

Opposition MPs accuse the Speaker of bias and allocating little time for them to present their five pieces of dissenting reports on the Bill.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

When the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026, was finally passed at 8.55pm yesterday, Parliament Speaker Anita Among, with a sigh of relief, declared, "Honourable members, this is an historic Bill, because it is our last Bill in the 11th Parliament!"

She commended the legislators and described them as 'wonderful people,' who should be blessed by God. She then adjourned the House sine die (unspecified date).

But that was only the sweet ending of the story that had seen hot exchanges on the floor of Parliament that day.

How it unfolded

A group of 353 MPs had earlier converged at the House at their last sitting, where the majority endorsed the Bill that had drawn robust Opposition from the public and heated debate among the MPs who scrutinised and debated it.

The open exchange between the two business leaders in Parliament; the Leader of Opposition in Parliament (LoP), Mr Joel Ssenyonyi, and the Prime Minister, Ms Robinah Nabbanja, clearly indicated Speaker Among had an uphill task to control the charged MPs as they passed the controversial Bill on Tuesday.

The Opposition MPs accused the Speaker of bias and allocating little time for them to present their five pieces of dissenting reports on the Bill.

Ms Among was at some point compelled to heed the Opposition's demand after they protested the time allocated to them was limited, with Mr Ssenyonyi insisting that fair play demanded, "You have your way, and we have our say."

But the Speaker in retort said, "Even if you do everything, it [the Bill] must be done today!"

After listening to the report of the majority members of the joint Committee on Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, and Defence and Internal Affairs, and other minority reports, the MPs then scrutinised the Bill clause by clause and made some minor changes before they passed the contentious piece of legislation into an Act of Parliament.

The law

Upon receiving the President's signature, any individual or legal entity found engaged in political activities that promote the interests of a foreigner will be regarded as an agent of a foreigner.

A uniform punishment of Shs2 billion fine for entities, and Shs1 billion fine, or 10 years imprisonment for individuals, or both have been tagged on the majority of the crimes.

An agent of a foreigner, for example, once the President signs the legislation into law, will now be held culpable should they solicit, collect, disburse, or dispense contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of a foreigner, for the purpose of financing or sponsoring political activities to further the interest of a foreigner.

How Among delivered the Sovereignty Bill

Drama in the House

Led by Mr Ssenyonyi, the Opposition team entered the House determined to fight and block the Bill, but their numerically big opposite in ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party easily countered them.

They were led by Premier Nabbanja, who is also the Leader of Government Business in Parliament.

The Speaker started battling with Mr Ssenyonyi right from the onset of the debate before Gen David Muhoozi, the State Minister of Internal Affairs, kicked off the deliberations, after Mr Ssenyonyi, also the Nakawa West legislator, asked the House to throw out the Bill on two grounds.

Mr Ssenyonyi, the National Unity Platform (NUP) party spokesperson, told Parliament that the Bill to be tabled was fresh and was different from the one that the same House had received late last month.

He argued that several amendments had been inserted after President Museveni rejected the Bill.

Mr Ssenyonyi further said the same Bill that was about to be processed, was premised on a leaked Committee report, and yet the same 11th Parliament had blocked his tabling of the Uganda Airlines probe report that was authored by the Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Cosase) on the same grounds.

But the Speaker, who is also the Bukedea Woman MP, rebutted that she had personally sanctioned the Committee report to be uploaded on the Parliament Information System, so it didn't leak.

She also dismissed the claims that the Bill was new, saying the President did not write to her on anything regarding the proposed law.

But once the Government Chief Whip moved a motion for the House to suspend Rule 214(14) to allow members to, without delay, debate the joint committee report, Mr Ssenyonyi bounced back with more jabs.

Immediately, Speaker Among announced that the "Ayes" had carried the day to suspend the rules as proposed by Government Chief Whip Denis Hamson Obua, Mr Ssenyonyi, and 40-odd MPs stood up and refused to sit down, insisting their members were not content with the voice voting and demanded a division.

After Speaker Among directed the Ayes into the lobby on her right and the Nays on her left, she appointed two tellers for each lobby and one for those who abstained to count those present in the House.

With only 54 Members present, the Opposition side suffered a significant defeat at the hands of the 284 NRM party MPs. But Mr Ssenyonyi again rejected the defeat and demanded that the Speaker ascertain the numbers by head count.

The LoP insisted that "this Sovereignty Bill protects power, not Ugandans, and that it criminalises dissent and shrinks freedom; and should be rejected."

After the Speaker announced the results from the division lobbies, Mr Ssenyonyi quickly called upon his col-



Parliament Speaker Anita Among chairs the House on Tuesday. PHOTO/ PARLIAMENT

leagues to remain standing, expressing their dissent towards the voting outcome. They insisted that the Speaker verify the tally.

She grudgingly accepted and assured Mr Ssenyonyi and his Opposition colleagues that "We shall not get tired... this is the last one, and we shall have it."

Ssenyonyi hit back almost instantly: "We shall also not get tired." In retort, The prime minister joined in what appeared a humorous exchange between the Leader of Opposition and Speaker Among, who reminded the members that she is "the custodian of law in Parliament."

PM Nabbanja moment

Ms Nabbanja, who stood at the dispatch and attempted to clutch the dispatch table microphone, shouted out, "It must end today, whether you like it or not," to which LoP Ssenyonyi replied, "They told you to get out and not to come to the microphone and make noise."

In an effort to restore order in the House, Speaker Among struck a placating tone and mentioned Jonathan Odur's name as she called for calm and patience. However, a visibly upset Odur did not appreciate the gesture, especially after the Speaker denied him more time that he said he had needed to present his extensive 40-page minority report.

At first, the Speaker offered him two more minutes to wrap up his submission, which he outrightly declined. She then extended the time by an additional five minutes, but Mr Odur still refused, pleading that the Hansard captures what happened and how the events unfolded for future reference.

The battle-ready ruling party machine, through its Chief Whip had effectively mobilised their members to participate in big numbers.

Outgoing Kira Municipality MP Ssemujju Nganda previously referred to this situation as "SFC," an acronym for the elite and thorough military Special Forces Command. With a tongue-in-cheek remark, he said, "I want to begin by thanking the NRM Whip for effective mobilisation because the majority of these MPs have not been coming."

Ms Among immediately interjected and said all MPs had been attending, only for Ssemujju to add that, "I agree to that when we were processing the Budget, but I am scared because last time when SFC invaded us, they were standing like many of those NRM MPs in the corners."

"I didn't mean to offend anyone, but



NRM affair.

"I want to begin by thanking the NRM Whip for effective mobilisation because the majority of these MPs have not been coming [to legislate in Parliament]."

Kira Municipality MP Ssemujju Nganda

if there are colleagues who are here to vote, you can ask them to excuse themselves. We need some air; those who are standing everywhere, they will be notified that voting has started."

Scrutinising the Bill

After some back and forth, the Committee of the whole House was convened to scrutinise the Bill clause by clause, but no sooner had they started on Clause 2 than Mr Ssenyonyi rose to remind the Speaker.

"...We were here battling for space. Honourable [Jonathan] Odur hardly read his report; he had read a quarter way, others you were saying two minutes. These rules give every member space in these rules. I am asking, are you saying that the views on our end... you don't want to entertain them, because our colleges from the other side were given 40 minutes but with the haggling that has been happening..."

He further said, "you people have got the numbers to do anything, you can even choose that tomorrow the sun will not rise because you have numbers after all. I don't know why you are panicking so much, our requests don't have value, in the Committee our colleagues were struggling to get space, we thought that when we come here our leader of all of us will be fair to all of us... are we irrelevant to you?"

In response, Ms Among said, "Honourable Ssenyonyi is a very good friend of mine, and I don't want people who play double standards. You came and thanked me for giving your members time as you asked... I have accorded time for the members to read their minority reports, including Medard Ssegona, Betty Nambooze, Gilbert Olanya, and others."

Mr Ssenyonyi was referencing the space constraints the committee members faced while trying to present their minority reports, where the Erute North MP, Mr Odur was forced to read his quarter way due to time limitation. The Speaker earlier allocated 30 minutes for all minority reports, but later added an additional five minutes.

Others who presented the dissenting report were Mr Gilbert Olanya (Kilak South), Mr Abdallah Kiwanuka (Mukono North), Mr Médard Ssegona (Busiro East), and Ms Betty Nambooze (Mukono Municipality).

The House later scrutinised the Bill clause by clause and passed it to await the President Museveni's signature to make it law.