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THISDAY REPORTER

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THE government has flatly rejected pressure from the country's powerful hunting lobby for a reversal of its recent decision to significantly hike various hunting block and trophy fees.

This development comes amid reports of various well-connected and influential holders of hunting block licences and concessions vigorously lobbying the government to rethink its move to increase the fees.

Sources have told THISDAY that the hunting firms have been trying to call in favours from their connections in government circles, while also waging a parallel media campaign in an all-out effort to sway public officials.

The Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, Prof. Jumanne Maghembe, confirmed yesterday that the government has been under considerable pressure from industry stakeholders to reverse its decision on new fees effective this (2007/08) financial year.

He, however, dismissed arguments offered by some local hunting companies that the fee hikes would make Tanzania a less attractive destination for tourists in the region.

"Resisting change is a common trait for many human beings. But there is no argument that can convince the government otherwise," Prof. Maghembe told THISDAY in an interview.

He added: "Actually, despite the recent fee increase, we still have some of the lowest rates of hunting fees in East and Central Africa."

Tabling the ministry's 2007/08 budget estimates in the National Assembly last month, Prof. Maghembe announced tough, new measures aimed at strengthening controls over dwindling wildlife resources and boosting the hunting industry's overall contribution to the country's national economic output or Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The minister said the revised game hunting fees were actually in line with prevailing rates in the rest of the 14-member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Under the new structure, the trophy fee for hunting a lion has been raised to \$12,000 (approx. 15.6m/-), up from just \$2,500 (approx. 3.25m/-).

Furthermore, hunters now have to pay \$15,000 (approx. 19.5m/-) to kill an

elephant in Tanzania from the previous fee of \$5,000 (approx. 6.5m/-).

Also revised upwards were licence fees for lucrative hunting blocks, from a mere \$10,000 (approx. 13m/-) to \$50,000 (approx. 65m/-).

But in the immediate aftermath of the government's announcement, hunting block owners came up in arms against the new fee structure, describing the 500 per cent fee increase as outrageous.

An adamant Prof. Maghembe insisted yesterday that even with the fee increase, the hunting industry would still remain a "very lucrative business."

"What are they (hunting firms) complaining about?" he queried, asserting that hunting companies were actually using the blocks "almost free of charge."

The minister cited a typical hunting block in the Selous Game Reserve covering an area of 1,000 square metres, which is equivalent to 100,000 hectares.

"This means that at our new rates of \$50,000, we are actually charging \$0.5 per hectare...this is almost free of charge," he said.

The local tourist hunting industry has long been one of the areas considered particularly prone to serious corruption.

The new government measures come on the back of widespread reports that some well-connected individuals have been monopolising licences for hunting blocks, which they covertly sublease to foreign hunting companies for exorbitant fees.

Tanzania has over 130 hunting concessions covering an area in excess of 200,000 square kilometres, that are leased to hunting outfitters licensed to conduct tourist hunting.

More than 60 species of animals in the country can be hunted on a tourist-hunting licence.

Records show the ministry's wildlife division currently earns an average annual income of just \$10m (approx. 12.5bn/-) from its concessions.

However, government officials say President Jakaya Kikwete is keen to see the hunting industry making a "more realistic contribution to national economic growth."