

NEWS

# Varsity dons abuse duty-free facility

By BROWNE KUTSWA

A duty-free facility to buy a car of your choice? That is one of the fringe benefits you enjoy as a lecturer in any of the public universities in Kenya.

A new car inclusive of duty costs about Sh. one million, but, a university lecturer, would pay only half of that. But, what is the future of this fringe benefit?

Upon return from a Commonwealth summit in Auckland, New Zealand, last year, President Daniel arap Moi expressed concern that this facility had been abused by beneficiaries not only at universities but in other institutions. Against this background, he said, the Government may review the need to have it.

Withdrawing this facility would mean that those who were entitled to it would have to pay duty like any other citizen. In an interview with *The Anvil*, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Prof. Francis Gichaga, admitted that this facility had been abused by some lecturers who diverted it to benefit people who were not entitled to it. This defeated the purpose for which it was intended, he said.

Prof. Gichaga, who bought a Peugeot 504 in 1990 using this facility, said that when this facility was granted by President Moi in the late 80s, the aim was to boost the morale of lecturers by enabling them to afford cars which reflected their status in society. Previously, the university car park was overwhelmingly dotted with ramshackles.

Investigations carried by *The Anvil* revealed that some lecturers traded in this facility for a fee.

Non-beneficiaries would order expensive cars from overseas, pay for the purchase and shipping and then register the details of the car in the lecturers' name to avoid paying duty. On mutual understanding, the purchaser would then own and drive his car while the lecturer gets his "cut".

Assuming the purchaser spends Sh. 400,000 to buy a Mercedes Benz from Bel-

gium or Germany, the duty chargeable which is another Sh. 400,000 is waived, the lecturer may demand half of this figure as his "cut".

Meanwhile, records at the Administration Registrar's office indicate that the lecturer owns a car he bought using this facility when in reality, he owns none.

In an attempt to address this situation, Prof. Gichaga issued a circular dated 21 November 1995 addressed to academic staff seeking to "safeguard our interests" but the mechanisms he prescribed were not water tight. The Vice-Chancellor asked those who had utilised the duty free facility since October 1991 to present their vehicle log books and also show the vehicles procured for verification by the Administration Registrar by December 1995.

The Treasury and the Commissioner of customs were to be informed about those who failed to beat the deadline.

According to the Vice-Chancellor's Personal Assistant, Mr. Alfred Mutawali, culprits would have been made to pay duty, but none was found. However, lecturers who spoke to *The Anvil* but did not want to be identified said that when the circular was issued, those who had extended this facility to non-beneficiaries made arrangements for the cars and log books to be inspected and verified by the administration registrar's office.

Mr. Mutawali believes that since none of the lecturers was implicated, claims of abuse of the facility must have been instigated by jealous outsiders who envied lecturers enjoying the privilege.

A tutorial fellow in the Department of Philosophy, Mr. Francis Owaka, links the uncertain future of the duty-free facility to pressure by the World Bank which wants major reductions in university expenditure.

Others say that the abuse of the duty free facility could be a tip of the iceberg of much more sinister activities although Prof. Gichaga denies this.

In an interview with *The Anvil*, Dr. Peter Wanyande of the Department of



Distant dream: Even with duty-free car facility, such sleek cars are still beyond the reach of most lecturers. (Pic. by Stephen Otieno)

Government argues that whereas lecturers appreciated this privilege, most of them cannot afford a car even when duty is waived. The solution, he says, is to improve the terms of service for lecturers. Without better terms, lecturers are forced to spend part of their teaching hours offering consultancy services elsewhere.

According to a Senior Administrative Assistant at the School of Journalism, Mr. Daniel Tisi, others resort to unorthodox means such as renting their servants' quarters or extending some of their benefits to cover outsiders so as to earn additional income.

## Zainabu of the slow eyelids

From page 8

"Get out! or else I will ask the Watchman to throw you out," commanded the second lady.

We all turned round to see if there was anyone heading towards us, but all we saw was the old frail man dozing away on an armchair. Beside him were two pot-bellied men basking in the afternoon sun. We later interviewed several people around the place but none of them

was aware of the unfortunate encounter Zainabu experienced, let alone know her. But one thing they all seemed to know was where the Lodge was situated and what kind of 'beings' frequent the place. He concluded by saying, "You can all rightly guess who Zainabu is."

It was Sir Winston Churchill who once said 'never give up', we are planning to do just that. Our mission will come to an end when Zainabu is found and interviewed.

## Vice Chancellor outlines new varsity policies

From page 4

If individual standards have gone down it is not the university as a whole - this university has given birth to all other universities in Kenya, it is the mother university. I don't worry about standards, a majority of our students do well and our best students are the best anywhere else be it in the US or Canada or Britain, they become number one, two... The problems we have here make them to develop techniques of survival to pass exams by looking for information. If a student complains about a lecturer I tell them to go to the library which is the best in East and Central Africa. Private universities in Kenya depend on our staff to teach their students and they always get good press coverage, but for us it's always bad.

Q: But what of the delays in the post-graduate masters programmes?

A: When we set up the Board of Post-graduate Studies we wanted to hasten the process for students but in reality the problems could be inter-personal. A lecturer not wanting a student to finish the programme therefore delays him/her and the research takes too long then one is told to revise it and can easily just give up. We hope to provide in the future the increase of accountability of lecturers to let students finish on time.

Q: On the local scene, what is your comment on students suicides, Aids scourge, alcohol and drug abuse in view

of your customary advise to freshers on this?

A: Students who take drugs and alcohol do so because of their domestic background. Mostly students have problems with parents and in some cases if you knew the difficulties you would not believe, some are extreme... others have an easy home life and find it difficult here because no one listens to them so they are lonely, although we have student counsellors to help if approached.

As for Aids, there is no pattern as it has killed not just students but academic and administration staff. It is a game of chance, a society problem. I am deliberately avoiding to give you statistics but we have lost many, even two is many and calling parents with such information that the child is dead is the worst news.

Q: On security in the university, the robbery of computers rendered the University Press moribund since 1994. This is the same fate that befell the School of Journalism which lost computers to thieves recently on (Feb 16). What is your comment?

A: We hope to revive the Printing Press to publish books soon. A lot of these thefts are inside jobs by somebody who has access to the keys. We have sacked security men in the past but we are ashamed to lose equipment obtained from sacrifice to unscrupulous people. We suspect that this is a syndicate that particularly targets computers.

## Kirwa on democracy

From page 4

should not be deceived by the fact that the Opposition is tottering on the brink of political disaster, adding that the Opposition is not in the leaders who have been wrangling, but in the people, and Kanu should be looking for ways to change people's attitudes, instead of spending time causing internal political attrition.

Asked what he feels about President Moi's studious silence over his outburst, Kirwa said, "I welcome the gesture in the hope that it is a genuine recognition of the issues I raised rather than an opportunity to reorganise forces on the ground to make a final devastating assault on me." To the many Kanu politicians who criticized his statement but tactfully evaded the issues raised he said, "They were playing their role of cheap and recycled political sycophancy and I forgive them."

He was not surprised at all since their reactions were totally in conformity with the Kanu grain of thinking, adding, "I feel better now that the public is aware of the inherent problems in Kanu..."

The MP is still convinced that the issues in his recent statement are not only pertinent, but also closely identify with the aspirations of the masses.

No wonder, then, political observers perceive President Moi's recent visit to Nandi and Uasin Gishu Districts (President Moi left last Thursday for these districts and left Eldoret Monday, May 6) as a carefully planned strategy to make peace with the Nandis most of whom are in solidarity with Kirwa and although still solidly behind Kanu and the President, believe the head of State is pushing them against the wall.

## Hard times at varsity as new loan scheme bites

From page 8

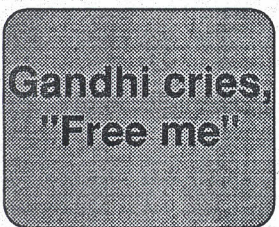
in-hand, romancing in the evenings.

The standards of games at the university have also fallen. One no longer can see students' teams practising on the various pitches. According to Ms. Sumbeyio, the students no longer show interest in the various games. She said that the university administration was not aware of problems the students might be facing in the games and if there were any, they should be brought to their attention.

Unlike Main Campus, life at Upper

Kabete Campus is more relaxed. The prices of food here are lower, given that the Department of Food and Technology has a plant that processes dairy products. These are sold to students at reasonable prices. Students who cook in their rooms also buy other foodstuffs at reasonable prices.

Students' social life is now haphazard. They come in and before they can settle down, the semester is over and they have to move out again. As a result, students hardly get to know each other and this makes their socialization process even more difficult.



From page 8

It was the prerogative of the campus administration to decide on the usage of the former library, Gandhi's memory should not be allowed to die. He said it was entirely upon the University to select a new site to relocate the statue, but the Commission was willing to assist in any way possible. The Second Secretary also revealed that the Indian High Commission held a meeting with the University administration last year and it was agreed that the statue be relocated.

This was confirmed by the Personal Assistant to the Vice Chancellor, Mr. Alfred Mutawali, who said it was agreed that the High Commission would put its proposal in writing to enable further study and possible recommendations. However, he denied that the statue was intentionally misplaced, saying circumstances had forced the former library to be converted into a bookshop. Mr. Mutawali further said the University administration was willing to look into the relocation of the statue to give it the honour it deserved, adding that Gandhi's memory should be associated with the drawing of knowledge, and not just the purchase of books.