

As President Museveni was talking succession and bashing Mr Kibirige Mayanja, about 760 veterans of the NRA, based in Bundibugyo District, were threatening not to vote for him in the 1996 presidential election.

BY ISAAC MUFUMBA

Thirty years ago, President Museveni made his first public comments about the contentious succession question, telling a campaign rally that he would name a successor within the next five years. According to *The Monitor* of April 1, 1996, Mr Museveni made the comments on Saturday, March 30, 1996, in Bombo while addressing members of the Nubian community.

The comments came shortly after one of the leaders of the Nubian community, Ismail Kharim, assured him that the community would overwhelmingly vote for him in the 1996 presidential election, in which he was being challenged for the top job by Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere and Mr Muhammad Kibirige Mayanja.

Ssemogerere was the candidate of the Inter Political Forces Cooperation (IPFC), which brought together the Democratic Party (DP), Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) and National Liberal Party (NLP) of Tiberio Okenyi. The candidature of Mr Mayanja was a product of discussions that educated Muslims in their 30s and early 40s had been having about the politics of the country since 1991.

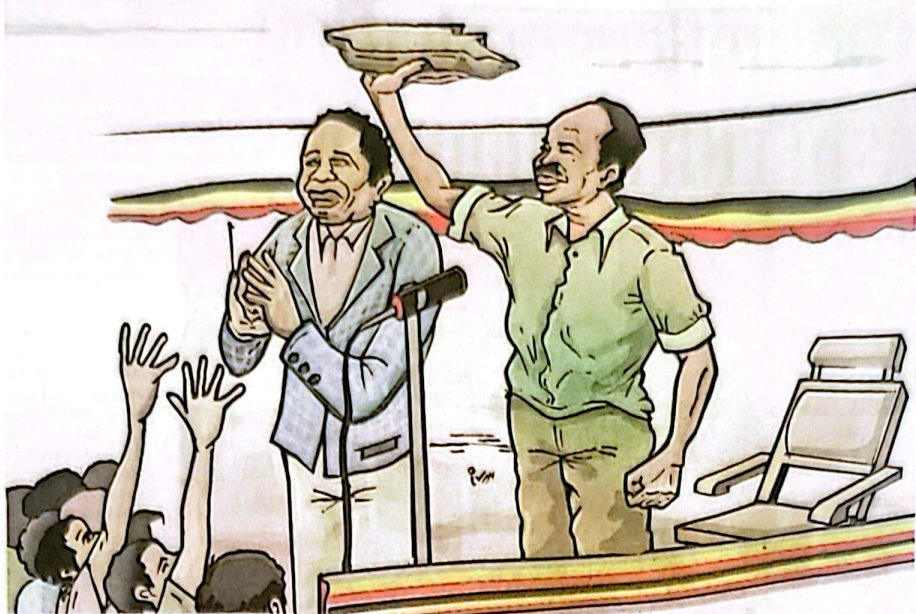
The group that included Hussein Kyanjo, Khalid Lubega, Imam Kasozi and Abasi Kiyimba, among others, and was later joined by non-Muslims such as Alex Ojok, Dr Mukibi Katende, Rev Santos Okeima, Apollo Kasule and Margaret Nalukenge, had by 1993 agreed to register a political party – the Justice, Education, Economic Revitalisation, Morality and African Unity (Jeema), but the adoption by the Constituent Assembly (CA) of Article 269, which barred parties from engaging in "any activities that may interfere with the Movement political system" and also barred political parties from opening and operating branches, holding public rallies or sponsoring candidates for public office" made it impossible for the party to be registered.

Mr Mayanja, who had earlier made an unsuccessful attempt to represent Kawempe in the CA, was the candidate of the unregistered Jeema.

"Choose a candidate who is capable of carrying your *murkaka* [Nubian for grindstone or *lubengo* in Luganda] across a wider river, and let me carry it now; then I can also help you to get a better person to help me after the five years," Mr Museveni was quoted to have told the Nubians.

The newspaper reported that Kharim had reassured the President that their vote would not be determined by their faith.

"We want to assure you, President Museveni, that although one



An illustration of NRM presidential candidate Yoweri Museveni (left) campaigning in Bombo in 1996. ILLUSTRATION BY IVAN SENYONJO

Museveni promises to name successor as NRA veterans back Ssemogerere

of the presidential candidates is a Muslim, that is not our qualification. The Nubian votes are all yours," said Kharim amidst applause.

In return, Museveni assured the Nubians of their safety.

"Feel at home, the NRM government doesn't associate the sins of the father [Amin] with the son or any other relative as it was in the past. If Amin comes back, it is a different story; he was a misleader, and we are only... with you, you were misled," he added.

According to the newspaper, the comments on March 30 were the second day of Mr Museveni's election campaign.

The campaign had been officially launched the day before (Friday, March 29, 1996) at Nakasongola, where the President had also given hints about possible succession.

"In future, if I identify a capable person among my people, I will personally point him out as the person capable of carrying the grinding stone, but to simply let go of the grinding stone, we cannot hand over the grinding stone to an incapable person; it is not something to play around with. We have so many other things those incapable persons can go play with," Mr Museveni was quoted to have said.

Museveni blasts Mayanja

The newspaper reported that while campaigning at the Nakasongola Sub-county headquarters, Mr Museveni let fly and launched a searing onslaught on the third presidential candidate, Mr Mayanja, saying such men had no business vying for the presidency because they had no record of even carrying the smallest of grinding stones.

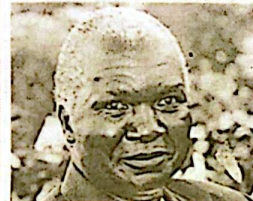
"I have never heard of a man like Mayanja lifting even a small grinding stone. Now he wants to carry Uganda's grinding stone! What shall we do if he crumbles under its weight?" Mr Museveni was reported to have wondered.

Veterans back Ssemogerere

Meanwhile, as Museveni was talking succession and bashing Mr Mayanja, about 760 veterans of the National Resistance Army (NRA), based in Bundibugyo District, were threatening not to vote for him in the 1996 presidential election.

The Monitor of April 1, 1996, reported that the veterans of the NRA, which had since been renamed the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) with the coming into force of the 1995 Constitution, accused Mr Museveni of short-changing them by failing to fulfil a litany of promises that he had made to them.

"Museveni let us down badly,"



Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere

the newspaper quoted Lt Salim Kiiza, the chairperson of the District Veterans in Bundibugyo, as saying.

It should be remembered that the government carried out phased demobilisation and reintegration of 36,400 out of the estimated 90,000 NRA soldiers back into the community between 1992 and 1995.

The government created the Uganda Veterans Assistance Programme (UVAP) to oversee the exercise, which was carried out in three phases.

The objectives of the World Bank-funded exercise were to demobilise and resettle the veterans and their families; facilitate the veterans' social and economic reintegration into peaceful, productive and sustainable civilian life; and restructure public expenditure with a view to increasing the purse to fund economic and social infrastructure projects and services.

Packages that were given to the demobilised veterans included cash, health care support and financial contributions towards their primary school-age children.

Lt Kiiza was quoted as saying Mr Museveni was taking them for a ride. He claimed that the NRM government had failed to pay the veterans their pension and gratuity as had been promised.

The newspaper reported that a group of NRA veterans who stormed the home of the Resident

District Commission (RDC) to meet Maj Jacob Asiimwe, the administrative secretary at the NRM Secretariat, who was on a two-day visit to Bundibugyo to discuss the veterans' problems, was barred from entering the premises.

After the debacle, Lt Kiiza told *The Monitor* that they had been ready to tell Maj Asiimwe that they were going to vote for Opposition candidate Ssemogerere.

"We fought the war, but after giving way to Museveni to eat, he forgot us," Lt Kiiza was quoted to have told this newspaper.

Another veteran, Lt Kapalaya, was quoted to have told *The Monitor* that the veterans had also been promised employment as security guards in the district, but that the promise had turned out to be not air.

Lt Kiiza said they could still reconcile with Mr Museveni and give him their votes if their dues were paid.

In what was viewed as a sign that the veterans would be a slippery constituency during the election, they turned up in what was described as "larger than expected numbers" for Ssemogerere's nomination at Kololo Airstrip in Kampala on Wednesday, March 27, 1996. During the function, the veterans clamoured for the settlement of their retrenchment benefits.

The newspaper, however, reported that the Bundibugyo veterans' show of support for Ssemogerere was ironic given that the presidential hopeful had failed to raise the 100 signatures of registered voters in the district to facilitate his nomination.

It was reported that Ssemogerere's supporters had shied away from the signing of the nomination forms for fear of security operatives. Only the family of one Mukwede, who was the District IF-FC boss, and a handful of diehards braved the signing ceremony.

It would appear that the veterans' vote did not count for much. Mr Museveni was declared the winner with 4.4 million votes, followed by Ssemogerere, who garnered 1.1 million votes. Mr Kibirige Mayanja came third with 120,000 votes.



1996

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