

Alan Tacca On the Mark

Will Uganda remain a vampire state for another five years?

As he never tires of hammering it into the ears of his audience at various radio talk shows, one of President Museveni's media functionaries, Mr Tamale Mirundi, has a very high opinion of his intellectual prowess.

And perhaps because he keeps reminding his studio hosts at Top, Impact and Star FM radio stations that they are among the many Ugandans incapable of advanced reasoning (*"Bino mmwe temubitegeera"*), none of them seems able to rise above the humiliation and muster the confidence to challenge even the most obvious inconsistencies and contradictions in his fiery verbal exhibitions.

Take two of his pet themes. Repeated a thousand times over the years, the first goes like this: Opposition politicians Dr Kizza Besigye and Mr Amama Mbabazi, et al are serial thieves who have also been undermining the NRM government in every other way you can think of, and who now want to take power so that they can protect their loot.

The second theme goes like this: Why is it Dr Besigye who always claims that the election has been rigged against him every time he has contested? If you are cheated so many times, then there is a problem with you.

The inability to guard your votes is proof of

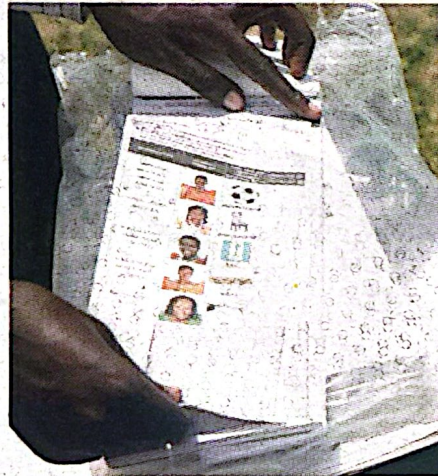
your incompetence.

Okay? Now, from the mindset of the ruling elite; then the spirit cultivated in a partisan Parliament and the election-related laws they formulate, as well as the attitude of the various security organisations and their shadowy goons; to the complex mechanisms of handling the voters' register and the ballot papers themselves; at every stage in this long exercise, distortions and outright cheating can be deliberately introduced.

In my ignorance, I imagine that it is much easier to catch the thieves who have, say, overpriced the transport element in the organisation of an international conference; or the construction of a government road; or who have hired ghost teachers and ghost soldiers; or who have wrongly removed and shared out Gavi funds; it is probably much easier to detect, identify and prosecute these culprits than to catch the conspirators who manipulate the electoral process.

If this observation is fairly sound, and if we also take on board the reasoning of our esteemed radio talk show intellectual, then a ruler whose Treasury is repeatedly and successfully raided by Opposition politicians is far more incompetent than an Opposition candidate whose

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votes are repeatedly stolen – unless of course the ruler has a mysterious interest in the disappearance of government funds.

But then maybe that is the conclusion Mr Mirundi has all along been indirectly inviting us to make.

Anyhow, the incumbent President has had at his disposal institutions that sound imposing. The Auditor General; the Inspector General of Government; Parliament's Public Accounts Committee; a full tier of courts; then also a special Anti-Corruption Court. He has the police and its detectives. And who knows; maybe the relatively recent crime preventers also have an elite wing that can anticipate and avert acts of corruption in high places. Yet Uganda is still run like a vampire state.

President Museveni may see a linear beauty in solving one big problem at a time and marking his triumph on the calendar, and such an approach might indeed appeal to any one-man-show micro-manager, but its beauty is deceptive. The mechanisms of the State and a country's socio-economic activity are a total concept. They are inseparable. You ignore one aspect at your peril. That is why true leaders seek out praiseworthy performers, not pathetic cases against whom the leader can shine.

President Museveni more or less ignored (or maybe even winked at) the thieves in his government for 30 years, because (we are told) he was attending to more urgent issues. Now we have on our hands a country whose every sector is dominated by thieves. Whether Mr Museveni is re-elected or an Opposition leader takes power, it is quite frightening to visualise another five years of government propagandists castigating people outside government as the movers and shakers of a vampire state that would not go away.

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