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PARLIAMENT RACE 2016

33,377

Previous victory: The number of votes Maj Gen Kahinda Otafiire garnered in the 2011 election.

Otafiire, new entrant Kahonda

Daring. Capt Kahonda's bid to unseat Maj Gen Kahinda Otafiire, the current minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, in the constituency which has known no other representative under the NRM regime, has turned him into something of a political celebrity.

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Gen Otafiire (R) speaks at a rally in Mitooma Sub-county, Mitooma District, recently. PHOTOS BY ZADOCK AMANYISA

MITOOMA. Until October last year, former army Capt Donozio Kahonda was not known beyond Ruhinda constituency in Mitooma District.

His daring bid to unseat Maj Gen Kahinda Otafiire, the current minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, from the constituency which has known no other representative under the NRM regime, has turned him into something of a political celebrity.

Gen Otafiire, a member of the ruling party's highest decision making organ, the Central Executive Committee, a long-serving minister, and one of the seven members of the historical army high command, did not concede defeat after the October 2015 primaries in which he scored 32.2 per cent.

He chose to fight for his political life on an Independent ticket. Just recently, on Sunday (February 7) supporters of the two candidates were involved in a fierce fight near Kashenshero Town Council, the second such altercation in recent weeks.

At least 25 people including two policemen were injured, according to police. Eight people suffered severe injuries.

Capt Kahonda claims it is Gen Otafiire who masterminded the clash. He says they found a group of boda boda cyclists had blocked the road to Kashenshero town where he was scheduled to address a rally. They reportedly refused to give them way.

The clash was not far away from his home and his military escorts intervened on the side of his supporters.

It is still too early to say whether this clash was in revenge for the previous incident in which six of the minister's supporters were hurt.

The Otafiire group suffered injuries last month in a fight with followers of Mitooma District MP, Ms Joviah Kamateeka, and Mr Benon Karyaija, the district LC5 chairperson. The two leaders are known supporters of Mr Kahonda. It continues to be a bitter contest. Early this year Gen Otafiire, speaking at Kitabi Seminary in Bushenyi, referred to Mr Kahonda as tobacco which voters ought to spit out before he stains their teeth.

The former captain won the NRM primaries while he was locked up in Kirinya prison in Jinja where he was remanded on forgery charges on October 8, 2015.

Constituents here blamed Kahonda's troubles on Gen Otafiire, who they say wanted to neutralise his political opponent. It is suspected that they voted for him in protest and out of sympathy. "When the message came (that I have won), I was very happy, and my fellow prisoners [celebrated]. To me it was unbelievable because I was inside cells well knowing that the people I had contested with had all the resources at their disposal which they would employ to win the election. Nevertheless, where God is, nothing is impossible," Mr Kahonda told *Daily Monitor*.

While campaigning in Mitooma District, Independent presidential candidate Amama Mbabazi praised the people of Ruhinda County for crushing Gen Otafiire.

Mr Mbabazi said though he is friends with him, the minister sometimes abuses him. This reinforced whispers that had been making the rounds that the former NRM secretary general was among the architects of the defeat of Gen Otafiire.

The two competed for NRM secretary general position in 2010 together with Prof Gilbert Bukenya and Theodore Ssekikubo and Mr Mbabazi prevailed.

Gen Otafiire, who is known to be tough and aloof has now softened, thanks to Mr Kahonda. His home, which used to be a no-go area is now accessible to everyone. Wherever he goes to campaign in the constituency, Gen Otafiire tells voters, "My home is open to all and soldiers are for my personal protection only, not to intimidate residents who are my voters."

He has had bad blood with most of the prominent people in the constituency who say he parades himself as the only bull in the kraal. Gen Otafiire was opposed to the split of Bushenyi into five other districts in 2010. He is also known for his sharp tongue, one time allegedly telling locals to tell their problems to God because he is not God to solve their issues.

After defeating FDC's Chapaa Karuhanga, Uganda Federal Alliance's John Bosco Mugasira and Independent Gilber Najuna Njuneki in the 2011 election, Gen Otafiire set out on his fourth term which would see him drift further away from the people.

He reportedly did not listen to the constituents' cries for better roads, water and schools. He added salt to injury by reportedly saying that they did not vote for him to attend their funerals.

"Stop accusing me of not attending your funerals and parties. Did you vote me to romance you? MPs have their roles and those who go astray get problems with the voters," Gen

WHO IS CAPTAIN KAHONDA?

Capt Donozio Kahonda was born on August 13, 1980, in Kyamuyanga, Kabira Subcounty in Mitooma District. He studied at Nyakishojwa Primary school where sat for Primary Seven. He then studied for Ordinary Level at St Francis Buhunga High School in Rukungiri District between 1997 and 2000. At school, Kahonda was the head prefect, an athlete and a scout.

He obtained a certificate in Business Administration at Makerere Institute for Social Development. He later pursued a Diploma in Business Administration at Makerere University Business School.

In November 2001 he joined the army. He was part of the group of soldiers that participated in the Operation Iron Fist under the late UPDF commander Gen Aronda Nyakairima, pushing deep into South Sudan in what would become a rout of the Lord's Resistance Army rebels. He was later assigned to Bombo Barracks as staff officer, served under the political commissariat of the General Court Martial and also undertook courses in fraud detection. Before he retired in December 2014 at the rank of captain, he had also served as a platoon commander. He decided to run for the MP seat 10 months before winning the NRM flag. This followed a roundtable meeting with some opinion leaders from Mitooma who sat in Kampala.

In September last year, Gen Otafiire alleged that Capt Kahonda did not have the minimum academic qualifications and had made several forgeries at the time he joined the army. Gen Otafiire said Kahonda joined the army under the names of Dickson Mutabazi.

Capt Kahonda was taken to Jinja Magistrates Court presided over by Immaculate Nyamwenge where he was charged with 16 counts of forgery and uttering false documents contrary to the Penal Code Act.

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