

Local News 22nd July 2010

MP's pay Hike, Kibaki Rises

The deliberate move by MPs to hike their salaries which has been received with much criticism from the public seems to have caught the attention of President Mwai Kibaki. The head of state is now attending a meeting of members of parliament summoned to deliberate on the thorny issue at parliament old chambers. The MPs have noted that the president bears the final word in their quest to have their monthly salaries raised from 850,000 shillings to 1.1 million shillings. The legislators have registered discontent with the intervention of the attorney general Amos Wako, Prime Minister Raila Odinga and finance Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, arguing that firm statements from Raila and Uhuru on the issue are geared towards attainment of individual political mileage ahead of the 2012 general election.

Ends...David Macharia

Civil servants are free to have their say on national issues

Information and communication permanent secretary Bitange Ndemo says Civil servants are Kenyan citizens who should be free to have a say on national issues. Citing the constitutional review debate, Ndemo said that government officials are free to campaign for or against the proposed draft constitution without being pressurized.

In the meantime, Dr. Ndemo has dismissed claims that government officers are using state resources in the referendum campaigns, saying that they are only utilizing their legal allowances.

End...David Macharia.

Humanitarian partners call for peaceful referendum in Kenya

Kenya's Humanitarian and development partners met today to review measures put in place to ensure a successful outcome of the national referendum on the proposed new constitution which takes place on 4 August. The partners' dialogue underscored the fact that regardless of the referendum's outcome, priority must be given to ensure peace and tranquility is maintained across the country. The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Kenya, Aeneas Chuma, commended the work already undertaken to develop preparedness plans and strengthen coordination among partners on the ground.

The Secretary General of the Kenya Red Cross, Abbas Gullet and the Head of Office for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Kenya, Ms. Jeanine Cooper, used the occasion to present the coordination mechanisms and operational roles, functions and responsibilities detailed in the inter-agency preparedness plan. In response to concerns over possible violence triggered by hate speech, humanitarian partners assured the meeting that adequate structures have been put in place to ensure the atmosphere remains calm and peaceful leading up to and immediately after the referendum, while at the same time maintaining operational neutrality. The Uwiano Platform for Peace - a joint initiative of the Government

and civil society - has supported the establishment of peace committees in districts identified as potential hot spots ahead of the referendum.

Kenya readies for online tourism fair

The Kenyan tourism industry has been urged to take advantage of the faster online speeds, increasing dominance of e-commerce and the rise of social media networking to further accelerate growth. E Tourism Frontiers Chief Executive Officer Damian Cook says as a result of the fast growth in ICT and particularly internet speeds in Kenya, the tourism business has been revolutionized. He noted that with the increasing interest in Africa generated from the 2010 FIFA World Cup it is critical that tourism companies in East Africa take advantage of online marketing opportunities.

E Tourism Frontiers will be holding a two-day conference with a Travel Technology Exhibition in Nairobi on September 2 and 3 this year. Cook said the E Tourism East Africa Conference will help the sector understand and leverage the online opportunities and the new technologies available in the region.

50 Feared Drowned As Ferry Capsizes in Uganda

More than 50 persons are reported missing--possibly drowned--when a ferry carrying 60 passengers capsized Wednesday on the Ugandan side of Lake Victoria. The accident occurred Wednesday when the ferry was sailing from Jjaana islands in Kalangala district to Kasenyi landing site in Wakiso district with timber, sacks of fish and 60 passengers, mostly traders, on board. Ten passengers were confirmed dead while four survivors were pulled out of the water unconscious and were being treated at a hospital, a police spokesman said.

He said strong winds might have caused the ferry to capsize just when it was to dock near the town of Entebbe, just south of the capital, Kampala. It is not clear if there were more individuals on the boat in addition to the 14 known passengers. The accident is the third most serious ferry tragedy in East Africa. In May 1996, the Bukoba ferry sank on its way to Mwanza in Tanzania, taking along with it around 800 persons on board. And on April 27 of 1994, the MV Mtongwe sank while crossing from Mtongwe to Mombasa Island, drowning 272 individuals.

Global News

IMF cancels Haiti's \$268m debts and agrees \$60m loan

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has agreed to cancel Haiti's \$268m (£176m) debt and lend the impoverished Caribbean nation a further \$60m. The IMF said both decisions formed part of a strategy to support Haiti's reconstruction plans in the wake of the devastating earthquake six months ago. The disaster left some 230,000 people dead and more than a million homeless.

The international community pledged \$9.9bn (£6.5bn) for the reconstruction effort at a conference in March. The new three-year loan from the IMF is intended to boost Haiti's international reserves and help the central bank manage potential swings in the value of the local

currency that could arise from large aid flows going into the country. It will be interest-free until the end of 2011. After that rates will remain low.

North Korea anger at US-South Korea war games

The US and South Korea's plans to hold joint military exercises pose a major danger to the region, Pyongyang says. Some 20 ships and submarines and 100 aircraft are to take part in four days of manoeuvres in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) from Sunday. North Korea has also said new US sanctions against it will violate a UN statement issued after the sinking of a South Korean warship.

Hillary Clinton announced the sanctions during a visit to South Korea. The US secretary of state has now arrived in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, to attend a regional meeting of foreign ministers. The US-South Korean joint military exercises, which will involve about 8,000 personnel and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington, drew criticism from a member of Pyongyang's delegation at the regional security forum in Hanoi.

Death rates at lowest ever levels in England and Wales

Death rates in England and Wales are at their lowest-ever recorded levels, official figures show.

Despite health concerns surrounding rising levels of obesity and alcohol use, death rates for both men and women fell by about 5% in 2009 from 2008. There were under half a million deaths registered - the last time the figure fell this low was in the mid-1950s, when the population was 10m smaller.

Deaths from heart disease and cancer have fallen sharply in the last decade. Between 1999 and 2009, death rates fell by more than a quarter for men and over a fifth for women, according to the figures from the Office of National Statistics, which said they were now at their lowest since records began in 1841.

Sports News

Kenya's Masai says gold hard at Africa athletics event

World 10,000m champion Linet Masai has confirmed it is now hard for her to win at home during the Africa Athletics Championships after her younger brother Dennis scooped gold in Moncton, Canada on Tuesday to become the world junior champion. Masai, who has shifted camp from her high altitude base in Iten, Eldoret to Nairobi, said though she is happy for the brother's success, it leaves her weary as the pressure mounts for her to win in her specialty.

With just a week before the continent's best in track and field descend in Nairobi, Masai is taking her training a gear up as she links up with former world cross country junior champion Pauline Korikwani and Doris Chengieywo in the 10,000m race keen to stop the Ethiopians.

Masai pointed out that she expects a strong challenge from Ethiopia, who are eager to reclaim the 10,000m title which she pulled under their feet in Berlin last year when she beat Meseret Defer in the finals. Now she has to be content with the in form Olympic Champion Tirunesh Dibaba. The two athletes have already faced each other on three occasions in since 2009.

Muralitharan reaches 800 landmark

Muttiah Muralitharan became the first bowler to take 800 Test wickets on the final day of his Test career in Galle. The Sri Lanka off-spinner, 38, who made his Test debut in 1992, began his final match against India on 792 wickets. He ousted record Test run-scorer Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday and went on to take 5-63 as India had to follow on. Team-mate Lasith Malinga took 5-50 but with the last pair together, Murali had last man Pragyans Ojha caught by Mahela Jayawardene at slip to reach his 800.

It left Sri Lanka needing to score 95 to win the game and take a 1-0 lead in the series, but Muralitharan's achievement - reached in his 133rd Test - will overshadow the game.

Business News

Kenya refinery ends KenolKobil deal over pay dispute

Kenya's sole refinery said on Wednesday it had terminated an agreement for processing fuel with KenolKobil, the latest step in its four-year dispute with the company over non-payment of refining fees. KenolKobil, which supplies more than a quarter of the Kenyan market, said it had put in place contingency measures to shore up its supply of fuel products in east Africa's biggest economy. Shares in the oil firm have fallen about 4 percent since Tuesday on concerns by investors that the oil marketer was likely to lose its fuel processing deal with the refinery. The Kenya Petroleum Refinery Limited (KPRL) said KenolKobil had unpaid arrears of about 600 million shillings (\$7.33 million), and said KenolKobil was profiting unfairly by refusing to pay the same fees as 34 other refinery customers, while selling fuel at a similar price.

Obama signs financial reform law

President Barack Obama has signed into law the biggest overhaul of American financial regulation in decades. The president said the law will ensure "that everyone follows the same set of rules, so that firms compete on price and quality, not tricks and traps". The law is a major victory for Obama and the Democrats, who passed it with little Republican support after months of political wrangling.

It was vehemently opposed by the financial services industry. The law tightens mortgage and consumer lending rules, improves disclosure for student borrowers and average investors and establishes a new consumer protection agency, among other provisions. Almost every Congressional Republican opposed the bill, saying its new regulations would prove burdensome to businesses trying to create jobs.

Facebook hits 500m user milestone

Social network giant Facebook has registered its 500 millionth member, the firm has announced. The site, which launched in 2004, has gained around 100 million new users in the last six months. Facebook said the number was "an important milestone" and added that it was "humbled and inspired" by the stories of its users, which it is asking people to share on the site. The UK

currently has around 26m Facebook users. Stuart Miles of tech blog Pocket Lint said its success was down to "word of mouth".