

So what are we to make of Dr Besigye's resurgence, Mr Museveni being forced to work

legitimacy necessary to govern, oversee a transition on his own terms, or seek the constitutional amendments necessary should he

with a minority in Parliament. This would create two power centres in the country and either slow down the legislative reforms he

Mr Kalinaki is a Ugandan journalist based in Nairobi.
dkalinaki@ke.nationmedia.com
Twitter: @Kalinaki



Henry Edison Okurut Presidential debate

Second debate was short on intellectual aggressiveness

The debate is the thing" and so it was again on February 13. And, just as it was with the first presidential debate held on January 15, the venue for the second televised battle of wits and tongue-twisting between the 2016 presidential candidates was, once again, the palatial Victoria Hall at Serena Hotel.

Candidate Yoweri Museveni's physical presence this time round was the proverbial icing on the cake! A good cross section of the guest invitees had a compelling need to see what he would make of his maiden but belated participation in an exercise which he had earlier derogatively dismissed as a preserve for high school students! Many more must have just wanted to witness, first hand, the widely expected showdown between the two politically asymmetrical protagonists – President Museveni and Dr Kizza Besigye. And of course, there was that group who impatiently looked forward to another bout of candidate Elton Joseph Mubirizi's entertaining performance. All in all, there was a readily perceptible sense of joyous anticipation and pervasive curiosity among the guest crowd at Victoria Hall.

Then came the actual moment itself! Dr Suzie Muwanga, the lead moderator, started it off by walking the candidates and the cli-

ent audience through a rather lengthy raft of ground rules. It is from this point that I started to feel how I missed the confident flair, stylish elegance, intellectual aggressiveness, well informed questioning and distinctive clarity of Allan Kasujja and Nancy Kacungira's moderation capabilities. While round two's facilitating trio of Dr Shaka Ssali of the VOA, Makerere Don Dr Muwanga and Dr Joel Kibazo were also up to the task, they lacked the charm, dynamism and spark that enchanted the viewers of round one. They instead appeared a little shackled, overly formal and too reserved sometimes to the point of being timid! The ground rules were not being uniformly enforced with some candidates getting preferential time allotments and/or lion's share of the questions to answer. Several of the "disadvantaged" candidates including Dr Bwanika, Prof Baryamureeba, Gen Biraaro and Maureen Kyalya variously voiced their dissatisfaction over this kind of discriminatory treatment coming from the members of the interviewing panel!

Dr Mwanga, the dominant moderator, was particularly culpable of this lopsidedness. Ssali's role in the debate was nearly eclipsed by the relative prominence of his colleague. We now understand that a "truncated" participation of Ssali was a conditionality to se-

While round two's facilitating trio of Dr Shaka Ssali of the VOA, Makerere Don Dr Muwanga and Dr Joel Kibazo were also up to the task, they lacked the charm, dynamism and spark that enchanted the viewers of round one. They instead appeared a little shackled, overly formal and too reserved sometimes to the point of being timid!

cure the attendance of a certain presidential candidate! That, I think, may have disturbed the spirit and purpose of the debate.

But to a large extent, the presidential candidates themselves lived up to their own billings. Pastor Mubirizi was predictably the darling of the guest crowd - his latecoming notwithstanding! He, for instance, made my day when he intimated that late arrival for official appointments is a globally acclaimed presidential tradition! And most interestingly, whenever the moderators picked Mubirizi's mind on issues to do with foreign policy, climate change, peace and security, trade,

tourism or some other issue of geopolitical concern, the good-natured pastor, almost invariably, kept underscoring the universality of the principle of institutional representation at all levels of governance as a panacea for all human development problems!

The acutely anticipative audience found this profoundly amusing as evidenced in their frequent outbursts in explosive applause!

Candidates Patrick Amama Mbabazi, Dr Abed Bwanika, Prof Baryamureeba and Maj Gen Biraaro easily came through as well composed incisively informed debaters. For instance, Mbabazi's embrace interpretation of "peace and security" to encompass the presence of food security, law and order, justice, health, employment opportunities, platforms for free interplay of ideas, etc, was very instructive.

Even the diametrically opposed Museveni and Besigye also ought to be credited for their demonstrated knack for contextualised responses to the questions asked and capacity to relevantly harness hindsight knowledge and attribution analysis to derive dependable policy suggestions.

However, their temperamental inclination sometimes threatened to torpedo the otherwise tranquil and civilised mood and tempo of the debate. Ms Kyalya's passionate concern for our involuntarily "enslaved" women/girls in foreign lands, spiraling brain drain and militarisation of domestic politics was also spot on, even though her proposed mitigation measures sometimes sounded superficial.

That said, the candle lit by the James Ogoola and his colleagues for such sober engagements between people of different political persuasions should be kept burning.

May God bless Uganda as the underlying logic of "The debate is the thing" germinates and blossoms forever and ever!

okurut1954@yahoo.com