

National News

As Uganda continues to navigate questions about leadership, Cabinet appointments will likely remain key moments to read the future of power in the country.

BY MONITOR REPORTER

The naming of a new Cabinet in Uganda carries political meaning far beyond government administration. Beneath the appointments, dismissals, and transfers lies a deeper national conversation about power, loyalty, and succession. After President Museveni responded to an argumentative essay that saw Mr Andrew Mwenda, a journalist, declare the Ugandan strongman "senile and incapable of judging right", the naming of Uganda's latest Cabinet has managed to re-awaken the succession question in the country.

"You will, however, discover that at 82, I am still able to defend Uganda and myself with the Bible, the AK-47 and the pen," Mr Museveni wrote in his May 23 response to the essay, adding, "As a freedom fighter, I am always stubbornly standing for patriotism, Pan-Africanism, social-economic transformation and democracy".

On Thursday in only the second sitting of the first meeting of the first session, the 12th Parliament serenaded Mr Matia Kasaija, wishing him a happy birthday. The erstwhile long-serving Finance minister had just turned 82. Rumours that he is battling a condition characterised by progressive loss of intellectual functioning have not gone unchallenged. Yet, like a bad smell, they linger. But if, indeed, Mr Kasaija was dropped for age-related reasons, the handing of full dockets to Mr Museveni's fellow octogenarian Ephraim Kamuntu (Internal Affairs) and 79-year-old Tom Butime (Tourism) was the clearest attestation by the Ugandan strongman that age is but a number.

Balancing act

The handing of the baton to the younger generation of 50-somethings believed to be in the good graces of Mr Museveni's son, also the Chief of Defence Forces of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, was, perhaps, overstated.

"Muhoozi appears powerful on social media because he is the President's son, but in reality, some decisions are beyond him. His father remains the final authority in decision-making," Mr Timothy Kalyegira, a political analyst, told *Weekend Monitor*.

He added: "Muhoozi remains Museveni's son and the CDF, but the idea of him being Museveni's automatic successor is not guaranteed. We still have Museveni for another five years. His term ends in 2031, but it is not automatic that Muhoozi will succeed him. It is not 100 per cent certain."

Yet, as he has deftly done across 40 years, Mr Museveni pulled off a balancing act that ensured that the wind was not entirely taken out of the sails of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU)—the pressure group aligned to the NRM party that his son leads.

"Individuals seen as close to that circle have taken up important positions such as Kinyowa Kiwanuka in Defence, Ambassador Adonia Ayebare in For-



Front row: President Museveni (centre) poses for a photograph with ministers and other officials after chairing the final Cabinet meeting on May 4 before the end of his 2021-2026 term. PHOTO KAGUTA MUSEVENI X HANDLE

Succession question towers above cabinet

eign Affairs, and Balaam Barugahara in Local Government. These ministries are not minor—they touch on security, Uganda's external relations, and grassroots political mobilisation," Timothy Chemonges, the executive director of the Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), noted.

"Those close to the PLU camp may feel stronger because their allies now occupy key government positions. At the same time, some older NRM figures may sense their influence diminishing. This dynamic could create quiet competition within the party between the old NRM establishment, Museveni's current power centre, and the emerging Muhoozi-linked group," he added.

No change?

In a country where President Museveni has remained at the centre of political authority for decades, the latest Cabinet arrangement is already fueling fresh debate over a number of questions. Who, for one, holds influence today? Who is being strategically positioned? What do the decisions reveal about the future direction of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party? There are no simple answers.

In the complex jigsaw puzzle, though, sits Jessica Alupo, who was on Thursday confirmed as the Vice President for another term. The position ranks second on the national order of precedence, a standing that should not be overlooked if the worries Mr Mwenda articulated in his argumentative essay are to be taken seriously. After being confirmed in the position on Thursday, Ms Alupo, also the Katakwi District Woman Representative (DWR) in the House, vowed to "serve with utmost desire, patriotism, and loyalty".

She added: "When we work as a team, we accomplish our assignments very fast, very well, and very easily." It, however, remains to be seen what the team Ms Alupo envisages will look like. The in-tray of the House Appointments Committee that was approved on Thursday will be filled to the rafters

when it gets to work on Monday.

Qualms about appointees whose dual citizenship flies in the face of constitutional provisions have to be meticulously considered. The swapping of Cabinet positions by Dr Jane Ruth Aceng Otero and Justine Kasule Lumumba has also indicated an absence of rigour that previously couldn't be labelled against Mr Museveni.

Descendants Resistance Army

At any rate, Mr Job Kiija, an associate director at Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action (IDEA), argued that the political message sent by the new Cabinet is one of managed continuity and synchronised institutional loyalty, carefully designed to mitigate the risk of an unguided succession crisis.

He told *Weekend Monitor* that the new troop deployments, uncoordinated as some appear, should not be viewed in isolation but as part of a broader systemic realignment across all pillars of State power.

Mr Kiija pointed to the recent installation of party-vetted leadership in Parliament, heavily backed by the PLU, which now functions alongside an aligned Judiciary and a professionalised mili-

tary to insulate the State from external shocks.

The researcher noted that the systematic replacement of historical bush-war stalwarts like Gen Moses Ali with the literal and ideological offspring of the ruling elite—such as Justine Nameere (daughter of Vincent Sempijja), Desire Muhooza (daughter of Salim Saleh), Musa Ali (son of Moses Ali), Dr Charles Ayume (son of Francis Ayume), and Shartsi Kutesa Musherure (daughter of Sam Kutesa)—illustrates the operationalisation of the "Descendants Resistance Army" philosophy.

Mr Kiija noted that the aforesaid strategy does not signal an immediate hand-over of power from father to son. "Instead, it constructs a robust institutional safety net ensuring that, in the event of an unexpected crisis, the overlapping structures of Cabinet, Legislature, and Military would seamlessly default to the President's son, preventing internal fragmentation or opposition exploitation."

He also described the appointments as part of a sophisticated hybrid strategy engineered to achieve absolute political consolidation for President Museveni. This, he argues, is most evident in the deliberate omission of polarising figures from both the PLU and historical NRM factions, such as David Kabanda, Matayo Kyaligonza, and Abdul Nadduli.

"By sidelining unpredictable actors, Museveni filters out potential sources of internal friction, instead prioritising highly compliant mobilisers," he opined.

Contradictions

Mr Kiija argued that this prioritisation of political conformity over institutional competence is underscored by dropping seasoned security figures like Gen David Muhoozi in favour of grassroots populist actors. These newer appointees, while fiercely loyal to the Executive, possess fluid allegiances that can easily shift to Gen Muhoozi when the transition requires it.

The IDEA Associate Director reckons

that the new Cabinet fundamentally alters internal power dynamics ahead of the 2031 polls. This, he further pointed out, achieves by dismantling traditional checks and balances and formalising the alliance between the NRM and PLU. The Judiciary and Parliament, he said, have been subordinated, operating as extensions of executive and military will rather than independent arms of government.

"By absorbing key PLU figures like Balaam Barugahara into strategic ministerial positions, Museveni has neutralised the risk of the PLU emerging as a hostile breakaway faction, consolidating both wings under a unified command structure," Mr Kiija observed.

He added: "The inclusion of nominees holding dual citizenship directly violates Uganda's constitutional and immigration frameworks, setting up an immediate legal battleground. Moreover, the retention of individuals implicated in major corruption scandals—such as the Karamoja iron sheets saga and the Parliamentary Exhibition—contradicts Museveni's public pledge of a corruption-free tenure."

On his part, Mr Marlon Agaba, the executive director of the Anti-Corruption Coalition of Uganda (ACCU), said the new Cabinet represents a good selection of ministers.

He described it as a mixture of experienced figures who have served in government before and new entrants who also bring valuable expertise. "All in all, it's a good selection. It's full of experienced people, and it will deliver on the manifestos and promises of the government," Mr Agaba noted.

Reading the nuances

Mr Agaba, nevertheless, emphasised that there is little to suggest a transition in leadership. He pointed out that several long-serving figures remain in the Cabinet, including generals such as Gen Henry Tumukunde, Gen Katumba Wamala, Jim Muhwezi, and Kahinda Otalire.

"I don't see anything pointing towards succession. It's more about control and retaining experienced ministers who have been in power for some time," he explained.

Mr Agaba noted that the new Cabinet reflects the President's focus on service delivery, particularly in areas such as wealth creation and the fight against corruption. "He doesn't want to see anyone sleeping. The emphasis is on working hard and tackling corruption."

Mr Robert Wanjala, a political analyst, said despite the speculation, one thing remains certain: Cabinet appointments in Uganda are rarely interpreted as ordinary government decisions. Every appointment, promotion, demotion, or omission carries political meaning. They reveal who remains influential, who is gaining ground, and who may be losing favour within the ruling establishment.

"The latest Cabinet... therefore, offers more than a glimpse into government administration. It provides insight into the state of power within the NRM and the broader political calculations shaping Uganda's future. Whether the changes signal continuity, controlled transition, or simply strategic political management, the succession question remains unresolved and deeply embedded in the country's political discourse," Mr Wanjala said.

As Uganda continues to navigate questions about leadership, governance, and generational transition, Cabinet appointments will likely remain key moments through which citizens, analysts, and political actors attempt to read the future of power in the country.

OBSERVATION



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