tempts to touch the trees.

Skin infections hit gold miners

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AMUDAT. Hundreds of artisanal gold miners in Kabisha and Chepkarat parishes, Karita Sub-county, Amudat District, are battling skin diseases caused by exposure to mercury used in purifying gold.

The Karita Sub-county health inspector, Mr Simon Peter Odelei, confirmed the incident, saying: "Our people are too complicated, I have tried to advise them about the dangers of using mercury but they are very big headed."

Mr Odelei explained that Mercury is a thick, waxy silver chemical that is used in the extraction of secondary gold.

"During this process, the vapour from the amalgamation (burning of gold particles mixed with mercury) is inhaled by the miner who often does not have protective clothing," he said.

Mr John Munyes, a 25-year-old miner, suffering from the skin disease, told *Daily Monitor* that he started feeling skin pain and itching before his body turned dark after using the chemicals.

"I can't tell what chemical has made me like this because I have used many including mercury for the last five years," he said.

But Ms Grace Chelain, another gold miner in Acerere, Nakapiripirit District, said the use of mercury has simplified their work. "We buy one kilogramme of mercury at Shs400,000 from our Indian suppliers and with that someone can get gold that can be sold between Shs700,000 and Shs1m," Ms Chelain said.

The Amudat District chairperson, Mr Francis Kiyonga, warned that the skin disease could become cancerous if government does not intervene. He advised government to equip the miners with safety precautions.

The chemical also affects animals. A fortnight ago eight goats died instantly after drinking water that had got mixed up with mercury.

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