

Mao cites intimidation in speakership race

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

KAMPALA. Democratic Party (DP) president Norbert Mao has vowed to remain in the race for Speaker of the 12th Parliament "*pakalast*", despite what he described as growing intimidation and a court petition challenging his position.

Speaking at a press conference in Kampala yesterday, Mr Mao, who also serves as Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, struck a defiant tone, insisting that neither legal challenges nor political pressure would force him out of the contest.

"I am in the Speakership race *pakalast*. I am moving at full speed to the finishing line — no stopping, no reducing speed. This is not about personal gain. It is about fixing Parliament and addressing the national question," he said.

Mr Mao alleged that his supporters are facing threats, inducements and pressure aimed at weakening his campaign.

"People are being called and offered money to denounce Mao. Is that the kind of country we are building?"

he said. He added that some DP leaders and supporters had reported being approached with financial incentives, while others had allegedly been warned against backing his candidature.

Despite this, Mr Mao said he would press on with his bid.

"We are going to fight legally, politically, in the media — everywhere. We are not going to give up," he said.

Mr Mao maintained that his candidature is driven by the need to reform Parliament and restore public trust.

"We don't need a Speaker who is looking for money; we need a Speaker who wants to make a difference and clean up the institution," he said.

He also called on Members of Parliament from the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) to consider backing him under the existing cooperation agreement between the two parties.

"There is a cooperation agreement, and it allows us to explore new areas of collaboration. The Speakership is one such area," Mao said.

The DP leader further revealed that he had received repeated warnings from supporters cautioning him about possible poisoning, particularly during recent political activities in Kyankwanzi.

"I keep getting calls and messages warning me to be careful, especially about poisoning. These are not things you take lightly, but they are also not new to me," he said.

Mr Mao linked the alleged threats to his outspoken stance on corruption and misuse of public resources.

Mr Mao also dismissed a court peti-

tion challenging his election, describing it as politically motivated and lacking substance.

"I heard that the petitioner says he has been looking for me and cannot find me. A minister of Justice who cannot be found? That is really interesting," he said.

He questioned the seriousness of the case, adding that the petitioner had not served the Electoral Commission.

Mr Mao's bid has also exposed divisions within DP, with some senior leaders questioning decision-making processes within the party.

Reflecting on past unity, Mr Mao urged members to avoid blame and instead focus on strengthening the party.

"We have always supported DP members wholeheartedly because we love our party, and these current disagreements should not overshadow our shared history," he said.

He cited previous cooperation with party figures such as Mukasa Mbidde and Gerald Siranda as examples of unity within the party.

AT A GLANCE

The Speakership race is shaping up to be competitive, with several contenders already in the field, including Lydia Wanyoto, Persis Namuganza and Alion Odria.