

Parliament suspends deadline for vehicle inspection

By Moses Walubiri and Nicholas Wasajja

Parliament yesterday stepped in to ease the apprehension among the general public over the approaching deadline for the ongoing mandatory vehicle inspection by effectively lifting it until one of its committees submits a report on a range of thorny issues pertaining to the project.

After a two decades hiatus, the Government reintroduced the annual mandatory vehicle inspection in December last year under the auspices of Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), which was awarded the tender.

SGS is a multinational company with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland which provides inspection, verification, testing and certification services. It has more than 90,000 employees and operates over 2,000 offices and laboratories worldwide.

The deadline for mandatory vehicle inspection was July 1 and long queues at inspection points at Namanve, Nabingo and Namulanda have been growing longer as motorists scramble to beat the deadline.

"The deadline is effectively suspended from today and all announcements should be stopped," Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga said after Minister of Works, Eng. Ntege Azuba, had presented a status report on the ongoing vehicle inspection by SGS.

A fortnight ago, Mukono South MP, Muyanja Ssenyonga, had raised a red flag over the vehicle inspection arrangement, describing it as a raw deal that will see a foreign company laugh all the to the bank for works capable of being done by local firms if empowered.

Among the concerns raised by lawmakers for which Azuba was required to make a statement was failure by SGS to rollout inspection points in different regions of the country thus requiring all motorists to travel to Kampala to have their vehicles inspected.

"We have engaged a reverse gear by giving jobs to foreigners at the expense of our people," Alex Ndezi said, re-echoing the earlier sentiments of MPs Lillian Nakate, Barnabas Tinkasiimire and Alex Ruhunda.

James Kakooza reminded the House that in the late 1990s, the Government blacklisted SGS after it did shoddy work in a project, where it had been contracted to inspect all imports to the country.

"The same government blacklisted the company not long ago. What makes you think that it has capacity to do this work?" Kakooza asked.

However, the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, knocked back appeals by a section of lawmakers to outrightly cancel the contract, saying the Government would be slapped with an astronomical bill for breach of contract.

Out of the estimated sh200b SGS will rake in annually from motor vehicle inspection, the Government will take a paltry 28%. Kadaga has given Parliament's physical infrastructure committee one month to conduct an inquiry into the concerns raised over the project and submit a report after conducting public hearings.