

According to Mr Kabanda, the decision to revoke Ms Among's endorsement followed "fresh guidance" from PLU chairperson Gen Kainerugaba.

BY PHILIP WAFULA

**T**he Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) has been described as the latest wave on the political scene, following the events that have shaped the incoming Parliamentary leadership in the past week.

The PLU is a loose political pressure group pushing for the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba to be the next leader of Uganda after his father, President Museveni. Last week, they withdrew their endorsement of Ms Anita Annet Among and Mr Thomas Tayebwa as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the 12th Parliament respectively.

The newly sworn-in Members of Parliament (MPs) are expected to elect a new Speaker and Deputy Speaker on May 25. The Speaker of Parliament is one of the third most powerful and revered office in the country's governance structure. The announcement by the PLU Secretary General David Kabanda formally quashed a March 11 directive, urging all PLU-leaning MPs-elect to rally behind the duo's re-election bid.

"The endorsement of Ms Anita Annet Among and Mr Thomas Tayebwa as candidates for Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively for the 12th Parliament of Uganda is retracted and withdrawn with immediate effect," Mr Kabanda said at the PLU offices in Kololo, a Kampala suburb.

Ms Among had visited the same offices a few weeks earlier ahead of Gen Kainerugaba's Birthday Run and rebuked those who were reportedly spreading claims that she harboured presidential ambitions of her own in the 2031 elections.

Ms Among became Speaker of the 11th Parliament on March 25, 2022, replacing the late Jacob Oulanyah, who died in office while receiving treatment in Seattle, USA. To further downplay her ambitions for the presidency, Ms Among denied any knowledge of even cocking a gun, a weapon the current President has been familiar with for most of his adult life.

Mr Kabanda said the decision to revoke Ms Among's endorsement followed "fresh guidance" from PLU chairperson, Gen Kainerugaba, who has since endorsed outgoing State Minister for Defence, Mr Jacob Oboth-Oboth for Speaker of Parliament.

"He has been the best minister in our government for the past 5 years. I want to be the first to endorse him for Speaker of Parliament (2026-2031). God bless Hon Oboth-Oboth," Gen Muhoozi posted on his X account.

These remarks followed a high-level meeting at State House chaired by President Museveni, which was reportedly attended by Ms Among and her predecessor, Ms Rebecca Kadaga.

During Mr Oboth-Oboth's thanksgiving ceremony in Mukono District at the weekend, Mr Kabanda informed the West Budama Central MP that as President Museveni's preferred choice, he would become the Speaker of the 12th Parliament in waiting.

"... This message has come from my chairman of PLU, and he has instructed



President Museveni (right) has a word with outgoing Speaker of Parliament Anita Annet Among during the State of the Nation Address, last year. PHOTO/FILE

## PLU vs NRM: Who holds the cards?



Among cuts cake at Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba's 52nd birthday recently. PHOTO/PLU X HANDLE



Jacob Oboth-Oboth during the celebration of the candidature announcement. PHOTO/IBRAHIM KAVUMA

ed me to inform you that it has been endorsed by His Excellency the President of Uganda," Mr Kabanda said to thunderous applause from the over 300 MPs-elect in attendance.

The NRM is yet to respond to this decision, which literally locked Ms Among and Mr Tayebwa out of retaining their former positions in the 12th Parliament, going by the emerging strength of Gen Muhoozi and his PLU.

### A quiet coup?

Asked whether power has slowly shifted from the NRM Secretariat to PLU, Prof Gerald Kagambirwe Karyeija, the dean of the School of Management Sci-

ence at Uganda Management Institute (UMI), said the pressure group is neither turning back nor can be ignored.

"Political actors have to either work with it, for it, around it, or against it. It is the latest wave in the political scene," he said on Sunday, adding that going forward, there will be an increase in the influence and dominance of PLU in shaping the politics of NRM and the nation.

"Next will be the formation of the Cabinet and significant positions in the country. It may also emerge, not as a key factor in decision-making, but also in policy initiation and legislation. We are going to see an increase in political ac-

tors either running to get PLU numbers or registration and affiliation," he said.

"The Opposition and activists are now to join (former Kira Municipality MP) Semuju Nganda's narrative on PLU, especially those who had either underestimated or dismissed the outfit. This may include legal battles and massive social media activity."

Prof Kagambirwe said PLU is positioning itself to gain or increase political legitimacy for being reformist in this *kisanja* (term).

Governance researcher Job Kijja says the current friction between the NRM and PLU over the speakership race does not signal a total breakup, but a significant and troubling internal reconfiguration of power.

"PLU is no longer just a mobilisation wing, but a decisive kingmaker shaping institutional leadership," he says.

Mr Kijja also points to the overwhelming attendance of the MPs-elect at Mr Oboth-Oboth's thanksgiving ceremony, and open endorsements from NRM's deputy Secretary General, Ms Rosemary Namayanja.

"That proves that the NRM establishment is rapidly aligning with the strategic direction set by Gen Kainerugaba," he said.

However, Mr Kijja warned that this transition exposes a deeper institutional crisis.

"With the CDF and the military apparatus now playing a central, managing role in deciding legislative leadership, it is fundamentally absurd that the leadership of independent arms of government are being determined by actors outside Parliament," he regrets.

Mr Kijja insists that Ugandans are witnessing a de facto military takeover of the Legislature.

"This overt interference severely damages the democratic principle of separation of powers and pokes massive holes in the ability of the next Parliament to be any better than the 11th. Instead of a robust, independent watchdog, the 12th Parliament risks being born captive to military dictates."

To contextualise PLU's alleged interference in the work of independent arms of the government, Mr Ka-

banda said: "Justice Teko has already been guided on how to handle that case [court petition], involving incoming Masaka City Woman MP Ms Just Nameere, and Ms Rose Nalubowa of the National Unity Platform (NUP)."

The initial results of the January 15 polls had Ms Nalubowa winning with about 25,443 votes against Ms Nameere's 20,324. Following a court-ordered recount supervised by Masaka Chief Magistrate Albert Asimwe, Ms Nameere won with 25,502 votes, while Ms Nalubowa garnered 23,176.

While the Judiciary is yet to respond to Mr Kabanda's latest allegations of fronting Justice Isaac Teko to hear the case, Mr Kijja says its alleged silence should be interpreted as "institutional caution", rather than submission.

"It is common for the Judiciary to avoid commenting on political cross-fire until formal processes are active. However, the fact that political actors feel empowered to openly claim influ-

# 2022

March, 2022, Anita Annet Among replaces the late Jacob Oulanyah, who had passed on in Seattle, USA.

ence over judicial outcomes highlights the immense and overbearing political weight PLU currently wields across all State structures in the pre-election landscape."

Former Aruu County MP Odongo Otto says we are seeing the leadership of the armed forces and Executive determining what happens in the Parliament.

"The two have a deep hand in who should be the Speaker, yet the Parliament should check the Executive," Mr Otto said, warning that the 12th Parliament will be the weakest as its leadership will be determined by another institution.

Mr Odongo says Uganda has "four centres of power", including President Museveni, who is more powerful than all the institutions, Gen Muhoozi, Gen Salim Saleh, and First Lady Janet Museveni.

The NRM is yet to formally comment on this notion. Efforts to reach the NRM director for communication, Mr Emmanuel Dombo, and the senior manager for Information, Communications, and Public Relations at the NRM, Mr Rogers Mulindwa, for a comment were futile by press time.