

Mungiki set to storm city

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turning up the heat on the sect that has sent a cold chill down the nation's spine with their extortion rings and brutal murders.

Speaking from Naivasha Prison yesterday, Mungiki leader Maina Njenga confirmed plans for the Uhuru Park meeting, but said it would be to hold prayers. He said a number of bishops and politicians have been invited.

But even as Njenga spoke, a contingent of 200 policemen from the General Service Unit moved back into the compound of his 12-bedroom house in Kitengela at dawn yesterday, only two weeks after security was withdrawn.

Cleansing ceremony

Security sources privy to the operation said the move was aimed at thwarting a planned prayer and cleansing ceremony of the house that had been occupied by the police since October 2005.

However, police sources said the planned prayer meeting would not be allowed to take place.

Most Mungiki mass activities are often styled as prayer sessions which end up in mass action as was witnessed last month when the group overran several areas in the country and staged attacks.

Police sources said yesterday that a directive had been given by the Government to contain any activities by the sect, including prayer meetings.

At a press conference two weeks ago, Prime Minister Raila Odinga said talks with Mungiki and other banned groups like the Mt Elgon SDF would commence.

Raila spoke amid several calls by some politicians from Central Kenya for the release of Njenga at the height of the disappearance and killing of several of the sect's leaders.

Raila contradicted

But Raila was before long contradicted by the Minister for Internal Security, Prof George Saitoti, who told Parliament that the Government would not engage any outlawed group in dialogue.

The move sent mixed signals because earlier the Government had appeared eager to warm up to the sect when it was reported that it had sent a delegation led by former Coast PC Mr Cyrus Maina to Naivasha prison to consult with Njenga.

The contingent of GSU police officers who were guarding Njenga's house in Kitengela were suddenly withdrawn, fueling speculation that Njenga's release was eminent.

Njenga himself expressed hope during an interview with *The Standard* that he could be released soon, saying he had postponed the burial of his slain wife, Virginia Nyakio — who was found dead on



Retired Anglican Bishop Peter Njenga prays outside the home of jailed Mungiki leader, Maina Njenga, after he was denied access to the house.

PICTURE: COLLINS KWEYU

April 8 alongside her driver Peter Njoroge — to await the outcome of the talks.

Two of his cousins who were also shot dead mysteriously as they headed to Naivasha to see him are yet to be buried.

Complications

The issue of the talks with Mungiki is said to have been complicated by a demand by Rift Valley Cabinet Ministers and MPs that if the Government strikes a deal with Mungiki, then it should also release all post-election crimes suspects.

A source at the office of the Internal Security Ministry said Saitoti's stand was firm, that the issue of Mungiki and any other groups and post election suspects was the work of the police and should not be interfered with.

It was clear yesterday that any deal Mungiki may have hoped for was trashed by forceful action by police who blocked the road near the Kitengela house and barred access to any family or sect members.

Maina Njenga's children and retired ACK bishop Peter Njenga (no relation to the Mungiki leader) had arrived at the venue hoping to hold prayers.

Police talked tough against the sect yesterday even as jailed the sect's chairman spoke from prison and expressed optimism that talks would continue.

The ceremony, according to Njenga was aimed at cleansing the home in preparation for the burial of his wife. He said nothing

would stop his group from getting to where they want saying the officers had been sent there by individuals in government opposed to the talks.

"We are under instructions not allow anyone in or out of the house," said Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr E Kiura, who was leading the operation.

Neighbours said the officers arrived at the house at 5.30 am and secured all entries into the compound. Two other roadblocks were erected in Athi River and Kitengela to vet all motorists.

Road blocks

Police manning the roadblocks said they wanted to ensure no member of the outlawed sect would be let through.

Njenga's family members accompanied by Retired Bishop Njenga and Bishop Reverend Margaret Kahoro of Christian Foundation arrived in a convoy only to get a rude shock of the officers.

They too were told no one would be allowed into the compound and asked to leave. Bishop Njenga who was carrying a bunch of leaves explained that they were out only to pray for the family and help them in cleansing the house but Kiura would have none of that.

Kiura asked him to pray at the scene and leave. Bishop Njenga heeded the directive and prayed at the scene as armed policemen stood only a few meters away.

Njenga's children, aged nine,

six and two were also present but were not allowed in. The bishops said they had been in meetings with their colleagues and Mungiki followers in the city before they were asked to visit the house and lead the prayers.

"We have been talking with the sect followers in a bid to save our children. They are our children and we cannot run away from them," he said.

While speaking from prison, the sect's leader complained that police were still cracking down hard on his group despite the earlier indication that a deal was in the making.

Njenga told *The Standard* from the Naivasha Maximum Security Prison that he wanted the talks to continue.

Missing youths

"I understand youths suspected to be members of Mungiki are mysteriously disappearing despite the ongoing efforts to address this problem. We will however stay calm and continue," said Njenga.

He said two youths, Peter Kariuki Njuguna and Njoroge Wanjohi of Embakasi went missing two weeks ago and have not been traced.

Earlier, the Chairperson of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, Mr Maina Kiai, had said any talks with the outlawed sect should be approached with caution and not be used to provide amnesty to perpetrators of violence.

Kiai said while it was impor-

tant to negotiate for security purposes, impunity should not prevail.

"Where provision of security is concerned, the state may negotiate with organised groups. However, talks with Mungiki should not be a forum for seeking amnesty," Kiai said.

Top bishops

And some top bishops who form the Religious Leaders Consultation Group, said in Nairobi that if the talks were to go on, then Mungiki must distance itself from all criminal activity while the Government should be sincere.

"When the Prime Minister Raila Odinga said that he was ready to dialogue with the Mungiki and other youth militants, there was a sigh of relief but a few days later, some of these youths were assassinated on their way for a meeting in Naivasha," said Bishop David Kamau, Auxiliary Catholic Bishop Archdiocese of Nairobi.

"This killing was a betrayal of trust from the people that are searching for a ray of hope and a peaceful solution," said Bishop Kamau in a statement signed by the head of Catholic Church John Cardinal Njue and Rev. Timothy Ranji ACK Mount Kenya South Diocese among others.

They condemned the killing of the youths saying that, "Our recommendation is that the youth who happen to fall into crime should be arrested and prosecuted but not automatically executed."

Grand Opposition MPs meet

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National Accord and Reconciliation Act and rock the fledgling coalition Government.

In what was seen as an attempt to tighten the noose around the MPs and warning that they risked losing their parliamentary seats, the President gazetted July 1 as the date when the Political Parties Act would come into force.

In the Act, any MP who supports the activities of a party other than the one that sponsored him or her to Parliament would be deemed to have defected and should, therefore, seek a fresh mandate from the electorate.

Last week, the Cabinet advised parties in the coalition Government to meet their parliamentary groups and reach an amicable solution. As a follow up, Raila met ODM MPs at the weekend in Nairobi to prevail upon them to drop their plans.

But Budalang'i MP, Mr Ababu Namwamba, accompanied by 10 MPs, declared at a rally in his constituency at the weekend that nothing would stand in their way.

Although they said the political parties law did not compel them to resign, Kilonzo said in Budalang'i they were willing to seek a fresh mandate from voters if need be.

Namwamba said the battle for the formation of the grand opposition in Parliament must be won.



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