

Demanding. The engineers who supervise structural and technical work at the construction project went on strike last week, saying they had not been paid wages and allowances since January.

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Karuma engineers lay down tools over pay

KIRYANDONGO. Works at Karuma hydro-power plant has stalled after engineers supervising construction went on strike last week over pay.

More than 35 engineers, who supervise structural and technical work at the construction project, laid down their tools last week, saying they had not been paid wages and allowances since January. This now means construction work at the power dam does not benefit from expertise of the engineers on strike.

The engineers are employed by Energy Infratech Pvt Ltd (EIPL), an Indian firm the ministry of Energy contracted in October 2013 at a cost of \$11.2 million (about Shs37b), to provide consultancy and supervisory services for construction works at Karuma hydro-power plant in Kiryandongo District.

Mr Joshua Denga, one of the engineers who spoke to *Daily Monitor* on Tuesday, said they downed their tools a week ago after failing to get pay.

He said they won't resume work until all their wages arrears are cleared.

"Unless they pay all our monies, we shall not resume work because our client UEGCL (Uganda Electricity Generation Company Ltd) will not appreciate we have family responsibilities that can only be met by cash," Mr Denga said.

He said several attempts to persuade EIPL to advance part of their pay failed because government had not cashed any of EIPL invoices.

"We are surprised that the best government can grant us for the good job we're doing is to deny us payment. The whole team of supervising engineers has not been paid," Mr Denga said.

Last year, government through the Solicitor General



Progress. Engineers at Karuma power dam inspect the ongoing construction recently. PHOTO BY STEPHEN OTAGE

rejected a move by the Energy ministry to secure an extra \$5.5 million (about Shs18b) contract fee for EIPL, four months after President Museveni ordered their contract terminated.

The Energy ministry officials had argued that the complexity of works being done at different phases of the project required EIPL to get more funds to increase its manpower to include, among others, geologists, electrical, mechanical, health, safety and environment experts.

But the Solicitor General turned down the request and instead advised that the procurement entity enters into a new contract that should provide for linkage between the first and new contract in order to avoid parallel supervision.

Another engineer, who declined to be named due to sensitivity of his role at EIPL, said they would petition the Energy ministry and other government organs, including Parliament, to address their plight.

"If they [government] do not act in a few days and sort

out our employer to clear our wages, we are going to petition Energy minister [Irene] Muloni and the relevant committee of Parliament to have our frustration addressed," he said.

"We're providing them (government) a service and a quality one that should be appreciated and paid for in time," he

UNHAPPY

Determined. The engineers, who include 15 Ugandans, have vowed not to resume work unless their wages and allowances are settled.

added.

Meanwhile, Mr VPS Chuahan, the EIPL project manager at Karuma, in an interview confirmed the engineers strike, but said he was optimistic the engineers would be paid by next week.

"There's nothing much EIPL can do since our client (government) has not advanced us any

money to settle these bills," Mr Chuahan said.

He said invoices for March and June financial quarters were submitted to UEGCL and unto the Energy ministry, but only one (about \$500,000) was forwarded and is expected to be cashed next week.

"We want UEGCL to intervene quickly so that the quality of work here is not compromised. The last time UEGCL paid us was in December 2016, but we have run out of financial resources to meet our financial liabilities at the project and also pay our engineers," Mr Chuahan added.

Energy State minister Simon D'Ujanga said he could not comment on the issue since he was away in Juba, South Sudan, but Energy permanent secretary Robert Kasande said part of the funds was advanced to EIPL by Wednesday.

"The ministry paid them yesterday [Wednesday] and we hope the engineers are going to be sorted out," Mr Kasande said.

But Mr Chuahan said the money only covered wages for