

THE SEMBLANCE OF PEACE AND SECURITY USHERED IN BY NRA WAS CORE TO THE RETURN OF MUTEBI

24th coronation anniversary: Tracing Buganda's journey to restoration

By Nicholas Wassajja

Today, Buganda kingdom marks the 24th coronation anniversary since Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II was crowned at Budo-Nagabali.

The kingdom was restored in 1993 climaxed by the coronation ceremony on July 31. The celebrations will be held at the Buwekula county

offices in Mubende district.

The crowning of Mutebi as the 36th Kabaka of Buganda was like a dream come true. Ironically, this would later lay the foundation for the restoration of the current Mengo (Buganda kingdom headquarters) establishment.

While this was the silver lining on Buganda's traumatising experience, the memory of the ordeal of 27



Kabaka Ronald Mutebi

depressing years after the abolishment of kingdoms in Uganda, caused by the 1966 crisis, is still fresh for many monarchists.

It is little wonder that the annual celebrations to mark the coronation are one of Buganda's most treasured days on its calendar.

"When Prince Mutebi returned, we had the Ssabataka's (head of the 52 clans) supreme council establishment. Many thought it would never actually go past that stage to restoration. Later, when the coronation took place in 1993, they again thought it would collapse. Now it is 24 years of progress," the Katikkiro (prime minister), Charles Peter Mayiga, recounts.

The storming of the Kabaka's palace at Mengo, which sent Kabaka Sir Edward Mutesa II into exile in London, was caused by the political crisis of 1966. Subsequently, former president Milton Obote's regime imposed on Uganda a republican constitution, commonly known as the pigeon hall constitution, in September 1967. It formally abolished all kingdoms in the country.

Ssekabaka Mutesa died in exile but he had pronounced Prince Mutebi as heir.

Political unity

In his bid for political unity, President Yoweri Museveni was willing to restore



Buganda officials inspecting Kaweerl Primary School playground where the function is taking place today

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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the kingdoms as cultural institutions without political powers but this was not until the National Resistance Army captured power in 1986.

Records have it that Mutebi, through connections with John Nagenda, sided with Museveni's NRA efforts (1981-1986) during the bush war when he visited fighters in Buganda to seek support from influential monarchists and boost the morale of the fighters.

For both Mutebi and Museveni, the move was a win-win situation but what was not clear was how the acrimony between Buganda and Uganda was to be resolved because it formed the cornerstone of the 1966 crisis.

The semblance of peace and security ushered in by Museveni's NRA was core to the return of Mutebi in 1990 from exile. He was then referred to as Ssabataka.

The return of Mutebi was the beginning of a journey that would later see him ascend the throne in a blaze of glory.

The radical monarchists wanted him to return with the pomp of a king, but bearing the historical machinations in a stable, but fragile Uganda at the time and the 1967 pigeon hall constitution, the idea had

legal implications; therefore a compromise for a neutral ground had to be struck.

Ssabataka council
On his return, Mutebi, under the title of Ssabataka, appointed an executive committee, dubbed the Ssabataka Supreme Council, to act as his advisory board, more so on how to secure the restoration.

Ssabataka's council had three crucial players, according to Mayiga in his book, *King on the Throne*. The trinity was composed of former Ssabalangira Besweri Mulondo, Rev. Dan Kajumba and city lawyer John Katende, who many say the story of the restoration cannot be complete without.

Mayiga, then a young lawyer fresh from the university, was appointed secretary to the council. He says of Katende in his book: "It is difficult to pronounce with certainty, whose contribution to the resurrection of the kingdom of Buganda was greatest, but without doubt, John Katende's was exceptional and among the most valuable."

Coronation manoeuvres

The restoration of the kingdom and later coronation was not guaranteed, it was a process full of manoeuvres and arm twisting. The monarchists literally forced their way through, setting July 31, 1993 as the date for the coronation, without as much as an agreement with the central government, but at least they hoped no one would risk opposing the restoration.

Institutions such as the Uganda Law Society (ULS) opined that the move was unconstitutional without the amendment of the existing 1967 constitution that outlawed monarchies and a section of the Army Council was also up in arms.

Reportedly, Museveni found a hard time convincing the army council that sat in Gulu about the restoration but hardly a month to the coronation, he pronounced himself that "it is impermissible to retain a

constitutional provision that denied people their cultural rights", according to a paper written by Prof. Oloka-Onyango.

With hardly a week to the coronation ceremonies, the National Resistance Council (NRC) passed constitutional amendments that repealed articles abolishing kingdoms and returning confiscated properties to belonged to them.

After the coronation, the kingdom, although entering in deep financial difficulties, seemed to move on at supersonic speed, growing on the goodwill of the people that donated for its survival. Key among the developments was Kabaka Mutebi's wedding to Lady Sylvia Nagginda, Nnabagereka (Queen) August 27, 1999.

"I am grateful that the people of Buganda now understand their kingdom, norms and customs, which the support they show in projects such as Masaza tournaments, the Kabaka's annual birthday marathon and the solidarity exhibited when in grief, for example, when the Kasubi Tombs were ablaze," Mayiga remarks.

Challenges

Mayiga points at the challenges that the kingdom still grapples with, which include the return of properties occupied by the central government, the demand for a federal system of governance and land disputes. The kingdom estimates that the central government owes it sh18.8b in unpaid rent.

In 2013, the Government returned a host of Buganda assets but the demand for ebyaffe, loosely meaning Buganda kingdom properties confiscated after the 1966 attack, still rages on.

As the kingdom marks 24 years since coronation, the leadership is aware of the complex nature of their problems to settle the Buganda-Uganda fragility.

Buganda's critics argue that Mutebi has set up structures in Mengo akin to those of the abolished kingdom that wielded political power.

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