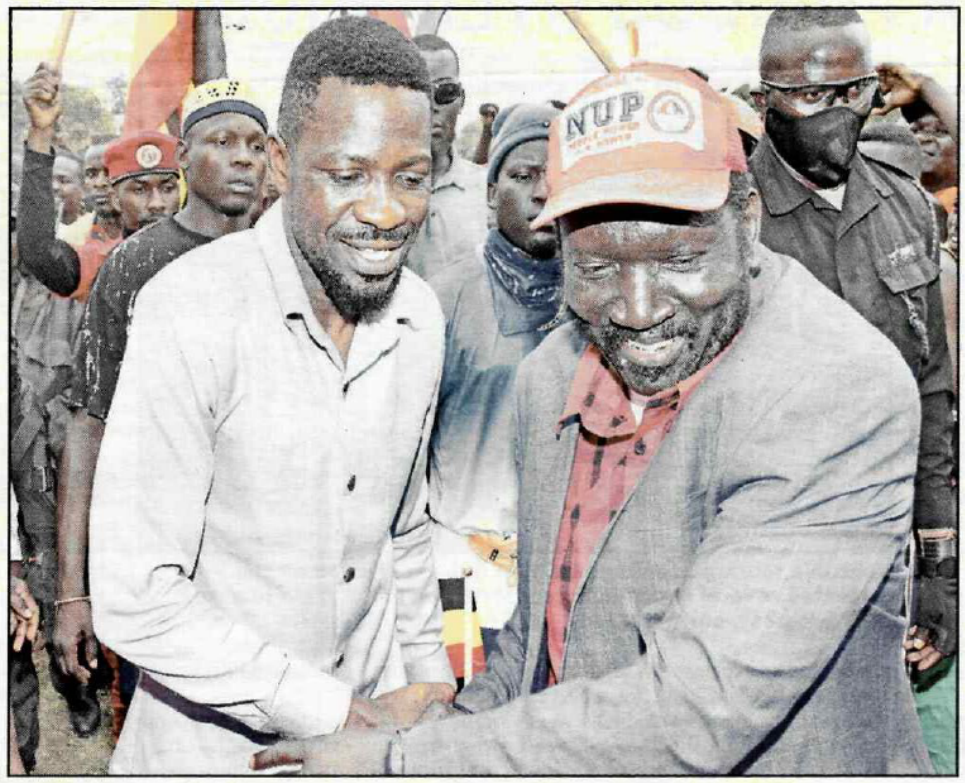
'CHANGE DOES NOT NECESSARILY COME THROUGH ELECTIONS'

WE ARE NOT PINNING OUR HOPES ON KYAGULANYI – NAMBESHE

NUP'S WAY FORWARD

Last week, National Unity Platform (NUP) deputy president for eastern region, John Baptist Nambeshe, chaired the party's executive board meeting to chart a way forward on several issues following the recent general election. On Monday, *New Vision*'s **Umaru Kashaka** spoke to him. Below are excerpts:



Kyagulanyi (left) being welcomed by NUP deputy president in charge of eastern region John Baptist Nambeshe (right) at Kabelai Primary School, Butebo district for his campaign rally on October 13, last year

Q On March 5, you posted on X (formerly Twitter) that you had chaired NUP's executive board meeting, during which you delivered a message of hope from party leader Robert Kyagulanyi. What was in that message?

A What was in that message is the fact that the struggle (for regime change) continues, despite all the challenges that we are facing, of our leaders being hunted and being on the run. Kyagulanyi, being a leader of the struggle and being away, even if you imprisoned him, there is no way you would imprison an idea. Kyagulanyi is not in any case an individual that the struggle is pinning its hopes on; Kyagulanyi is an idea and even if you imprisoned him, there is no way you would imprison an idea. It (an idea) will remain at large, until its purpose comes to pass.

Are you now the acting NUP president?

I have not declared myself one, but by virtue of my office, in absentia of the president, I act and that one is provided for in any structure of leadership.

We heard that in the coming days, you intend to meet party leaders from the different sub-regions of the country to chart a way forward on the numerous issues at hand. What is the way forward?

What we communicated in the presser that day (March 5) was a way forward because the essence of convening the press conference was to make a clarion call to all our troops wherever they are to know that out of sight, does not mean out of heart and the absence of our leader does not mean the movement or the struggle, or the noble cause of crusading for change has had a comma, or has had a full stop or any punctuation mark; the struggle continuous.

That was the message and that was the way forward. These other regional meetings (we intend to hold) are just rolling out that message that we stated at the party headquarters.

Are you telling your supporters that it is time to move on and prepare for the next general elections?

The struggle is not all about elections. That is where you miss the point. The struggle is about change and the change does not necessarily come through elections. We have seen change in Uganda many times has never come through elections, but unlike the past leaders who have taken over governments through the barrel of a gun, for us we have sought to take peaceful means and there are many options on our table. I stated in that clarion call that discipline which is now being exhibited by our party supporters and the larger opposition, so to speak, is a shield that protects us. And I said if we remain law-abiding citizens, lawfulness is a two-edged sword. And then finally, I called upon them to be united and to exhibit unity of purpose. So, all these together amounts to serious options of causing a regime change.

Your critics say Kyagulanyi is now alone in the fight for regime change via X, and you in Parliament, it is business as usual. Isn't that betrayal?

Did he (Kyagulanyi) on X command a boycott of Parliament, and we never complied? This is a pack of lies. We have not defied any of his directives. The media is only trying to use his being away to castigate us for not also joining him in running to where he is, but that is not the way to go. That is not how we work. It does not mean that when the leader is tweeting, we also have to follow suit as if it were a choir. We only wait for the opportunity that would require concerted efforts. If it is a matter that requires concerted effort, that is when you will see us all over social media, including X. But his tweets have been informative about his whereabouts, about his being safe and sound and all these tweets in summary are meant to keep hope alive in the massive support that we have that would be dejected and dismayed. So, there is nowhere where we have found ourselves on opposite sides of the aisle. We are still together with the leader – even when he is not with us.

How far can Kyagulanyi go when it comes to 'hiding'?

When did he say he is in hiding? I do not think he said he was hiding. He has merely escaped the wrath of the regime which you could read if you visited his home in Magere (Wakiso district). So, that escape is merely to survive. At least now we know the commander is alive and we can virtually get to him or engage with him to give us guidance. We live in a global village.

By virtue of my office, in absentia of the president, I act and that one is provided for in any structure of leadership.

Some NUP 'foot soldiers' on social media have said since you described the recent general election as a sham, you, the elected party MPs, should boycott the swearing-in ceremony in May. What would you tell them?

This party has a leadership, which will sit down and consider the available options of whether we boycott or not, but we cannot take advice from every Tom, Dick, and Harry, especially on social media, for that matter... For instance, if the Opposition and particularly NUP, which enjoys numerical strength, come to the 12th Parliament, opt to keep away, that would be a serious achievement on the part of the regime in power. So, we are not about to be misled, and we do not have a shortage of advisers as MPs-elect, who are undergoing serious trials and political persecution.

Outgoing Mawokota South MP Yusuf Nsibambi recently implored anyone in NUP who can reach Kyagulanyi to advise him to return home to resolve his "misunderstandings" with the Government. What is your comment on that?

We would have taken him seriously if he was still part of the struggle, but he is no longer part of the struggle; he is no longer opposition. He is now the regime. If he had done that before he crossed to the ruling party, maybe he would have been taken seriously, but now it is too late. We would even say that he is being used as a mercenary to lure the innocent NUP leaders into trouble.

But do you welcome any effort to have dialogue with the Government?

We would not reject co-operation, but then we have to be very careful with the people we are to co-operate with because some of the past engagements between the Government and the Opposition are very discouraging for us to swiftly enter any talks.

Some people are wondering how you managed to avoid being arrested when the Police was arresting other NUP deputy presidents. How did you survive?

I do not know what they were using as their basis for making arrests, but what I know from colleagues is that these were merely trumped-up charges that they were slapping on most of the people they were arresting. So, for me it is by God's grace that I survived. God's grace worked for me, just like God's grace worked for my superior, Robert Kyagulanyi not to have been arrested because if he had been arrested, they would have incarcerated him like Kizza Besigye.

Where does NUP fall on the issue of the speakership race?

That particular item is still premature because we have not convened as leadership to finally agree on the way forward. We are also a force to be reckoned with. We cannot lack among our own numbers one who could represent us in that race. So, we will cross that