

Govt orders Mubende gold miners to vacate

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THE army and Police yesterday morning directed all people operating in Mubende gold mines to vacate as they moved to close the mines.

The First Division commandant, Col. Joseph Balikuddembe, at around 9:00am went to Kampala gold mine located in Kitumbi sub-county and directed all people there to vacate within two hours.

Shortly after his directive, over 10 trucks full of policemen and teargas canyons were seen heading to the gold mines in Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties.

By mid-day yesterday, there was heavy Police presence at all the mines as miners and other people operating there moved away with their belongings.

The move follows government's warning to foreigners who are illegally operating in gold mines in Mubende district to quit before security agencies intervene.

According to the Government, the foreigners are part of the illegal miners who pose a security threat to the people of Mubende and the country at large.

The energy ministry's permanent secretary, Dr Stephen Isabalija, said they had noticed an influx of people, among which are foreigners from neighbouring countries and beyond that are involved in illegal mining in areas of Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties.

The Mubende gold mines have attracted people from countries such as Rwanda and DR Congo, and there have been a number of cases reported, including murder, some of which remain unresolved to date.

"These people do not only use rudimentary methods such as hoes, spades and basins to pan and extract gold, but some of them undertake highly mechanised mining operations such as using bulldozers to excavate the ore. They also use mercury and cyanide in the processing of gold that has resulted in environmental degradation and also affected the health and safety of the people in the areas of these mining operations," Isabalija observed in a statement of August 2.

In order to address the above problems, Isabalija said the Government was putting



A miner washing stone dust in search of gold nuggets at an open-pit gold mine in Lukingi village in Mubende district. Mubende gold mines have attracted people from Rwanda and DR Congo

in place intervention measures, where all local artisans will be registered in the mining areas of Kitumbi and Bukuya sub-counties, so that they can be organised groups that shall ultimately be regulated.

The intervention is anticipated to take three months and will subsequently help the ministry re-organise mining activities in Mubende and the country at large.

"The intervention will be supported by the Uganda Police Force, Uganda People's Defence Forces, Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control under the internal affairs ministry and will be led by the energy ministry," Isabalija said.

■ WHAT IS HAPPENING

In Bukuya town, the biggest trading centre near the mines, all bodaboda cyclists have a different name for these mines, the commonest name being Lugongwe, which is the bigger village, covering other villages such as Kitabona and Lujinji, where the mines are located.

The roads to Lugongwe and to the rest of the places in Kitumbi, are in a poor state.

An 80km-journey from Mityana town to Lugongwe costs sh50,000 by bodaboda. There are children of school-going age working at the mines, and nobody seems to care about why they are not going to school.

The miners are suspicious of any stranger and can easily attack you if your intention is not to buy gold.

In the mines are people who get the crude minerals, processors and buyers. Others deal in food vending and other merchandise. Gold is mined from deep pits of up to 80 feet. In some cases, gold miners use machines. Each trader or miner has his own area.

The process of getting gold starts with pounding or grinding of the rock ore. If it is not dry enough, it is exposed to sunshine.

Later, the product is mixed with water. The gold particles will float to the top. This is done with basins which are also sold in the camp. Out of a basin of crude ore, only one point of gold (size of a pill) can be got. The mining area has poor sanitation.