

Police aid 87 drug traffickers to flee

Long period. The suspects were arrested at Entebbe airport over the past 13 years.

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KAMPALA. A senior detective has been arrested as police began internal inquiries into the circumstances under which 87 suspected drug traffickers due for appearance in court vanished from custody.

The suspects were arrested at Entebbe International Airport over the past 13 years and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions sanctioned charges of drug trafficking against each of them.

Instead of detectives taking the accused to be formally charged in court, investigators were perplexed to find that each had under unclear circumstances been freed and escaped. This revelation, which

has sparked panic among police officers, is contained in a report of an impromptu audit of Aviation Police by the Police Professional Standards Unit (PSU) last week.

Mr Vincent Ssekate, the PSU spokesperson, said the suspects, who were arrested by Aviation Police between 2004 and August 2017, cannot be traced.

"The officer-in-charge of Crime Investigation, detective assistant superintendent of police Nantalis Emoly, has been arrested by PSU to help with the investigations. The suspects are nowhere to be seen yet they were arrested with illicit drugs and their files sanctioned," Mr Ssekate said.

We could not immediately establish if the exhibits too have disappeared.

Teams from PSU are now investigating how the suspects were allowed to disappear.

The audit of the Aviation Police,

which is in-charge of security at the country's only international airport in Entebbe, followed an incident on August 26 when a Guatemalan national was arrested with narcotic drugs and handed over to Aviation Police.

FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

In 2016, police seized 1,990 kilogrammes of narcotic drugs from traffickers. After the rise in narcotic drugs trafficking, in December 2016, the government started enforcing the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 2015, which gives harsher punishment to offenders and drug pushers. Narcotic drug convicts are now handed down sentences ranging from 10 to 38 years imprisonment.

He was, however, promptly released under unclear circumstances and allowed to re-board.

Other security outfits deployed at the airport intervened, plucked him out of the plane and detained him afresh.

This prompted the PSU to act, culminating in a forensic audit that unearthed what insiders contend was an elaborate collusion involving law enforcement officials and suspected criminals.

Mr Ssekate said the unsettling irregularities have compelled PSU to vet afresh all the Force's personnel attached to Aviation Police.

"Officers who will be found with professional dents will either be prosecuted or ejected from the unit and sent back to Human Resource Management for re-deployment," he said. We were unable to establish how many officers are likely to be affected.