



## Drinking illicit local alcohol; three deaths

By Jaliwason Jasson, Babati

THREE residents at Bashnet village in Babati District, Manyara Region have lost their lives after allegedly consuming a strong alcoholic beverage, whose brewing and sale point are being investigated.

ACP Ahmed Makarani, the regional police commander, said in a telephone interview with this reporter yesterday that the origin of the local beverage is still unknown.

The police intervened and halted burial ceremonies for the deceased until autopsy is conducted to facilitate a thorough investigation, he said.

"We have received the report and investigations are ongoing. Our focus is not on where the drink was produced but on determining the exact cause of death," he stated.

The police are waiting for results of a forensic examination to establish whether the cause of death was poisoning or "the result of drinking alcohol on an empty stomach," he further noted.

"That is why we are conducting a thorough investigation, with the involvement of a government chemist and a pathologist, to verify whether it was alcohol or poisoning," he said.

No burials will be permitted until full investigation is completed, he emphasised, affirming that the bodies of the deceased were transferred to Babati District Hospital for further examination.

Martin Akonay, chairman of Bashnet village also confirmed the deaths, noting that all three victims died in similar circumstances.

"They were all known to be heavy drinkers. One passed away at around 10pm, another at 3am and the third after 9am, he explained, elaborating that the community is now awaiting the results of the medical investigation to proceed with the burial arrangements.

A relative of the deceased, who wished to remain anonymous, told this reporter that five individuals were rushed to the hospital after drinking the brew, where two survived after being treated for poisoning.



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President Samia Suluhu Hassan arriving at Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare yesterday to attend the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State extraordinary meeting, to discuss the escalating crisis in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Photo: State House

# SADC Heads of State want DRC war ended

Guardian Reporter

**S**OUTHERN Africa Development Community (SADC) Heads of State and government have strongly condemned escalating hos-

tilities in eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Elias Magosi, the SADC executive secretary, said at a briefing that the leaders reiterated their steadfast commitment to collec-

tion of military advances in the region. They convened an extraordinary summit in the Zimbabwe capital of Harare yesterday to address the deepening humanitarian crisis and growing insecurity in the wake of intensifica-

tion of military advances in the region. Host President Emmerson Mnangagwa who also chairs

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# Premature births: Govt hints at extended maternity leave

By Augusta Njoi, Dodoma

THE government has approved a proposal to extend maternity leave for employees giving birth to premature babies, incorporating whatever remains in view of the normal 40 weeks of pregnancy.

Anthony Mavunde, the Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities state minister in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) told the legislature yesterday that additionally, fathers will now be entitled to seven days of paternity leave instead of three days.

**Many of these issues stem from employers prioritizing profit over the well-being of their workforce, which ultimately undermines employees' ability to deliver productive services and achieve desired outcomes**

He said the proposal, long advocated by the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA), is meant to protect the well-being and health of infants born prematurely as they require additional

maternal care. It was presented yesterday as part of the 2024 Labour Laws (Amendment) Bill, after reviewing its earlier proposal of a maximum maternity leave of 36 weeks.

Following discussions with the relevant parliamentary committee, the government agreed to extend this to 40 weeks, he stated.

A new clause, Section 34A, has been introduced to allow employers to grant up to 30 days of unpaid leave to employees dealing with emergencies or disasters, providing a more supportive environment for employees during crises, he said. The bill also proposes amendments to Section 14 to define types of fixed-term contracts, expanding the scope of temporary employment to include contracts

for seasonal work, for training graduates, and for increasing work volume. This will allow employers to hire workers on fixed-term contracts in response to fluctuating demands, he specified.

Moreover, it is proposed that employers and employees may enter agreements on how to work during emergencies, such as outbreaks of diseases or other unforeseen circumstances that affect productivity in the workplace, he said.

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# Digital transition: EAC proposes regional payments master plan

**Cross-border payments remain costly, averaging seven percent of the transaction value, well above the global average target of one percent for ...**

By Guardian Reporter

THE East African Community (EAC) is seeking to accelerate regional digital integration by developing a regional payment systems master-plan, intended to harmonise legal, regulatory and oversight frameworks for a conducive cross-border payment ecosystem in the region.

Annette Ssemuwemba, the EAC deputy secretary general for Cus-

toms, Trade and Monetary Affairs, at a meeting of the EAC regional payments system steering committee in Entebbe on Thursday, rooted for an efficient and reliable payment systems in fostering economic integration.

The master-plan is geared to making cross-border payments faster, safer, cheaper and more transparent, she said, underlining that this initiative is crucial for unlocking the region's trade and

financial potential.

She reaffirmed the region's desire to make cross-border payments more integrated to facilitate trade and financial inclusion, as the region sees rapid growth in digital payments.

Mobilemoney transactions are surging but challenges persist, including high transaction costs, limited interoperability and regulatory disparities across partner states, she stated.

"Cross-border payments remain costly, averaging seven percent of the transaction value, well above the global average target of one percent for retail payments and three percent for remittances," she asserted.

While the 1999 EAC Treaty of Integration has provisions for harmonisation of legal frameworks,

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Inglis gives Australia another selection headache





## Premature births: Govt accepts to extend length of maternity leave

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Section 37 has also been amended to prevent initiating or continuing disciplinary proceedings against an employee when the dispute is before the labour commission or labour court, in order to avoid interference with ongoing conflict resolution processes, he said.

The bill outlines compensation according to the type of dispute and sets minimum and maximum limits for compensation for wrongful dismissal. Section 41A is proposed to introduce conditions related to breaches of fixed-term employment contracts.

Furthermore, Section 71 has been updated to ensure that the establishment of high-quality contracts between public institution heads aligns with public service regulations, streamlining employment terms in government institutions.

Trade unions will also be allowed to enter high-quality contracts with employers or employer associations to set up platforms for employee participation in the workplace, he suggested.

The Employment of Foreigners Act, Cap. 436 will be amended to allow foreign workers with a Class A work permit to work for a company in which they hold shares, after obtaining ap-

proval from the Commissioner for Labour rather than requiring a new work permit.

This is intended to simplify facilitation for foreign investors and improve the wider investment environment, he stated, elaborating that work permit application fees will be rectified to allow refugees with appropriate status to work without being restricted by the work permit expiry date. Amendments to Section 12 of the same Act will allow work permit renewals to be submitted to the Commissioner for Labour at least two months before the permit expires.

Fatma Hassan Toufiq (Special Seats), chairperson of the Social Welfare and Community Development committee of the National Assembly, recommended that the government consider further amendments to allow employees who give birth to children with special needs (such as those with Down syndrome, large heads, cleft palates, heart defects, or sickle cell anaemia) to receive special maternity leave.

Salma Kikwete (Mchinga) urged men who will be taking the one-week paternity leave to avoid using the opportunity for other activities instead of supporting their wives during the challenging time of caring for premature babies.



Traders at Samunge Market in Arusha blocking the Samunge-Fire road yesterday, demanding that the government address complaints like city council militiamen seizing their goods despite their paying daily fees, along with clogged toilet chambers, releasing wastewater to their stalls. Photo: Correspondent Getrude Mpezya

## Digital transition: EAC proposes regional payments master plan

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the absence of an enforceable regional payments law and regulatory framework across the partner states remains a challenge, she further noted.

A few partner states have enacted national legislation aligned with EAC commitments, creating a legal gap that

hinders uniform enforcement of cross-border payment regulations.

"Despite these hurdles, opportunities exist. The region's growing digital economy, expanding internet penetration, currently at 28 percent of business level connectivity at an affordable cost, innovative financial technologies are paving the way for an inclusive and seamless pay-

ment ecosystem," the policy adviser noted.

A mutual recognition framework for licensing payment service providers (PSPs) is expected to facilitate cross-border operations, while a harmonised regulatory framework for intra-regional mobile money and e-wallet transactions is also being developed for interoperability and security,

she elaborated.

Currency acceptability and convertibility is also lined up to address currency-related challenges, fostering better pricing mechanisms, she said, hinting at developing infrastructure enabling instant cross-border wholesale and retail payments.

The master-plan will identify infrastructure needs for in-

stant cross-border payments to ensure access, speed, cost efficiency, transparency, inclusivity and safety as well as sustainability of the payment systems, she affirmed.

The steering committee meeting brought together EAC central banks, the German agency GIZ, Trade Mark Africa (TMA), the World Bank and EAC Secretariat facilitators, she added.



Jerry Silaa, the Communication and Information Technology minister, explains government efforts to combat fraudsters who use mobile phones to conduct scams on unsuspecting people in the legislature yesterday. Photo: Correspondent Ibrahim Joseph

## SADC Heads of State want DRC war ended

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SADC, in his opening remarks stressed the urgent need for intensified peace building efforts and dialogue to resolve the crisis.

He reaffirmed the community's dedication to regional peace and security, pledging to redouble efforts to protect civilians caught up in worsening instability, in accordance with the SADC mutual defence pact.

He underscored the importance of strengthening political will across the region, to create a clear, actionable roadmap to accelerate peace initiatives in eastern DRC. Acknowledging the valuable support of international partners, he insisted that much more needs to be done to alleviate the suffering of displaced populations in the region.

"The crisis in the eastern territory, arising from persistent armed conflict, cannot be ignored. The people of this region have suffered for far too long," he stated, pointing at the urgency of the situation.

Heads of State from several SADC member countries attended, expressing unwavering solidarity with the people of eastern DRC, seeking to find lasting solutions to the ongoing violence.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who chairs the SADC organ on Politics, Defence, and Security Cooperation, was similarly in attendance, while DRC President Etienne

Tshisekedi attended the meeting virtually.

The summit was meant to devise a comprehensive peace strategy, leveraging regional cooperation and international support to restore lasting peace and stability in the troubled region, the secretariat chief intoned. Given the gravity of the security situation in eastern DRC, the summit was convened to reassess collective response to the emerging situation, he said.

"The discussions at this summit reaffirm SADC's unwavering commitment to supporting the DRC and ensuring long-term stability in the region," he stated.

"I am confident that the decisions made here will reflect our continued solidarity with the people of the DRC and our broader mission to enhance security and stability across both the region and the continent."

"Our region has long been known for its peaceful co-existence and resilience. It remains a beacon of hope for the people of SADC and Africa at large, especially in a world where many continue to endure the devastating effects of conflict and instability."

SADC countries are committed to regional peace, unity and development, where the DRC people and the entire region can look forward to a future of peace, security and prosperity, he added.

## 50 Million in West Africa Face Food Insecurity - FAO

By Guardian Reporter and Agencies

THE Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on Thursday said the number of people facing food insecurity in West Africa has risen to 50 million.

FAO Country Representative, Kofi Dominic, who gave the alarming statistic at panelist session in the ongoing 5th Lake Chad Governors' Forum in Maiduguri. Dominic said that the figure indicated a sharp increase of 35 million in just five years.

The envoy, therefore, called for urgent intervention to prevent further deterioration of the region's food crisis. "In 2020, there were 15 million people in food insecurity across West Africa.

"Today, that number has surged to

50 million despite all efforts in agriculture, livestock, and food distribution," Dominic said.

He, however, attributed the crisis to three major factors: conflict, climate change, and economic shocks, which have severely disrupted food production and supply chains across the region. "Last year alone, 15 countries in West and Central Africa experienced devastating floods, affecting nearly seven million people.

"In Nigeria, floods destroyed 850,000 metric tons of food—enough to feed eight million people for six months," the envoy said. Dominic stressed the urgency of shifting from short term humanitarian aid to sustainable, long-term solutions, including large scale

investment in agriculture, climate resilient seeds, and improved irrigation systems.

He commended the collaboration between FAO, the Nigerian government, and state authorities, adding that the Governor of Borno, Prof. Babagana Zulum, has indicated commitment to addressing food security challenges.

"With only five years remaining to meet the global target of zero hunger by 2030," the envoy said. Dominic also called on the donor agencies, governments, and private sector stakeholders to take immediate action. "The pace at which food insecurity is growing demands urgent investment and coordinated efforts to reverse this trend be-

fore more lives are lost to hunger and malnutrition,

The FAO's latest figures underscore the severity of the crisis and the need for a comprehensive response to secure food access for millions across the region," he said. Also speaking, David Stevenson, the Country Representative for WFP, highlighted the severity of the crisis in the region.

He said that the region was grappling with numerous challenges, including climate change, conflict, and displacement, which have exacerbated food shortages.

"Currently, over 7 million people in the Lake Chad Basin are food insecure, and this figure continues to rise as the crisis deepens.



## EAC energy experts meet to explore affordable renewable energy solutions

By Guardian Correspondent, Arusha

ENERGY experts from East African Community (EAC) member countries, alongside private sector stakeholders, have convened in Arusha for a two-day conference focused on improving access to affordable renewable energy.

James Mageza, the representative of youth in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), speaking at the East Africa Energy Cooperation Summit (EA-ECS), emphasised that the time is ripe for EAC countries to harness renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and coal to address the region's energy needs.

"Energy experts from EAC countries and private sector stakeholders have convened here to discuss how to improve the production of solar, wind, and coal energy to be used in industries to boost the economic growth of our member states," Mageza said.

He further noted that one of the key outcomes of the meeting was to establish a shared energy market within the region that would ensure the production and affordable distribution of renewable energy.

Each country will also focus on increasing their renewable energy generation capacity.

"During this meeting, we also discussed how we can utilise Mwalimu Nyerere Hydropower

Station, which generates 200 Megawatts, to help EAC countries obtain reliable industrial electricity, which will contribute to job creation, especially for the youth," he said.

Mageza highlighted that the need for unity in the energy sector across the EAC was a major reason for convening the meeting, as many member countries have not been aligned on energy matters.

The goal is to create a unified energy market that supports mutual assistance among member states.

The meeting coordinator, Abdoulaye Sylla, pointed out that the conference was organized after recognising the impressive strides made by several EAC countries in the renewable energy sector in recent years.

"Countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda have made significant progress in the renewable energy sector, and we are now working to strengthen cooperation in this area," Sylla said.

The conference brought together key stakeholders from the energy production sector, engineering, procurement, construction, and finance (EPCF), with the aim of evaluating investment opportunities and innovations introduced by major strategic companies, including data centres in Africa.



Shinyanga Regional Commissioner Anamringi Macha (2nd R) speaks with some cotton farmers at Kisuke village in Ushetu, Kahama District on Thursday, while inspecting cotton farming in the area. Photo: Correspondent Shabani Njia

## Zanzibar commences budget monitoring for gender equity

By Guardian Reporter

THE President's Office Finance and Planning in Zanzibar, with support from UNICEF, yesterday held second high-level budget monitoring symposium under the theme 'Investing in Gender and Equity Budgeting to transform social outcomes and service delivery'.

During the dialogue, key stakeholders from ministries, departments and agencies as well as development partners discussed how the bodies in specific sectors perform in implementing their budgets

and planned activities as essential instruments to improve the delivery of basic service such as health care and education for children in Zanzibar.

The symposium's analysis highlighted significant progress made in the areas of health, water and energy, community development, gender, elderly and children as well as education in achieving their financial targets for the 2022/2023 fiscal year.

For the 2024/2025 fiscal year, budget monitoring has been expanded to include two additional sectors: agriculture and blue economy.

"Some of the achievements made since the first budget monitoring symposium in December 2023 include improved gender and equity planning and budgeting; improved capacity of the budget department to undertake budget monitoring as well as improved resource prioritization in monitored sectors, among others," said Zena Mahmoud Hassan, Commissioner of Budget. Efficient budget monitoring efforts by the President's Office (Finance Planning) have yielded improved planning, budgeting, decision making and collaborations with sector ministries. Other results in-

clude linking sector budgets with the Zanzibar Development Plan as well as strategic alignment of resources to national priorities. Similarly, capacity-building efforts across ministries have equipped planners with tools to adopt Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) indicators, ensuring their budgets deliver measurable outcomes.

A cornerstone of the progress has been the introduction of gender and equity-sensitive budgeting, identifying specific activities that promote gender and equity and deliberating specific allocations in the

six pilot sectors. This has led to the development of a gender and equity sensitive roadmap, marking a critical step toward inclusivity in fiscal planning.

"At the heart of public financial management lies a nation's ability to turn fiscal strategies into tangible results for its people," said UNICEF Country Representative Elke Wisch said. "For Zanzibar, this means ensuring that every resource allocation reflects an investment in the future where children, women, and vulnerable populations have equitable access to essential services and opportunities."



Sergeant Sijali Nyambuche, head of the gender desk for Serengeti District police station in Mara Region provides education on the dangers of gender-based violence to pupils of Kisangura Secondary School in Mugumu earlier this week. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

## 241m/- dispensary saves lives, boosts healthcare in Mwanza

By Correspondent Neema Emmanuel, Mwanza

THE construction of 241m/- dispensary has saved the lives of pregnant mothers and scaled down the burden of travelling long distances for healthcare services.

Speaking after TASAF and development partners, including the embassies of Sweden and Iceland as well as the World Bank had inspected the project, Mihama dispensary medical officer-in-charge, Dr Ng'hwaya Tenga, said the construction began in 2022 and was completed in 2024. Services officially started on May 2, 2024.

He explained that before the dispensary was built, residents faced serious challenges to access healthcare, particularly during childbirth, with some mothers delivering at home or losing their lives due to poor road infrastructure. "Now, they benefit from delivering safely at the dispensary and returning home in good health," he noted.

"The project cost 241m/-, with TASAF contributing 225m/- and the community providing the rest. We offer out-patient services, childbirth assistance, and circumcision. So far, we have served 1,062 out-patients, performed 206 circumcisions, conducted 968 tests, provided family planning to 1,700 clients, and assisted 53 mothers during delivery," explained Dr Tenga.

Agness Revocatus, a resident of Miha-

ma, emphasised the importance of the project, stating that they previously had to walk long distances for healthcare.

"We used to go as far as Kirumba, only to be referred to Sekou-Toure hospital. It was an uphill struggle. Some women would give birth on the way. Others lost their lives and babies as well. We've lost many relatives over the years. Now we're happy to have this health centre nearby," she said.

Alon Majura, Mihama Street government representative, added that the dispensary would benefit not only Mihama residents but also those from nearby villages including Jive Kuu, Kaza Moyo, and Bwiru-Elimu. "We are grateful to the government and all stakeholders who made this project possible," he said.

Adelina Anthony, chairperson of the UWT in the ward, expressed gratitude to TASAF and other development partners, noting that the health centre was a long-standing plea from residents, particularly women.

Leonard Robert, TASAF coordinator for Ilmelu Municipality, stated that from 2020 to December last year, a total of 3,450 beneficiaries received over 6bn/- in grants.

In terms of development projects, from 2021 to December last year, 46 projects worth over 2.2bn/- had been implemented in the municipality. Of these, 33 have been completed, while 13 are still underway.

By Special Correspondent

AS Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to evolve, African governments and entrepreneurs increasingly turn to AI-powered tools to help transform education.

The growing awareness and availability of low-cost, AI-driven tools are making them more accessible to many across the continent, offering opportunities to develop locally tailored digital solutions to improve learning.

AI tools, both free and affordable, are gaining traction among those with smartphones and internet access. While governments and lawmakers grapple with the implications of AI tech-

nology, millions of individuals are already leveraging its capabilities. From generating essays and exam answers to producing videos and podcasts, AI is helping people in various corners of Africa save time and enhance productivity.

Even in areas where electricity and internet connectivity are limited, AI's potential is widely recognised. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a nation facing ongoing conflict, poverty, and inequality, educators are beginning to see how AI can impact communities, despite the challenges.

"We are obviously behind in terms of new technologies, for various reasons," says Benja-

## African schools prepare for the AI revolution

min Sivanzire, a teacher in Beni, North Kivu. "Many parts of DRC don't even have traditional communication methods, like radio or television." While AI has not yet reached his classroom, Sivanzire highlights its growing presence in the wider culture, albeit with mixed outcomes. He stresses the importance of education on the distinction between credible information and misleading content created using AI tools, particularly videos designed for propaganda.

However, AI's development raises concerns about bias, es-

pecially given its concentration in the hands of a relatively small group of people, often from Silicon Valley.

Arida Shahid, the independent Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, raises the concerns about the algorithms powering AI tools. "They tend to be developed by individuals in a particular location, who often have their own biases," Shahid explains. "These algorithms struggle to recognise people with dark skin and fail to cater to those who, for example, have autism and are uncomfortable with cameras."

The growing dominance of AI in education has raised alarms about potential biases, as evidenced in the UK, where an AI system was used to grade exam papers, leading to biased decisions against some ethnic groups. According to Shahid, this demonstrates the need for a more inclusive approach to AI development, especially in education, to ensure fair outcomes for all students.

The need to expand the developer talent base is vital in ensuring that AI tools for education are representative of diverse voices

and needs. According to Shafika Isaacs, head of technology and AI at UNESCO, African EdTech startups have rapidly grown in recent years, experimenting with AI-powered digital tools that can support teaching and learning across various contexts, including African languages and local dialects. "I've worked with a startup that helps high school students select career pathways, including choosing the right university or entrepreneurship programme. They've had strong results, particularly in underprivileged schools," Isaacs explains.

Startups have also developed AI-enabled mobile apps, such as chatbots, to support teachers in teaching subjects like literacy and mathematics. However, Isaacs points out that there is often a disconnect between the public education system and the tech sector, urging educators to engage with developers and actively design technologies that are relevant to their cultural and linguistic contexts.

In Côte d'Ivoire, AI is already making an impact, particularly in the private sector. The country's Minister of Education, Mariatou Koné, shares that the education system is undergoing a transformation, with AI playing a crucial role.





Francis Alfred (C), the Cashew Board of Tanzania (CBT) director general, briefs journalists in Dar es Salaam yesterday on the world cashew stakeholders meeting scheduled for mid-November in the city. Photo: Correspondent Joseph Mwendapole

## Singida RC encourages hands-on field practice for regional leaders

By Guardian Correspondent, Singida

SINGIDA Regional Commissioner Halima Dendego has directed all regional leaders to own farms so that they can serve as role models for the communities, encouraging hands-on field practice rather than merely favouring farming without practical techniques.

Dendego issued the directive yesterday during a meeting focused on the distribution of subsidised sunflower seeds brought to Singida.

The meeting was attended by district commissioners, council directors, council chairpersons, and agricultural officers.

"We cannot continue advocating for farming while we, ourselves, do not practice it. Let's make it a rule across the region—from the provincial level down to the wards—that each leader should at least have one-acre farm. This will serve as a demonstration plot for the public.

The regional commissioner also emphasised the need for quick distribution of sunflower seeds to farmers, urging that they begin planting as soon as possible.

She further called on district leaders to continue motivating citizens to engage in sunflower farming to boost production because Singida is a key region for sunflower oil production.

"This year, the region has set the target of cultivating 1,025,641 acres of sunflower, with an expected yield of 1,000,000 tons," Dendego said.

She explained that in order to meet the targets, 2,051 tons of sunflower seeds are required, and so far, 101.814 tons have been allocated to the councils.

In response, the chairperson of Ikungi District Council, Ally Mwangi, suggested that the government consider conditions for citizens who do not have the immediate funds to purchase seeds, allowing them to borrow and repay after the harvest.

## CBT sets ambitious target for cashew nut production

By Correspondent Joseph Mwendapole

THE Cashew Board of Tanzania (CBT) has set an ambitious target for the cashew nut production, with plans to increase production to one million tons by 2030.

Francis Alfred, director of CBT, shared the news in Dar es Salaam yesterday when briefing reporters ahead of a global cashew meeting which will be held later this year. It will bring together over 500 stakeholders from across the globe, including 33 countries that produce cashews, to discuss investment

opportunities in the industry and strategies to expand market access.

He said for the past three years, the government has fully subsidised cashew inputs for farmers, which had helped boost production from 310,000 tonnes in the 2023/2024 season to an estimated 410,000 tonnes in 2024/2025.

However, the government's sights are set higher, with the target to triple production by 2030.

Alfred said to achieve the goal, the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with the CBT implement the Building a Better Tomorrow:

Youth Initiative for Agribusiness (BBT-YIA), which has employed 500 youth to provide extension services to farmers in key cashew-growing regions including Mtwara, Lindi, Ruvuma, Coast and Tanga.

Major part of the government's strategy involves the development of dedicated industrial park at the villages of Maranje, Nanyamba, Mtwara, where 1,572 acres have been set aside for the project.

This will be home to 30 cashew nut mills, six cashew nut shell oil mills, and four sesame processing mills, all aimed at increasing the

country's processing capacity and to ensure full potential of domestic cashew production is realised by 2030.

Alfred thanked the government's ongoing support for the cashew industry, with substantial investments in agricultural subsidies.

Regarding the meeting, he said that it will jointly be organised by CBT and the African Cashew Alliance as a platform for exploring opportunities in the cashew nut sector.

Alfred noted that the meeting is expected to attract participants

from across the world, including prominent cashew-producing nations such as Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Cambodia, India, Vietnam, Brazil, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau, and Burkina Faso. Countries including Mali, Benin, Ghana, Madagascar, Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya, Mauritius, the Comoro Islands will also be represented.

In addition to producers, stakeholders from leading consumer markets including the United States, Europe, China, the Middle East and South Africa will also attend, underscoring the global interest in the

cashew industry.

The focus of the meeting will be on investment in the cashew value chain, ranging from farmers and growers to processors, roasters, transporters, cooperatives, and distributors.

One of the key topics will be increasing the extraction and processing capacity for cashews and their by-products, both within Africa and globally. Alfred highlighted opportunities for new innovations, such as cashew nut shell liquid, cashew nut milk, and alcohol, to diversify the industry.



Brigadier General Charles Mwanziva (L) the director of medical services for the Tanzania People's Defense Forces (TPDF) and Dr. Paul Lawala, executive director of the Mirembe National Mental Health Hospital displaying documents in Dodoma on Thursday shortly after signing an agreement for mental health service provision by the hospital's experts for the armed forces. Photo: Correspondent Paul Mabeja

## Mirembe put much focus on mental health community outreach

By Guardian Correspondent, Dodoma

EXECUTIVE Director of Mirembe National Mental Health Hospital (MNMH), Dr Paul Lawala has said the hospital has currently put much focus on community education on mental health issues in the country, rather than waiting for patients to seek help.

Dr Lawala made the remarks on Thursday here during a press briefing, following the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the hospital and Vanessa Amada Foundation.

The MOU aims to strengthen collaborative efforts to ensure that quality mental health services are accessible to young people and children.

Dr Lawala explained that, over the past two years, the hospital has prioritised investing more in education rather than waiting for people to fall ill.

"We have realised it is essential to engage healthy community on the issue of mental health, rather than focusing solely on the illness, as it has been very challenging to reach people due to the prevailing societal conditions," Dr Lawala said.

He further added that the community still lacks sufficient awareness about mental health issues, and there is a significant stigma surrounding it. He believes that with the right education, people will begin to understand and address the issue in a constructive manner.

He emphasised that if the public becomes better informed about mental health, it would encourage individuals to seek help earlier.

"Currently, people are not coming forward due to lack of information on where to go for help or because of the stigma still prevalent in our society," he said.

Vanessa Amada, director of Vanessa Amada Foundation expressed gratitude for the collaboration, noting that it would help drive positive changes in the community. "We are deeply grateful to Mirembe hospital for their excellent cooperation, which has been a key pillar of our work since we started," she said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), over 10 percent of young people worldwide face mental health challenges, with many lacking early professional intervention.

In Tanzania, the challenges have been exacerbated by stress, substance abuse, difficult living conditions, and the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

The Vanessa Amada Foundation has been working closely with Mirembe hospital and the Drug Control and Enforcement Authority (DCEA) to provide solutions to the challenges.

## EAC supports Tanzania in containing Marburg virus outbreak in Kagera Region

By Guardian Reporter

THE East African Community (EAC) has expressed its unwavering solidarity with Tanzania and other key stakeholders following the confirmation of Marburg Virus Disease (MVD) outbreak in Kagera Region.

With two confirmed cases and 18 suspected cases reported, this marks Tanzania's second encounter with the deadly virus since the 2023 outbreak in the same region.

In a statement availed to the media yesterday, the EAC Deputy Secretary General responsible for Infrastructure, Productive, Social, and Political

Sectors Andrea Aguer Ariik Malueth, commended Tanzania's leadership and the invaluable support provided by global partners in addressing the outbreak.

He emphasised that such collaboration underscores the significance of unity and shared responsibility among nations during health crises.

"This outbreak highlights the importance of regional solidarity and swift action," said Ariik, acknowledging the critical role of coordinated efforts in mitigating the impact of health emergencies.

Ariik further reaffirmed the EAC's commitment to standing with Tan-

zania and all EAC partner states in managing the current health emergency.

He stressed that the EAC would continue to prioritise enhancing regional capacities to respond to such crises while reinforcing collective preparedness for future threats.

Tanzania's experience in managing the 2023 outbreak in Bukoba District, which resulted in nine cases and six fatalities, has equipped the country with crucial expertise in outbreak containment. The EAC Secretariat is encouraging partner States to share best practices and technical expertise to strengthen the

regional response to the outbreak.

In collaboration with partners such as the German government through GIZ and KfW, the EAC Secretariat is advancing efforts to contain MVD and Mpox outbreaks while reinforcing pandemic preparedness. Key interventions include the deployment of mobile laboratories and the establishment of rapidly deployable experts (RDE) pool to ensure swift expert response in outbreak areas.

Additional measures include strengthening Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), establishing 43 Water, Sani-

tation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in border areas, and training border staff, health workers, and community leaders.

The EAC Secretariat has prioritised strengthening Tanzania's capacities to respond to the current outbreak by deploying a mobile laboratory where MVD testing is actively being conducted. Furthermore, the EAC has donated two testing kits, each capable of performing 96 tests, to support diagnostic efforts. In collaboration with the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNITM), the EAC Secretariat is also providing

technical guidance to laboratory experts. Further plans are underway to enhance regional surveillance through additional field missions.

Marburg virus is a severe zoonotic disease, similar to Ebola, and is associated with a high fatality rate, varying from 24 percent to 88 percent, depending on the virus strain and case management. Transmission occurs through direct contact with bodily fluids of infected individuals or contaminated surfaces. As there is no specific vaccine or treatment, supportive care remains the primary form of medical intervention.





Stephen Wassira, CCM vice chairman (Mainland) addresses a rally for his welcome event in Bunda town on Thursday. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

## Heavy rainfall causes fatalities in Morogoro

By Correspondent Idda Mushi, Morogoro

HEAVY rainfall has caused two deaths in Morogoro municipality on Wednesday.

One of the deceased is believed to have fallen into the river while attempting to cross over to the other side.

Morogoro Regional Police Commander, SACP Alex Mkama said among the two was Hashim Kassim Juma, aged 43, a resident of Kihonda B in Morogoro municipality.

He drowned after falling into the river while attempting to cross over to the other side at Majengo Mapya - Lukobe Ward.

Commander Mkama explained that the incident occurred at around 6:00 PM on January 30, 2025, when the victim tried to cross over to the other side after heavy rainfall. Unfortunately 'lost his footing' and was swept away by strong current. His body was later recovered from the river.

Another disaster happened on January 29, 2025, in Mambi Ward, Mafisa Division, within Morogoro municipality.

The body of an unidentified man, believed to be between 35 and 40 years old was discovered in water-filled ditch.

It is suspected that the man attempted to cross over to the other side but was overwhelmed to escape the dangerous situation.

His body was found later, and it was taken to the mortuary at Morogoro regional referral hospital. The two bodies are awaiting identification at the mortuary.

He also expressed condolences to the families of the victims during this difficult time.

The police commander urged the public to be extra cautious, especially during the rainy season, and avoid crossing flood-prone areas. He stressed the importance of using designated safe crossings rather than attempting to walk through flooded areas.

"The public must exercise patience and wait for the rains to subside before attempting to cross over across flooded areas," Mkama said.

The heavy rainfall that started on January 29, 2025, caused widespread flooding across many parts of Morogoro municipality. Some of the most affected areas included Lake Oil Mafiga, Morogoro-Iringa highway, and the vicinity near the central bus station, where large amounts of debris, including rocks and fallen trees blocking half the road they generally drive to work.

The heavy rainfall created difficult conditions, with several roads becoming impassable leading to traffic jam.

The authorities have urged residents to avoid unnecessary travels during the heavy rainfall.

## Tanzania set to host international power, electronics exhibition

By Correspondent Theresia Victor

TANZANIA is set to host major event next week aimed at transforming the country's power and electronics sector, driven by the need for more efficient power management and the increasing use of renewable energy.

Dubbed: "Power and Electronics Tanzania International Exhibition", the exhibition will be organised by Exhibition and Trade Services India Pvt Ltd (ETS IPL) in collaboration with the Tanzania Renewable Energy Association (TAREA).

The event will take place from February 5 to 7 in Dar es Salaam and promises to unlock untapped potential in the country's rapidly growing energy sector.

Speaking at a press conference briefing in Dar es Salaam on Thursday, ETSIPL di-

rector Vijiyanka Brighuvanshi emphasised that the exhibition's core objective is to foster partnerships and bring together key stakeholders including industry leaders, investors, and policymakers to explore new opportunities in Tanzania's energy sector.

"The exhibition will showcase the latest innovations in power and electronics while creating an environment for collaboration among key industry players from around the world," Brighuvanshi explained. "Tanzania's power sector holds great untapped potential, and this event will help connect businesses and investors with the resources they need to thrive."

With over 100 companies from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East set to participate, the event underscores the growing international interest in Tanza-

nia's power and renewable energy sector. Countries such as India, South Africa, the UAE, China, Kenya, and Zambia will be represented, highlighting the global demand for investments in Tanzania's energy infrastructure.

Dr Matthew Matimbwi, executive secretary of TAREA, highlighted the central role that electricity plays in driving both economic and social progress. "A reliable power supply is crucial not only for industries and businesses but also for essential services such as healthcare, education, and communication," Matimbwi said.

He further emphasised that expanding electricity access, especially in rural areas, will help bridge the urban-rural divide and contribute to the country's overall development.

One of the key themes of the exhibition

will be renewable energy solutions, with displays featuring solar energy technologies, inverters, batteries, LED lighting, and other eco-friendly power solutions.

As Tanzania strives to meet its industrialisation and growth targets, the event will demonstrate the importance of investing in sustainable energy sources to ensure a stable and cost-effective power supply.

Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture (TCCIA) public relations officer Steven Ngalya noted the significance of strong power and electronics sector in achieving Tanzania's industrialisation goals.

"A stable electricity supply is essential for driving the growth of sectors such as manufacturing, mining, agriculture, and services," Ngalya said, urging the public to attend and explore the wide range of prod-

ucts and solutions on display.

Tanzania Trade Development Authority (TANTRADE) manager Dorothy Urio echoed the importance of investing in energy infrastructure, particularly in renewable energy.

"A robust electricity sector is the backbone of economic growth and better standard of living for all Tanzanians," Urio remarked.

The exhibition is also seen as an opportunity for collaboration between the public and private sectors, with Shukuru Meena, project coordinator at the Tanzania Traditional Energy Development Organisation (TaTEDO), emphasising that the event will offer platform for stakeholders to explore innovative solutions and strategies for advancing the country's power sector.



Manyara Regional Commissioner Queen Sendiga (with glasses), speaks with Prison Department officers during a visit to Babati Prison yesterday to inspect the implementation of cleaner energy use. Photo: Correspondent Jaliwason Jasson

## Govt to come up with efficient waste strategy

By Guardian Reporter

WASTE management strategy for the next half decade is being drawn up by the Vice-President's Office (VPO), it has been revealed.

Abdallah Hassan Mitawi, deputy Permanent Secretary in the Vice President's Office (Union) has said.

He said the strategy aims to strengthen waste management infrastructure nationwide.

Mitawi announced in Dodoma on Thursday when speaking during a stakeholders' meeting on plastic waste regulations and management in the country. He noted that Tanzania is estimated to produce between 14.4 million and 20.7 million tons of solid waste annually. He explained that urban areas are expected to generate more waste compared to rural regions.

"Statistics from areas with high solid waste production show that garden waste, wood, and food waste account for 63.4 percent; a mix of electronic waste, household items, ashes, and non-chemical waste is 12.8 percent; plastic waste is 12 percent; paper waste is 6.1 percent; glass waste is 4.2 percent; and metal waste is 1.5 percent."

Mitawi added that 70 percent of the solid waste produced in the country can be recycled. However said only 5 to 10 percent of the waste is recycled, with a significant portion coming from plastic, paper, scrap metal, aluminum, glass, electronic waste, lead-acid batteries, and used oils.

He highlighted that the 5 to 10 percent recycling rate has been influenced by the implementation of the 3Rs concept (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), particularly in the private sector.

For instance, eight beverage companies have partnered to promote sustainable waste management through the producer responsibility scheme to control waste from their products, coordinated by the Plastic Waste Recycling Organisation (PETRO).

However, he mentioned that the collaboration aims to collect and recycle 12.5 million tons of plastic waste annually across the country. A large proportion of the waste produced is discarded improperly, with the exception of seven municipalities with modern landfills.

Dr Kemilembe Mutasa, the Vice President Office's director of environment stated that to address waste management, particularly plastic waste, the government, through the Vice President's Office, has taken various measures to strengthen waste management in the country. The measures include the development and revision of policies, laws, regulations, strategies, and guidelines.

She also mentioned that the government continues to provide public education through radio and television programmes, workshops, and meetings. Additionally, they have developed a model plastic waste recycling project in Dodoma City.

Sarah Pima, executive director, Human Dignity and Environment Care Foundation (Hudefo) stated that her organisation has been collaborating with the government to promote environmental conservation, particularly in regions that generate plastic waste, such as Dar es Salaam. She added that they have also been educating various groups, including journalists, through media outlets to reach wide audience simultaneously.

## PCCB identifies major loopholes of revenue loss in Morogoro

By Guardian Correspondent, Morogoro

THE Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) in Morogoro Region has identified major loopholes of revenue loss at Msamvu regional bus terminal.

The deputy head of PCCB in Morogoro, Christopher Mwakajinga revealed here yesterday when briefing reporters on the bureau's activities between October and December 2024.

Mwakajinga pointed out that they discovered revenue loss issues include failure

by revenue collectors to issue receipts to some passengers and reusing of old receipts.

Other gaps identified involved not issuing receipts due to claims of lack of change and revenue collectors receiving insufficient rolls of receipts, which did not align with the daily revenue targets.

Following the findings, PCCB initiated a follow-up exercise to monitor the revenue collection process at Msamvu terminal over three consecutive days from December 12 to December 15, 2024.

Mwakajinga reported that during the three days, a total of 18,083m/- was collected, where 5.6m/- collected December 12, 6.4m/- December 13, and 5.9m/- on December 14.

"An assessment of the revenue collected in December 2024 shows that the money collected during these three days were the highest for the entire month," Mwakajinga said.

He noted that the monitoring process uncovered serious gaps in the revenue collection process at the terminal. If the loop-

holes were not addressed, he warned, the revenue will continue to be lost, benefiting only a few unscrupulous individuals.

The bureau has decided to make the monitoring of revenue collection at all local sources, including Msamvu terminal.

"We are working closely with Morogoro municipality to address the issues identified during the monitoring exercise. We aim to identify all individuals involved in the mismanagement of funds at Msamvu terminal and ensure they face legal consequences," he said.

He also issued a warning to all local authorities within Morogoro Region to ensure proper management of revenue collection.

Additionally, Mwakajinga encouraged the public using Msamvu bus terminal to always request receipts for services rendered.

Salum Tembo, the bus owner at Msamvu terminal urged PCCB to take stern measures, including legal proceedings against those found responsible for the loss of government revenue.



## Nigeria union rejects telecom tariff hike, plans for protest

ABUJA

NIGERIA'S main labour union, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), has strongly rejected the government-approved 50 percent hike in telecommunications tariffs and announced plans for a nationwide protest on February 4.

The tariff increase, which marks the first hike in over a decade, was approved by the telecommunications regulator last week in response to mounting pressures from telecom operators struggling with rising operational costs, high inflation, and currency devaluation.

At a meeting on Wednesday, NLC leaders condemned the tariff hike, labelling it "insensitive, unjustifiable, and a direct assault" on citizens who are already dealing with the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

The crisis has been aggravated by reforms implemented by President Bola Tinubu's administration, which the union claims are pushing more Nigerians into poverty.

NLC President Joe Ajaero stated that the planned protest would serve as a warning to the government about the potential dangers of imposing such a burdensome

increase on an already struggling population.

Ajaero highlighted the steep rise in food prices and the recent hikes in petrol and electricity costs, which have intensified economic hardship for millions of Nigerians.

The union has called for the immediate suspension of the tariff adjustment and urged the government, telecoms regulator, and union leaders to engage in dialogue to address the issue.

He further warned that if authorities refuse to engage in constructive discussions, the NLC could consider a nationwide boycott of telecommunications services or even a general strike.

The NLC, which represents millions of Nigerian workers, has had frequent clashes with the government over economic policies it claims exacerbate poverty. However, government officials argue that the reforms are necessary to stabilise the economy and attract investments.

The telecom tariff hike has sparked widespread debate across the country, with many Nigerians fearing that the additional financial burden will further strain their already stretched budgets.



Agriculture minister Hussein Bashe (C), hands over a dummy cheque for 13bn/- to John Ntelizyo (L), chairman of the Tobacco Cooperative Joint Enterprises Limited (TCJE) in Dodoma on Thursday, to support tobacco farmers in the country. Looking on (R) is Joel Laurent, executive director of the Tanzania Fertilizer Regulatory Authority (TFRA). Photo: Correspondent Renatha Msungu

## South Africa's poultry industry remains resilient

JOHANNESBURG

DESPITE numerous challenges, South Africa's poultry industry remains resilient, according to the South African Poultry Association (SAPA).

The industry continues to show optimism for 2025 despite ongoing uncertainties, with highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) remaining the most pressing concern.

The domestic poultry industry is a R65-billion (€3.36 billion) strategic

national asset, making it the country's second-largest agricultural sector.

The poultry sector is also South Africa's largest employer, with nearly 58,000 people across the value chain. Currently, the industry slaughters 21.5 million birds each week, having made significant investments to increase its slaughter capacity from 19.5 million to 22.5 million birds per week.

However, some farms are still recovering from the 2023 HPAI outbreaks, and many farmers re-

main cautious about overextending themselves, especially in the face of future outbreaks and imports.

As the year progresses, key issues such as the rollout of vaccination programmes, compensation for culling, fluctuating trade dynamics, and rising feed costs driven by a stronger dollar and weaker rand have dominated the agenda.

Efforts to implement widespread vaccination against avian influenza have faced setbacks. No

farm has yet met the stringent biosecurity protocols required for vaccination approval, creating a dilemma for the industry. Without vaccination, the sector remains vulnerable, particularly as the risk indicator remains in the red zone.

SAPA notes that the two HPAI strains involved in the 2023 bird flu outbreaks—H5N1 and H7N6—were particularly devastating. The H7N6 strain was significantly mutated and new to the region at the time. Currently, three H5 vaccines have been approved for im-

port, but the testing protocols for H7 vaccines mean that they are still months away from approval. SAPA continues to negotiate with the government for a practical solution, urging agriculture minister John Steenhuisen to intervene, compensate farmers for culled chickens, and facilitate vaccination.

With Europe's avian flu season starting early and spreading aggressively, and three additional U.S. states shutting down due to the virus, SAPA emphasises the

need for South Africa to prioritise vaccination to mitigate potential outbreaks, noting that current biosecurity protocols, though stringent, are insufficient to prevent an outbreak.

The poultry import landscape has evolved. While total chicken imports rose from 2023 to 2024, imports of bone-in cuts declined. This increase was driven by mechanically deboned meat (MDM) and offal, which face no tariffs. SAPA highlights that Argentina, which is exempt from anti-dump-

## Kinshasa residents want action to end war in eastern DRC

KINSHASA

SOME residents in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, yesterday welcomed the address by President Félix Tshisekedi, saying they wanted action to end war in eastern Congo.

The president of the Democratic Republic of Congo called for massive military mobilisation to resist the rebellion in a televised speech broadcast late on Wednesday.

Kinshasa resident, Eva Mpunha, said he was "happy with this call".

"We young people want to enlist in the army so that we can guard against the enemy day and night to protect our country. We young people will not give in," he said.

Tshisekedi's comments came after the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels seized the key eastern city of Goma.

"I would like to congratulate the chief for his speech. We want him to know that we are always with him," said Jean Michel Kamba, warning the president to beware of the "traitors" and "thieves" around him.

Some buildings in the capital still bear the marks of vandalism carried out earlier this week by demonstrators.

They were protesting against the

perceived inaction of the international community to the advance of the M23 and their Rwandan allies.

The rebels yesterday said they planned to continue their offensive all the way to Kinshasa.

Tshisekedi has vowed "a vigorous and coordinated response" to push them back, but said he remained committed to diplomacy.

Residents in the city say they want an end to the war.

"Talking a lot is not a problem, but we want the president to unite the politicians and the military to have the same vision to win the war," said Kany Malolo David.

Meanwhile, in the east of the country, the rebels fighters moved beyond Goma in an apparent attempt to expand their control in the conflict-battered region.

The regional East African Community has called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and "strongly urged" the government to hold talks with the rebels.

Tshisekedi was conspicuously absent from the virtual summit attended by Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

United Nations experts say the M23 rebels are backed by some 4,000 troops from neighbouring Rwanda.



Boniface Dinda (R), the Suguti ward executive officer in Musoma District, Mara Region, speaks to parents of Suguti Secondary School pupils earlier this week, discussing strategies for contributing food to the school. Photo: Correspondent

## Niger becomes first African country to eliminate river blindness - WHO

BRAZZAVILLE

THE World Health Organisation (WHO) has congratulated Niger for achieving a significant milestone in global health by meeting the criteria for the elimination of onchocerciasis, or river blindness.

The accomplishment makes Niger the fifth country worldwide and the first in Africa to be officially recognised by WHO for interrupting the transmission of the *Onchocerca volvulus* parasite, which causes the disease. In a statement on Thurs-

day, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed his admiration for Niger's achievement: "Eliminating a disease is a significant achievement that requires tireless dedication. I congratulate Niger for its commitment to liberating its population from this blinding, stigmatising illness that causes so much human suffering among the poorest. The success is a testament to the remarkable strides we've made against neglected tropical diseases and offers hope to other nations still battling

onchocerciasis, demonstrating that elimination is possible."

Onchocerciasis, commonly known as river blindness, is a parasitic disease transmitted by the bites of infective black flies, primarily found in riverine areas. It is the second leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide, after trachoma, and predominantly affects rural populations in sub-Saharan Africa and Yemen, with smaller endemic areas in Latin America.

Niger's success in eliminating onchocerciasis can be at-

tributed to a series of country-led efforts, partnerships, and interventions. Between 1976 and 1989, Niger participated in the WHO Onchocerciasis Control Programme in West Africa (OCP), which involved vector control measures such as spraying insecticides.

The efforts significantly reduced transmission levels. Following this, from 2008 to 2019, Niger implemented mass drug administration (MDA) with ivermectin and albendazole, which was key

to interrupting transmission.

The drugs, donated by Merck Sharpe & Dohme (MSD), were used in areas still affected by lymphatic filariasis (LF), which coincidentally overlapped with onchocerciasis-endemic areas.

In 2014, Niger began preliminary assessments to determine whether onchocerciasis transmission had been successfully interrupted, following the cessation of LF MDA in many areas. Entomological and epidemiological surveys confirmed the success, showing a dramatic decrease in prevalence—

from about 60 percent to just 0.02 percent. This marked a significant turning point in the country's efforts to eliminate the disease.

A crucial factor in Niger's achievement was the collaboration between the Nigerien government, WHO, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which facilitated resource mobilization and technical support.

Continuous monitoring of disease prevalence and impact also played a critical role in adapting and refining interven-

tion strategies to maintain their effectiveness.

Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, commended Niger's efforts, stating, "Onchocerciasis has long caused immense human suffering. It has also impeded the economic development of affected communities, driving people away from rivers, which are often lifelines for livelihoods. Niger's success ends this burden for its people. It also positions Niger as a model for the elimination of neglected tropical diseases in Africa."



## Uganda records first Ebola death since 2023 outbreak

MAYOTTE

A NURSE in Uganda has died of Ebola, health official said yesterday, in the first recorded fatality since the last outbreak ended in 2023.

The 32-year-old male nurse was an employee of Mulago hospital, the main referral facility in the capital, Kampala, Diana Atwine, permanent secretary of the health ministry, told reporters yesterday.

After developing a fever, he was treated at several locations in Uganda before multiple lab tests confirmed he had been suffering from Ebola. The man died on Wednesday and the Sudan strain of Ebola was confirmed following postmortem tests, Atwine said.

At least 44 contacts of the victim have been identified, including 30 health workers and patients at Mulago hospital, according to Uganda's Ministry of Health.

The health authorities are "in full control of the situation," Atwine said, urging Ugandans to report suspected cases. Tracing contacts is key to stemming the spread of Ebola, and there are no approved vaccines for the Sudan strain of Ebola.

Uganda's last outbreak, discovered in September 2022, killed at least 55 people before it was declared over in January 2023.

Confirmation of Ebola in Uganda is the latest in a trend of outbreaks of viral hem-

orrhagic fevers in the East African region. Tanzania declared an outbreak of the Ebola-like Marburg disease earlier this month, and in December Rwanda announced that its own outbreak of Marburg was over. The ongoing Marburg outbreak in northern Tanzania's Kagera region has killed at least two people, according to local health authorities.

Ebola, which is spread by contact with bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials, manifests as a deadly hemorrhagic fever. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding.

Scientists don't know the natural reservoir of Ebola, but they suspect the first person infected in an outbreak acquired the virus through contact with an infected animal or eating its raw meat. Ugandan officials are still investigating the source of the current outbreak.

Uganda has had multiple Ebola outbreaks, including one in 2000 that killed hundreds. The 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed more than 11,000 people, the disease's largest death toll.

Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.



Corporal Alfred Mtawali of Arusha Central Police Station provides education to passengers inside a bus on the use of e-tickets at the Arusha upcountry bus terminal on Thursday. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

## Ismaili community in Tanzania meets to celebrate unity and peace

By Guardian Correspondent

THE Shia Imami Ismaili community in Tanzania has celebrated a major milestone with the unveiling of the Fanoos, a symbolic lantern representing light, hope and unity, at an event held in Dar es Salaam.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) continues to advance education and healthcare in the region.

The event, part of the Global Encounters programme, highlighted the Ismaili community's enduring legacy and con-

tributions to Tanzania's development.

The Fanoos is a traditional lantern that travels around the world, carrying messages of friendship and community.

A statement by Aga Khan Council availed to the media recently stated that the January 25 ceremony brought together community members, leaders, and youth, showcasing the values of unity and service central to the Ismaili tradition.

Held at Upanga Jamatkhana, the event celebrated the contributions of early visionaries like Sewa Haji, whose phi-

lanthropy established what has now become Muhimbili National Hospital.

The Fanoos, a traveling emblem of togetherness, has journeyed across nations, connecting Ismaili communities worldwide. Its arrival in Tanzania underscores the country's historical ties with the Ismaili Jamat, which has played a pivotal role in advancing healthcare, education, and infrastructure since the 1850s.

The Fanoos launch also reflects Tanzanian Jamat's role in the Global Encounters initiative, a programme foster-

ing leadership, cultural exchange, and service among Ismaili youth. Since 2012, Global Encounters has empowered thousands of young leaders across the globe.

As part of the broader Global Encounters programme, the Fanoos journey will culminate at the Global Encounters Festival 2025, to be held in Dubai from July 20 to 27.

The event will bring together Ismaili youth from over 30 countries to showcase talent, participate in service projects, and strengthen bonds within the global community.

"Dubai's dynamic cultural and innovative backdrop offers the perfect setting for the festival, furthering the Ismaili mission of fostering unity and progress across borders," reads the statement.

"The Fanoos roadshow exemplifies the Ismaili community's commitment to preserving its rich heritage while inspiring future generations. Its launch in Tanzania not only honours the community's historical contributions but also serves as a beacon of hope and progress, symbolising collective aspirations for a brighter future."



Bagamoyo MP, Muharami Mkenge, participates in cleaning a rain water trench at a Bagamoyo street earlier this week. Photo: Correspondent

## Regional forecaster sees downpour, floods in Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi

NAIROBI

TANZANIA, Kenya and Burundi will receive more rainfall than usual in the coming week, leading to floods, the Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) bloc has said.

ICPAC said in its latest forecast that the three countries could receive up to 200 mm of rainfall per day. "The expected very heavy rainfall is likely to lead to flooding incidents. Communities in high-risk areas are advised to exercise caution during this period," it said.

The IGAD agency noted that the Greater Horn of Africa region would experience higher temperatures of up to 32 degrees Celsius during this period.

The most affected countries are expected to include South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, according to ICPAC.

ICPAC recently forecasted that between March and May, the Greater Horn of Africa countries would experience below-normal rainfall as the region bears the brunt of climate variability.

Up to 67 million people in the region are food insecure due to conflict and climate shocks, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and IGAD.

## France hands over last army base in Chad

N'DJAMENA

TWO months after Chad severed its defence agreement with Paris, the French army has handed over its last military base in the country, the Kossei base, in N'Djamena.

Though it was Chad who announced the end of the defence pact, the head of

the French Armed Forces' Africa Command stated that the handover was partly France's decision.

Pascal Ianni, head of French Armed Forces' Africa Command, said, "The transfer of the (Adji) Kossei base today marks a new stage. It is part of the French decision to end permanent (military) bases in Central and West Africa."

"This structural change is necessary to adapt to the evolution of the world, and the evolution of Africa. We are reaffirming our partnerships in a dynamic Africa whose youth carries a lot of hope. We must act differently," he added.

It comes after France handed over its two other military bases in the country. The Chadian army's chief of staff has

hailed the end of defence ties with Paris.

Abakar Abdelkerim Daoud, Chadian Army's Chief of Staff, said, "I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who gives us the opportunity to make this dream a reality. I announce to you today that the work of the French army is coming to an end and the Chadian army is capable of taking over the role that the French army

plays in Chad."

Before the end of the agreement, France had around 1,000 personnel in Chad.

After battling Islamic extremists alongside regional soldiers, French forces have also been expelled from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.



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**Taking A New Look  
At The News  
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## Deaths from cholera arise from inadequate rural sector resilience

FAIRLY disturbing reports sat that 12 people have lost their lives in Chunya District, Mbeya Region, in the wake of a cholera outbreak since last October, with 680 persons being infected. District authorities and hospital officials assert that the menace was largely confined to mining areas, in reflections that were being made at a third-quarter district council session for fiscal 2024/2025. The map of the disaster was vivid.

Reports say that the outbreak occurred in two phases, first in October 2024 where over 600 people were affected and 10 deaths were reported. Then at the end of December 80 people were infected and two more deaths reported, which means that some oversight efforts were instituted and held sway for a while, and when an officer charged with supervision was preoccupied with other issues, the areas affected went back to their old ways. That means there is a lack of will to change some habits, and if one overrules the idea that culture is the problem, it follows that it is cash.

In the second wave of infections two people died, one person dying in the community and another at a camp set up for cholera patients. The district authorities say that the area has several mines and lacks proper sanitation, with many of those infected being miners. It is somewhat surprising that miners in as many as four wards lack proper sanitation, or more accurately there are things tied up with proper sanitation that were not being observed. One of them is water with soap, too often neglected.

While cholera was rife in the dim past in various parts of Global South, this is no longer the case and cholera outbreaks sort of signal intense deficien-

cies less in health administration than in community supervision. One such situation is noticed in remarks that local government officials were helping district administrators to get the miners to beware using pools of rainwater collecting in some pits as such spots are often littered with waste. The very idea that one can drink pool water, presumably without its having been boiled speaks a lot on the sort of budgeting there.

One would scarcely see the reason to have water agency officials along with the district secretariat moving to collect and test water samples from some of the pits, in an effort to identify the nature of contamination. No surprise that cholera bacteria were found, while the issue remains whether there is a community or local government presence in how the community of miners live and work. It is hard to see people being allowed to collect drinking water from ponds in dense activity areas of the sort, how far there is clean water in the area and if any health inspections in the area.

To be sure, cholera or other infections arising from contamination are not prevented on a day to day basis because local government officials will be there to ensure that people do the right things. But if people conduct mining work more or less safely in a sanitary sense of the term for years and then during one rainy season something goes wrong, one needs to pose the question as to who failed in their work. Was it food that was prepared using contaminated water, or was it drinking water that was taken from such pools and insufficiently boiled or just spilled with water guard, or just cleverly sold by a vendor for a quick profit for that day?

## Regional forecaster's flooding scenario shows variations of regional projections

A CLIMATE monitoring agency in the nearby capital of Nairobi has issued a forecasting projection that Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi will receive more rainfall than usual in the coming week. This is expected to lead to floods, on the basis of remarks by the Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) tied to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) also housed in the Kenyan capital. This view of events might slightly differ with what many people are tuned to expect on this side of the border for the year's long rains period, up to May.

Yet if the prediction is taken on its terms it is less about the season that simply about the coming week, and is similarly about a scatter of such rainfall or being pronounced for vast areas of the three countries. All that would not be surprising as early February is part of a late in the year rainy season that could finally be petering out, or the long rains season that is more or less starting at this stage. The prediction falls between the two.

There is a factor that can influence the sort of rainfall prediction in the zone and how to actually figure it in terms of the mode or pattern of rain that is being absorbed, namely the change of latitude to the north, or to the south. There are times where Tanzania experiences floods while much of Kenya (of whom we hear more of what happens there than elsewhere) would be facing acute drought,

and vice-versa. But then if one watches weather on international television, the whole zone is unified, up to DRC.

Listening to weather predictions generally, there is less reference to localized causes of rainfall, and instead one sees major currents traversing oceans impacting continents. But at a more localised level, it is possible the cool season and warmer season shifts can have different implications for precipitation, winds or ocean currents, which sets the stage for the differences we see with Kenya and Uganda in particular. We have varying characteristics of latitude, and potentially different rainy seasons.

Tanzania is similar to Uganda in latitude characteristics but its opposite, as it lies almost entirely north of the Equator, while Tanzania is one degree south at its northern line of border, through Lake Victoria. In that case while Uganda has a north of Equator pattern of weather conditions, we have a south of the Equator pattern, while Kenya is cut more or less neatly down the middle. That means the Nairobi-based report may show some of that imbalance, showing what is more visible in north, though with some noticeable impact or extension, especially along border areas. As for the rest, it can be a matter of generalized, rather out of focus, etc in which case local observers need to keep in mind the local forecasting, especially as the Nairobi projection focused solely on the coming week.

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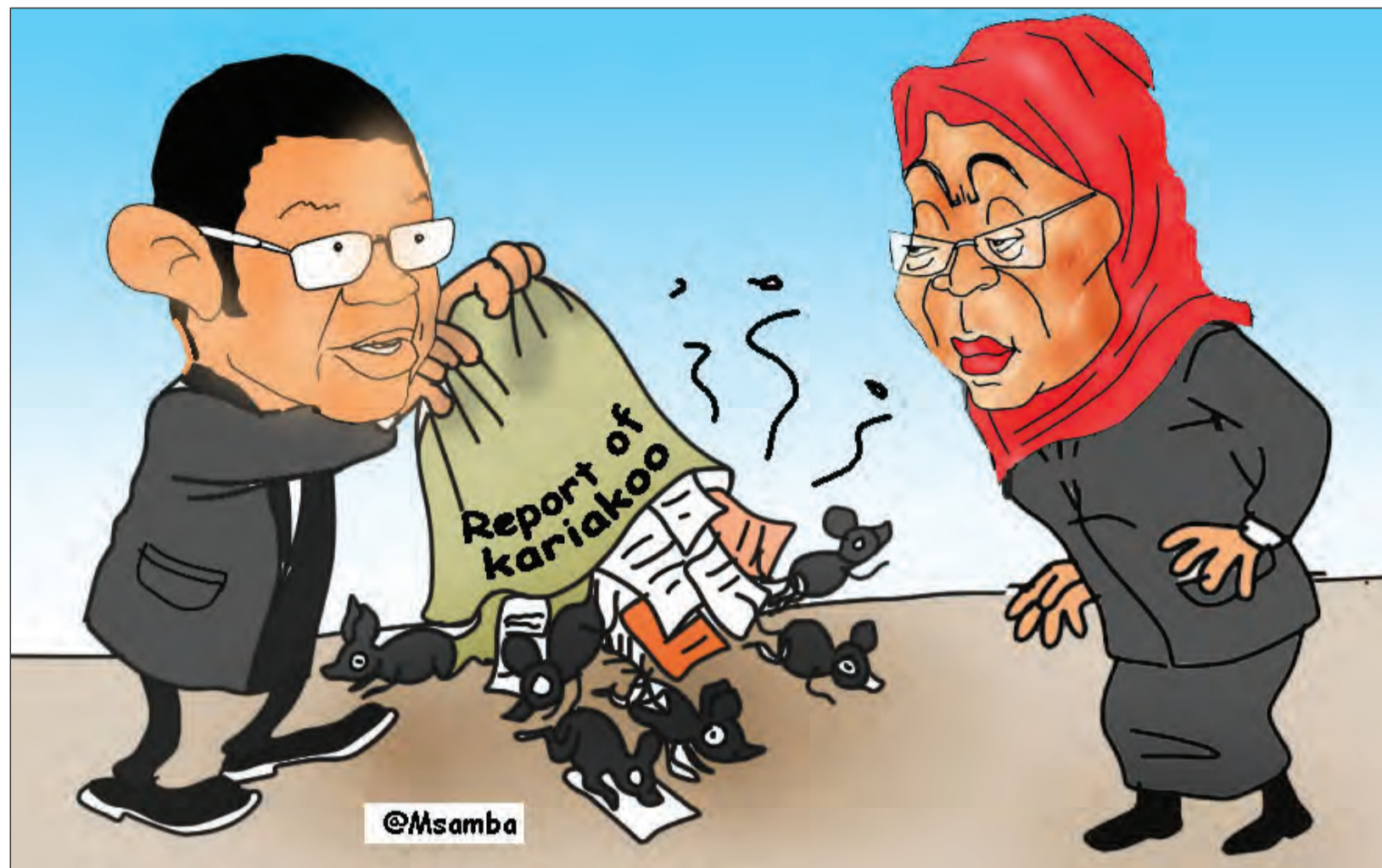
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## Greed and cynicism fuel Rwanda's war in DRC

By Frederic Mousseau

ON January 28, addressing the UN Security Council from Goma, Vivian van de Perre, Deputy Head of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), provided a detailed briefing, highlighting the dire humanitarian situation and the need for "urgent and coordinated international action" to stop the fighting between Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and Congolese forces - as they battle for control of the city.

She reported that the recent clashes have led to massive displacement, with over 178,000 people fleeing Kalehe territory after the M23 took control of Minova. More than 34,000 of those on the run have sought refuge in already overcrowded IDP sites in and around Goma, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and overwhelming the city's infrastructure.

OAKLAND, California, USA, Jan 30 2025 (IPS) - The fresh offensive by the M23 rebels and Rwanda forces in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) coincides with the first anniversary of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the European Union (EU) and Rwanda to cooperate on the supply of "critical minerals."

The agreement could not be more appalling given its total disregard of Rwanda's role in driving the violent conflict raging in Eastern DRC for the last thirty years, either directly through its own forces, or by supporting armed groups to fight on its behalf. The consequence has been deaths of millions, along with massive displacement and immense suffering for the Congolese.

President Paul Kagame of Rwanda justifies the war, citing concerns for peace and security for the Tutsi ethnic group, target of the 1994 genocide. It is, however, Rwanda's illicit extraction of eastern Congo's highly lucrative minerals including gold and the world's largest reserves of cobalt (used in batteries) and coltan (used in modern technological devices), that is fueling this devastation.

Rwanda's support of the rebel group M23 has allowed it to take over much of eastern Congo, capture many mines, and perpetrate massacres and egregious human rights abuses.

While it is wrong and immoral for the EU to strike a deal with a country responsible for so much suffering, the very terms of the February 2024 agreement make it worse as they overlook the role of Rwanda in illicit extraction.

Over the past decade, Rwanda has exported far higher quantities of coltan than its own mines produce. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of Rwanda's coltan exports are illegally sourced from eastern DRC, through what the NGO Global Witness has dubbed as a massive "laundromat."

Yet, the European bureaucrats who



People displaced by the fighting in Goma flee the city. Credit: WFP/Moses Sawasawa

worded the agreement stated that "[Rwanda] is a major player on the world's tantalum extraction. It also produces tin, tungsten, gold and niobium, and has potential for lithium and rare earth elements."

In addition, Rwanda with its favorable investment climate and rule of law can become a hub for value addition in the mineral sector. One gold refinery already exists, while a tantalum refinery will soon be operational."

The EU - like the US - has legislation in place that is supposed to prevent the use of conflict minerals from DRC but the MOU's more than favorable terms to describe Rwanda and its business climate suggest a deliberate choice not to enforce European laws despite the country's well documented egregious records.

Losing hope with Western regulators, last month, DRC filed criminal complaints against subsidiaries of Apple in France and Belgium, accusing the tech firm of using conflict minerals in its supply chain. Lawyers for the DRC government claim that Apple is responsible for "covering up war crimes and the laundering of tainted minerals, handling stolen goods, and carrying out deceptive commercial practices to assure consumers supply chains are clean."

This complaint speaks to the blatant failure of the traceability schemes that have supposedly been put in place to address the issue of "conflict minerals." Since 2010, the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative is supposed to ensure upstream traceability in the African Great Lakes Region. It operates at over 2,000 mines and has

been endorsed by the Responsible Minerals Initiative and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Unfortunately, instead of restricting the entry of conflict minerals into global supply chains, the scheme has been used to illegally launder conflict-minerals from DRC or smuggled into neighboring countries. This has allowed illegally tagged minerals to ultimately end up in the products of brands such as Apple, Intel, Samsung, Nokia, Motorola, and Tesla.

The horrors unleashed due to conflict minerals in Eastern DRC are well known to governments, corporations and their shareholders. For years, the United Nations has sounded the alarm over Rwanda's continued assistance to the M23, documenting the direct involvement of its armed forces in the conflict and the supply of weapons and ammunitions to the rebels.

Yet, Western countries remain long-time supporters. From 2001 to 2022, the US alone provided over US\$3.9 billion in economic aid to Rwanda and waited until October 2023 to place Rwanda on a blacklist for military aid for violating the Child Soldiers Prevention Act due to Rwandan support for M23, which recruits child soldiers.

The UK has been hesitant to criticize Rwanda, let alone cut off military aid, as it was negotiating a migrant deportation pact with the country. While France and the EU have publicly denounced Rwanda, neither have cut off military aid, and continue cooperation as demonstrated by the critical minerals deal.

In a March 2023 press conference with President Tshisekedi, when asked if France would pursue sanctions against Rwanda, President Macron's response blamed the Congolese government for country's instability.

In addition to the violence, the on-going war and exploitation of DRC's mineral resources has a dire impact on the country's economy, draining its financial resources and preventing revenue from mineral extraction to reach its coffers. Poverty and hunger are widespread whereas access to basic services such as health and education are greatly underfunded.

The situation of countries not benefiting economically from their own natural resources has been labelled as a "resource curse." However, looking at the forces driving and profiting from the exploitation and violence, it is not the curse but rather the greed and cynical attitude of governments and corporate actors that is responsible.

On January 25, 2025, the EU said that "Rwanda must cease its support for the M23 and withdraw," and warned that it "will consider all the tools at its disposal in order to hold accountable those responsible for sustaining armed conflict, instability and insecurity in the DRC." Sanctions on Rwanda are obviously long overdue.

An easy first step for European countries will be to end the agreement that should have never been signed in the first place. The next step must be enforcement of conflict minerals regulations and laws they have conveniently failed to apply so far.



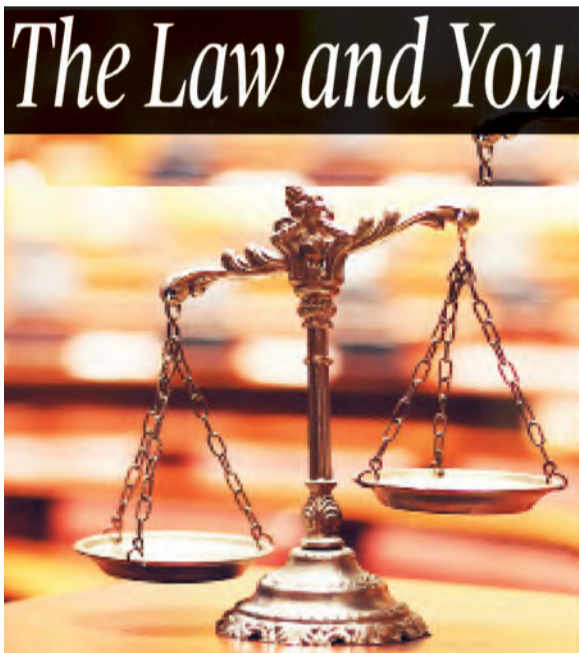
# Recommendations on Tanzania's criminal justice reforms should be implemented

By Telesphor Magobe

**L**AST week, we briefly looked at our right to a just electoral process (electoral integrity) and our duty to make it happen. We said while mindful that this year we will have the general election to elect the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Councillors.

The idea was to stress the role the people have in electing the leaders of their choice because sovereignty resides in the people and it is from them that the government gets all its power and authority (Article 8 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania).

Today, I invite you to briefly look at some of the recommendations of the criminal justice commission formed by President Samia Suluhu Hassan and launched on January 31, 2023 to look into how to improve criminal justice institutions. Chaired by retired Chief Justice Mohamed Chande Othman, its aim was to look into criminal justice issues and recommend how to improve the criminal justice system and make criminal justice institutions more effective.



## The Law and You



Retired Chief Justice Mohamed Chande Othman

The recommendations were presented in form of a summary to address the complaints Tanzanians have on the criminal justice system and criminal justice institutions in the country, taking into account good governance and civil rights.

The commission found that there were many issues in the chain of criminal justice from the prevention of crime, the identification of crime and the reporting to the police, the search and how the arrest of suspects was conducted, preparations for prosecution, court proceedings and the delivery of judgement, the imprisonment of convicts to the life of prisoners who have finished their jail term and their return to civilian life.

The scope of the summary of the report is to show the magnitude of the problems and challenges and how they affect the system and effectiveness of criminal justice institutions. The summary also contains the recommendations of the commission concerning the steps to be taken to address the problems and challenges and meet public expectations.

The recommendations are a result of research and in-depth discussions with senior retired leaders, retired leaders and those who are still in office in criminal justice institutions, executives and members of staff in those institutions, various stakeholders, political parties, religious leaders, the victims of the present criminal justice system, professional unions, business unions, experience from other countries and citizens who were reached in their areas.

One of the areas looked at was the abuse of power. The commission suggests in its summary that arrest authorities must use their powers for the purpose of preventing and combating crime. However, the commission says, sometimes arrest authorities have been abusing their arrest powers and cause inconveniences to citizens.

In particular, the commission decries arresting without grounds and arresting people over civil disputes. The commission says as regards unlawful custody (false imprisonment) in *Rev Christopher Mtikila v State Attorney*, the judge ruled in favour of Rev Mtikila on false imprisonment.

In another civil case of *Mary Peter Otaru v Onesimo Buswelo and Others*, the complainant was put in custody for five days under the directive of Siha District Commissioner over a civil dispute. Since the District Commissioner disregarded the law to subject the complainant to unlawful custody, the High Court of Tanzania directed the government to compensate the complainant Sh1 million.

The commission says it has discovered that some regional and district commissioners use the Regional Administration Act (Chapter 97) and the National Security Council (Chapter 61) beyond the powers to trample on civil

rights on various issues without following legal provisions. The commission also discovered that regional and district commissioners are accompanied by security committee members during various visits out of necessity.

In light of this, the commission recommends amendments to the Regional Administration Act (Chapter 97) to deprive the regional and district commissioners and other leaders of the powers to arrest using their positions, instead they should follow a procedure stipulated in the Criminal Procedure Act (Chapter 20), which allows any private person to arrest any person who commits any criminal offence in his or her presence.

The commission also recommends that if it is necessary for regional and district commissioners to arrest under sections 7 and 15 of the Regional Administration Act, then they should do so in compliance with the legal provisions stipulated only in those sections. Some of the provisions stipulated in those sections include: the offence should be committed in the presence of the regional or district commissioner, it should be a criminal offence, the offence should cause the breach of the peace, after the suspect has been arrested the regional or district commissioner must write to the magistrate to give reasons which caused the suspect to be arrested. It is good, therefore, to implement the recommendations so that the criminal justice system and criminal justice institutions may be more effective.

**Today's quote: "The administration of justice is the firmest pillar of government." - George Washington.**

**The author is a Dar es Salaam-based lawyer. He can be reached at t22magobe@gmail.com**

# Supporting parents of premature babies: Need for workplace, policy improvement

By Frank Monyo

**T**HE birth of a child is a joyous occasion, bringing immense happiness to families. However, when a baby is born prematurely—before completing the full gestation period—parents often face significant emotional, medical, and workplace challenges.

In many public institutions, existing labour policies fail to adequately address the special needs of parents of premature babies, creating additional stress and hardships.

One of the major concerns in public workplaces is lack of designated facilities for parents of premature babies. Many offices do not provide breastfeeding areas, rest spaces, or designated locations for preparing breast milk.

Absence of these supportive infrastructures forces parents, particularly mothers, to juggle between work demands and their child's medical needs, often without sufficient understanding or assistance from their employers.

Government interventions

Recognizing these challenges, Vice President Dr Philip Mpango announced on May 1st last year that maternity leave for mothers of premature babies should begin only after the special care period required for the baby's health, as determined by medical assessments.

The VP stated that employees would be allowed to take up to six months of leave post-maternity leave to facilitate breastfeeding and infant care.

Dr Mpango emphasized that maternal and child health, particularly the well-being of premature babies, is a top priority for the sixth-phase government. As part of this commitment, new maternity leave provisions were introduced—84 days for mothers of single premature births and 100 days for mothers of multiple premature births.

Premature babies require constant medical monitoring due to their fragile health, necessitating additional leave or workplace flexibility for parents.

However, many employers remain unaware of these needs, creating undue pressure on parents to meet work obligations while managing critical family responsibilities.

Need for workplace accommodations

To better support parents of premature babies, public institutions should establish designated breastfeeding and resting areas in workplaces, provide psychological support services for parents coping with the emotional stress of caring for a premature infant and strengthen labour laws to protect the rights of working parents of premature babies.

International guidelines

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) provide crucial guidelines to safeguard maternal and child health, as well as workers' rights.

WHO underscores the importance of quality maternal and neonatal care, recommending specialized medical services for premature babies and supportive policies for their parents.

ILO's Maternity Protection Convention (C183) of 2000 mandates a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave and job security for women post-childbirth.

While the convention does not explicitly address premature births, it serves as a foundation for governments



to implement special provisions for such cases.

As a WHO and ILO member, Tanzania has begun implementing policies to safeguard the rights of parents of premature babies. The government has confirmed that:

The special care period required for a premature baby will not be deducted from maternity leave.

Investments have been made in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) and advanced medical equipment, such as respiratory support machines, to improve the survival and care of premature infants.

Promoting education, public awareness

Every November 17, Tanzania joins other countries to observe World Prematurity Day, highlighting the importance of proper neonatal care and advocating for parents' rights.

Additionally, the National Integrated Programme for Early Childhood Development (PJT-MMMAM) seeks to provide comprehensive early childhood care, with a particular focus on premature infants.

The role of advocacy

Dorice Mollel, Director of the Dorice Mollel Foundation,

advocates for the rights of parents of premature babies. She emphasizes the need for workplace support, extended parental leave and improved healthcare services.

"Parents of premature babies require special care and they deserve full support from both employers and society. It is crucial that workplaces provide flexibility, additional leave, and psychological assistance to help these parents balance work and family life," said Mollel, urging public institutions and policymakers to improve labour policies to accommodate parents of premature babies, implement workplace support programmes, such as designated lactation areas and ensure that parents do not face discrimination for taking additional leave.

"At our foundation, we strongly believe that protecting workers' rights—especially those of women who give birth to premature babies—is essential for societal progress. We fully support all efforts aimed at improving policies and services for these parents," she affirmed.

Lessons from other countries

Several countries have implemented progressive labour laws to protect parents of premature babies. Canada,

the United Kingdom, and Sweden provide extended maternity leave for mothers of premature babies.

These countries mandate workplace accommodations for lactation and infant care. Their policies ensure that healthcare services for premature babies are widely accessible.

Ensuring the well-being of premature babies requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy reforms, workplace accommodations, and increased public awareness. Tanzania's recent government initiatives mark a step in the right direction, but further efforts are needed to align with global best practices.

Employers and policymakers must collaborate to fully support working parents, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to care for their premature babies without jeopardizing their careers.

By strengthening labour laws, workplace environments, and healthcare infrastructure, Tanzania can create a more inclusive and compassionate society—one that prioritizes both family well-being and workforce productivity.

ENDS



By Circles Robinson

## Chile: Farmers' markets strengthen link with consumers

NEARLY 200 Farmers' Markets operate throughout Chile, establishing a successful relationship between small producers of family farming, indigenous, and rural agriculture and the end consumers of their products.

Around 2,500 farmers participate in the initiative, allowing Chileans to access healthy food at affordable prices.

This connection enriches public and open spaces where producers sell vegetables, fruits, processed foods (such as honey and jams), and handicrafts or medicinal herbs.

The Farmers' Markets network is mainly made up of women and operates according to the season, climate, and cultural relevance of each territory. It has been promoted since 2016 by the state-run Institute for Agricultural Development (Indap).

Amid her work in Lolenco, in the municipality of Curacaví, 51 kilometres north of Santiago, Cecilia Salgado said, "Farmers' Markets were a window, a wonderful door for us."

"My husband and I worked in egg production. But we were not at ease because we didn't know what to do with so many," said the 61-year-old farmer when interviewed at her farm.

"Everyone had the same problem: where do I sell this, who do I offer it to? And buyers only offered what they wanted. But now there are no intermediaries, and we sell at a fair price," she asserted.

Farmers' Markets establish direct sales networks and fair trade in spaces where family agriculture offers the best of healthy production.

Additionally, traditional and ancestral foods, native to Chile's indigenous peoples and their territories, are revived, giving value to this cultural and heritage knowledge.

Salgado has been selling her produce for six years at the Curacaví Farmers' Market, but she has also sold at others, such as the one in Maipú, Santiago.

She owns two one and a half hectares plots, with almond, plum, apple, and citrus trees.

"The trees started to produce, and the fruit doesn't last long enough to sell. Now we are at peace because we know the markets are on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and we can sell that fruit," she explained.

"The most attractive fruit for buyers is 'feijoa' (Acca sellowiana) or Brazilian guavas. We started with two trees, and now we have 20. It has been very well received because it contains vitamins, antioxidants, and is fragrant and delicious," she proudly shared.

Salgado says everything has improved since joining Farmers' Markets.

"We were trained in a workshop, we have uniforms and tents, and there is a regulation that requires good behaviour and good language," she explained.

Additionally, she now has a Health Resolution that certifies her products as organic.

Indap officials visit her regularly to provide advice and verify that her production is organic. They recently collected oranges to take them to the lab and examine their traceability.

Santiago Rojas, National Director of Indap, summarized the work of these markets: "They facilitate access to fresh and healthy products from rural and indigenous entrepreneurs."

He also emphasized their constant growth.

"We will continue bringing products closer and improving the income of Family Farming and Indigenous Agriculture (Afcí) in all regions of Chile," he underlined.

The initiative aims to promote a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient family farming and indigenous agriculture, ensuring food and nutritional security sovereignty while promoting environmental conservation, rural development, and the continuation of rural and farm life.



Chileans Jacqueline Ulloa, Francisca Cáceres, Eulalia Flores, Julio León and Maritza Celis at the Farmers' Market that has been operating for two years in the municipality of Pirque, on the southern outskirts of Santiago. They are producers of eggs, vegetables and herbal plants.

The roles of agro-exporters and family farmers Chile is a global supplier of food, with large agro-exporting companies selling primarily to Asia, especially China, as well as the United States and the European Union.

In 2024, Chile's farm, forestry, and fishing exports grew by 25 percent, contributing 9.029 billion dollars in income. Of this total, 8.245 billion dollars were from fruit, which increased by 28.6 percent compared to 2023.

The star product was cherries, with shipments worth 3.574 billion dollars and a growth of 51.4 percent over the previous year. Meanwhile, grape exports totaled 1.281 billion dollars, a 39.2 percent increase.

But while large-scale agriculture focuses on the tables of international consumers, a significant percentage of the food for Chile's 19.5 million inhabitants comes from family farmers.

According to the Chilean Agriculture Overview, Family Farming and Indigenous Agriculture represents 90 percent of the total agricultural production units in this long, narrow southern country, nestled between the Andes mountain range and the Pacific Ocean.

Indap data reveals that the family and indigenous farmers (Afcí) control 54 percent of vegetable production and over 40 percent of annual crops, of a single harvest.

In 2023, Afcí reached a record in sales to the state-run School Feeding Program, with gross transactions totaling 4.12 million dollars.

This program supplies vegetables and fruits to more than 12,000 educational facilities, benefiting 1.8 million students.

**A Transhumant beekeeper**

When almost arriving in Puntra, a small town on the southern island of Chiloé, 1,100 kilometers south

of Santiago, IPS interviewed Cesar Gonzalez, a 47-year-old transhumant beekeeper, who traveled there from San Bernardo, a southern suburb of Santiago, with his best 250 beehives.

Transhumant beekeeping was born out of the need to continue developing the beehives in the most suitable places.

"In the city, I can develop a hive thanks to the flowers in the gardens. In the mountains, there are native flowers with a high percentage of nectar and pollen. We look for places where the bees will thrive optimally," he explained by phone from Puntra.

"Chiloé is not my home zone, but we start the year here. We have to let the hives winter. I did tests, and it turned out it's better to come to Chiloé to wait for the start of the southern winter and leave here with the bees when summer begins in Chile. The queen has rested, and we take her to the north, where it is still winter, though not as severe, and there is an eucalyptus bloom," he explained.

He added that during this period, "the bee cleans its house, becomes active, collects some pollen and nectar, and we start helping by leaving them honey and a treatment for moisture."

In August, the pollination of blueberries and almonds begins in the north and central parts of Chile. In September, cherry trees bloom, and there is a second pollination, followed by the pollination of avocados (*Persea americana*) two months later.

"We produce very high-quality honey from native and virgin flowers because here, practically, no one touches the fields," Gonzalez explained.

He highlighted tepu (*Tepualia stipularis*), tiaca (*Caldcluvia paniculata*), and ulmo (*Eucryphia cordifolia*) as native flowers in Chiloé's forests, ideal for the special pollination he seeks.

Gonzalez has been a beekeeper for 16 years and, since 2024, produces under the brand "Finis Terra, honey from the end of the world."

"The Farmers' Market is a fairly constant source, not with a large boom, but constant. We set up at the Plaza de Armas Market in San Bernardo, south of Santiago," he said.

He has sold up to 1,000 kilograms of his honey per year.

"At Farmers' Markets, people know the quality of the product. Sometimes I show videos of the processes, where we explain where we are, and what flowers the bees consume," he emphasized.

A fully developed hive has between 60,000 to 70,000 bees, and Gonzalez has 250 hives, still far from the beekeepers in the neighbouring municipality of Paine, adjacent to San Bernardo, who have up to 2,000.

From computer technician to agricultural supplier

Farmers' Markets have been key to reactivating the post-pandemic economy, allowing families to stay active and competitive.

Eva Herrada sells her agricultural brand Campomix. She sets up every Friday at Plaza Perú in the upscale municipality of Las Condes, Santiago.

The day before, she harvests on the 1.5-hectare property she rents in the municipality of Lampa, 34 kilometers north of Santiago.

She offers vegetables and herbs grown without chemicals, packaged, clean, and ready to use.

"Our business is family-run. My father Efraín, 75 years old, my sister Karina, my husband, and I work together," she said.

A few years ago, she worked as a computer technician, but her business went bankrupt, and she decided to join agriculture.

"People here appreciate us, and that's beautiful. It's moving to see that people come happily to look for our products. They ask what we do to make the vegetables last so long, and they value the cleanliness and the fact that the product looks beautiful," she said.

She added, "We work with clean agriculture, which means we provide the healthiest product, without pesticides."

Before the pandemic, she sold her products in bulk. With Farmers' Markets, she now sells directly to end consumers.

She's happy because she studied to get certified in dehydration and recently bought a machine to process these products.

"Dehydrated products don't spoil, they come sealed, and when needed, they can be eaten. In a natural disaster, an earthquake, or a storm, if people run out of food, they have dehydrated products that can be revived and eaten," she explained.

Her only fear is that her land is rented.

"We had three hectares, but the person who rented to me asked for half of it, even though I was up to date on payments. It was very bad, sad, and serious because now this type of land is being used to build houses and apartments. I have a five-year contract, but if they end it early, I'll be stuck. And I don't have the money to buy," she concluded.

## Between bombs and books: War's impact on Lebanese students

By Urooba Jamal

THE fierce stench of rotten food and burned furniture greeted 19-year-old Fouad Abou Mrad and his father when they returned to their home in the southern suburbs of Beirut, a stark reminder of how Israeli attacks had upended their lives.

The student at Notre Dame University - Louaize and his family had abandoned their home in Dahiyeh during Israel's bombing campaign in September.

"Seeing the place that I grew up in that state was just shocking. I've never experienced that before in my life. It was straight out of a horror film," he said, adding that his home "smelled like dead bodies".

Abou Mrad said he searched his destroyed home in early October for school supplies - his laptop and other essentials - because his university in the northern coastal city of Zouk Mosbeh was starting up courses again.

The learning and futures of Lebanese students had been disrupted by Israel's bombardment of Lebanon with nearly half of the coun-

try's 1.25 million students displaced, according to Lebanon's Ministry of Education.

A temporary ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah group was implemented on November 27 but only after months of bombings that left a psychological toll on young people like Abou Mrad. He and other students are now trying to settle back into a regular routine and focus on passing their exams.

Abou Mrad, a hospitality and tourism management major, is just one of the hundreds of thousands of young people in Lebanon whose lives - and education - were upended by the conflict.

"Nights from hell"

November 18 is a day Sajed Salem will never forget.

The 23-year-old southern Lebanese native lived alone on campus while attending Saint Joseph University of Beirut, located in the capital's Ashrafieh area.

That week, Israeli forces had been bombing Beirut for days, what Salem called "nights from hell".

Despite the intensifying bombardment, in-person classes had resumed, and on that Monday, he was sitting in



Sajed Salem, left, and Fouad Abou Mrad both felt that their studies - and lives - were upended by Israel's war

his culinary arts class when explosions went off nearby. The blasts shook the building and the desks in the classroom.

"Immense psychological toll"

According to Maureen Philippon, the Lebanon coun-

try director for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), living through conflicts like these hinders academic progress and burdens students psychologically.

"Constant exposure to violence, displacement and loss leaves [students] highly

stressed and anxious, impairing their ability to focus, learn and retain information," Philippon said, adding that the "psychological toll is immense".

These effects continue even after the conflict has ended.

"In Tyre, I saw children freaking out when they would hear a plane, putting their hands on their ears and looking around in panic," she said, referring to the city in southern Lebanon that Israel heavily bombed.

Exams in a time of war

After the blasts shook the walls of his classroom, Salem fled the same day to Chouf in central Lebanon, where some of his relatives were taking refuge.

"I called my cousin. I told him to immediately come here and pick me up," he said.

Salem's village of Dweira in southern Lebanon was among the first to be bombed when Israel escalated the war on September 23. His mother and siblings got trapped in their home due to the strikes, Salem said.

Alone in Beirut, he couldn't reach them by phone until the next day, an agonising experience he said he would not wish on his "worst enemy".

After leaving for Chouf, Salem's problems weren't over. School continued despite the bombings, and he was forced to travel back to Beirut at least once or twice a week for exams.

Salem said that during the constant bombing, his teacher still held an exam despite students asking for a reprieve. He, along with many of his classmates, failed the test.

"The exam was not that easy. He [the teacher] made



## African officials appeal for strengthening public health system amid new outbreaks

MOMBASA

**T**HE recurrence of infectious diseases such as Ebola, mpox and Marburg in Africa calls for enhancing the resilience of the continent's public health systems through sustainable funding, technology adoption, improved surveillance and community engagement, officials said Tuesday at a forum in Kenya's coastal city of Mombasa.

Africa remains vulnerable to disease outbreaks that are being fueled by climate change, pollution, unregulated human mobility across borders and limited access to diagnostics and essential medicine, said the officials and experts attending the East Africa Regional Global Health Security Summit 2025.

The summit that runs from Jan. 28-30 was convened by Kenya's Ministry of Health and partners and aims to chart a new pathway for enhancing preparedness and response to pandemics in the region.

In addition, delegates from governments, academia, civil society, donors, industry and regional blocs attending the three-day forum will discuss novel ways to boost biosecurity, advance health equity, and ramp up the adoption of technologies and innovations in the health sector.

Kenyan President William Ruto in his opening remarks said that African nations have a collective duty to revamp their health systems and ensure they are capable of responding to outbreaks that are transboundary.

"The threats posed by infectious diseases, antimicrobial resistance, climate change and other health challenges require a united and proactive approach," Ruto said in a speech read on his behalf by Deborah Mlongo Barasa, cabinet secretary in the Ministry of Health.

Ruto called for investments in research and local manufacturing of testing kits and vaccines while leveraging technology, partnerships and community out-



reach to boost health security on the continent.

The inaugural East Africa Region Global Health Security Summit 2025 runs under the theme of "Securing Health and Prosperity, One Community at a Time," underscoring the urgency to improve the continent's ability to detect, respond and manage health emergencies.

Abdourahmane Diallo, the World Health Organiza-

tion representative in Kenya, said that robust community-based surveillance combined with partnerships, innovations and forward-looking policies are pivotal to enhancing Africa's public health security.

Diallo stressed that mobilizing resources from the domestic private sector is key to tackling funding gaps in the continent's health sector, occasioned by shrinking external support.

Raji Tajudeen, acting deputy director-general at the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stressed that political goodwill, innovative financing, reskilling the health workforce and streamlining the supply chains for essential commodities will ensure the continent's health systems are responsive to emerging threats.

## UN rights chief seeks out \$500m in 2025, warning that lives are at risk

GENEVA

**T**HE UN human rights chief appealed on Thursday for \$500 million in funding for 2025 to support its work, such as investigating human rights abuses around the world from Syria to Sudan, warning that lives hang in the balance.

The UN human rights office has been grappling with chronic funding shortages that some worry could be exacerbated by cuts to US foreign aid by President Donald Trump. The annual appeal is for funds beyond the allocated UN funds from member states' fees, which make up just a fraction of the office's needs.

"In 2025, we expect no let-up in major chal-

lenges to human rights," High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk told member states in a speech at the UN in Geneva.

"I am very concerned that if we do not reach our funding targets in 2025, we will leave people ... to struggle and possibly fail, without adequate support," he said.

He said any shortfall would mean more people remain in illegal detention; that governments are allowed to continue with discriminatory policies; violations may go undocumented; and human rights defenders could lose protection.

"In short, lives are at stake," Turk said.

The human rights office gets about 5 percent of the regular UN budget, but the majority of its funding comes voluntar-



ily in response to its annual appeal announced on Thursday.

Western states give the most, with the United States donating \$35 mil-

lion last year or about 15 percent of the total received in 2024, fol-

lowed by the European Commission, UN data showed. Still, the office

received only about half of the \$500 million it sought last year.

## Ivory Coast bishops urge transparent election ahead of October 25 presidential poll

YAOUNDÉ

**C**ATHOLIC bishops in the Ivory Coast, also called Côte d'Ivoire, have called on the electoral commission to ensure "free, fair, transparent, credible, and inclusive elections" as the nation prepares for general elections in October.

The prelates made the appeal at the conclusion of their Plenary Assembly, held from January 20 to January 26 in Boudoukou, in the eastern part of the country. They emphasized that a transparent and credible election would inspire public confidence in the electoral process and help prevent the post-electoral violence that has historically plagued the West African nation.

One of the worst post-electoral crises in Ivory Coast was recorded between 2010-2011. Supporters of incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and challenger Alassane Ouattara clashed over

disputed election outcomes, resulting in the deaths of at least 3000 people, and the displacement of tens of thousands of Ivoirians.

Gbagbo himself was arrested in April 2011 and transferred to The Hague in November that year after the deadly violence caused by his refusal to accept defeat by Alassane Ouattara. He was accused of crimes against humanity.

Fast forward to the 2020 presidential election and the threat of violence loomed large once again. President Alassane Ouattara's controversial bid for a third term deemed unconstitutional by the opposition, ignited widespread unrest. The opposition's call for civil disobedience and a boycott of the election led to violent clashes between supporters of different political factions.

The violence left at least 83 people dead and 633 injured, and the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees estimated that around 3,200 Ivoirians fled the country to avoid the violence. In addition, property destruction was rampant, with homes, businesses, and public infrastructure targeted and damaged. The economic impact of the violence was significant, disrupting daily life and hindering the country's development.

Ouattara, however, won the election in a landslide, defeating a divided opposition, and in efforts to lower the political temperature, he promised to free political prisoners, and allowed Gbagbo—who had already been acquitted by the ICC, to return home.

Catholic bishops are still apprehensive that the scars of electoral violence that have remained in the collective memory of the people, could spark renewed violence were this year's elections to be conducted under circumstances that don't inspire confidence.

"There is no doubt that the Ivorian nation is at a crossroads in this jubilee year, which is also the year of the presidential election," the bishops said.

They said that "the way in which its [Ivorian] daughters and sons behave at this time is decisive for its survival."

The bishops urged the faithful to pray so that "the authorities and the opposition do what is necessary to save the Ivorian nation" and prepare "peaceful and trouble-free elections."

For a problem free election to happen, the Church leaders say the regulatory bodies need to be "vigilant and more honest in the exercise of their functions and activities."

"This recommendation requires integrity and resistance to all attempts at corruption and pressure, in order to avoid compromising their ethical responsibility to the nation," the bishops said in their declaration.

"The conference encourages politicians to respect the values of integrity and decency, while condemning all forms of vote buying and selling, which it considers illegal and inadmissible. It also advises political parties and actors to refrain from such practices," the statement continues.

The bishops' concerns have also been raised by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. In December, it encouraged "national stakeholders and election management bodies in Côte d'Ivoire to intensify their efforts to reach a consensus and ensure that the 2025 elections are inclusive and participatory, with electoral processes and specific solutions that respond to the aspirations of the population."

Several political figures have already signaled their desire to run for the October Presidential election. Former president Laurent Gbagbo

(2000-2011) has been nominated by the African Peoples' Party - Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) - but his eligibility is still questionable due to a court conviction. His ex-wife, Simone Ehiwet Gbagbo, has also announced her candidacy.

The main opposition party, the Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), has not yet nominated its candidate, but its chairman, Tidjane Thiam, is expected to enter the fray, where he may face internal completion from former Trade Minister Jean-Louis Billon, who has declared his candidacy. Finally, former prime minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan (2000-2003) has been nominated by the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI).

The most controversial candidacy, however, may come from President Ouattara himself. Having been in power since 2011, he had promised to hand over power to a new generation in 2020. However, his chosen successor, Amadou Gon Coulibaly,

died suddenly in July, just a few months before the 2020 election. Consequently, Alassane Ouattara decided to run for a third term, thereby violating the two-term presidential mandate of five years each.

The president hasn't yet said if he will seek a 4th mandate, but did tell the diplomatic corps recently that he "had not yet taken the decision" on whether to seek re-election, even as he insisted he still had the zeal to serve his country.

The bishops didn't address the issue of the President's candidature, but did recognize what they said was Ouattara's commitment to "guarantee fair and transparent conditions for all candidates." They said a free, fair and transparent election will truly make 2025 a jubilee year.

"In this year of the Jubilee of Hope, we do not want any more deaths, we want to sing of hope," they said.



# In Uganda, a women-led replanting initiative fights flooding and erosion

By Innocent Kiiza

**I**N western Uganda's Kasese district, where the Rwenzori Mountains meet the sprawling plains of Queen Elizabeth National Park, Janet Nyakairu Abwoli is on a mission to rejuvenate her land and empower her community. Farmers here long enjoyed fertile soil and predictable weather, but over the past 20 years, rainfall has become increasingly erratic. Frequent flooding has caused the district's principal river to flood, uprooting homes and washing away fields.

Abwoli's answer to this is to plant trees.

Evelyn Mugume, the environment officer for Kasese municipality, says that rainfall patterns in the district have changed. "We used to expect rains by August 15, but now they start in mid-September. Floods have become a common phenomenon, even in areas without rivers, washing away crops, homes, and livelihoods," she tells Mongabay.

"The temperatures, seasons, and patterns of rainfall and drought have all shifted noticeably. In the past 10 to 20 years, we have seen prolonged droughts and intense, shorter rainfalls that are insufficient for crop yield and production."

In response to this new situation, the Ugandan government and civil society organizations have promoted planting trees as a solution. They are encouraging people in Kasese district to plant native species, which are more resistant to pests and diseases and offer ecological and socio-economic benefits.

"Every rainy season, people come to us for indigenous trees," says Mugume. "But it's not just about planting trees, it's about understanding their purpose and the role they play in our survival."

Mugume says the Kasese municipality has established nurseries to provide free tree seedlings, particularly to women, to support reforestation efforts.

Eight years ago, Abwoli began organizing women to plant Ficus trees near their homesteads to provide shade and help control erosion, and Dracaena trees on their fields to retain soil moisture.

The power of trees

Ficus trees quickly became central to her initiative. These trees, she explains, grow fast and their wide canopies provide shade for crops and homes. Their root systems help to hold the soil together, preventing erosion along riverbanks and on slopes, and they also act as windbreaks, safeguarding plantations of bananas, coffee and other crops.

In a region like Rwenzori, where many people herd goats, the leaves of Ficus trees are also a source of fodder.

Dracaena is a family of drought-resistant trees and shrubs widely distributed across Africa and southern Asia. *D. afromontana*, the *Dracaena* species most commonly found in Uganda, is traditionally planted to mark the boundaries of family plots of land by the Bakonzo, one of the several ethnic groups that call Kasese district home.

Across Uganda, people also value *Dracaena* species for its medicinal properties, making use of the plants' leaves and roots to treat ailments like coughs and stomach issues.

Ficus trees, known as *omutoma* in the Lukonzo language, also hold cultural value for the Bakonzo, often planted on a family's land as a symbol



Janet Nyakairu Abwoli, Kasese district, Uganda

of heritage and lineage. Despite this, residents often cut these trees down for firewood as they are easy to fell, although the high moisture content and fibrous, low-density branA nursery for culture

A nursery for culture

Abwoli organizes workshops to teach women how to plant and care for these trees, recovering their multiple benefits on farms and around homesteads. Her appreciation of the trees' value comes from her grandmother, who taught her about the medicinal and ecological importance of native trees. "What I'm teaching isn't new," she says. "It's what our ancestors practiced before deforestation took over."

Reviving the planting and protection of these trees in Kasese district represents both a practical response to environmental challenges and the strengthening of the cultural connection.

Her efforts are gaining recognition in the broader community, with local leaders and even schoolteachers inviting her to speak about her work. Some women are now teaching their children to plant and care for trees, ensuring that Abwoli's legacy will continue.

"Women like Abwoli are pillars of our community," says Mugume. "Through their efforts, we see how indigenous trees can restore degraded landscapes and build resilience against climate change."

Some of the women who planted trees with Abwoli eight years ago are seeing remarkable results. One of

the women, Jannet Kabughu, says the trees have transformed her farmland.

"My maize doesn't dry out like it used to, and the soil stays moist even during the dry season," Nyakairu says. Some women also harvest and sell *Dracaena* leaves for medicinal purposes.

"It's not just about planting trees," Abwoli emphasizes in her sessions. However, some of the more recently planted areas have not done as well. In one village, over half of the seedlings failed due to poor watering practices, Kabughu says a problem Abwoli attributes to a lack of resources and commitment.

The seedlings being planted across the district come from a mix of sources. Abwoli grows some herself in a backyard nursery, while others come from the municipal government or are donated by NGOs such as WWF.

"The cost of acquiring and maintaining seedlings poses a significant challenge for many families in Kasese," she tells Mongabay. "A single Ficus seedling that is ready to germinate and grow firmly in the garden costs about 5,000 Ugandan shillings (\$1.50). Additionally, one needs a watering can to ensure regular irrigation until the seedling establishes firmly in the ground."

For families whose livelihoods rest on subsistence farming, any cash they have is spent on essentials like school fees, medical expenses, and clothing. Even when they appreciate the long-term benefits, investing several thousand shillings is often seen as a luxury

they cannot afford.

"We want to save our land and environment," Abwoli says, "but the upfront costs make it difficult for most people to start."

Trees planted by women who have ready access to water sources or additional labor often thrive. But, says Mugume, those burdened with heavy domestic workloads, including fetching water and firewood to cook, find it difficult to dedicate the time and energy needed to look after their seedlings.

"I tried planting, but the goats ate everything," says Maria Kanyere, a widow raising three children. "I don't have time to fence them off."

Johnson Karehero, Kasese district's officer for natural resources, says he acknowledges the obstacles. "Abwoli's model aligns with our mission to protect indigenous tree species and restore degraded areas," he says. "We must build on her initiative with additional support for tools and training to sustain these efforts."ches of *Dracaena* make poor fuel.

## Mpox in DRC: Residents of the slums have little chance to avoid the epidemic

By Yap Boum

**W**ALKING through the crowded streets of the Pakadjuma neighbourhood in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, I am struck by the vibrant atmosphere around me.

Children play happily in puddles, surrounded by piles of plastic bags and open ditches of sewage. Shacks patched together from pieces of corrugated iron crowd the settlement. Loud rumba music blasts through the air as young people enjoy themselves in open bars, waiting for grilled pork or chicken to be served. Sex workers sit outside tin shacks in narrow alleyways, calling for customers.

Nearby a Médecins Sans Frontières triage centre is the only reminder that this slum area is the epicentre of the mpox epidemic in Kinshasa. There are no posters, no pamphlets or banners warning residents of the dangers of this viral disease that was declared a continental and global emergency in August last year.

At the clinic, patients suspected to have mpox are sent to one of three dedicated mpox centres in the city. Common symptoms include fever, headache, muscle ache, chills, exhaustion, swollen lymph nodes and lesions. With symptomatic care most patients get better in 7 to 35 days, depending on the severity of the case.

As an epidemiologist co-leading the response to mpox for Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, I visited Pakadjuma to get a better sense of the situation on the ground.

Mpox has historically been a rural disease in the DRC. This microcosm of Kinshasa sheds light on the complex challenges of managing the outbreak in a city.

Fighting on two fronts

With a population of more than 17 million, Kinshasa is Africa's biggest megacity. Pakadjuma is one of the city's many overcrowded areas where people live in extreme poverty.

Kinshasa, often called "Kin la Belle", faces a unique crisis in the fight against mpox. Both strains of the virus, clade Ia and clade Ib, are circulating in the city simultaneously. This is first time this has happened.

Clade Ia, which is primarily transmitted from animal to human and then within households through touch, has been endemic to Africa for decades.

Clade Ib is a new strain and contracted predominantly through sexual contact. It is the strain that has spread rapidly across 21 African countries during the current epidemic in east and central Africa.

This dual transmission makes the fight against mpox even more complicated: how does one tackle a public health crisis rooted in both intimate human connections and structural inequities such as living in overcrowded areas?

Although the strains are treated similarly clinically, their spread and transmission differ.

Clade Ia is mainly associated with zoonotic transmission (from animals to humans) in rural areas. Animal surveillance and community education are required to control spillovers.

Clade Ib, with higher human-to-human transmissibility, necessitates intensified contact tracing, vaccination, and preventive measures in urban



A laboratory worker analysing test samples at Kinshasa's Institut National de la Recherche Biomédicale.

and peri-urban areas.

Tailoring strategies to these differences is key to containing the outbreak.

**When condoms don't work**

Pakadjuma, in the north-east of the city, is known for poverty and high crime rates. For many girls and young women the sex trade is their only option if they want to survive.

One of the most pressing challenges to combat the virus in the area is curbing sexual transmission.

Unlike HIV, where condoms can significantly reduce the risk of spread, mpox poses a different challenge: because the virus is spread by touch there is no practical preventive measure for sexual transmission apart from complete abstinence.

Mpox lesions start in the groin, making any movement excruciating. For these sex workers, though, abstinence is not an option. It would mean losing their livelihood and the ability to feed their children.

For their clients, who come from all over the city, it would require altering a core aspect of their lives for a disease they perceive as less lethal than Ebola. There are no easy answers to this dilemma.

**Tracing the spread**

Contact tracing, a cornerstone of outbreak control, is another hurdle. Identifying and tracing the contacts of sex workers is complex. As a result only a fraction of mpox cases are confirmed with laboratory analysis.

On average, each mpox case has about 20 contacts, yet tracing cli-

ents in a highly confidential sexual network is next to impossible.

Without effective contact tracing, infected individuals remain in the community, often seeking treatment only when their condition worsens. From discussions with Médecins Sans Frontières staff in the triage zone, it emerges that suspected mpox cases usually arrive in advanced stages of the disease, when symptoms are clearly visible. Many patients first attempt other remedies such as traditional healing methods, before seeking medical care.

Fortunately Kinshasa benefits from a strong laboratory network led by the Institut National de la Recherche Biomédicale and test results are available within 48 to 72 hours. This state-of-the-art institute was pioneered by Dr Jean

Jacques Muyembe, the microbiologist who first discovered Ebola.

In the first week of January 2025 there were 1,155 confirmed cases and 27 deaths in the city, according to the DRC Ministry of Health.

Even for those who seek care at the dedicated mpox centres, navigating the chaotic, congested roads is a nightmare. Yellow minibuses - ominously known locally as the "Spirit of Death" - are crammed and it can take hours to get to a destination.

With increasing patient numbers, mpox centres in the city are overwhelmed.

The fight on all fronts addressing the mpox outbreak in Kinshasa requires a multifaceted approach which includes:

**Vaccination:** Blanket vaccination drives offer the strongest hope for controlling the outbreak in hotspots such as Pakadjuma where contact tracing is almost impossible. In these cases the whole community needs to be vaccinated.

This could break transmission chains while allowing individuals at risk, such as sex workers, to continue plying their trades.

**Prevention and control:** Home care is essential, particularly in informal settlements like Pakadjuma. Providing food and material support to patients and their families and encouraging the isolation of infected relatives will help to limit the spread of the disease.

These measures require new thinking, however, when people are trying to survive from day to day.

**Talking to the community:** This is difficult because of the stigma around the disease, but it must be at the heart of the response.

**Amplifying the message:** The media, local leaders and trusted community members need to be engaged to spread the word loud and clear.

This all needs to happen immediately or the epidemic will be almost impossible to contain in this vast, sprawling city. The consequences would be dire.



## BUSINESS



## African startups raise \$3.2 billion in 2024

LAGOS

African startups raised \$3.2 billion in equity and debt funding in 2024, according to a report by venture capital firm Partech Africa.

The report titled: Africa Tech Venture Capital 2024, revealed that this represents a 7 percent drop from \$3.49 billion reported the previous year. It said equity funding remained steady at \$2.2 billion, matching the figures from 2023. However, debt financing declined significantly, dropping 17 percent to \$1 billion.

"This growth is largely attributed to the increasing appetite for equity funding, as venture capitalists and private equity firms doubled down on their commitment to African markets," a Lagos-based venture capitalist said.

However, the report noted that the decrease in debt funding can be mainly attributed to rising interest rates and the strengthening of the U.S. dollar against African currencies. This put pressure on local currencies, raising the cost of loans in dollars and increasing repayment burdens for African startups.

Despite this setback, debt still accounted for 31 percent of the total funding raised by startups across the continent. The report also noted that activity in Africa's tech ecosystem remained relatively stable, with 457 equity deals (down 3 percent) and 77 debt deals (up 4 percent).

Looking at equity funding by country, Nigeria led the pack with \$520 million, followed by South Africa (\$459 million), Egypt (\$297 million), and Kenya (\$221 million).

"These four countries, often referred to as the 'Big Four,' continued to dominate equity funding on the continent, though their share was smaller compared to previous years—67 percent of the total in 2024, down from 79 percent in 2023 and 72 percent in 2022," the report said.

Beyond the Big Four, only Ghana, Morocco, and Tanzania raised more than \$50 million in equity in 2024. In terms of sectors, fintech remained the largest beneficiary of equity funding, receiving \$1.3 billion, or 60 percent of the total. Other sectors attracting significant funding included cleantech (9 percent), e-commerce (7 percent), business services (7 percent), and agritech (4 percent).

When it comes to debt funding, Kenya led with \$382 million, followed by Egypt (\$142 million), South Africa (\$132 million), and Ghana (\$118 million).

As in previous years, cleantech captured the largest share of debt funding (40 percent), followed by fintech (34 percent) and connectivity-focused startups (11 percent).

The report also highlighted a 2 percent increase in the number of unique equity investors, reaching 583 in 2024. These investors were particularly active in seed-stage investments but less involved in Series A and B compared to previous years.

In terms of average deal size, most stages of investment saw a decline, particularly Series A (down 18 percent) and Series B (down 27 percent). However, seed-stage investments showed positive growth, with average deal sizes increasing by 26 percent.

"Total funding amounts dropped across all stages of development, except for the Growth phase. Notably, mega-deals (transactions over \$100 million) saw an increase in both number (43 percent) and value (57 percent). In 2024, there were three megadeals in debt

and four in equity, totalling \$1.1 billion," Partech added.

Amazon Web Services (AWS), the global cloud services provider, has added the naira and other currencies to its payment catalog.

In an update, the firm said, "In addition to the currencies already supported, AWS US customers can choose to pay in Chilean Peso (CLP), Colombian Peso (COP), and Uruguayan Peso (UYU). Similarly, AWS Europe customers can pay in Egyptian Pound (EGP), Nigerian Naira (NGN), Polish Zloty (PLN), Romanian Leu (RON), and Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH)."

It noted that payments in local currencies are important to help customers avoid the costs of payments in foreign currencies.

"It removes payment friction for customers in countries where local regulations put limits on the foreign currency amount a customer can access," it added. This development is crucial as startups and business owners grapple with the rising costs of cloud services owing to FX volatility.

To solve this, homegrown cloud providers have begun to spring up to solve the problem of foreign exchange by offering local pricing options. Offering a new payment option allows AWS to maintain its relevance in Nigeria despite the presence of local players.

Male-led startups continue to be more prominent than female-led ones. However, many female-led or co-led startups are making their mark from e-commerce to supply chain, edtech, and Artificial Intelligence, among others.

Middleman is an e-commerce website that solves the problem of trust among vendors and customers by performing the function of a "middleman" literally. Co-founded by Omolara Sanni in 2023, the startup holds customers' payments until they confirm that their purchase has been completed and delivered successfully.

Since its launch, it has seen transaction value reach over N1 billion and has won grants like the First City Monument Bank (FCMB) HERCcelerate, First Bank Fintech Innovators Pitch, and the PitchHER competition organised by Wetech.

Sabi, co-founded in 2021 by Anu Adeyoyin Adasolum, is improving e-commerce in Africa by leveraging market intelligence to streamline trade. Unlike traditional B2B platforms, Sabi provides manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and farmers with tailored solutions for payments, logistics, and inventory management, addressing inefficiencies in markets where informal networks obscure critical data.

Since 2021, Sabi has processed over \$1 billion in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV), worked with over 250,000 users, and facilitated about 15,000 monthly transactions, dominating Nigeria's market while expanding into South Africa and planning entry into Tanzania and Senegal. Its asset-light model supports businesses with tools, financing, and logistics while also connecting African commodities to global markets via its TRACE platform.

Messenger is a logistics platform that provides financing and aggregation for end-to-end logistics and supply chain operations in Nigeria. Co-founded by Amanda Etuk, Messenger efficiently connects businesses to their customers through logistics solutions. Its mobile applications connect individuals and businesses to nearby logistics assets while supporting operators through asset financing and operations support.

# Government, development partners push for health digital transformation

By Francis Kajubi

ICT experts from the government and the private sector have met in Dar es Salaam to discuss the best ways of developing IT systems that easily read each other and thus facilitate the implementation of the integrated digital economy policy.

Addressing a workshop to discuss the importance of digital systems in the provision of various social services to achieve an integrated digital economy yesterday in Dar es Salaam, Dr Kundwe Mwasaga Director General of the ICT Commission said that the efforts being made to achieve a digital economy are aimed at to achieving the goal of coordinating and promoting ICT.

"We are discussing how to create an enabling environment for ICT inovators to design digital solutions that enable many systems to work well with each other. We are discussing how to develop the established systems," said Dr Mwasaga.

Mohamed Mashaka, Director of Information Systems Development and Services at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology said for a start, they



Dr Kundwe Mwasaga, Director General of the ICT Commission addresses the GovStack Deep Dive Tanzania workshop in Dar es Salaam of Friday. Photo: Francis Kajubi.

have chosen to start with the health sector where innovations are needed to simplify the delivery of services.

He made the remarks at a two-day workshop focused on insights into Tanzanian digital services covering various sectors

including health.

"We need enough innovations for a digital health wallet that can facilitate the maintenance of the

patient's personal records and the trend and history of his treatment," he said.

Mashaka said these efforts are part of the digital economy strategy that was discovered last year, which aims to make all sectors digital.

Dr Emmanuel Mkilia, Director General Personal Data Protection Commission said that digital development must consider the protection of personal information during the development of ICT infrastructure.

"We focus more on how ICT innovations are safe in protecting users' personal information. We have chosen to start with the infrastructure for the provision of digital health services and later we will continue with other sectors," said Dr Mkilia.

He asked the digital service providers to join the commission not only to fulfill the legal requirement but to build a trust that will give everyone the freedom and peace to participate in the digital economy.

The workshop was co-organized by GovStack, German Cooperation, Estonian Center for International Development and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.



## Bank affirms to support clean energy transition

By Francis Kajubi

STANDARD Chartered has affirmed to fulfill its pledge on realizing its mission towards clean energy consumption in Tanzania and the continent at large.

Addressing participants at the just ended Africa Heads of State Energy Summit in Dar es Salaam, Herman Kasekende, the bank's CEO in Tanzania said the bank is underscoring its role in advancing sustainable energy and infrastructure projects across the continent. Kasekende asserted that

by collaborating with governments, regulators, private enterprises, and local communities, the bank is driving transformative initiatives aimed at accelerating Africa's transition to a greener and more connected future.

"We believe in Africa's potential to lead the global energy transition and are committed to being a catalyst for that progress. Our work in the continent is built on a foundation of trust, collaboration and innovation," said Kasekende.

According to him, the bank continues to play a

pivotal role in addressing critical infrastructure gaps while supporting the continent's long-term growth and sustainability goals.

He said that in Tanzania the bank has facilitated \$1.46 billion in funding for the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), connecting Dar es Salaam to key inland regions and neighbouring countries.

The SGR project aims to reduce transportation costs, increase regional trade and improve connectivity.

He clarified that the bank has already committed to mobilise \$300 billion in green and transition finance globally by 2030, with a significant focus on Africa.

"The commitment underscores the bank's aim to support the continent's transition to net-zero emissions through investments in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and capacity-building initiatives," said Kasekende.

On his part, Kariuki Ngari, the bank's CEO for Kenya and Africa said as Africa embarks on its en-

ergy transition journey, partnerships are essential.

He said the bank is committed to playing its part by collaborating with governments and other private sector players to deliver innovative solutions that drive inclusive growth.

"Together, we are not only addressing today's energy needs but also laying the groundwork for a greener, more resilient future for generations to come," said Ngari.

In addition, he said, the bank supports community participation through vocational training programmes and financial literacy workshops to equip local populations to participate in and benefit from the energy value chain.



# 23 banks slash interest rates after CBK's progressive cuts

NAIROBI

Majority of Kenya's commercial banks have slashed interest rates on lending and deposits to a 4-month low, months after the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) began its ongoing easing policy.

Of the 10 listed banks, Housing Finance had the most expensive interest rate at 20.17 percent while Standard Chartered offered the cheapest loans at 15.28 percent. Others had lending rates ranging, with Absa at 18.95%, NCBA at 18.04 percent, I&M Bank at 17.86 percent, Co-op bank at 16.90, KCB at 16.84 percent, DTB at 16.80 percent, Equity Group at 16.07 percent, and Stanbic at 15.36 percent.

Overall, the Middle East Bank Kenya had the most expensive loans at 22.00% followed by Credit Bank at 20.41 percent, CIB Kenya at 20.20 percent, HF Group at 20.17 percent and Sidian Bank at 19.95 percent while Access Bank Kenya had the cheapest loans at 11.46 percent.

Among those that hiked rates included KCB Bank, Diamond Trust Bank and Co-operative Bank for listed banks and Family Bank, Sidian, Consolidated, Habib, DIB, Kingdom Bank, Gulf African, Premier bank, Credit Bank, Access Bank and the Middle East Bank.

CBK has nudged commercial banks to lower interest rates in line with the progressive benchmark rate cuts and the evolving risk factors. "When the central bank raised the policy rate, banks were very quick to raise their lending rates," CBK Governor Kamau Thugge said in the post MPC brief in December.

"All we are asking for is for banks to be fair and act in the same way by

reducing interest rates as soon as possible."

In December, The Kenya Bankers Association said that while the lending rates were set to drop, the reductions would be implemented progressively due to the nature of the banking sector which operates by mobilizing deposits and issuing loans from the same deposit pool.

Meanwhile, the average deposit rate edged lower to 10.41 percent in December from 10.45% in November while savings rate rose to 4.25 percent in December from 3.54 percent in November.

The CBK kicked off its easing campaign in August 2024 with a 25 basis points rate cut, and a subsequent 75 basis points, bringing the benchmark rate to 12.00 percent. In its final policy meeting of 2024, CBK cut rates aggressively by 75 basis points to stand at 11.25 percent. The next MPC meeting will be held on 8th February 2025.

In December 2024, Kenya's economic story reached a pivotal chapter. The Central Bank of Kenya (CBK), at its highly anticipated Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting on December 5, faced a moment that begged for bold action.

With inflation at record lows, economic growth faltering, and foreign reserves soaring to historic highs, the stage was set for a dramatic policy shift. Yet, instead of seizing the moment, the CBK chose caution. It trimmed the Central Bank Rate (CBR) by 75 basis points to 11.25 percent, with the next review deferred to February 2025.

While such a reduction might seem significant in different circumstances, this move fell short for an economy grappling with a liquidity crunch which is affecting both the



government & its citizens. Businesses, households, and key sectors are now left to wonder: was this a tale of a missed opportunity brewed by hesitation?

For months, Kenya's inflation rate has been whispering promises of stability. By November 2024, it stood at an enviable 2.8 percent, far below the central bank's mid-range target of 5 percent.

Improved food supplies, declining fuel prices, and a robust shilling combined to keep inflationary pressures at bay. Both CBK surveys and private perception surveys indicate that businesses expect inflation to remain low in the coming months. The CBK's own projection anticipates inflation levels to remain below 5 percent in the next four months.

Market players saw these conditions as a green light for the CBK to loosen its grip on monetary policy and reignite growth with minimal risks to price stability. Instead, the

MPC chose restraint, leaving many to wonder.

Kenya's economy showed clear signs of losing momentum in 2024. Real GDP growth in the first half of 2024 averaged 4.8 percent, a notable drop from 5.5 percent in the same period of 2023.

Credit-dependent sectors like manufacturing, construction, and mining bore the brunt of earlier tight monetary policies, which curbed access to affordable financing.

All other sectors slowed down in growth. Analysts had hoped for a decisive rate cut to breathe life into these critical areas. Instead, the moderate easing raised concerns about whether the CBK's caution might prolong the economic slowdown.

At the heart of Kenya's economic conundrum lies a credit bottleneck. Despite successive reductions in the CBR, commercial banks have kept lending rates stubbornly high, citing elevated non performing loans

and competition for deposits from Treasury bills which increase cost of deposits. In our view, these reasons provided by banks lack merit and are just excuses for them to sustain lazy intermediation practices of lending to the government.

This reluctance to lower borrowing costs has stifled businesses and households, leaving them gasping for liquidity. We argue that easing credit access could be the antidote which will unlock liquidity, reduce loan defaults, and stimulate investments for growth. An aggressive rate cut might have sent a stronger message to banks to recalibrate their lending practices.

Yet, the CBK relied on persuasion, stopping short of actions that would compel banks to act.

mid these challenges, Kenya's external position shines as a beacon of strength. By the end of 2024, foreign reserves are expected to reach a historic \$9 billion, equivalent to 4.57

months of import cover. This surplus, supported by a stable current account and improved capital and financial flows, underscores Kenya's external resilience.

The Kenyan shilling, supported by improved balance of payments, has thus far appreciated by 17.42% in 2024, outperforming regional & global peers. These achievements offered the CBK a cushion to act boldly, without the fear of destabilizing the economy. Yet, the MPC's cautious move has left this potential untapped.

"This was a moment for daring," one commentator reflected. Persistently low inflation and a strong external position provided the ideal backdrop for an aggressive monetary policy shift. A 200 basis-point reduction, as some had advocated, could have revitalized credit access and stimulated faltering sectors. However, the CBK's decision has in our view prolonged a slow recovery, deferring hopes for robust economic growth.

Behind the CBK's cautious stance looms the influence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF has been vocal in its call for a tight monetary stance, warning of core inflation risks and global monetary policy misalignments. The November 2024 IMF review report was not shy to make this point.

The IMF's call for a tight monetary environment follows recent realization that Fiscal reforms were getting derailed by political action from Kenyan Citizens and will therefore take longer than expected. While the IMF's concerns are partly valid, domestic indicators suggest Kenya is better positioned to take calculated risks.

# Nigeria's high interest rate spread seen dragging GDP by 30 percent

LAGOS

High interest rate spread in Nigerian banks could potentially drag the country's economy by 20 to 30 percent, adding more pains to businesses and households whose spending power has been hammered, according to experts.

Tilewa Adebajo, chief executive officer (CEO) of Lagos-based CFG Advisory and Mustafa Chike-Obi, chairman and CEO of Bank Directors Association of Nigeria, made this position known during a programme on Arise TV Thursday.

"Nigeria has the highest interest rate spread in the world and the reason for this is that we have some very huge systemic challenges as you can see with inflation. From 2009 till date, Nigeria's interest rate spread has been high," Adebajo said.

Over the past few years, from 2023 to 2025, interest rate spreads in Nigerian banks have notably increased, reaching a record high from 6 percent to 19 percent, as reported by The CFG Advisory.

The interest rate spread refers to the difference between the rates banks charge on loans and those they offer on deposits.

Africa's biggest oil producer is grappling with historical high interest rates induced by sky-high inflationary pressures. The rising rate is hammering borrowing costs and hurting business growth.

Chike-Obi explained that the Nigerian government – the fiscal and monetary sides – must balance rates for sustainable growth, noting that an increased oil production output of up to 500,000 barrels per day won't even do the magic.

"This spread is what drags the economy down. Companies can't borrow. There's no access to credit. And people cannot save because we're giving a very low rate for saving," the Bank Directors Association chief said.

"I think our GDP could be 30 percent bigger if the spreads are less than 5 percent," he said.

At the last monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting in No-



ember, the key interest rate was hiked by a token 25 basis points to 27.5 percent while the asymmetric corridor was unchanged at +500/-100.

The Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) for Deposit Money Banks (DMBs) was equally left unchanged at 50 percent while the CRR for merchant banks also stood at 16 percent. The liquidity ratio was left unchanged too at 30 percent.

In their report entitled, 'Adverse Effects of High Interest Rate Spreads on the Nigerian Economy,' the duo said Nigeria's high rate spreads are caused by regulatory requirements, monetary policy stance, liquidity and funding and higher credit risk.

Chike-Obi noted that one of the biggest concerns is the CRR, which he said is the highest in the world at 50 percent, followed by Turkey at 25 percent.

High CRR means for every naira deposit a bank gets, half of it must go to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) – 50 percent at zero percent interest rate.

"If we are going to take a deposit that we should pay 20 percent for, we pay 10 percent because we have given 10 percent or half of it to the CBN. That's the biggest impact on the interest rate spread," Chike-Obi said.

A high interest rate spread economy suffers reduced investments, limited access to credit, crippling the operations of small businesses that form the backbone of every economy.

When rates are at record high, cost of borrowing automatically increases, limiting business expansion and slowing economic

growth. Inequality and poverty rates deepen, with saving rates shrinking.

Chike-Obi said the high-interest rate spreads in Nigerian banks is hindering banks from lending to key sectors of the economy that could catalyse growth needed to increase its GDP.

"Banks are not lending to construction, industry, manufacturing, and even to SMEs. The only people they are lending to are people who have a life cycle of six months or less – petroleum importers, export people.

"Two years from now, our import dependency will actually increase. The highest cost today in business is financing cost. You look at businesses today, they're not viable due to this interest rate spread," he said.

He explained that high import dependency could further add pressure on the naira that has been relatively stable for the past two months.

Turning the corner requires Nigeria to think of how it can create more dollars to meet its foreign exchange demands, according to Chike-Obi, stressing that the outlook for 2025 remains bleak if the country is still dollar-starved.

"We need to maintain orthodoxy," Adebajo said, noting that improving the output gap could boost the economy and help reduce monetary response to fiscal issues.

Meanwhile, Olayemi Cardoso, the CBN governor, said on Thursday that tightening policies by the bank halted inflation from reaching 42.81 percent by December, 2024.

Cardoso spoke in Abuja at the Monetary Policy Forum, which brought together, monetary and fiscal authorities, subject-matter experts, policymakers, scholars, and market economists to discuss developing economic issues, especially on how to manage anticipated disinflation process.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicate that inflation reached 34.80 percent, in December 2024, driven primarily by core inflation. Food inflation showed signs of moderation.

Addressing the forum, Cardoso recalled how liquidity injections since COVID-19 pandemic have created significant overhang, inflationary pressures and heightened foreign exchange volatility.

He said while those measures were intended to cushion immediate shocks from the pandemic, they did not translate into commensurate productivity growth. This, he said, underscores calls for a disciplined and coordinated approach to monetary policy to restore stability.

To contain rising inflation, CBN, in 2024, raised the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) with cumulative 875 basis points to 27.50 percent. Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) of Other Depository Corporations (ODCs) by 1750 basis points to 50.00 percent, and adjusted the asymmetric corridor around the MPR as well.

Cardoso reiterated that despite persisting inflation, these measures have paid off.

According to him, "Counterfactual estimates suggest that without these decisive policy interventions, inflation could have reached 42.81 percent by December 2024."

The monetary forum is focused on a rigorous intellectual discourse, providing an opportunity to examine monetary policy formulation, implementation and outcomes, while offering evidence-based insights to enhance policy effectiveness.

He said while the CBN is fully committed to ensuring price stability, but is also mindful of the adverse effects of policies on growth and livelihoods.



US President Donald Trump

# Canada, Mexico to face 25 percent tariffs, Trump says

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has said he will follow through with his threat to hit imports from Canada and Mexico with 25 percent border taxes, known as tariffs, on 1 February.

But he added that a decision about whether this would include oil from those countries had not yet been made.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, Trump said the move was aimed to address the large amounts of undocumented migrants and the fentanyl that come across US borders as well as trade deficits with its neighbours.

The president also suggested that he was still planning to impose new tariffs on China, percent, but did not give any details.

"With China, I'm also thinking about something because they're sending fentanyl into our country, and because of that, they're causing us hundreds of thousands of deaths," Trump said.

"So China is going to end up paying a tariff also for that, and we're in the process of doing that."

During the election campaign, Trump threatened to hit Chinese-made products with tariffs of up to 60 percent, but held off on any immediate action on his first day back in the White House, instead ordering his administration to study the issue.

US goods imports from China have flattened since 2018, a statistic that economists have attributed in part to a series of escalating tariffs that Trump imposed during his first term.

Earlier this month, a top Chinese official warned against protectionism as Trump's return to the presidency renews the threat of a trade war between the world's two biggest economies - but did not mention the US by name.

Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Ding Xuexiang, Vice Premier of China, said his country was looking for a "win-win" solution to trade tensions and wanted to expand its imports.

Canada and Mexico have said that they would respond to US tariffs with measures of their own, while also seeking to assure Washington that they were taking action to address concerns about their US borders.

If US imports of oil from Canada and Mexico are hit with levies it risks undermining Trump's promise to bring down the cost of living.

Tariffs are an import tax on goods that are produced abroad.

In theory, taxing items coming into a country means people are less likely to buy them as they become more expensive.

The intention is that they buy cheaper local products instead - boosting a country's economy.

But the cost of tariffs on imported energy could be passed on to businesses and consumers, which may increase the prices of everything from petrol to groceries.

Around 40 percent of the crude that runs through US oil refineries is imported, and the vast majority of it comes from Canada.







## WORLD

## UN says concerned about rebels advancing south in DRC

UNITED NATIONS

THE United Nations is "deeply concerned" by the M23 rebel group advancing towards South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a UN spokesman said on Thursday.

"We are deeply concerned by the situation in South Kivu particularly, which remains very volatile, with credible reports that the M23 is moving rapidly towards the city of Bukavu," said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, at a daily briefing. Bukavu is the capital of South Kivu province.

"Our colleagues in the peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) say there are reports of Rwanda defense force cross-border movements in that direction," he said.

MONUSCO withdrew last year from South Kivu under a revised Security Council mandate at the request of the DRC government.

Dujarric said clashes are reported between the rebel M23 and the Con-

golese armed forces as well as allied forces south of Minova, in South Kivu.

"Our colleagues are also concerned about humanitarian and security risks, particularly interethnic conflict, in the absence of UN peacekeeping forces in that area," he said.

The M23 took control of a significant part of Goma earlier this week, including the airport, which Dujarric said remains non-operational.

The spokesman said the situation in Goma remains tense and volatile, with occasional shootings continuing within the city.

"Water and electricity have been off for almost a week and unexploded ordnance remains a serious obstacle to freedom of movement, of people, of humanitarians and peacekeepers," Dujarric said. "The mission was able to take a few reconnaissance patrols yesterday (Wednesday) within the city to begin the process of assessing damage, and a number of peacekeeping positions were able to be resupplied."

He said the peacekeeping mission operates in a highly challenging envi-



M23 rebels escort government soldiers and police who surrendered to an undisclosed location in Goma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on Thursday. AP

ronment and is being tested.

"Our colleagues at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) say that our partners are beginning to move around Goma to assess the damage to their warehouses in the wake of looting," Dujarric said. "Aid organizations plan to resume provision of humanitarian aid tomorrow (Friday) with the capacity and stocks available - obviously if the security situation permits this."

He said the Congolese Red Cross, with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross, continues to remove numerous corpses throughout Goma to mitigate public health issues.

"Our colleagues at the World Health Organization say that hospitals in Goma are not surprisingly saturated with the influx of wounded people," Dujarric said. "WHO says the risk of spread of Mpox, cholera

and measles has increased due to people leaving healthcare facilities where they had been receiving treatment for those diseases."

Humanitarians also reported that the water supply disruption in Goma over the last six days is compounding the risk of the spread of cholera and other water-borne diseases.

On the political front, the spokesman said the leadership of the UN mission in the DRC is multiplying its engagements, pushing towards a cessation of hostilities.

Bintou Keita, the special representative of the UN secretary-general and head of the peacekeeping mission, met with DRC prime minister, key ministers and the leadership of the Congolese army and police, and agreed to establish a joint government-MONUSCO working group to work on all relevant issues closely.

Xinhua

## WHO deploys emergency team to help Uganda fight new Ebola outbreak

KAMPALA

THE World Health Organization said on Thursday that it has deployed an emergency medical team to help Uganda fight a deadly Ebola outbreak that killed a health worker in Kampala, the Ugandan capital.

The personnel will provide technical and logistical support to Uganda's Ministry of Health, said the WHO in a statement issued here.

The ministry on Thursday declared an Ebola outbreak after a 32-year-old male nurse working at Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala succumbed to Sudan Ebola virus Wednesday, marking the eighth outbreak of the deadly disease in the East African country.

The WHO said it is "working closely with Ugandan health authorities to revitalize a robust surveillance and case management system, community mobilization, and risk communication in response to the outbreak".

The confirmed case, designated as the index case who initially developed fever-like symptoms, sought treatment at multiple health facilities, including Mulago, as well as from a traditional healer, according to health authorities.

A total of 45 contacts have been listed and isolated, including 30 health



Doctors walk inside the Ebola isolation section of Mubende Regional Referral Hospital, in Mubende, Uganda, on Thursday. AP

workers and patients from Mulago Hospital, 11 family members of the deceased, and four health workers of Saidina Abubakar Islamic Hospital in Matugga, according to Diana Atwine, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Health.

"The vaccination of all contacts of

the deceased against Ebola virus disease is set to commence immediately. The available doses of the Ebola vaccine are prioritized for contacts and health workers," Atwine told the press on Thursday in Kampala.

The Ebola virus is highly contagious and causes various symptoms, includ-

ing fever, vomiting, diarrhea, generalized pain or malaise, and, in many cases, internal and external bleeding.

According to the WHO, the fatality rate for those who contract Ebola ranges from 50 percent to 89 percent, depending on the viral subtype.

Xinhua

## East African bloc launches project to address climate crisis, conflict

NAIROBI

THE Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African bloc, and partners on Thursday launched a project to protect civilians from climate shocks, conflict and displacement.

Strengthening early warning and disaster preparedness is part of the initiative that is supported by the World Food Program (WFP), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Danish Refugee Council.

The project, which was launched in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, and is meant to be implemented for two years, seeks to foster collaboration among key stakeholders and generate evidence to demonstrate the value of proactive approaches in tackling climate-related risks.

"These climate shocks, layered with conflict and other risks, have revealed the pressing need for proactive and coordinated actions," said Rukia Yacoub, WFP's deputy regional director for Eastern Africa, during the launch. She called

for a robust partnership between governments, and local and international organizations to achieve positive results.

Ahmed Amdihun, senior regional program manager for Disaster Risk Management at IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Center, said the project's launch marked a milestone in regional efforts to confront the climate crisis.

By fostering innovation, leveraging resources, and prioritizing collaboration, the partners can help ensure anticipatory action becomes the norm in the

region, said Amdihun, who believed the project was launched at a time when the IGAD region faces an alarming convergence of climate extremes and conflict that is devastating communities with unprecedented frequency and severity.

The Horn of Africa region in recent years has experienced severe flooding in South Sudan that displaced millions while the 2020-2022 drought left 23.4 million people acutely food insecure, displaced 2.7 million, and severely impacted 5.1 million children.

Agencies

## US to slap BRICS with 100% import duties if they try to replace dollar - Trump

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump once again pledged to impose 100% import duties on BRICS member states if they try to create a new currency or any other alternative to US dollar.

"We are going to require a commitment from these seemingly hostile countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs, and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy," Trump wrote on his Truth Social network.

"The idea that the BRICS Countries are trying to move away from the Dollar, while we stand by and watch, is OVER," he continued.

"They can go find another sucker Nation. There is no chance that BRICS will replace the U.S. Dollar in International Trade, or anywhere else, and any Country that tries should say hello to Tariffs, and goodbye to America!"

Earlier, Trump said he would impose 100% tariffs on goods from BRICS countries if they create a new currency or abandon the dollar. After that, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar emphasized that the country "has never been a supporter of de-dollarization."

According to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and BRICS sherpa Sergey Ryabkov, the association is ready to explain to Trump that it is not about abandoning the dollar, but about drawing conclusions from Washington's mistaken policies.

The BRICS group was established in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India and China, with South Africa joining in 2011. On January 1, 2024, Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia joined the association. Saudi Arabia has also received an invitation to join BRICS, but according to its authorities, Riyadh is still weighing the proposal.

In 2024, BRICS was chaired by Russia. The key event during its presidency was the Kazan Summit on October 22-24, where it was decided to create a category of BRICS partner countries.

The first countries to become partners were Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan. Indonesia was also initially named as a BRICS partner, but on January 6, Brazil announced that the Asian country had been granted full member status.



## Still no Putin-Trump talk yet, Kremlin spokesman tells TASS in wake of Washington crash

MOSCOW

THERE have been no contacts between the leaders of Russia and the United States, Russian Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, commenting on US President Donald Trump's remarks that he has not discussed the recent deadly air crash in Washington with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.



"There was none," Peskov said briefly, when asked whether the two leaders had a phone conversation recently.

Previously, Trump was asked whether he contacted Putin on the subject of the crash, because Russian citizens were among the victims, Trump replied: "I have not, no, not about this." The media interpreted this phrase as a possible hint to the fact that a conversation has taken place, but on a different subject.

An American Airlines passenger jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter collided near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

The American Airlines flight, en route from Wichita, Kansas, was carrying 60 passengers and four crew members. There were at least three service members aboard the helicopter. Upon the collision, both aircraft crashed into the Potomac River. The bodies of 28 people have been plucked out of the water so far. US authorities said there are no survivors.

According to the Wichita Eagle newspaper, members of the US junior figure skating team were aboard the plane. A source told TASS that Yevgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, who won the world championships in pairs figure skating for Russia in 1994, were also among the passengers, as well as Inna Volynskaya, Soviet bronze medalist in pairs figure skating.

## No survivors expected in aircraft collision in Washington, D.C., says fire chief

WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON D.C. fire chief said on Thursday that there are likely no survivors in the midair collision of a passenger plane and helicopter near Reagan National Airport Wednesday night.

"We are now at a point where we are switching from a rescue operation to a recovery operation. At this point, we don't believe there are any

survivors from this accident," John Donnelly, chief of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, told a press conference at the airport Thursday morning.

The American Airlines plane had 60 passengers and four crew members, while three U.S. Army soldiers were onboard the Black Hawk helicopter. Donnelly said that at 8:48 p.m. local time (0148

GMT Thursday) last night, the control tower sounded an alert, notifying responders about a reported aircraft crash on or near the airport, noting that about 300 rescuers responded to the accident.

"These responders found extremely frigid conditions. They found heavy wind. They found ice on the water, and they operated all night in those conditions," Donnelly

said. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Potomac River was 36 degrees Fahrenheit, roughly 2 degrees Celsius Wednesday night.

"We have recovered 27 people from the plane and one from the helicopter," said the fire chief. "The crash area is a little spread out, so we've got some work to do." At the press conference, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy

said that the helicopter was following a "standard" flight pattern last night and the passenger plane was also on a "standard" approach as it was coming into D.C., without specifying what went wrong before the deadly collision. Duffy noted that the National Transportation Safety Board will begin analyzing the aircraft in partnership with the Federal Aviation Administra-

tion. When asked about President Donald Trump's statement Wednesday night that looks like the accident should have been prevented, Duffy told reporters that "Do I think this was preventable? Absolutely," Trump wrote on Truth Social Wednesday night: "The airplane was on a perfect and routine line of approach to the airport. The helicopter was going straight

at the airplane for an extended period of time. It is a CLEAR NIGHT, the lights on the plane were blazing, why didn't the helicopter go up or down, or turn. Why didn't the control tower tell the helicopter what to do instead of asking if they saw the plane." "This is a bad situation that looks like it should have been prevented. NOT GOOD!!!" said Trump.

Xinhua



# Israel releases Palestinian prisoners after delay over chaotic hostage handover

CAIRO/JERUSALEM/  
RAMALLAH

HAMAS freed three Israeli and five Thai hostages in Gaza on Thursday and Israel released 110 Palestinian prisoners after delaying the process in anger at the swarming crowds at one of the hostage handover points.

Arbel Yehoud, 29, abducted from Kibbutz Nir Oz in the Hamas-led assault on Israel on Oct 7, 2023, looked fearful and struggled to walk through the crowd as armed militants handed her to the Red Cross in a tense scene in the southern city of Khan Younis.

Another Israeli hostage, Gadi Moses, 80, was also released along with five Thai nationals who were working on Israeli farms near Gaza when the militants burst through the border fence.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the sight of their chaotic handover was shocking and threatened death to anyone hurting hostages.

He and Defense Minister Israel Katz said they had ordered a delay in the releases of the prisoners "until the safe exit of our hostages in the next phases is assured". The prime

minister's office said later that mediators had committed to ensuring the safe passage of hostages in future handovers.

Later on Thursday, buses arrived in the West Bank city of Ramallah carrying some of the 110 Palestinian prisoners to be freed as part of the phased agreement that halted more than 15 months of war in the coastal territory on Jan 19.

The prisoners were met by cheering crowds in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory, with men chanting "we sacrifice our souls and blood for you."

Zakaria Zubaidei, one of the leaders of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas' rival the Fatah group, was the most prominent Palestinian prisoner to be freed. He escaped prison in 2021 with three other inmates but was then recaptured.

Zubaidei has always been known as the strongman of the West Bank city of Jenin, a hotbed of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and site of frequent Israeli army raids, including a major operation just a week ago.

"Thank God who blessed me with the re-



This handout image released by the Hamas Media Office on Jan 30, 2025, shows Israeli-German nationals Gadi Moses (right), 80, and Arbel Yehoud, 29, who were held hostage in Gaza since October 2023, during their handover to a Red Cross team in Khan Younis as part of a third hostage-prisoner exchange. AFP

lease today. May the souls of the martyrs of Gaza rest in peace," Zubaidei told jubilant crowds who had gathered to greet him in Ramallah.

Asked about reports Israel would not allow him to return home to the Jenin refugee camp, Zubaidei replied, "The dragon is the owner of the land and the hunter must leave".

He is known in Jenin as the dragon.

## Clashes in Ramallah

Palestinian health officials said at least 14 Palestinians were hurt by Israeli fire, some with live and rubber bullets, others from gas inhalation, as they gathered at the entrance to Ramallah to welcome the freed detainees.

Video footage showed Palestinians

throwing stones towards police and then running away as police began firing.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Some prisoners from East Jerusalem had arrived at their homes while others were taken to Gaza or deported to Egypt.

Earlier, in Jabalia in northern Gaza, an Israeli soldier, Agam Berger, wearing an olive green uniform, was led through a narrow alley between heavily damaged buildings and over piles of rubble before being handed to the Red Cross.

"Our daughter is strong, faithful, and brave," a statement from her family said. "Now Agam and our family can begin the healing process, but the recov-

ery will not be complete until all the hostages return home."

A video released by Netanyahu's office showed a pale Berger crying and smiling while sitting on her mother's lap.

Footage of 80-year-old Moses reuniting with his family showed him walking unaided. A doctor said Moses was in a relatively good condition but would continue to be monitored.

Netanyahu has faced criticism in Israel for not having sealed a hostage deal earlier in the war after the security failure that enabled the Oct 7 Hamas assault.

## Hamas defiance

Hamas, which Israel has vowed to obliterate, still has a strong presence in Gaza despite more than 15 months of heavy bombardment from the Middle East's most advanced military and the assassination of Hamas leader Yahya Al-Sinwar.

"The killing of leaders only makes the people stronger and more stubborn," senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said of Sinwar, filmed by an Israeli drone badly wounded throwing a piece of wood at the device in his final defiance of Israel.

Agencies

Washington's pause over approval for Russia's new ambassador nearly alarming – diplomat

MOSCOW



THERE has been no progress in the situation over a new Russian ambassador, and the pause in Washington is becoming increasingly alarming, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told TASS.

"No progress in terms of the approval [process for a new Russian ambassador]. We are in the waiting mode. Time goes by. And while we are certainly not in the alarm zone yet as regards the duration of this waiting period, we have been gradually nearing that.

"Therefore, we would like to hear a signal from Washington that a favorable decision has been made," the senior Russian diplomat explained.

Without an ambassador, any diplomatic mission, especially in the US capital, is not as effective as it should be, Ryabkov emphasized. "With the onset of the new administration, I believe the US side, too, would also like to bring all mechanisms of interstate communication to normal. Therefore, we urge [the US] to pay due attention to this story," he added.

In late November, Russian media outlets reported that Director of the Foreign Ministry's North America Department Alexander Darchiev may become Russia's new ambassador to the US, taking over for Anatoly Antonov, who returned to Moscow after being relieved of his duties as envoy by President Vladimir Putin's decree.

This claim has yet to be officially confirmed. While the Russian Foreign Ministry told TASS that a candidate for the diplomatic mission had been chosen some time ago, no public statements have been issued on the matter.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov has stated that the appointment of the next Russian ambassador to the United States will occur soon.

## Britain implements delayed third phase of post-Brexit border rules

LONDON

THE delayed third phase of Britain's post-Brexit border regime for imports from the European Union will begin yesterday - four years after Britain left the bloc's single market and nine years after it voted to leave the EU.

After Brexit, such was the scale of Britain's task to untangle supply chains and erect customs borders, that it only started imposing new rules last year.

The first phase of Britain's new border model requiring additional certification for some goods came into force at the end of January last year. A second phase followed at the end of April, introducing physical checks at ports for products such as meat, fish, cheese, eggs, dairy products and some cut flowers. New changes were also introduced.

From Friday, a third phase, delayed from Oct 31 last year, will kick off, with businesses moving goods from the EU to Britain required to comply with new UK safety and security declaration requirements - detailed information about the products being shipped.

Britain's HM Revenue and Customs said mandatory collection of the data would enable "more intelligent risking of goods", with legitimate goods less likely to be held up at the border. It said this would mean less disruption to businesses whilst preventing illegal and dangerous goods entering the UK.

But it warned businesses that declarations must be submitted before goods arrived at the UK border to avoid them being held up for unnecessary checks and possible penalties.

## Three victims of US plane crash held Russian passports, diplomat confirms

SARANSK

THREE people among those killed in a recent plane crash in the United States held Russian passports, and information regarding another passenger is being verified, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at a news briefing.

"According to our embassy, three victims of this plane crash had Russian passports. There is confirmation regarding another, a fourth person who could hold a Russian passport, this information is currently being verified," the diplomat said.

According to Zakharova, there were Russia's world champions in figure skating,



Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, and a Soviet figure skater, Inna Volynskaya, who worked as coaches in the United States, on board the crashed passenger plane. US athletes on board the flight were killed too, the diplomat added, citing a US

statement that there are no survivors after the plane crash.

"Our embassy is communicating with the US Department of State on the entire range of issues," Zakharova assured reporters, even as it "looks like a one-way communication."

The Russian embassy has been asking questions, "but we have not received substantive responses so far. However, there is communication, and we have been given some general replies," she explained.

The Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman extended condolences to the families of those killed in the Washington, D.C. plane crash and all Americans.

Passenger plane, helicopter collide in US capital

An American Airlines passenger plane and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter collided midair near Reagan National Airport on Wednesday evening local time.

The passenger plane traveling from Kansas was carrying 60 passengers and four crew members, and there were at least three US Army soldiers on board the military chopper. The passenger plane split apart and came to rest in the Potomac River.

US President Donald Trump confirmed that there were Russian nationals among those killed. The US has already been in contact with Russia and will facilitate the transfer of their remains home, he said.

## India, Indonesia reaffirm commitment to peace, stability, prosperity in Indo-Pacific

NEW DELHI

INDIA and Indonesia reaffirmed their commitment to deepening their bilateral partnership and enhancing regional and global cooperation during President Prabowo Subianto's visit to India as the Chief Guest for the 76th Republic Day celebrations.

The two leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Prabowo, discussed a wide range of issues, including strengthening the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Both the leaders welcomed the ongoing collaboration under the India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral format to address key challenges, including maritime domain awareness, marine pollution, and advancing the blue economy.

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The Ministry of External Affairs in a press release said, "The two leaders agreed to strengthen efforts towards implementation of the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region through existing

ASEAN-led mechanisms with trust and confidence based on shared democratic values, strong belief in sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a shared commitment to the rule of law and the principles of the UN Charter

Both leaders reaffirmed working together on regional and global issues of common interest while endeavouring to strengthen bilateral partnership through the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Both leaders also agreed to further strengthen people-to-people ties as a cornerstone of the India-Indonesia partnership. In this spirit, they welcomed the celebration of 2025 as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism, recognizing the potential to further enhance cultural exchanges, people-to-people contact and tourism.

Both leaders welcomed efforts to synergize the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), particularly highlighting Indonesia's co-leadership in IPOI, alongside France, on the Maritime Resources Pillar.

They urged the officials to expedite the implementation of activities, including taking stock of fishing architecture, promoting sustainable aqua-



culture and mariculture, addressing Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, fostering cooperation with regional organisations such as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), as well as advancing initiatives related to mangroves, environmental impact assessments, mapping exercises for marine mineral exploration, the press release said.

Taking the commitment to maintain stability in the Indo-Pacific region forward, both leaders reaffirmed commit-

ment to regional peace and security and welcomed the ongoing cooperation under the India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral format to address common challenges, exchange views and explore opportunities for collaboration including in the areas of maritime domain awareness, marine pollution, blue economy and also under the frameworks of East Asia Summit (EAS), Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

India and Indonesia also welcomed the existing close coordination between India

and Indonesia in the multilateral fora including UN and the G20. They emphasised the importance of South-South Cooperation and agreed to work together on issues of importance to the Global South. In this context, President Prabowo appreciated India's initiative in organizing Voice of Global South Summits.

Reaffirming their commitment to reformed multilateralism, they agreed to undertake joint diplomatic initiatives to further enhance cooperation in international forums, ensuring their voices continue to contribute effectively to shap-

ing global governance.

Both leaders reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and other lawful uses of the seas, including unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and to promote peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, and the relevant standards and recommended practices by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

In this regard, they supported the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety and look forward to the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) that is in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

India welcomed Indonesia joining the BRICS as a member country and expressed confidence that it will further strengthen the BRICS solidarity and regional cooperation.

India is currently the Vice Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and leading the Working Group on Blue Economy with Indonesia. Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their cooperation in the Working Group on Blue Economy, where, as co-leads, they are implementing the work plan to drive sustainable socio-economic growth to foster balanced development while safeguarding the marine resources.

President Prabowo thanked Prime Minister Modi for the honour of being the Chief Guest on 76th Republic Day of India and the warm reception and hospitality extended to him and his delegation during the visit. President Prabowo invited PM Modi to undertake a visit to Indonesia on mutually convenient dates.

Notably, at the invitation of the PM Modi, President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto paid a State Visit to India from January 23-26. He also attended the celebrations of the 76th Republic Day of India as the Chief Guest. He was accompanied by a high-level delegation including several Ministers as well as Senior Officials of the Indonesian government and a business delegation.

ANI



The Guardian  
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# SPORT



Los Angeles Lakers guard Bronny James (9) is fouled while scoring by Washington Wizards forward Tristan Vukcevic (00) in the fourth quarter at Capital One Arena in Washington, District of Columbia, USA on Wednesday. Agencies

## LeBron James, son Bronny contribute to Lakers' rout of Wizards

By Field Level Media

LEBRON James had 24 points and 11 assists to help the visiting Los Angeles Lakers rout the Washington Wizards 134-96 on Thursday.

Bronny James, the 20-year-old son of 40-year-old LeBron, entered the game for Los Angeles to start the fourth quarter and played the entire final 12 minutes. He made 1 of his 6 field goal attempts -- a three-point play for the second bucket of his NBA career -- and finished with a career-high five points.

Rui Hachimura added 22 points, while Shake Milton chipped in 21 points off the bench as the Lakers won their fifth game in six tries. Austin Reaves had 17 points, Max Christie followed with 13 and Jaxson Hayes paired 10 points with 10 rebounds. Dalton Knecht also scored 10 off the bench.

Washington, which dropped its 16th straight game, was led by Jordan Poole's 19 points and Kyle Kuzma's 13. Corey Kispert scored 11 points as the Wizards shot just 31.9 percent from the field.

After trailing 78-45 at halftime, Washington began the third quarter on a 7-0 run, capped with Kuzma's three-point play at the 9:50 mark. The Lakers answered with a 10-0 spurt that included five straight points from James.

Bub Carrington's floater and Milton's free throws stamped the team's respective third quarter scoring as Los Angeles led 105-70 entering the fourth. Milton scored seven in a row to push the margin to 40 at 115-75 with 8:29 left. Los Angeles led 42-29 after the first quarter.

Bilal Coulibaly's pullup jumper trimmed the Lakers' lead to 18-15 with 6:02 left before Christie and Reaves' 3-pointers stamped an 11-3 Los Angeles run. The Lakers' advantage ballooned to 17 in the second quarter as Hachimura accounted for five points during a 7-0 run that pushed the lead to 49-32.

After Richaun Holmes' layup and Kuzma's free throw stopped the bleeding for Washington, back-to-back dunks by Hayes and Hachimura began an 8-0 run that extended the Los Angeles lead to 57-35 with 6:59 left in the second quarter.

Coulibaly's dunk cut Washington's deficit to 66-42, but Christie's triple at the 3:24 mark jumpstarted a 10-0 Lakers run.

Meanwhile, Jaren Jackson Jr. sank two free throws with 8.6 seconds remaining to lift the Memphis Grizzlies to a 120-119 victory over the visiting Houston Rockets on Thursday.

Houston had an opportunity to win at the buzzer, but Fred VanVleet missed a 3-point attempt.

Desmond Bane led the Grizzlies with 24 points, 12 rebounds and six assists. Luke Kennard scored 22 points, and Jackson finished with 21. Memphis ended the contest on a 13-4 run to register its seventh win in eight games.

Houston, which had its four-game win streak end, got 25 points, six rebounds and five assists from Jalen Green. Dillon Brooks contributed 22 points and Amen Thompson had 21 points, seven rebounds, four assists and four blocks.

The Rockets were seeking their first series sweep of the Grizzlies since 2009-10, having won the prior three matchups this campaign.

In a matchup of two of the Western Conference's top three teams, the game featured 14 ties and 13 lead changes.

Key starters for both teams -- Grizzlies guard Ja Morant and Rockets All-Star Game selection Alperen Sengun -- did not play. Morant, sidelined by right shoulder soreness, sat out for the 20th time this season. Sengun, who has a left calf contusion, missed a game for the first time in 2024-25.

Trailing by 10 entering the third quarter, the Grizzlies opened the period on an 8-0 run powered by consecutive 3-pointers from Kennard. Using that momentum, Memphis chipped away at the Houston lead and eventually took a brief advantage at 79-78 on a shot by Santi Aldama.

The Rockets recovered to pull ahead 96-92 at the end of the quarter.

After giving up 38 points in the opening quarter and falling behind by seven in the second, the Grizzlies had difficulty closing the gap. Houston, which made eight 3-pointers in the first half, extended its advantage to 66-55 in the closing minutes of the second period and led 66-56 at the half.

Green had three 3-pointers in the first half and 15 points, while Thompson added 14. Bane and Jackson topped Houston with 12 first-half points apiece.

REUTERS

## From Games on five continents to digital change, IOC candidates unveil plans

LAUSANNE, Switzerland

THE seven candidates for the world's most powerful job in global sport -- the presidency of the International Olympic Committee -- unveiled their plans and vision for the Games in a brief presentation to the IOC membership on Thursday.

From a Games held simultaneously across five continents to the need for quick digital change to keep up with the times, the priorities of candidates varied in the 15 minutes each was allowed to address the 100-plus IOC members behind closed doors.

The members, who on Thursday were not allowed to ask any questions, will elect a new Olympic leader for an eight-year term on March 30 at their session in Greece.

"The Olympics to be held on five continents at the same time," Morinari Watanabe, international gymnastics federation chief and presidential candidate told a press conference following his presentation. "To offer greater potential for broadcasters and commercial opportunity."

The candidates are World Athletics chief and former Olympic champion Sebastian Coe, multiple Olympic swimming gold medalist Kirsty Coventry, Zimbabwe's sports minister, as well as Spaniard Juan Antonio Samaranch, son of the late former IOC president.

International cycling chief David Lappartient, Prince Feisal Al Hussein of Jordan, Olympic newcomer and multimillionaire Johan Eliasch,



FILE: The Olympic rings symbol is displayed by the Olympic House, ahead of the Executive Board meeting of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in Lausanne, Switzerland, December 3, 2024. REUTERS

who heads the International Ski Federation, and Watanabe complete the candidates' lineup.

"I felt very good in the room. It is for them (members) to decide whether I touched the right fibres," Samaranch, who among other things wants a new bid system for cities, told a press conference following his presentation.

While Lappartient said he would like the Games to be hosted by an African nation, Prince Feisal wanted the return of boxing on the Los Angeles 2028 Games programme after the international federation (IBA) was stripped of its Olympic recognition by the IOC over governance problems.

NO FAVOURITE

It is difficult to predict the outcome of the vote with no clear front-runner, unlike 12 years ago when outgoing president Thomas Bach as overwhelming favourite was first elected.

Los Angeles will host the 2028 Summer Games while Brisbane will stage the 2032 edition.

The IOC's finances are robust, with \$7.3 billion of revenues already secured for the years 2025-28 and \$6.2 billion for 2029-2032, but it also saw three top sponsors -- Toyota, Bridgestone and Panasonic -- terminate their contracts in 2024.

Several of the candidates touched on the need to review the Olympic body's commercial

structure.

"I am standing because I believe I have a proven track record and experience to deliver," said businessman Eliasch. "I know what it takes to lead and drive change. This is not a popularity contest."

Coventry, the only female candidate and the only one from Africa, said she was not getting any favourable treatment or support from President Bach, a former Olympic fencing champion, despite being long seen as his preferred choice.

"As fellow athletes we share a lot of common ideas and philosophies. I do firmly believe he is being very fair to all candidates," Coventry said.

REUTERS

## Inglis gives Australia another selection headache

MELBOURNE

IT was a debut three years in the making but Josh Inglis made it one to remember with a thrilling century against Sri Lanka to give Australia another selection headache in the lead-up to the World Test Championship.

While Usman Khawaja's epic 232 at the age of 38 dominated day one on Thursday in Galle, Inglis's blazing 102 off 94 balls put him in rare company in Australian cricket as the nation's third player to score a century on debut in the subcontinent.

The wicketkeeper-batsman follows former captain Michael Clarke, who scored 151 against India in Bengaluru in 2004, and Shaun Marsh, who made 141 -- also against Sri Lanka -- in Pallekele in 2011.

Inglis (pictured), who turns 30 in March, has been involved in Australia's white-ball set-up since early 2022 and was part of the triumphant 50-overs World Cup team in India the following year.

However, he has had to bide his time for a chance in tests, carrying the drinks during tours of Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2022.

Incumbent wicketkeeper Alex Carey has been impossible to budge, leaving Inglis with the task of proving his batting alone is enough to justify selec-

tion.

With Australia's place in the World Test Championship final secure after their 3-1 series win over India, selectors had the luxury of shaking things up against Sri Lanka and took a punt on Inglis, who slotted in at number five.

In front of his thrilled parents in the stands, Inglis repaid the selectors by racing to his century in 90 balls, the fastest test ton by an Australian on debut and the second-fastest by a debutant from any nation.

Only India's Shikhar Dhawan has been quicker, reaching the milestone in 85 balls against Australia in Mohali on the way to an incredible 187 off 174 balls on his debut in 2013.

Inglis's innings will give coach Andrew McDonald and Australia's other selectors plenty to ponder as they try to nail down their best XI for the WTC final against South Africa at Lord's in June, as well as the Ashes in the next home summer.

Inglis adds to a logjam of players hoping to cement a place, including all-rounder Beau Webster and teenage opener Sam Konstas, who was dropped for Galle.

All-rounder Cameron Green's return is also on the horizon as he recovers from spinal surgery.

England may wonder what they have missed out on, with Leeds-born Inglis having grown up in Yorkshire before mov-



ing to Western Australia in 2010 with his family.

Inglis said on Thursday that his heritage was always a talking point in matches against England.

"Whenever we play England everyone asks me what anthem I'm going to sing," he said of his teammates.

"You can't choose where you're born and

it's just one of those things. It's part of my story and I think the gags will always hang around."

REUTERS



## 'Anything is possible' - Amorim says Man U must target trophy

BUCHAREST

RUBEN Amorim insisted that despite his difficult start as Manchester United manager, his side must target winning the Europa League after booking their last-16 spot with a 2-0 victory at Steaua Bucharest on Thursday.

Amorim became the first United manager to lose five of his first 10 games in all competitions since Walter Crickmer in 1932, but a recent improvement has helped him settle into life in Manchester.

The Portuguese admitted after Sunday's victory at Fulham that he feels 10 years older having succeeded Erik ten Hag in November.

"I don't see a big difference in the way we play, but today we had more time to think and now you can see some movements, the idea is there because we have more time to play and understand the game," Amorim told reporters.

"I think we can go game by game and we can win it. Then you have the responsibility, no matter the context, you are in Manchester United so you must fight for winning trophies.

"When you get to this stage of any competition, anything is possible and they can prove they can win against anybody."

United's third-placed finish in the Europa League first phase ensured they avoided a two-legged play-off to reach the last 16.

"That is really important for us, to have time to train, create connection between everyone, the staff, everyone there in training, go to the pitch, know each other in the right environment," Amorim added.

"Then we have one week to prepare a game, the beginning of the week you can work your idea and then have time to prepare the game and focus on the opponent. I can understand better my players."

REUTERS

## Messi eyes 2026 World Cup, Argentina coach Scaloni says

BUENOS AIRES

ARGENTINA great Lionel Messi wants to play in the 2026 World Cup, but is too early to make any official announcements, his national coach Lionel Scaloni said on Thursday.

Scaloni, who led Argentina to the 2022 World Cup title in Qatar, explained the 37-year-old record eight-times Ballon d'Or winner's desire to remain in the squad.

"The first thing to say is that both he and his teammates are aware that there is a reasonable amount of time left and that he and everyone else are keen to play in the World Cup," Scaloni told DSPORTS.

"We will have to wait and see how things develop. He (Messi) knows what we are thinking and he is the most intelligent of us all," the coach added.

Scaloni also spoke about former Argentina forward Angel Di Maria's decision to retire from international football after winning his second Copa America trophy last year.

"From what he said, it is over. And in the best possible way. If he had written his film, his book, his football story, I don't think he would have written it as well as he ended it," Scaloni said.

REUTERS

## "Made in Tottenham" trio see Spurs through to Europa League last 16

LONDON

A TRIO of Tottenham Hotspur youths stepped up to the mark on Thursday night to send the London club directly through to the last 16 of the Europa League with a 3-0 home win over Elfsborg, ensuring they avoided a potentially tricky playoff.

A loss to the Swedes could have seen Ange Postecoglou's side finish outside the top eight and forced into a two-legged playoff tie, but goals from 20-year-old Dane Scarlett, Damola Ajayi (19) and Mikey Moore (17) saw them comfortably finish fourth on 17 points.

"Made in Tottenham tonight," Postecoglou told broadcaster TNT Sports. "Super pleased for the young boys, and we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that we had another couple of 18-year-olds out there as well, so yeah, it's great. It's great for the club.

Spurs struggled to break down the dogged defence of their Swedish visitors until their youth movement took over in the 70th minute, and after that there was no looking back.

"I'm sure those boys won't sleep tonight, but we needed that. We needed some energy - we kind of designed the game today, we're trying to protect some of our players, we've got a big week coming up, and we were going to need the young boys today, and they stood up," Postecoglou said.

REUTERS

# High-flying Bournemouth have Liverpool in their sights

LONDON

AN away clash at Bournemouth might not have been underlined as a major obstacle in Liverpool's pursuit of the Premier League title but today's clash on the south coast suddenly looks anything but a relaxed trip to the seaside.

Liverpool have won 10 of their last 11 Premier League clashes against Bournemouth but will face a team whose astonishing run of form has catapulted them into the mix for Champions League qualification.

Andoni Iraola's side have beaten three of the current top four at their 11,000-seat Vitality Stadium this season -- Manchester City, Arsenal and Nottingham Forest.

Last week's 5-0 hammering of Forest, a week after they went to Newcastle United and destroyed them 4-1, removed any lingering doubts as to the validity of Bournemouth's attempt to compete for a European spot.



AFC Bournemouth manager Andoni Iraola celebrates after the Premier League match against Newcastle United at St James' Park, in Newcastle, Britain on January 18, 2025. REUTERS

They sit in seventh place, one point behind fourth-placed City, and will be relishing the chance to have a swing at Arne Slot's Liverpool today.

Liverpool did win the reverse fixture 3-0 but the score disguised the problems Bournemouth caused them. Iraola's high-pressing side had 19 shots

that day -- more than any team has managed against Liverpool this season, home or away.

Incredibly, the 42-year-old Iraola has had to juggle the sort of injury crisis that has knocked bigger clubs off the rails this season and several first-team players will be missing as they take on Liverpool at the week-

end.

But thanks to the tireless work ethic he has drilled into every one of his squad and his astute transitional game-plan, Bournemouth continue to punch well above their weight.

"Every week presents a new game to relish, and I believe this is the mindset we should adopt," Iraola said after last week's trouncing of Forest.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, who like Iraola hails from the Basque Country, will certainly be hoping Bournemouth can breathe new fire into the title battle.

Should Bournemouth pull off another remarkable result and stop Slot's juggernaut, Arsenal would go into tomorrow's blockbuster showdown at home to Manchester City with a huge incentive of cutting the gap back to three points.

Arsenal will be wary, however of a City side who may be virtually out of contention for a fifth successive title but who are beginning to show signs of fight after a woeful slump.

City scrambled into the Champions League playoffs as they came from a goal down to beat Club Brugge on Wednesday and last weekend also recovered from going behind to overpower Chelsea 3-1 in the

Premier League.

Pep Guardiola's fourth-placed side are unbeaten in their last six league games and appear to be steeling themselves for the sort of run that has often carried them to titles.

Talk of a Forest title challenge always looked fanciful and last week's setback at Bournemouth was a wake-up call for Nuno Espirito Santo's third-placed team.

They will aim to get that out of their system as they host Brighton and Hove Albion in the weekend's opening game.

At the bottom of the table 19th-placed Ipswich Town have a must-win game at home to seemingly doomed Southampton while 18th-placed Wolverhampton Wanderers host Aston Villa later.

Should Ipswich and Wolves both win and move to 19 points it would ramp up the pressure on free-falling Tottenham Hotspur (24 points) who face an awkward fixture at Brentford tomorrow.

Sixteenth-placed Everton host 17th-placed Leicester City today looking for a third consecutive victory which would move them further clear of danger.

REUTERS

## Inter's title chase faces test as Milan eye third straight derby win

MILAN

AC Milan have the chance to throw a spanner in the works of Inter Milan's title charge when they host their city rivals tomorrow in a match that could shape the Serie A season.

The title race is shaping up to be a two-horse battle between Inter and Napoli, with both in impressive form, but Milan have the opportunity to shift the dial.

Milan sit seventh with 34 points, while second-placed Inter are on 50, three behind leaders Napoli with a game in hand.

A victory in the 'Derby della Madonnina' could not only disrupt Inter's title push but also reignite Milan's league campaign after a disappointing season so far.

Milan have recent history on their side, having already beaten Inter twice this season - once in the league in September and again in the Italian Super Cup final earlier this month.

A third straight victory would give Milan more than just city bragging rights; it would mark the first time since 2011 they have secured three consecutive wins over their rivals.

Both sides face injury concerns, with Emerson Royal sidelined for Milan due to a calf issue. However, new signing Kyle Walker could be in line to make his Milan debut after joining on loan from Manchester City.

Inter could be boosted by the returns of Hakan Calhanoglu and Francesco Acerbi, who are nearing full fitness after injury, according to Italian media reports.

MOTTA UNDER PRESSURE

Juventus host Empoli on Sunday in a match that manager Thiago



FILE PHOTO: AC Milan's Christian Pulisic celebrates scoring their second goal against Inter Milan during the Italian Super Cup final at Al Awwal Park, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on January 6, 2025. REUTERS

Motta hopes will mark the beginning of a turnaround. It's been a season full of twists and turns for his side, who were unbeaten in the league until a narrow 2-1 loss to Napoli on Saturday, but struggled with a string of draws.

After Wednesday's 2-0 Champions League defeat at home to Benfica, the pressure is mounting on Motta to steer the team back on track against 14th placed Empoli.

Juve have suffered four defeats across all competitions this season: two in the Champions League, one in Serie A, and one in the Italian Super Cup. They sit fifth in the Serie A table, two points behind fourth-placed Lazio.

Adding to Motta's woes, defender Pierre Kalulu picked up a thigh injury in the loss to Benfica and will miss tomorrow's match.

row's match.

With Gleison Bremer, Andrea Cambiaso, and Juan Cabal already sidelined, Juve's defensive line looks increasingly fragile.

Antonio Conte's Napoli travel to AS Roma tomorrow having secured seven consecutive

league wins.

Roma are unbeaten in their last six league matches having bounced back after a shaky start under Claudio Ranieri, who was appointed in November as the club's third manager this season.

Napoli will be the

fresher of the two sides, having not played since last weekend's clash with Juve, while Ranieri's team face a decisive Europa League match against Eintracht Frankfurt on Thursday.

The league leaders are also relatively injury-free, with Mathias

Olivera their only player still sidelined and set to return in about a month.

Third-placed Atalanta host Torino today, after a challenging run that has seen them win just once in their last five league matches to fall seven points behind Napoli.

REUTERS

Gwiji by David Chikoko





High-flying  
Bournemouth have  
Liverpool in their sights

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## Yanga seek Premier League top spot against Kagera Sugar



Ramovic.

"The team is likely to use a low block, so we must break them down, find spaces, and play between the lines with quick forward passes."

Kagera Sugar, currently second from bottom, are enduring a difficult season, sitting six points away from safety. They also have one of the league's weakest attacking records, with just 10 goals in 15 matches.

While Kagera Sugar could pose some resistance, Young Africans are in far superior form, making an upset highly unlikely for the Lake Zone side.

In his pre-match press conference, Kagera Sugar head coach Melis Medo acknowledged the pressure surrounding the game and stated their main objective would be to avoid defeat.

"Tomorrow is a big game with too much pressure on the players, the bench, and on Yanga as well after not qualifying for the next stage of the CAF Champions League," said Medo.

"Yanga are coming to win as usual. Kagera are coming to try not to lose, as usual. The question is how we do that. Closing our lines when attacking, defending low, defending high—it's all part of the game."

Historically, Young Africans have dominated this fixture, winning 23 of their past encounters compared to Kagera Sugar's four, with two matches ending in draws.

Given their current form and superior squad, Young Africans will be confident of securing another victory.

"We face a very good team again, which will be very tough for us. We have to play at our best once again because, as I have often said, we respect every opponent. To win, we must perform at our highest level," said

By Correspondent Michael Mwebe

YOUNG Africans will be eager to reclaim the top spot in the 2024/2025 Premier League when they take on a struggling Kagera Sugar side at the KMC Complex this afternoon.

The defending champions trail league leaders Simba by just one point and will be determined to extend their winning streak to seven consecutive matches.

Young Africans head coach Sead Ramovic (pictured) emphasized that his team cannot afford to underestimate any opponent as they aim to defend their title.

## Azam FC eye title push after beneficial mid-season break

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

AZAM FC have expressed their satisfaction with the recent Premier League break, citing it as a valuable opportunity for squad assessment and tactical refinement ahead of a hectic February schedule featuring six league matches.

Head coach Rachid Taoussi used the break to organize a series of friendly matches, allowing him to evaluate new signings and provide playing time to squad members who saw limited action in the first half of the season.

Azam's last league match before the break was a 3-1 home victory against JKT Tanzania on December 27. They will resume their campaign at home against KMC on February 6, before traveling to face Pamba Jiji at Kirumba Stadium on February 9.

Speaking about the club's readiness, Azam FC spokesperson Hasheem Ibwe welcomed the opportunity to restart the second round at home, emphasizing that the team is well-prepared for the challenges ahead.

During the break, Azam played seven friendly matches, including four closed-door games against Zanzibar's KVZ, Mafunzo, and Uhamiaji, as well as three public encounters against JKT Tanzania, Mtibwa

Sugar, and a return match with Mtibwa Sugar.

Ibwe highlighted that these friendlies allowed coach Taoussi to integrate new signings Zidane Sereri and Zouzou Landry, while also ensuring that squad depth remains strong for the remainder of the season.

"Our mid-season friendlies provided a crucial platform for the coach to assess the squad and explore the best ways to utilize our new additions.

"It was also an important opportunity for players like Mamadou Samake to get minutes in a competitive setting," said Ibwe.

Azam bolstered their squad with two key signings: Zidane Sereri (19-year-old Tanzanian midfielder) from Dodoma Jiji, who joined on a five-and-a-half-year deal and Ivorian defender Zouzou Landry, a left-back and center-back from AFAD Djekanou in the Ivorian Ligue 1.

Both players are expected to compete for starting roles and add depth both defensively and offensively.

Ibwe assured fans that Taoussi is pleased with the squad's progress and confident in the team's ability to meet its objectives for the season.

"We are pleased with our preparations and aim to maintain momentum when the league resumes.

"Our goals remain unchanged: winning the league title and the Federation Cup. We have been consistent contenders in recent years, and this season, we are determined to push ourselves further," he said.

Azam's experience in the CAF Champions League preliminary round has further fuelled their ambition for continental football next season.

"Our participation in the CAF Champions League made us even more eager to return and go further in the competition.

"We believe we have the quality and depth to achieve greater success than last season," Ibwe added.

Azam FC currently sit third in the Premier League standings with 36 points, trailing leaders Simba SC (40 points) and second-placed Young Africans (39 points).

The team boasts an impressive defensive record, having conceded just eight goals in 16 matches - the third-best in the league, behind Simba (five goals conceded) and Young Africans (six goals conceded).

With a strong squad, renewed confidence, and a clear mission, Azam FC look set to mount a serious challenge for the Premier League title and secure continental football next season.

## Musonye, Rabar praise Tanzania's CHAN preparations

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

THE chairman of Kenya's Local Organising Committee for the African Nations Championship (CHAN), Nicholas Musonye, and CEO Myke Rabar have expressed satisfaction with Tanzania's preparations for the tournament.

The two officials concluded their tour of Dar es Salaam on Wednesday, where they inspected competition and training venues in the city.

They also attended the signing of a sponsorship extension between the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and French petroleum company TotalEnergies.

CAF has announced that CHAN 2025, co-hosted by Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, will kick off on August 2, with the final set for August 30.

"We are pleased with the coordination between Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in or-

ganizing the tournament," Musonye said.

"During our visit to Dar es Salaam, we inspected the Benjamin Mkapa Stadium and various training grounds, and I must say that preparations are well on track.

"Even if the tournament had taken place in its initial February schedule, we would have been ready. Now, it's just a matter of finalizing the finishing touches and promoting the event," he added.

CAF President Dr. Patrice Motsepe confirmed that the governing body's executive committee met in Rabat on Monday to review updates on both the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) and CHAN.

"The executive committee also received an update on the African Nations Championship. The competition will now kick off on Saturday, August 2, and the final will be played on August 30, 2025," CAF said in a statement on Tuesday.

**TONIGHT @ 9:00**

**EATV MONDAY**

11:00 DADAZ  
12:00 KIPENGA XTRA  
13:00 Zote Kuntu  
13:30 Kali Za Wana  
13:55 Dondoo Za Michzo  
14:00 SKONGA (r)  
14:30 Planet Bongo (r)  
15:00 Funguko  
15:30 Akili & Me  
15:55 Dondoo Za Michzo  
16:00 Zote Kuntu  
16:55 Dondoo Za Michzo  
17:00 SSELEKT  
17:55 Kurasa  
18:00 Kali Za Wana  
18:30 #HASHTAG  
19:00 EATV SAA I  
20:00 DADAZ (r)  
21:00 SSPORTS  
22:00 Zote Kuntu  
23:00 Kurasa  
23:05 EATV SAAI (r)

**5Sports**  
The week's local and international sporting events as well as indepth analysis of the biggest sporting highlights of the week are covered on 5sports.

**eastafrika RADIO**

05:00 Supa Breakfast  
09:00 MAMAMIA  
12:00 Kipenga Xtra  
13:00 Planet Bongo  
16:00 EA Drive  
19:00 Kipenga  
21:00 The Cruise

**88.1FM**  
DAR ES SALAAM

## CAF amends player registration rules for Champions League and Confederation Cup

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi & Agencies

THE Confederation of African Football (CAF) has revised its player registration regulations for the CAF Champions League and CAF Confederation Cup, allowing clubs to register players who have already participated in either competition for another club within the same season.

Previously, clubs were prohibited from fielding players who had already featured in continental action with another team during the same campaign.

The strict rule significantly restricted player movement during the mid-season transfer window, limiting clubs' ability to strengthen their squads for the remainder of the season.

CAF's executive committee approved the amendments following a meeting held in Morocco after the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) draw.

Additionally, the player registration deadline for both the CAF Champions League and the CAF Confederation Cup has been extended to February 28, 2025.

With these changes, CAF's regulations now align with those of UEFA's club competitions, including the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League.

Under UEFA rules, a player who has been fielded in the first, second, or third qualifying rounds, or the play-offs of any European club competition, is eligible to play in another tournament for a different club from the league phase onward.

Players who have not yet been fielded in any match are also allowed to register for another club in the same season.

CAF's regulatory changes are expected to enhance the competitiveness of African club football, particularly for teams preparing for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, set to take place in the United States in June and July 2025.

## Flexibles by David Chikoko

