

Fall of Among and NRM's twisted logic



Outgoing Speaker of Parliament Anita Among (left) and President Museveni. PHOTO/FILE

The corrupt system created and tolerated by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) now threatens its very hold on power.

BY TIMOTHY KALYEGIRA



Twenty one years ago, in May 2005, then Vice President Gilbert Bukenya reached out to the then managing director of Monitor Publications, Conrad Nkutu, to unburden himself.

In a *Daily Monitor* news story that followed came the first reference to a term that now shapes national life: Mafia.

Bukenya narrated suspicious activity around his farm and home, with secret agents photographing them, and then told Nkutu that there was a "mafia" at the heart of the Ugandan State, running the government and national affairs.

Since Bukenya's revelations two decades ago, it has become clearer over the years just how accurate that *Daily Monitor* headline was.

Whole new residential areas, apartment blocks, tower blocks, hotels and other properties in and around Kampala have sprung up since 2005 on the back of massive corruption and money laundering.

In the seven days following President Museveni's swearing-in at Kololo on May 12, more breathtaking news has happened in Uganda than in five years combined.

The fall of former Speaker of Parliament Anita Among and from being, arguably, the most powerful and most influential woman in Uganda, has gripped the country, set social media alight, and sent ripples of shock and fear through the political class.

Ms Among is facing investigations

over allegations of illicit enrichment, abuse of office, and financial mismanagement during her tenure.

Uganda over the last 40 years

Primitive accumulation of primitive wealth, by primitive people, for primitive reasons. That's my summary of Uganda over the last 40 years and much of Africa.

All this is not for lofty philosophical or artistic goals, such as setting up centres of learning and excellence or long-term philanthropy.

No. It's the standard case of more houses, more cars, more women, more booze as life's end-goal. And that's how we find ourselves in the midst of the current investigations.

Mindlessness, restlessness, soullessness, heedlessness, ruthlessness – people gripped by a bottomless, irrational hunger and need for more and more and more, without even understanding why they are this way.

The corrupt system created and tolerated by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) now threatens its very hold on power.

There have been numerous warnings and advice to President Museveni not to treat corruption and impunity lightly, but he ignored them all.

When former Inspector General of Government (IGG) Beti Kamya in 2022,

announced her intention to require soldiers and other security officials to declare their wealth publicly under the Leadership Code of 2021, it rattled the establishment.

In a December 2021 letter to the IGG, President Museveni wrote: "The logic is that the identities and details of army personnel should be the monopoly of the CPA (Chief of Personnel and Administration). Even he/she may not know all the details because it is dangerous to do so. The wealth, in terms of [the] conduct of the personnel of the defence forces, is monitored by a wing of CMI (Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence). This wing is known as counterintelligence. Military intelligence gathers information about enemy armies and other enemy groups. On the other hand, counterintelligence gathers information about possible pollution of our own defence forces (enemy agents, political subversives, corrupt people)."

On the face of it, the President's argument made sense, given that the identities of a significant section of the national security sector must, of necessity, remain anonymous.

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What he says...

Criminal society. For years before his argument about not prosecuting the corrupt was that, in anger, they might decide to take their ill-got wealth out of the country. So, Mr Museveni turned a blind eye to the arcades, apartments, fuel stations, hotels, schools, and farms cropping up across the country. When the business class and civil service accumulate property and wealth almost entirely by wheeler-dealer activities, the inevitable result is a criminal society.

Timothy Kalyegira, journalist and researcher

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When the business class and civil service accumulate property and wealth almost entirely by wheeler-dealer activities, the inevitable result is a criminal society.

When this wheeler-dealer way of life extends to the political class, the result is the Mafia-like State that Bukenya described.

We see this play out during every NRM primary election exercise, every five years.

But even for the soulless people with personality disorders that some politicians tend to be, at some point, wealth and property alone start to lose their initial appeal. Life becomes monotonous and unchallenging.

That's when some of the more ambitious begin to develop grandiose ideas of running for president.

Most thinking and well-informed people have noted that the clampdown on Among is not over her new Rolls-Royce SUV or the alleged corrupt environment at Parliament.

Money and lots of wealth only become a problem when they start being directed toward political ends, particularly the presidential office.

The process of clamping down on Among reveals the twisted logic of the NRM State.

Almost everything about present-day Uganda is a case of illegality or irregularity. Even the process to fight corruption.

Rather than the State's established institutions being at the centre of the anti-corruption drive, it's the Chief of Defence Forces, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, leading the investigations.

There is a deafening silence on many political and military figures who have been at looting and land-grabbing for decades.

Crates of money are being shown, reportedly from Among's homes, but nothing is shown of formal search warrants by the police, as required by law.

Several politicians with questionable levels of wealth and income are prominent members of the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU), a political organisation led by Muhoozi, a serving army officer and, therefore, itself illegal under the law and the Constitution.

And then arises the question of boundaries.

If the CDF in his personal capacity is leading the fight against corruption, what happens one day when, say, a national newspaper publishes a story or report that angers him?

Will he raid the newspaper's offices and have them shut down indefinitely?

If this same CDF, who is always mocking the former NUP presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi as "Kabobi", decides to raid NUP's party headquarters and close them, what's there to stop him?

Speaker Among banned the Nation Media Group from covering Parliament. There was no court or government media body to overrule Among.

This week, NMG reporters from NTV and *Daily Monitor* returned triumphantly to Parliament to resume their reporting. They returned to Parliament only because Among has now fallen in to disfavour.

This means if the new Speaker, expected to be Jacob Oboth-Oboth, starts developing the familiar grandiosity and overreach as Among, he too could ban the NMG.

So, it's all bizarre, arbitrary, and illogical how the NRM State runs the country and wields power.



Former Speaker Anita Among Rolls-Royce SUV is towed to the police headquarters in Naguru, Kampala, this week. PHOTO/ABUBAKER LUBOWA