

# Housing allowance for varsity staff up

By Amisi Ogara

Public universities staff are set to benefit from a new housing scheme announced by the government last week.

The staff will receive housing allowances increase of between 21 and 60 per cent.

Professors and senior lecturers will be entitled to a housing allowance of Shs 60,000, up from a minimum of Shs 37,500. Personnel in job groups equivalent to the government's P, Q, and R, who currently earn between Shs 15,000, and Shs 17,000 will now draw a maximum of Shs 40,000. The highest paid don in job group 'V' will draw an allowance of Shs 100,000.

However, unlike other beneficiaries of the scheme, there is a catch in respect of the university award: the institution must not pay the new allowances beyond the current treasury allocation.

The award is silent on the long-awaited increases in salaries for university staff. Kenyan lecturers and professors are the most poorly paid in the Commonwealth, a tradition that has led to a constant brain-drain over the decades.

Intriguingly, both the university authorities and staff were unaware that they were among those to benefit from the new scheme. The *Anvil* found most of them agonising over their poor remuneration and expressing envy at primary and high school teachers who were thought to be the only beneficiaries.

There were mixed reactions on the award with a cross-section of senior university administrators saying they were unaware that the increment affected the university.

Others expressed fear that the scheme could force the university to raise house rents for university staff houses.

The fact that the university authorities had not received the circular from the secretary to the cabinet, Dr Sally Kosgei, announcing the improved housing allowances speaks volumes about the fate of the award on the universities: It may take months before it is implemented. Officially, however, the award takes effect on July 1, this year.

Our investigations showed the Vice-Chancellor's office had not received a



Human rights activists demonstrate along the streets of Nairobi. Last week they petitioned the Attorney General, Amos Wako, to urgently table a bill in Parliament to address police torture. See story page 3 (Picture courtesy Nation)

## Electricity bills skyrocket as students opt to cook in halls

By Mugure Kihika and Noelina Nabwire

The University of Nairobi is spending more than Shs 6.0 million per month in electricity bills, due to massive cooking in the halls of residence.

The Director of the Students Welfare Authority (SWA), Dr. Maurice Awiti, says the University is struggling to meet the high bills. Awiti confirmed that the university has reached an understanding with the Kenya Power and Lighting Company to settle the bills in instalments.

The director warns that cooking in the halls of residence is a disaster in waiting, unless it is controlled or stopped altogether. He adds that as a deterrent, the university is taking disciplinary measures against students involved in the practice. Students whose cooking activities have caused fires are either denied accommodation or expelled.

The *Anvil* has established that more than 85 per cent of the students in the Main Campus, cook in their rooms. The

University is spending huge sums of money in electricity and water bills. Maintenance costs have gone up following escalated destruction of sockets and circuit breakers.

The power rating at the halls is inadequate for cooking. Mr. Oluoch says that the use of cooking gadgets has resulted in frequent power blackouts caused by overloading.

The situation is worsened by overcrowding at the halls of residence. A room meant for one person now accommodates two to three people, who all use the same power supply output.

Cooking is done under unhygienic conditions. The rooms are poorly ventilated. Fire outbreaks are likely and no safety measures have been put in place. There are no visible fire extinguishers in the halls while most halls have one entrance which also serves as the exit. Last year, six serious fire accidents were reported in various halls of residence. Two rooms in Hall Nine were completely burnt after a student left a heater on and went to class.

In February last year at Kikuyu Campus Pioneer Hall, cooking gadgets left unattended caused the destruction of two rooms. Property worth over Shs 100,000 was also destroyed.

More problems continue to bedevil the institution due to the introduction of the cost cutting measures.

A halls assistant who has been at the university for more than 35 years equates the halls with slums. He says that cooking in the halls is responsible for the deplorable conditions in the hostels. The situation is worsened by retrenchment. Some halls officers have to take charge of more than three halls.

The Customer Relations Officer at the Students Welfare Authority, Mr. Fred Oluoch, says that it is impossible to keep the hostels clean. The students dirty the bathrooms with potato peelings, sukuma wiki stalks and other food remnants as soon as they are cleaned.

Mr. Oluoch maintains that every hall has fire extinguishers kept in the custodian's office. He adds that each hall has a

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## Scientists battle over Aids vaccine

By Arthur Okwemba

Scientists in the Kenya Aids Vaccine Initiative are vaccinating volunteers with an Aids vaccine without a legally accepted memorandum of understanding (MoU) to guide the project.

The commencement of the vaccine trials contradict an earlier agreement that they will only do so after a new MoU was signed. There are fears are that the Kenyan team might have been duped to start the trials, before the signing of the new MoU.

The new MoU is extremely important, as source at KAVI puts it, it's on whose basis the vaccine project gravitates.

In the MoU, pertinent issues on how the patent on vaccine ownership and related benefits will be distributed, are provided for.

Issues concerning the vaccine invention and the Majengo prostitutes who provided the knowledge that aided in the vaccine development are also integrated.

Similarly, the MoU is to fundamentally alter the procedure of funding, whereby International Aids Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) is supposed to fund the University of Nairobi (UoN) directly and not through Oxford University.

Under the new arrangement, each university will present its budget to IAVI, and the money will be sent directly to it.

A reliable source attached to the project who sought anonymity said, "Every time we attempt to sign the document, we realise some clauses have been