

Dark spots that stained 11th Parliament

The 11th Parliament was condemned by the public for its unchecked lavish spending, alleged maladministration, and stifling of some media access report on its activities.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

The outgoing Speaker of Parliament, Ms Anita Among, on Wednesday praised the performance of the 11th Parliament whose leadership she assumed after the death of her predecessor, Jacob Oulanyah, in March 2022.

Ms Among told reporters immediately after being sworn in as the Bukedea District Woman MP for the 2026 to 2031 term that the House she had led for the last five years had outperformed in its duties for Ugandans.

This rosy self-appraisal stands in sharp contrast to the sharp media and public criticisms of the 11th Parliament that they condemn for its unchecked lavish spending, alleged maladministration, and stifling of some media access report on its activities.

Speaker's lavish life

The latest of these criticisms is the news that Ms Among has acquired a high-end Rolls-Royce Cullinan, valued at a huge Shs 3.4 billion (about £440,000 to £520,000).

The story, published by Weekend Monitor last week, has sparked outrage with the public questioning the actual source of income that could have been sunk into acquiring the vehicle. These queries come on the heels of a similar lavish exhibition associated with the incumbent Speaker, who had recently unveiled a massive mansion which became the talk of the nation after she hosted MPs in the magnificent country mansion in Bukedea District.

Shortly after, on May 23, 2024, President Museveni asked Ms Among to explain if she owned a house in the United Kingdom, which the British authorities had claimed belonged to her. "Do you own that house or are you renting it?" the President had asked in a letter, noting that the said house was in the form of Flat 4, Silk House, 7 Waterden Road, London, E20 3AL, United Kingdom.

But in February last year, the IGG cleared Ms Among of the claims.

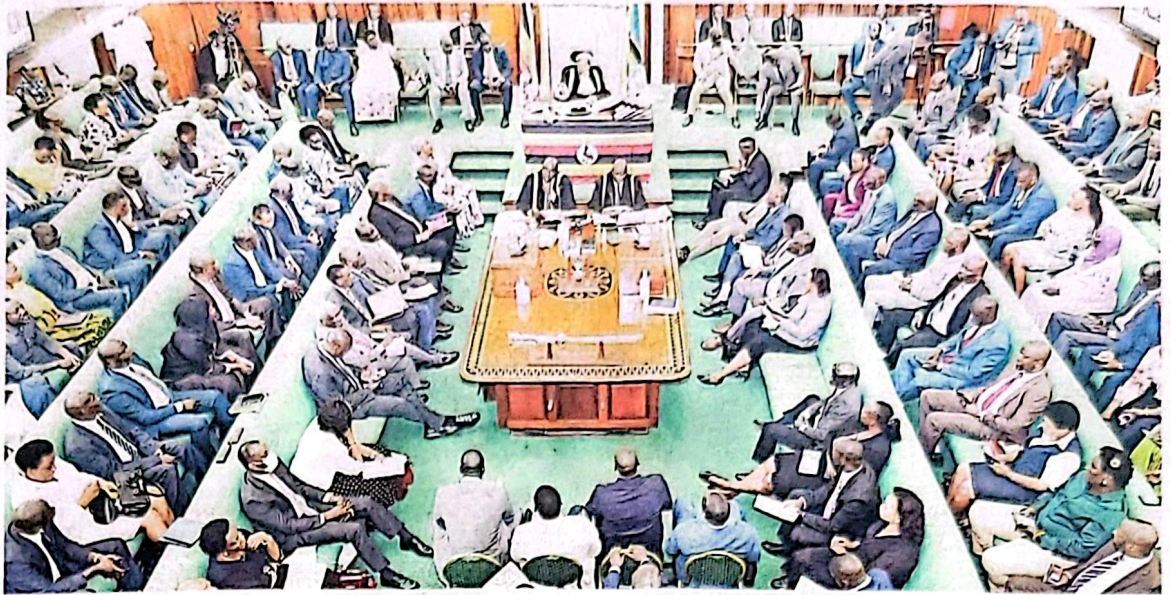
House admin, gagging media

The 11th Parliament banned the Nation Media Group from covering the proceedings and accessing the House from October last year.

The Parliament administration revealed that an investigation against the media group, which owns NTV, Daily Monitor, Spark TV, KFM and Dembe FM, Enyanda, and Nation Courier, had been launched.

To date, the NMG-U has never gotten a clear explanation from the House although the Deputy Speaker shortly after this unexplained ban promised to engage the NMG-U leadership.

To date, the media house has never been reallocated to access and cover Parliament.



Members of Parliament during a plenary session chaired by Speaker Anita Among, in February 2024. PHOTO/FILE

ARREST OF MPS OVER CORRUPTION

President Museveni while delivering the 2024 State of the Nation Address (SONA) in June unequivocally declared there was corruption at Parliament and said he would do whatever it takes to deal it a blow.

A day after, three MPs including Yusuf Mutembuli (Bunyole East), Paul Akamba (Busiki), and Cissy Namujju (Lwengo District Woman) were arrested, charged, and remanded over accusations asking for a bribe from the chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission during the budgeting process.

Mr Museveni during this year's NRM retreat in Kyankwanzi said he personally forgave the trio after they apologised.



Speaker Anita Among (left) and her deputy Thomas Tayebwa during the swearing-in of President Museveni at the Kololo Ceremonial Grounds in Kampala. PHOTO/COURTESY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF UGANDA X HANDLE

ing money, do not cover your dirt using Parliament," she said.

The Shs40 million "bribe" to MPs

Barely three months after she was elected as the Speaker of Parliament, Ms Among's leadership was mired in a scandal after it emerged that the House reportedly bribed a section of MPs from the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party and the Opposition with Shs40 million each to pass a Shs618b Supplementary budget which contained Shs77b for State House Vote in FY 2022/2023.

News of this bribe was broken by the President of the National Unity Platform (NUP) party, Mr Robert Kyagulanyi then asked his party members to take back the dirty money.

Indeed, one of his party members and Bukoto South legislator, Dr Twa-ha Kagabo, tried to return this "dirty money," but was instead humiliated and later forced to apologise to the Speaker, and his colleagues, for tarnishing the image of Parliament with a false allegation.

NUP withdrawal of Mpuuga

After being implicated in the Shs1.7 billion service award, the NUP leadership recalled Mr Mpuuga from his Parliamentary Commissioner job, but he declined. The party Secretary General David Lewis Rubongoya petitioned the Speaker and renominated the Mityana Municipality MP Francis Zaake, but was rejected.

NUP was then tasked twice to convince the MPs, including 177 members to sign on the notice, and 265 members to vote in their favor, and convince the Clerk to Parliament who must put their motion on the order paper for debate.

The NUP party failed and Mr Mpuuga was able to serve until the end of the term.

Barring MPs from accessing Lubowa In February 2024, a group of MPs from the Parliament Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities (Cosase), and State Enterprises (Cosase) were barred from accessing the Lubowa Specialized Hospital construction site, just three months after Parliament had approved Shs2.7 billion to the Ministry of Health for supervision works at the facility.

The MPs led by the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Mr Joel Ssenyonyi, had gone to assess the progress of construction works but were blocked by police officers on the basis that they had no clearance from the Inspector General of Police (IGP).

Mr Ssenyonyi defended the opposition oversight visit to the site, noting that the government has invested a lot of money in the project.

Trashing Uganda Airlines inquiry report

In January 2023, Speaker Among blocked the tabling of the report of CO-SASE, chaired by Mr Joel Ssenyonyi, which implicated CEO Jennifer Bamuturaki and other officials in irregularities, over claims that it had been leaked to the media.

The report highlighted significant financial mismanagement, corruption, and operational inefficiency. The investigation, which centered on reports from the Auditor General for the Financial Year 2020/2022, was marred by political controversy when Ms Among refused to allow the final report to be tabled, leading to accusations of a cover-up.

Regional sittings of Parliament

The 11th Parliament in August 2024, launched the sittings from Guhu, with an aim of bringing the Parliament closer to the people and addressing regional issues. This session ran between August 28 and 30, 2024 at Kauda Grounds, from where the Speaker declared the regional sittings would become part of the legislative culture. The sittings did not proceed to Masaka, Mbarara, and Mbale as had been planned.

The 11th Parliament was also entangled in other challenges, including the contentious award of retirement benefits for former Speakers, as well as the Speaker's handling of NUP detainees, handling of sensitive debates in Parliament, overseas trips for Opposition MPs, and the stalling of works on the new Parliamentary Building, and the institution continuing to rent.