

# MINISTERS VIEW MNR DAMAGE

rald Correspondent

MUTARE.

HE Katiyo tea factory near Mutare which was attacked by South African-backed MNR bandits on Saturday was toured Thursday by the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, Cde Moven Mahachi, the Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, Cde Victoria Chitepo, and MP for Mutare East, Cde Lazarus Karayebani.

The group heard how the tattered-clothed gang of bandits first struck at the estate's factory, where they partially blew the main electrical switchboard and one other, but with no casualties.

Eyewitnesses said the factory guard who was on duty at the time the attack said the bandits arrived at about 7 pm and got hold of him. They forcibly removed his clothes, shoes and took away some money. One of them took up position

at the gate and stood guard.

The bandits forced the factory guard into the factory at gunpoint and asked him to show them the "vital devices" of the factory. Most of the doors were locked and the bandits could only gain entry through the open ones.

The bandits then tied explosives to what they thought were strategic instruments in the factory's operations. Two switchboards and three other gadgets were blown off, some over the factory's concrete wall.

However, because of careful locking of the other doors to the boiler section and the processing factory the bandits could not cause any other damage.

The explosion which caused damage to the expensive complex made workers of the estate who were enjoying a disco dance at the local beerhall scurry for cover. They informed the security forces who were in

the area of the explosion.

Local people said three of the bandits were in combat uniform there was one woman with a gun and other bandits in tattered clothes who struck at the field manager's house.

They were said by the field manager, Cde Oscar Sithole, to have asked where the car that was always parked at his front kitchen door was. They then entered the house, took away clothes from the family's wardrobes, clothes and \$500 from the house maid and set alight Cde Sithole's car which was parked in his garage.

The bandits went to the estate club and cut open part of the fence near the gate. But people at the club had heard the explosions and had ordered the security guard to lock the gate soon after a driver of one of the cars that were eventually burnt had just arrived.

Eyewitnesses said that driver quickly rushed into a toilet and

held up the handle tightly with the bandits trying to vainly to force it open. They later went into the local club and drank beer before burning up two almost new vehicles that belonged to the tea estate.

Agricultural and Rural Development Authority general manager, Dr Liberty Mhlanga, who was conducting the tour, told the delegation that there were plans to replace the damaged devices.

However, he said a certain amount of foreign currency had to be immediately allocated to the estate to buy certain commodities that cannot be manufactured in the country.

The bandits are said to have beaten up local people in the nearby Mandeya communal lands, looting their belongings and stripping two women of their clothing.

Cde Mahachi's delegation held talks with the management and workers committee of the estate.