

Carrying the Ugandan Flag in the UK Parliament

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Four thousand miles away from Kampala in the heart of central London, a group of Ugandans are busy shaping events in British politics.

Sitting in the Palace of Westminster, the mother of all Parliaments, are five Ugandan-born politicians and an MP born in Britain to Ugandan parents.

They are often tipped for higher roles and are helping to influence British politics both at home and abroad.

When Lord Dolar Popat, born in Tororo in 1953, recently met with a delegation of Ugandan MPs visiting London, he joked about a 'Ugandan Cabinet in Exile' in Westminster.

In the elected chamber, the House of Commons, Priti Patel and Shailesh Vara are Conservative MPs with strong political backgrounds. Vara was born in Kakira in 1960 to Hindu Indian immigrants. Having moved to Britain at the age of four, Vara trained and qualified as a solicitor.

He was first elected Member of Parliament for North West Cambridgeshire in May 2005 and was re-elected in 2010.

He became a front-bench spokesman for his party in 2006 when he became the Shadow Deputy Leader of the House.

Since 2010 he has served Her Majesty's Government as a whip, ensuring support for government legislation and advising ministers on potential problems.

Priti Patel is seen by many as a rising star in the Conservative Party. Born in London to Ugandan parents, she was elected in 2010 as the MP for Witham constituency in Essex.

Before parliament she worked for the Conservative Central Office Research Department where she became the director of corporate communications.

She is an active and outspoken MP, seen as being part of the right of the Conservative Party on many issues.

In the House of Lords, the unelected second chamber of the British Parliament made up appointed Peers, hereditary members and members of the Church of England, Uganda's influence can also be felt.

Originally from Kampala, the charismatic and outspoken Archbishop of York, John Sentamu continues to take an active interest in Africa.

Sentamu, the second highest ranked Bishop in Britain, is the sixth of thirteen children. Encouraged in this Ugandan education by English missionaries and teachers, he graduated with a bachelor's in law from Makerere University, Kampala, and is an advocate of the High Court of Uganda.

On moving to the UK in 1974, he studied Theology at Cambridge University and was ordained in 1979.

He has taken on a number of difficult roles within and outside the Church, including being the Bishop of Birmingham in 2002 and chair of the Damilola Taylor murder review.

Baroness Shriti Vadera was born in Uganda in 1962 into a family of Indian origin. She fled to India in 1972 before studying philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University.

She is an investment banker by trade and for over 14 years Vadera was employed at investment bank UBS Warburg.

Following Gordon Brown's election as Prime Minister in 2007, he appointed Vadera as a minister in the Department for International Development and after six months, she was moved to the Department for Business.

Vadera is believed to have been instrumental in the creation of an unprecedented banking rescue package. Since her time in government she has acted as an advisor to the G20 and acted as a consultant to many governments.

Joining Vadera and Sentamu is Lord Mohammed Sheik, a Conservative Peer, born in Kenya and brought up in Uganda. Sheikh's parents originated from the

Indian sub-continent and he attended school in Mbale where he attained the Cambridge Higher School Certificate.

His successful business career started when he joined the Sun Alliance Insurance Company in London. Lord Sheikh is now the chairman of Iqra Ethical Plc. (Islamic and ethical insurances and financial services) and Macmillan Sheik Plc.

Sheikh is also Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Forum and the leader of the Conservative Ethnic Diversity Council. He became a life peer in 2006 and he speaks regularly in the House of Lords on a variety of subjects.

The final member of the Ugandan Group is Lord Dolar Popat. Having been made a peer in July 2010, Popat has focussed his energies on building relations with the Commonwealth, particularly India and East Africa.

‘I regularly meet delegations of East African MPs and diplomats here,’ says Popat.

Lord Popat has been a businessman for the past 30 years, living in London with his wife Sandhya and his three children. His passion in ensuring the Conservative Party appeals to the British Indian community and he coordinates much of the party’s outreach work.

Despite being one of the Asians forced out of Uganda in the early 1970’s , Popat still remembers his home country fondly.

‘People still make the mistake of underestimating Africa. It can have a bright future, but we need to develop the next generation of politicians and ensure the best democratic principles are embedded across the continent.’

‘Britain no longer looks on Africa as merely a place to deposit aid. Having a strong Ugandan influence in our Parliament can only help to ensure we work closely together.’