

National News

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Legislators attending the nine-day retreat say the hopefuls are hopping from one dormitory to another seeking their support.

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The ongoing ruling NRM party retreat for newly elected MPs has reportedly been turned into a campaigning ground for aspirants seeking to become Speaker of the 12th Parliament, *Daily Monitor* has learnt.

The aspirants, who this publication sounded out, admitted witnessing their "powerful" colleagues canvassing support both at night and in broad daylight. But the NRM party officials said they were not aware of any such campaigns, although they did not rule out the likelihood.

More than 400 MPs are attending the nine-day retreat at the National Leadership Institute at Kyankwanzi. They are being drilled on the theme, "Aligning the NRM leaders towards protecting the gains and making a qualitative leap to the higher middle-income status society."

The retreat commenced last Tuesday and will close on Wednesday.

But the NRM party spokesperson, Mr Emmanuel Dombo, said the party has not received any complaints regarding campaigning for becoming the next Speaker.

"But I wouldn't be surprised if it is happening. Human beings are creative," he said.

Last week, President Museveni, who is

Aspirants for Speaker send mixed cues on campaigns

also the NRM party national chairman, threw the race wide open when he told the MPs-elect that the February recommendation of extending the term of incumbent Speaker Anita Among, and deputy Thomas Tayebwa by the NRM Central Executive Committee (CEC) would be subjected to further discussion.

Ms Anita is facing five competitors, including three from the NRM party, and two outside the party. They include Alioni Yorke Odria (Aringa South), Lydia Wanyoto (Mbale City Woman), and Dr Asiimwe Florence Akiiki (Masindi District Woman), all from the NRM party.

Others are Mr Norbert Mao (Laroo-Pecce) from the Democratic Party (DP), and Persis Namuganza (Bukono), who is an independent, but NRM party-leaning.

But various elected legislators attending the nine-day retreat said the hopefuls are hopping from one dormitory to another seeking their support.

"They are flocking to our dormitories at night, wooing us to vote for them. Some of them are utilising the period of campfire to secretly push their messages," a legislator who preferred not to be named, said.

Another legislator said, "The real campaign is going on here as candidates or their agents come at night into the dormitories."

Daily Monitor could not independently verify these claims, but several of our



Ms Anita Among is from the ruling NRM party.



Mr Norbert Mao represents the Democratic Party

sources said some of the candidates or their agents are meeting small groups of the legislators on the sidelines of the official programme, including during breaks and while en route to dormitories.

The sources also said as the race heats up, some of the contenders are already extending sweeteners to the MPs-elect to influence the vote.

What the law states

Article 82 of the Constitution prescribes that the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament are elected by Members of Parliament (MPs) from among themselves at the first sitting after a General Election, and the exercise

is presided over by the Chief Justice or a judge designated by them, using a secret ballot.

Rule 5(3) of the Parliament Rules of Procedure emphasises that any person who publicly campaigns or causes campaigns through his or her agent, in a manner that is in breach of Rule 91, which speaks about the behaviour of legislators, shall be subject to the Code of Conduct for Members.

Mr Mao and Odria separately denied being involved in the early campaigning, saying they are prohibited by the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure.

Mr Mao said, "The Parliamentary Rules of Procedure prohibit campaigning for the position of Speaker. I am committed

to abiding by the rules, and we intend to complain against candidates who are violating the rules through active campaigning and bribery to procure endorsements."

Relatedly, Odria said, "I am not campaigning, but I have seen some candidates campaigning openly both at night and during the day. I suspect one of the candidates will face the court because we have already started gathering evidence about her."

Dr Asiimwe said she was returning to Kyakwanzi to kick-start her mobilisation but not campaigning since it is against the rules.

Mr Chris Obore, the director of Communication and Public Affairs at Parliament, said Ms Among was not among those campaigning at night.

"Are you not aware that she (Ms Among) sought permission from the President and left Kyankwanzi because of bereavement? She is in Buyende District with her husband for the funeral of their mother. So, if there is any candidate campaigning at night in Kyankwanzi, Anita Among is not one of them, therefore, ask those campaigning why they are doing so," he said.

Efforts to obtain comments from both Ms Namuganza, and Ms Wanyoto were futile because they both neither picked up our repeated calls nor replied to our messages to their known phone contacts.