

Balala to name task force for selling Kenya as meeting venue

MOMBASA
By PHILIP MWAJKIO
AND BERNARD SANGA

Booyed by the recent increase in international conferences, the national government has said it will set up a Convention Bureau to come up with a policy to market Kenya as a meeting destination.

Tourism Cabinet Secretary Najib Balala said on Wednesday that a task force would be formed to advise the Government on the formation of the bureau in 30 days. He also said a convention centre would be put up at the Mombasa Beach hotel, adding that the coastal county was ideal such an initiative.

Addressing delegates at the inaugural State House Tourism Summit at State House Mombasa, the Mr Balala named hotelier Tasneem Danjaji as chairman of the task force. He did not, however, name other members.

"We have seen the growth in conference tourism in Kenya with clear indications of the huge potential this segment has in its overall contribution to our tourism sector hence the need to fully maximise its enormous potential," he said.

The CS said the country has begun to see and enjoy benefits accruing from conference tourism, which will go a long way in enhancing Kenya's brand in the global arena.

Records show that in 2014, international conferencing arrivals in Kenya stood at 103,891 delegates, representing 12 per cent of the total international tourist arrivals. In 2015,

the arrivals from this market segment grew by 13 per cent to 117,630 delegates, representing 15.6 per cent of the total international tourist arrivals for that year.

Further growth in the conference market is expected this year and beyond.

The most notable major meetings and conferences held in Nairobi recently were the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit held in July 2015, the World Trade Organisation 10th Ministerial Conference in December 2015, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 14 in July 2016.

Last week, Nairobi played host to the Sixth Tokyo Investment Conference on Africa Development (Ticad), the first time this conference is being held in Africa since its inception in 1993.

CONVENTION CENTRE

Ticad VI sought to identify common priorities for accelerating sustainable development, including the growing role of the private sector. The event was graced by 37 heads of State including prime ministers from Africa and Japan at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre, the largest convention centre in East and Central Africa.

Balala said that part of a 10-acre parcel of land at Mombasa Beach Hotel would be allocated for the convention centre, which will occupy two acres.

"We are looking at the next three months to have a study complete," Balala said, adding that it was time for Coast region tourism to rebrand itself. He floated the idea of renaming the



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region the Coast Riviera.

"Some 10,000 acres of virgin land would be set aside for investors to come and set up hospitality establishments in an effort to rev up the fortunes and admiration of the Kenyan

Urali College captain Timothy Wanjiro serves Tourism Cabinet Secretary Najib Balala during an inaugural State House Tourism Summit at State House Mombasa yesterday. [PHOTO: OMONDI ONYANGO]

coast," he said.

Balala also revealed that plans were ongoing to have Berth One at the Port of Mombasa converted into a terminal for modern cruise ships.

TradeMark East Africa and Kenya Ports Authority have pumped in Sh100 million for massive refurbishment works that will see the construction of a cruise berth at the harbour.

"We have a date set for renovations and are looking at having the new terminal ready by August 2017, in readiness for the cruise season that starts in October," Balala said.

TFS Serena Managing Director Mahmoud Janmohamed welcomed the opportunity to host the summit, terming it beneficial to the tourism industry.

Arson attacks leave families homeless

By JOSEPH MASHA

Eight families have been rendered homeless by unknown people who have been torching houses in Kisoeni village, Chonyi sub-county, at night.

The arsonists, said to be moving around on motorbikes, have been demolishing houses in petrol before setting them alight. The destruction of houses and other property began on Tuesday night and continued on Wednesday night.

Some of the residents have lost their food stocks after their granaries were razed.

Chasimba Ward MCA Boniface Mwangi condemned the attacks and urged police to investigate. Mr Mwangi said the arson could be connected to a protracted boundary dispute between the Chonyi and Kauma communities.

"So far it is not clear why the houses are being burnt down at night, but we have intelligence reports that it could be because of the boundary between the Chonyi and Kauma," he said.

Area chief Ruben Ndango yesterday said reports had revealed that some youths from one of the two communities had been hired to destroy the property.

"For a long time, members of the Chonyi and Kauma communities have had differences about the boundary and this recent act could be associated with that dispute," the chief said.

TAITA TAVEYA

Medical training college opens campus in Voi

By RENSON MNYAMWEZI

Kenya Medical Training College (KMTc) has established a new campus in Voi town.

KMTc acquired four classrooms and an administration block at the Coast Institute of Technology (CIT) where the campus will be.

KMTc Board of Directors chairman Phillip Kaloki said the new college will open its doors on September 15 and admit about 100 students.

Speaking after inspecting the CIT facilities in Taita Taveta County yesterday, Prof Kaloki disclosed that the region would get preferential treatment in areas of admission and job employment opportunities.

Kaloki said 50 nurses and 60 clinical officers' trainees will start training at the college, adding that the college Principal will be posted to the region next week.

Kaloki revealed that students from the county will be given priority.

"Through collaboration with the county administration, we will give at least 30 per cent of the total number of admissions in the new medical college to the county," he said.

High default, late payment rates hit Uwezo Fund loans

KWALE

By TOBIAS CHANJU

Youth Affairs and Gender Cabinet Secretary Sicily Karuki has disclosed that half of the money borrowed from the Uwezo Fund is not repaid on schedule. She said delayed repayments and defaults were most prevalent in Msambweni constituency at 43 per cent.

Speaking during a tour of various youth and women groups projects yesterday, the Ms Karuki urged youths to ensure that they repaid their loans on time to enable other groups to benefit from the kitty. She also distributed Uwezo and Women Enterprise Fund cheques.

The CS said the notion that the fund was a political affair caused ma-

ny groups to default.

"Because this fund was started when Uhuru became President, people assumed it was free money and thought they wouldn't need to pay it back. It is not good to mix politics and money," she said.

Msamweni Youth Officer Festus Matee told The Standard that most beneficiaries thought the money was given as handouts. And the CS revealed that most of the youth groups did not even use the money for the business projects they had applied for.

"Some groups disintegrated while others stopped paying midway," she said.

Groups that have disintegrated over the last two years stand at 30 while those that started and stopped number 20.

Mr Matee added his office was planning to summon the groups

through area chiefs who signed as guarantors.

"We will summon them to see how prepared they are to pay the money back. Eventually, we will forward their names to the Credit Reference Bureau so they do not benefit from credit facilities in future," he added.

The CS also called on youths to be alert as the country heads into an electioneering period, to avoid being used by politicians. She said the future of the country depended on the youth so they should have a positive influence in their communities.

The CS was accompanied by Kwale County Woman Representative Zainab Chidzuga who said the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) has gone a long way in uplifting the lives of youths and women in various counties.



Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs CS Sicily Karuki at a past event in Nakuru. [PHOTO: MERCY KAHENDA/STANDARD]