical doctor, Lecturer at Muni University and former health leader in Uganda Medical Association
anzoism2008@gmail.com