

MINISTRY MOVES | KFS set to establish extent of forest plantations

Sawmillers upbeat over plan to lift logging ban

Move is set to end the decade-long monopoly which multinational corporations enjoyed

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Sawmillers have welcomed a government plan to lift the ban on logging imposed 10 years ago.

Forestry and Wildlife minister Noah Wekesa said the ban would be lifted once the Cabinet gives its approval. The decision was reached after talks between the government and other players in forest management.

Yesterday, sawmillers said lifting the ban would end the decade-long monopoly enjoyed by multinational corporations.

The chairman of the Kenya Timber Manufacturers Association, Rev Bernard Gitau, said: "Multinational companies have been favoured by the government for all this time, during the ban, and I think it's time all of us are treated equally."

Dr Wekesa made the announcement on Friday in a speech read on his behalf by the permanent secretary, Mr Mohammed Wa-Mwachai, during a graduation ceremony at the Kenya Forestry College in Londiani.



BACKGROUND

Risk to forest cover

Logging was banned in 2000 due to indiscriminate destruction of trees, which reduced forest cover to under two per cent of the land. This, in turn, led to drying up of the country's main source of natural water, including rivers and lakes.

Sawmillers now say the ban should be lifted because there is a system that would ensure sustainable logging.

He said the ban, though well-intended, had encouraged illegal logging in public forests.

It had increased the value of timber and driven trade in the commodity onto the black market, he added.

He said his ministry, through the Kenya Forestry Service, would soon complete a survey to establish the extent of forest plantations in the country.

"When the ban is lifted, allocation of harvesting areas will be according to provisions of the Public Procurement and Disposal Act 2005," he said.

Dr Wekesa said the Act would provide for competitive bidding and establish a reserve price for any size of plantation or trees.

At the same time, players in the forestry sector said that the ban negated the spirit of conservation of forests by allowing timber to rot and go to waste.

They spoke during a two-day workshop held in Nakuru.

"It is of great concern to us members. We have agreed that it (ban) has taken unnecessarily long to be lifted, which is not in line with sustainable forest management," said the Forest Society of Kenya chairman, Mr Philip Wamahu.

BRIEFLY

Flamingos flock back as Lake Nakuru fills up again



NAKURU

The number of flamingos at Lake Nakuru National Park has tripled due to heavy rains. Even the lake has filled up according to the park's acting assistant director, Ms Lydia Kisoyan. The park now has over 1.7 million flamingos up from 500,000 at the beginning of the year. Last year's drought had led to the death of some animals at the park.

RACHUONYO

Schoolgirl, 12, dumps her baby in toilet

A 12-year-old pupil delivered a baby and later dumped it in a toilet at Kowidi in Rachuonyo District at the weekend. The baby's body was found after the girl's relatives and villagers launched a search. Kowidi assistant chief Joshua Awiti Obuon decried the increasing cases of pregnancies among schoolgirls.

MOMBASA

MPs accused of bias in endorsing appointments

MPs have been accused of putting personal interests first in recommending appointments for heads of State commissions. Gichugu MP Martha Karua cited the case of Cecil Miller, whose appointment to the Interim Independent Electoral Commission was turned down by MPs "following unfounded allegations against him".

MIGORI

Health teams blamed for cholera outbreak

Two districts have been put on a cholera alert after five people died and 20 others were hospitalised. Residents of Kuria West and Migori districts blamed the deaths on medical and public health officers. They claimed the officers had not closed unhygienic business premises in Kenhancha, Masaba and Mabera towns.

SAMBURU

Rustlers kill boy and escape with livestock

It was double tragedy for Ngiro village in Samburu North after cattle rustlers struck, killed a 14-year-old boy, injured three people and stole more than 1,000 head of cattle on Saturday night. The District Commissioner, Mr Moses Mbaruku, said the incident occurred about 10km from Baragoi town and police were hunting for the raiders.

Two taken to Uganda over terrorism case

BY NATION REPORTER

Two suspects have been arrested in Mombasa over last month's Kampala bombing.

They were seized at the weekend in Nyalil and flown to Uganda where they are expected to be charged alongside their accomplices already in custody.

And in Nairobi, anti-terrorism police were yesterday holding six people in connection with terrorism investigations.

Three of the suspects were being held at Kasarani police station and the fourth, a woman with two children (below), was being held at Kilimanjaro.

In Mombasa, Coast anti-terrorism unit boss Elijah Tirop said the suspects are of Pakistani and Kenyan descent. He said seven vehicles suspected to have been stolen were found in their compound.

"I can confirm two suspects have been arrested in connection with last month's Kampala bombing and they will also face charges of theft," said Mr Tirop.

He said the raid was a joint operation with detectives from international agencies who had been

tippled by accomplices of the suspects in Uganda.

"I was not involved much in the operation that is why I cannot give more information," he said.

Authorised

A police officer, who did not want to be named because he is not authorised to talk to the media, said the pair was taken to Central and Port police stations where they were questioned separately for hours.

"The detectives from the Anti-Terrorism Unit have been trailing the suspects for several weeks before they caught up with them at their home in Nyalil," said the source.

Early this month, two people were also arrested at Kongowea's Kwa Karama village in connection with the bombing.

The arrest sparked protests from Muslim leaders, who accused the police of harassment.



Muslims push for a role in Cabinet team

BY NATION REPORTER

Muslims are pushing for inclusion of their representatives in a Cabinet committee that will supervise the implementation of the new Constitution.

Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims secretary-general Adan Wachu said the community feels discriminated against following failure by President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga to include a minister of the Muslim faith in the committee.

The team was set up during a Cabinet meeting last week and is headed by President Kibaki and Mr Odinga. Other members are Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka; Deputy Prime Ministers Uhuru Kenyatta and Musalia Mudavadi; and ministers Mutula Kilonzo, Sally Kosgei and Beth Ngilo.

Spearhead our issues

Others are Mr Kiraitu Murungi, Prof Anyang' Nyong'o, Ms Esther Murugi, Mrs Charity Ngilu, Mr James Orenge, Prof George Saitoti, Mr Moses Wetang'ula and Assistant-General Amos Wako.

Speaking to the *Daily Nation* over the phone, Mr Wachu said at least one of the Muslim ministers should have been included in the team to ensure their interests, including the kadhi courts, were addressed.

"Now who will spearhead our issues in the team? Our members are calling us, asking what went wrong," he said.

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