

Students, college heads clash over management

Purpose. The students claim to be struggling to cleanse the college of, among other things, alleged corruption, nepotism and tribalism.

BY BILL OKETCH

bill.oketch@up.net.ug

LIRA. Some students protesting what they term as "poor administration" at the Uganda Technical College (UTC)-Lira, are said to be intimidating both classmates and the administrators.

"You either leave voluntarily or we push you out" is typical of the threats reportedly received by top administrators from some students.

The students, who are now throwing their weight around at the government institution, claim to be struggling to cleanse the college of, among other things, alleged corruption, nepotism and tribalism.

They have petitioned the Education ministry's permanent secretary demanding that the principal, Mr Nathan Talwana, Dean of students, Mr Daniel Osinde, accountant Silver Agama, and the college public relations officer, Mr Abbas Nabyatta, be transferred over alleged incompetence. However, some students are opposed to violent move of settling disputes.

In 2014, there was drama at the college as a group of weekend students locked the principal in his office, protesting against fees increment.

Mr Talwana was locked up by students, who were holding placards, claiming the college had increased fees from Shs1.3m to about Shs1.9m per year.

The students reportedly asked the principal to get out of the office so that they could lock it but he refused, prompting them to lock him up. The principal was rescued 30 minutes later by anti-riot police.

In 2017, another group of students escorted their principal to Lira Central Police Station. Eyewitnesses say the manner in which the students handled Mr Talwana was inappropriate.

Some workers say this threatening behaviour shows how local politicians are attempting to



Protected. Police escort Mr Nathan Talwana to Lira Central Police Station after students locked his office in 2014. PHOTO BY BILL OKETCH

ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Establishment. Uganda Technical College - Lira is a tertiary institution of learning which offers both certificate and diploma courses in engineering. It is under the Ministry of Education and Sports headed by the Department of Business, Technical and Vocational Education Training (BTJET). The college was founded in 1948.

control and disrupt the institution through their student supporters.

"Some of these rioting students are being misguided by people who think an institution such as this should belong to a particular tribe, which is wrong. This is an institution for all Ugandans," says Mr Abbas Nabyatta, college public relations officer.

He dismisses all the allegations labeled against top admin-

istrators as baseless and unsupported.

The Uganda People's Congress (UPC) party spokesperson in Lango Sub-region, Mr New Moses, says the problem at UTC is brought about by greed.

"The top administrators are corrupt and they have messed up the development of the institution," he says.

Investigations

Lira Resident District Commissioner Robert Abak, says the principal had been asked to step aside to pave way for investigation into the allegations.

But students say Mr Talwana has since been reinstated, and according to them, the principal has now introduced strict and unrealistic fees policies to exclude students from the local community, who are mostly on private basis.

Last week, 19 students were suspended indefinitely after anger drove them to the street of Lira Town, to demonstrate. The school administration says the suspended students are undis-

ciplined.

Critics such as Lira District youth councillor Omara Elem, blame the conflict and feuds at the college on lack of transparency and accountability.

"The governing council also seems not to know their roles and responsibilities. They are being comprised by the administration. The representation of the district council in the governing council is also wanting," he says.

A human rights scholar, Mr Denis Odwar, says allegation of tribalism should be investigated deeply.

Mr Frederick Odongo, the Dokolo District chairman, says: "As district leaders of Lango Sub-region, we have been put in the blackout. We thought our Lira counterpart, Mr Alex Oremo Alot, would call and brief us. It's now coming to our concern that there is a lot of intrigue which is existing there and they don't want that to be known to other leaders. I met the commissioner of Technical Education and briefed her about it."