

Tension in Butaleja over Doho scheme

BUTALEJA

By Paul Watala

Security has been beefed up in Butaleja district following the recent attacks on Police posts by angry rice farmers and increased clashes over land conflicts.

Recently, angry rice farmers attacked Khangalaba sub-county Police Post and attempted to set it ablaze after the Police refused to release suspects who had been detained at the Police post.

It is alleged that rice farmers mobilised themselves under the influence of Butaleja Woman Member of Parliament Milly Mugenyi and attacked the Police post demanding the release of their colleagues.

As the angry farmers tried to overrun the Police post, the officer who was on guard shot one dead and injured three who were later rushed to Busolwe Hospital.

A group of rice farmers resisting the construction of Doho Rice Irrigation Scheme in Himutu sub-county also attacked some of their colleagues and burnt down an unspecified number of houses, accusing the owners of betraying them by accepting the scheme.

On a number of occasions, the two groups of rice farmers



Security officials, MPs, district leaders and rice farmers at a security meeting at Himutu Health Centre in Butaleja district on Thursday. By Paul Watala

have clashed causing injuries and destruction of crops of either group.

On Wednesday, security minister Henry Tumukunde rushed to Butaleja, where he camped for two days and held several meetings with the local leaders.

During the closed-door security meeting, Mugenyi was pinned for allegedly inciting the rice farmers to resist the construction of Doho II

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irrigation scheme.

"We resolved, after a meeting with the security minister,

to beef up security," Bukedi regional Police commander Julius Gogolo said.

Gogolo, warned residents against being used by politicians to attack the Police, saying it is criminal.

He also warned politicians against inciting locals to resist government programmes, adding that such leaders are against the development of the area.

Moses Nagwomu, the Butaleja East MP, appealed to rice farmers to accept the project, adding that the

Government has no intention of grabbing their land.

Mugenyi denied allegations of inciting the people, saying her only concern was that the Government was using some leaders to force rice farmers to accept the project without sensitising them first.

"Today, land matters are sensitive, so one cannot wake up and tell people to vacate without knowing the terms. Where do you want them to go? Is it because they live near the swamp," Mugenyi asked.

She appealed to rice farmers to stop attacking Police posts and burning people's houses just because they have views different from theirs. She encouraged them to remain united and observe peace.

However, rice farmers said they were not against the construction of the irrigation scheme, adding that their concern is they have never been sensitised.

"We appealed to the Government to come and sensitise us. Our district leaders claim that they have sensitised us, but this is not true," Steven Nambafu said.

"We are the land owners, but we have never seen any of the leaders who claim that rice farmers have accepted the project. We shall only accept it after being sensitised," he added.