

Uganda eyes middle income status

By Nicholas Wassajja

American President Donald Trump recently labeled African countries "shitholes". A few days ago, President Yoweri Museveni said he "loves" Trump because it is such controversial, but honest statements that will act as a wake up call to the sleeping giant that is Africa.

Reading through the minds of the National Resistance Army (NRA) heroes that set out to capture power 32 years ago, the intention was to transform the country politically, socially and economically, perhaps to avoid the Trump kind of labelling.

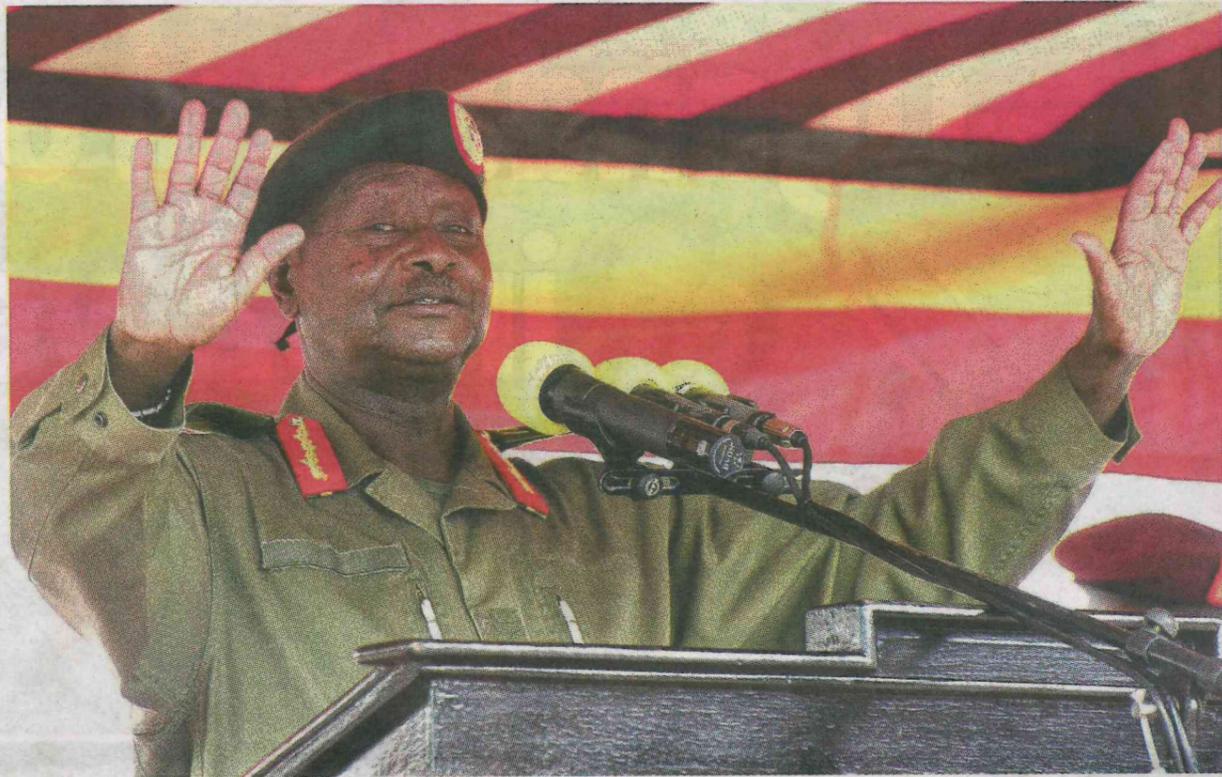
Indeed, the progress made over the years has been the result of shared effort, which rhymes with the theme for the 32nd Liberation Day anniversary, "Uganda's liberation a significant contribution to our present and future development".

It is upon this background that President Museveni, who spearheaded the NRA liberation struggle, argues that to avoid future scorning, Uganda and Africa at large needs to find lasting solutions to its continent's plight.

The liberation struggle started with 27 brave men on February 6, 1981 with an attack on the then Government army installation at Kabamba. It was an uphill task, but they succeeded.

The NRM deputy secretary general, Richard Todwong, says at the core of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) is the contribution each individual made, but urges citizens to continue engaging.

"When you read from history books, you realise that from the word go, Ugandans have been the cornerstone in the success story we all



Under President Yoweri Museveni, NRM's vision is to propel the country to attain middle-income status by 2020

THE CELEBRATIONS WILL RUN UNDER THE THEME, "UGANDA'S LIBERATION, A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT."

share in. However, a lot more still needs to be done, for example, we cannot be blind of the scattered cases of insecurity in some parts of the country. I think we need to go back to the NRA philosophy of everyone being their neighbours' keeper," Todwong says.

He adds the various security units and authorities continue to play their role in ensuring that Ugandans enjoy the

ultimate freedom that their forefathers sacrificed for. "Partial responsibility is an onus on everyone. But by and large, Uganda is safe from border to border," Todwong says.

His view rhymes well with President Yoweri Museveni's recent thoughts on the final stages of the East African Community (EAC) integration.

Speaking at the opening of the 4th East African



Richard Todwong

Legislative Assembly (EALA) last week, Museveni said the strive for prosperity of the people in the region should be knitted well with strategic security.

As the country looks forward to the final stages of the EAC integration, which involves political federation and monetary union by 2024, the issue of strategic security has been partly addressed by establishing the EAC armed forces, made of all the six partner states.

However, with or without the regional standby force, Uganda has mastered the importance of regional peace and security in the last 32 years of the NRM rule by providing its gallant sons and daughters a chance to fight alongside troupes from foreign countries in the face of instability.

The justification for this enormous sacrifice, Todwong says, is the fact that the fundamental pillar of development is peace and security, both internal and external.

"It is not news that South Sudan contributes to Uganda's export trade. Therefore, it is not only

illogical, but bad economics that we secure Amuru district and forget the neighbouring areas on the other side of the border," Todwong said.

According to the deputy government chief whip, Solomon Silwanyi (MP Bukooli Central), the choice of the theme is not only meant to appreciate the role Ugandans have played in building their country, but it is also a reminder of where Uganda has come from and where it is headed in terms of development.

The country has been experiencing consistent economic growth. According to a recent Bank of Uganda State of the Economy Report, in fiscal year 2015/2016, it recorded Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 4.6% in real terms and 11.6% in nominal terms.

Exports have increased from 2.8% of GDP in 2012 to 2.9% in 2016, while imports have decreased from 5.3% in 2012 to 4.3% in 2016.

The bank foresees economic growth picking up at 6.0% in 2019. Growth is expected to continue rising, driven mainly by public investment in extensive infrastructure and human capital development.

Silwanyi quickly adds that with infrastructure being high on the agenda in a decade plus, the Government will soon shift to enhancing human resource development and social service delivery, along more drums for household income.

"We believe that every Ugandan of goodwill has supported the NRM government in one way or the other. For example, we have teachers who, besides teaching academic work to learners in class, have

also instilled the spirit of patriotism," Silwanyi says.

He adds that the celebrations are also a wake up call for all stakeholders to remember that Uganda still has a long way to go.

Silwanyi says: "As we reflect on where we were, we also need to cast a light into the future. Yes, it is a bright one, but there are things that must be done. Having been in power for 30 years, some Ugandans seem satisfied with the current achievements and have veered off the course. That explains the high burden cost of non communicable diseases."

Today also marks almost two years since the electorate renewed the mandate of the NRM for another five-year term. The current vision is to propel the country to attain middle-income status by 2020.

When the NRM took over power in 1986, it tagged along the famous Ten-Point Programme, which outlined ambitious promises to transform the country.

Silwanyi's fears were allayed by President Museveni in 2016, when he outlined the key strategic bottlenecks that need to be addressed if Uganda is to achieve the much-awaited for middle income status by 2020.

Museveni said they should be addressed in the 2016-2021 term of office that he dubbed *Kisanja hakuna muchezo*.

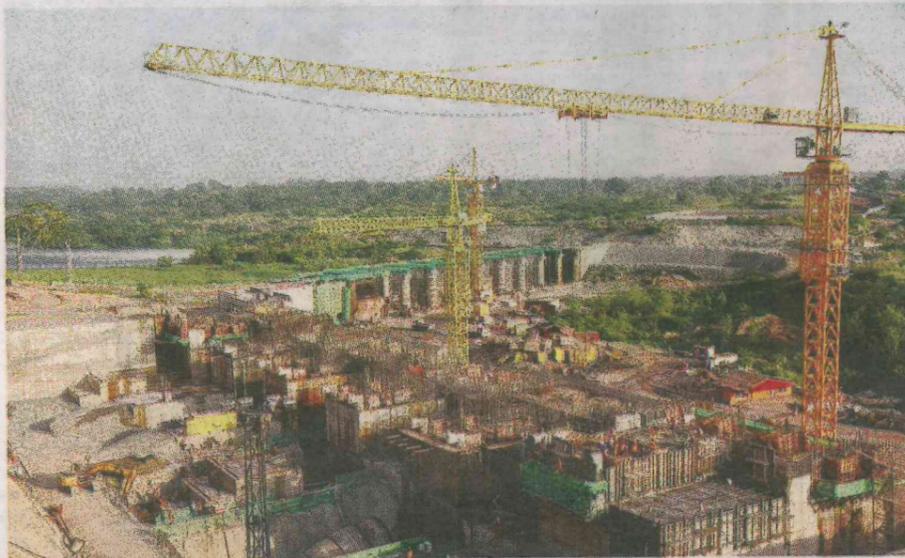
At the inauguration of Cabinet in 2016, Museveni outlined the major hurdles to economic development and backed them with executive orders, as strategic interventions to guide the realisation of his new plan.

He identified four principles at the core of the rejuvenated NRM, which include patriotism, Pan Africanism, social-economic transformation and democracy.

The 10 strategic bottleneck were — fighting ideological disorientation, eliminating sectarianism, improving education to refine human resource and facilitating private sector-led economic growth.

Others were developing roads, railway and electricity infrastructure, market expansion through regional integration, pursuing industrialisation for exports' value-addition, developing the service sector to create jobs, modernising agriculture to increase household incomes and deepening democratic governance.

With a projection of about sh16 trillion revenue collection in the 2018/19 budget framework paper from about sh15 trillion in the 2017/18 financial year, what remains to be seen is whether Government will address the standing challenges for a better Uganda.



The Karuma power project in Kiryandongo district. Electricity is one of the projects that the NRM government has embarked on to foster development in the country