

Kampala Extra

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Natural Resources led by Mr Alex Byaruhaba inspect plastic plates made from recycled material at a factory in Tula, Kawempe Division, Kampala, on Wednesday. The visit was part of the committee's efforts aimed at assessing the implementation of the Koveero ban. [Alex Esagala]



Illegal

Trucks load sand at Lugumba Landing Site on Lake Victoria in Kasanje Sub-county, Wakiso District. FILE PHOTO

Nema, Chinese firm lock horns over sand mining in L. Victoria

Contention. Nema says Mango Tree Group Ltd was only permitted to manufacture ships and must first seek approval to engage in sand extraction.

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WAKISO. The National Environment Management Authority (Nema) has warned of devastating environmental consequences if Chinese investors insist on mining sand in Lake Victoria.

Ms Naomi Karekaho, the Nema spokesperson, said Mango Tree Group Ltd was only permitted to manufacture ships and must first seek approval to engage in sand ex-

traction after they secured a license from the Uganda Investment Authority, not carrying out dredging on the lake shores," said Ms Karekaho in an interview on Wednesday.

"The sites where they want to excavate sand are very crucial. We warned them against tampering with them because any destruction may spark off a serious ecological disaster we may not handle as a country. They can think of other areas but an EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] has to first be carried out," she added.

Background

On September 2 last year, the company submitted its first EIA report to Nema seeking approval to

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Concerns. Environmentalists have on several occasions warned that unchecked sand mining activities in lakes and major swamps across the country will lead to a serious ecological disaster.

But the booming construction industry where sand is much needed seems to have blinded those in authority thus sacrificing the environment.

grounds that the company's activities would have a negative impact on the eco-system. In a June 1, 2017 letter to Mango Tree Group directors, the Nema executive director, Dr Tom Okurut, explained that Kimi Island, for instance, is a tilapia breeding area, while Buusi and Nkumba are breeding and nursery areas for Nile Perch as well as active fishing grounds, which cannot be tampered with.

But the company directors led by Mr Water Lee insist that to develop water transport on Lake Victoria, they need to dredge a ship channel on the lake bed to open up a route to Mwanza Port in Tanzania.

"To develop water transport on Lake Victoria, we need to do some dredging in some parts of the lake

briefly

Pickpocket arrested

KAMPALA. Police in Nsambya, a city suburb, are holding a man who was caught red handed snatching phones from passengers at Nsambya Police Barracks on Tuesday afternoon. The suspects had snatched two phones from taxi passengers when police officers arrested him. The suspect on interrogation confessed to the crime and promised to work with police to arrest his accomplices. In December, police spokesperson Emilian Kayima listed Nsambya traffic lights as one of the top crime spots in Kampala where taxi passengers are usually targeted by criminals. [Joseph Kato]

Police boss makes pledge

KAMPALA. Kampala Metropolitan Police commander Frank Mwesigwa has promised to provide security to leaders of crime preventers who have reportedly received death threats from unknown goons. He said leaders of the National Crime Preventers Forum are under threat after unknown persons signed letters to them.

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Voices

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NAOMI KAREKAHO,
NEMA SPOKESPERSON



"We are poor as a district, but we shall not seek temporary economic gains at the expense of the environment because if we do so, our future will be bleak as a country,"

MATIA LWANGA
BWANIKA,
WAKISO DISTRICT
CHAIRPERSON

Nema and offer us a dredging licence and we begin our project," said Mr Shuchun Fan, another company director. "Currently, we don't have a licence and that's why we can't do anything though we have launched the ship to show government how ready we are," he added.

The plan by Mango Tree Group Ltd to excavate sand from the lake has since caused a standoff between Wakiso District chairperson Matia Lwanga Bwanika and councillors. While Mr Bwanika insists the company's activities will kill aquatic organisms in the lake, the councillors led by the speaker, Mr Simon Nsubuga, say since the district needs money to facilitate various development projects, sand mining can be embraced as of the key revenue sources.

Council divided

Early this month, Mr Bwanika accused councillors of taking bribes from Gen Salim Saleh, the coordinator of the Operation Wealth Creation programme, to endorse the Chinese sand mining project, an accusation they have since denied.

In an interview on Wednesday, Mr Bwanika said he will not yield to any pressure to back a project he believes will endanger the lake.

"We are poor as a district, but we shall not seek temporary economic gains at the expense of the environment because if we do so, our future will be bleak as a country," he said

Gen Saleh has since openly backed the excavation of sand from the lake, saying the country must make sacrifices if it is to attain industrialisation.

Mango Tree had initially been licensed by the Uganda Investment Authority to build ships, a port and ship yard at Kawuku. It was also expected to use one of the built dredgers to open the water ways. A dredger they built was recently commissioned by State minister for Trade Michael Werikhe.