

Changes. At least five members of the "inner ring" said to have been members of a team set up by a former commandant of the Aviation Police, Colleb Mwesiye, have been redeployed.

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KAMPALA. Police authorities carried out a mini reshuffle and redeployed police officers hours after a *Sunday Monitor* story revealed that a powerful and highly connected criminal racket continues to thrive at Entebbe International Airport even as police earlier moved to purge the network with some arrests, including those of senior police officers.

The new commandant of the Aviation Police, however, says the movement of the officers was not a transfer but an internal process.

On Monday, November 13, the Aviation Police carried out an "instant" reshuffle and moved at least five members of the "inner ring" said to have been members of a team set up by a former commandant of the Aviation Police, which continued to operate even after he was relieved of duty at the airport.

Assistant Inspector of Police (AIP) Tumuhimbise, who was manning the x-ray scanner and who was on several occasions named as having played a role in aiding his colleagues and other drug lords to beat the airport x-ray, was transferred from the airport to the nearby Kigungu police post.

AIP Douglas Okao was removed from being the staff officer and replaced by a senior officer. The current officer-in-charge is an assistant superintendent of police. Despite protests from senior colleagues over a junior officer holding the position, Mr Okao had been maintained in the post by the immediate former commandant, Colleb Mwesiye, who passed away on November 7, 2017.

As Mwesiye lay hospitalised in Nakasero hospital in Kampala during his last days, then police spokesperson Asan Kasingye told this newspaper that he would not be arrested because of the state of his health.

The Flying Squad had just arrested Mr Lodovick Awita, the commandant of Very Important Persons Protection Unit (VIPPU) who had previously been commandant of Aviation Police and Ms Emoly Natali, the former Aviation Police intelligence boss.

These and four others - Assistant Inspector of Police Michael Ssemuwemba Basajjakambwe, Sergeant Deogratius Muheebwa, Sergeant Julius Mwesiye and Sergeant David Francis Owiny - were on November 15 charged with destroying prosecution evidence contrary to Section 102 of the Penal Code Act.

In this case, drugs that had been impounded at the airport and kept in stores was removed and replaced with flour.

More changes

After the arrests, Mr Kasingye said the police was conducting an investigation into the serious and wide-ranging allegations leveled against several police officers involving trafficking or abetting the trafficking of drugs and other contraband at Entebbe airport. We were unable to establish the progress of the said investigations for this article.

In another recent move at the airport that our sources pointed

Police changes narcotics team at Entebbe Airport



Suspects. (Left to right) Sgt Julius Mwesiye, Sgt David Owiny, Former Aviation Police CIID boss Emoly Natali and VIPPU commandant Lodovick Awita before court recently. MONITOR PHOTO

out, the Station Sir Major [Corporal Mubangizi] was removed and replaced by a one Sergeant [Omara] "as it should have been according to police seniority". The officers who were removed from these positions have since been put on normal deployment.

Asked about these developments, Mr Emilian Kayima, who has since taken over the duties of police spokesperson from Mr Kasingye, said: "I am not aware of that reshuffle. However, there is no vacuum because officers have deputies who can always take over in case of anything to continue with the service of the people."

The new commandant of the Aviation Police, Mr Ronald Ochakaon, said: "Those are temporary arrangements. They are not transfers. Those are just in-house things. All our transfers are made at the police headquarters and our PRO Afande Kayima communicates."

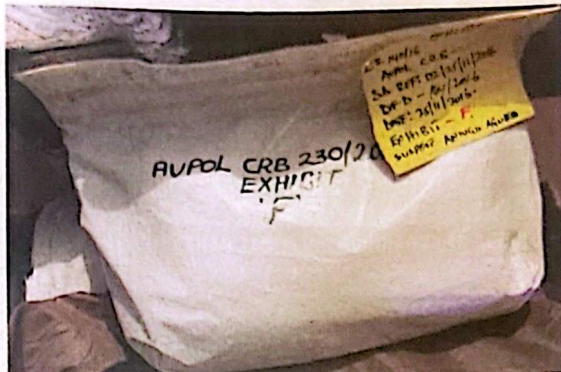
Since the changes were made, our sources say, the police have arrested two drug traffickers, a Rwandan national and a Congolese.

New twist

In the meantime, the six police officers charged in court for their alleged role in the smuggling cartel that deals in drugs and other contraband and have since been granted bail, instead blame some officials and chemists at the government analytical laboratory for their predicament.

In their statements on court record, the six accused police officers say some officials and chemists at the Government Analytical Laboratory remove samples when they are real drugs only for the officials in Kampala to report them as unreal.

The six appeared before Entebbe Chief Magistrate Mary Kaitesi Kisingye, who read the charges to them, which they denied. The six were each



Confiscated. A bag containing heroine that was impounded at Entebbe Airport recently. PHOTO BY PAUL ADJIDE

granted Shs10m non-cash bail and the case was adjourned to December 11 when they are expected to appear again before court.

They were charged with destroying exhibits but their case is in a general enquiry file which means many more cases and charges could arise out of it.

Prosecution led by Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Mark Odongo told court that between the years 2013 and 2015, the six accused persons, while serving at Aviation Police at Entebbe International Airport, destroyed narcotic drugs weighing 34.3kg yet they knew that the drugs would be required in judicial proceedings. Prosecution says they destroyed the drugs with the intent to prevent them from being used as evidence.

The implicated officers say the drugs should have been tested from Entebbe Aviation Police stores and not taken to the laboratories in Kampala, where they claim they were tampered with. They also accuse the government chemists of tampering

of the Aviation Police stores more than what would ideally be required as samples.

They say in their statements that sometimes more than two kilograms of a given substance is taken away as a sample but is in the end not returned.

Blaming the dead

The blame and responsibility has further been shifted to SSP Mwesiye, the former Aviation Police commandant, who passed away days after the police Flying Squad conducted their raids.

The officers claim that if the drugs were tampered with, then the responsibility falls on a one Sergeant Mwesiye who was the storekeeper and Mwesiye, and that the duo should be held responsible.

Mr Mwesiye's name featured prominently in our previous interviews with Aviation Police officers and other sources familiar with the operations of the airport, including

by a senior police officer who was moved from the airport police station a few years ago.

Mr Mwesiye, our source said, was recruited to the team and allegedly deployed purposely to aid the removal of ivory and drugs in the stores. He was only removed recently after chemists tested cocaine in the custody only to find it was flour.

When we contacted him for clarification or what? I don't know. I don't call me." He hung up.

Prodded further on the progress of investigations, police spokesperson Kayima said: "Prosecution of these suspected to have gotten involved in what we find unlawful started. These officers have since appeared in court. We shall wait for justice. We call for fairness and hearing of all parties. That alone is a sign showing the will to address all matters, truth, and we give the courts of law time to administer what they are mandated (to do)?"

Other charges

Saturday Monitor has established that ex-Aviation Police intelligence boss, Ms Natali, faces other charges jointly with Sgt Owiny over aiding drug trafficking, corruption and abuse of office. The charges existed prior to their recent predicament.

It is alleged that the duo aided a Brazilian national to smuggle drugs into Uganda. When the trafficker arrived at Entebbe, it is alleged that Ms Natali instructed Sgt Owiny to receive a bag containing the drugs from the man.

Owiny allegedly picked the bag from the man at the arrivals lounge and proceeded to take it to Ms Natali at the police station. The man was consequently escorted to the boarding room to immediately fly out of the country.

When contacted on phone over the matter, Ms Natali laughed heartily. She said during her time at the airport she apprehended many Brazilians and could not recall who we were talking about.

However, other security stakeholders, a police source said, had already been tipped about the deal. The man was immediately stopped on boarding, arrested and prosecuted. He paid a fine of Shs10m and was consequently deported.

Ms Natali was immediately arrested and released on bond after a week. She was allegedly on police bond when Flying Squad operatives picked her up.

Also, as the head of intelligence, Ms Natali was responsible for the 85 case files that were sanctioned by the Resident State Attorney but the suspects never appeared in court. All the 85 were narcotic drugs cases with exhibits.

"The media has done more damage. The damage is done. My words can no longer correct that damage. I am trying to recover from the trauma. By God's grace, I will go through this," Ms Natali when we put this to her. Our attempts to speak to Sgt Owiny were futile as his known telephone number was switched off.