

No light at end of the tunnel for Mbale-Tirinyi road construction

Standstill. Although the government had earlier stated that works would resume by October there are no signs of progress on the road.

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MBALE. Six months after the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) terminated a contract with Dott Services Ltd to construct the Mbale-Tirinyi Nakalama road, plans to rehabilitate it have since stalled.

Residents are now vexed over the deteriorating state of the road and government's delay to finalise its construction.

Dott Services' contract was terminated in May on allegations of shoddy work.

The company was awarded the contract to work on the 100.2km road at Shs73b after completing rehabilitation of Mbale-Tororo-Soroti highway in 2015 at cost of Shs190 billion.

According to a September 2, 2017 letter signed by Unra acting executive director Edna Rugumayo, the contract was terminated because the contractor failed to comply with the contractual obligations and was unwilling to be supervised by the road's authority.

"We have immediately commenced on the procurement of the new contractor. This process is now in very advanced stages and we expect to have a contract signed by the end of September 2017 and the contractor on site by the end of October 2017," Ms Rugumayo wrote then, although there is no progress on ground.

Current state

By the time the contract was terminated, the physical progress on the road was 19.09 per cent against the planned 94.46 per cent.

The contractor abandoned the road after digging open holes and water channels thus making the road impassable and prone to accidents.

Residents along the stretch have on several occasions protested and blocked the road, describing it as a deathtrap. On such occasions, traffic flow has been paralyzed and transport fares increased.

In August, a group of Members of Parliament led by Mr John Baptist Nambeshe (Manjiya County) staged a demonstration over the same, which was blocked by police, claiming the legislators had not sought permission from police.

Leaders from Budaka, Mbale, Namutumba, Iganga and Kibuku districts have faulted the government for delaying the construction works on the road.

Vendors and traders operating on the road have also cried foul over dust that has affected their goods.

"The contractor left the road with open water channels, which pose a



Shoddy work. One of the open water channels that were dug by Dott Services before its contract was terminated. (PHOTO BY FRED WAMBEDE)



Frustration. Residents block Mbale-Tirinyi road recently over delayed works. (PHOTO BY MUDAGHA KOLYANGHA)

danger to both the motorists and the pedestrians but the government is not bothered," Mr Umali Hamba, a former Kamukoli Sub-county councillor in Budaka District, said.

Mr Hamba accused UNRA of failing to maintain the road.

"They have failed to keep the road passable and control the dust by watering. This is very disappointing and disgusting," he said.

Mr Steven Masika, another road user, faulted the government for awarding contracts to companies without capacity to do standard work.

"This is what you get when you

award contracts to companies with no technical capacity," he said.

The Budaka LCV chairperson,

ABOUT THE ROAD

The road also referred to as great north road, is an important national road that connects towns in eastern region. It also acts as link to northern Uganda, Sudan, Egypt, Libya up to the Mediterranean Sea.

"This road facilitates import and export trade in the entire region and across the border. It has also facilitated economic development like the growth of trading centre's in the region," Mr Charles Oduukula, a resident, says.

Mr Sam Mulomi, said UNRA had committed itself that the works on the road would resume in October, but nothing has been done.

"We issued a notice to Unra threatening to carry out massive demonstrations over the state of the road but later, we called it off after they promised that the construction will soon begin by September. Unfortunately, there are no signs. We planning to hold the demonstration again," he said.

Unra take

However, the UNRA spokesperson, Mr Mark Ssali, said they had procured a new contractor, China Civil Engineering and construction Corporation, to resume work, but held back after Dott Services sued the authority over what it termed as unlawful termination of their contract.

"UNRA has not yet got the approval to send the contractor on site," Mr Ssali said.

The works was commissioned by President Museveni in November 2016. Mr Museveni in April 21, 2017 letter barred government agencies from entering into any new contract with Dott services.

"I have received credible information relating to fraudulent dealings by Dott Services that are not acceptable," he stated.

Mr Yasin Wabomba, the deputy speaker of Mbale Municipality, said the road is getting damaged because of poor workmanship and supervision.

"Unra always fails to do its supervisory work and they should be the ones to blame," he said.

Mr Nambeshe said there is no value for money if such substandard work can be tolerated by government.

"We are disappointed with government because this is wastage of taxpayers' money," he said.

briefly

65-year-old hangs self

NAMAYINGO. Police in Namayingo District are investigating circumstances under which a 65-year-old man hanged himself at Victoria Nursery and Primary School in Buheriba Sub-county last week. The deceased, identified as Suleiman Wandera by Busoga East police spokesperson James Mubi, is alleged to have been bickering with Mr Martin Manyasa, the school director, over ownership of the land that the institution sits on. Mr Mubi warned people against committing suicide yet police or leaders in the area can offer a solution. [Abubaker Kirunda]

Man found dead

JINJA. Police in Jinja District are investigating circumstances under which a man's body was last Friday found lying outside his house. Paul Niro Nabeta, a resident of Nsube Village in Budondo Sub-county, was according to Rose Namula, a neighbour, found lying dead with a polythene bag tied around his mouth. By press time, police had arrived at the scene but no official comment had been made regarding the deceased's death. His body was yet to be taken for a postmortem. Police urged residents to be vigilant and report any suspicious elements to local authorities. [Abubaker Kirunda]

36-year-old survives mob

LUUKA. A suspected 36-year-old witchdoctor at the weekend survived lynching by a mob in Walugabo Village in Nawampiti Sub-county, Luuka District for allegedly 'bringing demons into the village'. The suspect was saved by the village chairperson, Mr Paul Nzirubuzibu, when residents surged towards him with machetes. The suspect, however, denied the allegations claiming he also found them [demons] in the house that he bought. Cases of mob violence in the eastern region range from suspects said to have been caught stealing, practising witchcraft, or committing murder, among other crimes. [Abubaker Kirunda]

Three children admitted

TORORO. Three children from one family in Tororo Municipality have been admitted to St Anthony Hospital after reportedly eating poisonous cassava. The trio, from Agururu Village in Western Division, were admitted on Sunday night. Ms Norah Kauma, their mother, said when the family started eating the cassava, they discovered that it was bitter. Her children developed stomach ache and started vomiting, prompting her to give them oral salts. However, when their situation deteriorated, she took them to hospital. Ms Juliet Nyaketcho, a nurse, said at the time of their admission, the victims were dehydrated. [Joseph Omollo]