

Cocaine: Police officers' accounts frozen

By Vision Reporters

As Police continues to crack the whip on its officers implicated in the alleged theft of seized cocaine from Aviation Police (AVIPOL) stores at Entebbe airport, the suspects' bank accounts have been frozen by Bank of Uganda.

This followed a request from the Police administration pending the ongoing investigation, a top Police officer, who spoke to *New Vision* on condition of anonymity, disclosed yesterday.

On Tuesday, six Police officers were arraigned in Entebbe Magistrates' Court and charged with destroying evidence.

Among the accused is the commandant of the elite Very Important Persons (VIP) protection unit, Lodovic Awita, who was the former head of security at AVIPOL.

Others are Natalis Imoly, who

was the officer-in charge of crime intelligence at AVIPOL, Michael Ssemuwemba, Sgt. David Owiny, Sgt. Deogratious Muhebwa and Sgt. Julius Mwesigwa.

Prosecution, before Chief Magistrate Mary Kaitesi Kisakye, alleged that between 2013 and 2015, while working at AVIPOL, knowing that narcotic drugs may be required in judicial proceedings, the accused destroyed 35kg of cocaine with intent to prevent it from being used as evidence.

A kilogramme of cocaine is valued at \$50,000 (about sh181m).

Yesterday, it emerged that on one of the suspects' bank account (name withheld), the Police found sh800m. Preliminary Police investigations indicate that sh500m was withdrawn from the same account, a week before the owner was arrested.

Authorities at the

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Professional Standards Unit (PSU) said they were carrying out joint investigations with a 12-man team led by senior superintendent of Police, Mark Odong.

However, none of these officers could be reached for a comment. The PSU spokesperson, Vincent Ssekate, was also unavailable for a comment as he was reportedly engaged in a day-long meeting with the new Police publicist, Emilian Kayima.

It also emerged yesterday that investigators who first probed the 'theft of cocaine' case are recording statements explaining their roles on what had transpired and why they failed.

Accusations and counter accusations of dishonesty and frustrating investigations were made by both investigators and AVIPOL officers, culminating into threatening of violence and transfer of officers to different departments.

Last year, senior Police officers ordered the arrest of the in-charge AVIPOL stores, Stephen Oribi, after he reportedly declined to co-

operate with them and other security operatives in the theft of cocaine from the AVIPOL store. Oribi was replaced by Sgt. Mwesigwa. Oribi was later charged with a murder case of 2006 and remanded.

The developments prompted the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Gen. Kale Kayihura to institute a team comprising senior officers to probe the matter.

A total of 53 samples were picked from AVIPOL under the knowledge of top Police chiefs and government forensic experts, before they were sent for analysis at the Government Analytical Laboratory headquarters in Wandegaya, Kampala.

In its report to Kayihura, the laboratory proved that: "Only seven of the 53 samples (seized between 2013 and 2015 at the airport) tested positive for cocaine." The rest of the samples were a mixture of cassava flour and wheat.