

talking point



Changes. What is happening is that we are trying to transform some things at the university to enable the university contribute more meaningfully to the development of the Ugandan society. A few people may not be happy with the new reforms."



I am no dictator, I'm only trying to put things right - Nawangwe

Interview. Makerere University has over the recent weeks dominated the news because of the ongoing strike that pitted the Vice Chancellor against a section of his staff. *Sunday Monitor's Eric Kyama* caught up with the Vice Chancellor at his office at the university.

CLAIMS

"I don't know what a dictator means because everything I do goes through concerned committees. Probably they have got a certain definition of what a dictator means.

A university is not a political organisation. It is an academic institute governed by a certain set of rules and regulations. It is a professional organisation."

During your installation in September 2017, you promised to provide 'much needed leadership' with 'transparency and absolute humility'. But a strike is currently underway because the staff don't seem to agree with your style of leadership. Where could the problem be coming from?

I don't know about the strike you are talking about. I want to emphasise that there is no strike because teaching is going on. You are probably talking about some defiance by a section of the staff. That doesn't mean that we are not being transparent.

Probably we are being very transparent and that is what is shaking people who were used to lack of transparency. Now we are transparent and the administration is saying 'you have not declared the strike as required by the law so we don't recognise this, go back to work' and people have gone back to work. But a small section of people are trying to be defiant.

But the strike has been captured, including by the media...

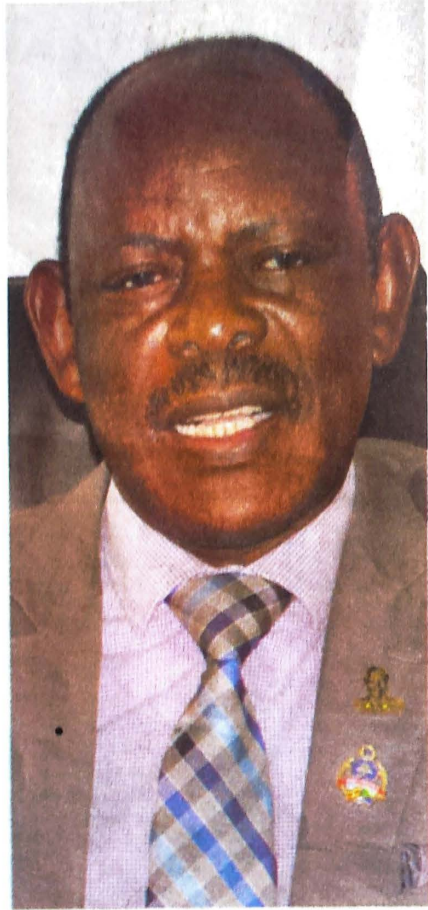
Well, I don't control the media. The media has the right to report what it wants. But you are a journalist; you can walk around and go to the colleges.

I will tell you that at the moment it is only the School of Law where no teaching has taken place, and College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences where only partial teaching is taking place. At the rest of the colleges, the situation is back to normal.

You have met a lot of resistance from some of your staff and students alike in introducing some of your reforms. Why do you think this is so?

Any change comes with resistance, whether it is for the good or for the bad. It takes time for people to appreciate what is being done. Universities are very traditional institutions, they have developed certain traditions.

It is a bit hard for some people to move away from certain traditions that have been there. What is happen-



Position.
Makerere University Vice Chancellor
Prof Barnabas Nawangwe during the meeting this week.

PHOTOS BY SHABIDAH NAKIBINGYA

A university is not a political organisation. It is an academic institute governed by a certain set of rules and regulations. It is a professional organisation. If people find that they are being challenged that probably they are failing certain things and somebody is trying to enforce that these are rules that govern us, they might think that I am a dictator. But in actual sense I am just trying to put things right.

You recently suspended or fired lecturers from the university. This is just the most recent in a string of suspensions during your reign. How should the public perceive you?

How will the public know? We know why these people were suspended and fired because we supervise them. There is tendency of people thinking that Nawangwe has suspended or fired so and so, the VC doesn't fire anyone; the VC can only report cases to the appointments board.

It's the appointments board that acts on such cases and decides whether to fire or suspend someone. [For] the people who were dismissed, I think *Daily Monitor* ran a story indicating why some lecturers were dismissed, which member of the public can claim that these people were not dismissed fairly?

Does the public believe that the university can accommodate a person who sexually harasses a student? Does the public believe that Makerere University should accommodate a member of staff who absconds from duty?

Does the public believe that Makerere University should accommodate a member of staff who ends up harassing a fellow lecturer? Does the public believe that Makerere University should accommodate a member of staff who uses abusive language yet we, as the top brains, are expected to be exemplary? Does the public believe that these people were fired unfairly? I don't think so.

Let's talk matters concerning academics. You promised to lift Makerere to the epitome of academic excellence and make Uganda proud. How is it going so far?

I think we have made good progress with that. We are still ranked among the top five universities by the Times Higher Education, a ranking that measures the quality of what we do; the quality of education and research. Times Higher Education also ranked us among the top 500 universities in the world.

On the issue of some other rankings like Webometrics, we have also made some progress because we had slid to

ing is that we are trying to transform some things at the university to enable the university contribute more meaningfully to the development of the Ugandan society.

A few people may not be happy with the new reforms. They are used to some traditions that are not helpful at all to the university and the Ugandan society.

But the administration is saying no, as the top brains of this country, lecturers are obliged to do more to help the country overcome some challenges since a lot has been invested in them.

And the same lecturers you are appealing to seem to question your leadership style, with some calling you a dictator

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