

COMMUNICATION

Lid over State secrets could be removed

Ministry drafts policy to ease flow of information to the taxpayer

By MUGUMO MUNENE

The public will access some of the Government's best kept secrets if new proposals to declassify official documents are passed into law.

The Information and Communication ministry has drafted a policy document on freeing government information to be discussed in Parliament.

Yesterday, Information minister Mutahi Kagwe told a seminar in Nairobi that the State was committed to ensure smooth flow of information between public officers and taxpayers.

"The Government will enact a Freedom of Information Act to provide a roadmap of how citizens can gain access to government information and instances where access can be denied," he said.

He went on: "Under the Act, public institutions will be required to produce any record on the request of any person, unless the institution can show a statutory exemption."

Public officials are reluctant to give information to the public, often citing the Official Secrets Act, a colonial relic designed specifically to preserve State secrets and security.

However, the drafters of the law did not outline which specific secrets related to State security, thus giving leeway to civil servant to deny the public

access to information.

The Official Secrets Act makes it an offence to use, for any purpose, prejudicial to the safety and interests of the country any code, word, plan article document or information that has been entrusted to a civil servant.

The laws have made access to government documents by the public and media a nightmare as bureaucrats who do not wish to give information cite the provisions.

Elsewhere, Nation Media Group chief executive Linus Gitahi said the fight for media freedom in Africa was on because some "rogue governments" were clamping down on its independence.

"We have witnessed rogue governments clamp down on independent media curtailing one of the cornerstones of a democratic society," he said.

Addressing the Moving Forward on Media Freedom, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Regional Conference for Africa at Safari Park Hotel, Mr Gitahi noted:

"The fight for media freedom is a fundamental role for all of us and that we shall never tire to demand it both at home and abroad. As some have said, human rights are not to be wished for; they are to be fought for."

Kampala recently closed NTV Uganda that belongs to NMG.

Public institutions will be required to produce any record on request of any person, says minister

COURT BATTLE



Ms Bernadette Okutu Shama, a widow of former Moyale MP Guracha Galgalo, leaves court with her lawyer, Mr Alfred Nyandieka, after hearing of the case involving the administration of Mr Galgalo's estate yesterday. Photo: PAUL WAVERU

Magistrate to testify in fight over former MP's property

By NATION Correspondent

An MP and a magistrate were yesterday summoned to appear before the High Court and testify in a dispute over administration of former Moyale MP Guracha Galgalo's estate.

High Court judge Lady Justice Joyce Aluoch also ordered the Moyale Member of Parliament, Mr Wario Malla Galgalo, a brother of the dead MP, to appear in court on March 13 when the case will be heard.

Also required in court is a magistrate stationed in Limuru, Mr Abdul Raman Aminga and Nairobi Kadhi Almuhdhar Ahmed Hussein.

The judge made the order following an application by lawyer Alfred Nyandieka representing Dr Guracha's widow, Ms Bernadette Okutu Shama.

Mr Nyandieka told the court that the three had sworn affidavits and he wanted to question them. Ms Shama is involved in a legal dispute with Ms

Rehema Dida Jaldesa who is claiming to be Dr Guracha's wife.

Ms Jaldesa wants the court to revoke temporary powers given to Ms Shama to administer the estate.

Ms Jaldesa has been listed as a beneficiary of the property in documents filed in court by Ms Shama.

She was indicated as a mistress of the dead MP, but she contends that she is his wife.

Judge questioned

And judge questioned why Ms Jaldesa was being referred to as a mistress. Mr Nyandieka told the court that Ms Jaldesa was described as such because she is married to another man.

The judge heard that Ms Jaldesa's previous marriage had not been dissolved.

But Ms Jaldesa's lawyer, Mr Cecil Miller, said the marriage was conducted according to the Islamic law and had been dissolved.

Sh350m store for medicine to be built

By NATION Correspondent

A medical drugs depot will soon be built in Nairobi's Embakasi area at a cost of Sh350 million.

Health minister Charity Ngilu yesterday said plans for the construction of the storage were at an "advanced stage".

"Currently, my ministry, through the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency, is spending hundreds of shillings in paying rents for hiring various warehouses in Nairobi and other towns," said the minister.

Shortage of drugs

Speaking in Nairobi, Mrs Ngilu said there were enough drugs in the country and allayed fears of a shortage of anti-retroviral treatment.

"At the moment, we have enough ARVs to treat the 120,000 people on the life-prolonging drugs for the next two years."

Mrs Ngilu was fielding questions from journalists during a fact-finding tour of the newly opened Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (Kemsas) depot on Mombasa road in Nairobi.

Kemsas's legal services manager, Mr Fred Wanyonyi said the 75,000sq feet depot currently stored drugs worth Sh4.8 billion.

Spacious depot

"Apart from the drugs, the facility is also able to store medical supplies such as gloves, syringes and hospital equipment due to its spacious size," he said.

Earlier, the minister inaugurated the third Kemsas board which will be led by Mr Peter Kanyago.

The members of the board include director of Medical Services, Dr James Nyikal and Kemsas chief executive, Dr Charles Kandle among others.

Mr Kanyago appealed to the Health ministry to increase budgetary allocation to Kemsas from the current Sh120 million to Sh400 million.

"This move is appropriate since the cost of operations fluctuates with the value and volume of medical commodities handled," he said.

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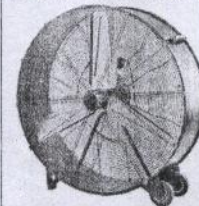
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