

Uganda's Animal Farm: The last pages

BY TIMOTHY KALYEGIRA



Recently on April 26, a road race, the MK Charity Run, was flagged off from

Kololo Airstrip in Kampala. Organised by the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), it was in honour of the 52nd birthday of the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and son of President Museveni, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

Gen Muhoozi, who did not attend, was represented by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Thomas Tayebwa.

Let's pause for a moment and take in all this. In no country in the world, except Uganda, does a serving army officer, especially the head of the army, engage in active public politics. In no country in the world, except Uganda, does a serving army officer head a political organisation. In no other country in the world, except Uganda, would serving army, police, and intelligence officers have participated in such a run, wearing T-shirts and vests with a portrait of the CDF.

In no country in the world, except Uganda, would the deputy Speaker of the national assembly represent the head of the army at a charity run organised by the political organisation that this CDF heads.

Court-martialled

No UPDF officer, if he or she were to form a political organisation or post the frequent utterances that Muhoozi does, would survive a single day without being court-martialled.

A senior army officer, Gen Henry Tumukunde, was held under house arrest for nearly a decade for political comments made on a Kampala radio station.

That same day, Sunday, April 26, I posted this brief remark on the social media app X: "We are now on the final few pages of Animal Farm."

I stated this, not because of the MK Charity Run, which in and of itself would be prima facie evidence of George Orwell's truism that most Marxist-Leninist revolutions eventually become exactly like the feudal or political order they overthrew.

My tweet was prompted by statements by Muhoozi asking why predecessor CDFs had not attended the Kololo run, adding that there would be consequences for this. He later deleted the tweets, but in this day and age, what one posts can always be screenshot for posterity.

But seeing the CDF declare that there would be a price to pay by his predecessors for not attending his charity run was remarkable.

Only people who were alive

at the time the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) came to power in 1986, or those of younger generations who have read and heard about the resolve, patriotism, and discipline the NRA exhibited in early 1986, would appreciate the distance we have come.

Those tweets marked the moment when Uganda officially entered the final, decadent phase of the NRM's 40 years at the helm of State power.

Glancing through photos of the MK Charity Run, one saw several prominent public officials, from current and retired army Generals to business founders, journalists, politicians, lawyers, and others.

Good education

Many of these have a good education, with Master's degrees, politically articulate, and at one point deeply concerned about the welfare of Uganda and Africa.

Surely, they know the law and the Constitution. Surely, they know about the role of the armed forces in political matters.

Several have spent decades from their youth critiquing the NRM state and the situation of governance in Uganda.

What, then, got them involved in an event that they all know was illegal in Uganda and would be in any other country?

It comes down to what many in the media, political class, and academia term state capture. I've stated in several articles in this newspaper that Uganda's economy is not in the best shape.

About 18 years ago, it ended the post-conflict recovery phase that had been marked by scarcity of basic consumer goods.

Today, the economy's challenge is how to achieve net positive GDP growth, and that's why the Uganda Revenue Authority struggles to milk any revenue it can from any sources.

Most of the 200-plus radio stations and 40-plus TV channels, the many hotels, fuel stations, restaurants, schools, and other businesses founded over the past 30 years are either struggling or on the verge of insolvency.

Prominent politicians own most, and their only hope of staying afloat is through political patronage and debt forgiveness.

This would explain why familiar business and political figures made a point of attending the MK Charity Run, thus having a fighting chance of being considered in future when the time comes for businesses to be bailed out by the State or commercial banks are requested to extend loan repayments.

We are going to witness more and more of this steady march toward the final paragraphs of Orwell's *Animal Farm*.