



No more Deserted ships at the Jinja Pier which reveals a glaring inactivity at the port. PHOTO BY RACHEL MADALA

Jinja pier abandoned, rotting away

Lost glory. A recent visit to the pier, which would be celebrating its Golden Jubilee this year, revealed an overgrown shrub, a permanently locked gate, old and rusted fuel tanks and a general aura of abandonment, lending credence to the assertion that this once monumental business hub is rotting away.

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JINJA Constructed on the banks of Lake Victoria around 1967 by the British colonial government, the Jinja Pier was meant to ease freight and passenger rail services within the three East African Community (EAC) member states of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Indeed, vessels took traders' merchandise on an expedition from the pier to Kisumu in Kenya and to Mwanza in Tanzania. Coffee was the main commodity in transit while tobacco, tea, hides and skins were the other commodities.

However, a recent visit to the pier, which would be celebrating its Golden Jubilee this year, revealed an overgrown shrub, a permanently locked gate, old and rusted fuel tanks and a general aura of abandonment, indicating that this once monumental business hub is rotting away.

A pier is a raised structure in a body of water, typically supported by well-spaced piles, pillars or bridges, built for several purposes. The Jinja Pier was mainly constructed to allow vessels among the then three East African states to dock. Other piers among member states were in Kisumu in Kenya and Mwanza in Tanzania.

Until 2006, the pier was under the management of Uganda Railways Corporation (URC) before ceding management to Rift Valley Railways (RVR) and the Ministry of Fisheries.

To understand some of the pier's woes, *Daily Monitor* sought retired marine Capt. James Wamono, 65, a resident of Njeru in Bukwe District and one of URC's longest-serving employees who joined the company in 1983.

With 25 years' experience as a ma-

KEY ISSUES

Mr Charles Kateeba, the managing director of Uganda Railways Corporation, says Ministry of Works and Transport had completed designs for remodeling of the port to build a new quay and container depot at a tune of US\$15m (Shs54b), noting that no major capital expenditure has been done at the port for more than 25 years.

rine second officer, then chief officer until his retirement as captain in 2006, Mr Wamono has nostalgic memories of this pier.

"It was cheaper to transport goods within the EAC member states. I vividly recall the journeys I made from Jinja to Kisumu," he says.

Capt Wamono and about 120 other marine workers were retired by URC in 2006 following an accident on Lake Victoria on May 8, 2005 in which MV Kaawa that was en route to Mwanza from Port Bell, collided with MV Kabalega, which was en route to Port Bell from Mwanza.

In that collision, MV Kaawa damaged its bow and MV Kabalega was damaged below the waterline. And while MV Kaawa managed to return to Port, MV Kabalega sunk about 15 kilometers southwest of the Sese Islands where it remains to-date.

What Went Wrong?

According to Capt Wamono, the change in ownership from URC to

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briefly

Cleric's body exhumed

IGANGA: Residents of Nakisene village in Nakigo Sub-county in Iganga District were last week shocked to find the skeleton of a former sheikh in the area lying atop his grave. Sheikh Abdu Lukiko is said to have died six years ago. The Busoga east police spokesperson, Mr James Mubi, said relatives saw the skeleton and reported the matter to authorities, adding that the grave had been dug. He said police were investigating the matter and those found culpable will be charged with trespass and disturbing peace of the dead. [Abubaker Kirunda]

Teachers lack houses

KUMI: The LC3 chairperson of Southern Division in Kumi Municipality, Mr Robert Odea Apedel has expressed dismay over shortage of teacher's houses. Mr Apedel said majority of teachers within the municipality have nowhere to sleep. He added that those who live in nearby villages have to commute from their homes, while others have to rent using their meagre salaries. [Simon Peter Emwamu]

Jinja pier rotting away

Voices

"These days, goods are being ferried by containers instead of by ships. The politicians who own many of these containers have altered the transport protocol and what is happening now, is that coffee is being transported by trailers as the politicians maximize profits at the expense of water vessels which are relatively cheaper," JAMES WAMONO, RETIRED MARINE CAPTAIN.

"I assure you that we have not abandoned the facility. Due to challenges that started after the sinking of MV Kabalega, the rail side has not been operational for long; but general purpose vessels have been using the pier," CHARLES KATEEBA, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF UGANDA RAILWAYS CORPORATION.

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RVR

greatly affected the operations of the Pier.

"When the ownership changed, RVR concentrated more on the railway and 'ignored' the marine (water) section. Remember, when they constructed Port Bell in Luzira, the Jinja Pier became a standby of sorts. But currently, even vessels don't use the bridge; instead, they pass along the railed part of the dock," he says. Investigations carried out by this reporter revealed that Bidco Uganda Limited is potentially the biggest user of the pier, as its ships dock at the facility while delivering the company's Palm Oil from Kalangala.

However, Mr Charles Kateeba, the managing director, URC, last week said the pier was very alive in their minds.

"I assure you that we have not abandoned the facility. Due to challenges that started after the sinking of MV Kabalega, the rail side has not been operational for long; but general purpose vessels have been using the pier," he said.

Capt Wamono also attributes the lull in pier activity to politicians whom he didn't name. These, he said, have altered the transport protocol.

What can be done?

Capt Wamono says not all is lost and that the pier can regain its former glittering glory.

"The pier simply needs routine maintenance as well as replacing its timber which vessels keep knocking as they dock," he advised.

Mr Kateeba noted that they have plans to restore the line which is missing and resume wagon ferry operations by the end of the year.

About 15 years ago, URC conjured up strategies to revive the pier, targeting among other companies; Gapco and Hared to deliver fuel via the pier to their reserve tanks in Jinja.

The strategies were to benefit the vast number of traders, clearing and forwarding companies, fish exporters, horticultural and food crop farmers in Busoga.

However, these strategies have over the years stagnated due to lack of funds.