State House, MPs use Shs78 billion on travel

Reason. The government agencies defended their expenditure, saying they are mandated to take the trips in order to do their work efficiently.

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KAMPALA. An intelligence report by Internal Security Organisation (ISO) on wasteful government spending in ministries, departments and agencies has singled out State House, Parliament, and the army as the biggest spenders on travel and fuel.

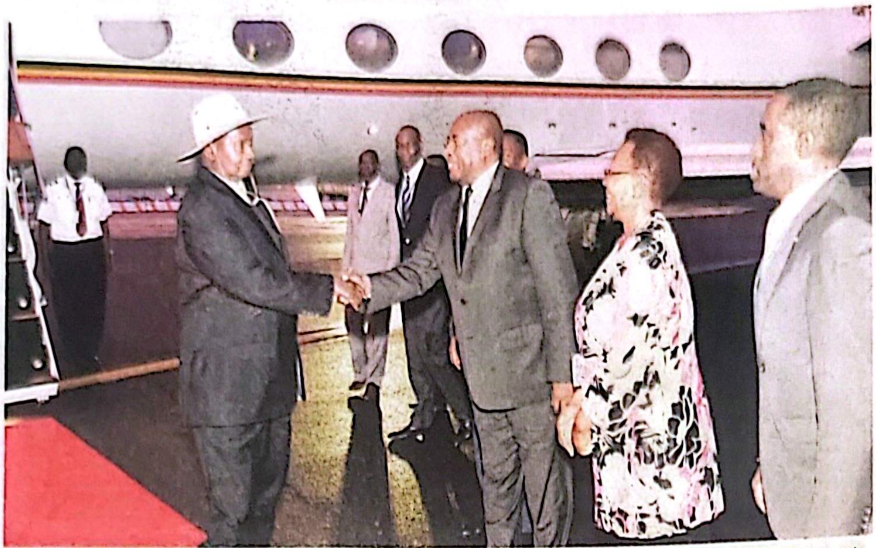
The intelligence report compiled between July and November, but released on Wednesday, shows State House and Parliament spent Shs78b on travels in and outside Uganda in the last Financial Year.

State House spent a total of Shs56b on travel while Parliament used Shs21b in the same Financial Year 2016/17, and the army Shs33.3b on fuel to run its military equipment.

President Museveni ordered the information in order to gauge how much money ministries and agencies were costing the government.

But Mr Don Wanyama, the senior presidential press secretary, was quick to justify State House's expenditure.

He told *Daily Monitor* in a telephone interview yesterday that President Museveni and State House staff spent the Shs56.1b "purposefully" on both internal and external travels.



Foreign trip. President Museveni is received by an official at JF Kennedy Airport in New York to attend 71st session of the UN General Assembly last year. FILE PHOTO

Purpose

Citing the last three trips abroad, Mr Wanyama said the President flew out of the country to meet interests of the East African Community for whom he is incumbent chairperson.

He also singled out the President's role in marketing investment potential of Uganda and attending important ceremonies.

During his recent September trip to Brussels, Mr Museveni held talks with the European Union (EU) on how best the EU member countries could freely trade with the EAC block basing on comparative advantages.

The EU and the EAC are expected to sign Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

Mr Wanyama also said the President also travelled to Dubai early November for the African-United Arab Emirates business summit where he and other heads of state marketed their countries' potentials for investment.

He said as a result, State House this week received a group of 60 big-time investors from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia who are prospecting areas of investment.

"In September, the President was assigned by his fellow EAC heads of state as the current chair to hold discussions with the EU commission president, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, on the EPAs. He also marketed Uganda at the African-UAE business summit in Dubai and investors have shown interest in doing business in Uganda," Mr Wanyama said.

On November 28, the President also visited Nairobi, Kenya, to grace the inauguration of President Uhuru Kenyatta for a second and final year term.

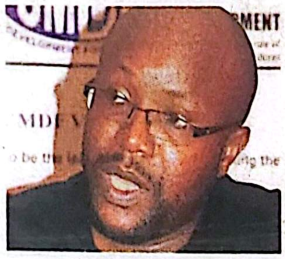
Mr Wanyama said this was not wasteful because Mr Museveni is the current chair of the EAC and his attendance was for fraternal relations.

State House topped the list of the top 10 big spenders on travel at a staggering sum of Shs56.1b in the 2016/17 Financial Year.

Other big spenders were named as Parliament (Shs21.4b), Ministry of Health (Shs19.6b), Ministry of Education (Shs15.9b), Ministry of Defence (Shs15.9b), Ministry of Water and Environment (Shs12.9b), Ministry of Finance (Shs11.1b), Ministry of Agriculture (Shs11.1b), Office of the Prime Minister (Shs10.5b) and the Judiciary (Shs9b).

Parliament also defended its Shs21.4b expenditure on travels.

Mr Chris Obore, the director of communications at Parliament, told *Daily Monitor* that the money was spent on per diems and air tickets for MPs to execute Parliament's mandate.



"The President does not travel abroad for holiday or to relax at beaches; he travels for work. President Museveni is the number one marketer of the country to make the economy grow and he cannot do this work from here (State House),"
DON WANYAMA, SENIOR PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY

"MPs travelling abroad is part of the mandate of Parliament because as an institution, we have to relate with other Parliaments around the world. Parliament also has to carry out oversight role on Uganda's missions abroad and this cannot be done without MPs travelling there. Some MPs are also members of international organisations like the Pan African Parliament, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, among others.

"Those travelling receive per diem and air tickets to enable them complete the task at hand," Mr Obore said.

He said Parliament appreciates the findings of ISO on wasteful expenditures, but suggested that much attention should be put on the service delivering agencies whose "mandate is domestic."

In the ISO report, Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) topped the list of big spending agencies with Shs13.6b used by officials on travels.

When contacted about being the top spending agency on travel, Mr Hamis Kaheeru, the Uneb spokesperson, said he could not comment on the ISO report which he has not yet seen.

"I cannot comment on the issue of a report which I have not yet seen," Mr Kaheeru said by telephone last evening.

Other big spending agencies are the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) at Shs11.8b, Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (Ubos) at Shs9.7b, Uganda Revenue Authority at Shs5.5b and Rural Electrification Agency (REA) at Shs4.4b.

The Defence ministry also defended its staggering expenditure on fuel after the ISO report cited it as the big spender on that vote at a tune of Shs33.3b in 2016/17 Financial Year.

The Defence and Veteran Affairs spokesperson, Brig Richard Karemire, said the money allocated to them is not even enough to sustain the daily trainings and operations.

Shs3.36t

Wage bill. According to the ISO report, Uganda's total wage bill is Shs3.36 trillion and the agencies spend 10 per cent of it more on salaries compared to mainstream public service, yet the agencies employ fewer people.

He said the ministry is already considering asking for a supplementary budget of Shs10b because it is already running on domestic arrears of Shs9b for fuel.

"The money allocated to us is insufficient, on the contrary, we need supplementary budget to procure more fuel products, pay the domestic arrears and continue with operations. We use fuel daily to run different equipment for training purposes. We are not wasteful," Brig Karemire said.

During a press conference at the ISO headquarters at Nakasero in Kampala on Wednesday, Lt Col Joseph Aliganyira, the intelligence agency's Director for Political Affairs, blamed wasteful expenditures in ministries, departments and agencies for imbalance in remuneration of civil servants and as cause of frequent industrial action.

"If we eliminate these wasteful expenditures and if we merge the agencies, government will have enough money to pay civil servants well. The strikes are brought about by the conditions whereby someone has to walk from a taxi park to place of work when these guys in agencies and departments are swimming in money and driving big government cars," Lt Col Aliganyira said.