

CAUSE OF HALT

The natural calamities that have hit the country in the recent past including locust invasion and mudslides have affected salary enhancement

By Apollo Mubiru

There will be no salary enhancement for civil servants in the next financial year (2020/2021), the public service minister, Muruli Mukasa announced yesterday.

The minister attributed the discussion to natural calamities such as mudslides in Bugisu and other parts of the country due to heavy rains, locust invasion and strategic security issues that have encroached on the state coffers.

"Disasters require a lot of money and the need to realign our national priorities to respond to emergencies is also important. It is imperative that we put a halt to the pay rise until the next financial year," Muruli explained yesterday.

The minister said much as there are contingency funds to respond to disasters, travels abroad of public servants have been regulated to save money.

The Government announced a new salary structure for various categories of civil servants that included medics, judicial officers, scientists, teachers, lecturers and non-teaching staff in public universities, low-ranking Police and prisons officers.

The July circular standing instruction of the 2019/2020 salary structure distribution signed by the ministry's permanent secretary, Catherine Bitarakwate, put the country's wage bill at sh4.6 trillion, up from sh4.2 trillion.

The minister, who reiterated

Government halts pay rise for civil servants



Muruli Mukasa (right), flanked by the Nakasongola County MP Noah Mutebi during a press conference at the ministry head offices in Kampala last week. Photo by Nicholas Oneal

government's commitment to have a well-remunerated civil service, regretted the change in plan.

"We had anticipated that in 2020, we would have reached the climax of pay rise of the civil servants. We might effect the pay rise in the 2022/2023 financial year," Muruli said.

Merger of government agencies

Addressing journalists yesterday at his office in Wandegaya, Kampala, Muruli also said discussions were underway in Cabinet on the proposed merger of government agencies.

"We are at the final stages of the legal framework that will enable us have a leaner but efficient and well-motivated civil service. We are working on

MERGER OF AGENCIES

Government in a bid to have a leaner but efficient and well-motivated civil service, has proposed the merger of over 30 agencies

an omnibus Bill that will enable us successfully implement the merger of government agencies to reduce duplication," he said.

In 2018, Cabinet okayed a proposal to merge over 30 agencies and return functions of more than 30 others to their mother ministries.

The Uganda National Roads Authority, Uganda Investment Authority, Insurance Regulatory Authority, Uganda Wildlife Authority and the National Agricultural Research Organisation are among the prominent institutions which will be merged and transformed into departments under the respective line ministries if the plan finally goes through.

This is intended to reduce the costs of administration. Agencies, commissions and authorities gobble up 37% of the national budget. This translates to over sh10 trillion of the

national budget.

Nakasongola locals get land titles

Flanked by Nakasongola County MP Noah Mutebi, the minister said locals in Nakasongola district are set to receive land titles on an eight-square mile piece of land of Kyarubanga Forest Reserve after the Government paid landlords over sh5b from the Land Fund. This, he said will solve the historical imbalances created by the colonial masters.

Over 1,800 households in Rwampanga, Mayirikiti, Kigegeo, Ddagala and Kayebe village will be the first beneficiaries.

To celebrate this milestone, Mutebi said they have organised an inter-denominational thanksgiving ceremony on Saturday at Nakayonza Primary School playgrounds.

President Yoweri Museveni, the chief guest, will also be honoured with a prestigious award for his selfless service to Uganda and Nakasongola in particular.

Last month, the President directed for the degazetting of Kyarubanga Forest Reserve. It stretches to four sub-counties including Nakitoma, Rwabyata, Lwampanga and Nabiswera.

He directed line ministries of environment, lands, housing and urban development to initiate the degazetting process to allow families that have settled on the land for many years to take full possession and engage in income-generating activities.

The National Forestry Authority had allocated the land to private developers interested in planting eucalyptus and pine trees but had left out the locals.

By Andante Okanya

Legal Aid Project closed due to cash shortage

The Uganda Law Society (ULS) has laid off staff of the donor-funded Legal Aid Project (LAP).

The affected include directly employed lawyers, numerous legal assistants and support staff.

The lawyers' umbrella body established LAP in 1992. The initiative was actualised with a grant from the Norwegian Bar Association (Norwegian lawyers association), through the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD).

The project was aimed at providing legal assistance to the impoverished and destitute persons across the country.

Allegations arose that staff were sacked without notice and that the layoff was flawed.

On Tuesday, the ULS president, Simon Peter Kinobe, told *New Vision* that indeed the layoffs took place, but refuted any ill-motive. He said the

decision was the best under the circumstances.

Kinobe explained that when the donor gave a departure timeline, the project was hinged on availability of funding.

"It is false for people to peddle the notion that they were fired. Due to unavailability of resources, we have chosen not to renew their contracts. A contract is a basis of how and when they are employed," Kinobe explained.

Limited lifeline

The ULS president observed that about 10 years after the grant, the donors informed stakeholders about their impending withdrawal.

Kinobe said the looming pullout placed ULS in a dilemma on how to co-opt the staff who would be affected.



Simon Peter Kinobe

"They were notified about their exit, so ULS had to come up with an exit strategy. Last year, we formally said goodbye to

"If we had a state-funded initiative, we would not have felt the gap,"

Namubiru-Mukasa

NORAD. The biggest question was what do we do with the employees," Kinobe said.

"Part of the assimilation strategy was that we get new donors on board. However, part of the exit strategy could not accommodate them."

LAP closed, 21 clinics open

Kinobe said although LAP was

closed, the 21 legal aid clinics are operational countrywide to provide the same services that LAP did.

The ULS official web portal, lists its current funders as Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS), Democratic Governance Facility, Canadian Bar Association and Avocats Sans Frontières.

Stakeholder reaction

On Tuesday, the executive director of Legal Aid Service Providers Network (LASPNET), Sylvia Namubiru Mukasa, told *New Vision* that the NORAD departure would create a void.

LASPNET is a 52-member non-governmental network of organisations instituted in 2004, and spread countrywide. It provides free legal services, sensitisation and empowerment of communities on legal and

human rights issues.

Namubiru said the departure would create a huge void. She said vulnerable groups had benefited from LAP in the past 25 years.

"Thousands of people will be affected. LAP has been a combined and holistic initiative, where land disputes, administration of estates, criminal justice system, among others, have been resolved," Namubiru said.

"I appeal to the Government to enact the legal aid law. If we had a state-funded initiative, we would not have felt the gap. This is a lesson for the Government, that private funding for legal aid is not sustainable."

She said the predicament should propel lawyers to scale up corporate social responsibility.