

National News

www.monitor.co.ug

Since its revival in August 2019, Uganda Airlines has faced persistent negative publicity alongside growing financial losses.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU & DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

Barely 24 hours after it emerged that embattled Chief Executive Officer of Uganda Airlines Jennifer Bamuturaki was on her way out, President Museveni met with Mr Girma Wake, the former CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, at State House Entebbe.

Mr Museveni later posted on his official X-platform: "I met Mr Girma Wake, the former CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, alongside Mr Robert Kateera at State House today. We discussed matters regarding air transport, among other issues."

While details of the meeting remain scanty, credible sources indicated that the government is considering hiring Mr Wake to reorganise Uganda Airlines. Sources further revealed that Ms Bamuturaki's term, which was scheduled to end in July, would be cut short to make way for Mr Wake, whose expertise officials believe could revive the struggling carrier. Several candidates are reported to have already submitted applications to replace Ms Bamuturaki.

In his prospective role, Mr Wake will form a team and work toward rebuilding confidence in the airline, restoring

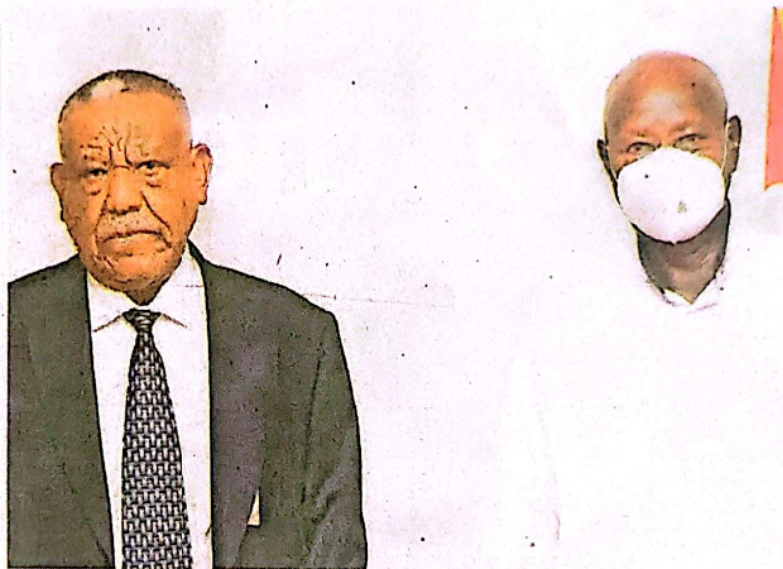
National carrier: Govt considers hiring ex-Ethiopian Airlines CEO

professionalism, and recommending a new management structure after assessing qualifications.

Since its revival in August 2019, Uganda Airlines has faced persistent negative publicity alongside growing financial losses. Public scrutiny intensified just a month after Ms Bamuturaki secured the job through a presidential appointment on July 5, 2022. A two-month probe by Parliament's Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities, and State Enterprises (Cosase) revealed gaps in her management practices.

The Nakawa West MP Joel Ssenyonyi-led committee found that Ms Bamuturaki, who holds a degree in Social Work and Social Administration, lacked the post-graduate business qualifications required for the role. Investigations also uncovered questionable contracts signed while she was commercial director, including a Shs156 million deal with online bloggers without proper procedures and unaccounted ticket sales worth about Shs982 million.

Financial records show that Uganda Airlines has yet to turn a profit. Losses grew from Shs102 billion in its first year to Shs325 billion in June 2023 before narrowing slightly to Shs230.81 billion in the 2024/25 financial year, reflecting a marginal improvement of Shs768 million. Aviation experts stress that for the airline to succeed, it must operate as a



President Museveni (right) with Mr Girma Wake at State House Entebbe on Wednesday. PHOTO/ PPU

commercial entity rather than a political project.

"Uganda Airlines needs a CEO with extensive international airline experience, backed by a clear mandate and real authority to run the business commercially," said Capt Mike Mukula.

"The management team should consist of proven experts in marketing, flight operations, maintenance engi-

neering, and financial control. If governance is right, people are right, and politics stay out, Uganda Airlines can become competitive, credible, and profitable," he added.

Mr Wake, in a 2018 interview with this newspaper, warned that government interference hampers airline operations. Speaking in France he said: "The right things [for the government to do]

BACKGROUND

Having steered Ethiopian Airlines from 2004 to 2011, Mr Wake is credited with fleet modernisation, staff training, and developing Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport as a major continental hub. He oversaw the airline's early adoption of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and strengthened Ethiopian Airlines' global network through Star Alliance membership.

are: give them enough capital, stop government interference, build capacity and create a regulatory framework that is necessary for them to do their work. If they do this, I think, they will succeed."

Former journalist Andrew Mawanda expressed optimism that the meeting between Museveni and Wake could guide Uganda Airlines from its current management woes to a more professional framework.

Mr Ssenyonyi, now Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, emphasised that the success of any incoming CEO would depend on the government allowing the airline operational independence.