A few CEC members shouldn't choose Speakers – NRM youth

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

KAMPALA. The decision by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) to endorse incumbent Speaker of Parliament Anita Among and her deputy, Mr Thomas Tayebwa, for another term has set the cat among the pigeons within the party, with youthful members calling it unfair.

A group of party youth leaders from various districts, under the umbrella body of the NRM Revolutionary Network (NRN), told reporters yesterday that the move by the NRM CEC, the party's top decision-making body, to ringfence the positions for incumbents not only undermines internal democracy but also clips the wings of emerging leaders.

The disgruntled youth argued that the current system, where a handful of "wealthy" individuals elected by a college of "hungry party members" meet in a boardroom to decide the Speaker and Deputy Speaker for 529 legislators representing 45 million people, is a bridge too far. They vowed not to tolerate a process that slams the door on several capable leaders.

But Mr Emmanuel Dombo, the spokesperson of the NRM CEC and the party's mouthpiece, dismissed the youth as indisciplined and ignorant of the matters at hand.

"Matters of CEC are not discussed in the public media briefing, and if they had any issue, they would have petitioned the party structure from the Secretary General and others because all people, including youths, are represented at CEC," he said.

He added: "Discussing party leaders who are on the level of CEC is a sign of indiscipline and calls for punishment."

However, Mr Jamir Kazibwe, who led the youth yesterday, said: "...We propose that the endorsement of candidates for Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament be a decision of the full NRM Parliamentary Caucus, not a preserve of a small group of top party figures operating under the CEC structure. The Caucus, composed of all elected NRM Members of Parliament, represents the collective political mandate of the party in the House."

Mr Edgar Mugisha, the Sheema District NRM youth leader, said: "The President has consistently emphasised meritocracy as a guiding principle in governance. But where is the meritocracy if positions are decided without internal competition? From LC1 to LC5 and parliamentary positions, the party conducts primaries. Why should the position of Speaker be different?"

Discontent of the youth came barely a month after the CEC, reportedly chaired by its Chairperson and President Museveni, endorsed Ms Among and her deputy Tayebwa for another term.

The race for Speaker has gathered steam after Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister Norbert Mao informally launched his bid for the seat, promising a more accountable Parliament.

He said: "The talk did not start with me. But when there is goodwill around your name, neither you nor your party can ignore it."

Mr Tayebwa later responded, saying: "Mr Mao's family is friendly to my family because during his wedding, I was his best man and my wife was a matron but I am also very sure that if Nobert Mao was the President of Uganda and the chairman of the NRM party, he would not give the position of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker to persons that are not from the political party because it will be suicide for the party."

"The cooperation we have with my senior brother Nobert Mao, the cooperation with the Democratic Party, is a cooperation, which we welcome as the NRM government because it's a great addition," the Ruhinda North MP added: referring to the 2021 agreement Mr Mao signed with NRM paving way for his current ministerial position.

ELECTION OF HOUSE HEADS

Article 82 of the Constitution provides for the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker by MPs from among themselves. The election is conducted during the first sitting of Parliament or when a vacancy arises, under the supervision of the Chief Justice or a designated judge, through a secret ballot requiring a majority vote. Under Parliament's Rules of Procedure, the Speaker is elected from among MPs, with a secret ballot held if the position is contested. Within the NRM, however, candidates for the speakership are traditionally vetted and endorsed by the CEC to ensure party cohesion.

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