



HEALTH



DESPITE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, ROUTINE VACCINATION OF CHILDREN CONTINUES PAGE 3

DISEASE



OBSTETRIC FISTULA IS PREVENTABLE AND CAN LARGELY BE AVOIDED PAGE 4

AGRICULTURE



GOVT PAID 2.4BN/- TO EX-EMPLOYEES OF KILOMBERO SUGAR COMPANY PAGE 5

GOVERNANCE



RUVUMA TO RECEIVE SPECIAL IDS FOR SMALL TRADERS PAGE 6



WHO multiplex hosts African innovators in Covid-19 fight

BRAZZAVILLE

A COMMUNITY of African innovators is stepping up support to the continent's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

They are collaborating with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in developing solutions to help contain the spread of the virus.

On Wednesday, the WHO Africa Region hosted the first of a series of sessions by multiplex for innovators across the region to showcase home-grown creative solutions aimed at addressing critical gaps in the response to Covid-19.

Eight innovators from Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, Guinea and Kenya presented their pioneering solutions, all of which have already been implemented in their respective countries. There was significant potential for the solutions to be scaled up further across the region.

Innovations ranged from interactive public transport contact tracing apps and dynamic data analytics to rapid diagnostic testing kits, mobile testing booths and low-cost critical care beds.

WHO officials have urged a multifaceted and multisectoral approach to combating

TURN TO PAGE 2

Govt slates June 29 for start of Form VI exams



Muslim faithful come together outside Dar es Salaam's Ladhwa Mosque yesterday for the last Friday prayers during this year's Holy month of Ramadan. Photo: Correspondent Jumanne Juma

By Guardian Correspondent, Dodoma

THE government has announced that this year's Form VI national examinations will be held from June 29 to July 16 and will run simultaneously with teachers' examinations.

Addressing journalists here yesterday, Education, Science and Technology minister Prof Joyce Ndalichako said boarding students are required to report to their respective schools on May 30.

This follows President John Magufuli's directive that secondary schools (Form Six students), colleges and universities reopen on June 1.

Prof Ndalichako instructed government officials at regional and district levels to make necessary arrangements before the schools start receiving students by the end of next week.

The required arrangements include putting in place measures to control the proliferation of Covid-19 amongst students. Those in boarding schools should sleep in observance of social distancing as well as making sure that each of the students wears a face mask routinely.

Minister Ndalichako directed the National

TURN TO PAGE 2

This follows President John Magufuli's directive that Form Six, colleges and universities should reopen on June 1.

MPs criticise TPA, REA, BoT over CAG's 2018/2019 report

By Henry Mwangonde, Dodoma

THE Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC) yesterday unveiled a number of gaps and areas that need to be addressed to ensure transparency in government expenditure.

Committee chairperson Naghenjwa Kaboyoka (Same East, Chadema) made the recommendations in the august House when tabling an analytical document after the committee went through the Report of the Controller

and Auditor General (CAG) for the financial year ending June 30, 2019.

The committee identified laxity in the administration of contracts at the Tanzania Ports Authority (TPA) and operational challenges which provide room for the loss of revenues, noting that TPA failed to account for 1.8bn/- expenditures.

She also faulted the government over poor administration of issuing national identity cards, handled by the National Identification Authority (NIDA). "There were no binding contracts between NIDA and



The move shall boost the authority's revenue collections, the committee noted

institutions that use its data," the committee report affirmed.

The Rural Electrification Agency (REA) had during the financial year approved payments totaling 1.08bn/-

to SMEC International Property Ltd, ignoring the committee's advice on the issue, she stated.

The PAC report noticed a 454.4bn/- debt which the Tanzania Electric Supply Company Limited (TANESCO) is owed by its customers, of which 205bn/- is electricity bills by government institutions and agencies.

"The debt affects Tanesco's performance," the committee noted, highlighting also that the Ministry of

TURN TO PAGE 2

SHARE FACTS ABOUT COVID-19

Know the facts about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and help stop the spread of rumors.

FACT 1 Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity. Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 can cause people to avoid or reject others even though they are not at risk for spreading the virus.

FACT 4 There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

FACT 2 For most people, the immediate risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to be low.

Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

FACT 3 Someone who has completed quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people.

For up-to-date information, visit CDC's coronavirus disease 2019 web page.

FACT 5 You can help stop COVID-19 by knowing the signs and symptoms:

- Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
- Seek medical advice if you
- Develop symptoms
- AND
- Have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

[cdc.gov/COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID-19)

US inks 5.6bn/- uplift for Covid-19 response

By Guardian Correspondent

THE United States has announced an additional \$2.4m (5.6bn/-) in health assistance funds for Tanzania through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The aid is intended for strengthening laboratory capacity for optimal diagnostics, risk communications, water and sanitation, prevention and control of infections, public health messaging and other relevant needs.

A US Embassy statement said in Dar es Salaam



yesterday that this support complements the \$1m recently disbursed Covid-19 relief funds, making it a total of \$3.4m in new health sector resources for Tanzania.

TURN TO PAGE 2



Private sector urged to uphold ethical practice, shun corruption

By Guardian Reporter,

Morogoro

THE National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) has called on workers and private businesses to improve upon internal corporate ethics and also do away with all forms of corruption.

Businesses should strive to be in compliance and obey the various national and traditional laws, regulations and seek to attain the expected standards.

The call was made by the Director of Administration and Human Resources in the Ministry of Agriculture, Hilda Kinanga on behalf of the ministry's Permanent Secretary Gerald Kusaya at the unveiling of the NFRA Workers Council on Thursday in Morogoro.

"As you know our country is among countries that are against corruption at work places and the society in general, hence I urge and direct all employees to abide by public service ethics," she said and warned of stern legal steps against those who will be engaging themselves in corrupt practices. She said the government was aware of various challenges they face in the implementation of their du-

ties including inadequate financial and human resources, issues that make them fail to attain targets.

She said the government through the Ministry of Agriculture will continue with efforts of workers involvement in NFRA's institutions to strengthen better service delivery of the public.

NFRA chief executive officer (CEO) Milton Lupa said in its two-day sitting members discussed various issues on NFRA and among the agendas was its 2020/21 business plan, implementation report for the third quarter of 2019/20 and going through the draft for the new Public Service Management system.

Lupa appealed to the government through the ministry's permanent secretary to communicate with the public service management and good governance for having experts for the management of modern silos and warehouses projects soon after their completion.

He also asked the government to allow NFRA to use funds for the construction of modern silos and warehouses to be used for storage of the maize crop as the buying season was just around the corner.



Arthur Shoo (L), Secretary General of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Northern Diocese, has a word with leaders from the church's Kilimanjaro Central and Hai dioceses yesterday shortly before presenting humanitarian aid to flood victims in Kilimanjaro Region. Photo: Godfrey Mushi

'Despite COVID-19 pandemic, routine vaccination of children continues'

By Guardian Correspondent,

Morogoro

CHILDREN under five years in outlying rural areas should continue receiving vaccination to ensure all of them are vaccinated in the prescribed time, despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another group that should con-

tinue receiving vaccination are girls of 14 years of age that who are supposed to get human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV) against cervix cancer.

The call was made by the project officer from the health ministry's national immunisation plan Dr Furahe Kyesi when speaking to officials Mtego wa Simba Health Centre in Morogoro rural district

during his inspection visit on vaccinations provided by health centres during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

A team monitoring vaccination in the ministry's Immunization and Vaccines Development (IVD), vaccination officials from Morogoro region in collaboration with Engender Health through Merck Sharp & Dohme BV (MSD), are in

the region to inspect the ongoing vaccination services in the Covid-19 pandemic period.

"We must ensure we cover this girls group because we had targeted to do so while they were at schools but since the schools are closed due to Covid-19 pandemic, we must reach them in their homes," Dr Kyesi said. "Children under five years of age should also be reached be-

cause when we are fighting against Covid-19 we must also ensure we vaccinate them against other diseases such as measles, polio, diarrhea and others so that we do not get another epidemic eruption."

Earlier, the health centre's midwife nurse, Ipyana Mamwala said every month they receive seven children who are vaccinated against various diseases, and added

that the centre is surrounded by four villages - Sangasanga, New Land, Mkono wa Mara, Mkambarani and Mtego wa Simba itself.

"Mothers still respond to the call of bringing their children for vaccination but we must also go out to reach those who do not come to the centre for vaccination.

The centre's doctor in charge Luambano Ally said due to the

Ministry's caution they took steps to strengthen preventive measures against Covid-19 infections including hand washing facilities at the entrances of the health centre.

"We have also directed that whoever comes to the health centre must wear a mask, and villagers have been abiding by that directive, including washing their hands," Ally said.



Zanzibar's Health minister, Hamad Rashid Mohammed (R), shares a light moment with Chukwani's Zanzibar House of Representatives member Mwanaasha Khamis outside the House on Thursday. Photo: Rahma Suleiman

Malawi's electoral chair resigns ahead of presidential election

LILONGWE

MALAWI Electoral Commission (MEC) chairperson Jane Ansah has announced that she has resigned.

The MEC leader has confirmed the resignation during an exclusive interview with the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation yesterday. She has also disclosed that she has written President Mutharika about the decision.

Ansah said the decision has stemmed from the fact that top courts in Malawi has faulted the commissioners for mismanaging the 2019 presidential election.

The resignation has come after the Ma-

lawi constitutional court in February upheld the opposition leaders' petition and nullified the May 2019 presidential election results on grounds of irregularities including manual alterations and use of tippex on the results sheets to change the figures.

Political commentators and activists are asking President Mutharika to appoint new commissioners for the sake of credibility during the next presidential election.

Malawians are expected to go into polls on June 23 to select a new state president despite the threat of Covid-19.

Meanwhile, office of the district health officer (DHO) workers who recently tested positive to the novel coronavirus (Covid-19)

are refusing institutional quarantine. A visit inside the Kameza Isolation Centre for Covid-19 revealed.

Senior Medical Officer for Blantyre DHO, Dr. Atusaye Mughogho told the press on Wednesday that the two have young children that cannot stay with a caretaker only for two weeks. Mughogho, therefore, said the DHO was still negotiating with the health workers so that they are isolated until another test is done and is proven negative.

"Institutional isolation is proving difficult because the health workers are reluctant. One of them has a two-year old child that cannot be left with a nanny for the fourteen day quarantine period," she said.

The other one is a bread winner and lives with little kids that are two and eight years respectively, according to Mughogho.

"In this case, much as we want to take care of the masses out there, we also need to consider the bond that is there between the workers and their families," said Mughogho.

"We have so far done an immediate inspection of their homes to see if there is no danger of transmitting the disease to other family members and possibility of self-isolation. Their immediate contacts, including the family members have also been tested and have come out negative," she added.

AGENCIES

Govt names five strategies to ensure water transport safety

By Guardian Correspondent, Dodoma

TWENTY years since the MV Bukoba sinking, the government has named five strategies that it had advised to strengthen water transport safety.

The tragic accident occurred on May 21 1996 and nearly 800 people lost their lives in Lake Victoria when the ship that was sailing from Bukoba to Mwanza sank near Bwiru in Mwanza Municipality.

Speaking here yesterday to reporters, the Minister for Works, Transport and Communications Isack Kamwelwe said the government has beefed up lake transport by accomplishing various projects.

He mentioned the projects as including the renovations of two ships in Lake Victoria - MV Victoria and MV Butiama, construction of a dry dock at Mwanza South Port on Lake Victoria.

He said since the MV Bukoba accident the government another strategy is the improvement to the Marine Transport Control Act while also beefing up water transport safety by having in place inspectors' offices from Tanzania Shipping Agencies Ltd (TASAC) in all regions bordering large lakes.

"Such inspections ensure all water vessels have adequate rescue equipment that correspond to the number of people in the vessel and passengers are instructed on how to use them," he said.

Kamwelwe mentioned the third strategy as the improvement to find and rescue operations whereas a centre for such service has

been established in Dar es Salaam.

"The government in collaboration with International Maritime Organization (IMO) has built a centre for the coordination of rescue operations at Dar es Salaam port which is managed by TASAC and is working 24 hours, seven days a week," he said.

The fourth strategy concerned the ports' infrastructures, which Kamwelwe said the government continues to improve at lake ports and the Indian Ocean for safety.

"The fifth strategy is the improvement in training and awarding certificates to sailors, the government has improved the management thereof under the Dar es Salaam Maritime Institute (DMI) in accordance to international protocol, and whose certificates are recognized internationally and enable Tanzania sailors to work in any ship in the world," Kamwelwe said.



The government in collaboration with International Maritime Organization (IMO) has built a centre for the coordination of rescue operations at Dar es Salaam port which is managed by TASAC and is working 24 hours, seven days a week



Same district commissioner Rosemary Senyamule (with pair of scissors) stands ready to launch an outpatients wing at Mtii village dispensary yesterday, with TPB Bank CEO Sabasaba Moshingi (2nd-L) among the witnesses. The bank extended 25m/- in support of the construction of the building. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

5,000 households benefit from 800m/- foundation programme

By Guardian Reporter

MORE than 5,000 households including children's home, widows and people with disabilities will benefit from food assistance worth 800m/- from Nama Foundation and its partners—An-Nahl Trust and Nice Tanzania.

The food items will be distributed to intended groups in Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Coast region, according to the Foundation's coordinator, Hamza Jabir.

Speaking to journalists in Dar es Salaam Jabir said the assistance is meant to support the government efforts against Covid-19, the highly infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. He said the foundation is also set to provide Covid-19 protective gears and medical equipment worth 500m/- . "We will together with our partners provide various goods worth 1.3bn/- in support of the government war against the deadly disease. We are determined to continue supporting poor families especially during the virus outbreak", he noted.

He explained that each of the families will receive 10 kilograms of rice, 10kgs of maize flour, sugar, cooking oil, face masks and hand sanitizers.

On medical equipment, he said they provide personal protective equipment (PPE), oximeters, oxygen concentrator, thermo scanner, special beds for intensive care unit

(ICU) and several others in accordance with government directives.

Jabir said the foundation will start with families located at Mwananyamala area in Kinondoni district where a total of 200 households will be reached. He said identification of the households will be done in collaboration with local government leaders. The event's co-coordinator, Selemu Abdallah acknowledged the support from the government.

He thanked Nama Foundation and its partners— An-Nahl Trust and Nice Tanzania for supporting the vulnerable households during the pandemic outbreak.

The novel coronavirus emerged in China late last year and has so far spread to at least 188 countries in six continents. The World Health Organization (WHO) declaring the outbreak a pandemic.

According to WHO, the symptoms for Covid-19 can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. Those mostly at risks of developing severe symptoms include older citizens and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart diseases.

Preventive measures that are critical to slow the spread of illnesses include social distancing, frequent hand washing with soap and running water or alcohol-based hand rubs.

Obstetric fistula is preventable and can largely be avoided - UNFPA

By Getrude Mbagi

HEALTH stakeholders have urged the government to continue putting considerable investments towards ending obstetric fistula by ensuring that every woman and girl has access to timely and quality maternal health care, including emergency obstetric care.

It is estimated that 3,000 women that develop fistula

every year in the country, fewer get treated and less than a third are not aware of causes of fistula and that it can be cured.

In a media tele-briefing held yesterday, Dr Wilfred Ochan, Deputy Representative the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Tanzania said that it is high time to ensure that every new case of fistula is prevented, and every obstetric fistula patient is treated and

receives the follow-up, social reintegration and rehabilitation support.

According to him, as the World marks International Day to End Obstetric Fistula today, concerted efforts between the government, stakeholders and development partners are still needed to improve maternal services.

He said that the day is marked to raise awareness and to mobi-

lize support around the globe to both prevent and treat this devastating childbirth injury.

"Eliminating fistula is a key element of "leaving no-one behind" and this is more relevant now than ever."

Obstetric fistula is one of the most serious and tragic injuries that can occur during childbirth. It is a hole, or abnormal opening, in the birth canal, that results in chronic leakage of

urine and/or feces. Women with fistula are often shunned by their communities.

He said that UNFPA is committed to ensuring that efforts to end obstetric fistula do not stall especially during Covid-19 pandemic.

"As part of national response efforts - we will continue to prioritize the delivery of safe and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, with

a focus on reaching those furthest behind."

Dr Ochan said that as the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Tanzania and around the world, efforts to end fistula must continue, and its prevention through the provision of comprehensive and lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services must remain a priority in these times of crisis.

"Every day, globally, more than 800 women die from pregnancy-related complications. For every woman who dies, 20 or more are injured or disabled. One of the most serious childbearing injuries is obstetric fistula 2 - a tear in the birth canal caused by prolonged, obstructed labour in the absence of timely and adequate medical care. Those who experience fistula suffer life-shattering consequences including chronic

TARI Ilonga centre produces hybrid sunflower seed varieties

By Correspondent Valentine Oforo, Dodoma

THE Tanzania Agriculture Research Institute (TARI) Ilonga centre has invented three hybrid sunflower seed varieties to be released to farmers in October, this year.

The vital innovation aims to improve production of the important cash crop which is currently cultivated in almost all the regions except Dar es Salaam.

The 2016 Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) report indicates that, sunflower cultivation is the most likely subsector to yield investable opportunities in Tanzania.

But unfortunately, Tanzania has yet reaped more from the economic fortunes of the crop due to several factors, among them, the absence of enough hybrid seed varieties as most farmers are reported to use recycled seeds.

According to experts, increased production of sunflower depends on availability of hybrid seed varieties, excessive processing capacity and the increased demand for edible oil.

National Coordinator for Sunflower Research, Dr Frank Reuben told The Guardian the new seed varieties for the crop include, TARI-ILO 2019 and TARI-NA 2019 which guarantees high yields to farmers.

He said the new seeds are resistant to pests and diseases, but also tolerant to drought condition.

"These are appropriate seed varieties for small scale and large-scale farmers. The reason is that, these seeds allow farmers to produce and distribute them in Quality Declared Seed (QDS) class within their farming community under supervision of the Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI)", Dr Reuben added.

He expressed that the institute was now working round the clock to ensure the varieties become known, accessible and used professionally.

He informed that the potential for expansion of sunflower farming in Tanzania is good since most of the arable land is suitable for growing the crop.

"There are chances for expansion of sunflower farming since we are yet to fully exploit its potential", he noted.

The 2020 map by sunflower production through atlasbig.com shows that Ukraine, Russia Federation, Argentina, China, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary, United States of America, France and Tanzania have been named as the most countries with production and yield as well as sunflower harvested areas.

The source also ranks Tanzania as the leading sunflower producer in Africa.

The seed production at TARI -Ilonga also involves rouging, pollination, and seed stocks maintenance. The seed stock maintenance increases the seed quantity and maintain precisely the specific characteristics of the parent stocks used in seed production.

A basic requirement in the increase of parental stocks is familiarity with their plant types so that a typical plant can be eliminated entirely.

The rouging program involves the removal of off type plants which often are difficult to identify positively because of the normal variation in the variety. Thus, TARI- Ilonga has a well-established producers for the production of quality seed," Dr Reuben observed.



Small trader Ramadhan Rashid packs tomatoes in ten-litre buckets from a vehicle at Nunge in Morogoro municipality earlier this week while waiting for customers. One bucket was fetching 5,000/-, which sources said was much lower than obtained only weeks ago. Photo: Correspondent Frank Kaundula

Govt pledges improvement of aviation sector for cargo transport

By Guardian Reporter

THE government has assured fish traders in Mwanza that it will continue to strengthen the infrastructure and improve the aviation sector to simplify transport of passengers and their cargo within and outside the country.

The assurance was given by the Deputy Minister for works, Transport and Communications eng

Atashasta Ndiye when witnessing the first cargo flight for transport of fish fillets by Ethiopian airlines from Mwanza airport.

"I would like to assure traders that the building for storing goods exists and is of high standard, freight transport also exists as well as the markets hence it is for you to grab this opportunity," he said.

Ndiye said there are also ap-

plications from other airlines to come and airlift cargo from Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA), Julius Nyerere International Airport (JNIA) in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza Airport.

Deputy Minister for Industry and Trade Eng Stella Manyanya said the transport of fish fillets has increased employment and income for the people of Mwanza as more than 15 factories for pro-

cessing fish fillets have been established.

Mwanza Regional Commissioner John Mongella called on traders in Mwanza to have a joint forum to discuss how to improve the products they produce and added that the government was ready to solve all challenges they will submit.

A fish dealer Edwino Oking'o said having more than one airline

to directly airlift fish fillets from Mwanza will enable the products reach customers in time, and added that in the past they used to store their fish until a plane becomes available, or rerouting the cargo via Nairobi.

Ethiopian airlines that has officially started transporting fish fillets, has transported more than 19 tons of the fillets and is the second to do so after RwandAir.

Govt vows to take stern measures against early pregnancies, marriages perpetrators

By Henry Mwangonde, Dodoma

THE government will take serious legal actions against anyone who will be found stirring absenteeism, pregnancies and early marriages to schoolgirls in the country.

In a written response to a question by Special Seats MP, Martha Umbulla, the ministry of education, science and technology said the Education Act chapter 353 with its amendments of 2016 lists a number of punishments for anyone who will be found involved in such practices.

The ministry said: "anyone who will be found in any act that perpetuates such practices shall be subjected to a fine not less than 5m/- or a five years jail term or all of them together," the ministry said quoting the Act.

In her basic question, the MP wanted to know the government's plans to rescue girls from pastoralist communities whom she said were lacking the opportunity to continue with school because they are married at a tender age despite laws stating clearly

on schooling opportunities that girls have.

In response, the ministry said an education circular of 2004 directs all children of school going age to be enrolled, registered, attend and complete their primary education as it is their fundamental right.

The ministry said apart from the laws it has also put in place various initiatives such as free education for primary and secondary education, establishment of learning centres, construction of girls hostels especially in pastoralists communities.

"The construction of hostels protects girls from walking long distances hence also being protected from pregnancies," the ministry said.

The ministry said the government was also working with various stakeholders to educate the public and youths on the side effects of early pregnancies and the importance of creating mechanisms to protect them.

The programme involves provision of long-term impacts of early pregnancies to various groups.



The construction of hostels protects girls from walking long distances hence also being protected from pregnancies," the ministry said.



Ally Mwakababu (R), the National Health Insurance Fund's Tanga regional manager, pictured on Thursday presenting bed sheets to Pangani District Council chairman Seif Ally on Thursday which the fund donated as assistance to the district's government hospital. Looking on (in glasses) is Tanga regional commissioner Martine Shigela. Photo: Correspondent Oscar Kasimiri

AfDB partners SWA in providing water in fighting Covid-19

By Faith Ikade

IN support of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) launched an international campaign, aimed at expanding access to water, sanitation and hygiene in Africa.

The goal is to ensure that water and sanitation systems are available, mobilizing funds to support countries in need and deliver ac-

curate and credible information.

Global partners such as governments, donors, civil society organizations, and other development partners working to ensure that SWA's goals are actualized.

The Hon. Kevin Rudd, SWA's High-level Chair, said that "Access to clean water and sanitation is absolutely crucial to slow the spread of Covid-19."

"This is particularly important in countries with fragile health-

care systems or where social distancing is harder. The support from world leaders for this Call to Action is a strong demonstration of their support for the work of the United Nations' partnership Sanitation and Water for All," Rudd added.

In preventing the spread of Covid-19, water, sanitation, hand hygiene, and social distancing, are paramount.

Covid-19 virus is transmitted

through respiratory droplets or contact. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), washing of hands with water and soap kills the virus.

It also interrupts the transmission of other viruses and bacteria causing common colds, flu, and pneumonia, thus reducing the general burden of disease.

But this can only be made possible when every individual has access to running water in suffi-

cient quantities.

Over 400 million Africans lack access to safe water and nearly 800 million do not have access to basic hand washing facilities. This poses a huge challenge in the fight against Covid-19.

However, the African Development Bank (AfDB) has taken a lead role in African responses to the crisis and its effects.

Last month, the bank released its COVID-19 Response Facility,

which will serve as its primary channel for efforts to address the crisis by providing up to \$10 billion to governments and the private sector. In the last decade, AfDB has invested an estimated \$6.2 billion in water supply and sanitation services and mobilized an estimated \$150 million in climate finance from the Global Environmental Facility and the Green Climate Fund to co-finance water sector projects.

This contribution has led to 52 million Africans gaining access to improved water supply and sanitation services.

The SWA statement emphasizes that "COVID-19 is not the first and will not be the last epidemic that countries will face." It urged African leaders to ensure this threat is not a missed opportunity to achieve the vision of universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene."

Govt paid 2.4bn/- to former employees of Kilombero Sugar Company - Mpango

By Henry Mwangonde, Dodoma

THE government has paid a total of 2.4bn/- as benefits for former employees of the Kilombero Sugar Company whose contracts were terminated after the state privatised the firm in 2000.

Finance and Planning Minister Dr Philip Mpango told the parliament here yesterday in his written response to Mikumi MP Joseph Haule (Chadema) that the payment was only legitimate following the government re-assessment of employees demands.

The minister said the assessment considered clause of the workers' terms of an employment contract and that the payment covered an upfront month salaries, holiday allowance, transport charges, luggage package, a one-month salary for ten years, salary increment arrears and unpaid contribution to social security funds (PPF and NSSF).

"A total of 2,404,984,239/00 was paid to those employees who lost their jobs. But the workers were not satisfied with the government payment pushing for a thorough assessment into the 2000 claims," he said.

The legislator has alleged that some 3,000 employees lost their jobs to the government-ILLOVU investment deal. He said the victims of the deal are yet to be paid their claims two decades since they stopped working for Kilombero sugar company.

When will the government pay their benefits, Haule asked? The minister said the re-assessment revealed that there was a deficit of about 11,830,019/00 in payments that the government had approved as benefits. The workers in their demand claimed they must be paid a long service award worth 1.27bn/- they had in a voluntary agreement with workers' union-OTU and the kilombero sugar management.

Regrettably, Dr Mpango said the government dropped the claims reasoning that the contract did not comply with the productivity and efficiency policy as it also didn't consider any production goals which include increasing productivity and profit maximisation of the company.

"This could have enabled the employees to fully benefits as a reward to their hardworking and diligence," the minister noted.

He stressed that the government had made all the required payments under the law to all former employees of the kilombero sugar company. The finance and planning minister said there are no unsettled claims thus far.



A total of 2,404,984,239/00 was paid to those employees who lost their jobs. But the workers were not satisfied with the government payment



A fishmonger at Dar es Salaam's Magogoni International Fish Market prepares fish for retail sale in the city, as found on Thursday. Photo: Correspondent Miraji Msala

Demolition of 1,194 structures along Msimbazi River was lawful - Zungu

By Henry Mwangonde, Dodoma

THE government explained that the demolition of 1,194 structures in the banks of Msimbazi River in Kinondoni Municipality in Dar es Salaam was a legal exercise.

Kinondoni MP, Maulid Mtulia (CCM) claims that the 2015 exercise crushed at least 690 homes at Magomeni Sunnah, 253 structures at Kawawa, 200 building at Hananasifu and 51 other structures at Mkunguni A but he says "none of the owners were compensated."

He asked why the authorities bulldozed houses of Kinondoni residents without compensation. "When will the affected families receive their benefits after being forced home-

less?" he asked.

In a written response, Minister of State in the Office of the Vice President (Union and Environment) Mussa Azan Zungu detailed that the exercise was conducted in the city between December 17 and 22 and resumed in January 2016 before being suspended indefinitely following some court injunctions.

"We only suspended the exercise to allow court hearings that were lodged by some residents in various courts in the city," the minister said. He noted that the demolition involved seven government authorities.

They include the National Environment Management Council (NEMC), Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlement Developments

Urban Planning Department, Office of the President Regional Administration and Local Governments-Dar es Salaam Municipalities, Ministry of Natural Resource and Tourism (Forestry Unit), The Police Force, the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) and the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service-TISS.

"The demolition of illegal structures was part of developing the Msimbazi river basin in Dar es Salaam," he said. Adding, "the exercise aimed at protecting the lives of the people living in the flood-prone river from losing their lives, properties and destruction of infrastructures."

Zungu insisted that the exercise followed all the legal processes which include assessment of all the structures in risk areas, identifying all the

illegal structures and marking the required structures to be demolished with x-mark and provision of time for tenants to vacate the premises for the exercise.

The minister noted that in addition, state authorities installed beacons for the river basin and shut down all social services including water, electricity and communication.

"I want to inform the lawmaker that the government through the ministry of land has established a complaint desk specifically to all the people who were affected by the exercise," he said. The exercise was run legally, transparent and without prejudice or favouritism as all people with legal demands had been compensated.



CCM Youth Wing secretary general Raymond Mwangwala unveils a plaque in Bahi District on Thursday to launch the construction of the wing's houses. Photo: Peter Mkwavila

Ruvuma to get 58,000 special IDs for small traders this year

By Guardian Correspondent, Songea

RUVUMA Regional Commissioner Christina Mndeme has handed out 9,000 new identity cards to be divided among District Commissioners in the region for onward transmission to petty traders.

She handed out the cards at a short ceremony in Songea mid last week attended by the DCs, regional administrative secretaries, ICT officials, trade officials and the Regional Tanzania Revenue Authority manager.

Speaking at the event, RC Mndeme said president John Magufuli has issued the IDs and for this year Ruvuma Region has received a total of 58,000 IDs and 9,000 have been brought for the first phase while 49,000 will be distributed in the second phase.

She said the IDs will be distributed to petty traders qualified for this year the exercise will be computerized for record keeping of the entrepreneurs and service

providers.

"I am directing trade officers to ensure application forms for the IDs are filled and the money paid thereon - 20,000/- per one ID is banked," she stressed.

She mentioned the number of IDs to be distributed in each district in the first phase with the figure in brackets as- Songea District (3,500), Mbinga (2,000), Tunduru (1,500), Namtumbo (1,000) and Nyasa (1,000).

Earlier, speaking at the event before introducing the regional commissioner, regional administrative officer Steven Ndaki said the aim of the IDs is to simplify the business management of petty traders.

Songea District Commissioner Polelet Mgema said last year his district was given 15,000 IDs and they distributed all of them to the petty traders.

In 2019 President Magufuli handed out 60,000 IDs to Ruvuma Region and by May 19 this year the region managed to hand out 55,607 and collected 1,112,135,000/-.

NIMR and TAAA donate Covid-19 hand washing gear to PWDs in Dar

By Beatrice Philemon

THE National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in collaboration with Tanzania Australia Alumni Association (TAAA) have donated hand washing equipment worth 7.9m/- to people with disabilities in Dar es Salaam.

NIMR Director General, Prof

Yunus Mgaya said on Thursday that the equipment meant to facilitate hand washing as part of prevention measures against Covid-19 was handed over to Ilala Deputy Mayor Omary Kumbilamoto.

The donated equipment includes four hand washing machines, 50 litres of liquid soap and 20 litres of sanitisers.

Mgaya explained that three of the hand washing machines are foot-operated hand one automatic hand washing machine. He said the machines have been designed and manufactured by the University of Dar es Salaam with the support from the Australian government.

"We have come together to show our support to people

with disabilities, it is our hope that people with disabilities will protect themselves from contracting the disease by frequently washing hands with soap and running water," he said. He said the university decided to come up with special hand washing machines for the disabled after realising many challenges they were facing.

The sensor hand washing machines will facilitate hand wash to the group as well as protect them from Covid-19, he said.

He called upon other institutions, individuals and private companies to support vulnerable groups with various Coronavirus protective gears.

Kumbilamoto commended NIMR and TAAA for donating

the machines for people with disabilities. He said the equipment will help control spreading of the disease amongst them.

He further said that the donated equipment will be placed at the busiest markets including Machinga Complex at the Karume market and Ferry fish market at Kivukoni

area. "May I request users to wisely use the equipment due to its importance in the fight against Covid-19," said the deputy mayor. Chairman of Dar es Salaam region Bajaj riders association expressed thanks to NIMR and TAAA for the support calling upon other institutions to emulate the spirit.

TAMWA urges parents to protect children against sexual abuse during Eid el-Fitr fête

By Guardian Reporter

THE Tanzania Media Women Association (Tamwa-Zanzibar) has urged parents and guardians in the Isles to be more careful and close to their children during celebrations of Eid el-Fitr so as to protect them against acts of violence and Covid-19 infections.

Tamwa-Zanzibar is one of the leading non-governmental associations which advocates for child rights in the Indian Ocean archipelago.

In a statement ahead of Eid el Fitr celebration, Dr Mzuri Issa, director of Tamwa Zanzibar advised parents to keep their children at home and stop sending them to greet their relatives as the country still struggles to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Dr Mzuri said that experience has shown that Eid el Fitr is one of the events where cases of violence against children are mostly reported.

According to her, in average five GBV cases are reported on daily basis, and it is estimated that 18 under-five children are being raped.

"So, it is high time parents and guardians protect their children during this time as reports show that children sexual violence doubles during Ramadan."

She said that during Eid el Fitr celebrations, majority of children are usually left without care, something which puts them risk as some children finds themselves in hands of dangerous people.

The official further reminded the public to adhere to the government directives on protective measures against the virus such as frequent hand washing, sanitising, observing social distancing and wearing face masks.

"Protecting yourself and others from the spread of Covid-19, this is our main message to people," she says, adding that coronavirus is deadly but can be prevented and contained.

Physical violence is also experienced by the majority of children in Zanzibar, 71 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls report experiencing physical violence before the age of 18. Relatives and teachers are reported as the most frequent perpetrators of violence against children.

Child abuse in Africa is a major threat to the achievement of the sustainable development goals on the continent and has become increasingly topical with a dramatic increase in recognition and an appreciation of the long term harmful effects on the affected population.



Hilolimus Mahundi (L), a manager with the Weights and Measures Agency in Shinyanga Region, shows journalists on Thursday one of 27 scales seized from a Kahama District businessman for not meeting legal requirements. Photo: Correspondent Marco Maduhu

Itigi to vaccinate 75,000 cattle against anthrax

By Guardian Correspondent, Manyoni

ITIGI Town Council in Manyoni District, Singida Region expects to vaccinate 75,000 cattle against anthrax.

The council's Livestock Development Officer John Chao told the councillors meeting this week that the number of cattle to

be vaccinated is among a total of 120,000 found in the area.

He said the vaccination exercise is expected to begin any time after receiving the vaccine from the zonal offices.

He stressed that the vaccine is a necessity for every herder who will be required to send all their animals during the vaccination

period and steps will be taken against herders who will evade this directive.

Closing the councillors' ordinary meeting, the council's chairman Ally Minja said the council plans a huge vaccination campaign.

He said the benefits from the vaccination include animals'

good health and council's revenue generation.

He also said the council plans to establish new weekly cattle auctions in areas with great activities.

Minja, who is also the councillor of Itigi Ward, said areas where the new auctions are planned to be established include Itagata,

whose auction will take place every Monday and Rungwa where the auction will take place every Saturday.

"I ask the management to go out and work on the modalities so that the auctions begin and our hope is that once they start operating the council's income will be beefed up.

Protecting yourself and others from the spread of Covid-19, this is our main message to people," she says, adding that coronavirus is deadly but can be prevented and contained

TARURA commended for renovating damaged roads

By Guardian Reporter

TANZANIA Rural and Urban Roads Agency has continued to restore road communications in various areas in the country that had been destroyed by rains.

For Dodoma and Manyara regions, communication continues to be restored in Babati, Mbulu and Kondoa districts.

TARURA Manager for Babati District Eng said Mikongomi said already communication has been restored in various areas and people were continuing with their economic activities.

A resident of Mafuta area in Babati said people had great difficulties when crossing the Masware Bridge after its embankment collapsed but as of now it is rectified and now people can cross without difficulties.

In Mbulu District road communication has already been restored and people are moving about without hardships.

Mbulu District Executive Director (DED) Hudson Kamoga said in special interviews that the

areas of the roads that had been destroyed by rains are now passable.

He said work done by TARURA has greatly assisted the people as TARURA experts have been arriving promptly whenever a challenge comes up. "I take this opportunity to congratulate President John Magufuli and his government in general for establishing TARURA as they never delay whenever a road becomes impassable due to rains," he said.

TARURA Manager for Mbulu District Eng Nuru Hondo said work in restoring road communication in the district continues and already many areas are now reachable by road.

In Kondoa District, Dodoma Region, road communication has already been restored whereas the Kalamba bridge has already been repaired and people are now using it without difficulties.

Speaking in a special interview TARURA Manager for Kondoa District Eng Goodluck Mbanga said the rains had cut off communications at Kalamba bridge but now it is already repaired.



Psychologist Sadaka Gandhi (L) and Bongo Flava artiste Mwasiti Almasi (R) address students in Singida Region earlier this week at a Kipepeo National Campaign platform that is used to relay inspirational messages meant to influence the behaviour of adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) and adolescent boys. The messages are designed specifically boost awareness on HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment as well as minimising the incidence of unwanted pregnancies. The campaign is a project under the Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children ministry and is jointly funded by the Global Fund, Tanzania's National Aids Control Programme and the Benjamin Mkapa Foundation. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

Three banks deploy agents in Musoma villages, physical branches to follow

By Correspondent Sabato Kasika

In efforts to bring closer financial services to the under-served rural communities three banks have set up agents in some villages in Musoma District, Mara Region to enable the communities access key financial services, boost rural financial and inclusive economy.

Musoma District commissioner Dr Vincent Anney said this in an interview with The Guardian while speaking about various development strategies being implemented in the district.

According to him, the banks - NMB, CRDB and NBC have deployed the agents as they are preparing to build branches that will be providing more services.

"Witnessing major banks setting up agents in rural and under-served communities is a huge step towards promoting inclusive economy," said Dr Anney.

He further explained that NMB agents are currently in the villages of Bukima and Mugango while of CRDB are in the villages of Saragana, Seka, Bukima and

Mugango. Dr Anney named the other villages, which are expected to acquire NMB and CRDB agents in the future as Bwai, Busekela, Etaro and Nyambono, adding that NBC will start in Murangi village.

"Perhaps I should clarify that Musoma district is made up of Musoma Municipal and Musoma District councils which have

68 villages whose residents rely on financial services in the city, this force them to travel long distances seeking for financial services in town," he said.

The introduction of these services, he said, will help them not to travel longer distances to follow the services as it was in the past, the presence of such banking agents is a positive step.

"For example, the residents of Busekela and other local areas, have been traveling more than 90 Kilometres to pursue financial services in the city but can now access the services in their surrounding areas," he added.

The presence of such agents in some villages, he said, was a concerted effort by various stakeholders including Musoma Ru-

ral MP, Prof Sospeter Muhongo who has been collaborating with the government to promote development. "This MP has been campaigning to encourage the presence of banks in his constituency to facilitate the provision of financial services and they are now putting agents in place to prepare themselves for bank buildings," he said.

Persons with albinism call on govt to station dermatologists across all regional hospitals

By Beatrice Philemon

THE Tanzania Albinism Society (TAS) has called on the government to deploy enough dermatologists in each region referral hospital so as to provide intensive medical care to Persons with Albinism (PwA) in the country.

TAS's Secretary General, Mussa Kabimba made the remarks yesterday while briefing journalists on the 40th anniversary of Advocating for the Rights and Dignity of person with disabilities that will be held on June 13th this year.

A dermatologist is a doctor that specialises in treating skin, hair, nail, and mucous membrane disorders and diseases. They can also address cosmetic issues, helping to revitalize the appearance of the skin, hair, and nails.

"We need dermatologists in each region referral hospital because majority of persons with albinism from poor families are dying due to skin cancer and others due to albinism-related health problems as they can't afford to pay for transport costs to travel from where they are to access quality medical services in major cities such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza and Arusha," he said.

Kabimba said that whenever they seek quality services, persons with disabilities have to go to Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI), Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre (KCMC) and Mwanza.

"As a result right now most patients are opting for traditional healers to save their lives something which risks their health," he added.

He noted that the number of people who are dying of skin cancer and other albinism-related health problems each year is very high.

He said that in 2018/2019 a total of 18 PwAs died from skin cancer and other albinism-related health problems according to the data from ORCI.

For his part, TAS's treasurer, Abdillah Omary added that due to COVID-19 pandemic, people with albinism will mark the 40th anniversary in Dar es Salaam through media organisations, social media and the climax will be held on June 13, this year.

Omary further urged the government to remove tax on imported goods used by PwA such as sunscreen lotions, boots or shoes, caps, vehicles and long sleeved clothes to protect them from ultraviolet rays of the sun.

He said TAS was officially registered in 1980 and so far TAS has extended its services in 100 district councils in 24 regions in Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar and they are working with people with albinism in Zanzibar.

The National Population and Housing Census 2012 report indicate that Tanzania has 16,376 people with albinism. So far the society has managed to reach a total of 13,364; among those 6,513 are men while the remained 6,851 are women.

Elaborating on achievements, Omary said that so far TAS has managed to strengthen good relationship with local and international stakeholders in a bid to combat discrimination against PwA and enable the society live healthier life.



Kondoa district executive director Mustapha Yusuf (L) has an audience with development stakeholders in his office yesterday. Photo: Correspondent Ibrahim Joseph

TRCS launches campaign on Covid-19 in Njombe Region

By Guardian Correspondent, Njombe

TANZANIA Red Cross Society (TRCS) has launched a plan for providing education on the prevention measures against Covid-19 infections in Njombe Region so as to reduce the disease's infection rate in the country.

Speaking soon after the launch the TRCS president David Kihenzile said since the government had already started work in such education, they have also seen the need to beef up strength and assist the gov-

ernment.

He said they continue to offer such services in nearly all regions of the country with the exception of not more than three regions to cover the whole country.

He said: "For Njombe Region we will cover all six districts, 107 wards, 18 divisions, 381 villages and their 82 areas, we shall cover residential areas and those with huge gatherings of people, we are not introducing new measures but we will increase our voice to the citizens on preventive meas-

ures to take against the pandemic," he said.

On behalf of the TRCS Secretary the Evaluation Manager for Epidemics Simon Kadogosa beseeched on Tanzanians to abide by guidelines from health experts against Covid-19 infections, and added that one method they will employ is the use of placards, flyers, loudspeakers and brochures to get the message across.

"We shall bring up to 4,000 placards that will be erected in various areas, 14,000 flyers that will be distributed in the whole

region and we shall use loudspeakers in strategic areas for those who cannot read," Kadogosa said.

Njombe District Commissioner Ruth Msafiri who was the guest of honour at the event said the fight against the pandemic is not to be undertaken by leaders only but by every citizen, and they should do so while working.

"We continue to educate the public but we must also have faith in God, we must also increase efforts in taking precaution-

US Covid-19 deaths compared to other diseases, pandemics and wars

By Robert Roy Britt

STATISTICS don't tell the whole story of Covid-19, and cherry-picking one set of numbers and presenting them in a vacuum can be misleading. But the number of Covid-19 deaths in the United States has now exceeded the country's deaths from the entire Vietnam War and the worst full flu seasons in the past 50 years - with more surely to come and many states are opening their economies back up.

Accordingly, I sought some perspective on deaths in relation to total population figures at the time various events occurred. The chart (updated this May 21) is not intended to shed light on how or when physical distancing and other Covid-19 preventive measures should be relaxed. It is, rather, just an interesting way of looking at the numbers, and only at a moment in time.

However, if the current pace of roughly 1,800 deaths per day continues through the end of May, which many epidemiologists expect it will (it may even be higher in June), the Covid-19 death toll will exceed the combined total for the Korean and Vietnam wars, and it will be higher than any single flu season since the 1918-1919 pandemic.

Note that the actual total of Covid-19 deaths is almost surely higher than the tally presented here, given that as of as many as 9,000 deaths in the country that were likely due to the disease but were not recorded as such.

This is according to a study by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published on April 28. And on May 11, the CDC said another 5,000 deaths in New York City, from March through May, may have been caused by Covid-19 but not officially counted as such.

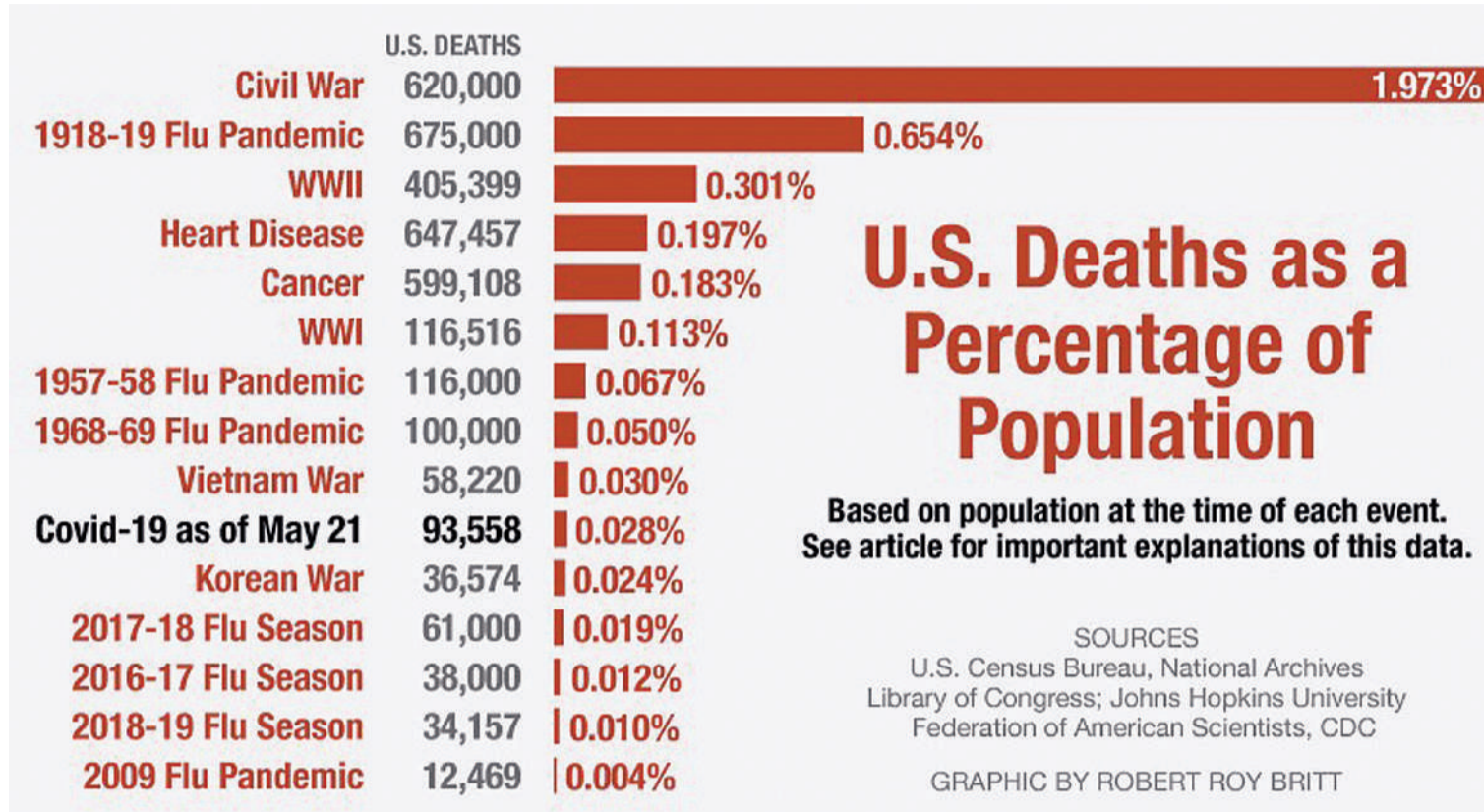
Meanwhile, there are lots of interesting numbers and facts behind these data. Of all these events, only the Civil War killed more than 1 per cent of the population that existed at the time.

If you projected that death percentage to today - not that this is relevant, it's just interesting - the toll would be 6.5 million people.

Likewise, if you projected the death percentage from the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic to today, 2.2 million Americans would die - again, just interesting, not a projection, though some historians and infectious disease experts see the multiple waves of that pandemic as a cautionary tale.

What really kills us

There's also much to ponder as it relates to what kills most people year after year, including largely preventable



causes like heart attacks.

Heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death in the US in any year, far outpacing other diseases, accidents, modern wars and other violence.

Here are the percentages of US deaths from the Top 10 causes based on the most recent year fully analysed (2017): heart disease: 23.0 per cent; cancer: 21.3 per cent; accidents/unintentional injuries: 6.0 per cent; chronic lower respiratory diseases: 5.7 per cent; strokes and cerebrovascular diseases: 5.2 per cent; Alzheimer's disease: 4.3 per cent; diabetes: 3.0 per cent; flu and pneumonia: 2.0 per cent; kidney disease: 1.8 per cent; suicide: 1.7 per cent.

All told, those ten causes account for about three-quarters of deaths, and the percentages don't vary by much from year to year - though Covid-19 could add a twist to the 2020 figures.

Were these the percentages you'd expect?

In fact, many people don't realise what kills most of us.

A recent survey found that humans tend to underestimate the percentage of people who die from heart disease and overestimate deaths by car crashes and violence.

Researchers say there's some deep psychology to our tendency to inflate the likelihood of dramatic events, in part due to vivid imagery in the news or in fiction. The reality is that we're more likely to die from a bathroom fall than to go down in an airplane or be murdered by terrorists.

Flu deaths overstated

Another important number behind the numbers, one that is sometimes stated incorrectly is that the average number of US flu deaths for the past

nine seasons (2010-2011 through 2018-2019) is 37,461.

The range is 12,000 to 61,000. That means Covid-19, in the space of about three months, has killed more people than any of the last nine flu seasons. Exactly when the coronavirus began circulating in the US has been questioned, but the earliest death is thought to have occurred on February 6.

However, annual flu deaths are always estimated by the CDC, rather than involving firm numbers. The reported figures involve complex mathematics and assumptions about unreported cases.

A new analysis by Jeremy Faust, MD,

who practises emergency medicine at Brigham & Women's Hospital, suggests that the CDC grossly overstates flu deaths and therefore Covid-19 has so far "killed between 9.5 and 44 times more people than seasonal flu".

More deaths ahead

By all estimates, this pandemic is far from over. Since April 2, more than 1,000 people have died each day in the US from Covid-19. On at least ten days, the toll exceeded 2,000 - more than the average daily death rate for heart disease. The daily death toll has seemingly plateaued as of early May, but the number of new cases is rising.

But as states loosen stay-at-home orders and businesses open up, an internal document from the US Department of Homeland Security obtained by The New York Times and published on May 4 projected about 3,000 daily deaths by June 1.

The document included the logos of the CDC and the US Department of Health & Human Services, though it's not clear who the document was created for or how widely it had been shared within the federal government.

NPR reports that the document contained one of several forecasts that were under development and was an unfinished work in progress.

Several leading epidemiologists meanwhile expect additional waves of Covid-19 infections, which could mean involving a large wave this fall or multiple smaller waves. Either way, they expect peaks and valleys lasting into 2022.

A Luminare dispatch by Robert Roy Britt, former editor-in-chief of Live Science and Space.com and author of the science thriller "5 Days to Landfall."

As Covid-19 burns, world's forgotten wars continue to take toll on civilians

JUBA

EARLIER this year, just before the coronavirus virtually shut down international travel, I sat under a mesquite tree and listened to a rambling speech by a South Sudanese general at a military base outside of the capital, Juba.

I was in that war-weary country to investigate violations of the arms embargo, which is up for renewal by the United Nations Security Council this month. The embargo is about two years old, and though it hasn't solved every problem, violence and human rights abuses have significantly decreased in the country since the main torrent of guns and ammunition was choked off.

That day, I had come to see the commander of the dusty improvised camp at Gorom brief a party of diplomats and international ceasefire monitors on his progress training South Sudan's newly established VIP Protection Force.

But instead, the general rattled off a litany of complaints - not enough supplies, not even bedding to sleep on. He said this while seated in front of a wall of unopened cardboard boxes, ten feet tall and forty feet long, all stuffed with sleeping mats donated by Japan.

There was a certain "which do you believe, me or your lying eyes?" quality to the presentation.

I wasn't there for logistical gripes, though. I was there to find out if their weapons were newly shipped in, and thus broke the embargo, and so when the general said he had four shipping containers full of small arms that he had collected from his soldiers as part of the disarmament process, I was interested.

I made it to twelve military training camps in South Sudan, and this was the only one with a nominally established armory. This was my best chance yet.

But when one of the general's officers opened the four containers for me, they weren't filled with guns. Instead they were stacked to the ceiling with bags of rice and durra, a kind of grain. These units weren't disarming. They were hedging their bets against a return to war.

The general was unapologetic. "These are the forces that will impose the peace in Juba," he said. "These soldiers are the backbone of this peace."

He said out loud what many fear: that even after so much bloodshed in South Sudan's civil war, when given the chance



Images taken when Amnesty's South Sudan researcher and Crisis Response team's arms and military operations investigator visited 12 military training sites in South Sudan in early 2020 to document violations of the UN arms embargo. They also witnessed evidence of child soldiers being used and diversion of arms. File photo

at a negotiated settlement, the generals will still search for peace at the end of a rifle.

On March 23rd, in the face of a mounting global health crisis, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a global ceasefire. Suffice it to say it was not heeded.

As the coronavirus spreads around the world, South Sudan is not the only place where a pandemic disease is poised to run rampant through a state of endemic conflict. Officially, South Sudan has only a few dozen cases. So too places like Syria, though as we have come to know, this is mostly a function of testing.

Meanwhile, in Yemen the number of cases is skyrocketing, and in Somalia, gravediggers in the capital can't keep up

with the surge in demand and the number of cases in Shabab-controlled territory is unknown.

Adding the coronavirus to these ongoing conflicts will only increase human suffering, and yet, at a time when the world could join together to confront Covid-19, so many wars continue to take their toll on civilians.

The Syrian government and Russian air force have in recent months continued to bomb schools and hospitals around Idlib. In the civil war in Libya, outside powers from Turkey to the United Arab Emirates have pumped in enough mercenaries and materiel that civilian casualties, from artillery and airstrikes, have actually increased since the start of 2020.

Across the Sahel, from Mali to northern Nigeria and Cameroon, and elsewhere in Africa, as far south as Mozambique, armed groups who have pledged allegiance to the group calling itself Islamic State are burning villages and beheading civilians.

And in western Myanmar, where the government's crimes against humanity forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, the military and Rakhine rebels continue to fight; in April, a World Health Organization worker driving coronavirus samples was killed in the crossfire.

And violence continues in South Sudan as well, as a fringe rebel group continues their fight against the government and longstanding inter-communal

rivalries breed abductions and gun-fights. Meanwhile, victims and survivors of mass atrocities during the conflict continue to be denied justice.

Fueling this instability and impunity are continued violations of the UN arms embargo. During our investigation, we found recently manufactured Chinese ammunition in the hands of the feared National Security Service.

We found the government's fleet of heavily armed Mi-24 attack helicopters, broken before the embargo was established, newly fixed and flying, ready to be used again to attack civilians as they had during the civil war. We found Kalashnikovs from Eastern Europe, some even made in the old East Germany, newly imported and in the hands of

government forces and opposition alike.

The civil war in South Sudan was decidedly low-tech, and featured horrific atrocities, including hundreds of people gathered up and gunned down in mass executions, often along ethnic lines.

But while the arms embargo has proven no panacea, since its adoption in July of 2018 there has not been a single documented large-scale massacre of civilians, certainly not of the scale seen in the early days of the conflict.

Some fighting and human rights violations continue, but nothing compared to what we saw before the embargo in 2014, back when tens of millions of rounds of ammunition were being shipped in at a time.

The fight against Covid-19 has been described as a war. I don't think that framing is accurate or helpful at all; I bet most of us who have experienced the chaotic messy violence of human beings killing each other would agree.

Wars destroy, but the response to a pandemic requires the opposite; an act of building, creating a resilient society where we take care of each other. And we have a common inhuman foe outside ourselves to mobilize against: a grotesque ball of goo covered in spikes.

Unfortunately, at the UN, the old divisions threaten this unifying opportunity. The rift between China and the United States has stalled a resolution on a 90-day humanitarian ceasefire that would allow for Covid medical aid to reach civilians.

And the question of arms embargoes gets wrapped up in discussions of dropping sanctions generally. Though they are considered by the same council, the arms embargo should not be seen as punitive in nature.

It is not a targeted sanction, it is a necessary tool for curbing human rights violations by all parties, and could not possibly be misconstrued as impeding a country's ability to treat Covid-19.

We face an uphill battle to get the South Sudan arms embargo, but there is still space for hope. The UN Security Council can move with purpose and good will and see the obvious truth: guns don't vanquish a disease.

At the start of the coronavirus outbreak, South Sudan was a place that had more attack helicopters than ventilators. It makes no sense to lift an arms embargo on a fragile country with a legacy of impunity for war crimes and a looming public health challenge.

If you really will have to travel, should you take a plane or car?

BY ALEXANDRA SIFFERLIN

THE Covid-19 pandemic has thrown a wrench into the summer plans of people around the world. Right now many places have stay-at-home orders that largely restrict travel.

However, as states begin lifting these restrictions or people need to move, there are questions about the safest way to do so. Is it better to take a road trip but risk stops along the way? Or is it better to take an airplane and spend hours in tight quarters with strangers?

"Any form of travel at this current time in the Covid-19 pandemic involves risk. Knowing the most up-to-date information regarding the virus and travel restrictions is critical," says Dr Jill Weatherhead, an assistant professor of tropical medicine and infectious diseases at Baylor College of Medicine.

Weatherhead says that taking public forms of transportation like buses, trains or planes can undoubtedly mean close exposure to more people in different areas of the country.

"While waiting within airports, bus spots and train stations as well as while riding in planes, buses and trains, practising social distancing as much as possible; disinfecting highly touched surfaces such as seats,

trays, armrests; and wearing a facial covering may help reduce viral transmission during travel," she says.

What about the lack of airflow on a plane? "Modern planes are equipped with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters which filter particles from recycled air, reducing risk of viral spread through the air," says Weatherhead, adding: "However, it won't necessarily prevent droplet or contaminated surface transmission of the virus if in close contact with sick individuals."

Dr Robin Patel, president of the American Society for Microbiology, takes a stronger stance on flying, saying: "Travelling in your own car, either by yourself or with members of your household, is certainly safer than traveling by airplane right now in terms of acquiring Covid-19."

"Even with physical distancing measures on an airplane, there is a risk of exposure to Covid-19 due to the sheer number of people not from the same household sharing the same space," she adds.

Patel says that because Covid-19 can be spread from people without symptoms or people who haven't yet developed symptoms, there's no easy way to know who might be carrying it.

She elaborates: "Having air travellers wear a mask, proper

cleaning surfaces in airports and on planes, and washing your hands regularly can help, of course, but if you're alone or with others from your household in your own car, there's really little risk of acquiring Covid-19 there; it's pretty much like being at home."

Weatherhead meanwhile says that while driving may reduce close contact with large groups of people, "driving requires frequent stops with exposures at restaurants, rest stops and filling stations."

Her advice: "Ensure that everyone in the car is from the same household. Reducing stops and washing hands regularly may also prevent spread of infection while on road trips."

The bottom line is that any transportation is going to come with a set of risks, especially if you're attempting to travel across states or for a long period of time. In some cases, the distance may make the decision easier. In any situation, try to stay spread apart from others, keep washing your hands, and wear your mask and seat belt.

Alexandra Sifferlin is editor of Medium's Covid-19 Blog, Deputy Editor, Elemental. She was previously with TIME Magazine, and has covered epidemics including MERS, Ebola and Zika.



Covid-19: China tells world health assembly they did their best

UNITED NATIONS

THIS week's 73rd World Health Assembly had member states adopt a resolution to review the global response to the coronavirus pandemic. The World Health Organisation (WHO) will also undergo an evaluation for its response to the outbreak.

At the virtual assembly, Chinese President Xi Jinping outlined China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying they did their "best to stem cross-border transmission" and to help other countries in need. He said in that China supported the idea of a "comprehensive review" of the world's response to the pandemic, once it has been contained, in order to measure efficiencies of the responses.

"This work should be based on science and professionalism, led by WHO and conducted in an objective and impartial manner," Xi said, adding that "solidarity and cooperation" are the strongest way to defeat the virus.

Xi also announced that China would fund \$2 billion over the next three years, with a focus on developing countries, to support their efforts to combat COVID-19.

China's response to COVID-19 has also come under heavy scrutiny, especially as reports continue to emerge that China may have a significantly higher number of COVID-19 cases than the country's data shows.

President of the assembly, Keva Bain from the Bahamas, lauded the WHO and its director Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, calling his leadership through this time "inspiring."

"This era of COVID-19 ushers in new technology," she added. "It requires new knowledge, new innovations, flexibility, [and] meaningful, respectful country interactions as well as new and greater global partnerships."

Harsh criticism from US

The assembly ended on the heels of United States President Donald Trump presenting his letter to Tedros, which defended cutting support to the organisation in April.

In the letter posted on Twitter, Trump claimed the WHO did not maintain the same level of scrutiny for China as it did for the U.S. and that its failure to hold China accountable for its lack of transparency regarding data of its COVID-19 cases has "been extremely costly for the world".

However, some experts believe that such harsh criticism of the WHO at this time could be problematic.

Dr. Jennifer Huang Bouey, a senior researcher at the Center for Asia and Pacific Policy, told IPS that the WHO has played a key role in containing a virus that is so global. "I found it very unfortunate that this happened at this moment because WHO is in a primary position to do the coordination and the technical support for a disease that can cross borders," she told IPS. "This is exactly the time that countries need to work together and help countries that have weaker systems."

Bouey's research has focused on how China's public health response has been shaped since it first addressed the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis almost two decades ago. SARS is also a viral respiratory disease, caused by the SARS coronavirus or SARS-CoV.

"During SARS there was no data-collection system at all," she said, "but after SARS the government put in a lot of funding to centralise the surveillance system."

She attributed China's failure to respond appropriately in part to the miscommunication between local and central government, belonging to a "very top-down system" where locals don't want to be held accountable for an emerging disease.

Regardless, she said the disease is "ruthlessly revealing" some of the problems at both country level and international level, and that WHO should not be blamed for its initial response in January, because the scale of the pandemic was not fully realised at that point.

Way forward

Meanwhile, other experts have said what will make a difference is how these current reactions translate to proper action in the future.



People wearing face masks at a Bus stop in Macau, China near a public hospital. This week's 73rd World Health Assembly had member states adopt a resolution to review the global response to the coronavirus pandemic. File photo Covid-19: China tells world health assembly they did their best

"It is one thing to talk about diagnostic tests, medicines and vaccines being universally, timely and equitably available, but if countries and multilateral institutions providing funding to developers do not do so with the necessary strings attached, then these will re-

main words on paper and will not translate into medicines in health care providers' and patients' hands," Katy Athersuch, a senior policy adviser at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Access Campaign, told IPS.

She said that it's crucial that data and technology being

used to test and document the cases are "openly shared to ensure that production can take place on the scale that is needed in order to provide for people everywhere in the world, not just for those in the highest income countries."

Bouey echoed a similar sentiment, and said there are lessons every

country can take from the crisis.

"We're always in the cycle of either neglect or panic, so whether COVID-19 can help us overcome that – to put into a plan, or regulation, [to see] whether these surveillance systems are still sensitive and whether we are still up to date on the strategies for a pandemic – these are lessons for every state and also for international organisations."

New study warns of Covid-19 impact on cardiovascular health

BRIGHTON, UK

A NEW study shows that a significant number of people who develop coronavirus disease 19 (Covid-19) may experience serious cardiovascular complications. Moreover, some possible treatments of the respiratory disease could end up harming cardiovascular health.

As they assessed data from people who received medical care for Covid-19, researchers recently started paying attention to the relationship between the disease and cardiovascular symptoms.

In April, the journal Radiol-

ogy published several studies showing a link between Covid-19 deaths and the occurrence of blood clots that impair circulation, an issue that increases the risk of life-threatening medical events.

Meanwhile, a review of available evidence indicates that Covid-19 is sometimes associated with serious cardiovascular outcomes, including heart failure and heart attacks, as well as blood clots.

"In writing this article, we hope to increase emergency physicians' knowledge and awareness of this new pathogen and its impact on the car-

diovascular system," says a co-author of the review, Dr. William Brady, of the University of Virginia School of Medicine, in Charlottesville.

He adds: "As we encounter more and more patients with Covid-19-related illness, we are increasing our understanding of its impact on the body in general and the cardiovascular system in particular. The rate of learning on this area is amazingly rapid. Information continues to change weekly, if not daily."

Dr. Brady and colleagues report their findings in a paper that appears in *The American*

Journal of Emergency Medicine. The researchers assessed the evidence presented in 45 studies that mentioned Covid-19 and a potential link with cardiovascular effects.

In the existing research, the investigators found associations between Covid-19 and myocardial injury, heart attacks, acute heart failure, abnormal heartbeats, and venous thromboembolism – or blood clotting.

Dr. Brady and colleagues write that, based on the evidence, myocardial injury with an elevated level of troponin, a key protein, "may occur in

7-17% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 and 22-31% of those admitted to the intensive care unit."

Myocardial injury refers to heart problems associated with an abnormally high level of troponin, a protein involved in the regulation of heart muscle contractions.

In addition, the researchers say that people with Covid-19 may also face a risk of heart attacks and that heart failure may already be present in a significant number of people who enter the hospital with Covid-19.

Finally, the investigators note that, according to the evi-

dence so far, people with COVID-19 have "an increased risk" of blood clots forming inside blood vessels, an important risk factor for strokes.

Aside from these findings, Dr. Brady and colleagues draw attention to possible interactions between drugs currently being tested as Covid-19 treatments and medication administered for cardiovascular problems.

One example is that of hydroxychloroquine, which interacts with drugs used to regulate the heartbeat.

In some Covid-19 patients, hydroxychloroquine "may cause direct myocardial toxicity" and

"worsen cardiomyopathy," a problem that can lead to heart failure, the researchers write.

Another drug that doctors should administer with caution to people with Covid-19, according to the researchers, is remdesivir, which could lead to abnormal heart rhythms, called arrhythmias, and low blood pressure, known as hypotension.

"As we gain more experience with this new pathogen (SARS-CoV-2, the new coronavirus), we realize that its adverse impact extends beyond the respiratory system," says Dr. Brady.

African nations warm to crop biotechnology for potential in boosting of food security

By Joseph Gakpo

THOUGH only a few African countries are now growing genetically modified (GM) crops commercially, governments across the continent are increasingly recognizing the crucial role that biotechnology can play in improving food security.

In response, African governments are moving to establish an enabling policy framework to support adoption of biotechnology, including GM crops and derived products, according to a paper published in *Frontiers in Plant Science* by John Komen and five other scientists working in Africa.

"While modern biotechnology and, specifically, genetic modification are subject of debate in many parts of the world, an increasing number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are making important strides towards authorizing general releases of genetically modified (GM) crop varieties for use by farmers and agribusinesses," the paper noted.

"Our review confirmed that an increasing number of African governments are making steady, in some cases rapid, progress in establishing science-based, functional biosafety systems," Komen, an advisor to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), told the *Alliance for Science*.

Documented economic and environmental benefits from planting GM crops – based on a track record of over two decades – are a major driver in the decision-making process, the paper said.

Currently, only farmers in South Africa, Swaziland and Sudan are growing GM crops commercially. Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and Kenya have approved the release of GM crops, but just the latter two countries have begun the rollout to farmers. About a dozen other African countries have GM crop research projects under way, with some of the experiments ongoing for more than a decade now.

Case studies from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda highlighted in the paper show broader agricultural policies in these countries are encouraging support for GM crops on the continent because the policies are science focused.

The Nigerian government's new agricultural roadmap – launched in 2016 as the "Green Alternative" – aims to build "an agribusiness economy capable of delivering sustained prosperity" and has encouraged the country's recent decisions to authorize the commercial release of two GM crops – insect-resistant Bt cotton and cowpea.

Ghana's "One-District-One-Factory" industrialization policy and its "Planting for Food and Jobs" program, which is

making improved seeds and other inputs available to farmers, have also provided clear guidance to technology developers who are testing and planning the release of GM crops in the country.

Kenya's "Vision 2030," an overarching development policy aimed at helping to lift the country's population into middle-income through agriculture, accelerated the recent approval of Bt cotton.

Related article: Famous chemist Bruce Ames a chemical industry apologist, anti-GMO group claims

Uganda's "Plan for Modernization of Agriculture," adopted some 20 years ago, also recognizes the potential of GM crops, the paper said. However, the nation's president has waffled in approving the biosafety bill adopted by Parliament.

In addition to the supportive policy initiatives sketched above, these countries have invested in establishing functional regulatory frameworks for GM crops, allowing decision makers to weigh potential benefits against potential adverse effects on the environment and human or animal health, the paper noted. A science-based and practical regulatory framework has become an important enabling factor for countries researching and adopting GM crops, the authors said.

"In countries that were selected as case studies for this article, there has been progress in recent years in establishing functional national biosafety frameworks and growing expertise in GMO decision-making," the paper said. These examples confirm that, increasingly, governments in Africa can adjust their regulatory decision-making processes based on accrued scientific evidence.

Political challenges

Despite the above potential, actual progress has so far been slow. Some African countries are having to deal with pressure from groups opposed to modern biotechnology, which are advocating against the introduction of GM crops.

"Many governments experience political opposition to GM crops and modern agriculture generally," the paper observed. "Political opposition is in most cases fuelled by anti-GM activism, which has slowed down or halted the adoption of biosafety legislation."

There are many examples where, in the final stages of the decision-making process, political support for the introduction of GM crops often wavers, Komen said. "This is not only because different government agencies need to cooperate and coordinate around commercial release decisions... but also because pressure increases from activists and anti-development NGOs who stir up



controversy on GMOs in local media, in politics, and even in courtrooms," he explained.

An uncertain regulatory environment discourages private and public sector investment into development of the pro-poor crops and traits that farmers need the most, the paper noted. Additionally, many of these countries lack capacity to design and implement biosafety regulations. This creates a significant barrier to testing and adopting new crop varieties, including those developed by genome editing and other plant breeding innovations, which would open new opportunities to grow more food, enhance incomes and reduce the environmental impact of agriculture. Though only a few African countries are now growing genetically modified (GM) crops commercially, governments across the continent are increasingly recognizing the crucial role that biotechnology can play in improving food security.

In response, African governments are moving to establish an enabling policy framework to support adoption of biotechnology, including GM crops and derived products, according to a paper published in *Frontiers in Plant Science* by John Komen and five other scientists working in Africa.

"While modern biotechnology and, specifically, genetic modification are subject of debate in many parts of the world, an increasing number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are making important strides towards authorizing general releases of genetically modified (GM) crop varieties for use by farmers and agribusinesses," the paper noted.

"Our review confirmed that an increasing number of African governments are making steady, in some cases rapid, progress in establishing science-based, functional biosafety systems," Komen, an advisor to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), told the *Alliance for Science*.

Documented economic and environmental benefits from planting GM crops – based on a track record of over two decades – are a major driver in the decision-making process, the paper said.

Currently, only farmers in South Africa, Swaziland and Sudan are growing GM crops commercially. Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and Kenya have approved the release of GM crops, but just the latter two countries have begun the rollout to farmers. About a dozen other African countries have GM crop research projects

under way, with some of the experiments ongoing for more than a decade now.

Case studies from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda highlighted in the paper show broader agricultural policies in these countries are encouraging support for GM crops on the continent because the policies are science focused.

The Nigerian government's new agricultural roadmap – launched in 2016 as the "Green Alternative" – aims to build "an agribusiness economy capable of delivering sustained prosperity" and has encouraged the country's recent decisions to authorize the commercial release of two GM crops – insect-resistant Bt cotton and cowpea.

Ghana's "One-District-One-Factory" industrialization policy and its "Planting for Food and Jobs" program, which is making improved seeds and other inputs available to farmers, have also provided clear guidance to technology developers who are testing and planning the release of GM crops in the country.

Kenya's "Vision 2030," an overarching development policy aimed at helping to lift the country's population into middle-income through agriculture, accelerated the recent approval of Bt cotton.

Uganda's "Plan for Modernization of Agriculture," adopted some 20 years ago, also recognizes the potential of GM crops, the paper said. However, the nation's president has waffled in approving the biosafety bill adopted by Parliament.

In addition to the supportive policy initiatives sketched above, these countries have invested in establishing functional regulatory frameworks for GM crops, allowing decision makers to weigh potential benefits against potential adverse effects on the environment and human or animal health, the paper noted. A science-based and practical regulatory framework has become an important enabling factor for countries researching and adopting GM crops, the authors said.

"In countries that were selected as case studies for this article, there has been progress in recent years in establishing functional national biosafety frameworks and growing expertise in GMO decision-making," the paper said. These examples confirm that, increasingly, governments in Africa can adjust their regulatory decision-making processes based on accrued scientific evidence.

Despite the above potential, actual progress has so far been

slow. Some African countries are having to deal with pressure from groups opposed to modern biotechnology, which are advocating against the introduction of GM crops.

"Many governments experience political opposition to GM crops and modern agriculture generally," the paper observed. "Political opposition is in most cases fuelled by anti-GM activism, which has slowed down or halted the adoption of biosafety legislation."

There are many examples where, in the final stages of the decision-making process, political support for the introduction of GM crops often wavers, Komen said.

"This is not only because different government agencies need to cooperate and coordinate around commercial release decisions... but also because pressure increases from activists and anti-development NGOs who stir up controversy on GMOs in local media, in politics, and even in courtrooms," he explained.

An uncertain regulatory environment discourages private and public sector investment into development of the pro-poor crops and traits that farmers need the most, the paper noted. Additionally, many of these countries lack capacity to design and implement biosafety regulations.

This creates a significant barrier to testing and adopting new crop varieties, including those developed by genome editing and other plant breeding innovations, which would open new opportunities to grow more food, enhance incomes and reduce the environmental impact of agriculture.

Commonwealth health ministers agree to share advice and solutions in Covid-19 battle

LONDON

COMMONWEALTH health ministers have agreed to coordinate their response in tackling the coronavirus pandemic.

Ministers endorsed removing fees for coronavirus tests and treatment, especially for migrants and refugees, as appropriate within national contexts, and creating a voluntary mechanism to share and distribute extra medical supplies including ventilators and testing kits.

They agreed on the need for solidarity and cooperation among Commonwealth coun-

tries and that close working with the World Health Organization throughout the crisis was vital.

This statement was released following the annual Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting held on 14 May.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland said: "We are now participants at an inflection point in history, and how we will be seen will be determined by how we act, right now, in this moment."

"The virus knows no nationality, race, religion, border or economic status. It is an interconnected issue threatening

our global health and world economic order, and should be dealt with as such - guided by a culture of multilateral compassion and cooperation - not competition.

"At this critical moment, invigorated by our common pain and concern, Commonwealth countries have come together to provide the save we need to deliver a coordinated multilateral response that will help thwart the pandemic and keep our citizens safe."

Globally, around 4.7 million coronavirus cases have been reported. Half a million of these

are in the Commonwealth. Seven member states are among 12 nations worldwide that have not reported any cases.

The fast-spreading virus has contracted economies, shattered income streams and forced millions of people to stay indoors.

Health ministers backed the need for unified action to recover from the economic turmoil accompanying the pandemic, while addressing critical health challenges and health systems' vulnerability, particularly to recurring climate-related events.

The World Health Organization's Director-General Tedros

Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "While coronavirus is an unprecedented shock to the world, through national unity and global solidarity, we can save both lives and livelihoods."

"Across the Commonwealth, countries will need to balance the demands of responding directly to coronavirus, while also maintaining essential health services."

Ministers pledged to keep essential health services running for non-COVID-19 patients with a critical non-communicable or infectious disease while dealing with an influx of coronavirus

cases.

They agreed to work with finance ministers to promote sustainable strategies to finance the implementation of universal health coverage with a focus on providing health care to women, the elderly, young people, marginalised persons and those with mental illness without facing financial difficulty. The Gambia's health minister Ahmadou Lamin Samateh chaired the meeting.

He said: "Not since the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 2000s has health occupied such a central position in development policy."

"With an unprecedented pan-

dem, straining health systems and halting the global economy, the role of resilient health systems across the world has come into full focus."

During the meeting, ministers presented effective national strategies to address the pandemic, which included a mass test, trace and isolate strategy, digital tools to monitor health status and track transmission routes and a clear communication line.

India is in line to chair the next Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting in 2021.

China's 'two sessions' to secure nation's 'Xiaokang' victory

BEIJING

CHINA on Thursday raised the curtain for its annual political high season after an over-two-month postponement as the country has turned the tide on the COVID-19 epidemic.

The top political advisory body started its annual session Thursday afternoon in Beijing, kicking off the "two sessions," a major event in China's political calendar that also includes the annual gathering of the national legislature to open on Friday.

This year's sessions are expected to highlight China's final push in poverty alleviation and completing the building of a moderately prosperous society, or "Xiaokang," in all respects.

Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders attended the opening meeting of the third session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held at the Great Hall of the People.

"The year 2020 marks the concluding phase for China's endeavor to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects and deliver on the 13th Five-Year Plan," Wang Yang, chairman of the 13th CPPCC National Committee, told more than 2,000 political advisors at the meeting.

The country's poverty alleviation tasks are near completion, as the number of impoverished people fell to 5.51 million at the end of 2019 from 98.99 million at the end of 2012.

Wang called on political advisors to fulfill their duties focusing on coordinating epidemic control and economic and social development to make



A journalist asks a question during a press conference of the third session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference through video link in Beijing on Wednesday. (Xinhua)

contributions to winning the battle against poverty and completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

Facing mounting uncertainties both at home and abroad, national legislators and political advisors are expected to offer insights on how

to secure the goal-achieving victory and lay good foundations for future development. Fairness and equality will be highlighted in this crucial year

during discussions on "Xiaokang"-related topics such as housing, health and medical care, according to Xin Ming, a professor at the Party School

of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

This year's "two sessions" are expected to garner more attention from home and abroad as they shed light on how the country will march toward its centenary goal while navigating COVID-19 ravages.

China has, through arduous efforts, achieved decisive results in curbing the epidemic and public health will be high on the agenda during the sessions.

Lawmakers and political advisors are also expected to discuss how to strive for improved performance in all areas of economic and social development as epidemic prevention and control becomes regular practice.

"China demonstrated great vitality in its systems and I have great confidence in our nation's development despite uncertainties for the future," said Zhang Shuibo, a member of the CPPCC National Committee and head of the School of International Project Management at Tianjin University.

On Friday, Premier Li Keqiang is expected to deliver a government work report to the legislative session, which will be closely watched since it will offer a series of solutions and new policy indicators in terms of how the world's second-largest economy is handling the fallout of the COVID-19 epidemic and global economic recessions.

Also on the agenda is the deliberation of a draft civil code. Once adopted, it will help boost the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance, said Wang Yi, dean of the law school at Renmin University of China.

Xinhua

Draft decision on HK national security legislation submitted to NPC

BEIJING

A draft decision on establishing and improving the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to safeguard national security was submitted to China's national legislature for deliberation yesterday.

Wang Chen, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) explained the draft decision to the third session of the 13th NPC, which runs from May 22 to 28.

Since the return of Hong Kong to the motherland, China has been firmly implementing the principles of "one country, two systems," "the people of Hong Kong governing Hong Kong," and a high degree of autonomy, Wang said.

The practice of "one country, two systems" has achieved unprecedented success in Hong Kong, he said.

But the increasingly notable national security risks in the HKSAR have become a prominent problem, the vice chairman said, citing activities that have seriously challenged the

bottom line of the "one country, two systems" principle, harmed the rule of law, and threatened national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Law-based and forceful measures must be taken to prevent, stop and punish such activities, he noted.

Article 23 of the Basic Law of the HKSAR stipulates that the HKSAR shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the HKSAR, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the HKSAR from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

More than 20 years after Hong Kong's return, however, relevant laws are yet to materialize due to the sabotage and obstruction by those trying to sow trouble in Hong Kong and China at large, as well as external hostile forces, Wang said.

Considering Hong Kong's situation at pre-

sent, efforts must be made at the state-level to establish and improve the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the HKSAR to safeguard national security, to change the long-term "defenseless" status in the field of national security, Wang said.

This will advance the institutional building to safeguard national security on the course of China's Constitution and the Basic Law of the HKSAR, he said.

This will also strengthen the work of safeguarding national security and ensure the steady and enduring growth of the cause of "one country, two systems", he added.

Wang elaborated on the following basic principles:

- Firmly safeguarding national security;
- Upholding and improving the "one country, two systems";
- Adhering to governing Hong Kong in accordance with the law;
- Resolutely opposing external interference;
- Substantially safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of Hong Kong residents;



Wang Chen, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress.

The draft decision consists of an introduction and seven articles, according to Wang.

Article 1 states clearly that the country will unwaveringly, fully and faithfully implement the principles of "one country, two systems," "the people of Hong Kong governing Hong Kong," and a high degree of autonomy; stresses taking necessary measures to establish and improve the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for the HKSAR to safeguard national security, as well as prevent, stop and punish activities endangering national security in accordance with the law;

Article 2 states clearly that the country resolutely opposes the interference in the HKSAR affairs by any foreign or external forces in any form and will take necessary countermeasures;

Article 3 specifies that it is the HKSAR's constitutional responsibilities to safeguard national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity; stresses that the HKSAR must complete the national security legislation stipulated in the Basic Law of the HKSAR at an earlier date and HKSAR's administrative, legislative and judicial organs must, in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, effectively prevent, stop and punish acts

endangering national security; Article 4 specifies that the HKSAR must establish and improve the institutions and enforcement mechanisms for safeguarding national security; when needed, relevant national security organs of the Central People's Government will set up agencies in the HKSAR to fulfill relevant duties to safeguard national security in accordance with the law;

Article 5 specifies that the HKSAR chief executive must regularly report to the Central People's Government on the HKSAR's performance of the duty to safeguard national security, carry out national security education and forbid acts of endangering national security;

Article 6 specifies the constitutional meanings of related legislation of the NPC Standing Committee: (1)Entrusting the NPC Standing Committee to formulate relevant laws at an earlier date for the HKSAR to safeguard national security, actively push for settling prominent problems in the national security system of the HKSAR, strengthen the building of special institutions, enforcement mechanisms and law enforcement forces, so as to ensure relevant laws' effective implementation in the HKSAR, Wang said.

Article 7 specifies that this decision shall go into effect as of the date of promulgation. After the issuance of the decision, the NPC Standing Committee will work with related parties to formulate relevant laws at an earlier date for the HKSAR to safeguard national security, actively push for settling prominent problems in the national security system of the HKSAR, strengthen the building of special institutions, enforcement mechanisms and law enforcement forces, so as to ensure relevant laws' effective implementation in the HKSAR, Wang said.

Xinhua

THE GUARDIAN SIMPLE WORD FIT // THE GUARDIAN CROSSWORD --00 89 00--

WORD-FIT

SOLUTIONS:

1. T
2. A
3. M
4. E

3 LETTERS: FEW, ADD, ANA
4 LETTERS: MEAN, TAME, NOSE, NEWS, REAP, DINE, MINT, (7 WORDS)
5 LETTERS: LEAST, AWASH, POEMS, TAPES, EGRET (5 WORDS)
6 LETTERS: CAREER, STRIVE, ANSWER, AMORAL, ASSETS (5 WORDS)
7 LETTERS: MALINDI
8 LETTERS: ADAPTORS
10 LETTERS: TYRRHENIAN

CROSSWORD

1 2 3 4
5 6 7
8 9 10
11
12
13 14 15 16
17 18
19
20

CLUES:

Across:

1 Printed publications
5 a female servant
7 plural form of ass
8 sliced bread broiled to make it crisp
10 Creator of heaven and Earth
11 edema
13 submit to the authority of
15 an organic compound made by replacing the hydrogen of an acid by an alkyl or other organic group an indirect reference
17 make a bleating sound
20 apparition of dead people

Down:

1 to specify
2 a time for anticipation
3 sending mail through the post office
4 a small South African antelope
6 a roof that resembles a half circle
7 to make ashamed
9 a hollow ball of perforated metal to hold tea leaves
12 the mark or line left by a fold
14 an adolescent
16 a sudden cry in a loud voice
17 syrian cloth
18 to move at a slower pace to stay behind the others

SOLUTIONS:

S A L V A T I O N S
L A S U
P R O A F L O A T
E S C O R E N
C A R E E N
L O W E M E N D
U G A N D A N S
S E N D E C
E T S E T S E T

S H O P S O I L L E I D
T B D R
A M I D U L A M A
R T R I B E I
S U U A N T
S H A M A N E
E T
F R A T U N D E R
I F F E C T I E D
C I F F Y C
L U S E N E T

By Maggie: 0755429240 felixmaggie@gmail.com

BUSINESS

COMPETITIVENESS

From Polokwane to London: How one tweet got this law student a modelling contract in the UK

JOHANNESBURG

In the spirit of sisters doing it for themselves, meet Tumelo Ntsewa, a 23-year-old model who, in a world that's standing still has boarded a plane to new heights in her career. The Polokwane-born model, whose dream is to see her face on Times Square, recently signed with a London-based modelling agency.

Tumi, as she's affectionately known, put out her intention to be signed in London in a tweet (see below) and her answer came in a contract from a London-based agency. As soon as she can travel, she'll be jetting off on her new adventure.

Tumi is thrilled for the opportunity to model internationally, getting the call was a dream come true for Tumi. "I could not believe that it was real. I had dreamt of being signed beyond South Africa and when it happened, I just knew that our agency's hard work was worth it," she says referring to the local agency she runs with her mother.

Now that she has signed with Zone Models in London, she aims to walk the runway for Gucci at Paris Fashion Week one day. Based between Johannesburg and Cape Town, Tumi has a BA Journalism degree and is currently a law student at Wits University. Inspired by one of the most loved modelling shows of our time, America's Next Top Model, at age ten, Tumi saw herself becoming a model one day.

However, her body image at the time, resulted in some internal battles. "I was a chubby, short, but a very confident young girl but I had the subconscious belief that I would be laughed at if I shared this dream," she says.

Taking the first step to ensure her dreams were heard by the universe, she made a school project where she jotted down her dreams and aspirations in two versions, one for her teacher, and one that remained in her

possession.

After some growth and courage, she began applying to several modelling agencies in 2015, and only got a breakthrough in 2017. "It took three years, moving agencies, and free shoots with photographers, with some of our work not being great, to finally getting one foot in the door," she adds. Tumi's first campaign as a model was with L'Oréal Paris South Africa, and she did a beauty campaign with Revlon.

Tumi has had to face many challenges in the industry she dubs cut-throat. "I have had to learn that sometimes criticism is not personal, that I may want a specific job but won't get it because my look as a model do not fit the brief. I have had to come to terms with being told 'no', often," she says.

One of the effective ways Tumi combats the challenges she faces is defined in the message of her brand - resilience. "I believe in trying even if the odds seem to be against you," she says. In a world that is constantly changing, different industries are expected to evolve as well.

For Tumi, when it comes to inclusivity and diversity, she finds nothing more beautiful than representation. "I love that there isn't a magazine, fashion editorial or campaign out today that does not include someone who is of colour, someone who looks like me. I love that our industry is now more than ever more embracing the idea that not all people are sample size and that we come in variations which genuinely need to be celebrated," she adds.

In a technology-driven world, there are boundaries still standing between SA models and the international scene. "The biggest boundary is access to information," she concludes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Tumi will not be moving to London anytime soon; however, she intends on moving once she has completed her studies.



Model Tumelo Ntsewa.

ENCOURAGING

Coronavirus: Home-made masks reduce transmission risk by 90%, study finds

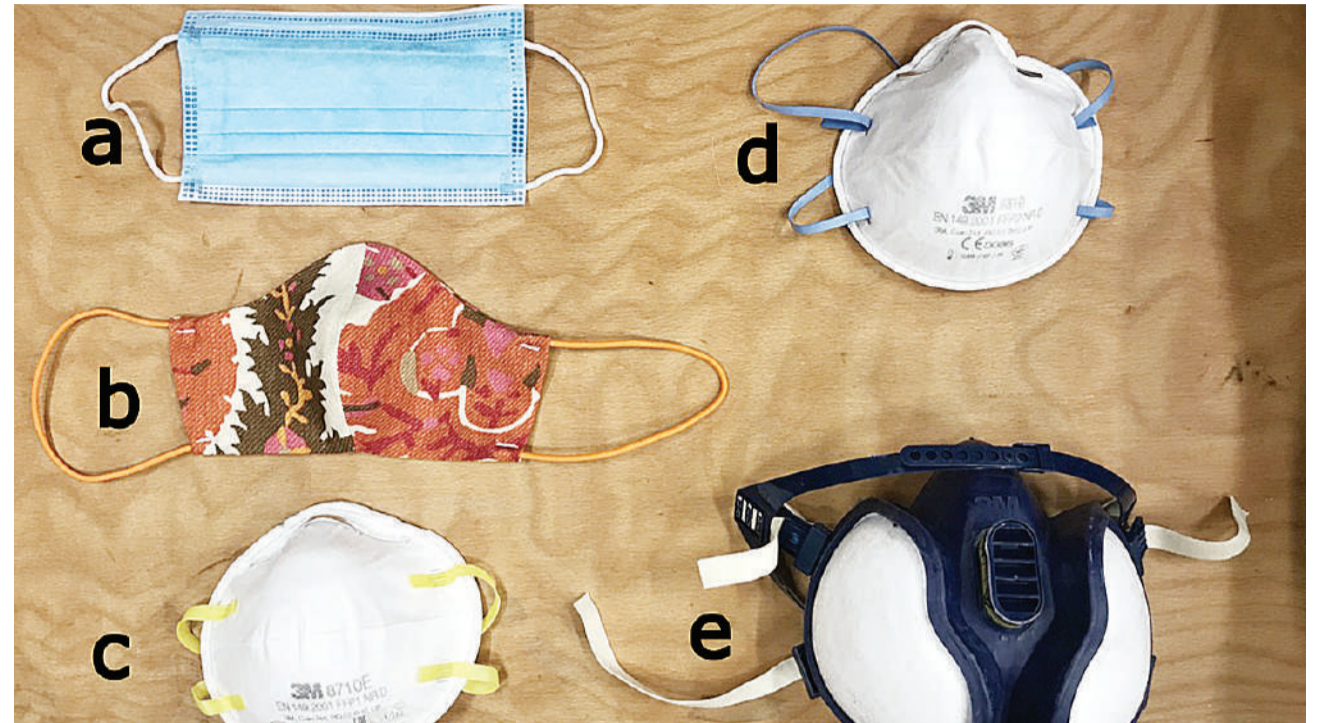
LONDON

Home-made masks or scarves can limit how far an exhaled breath can travel by 90 per cent or more, helping to slow the spread of coronavirus, a new study has found. The air exhaled by people with Covid-19 can contain droplets of water, many of which may hold the virus.

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland tested seven types of face masks, including handmade and surgical masks, respirators, and both lightweight and heavy-duty face shields. Unless they contained a valve, all of the masks reduced the forward distance travelled by exhaled air by at least 90 per cent. Masks with valves allowed more breath to escape from the back and sides.

Imaging techniques were used to enable scientists to measure the distance and direction that a breath travels when someone coughs or breathes heavily. Study participants wore the face coverings standing up and lying down, to see if positioning had an effect. Readings were also taken from a mannequin connected to a cough-simulating machine.

However the study also found limits to DIY masks - some potentially dangerous particles still escape into the air unless coverings are fitted properly and are of a medical standard. Handmade and surgical masks allowed for "far-reaching leakage jets to the side, behind and above and below" with "intense backward jets" from coughing or



Some of the masks tested.

heavy breathing.

Respirator masks, mainly used by workers exposed to fine dust, offered protection but the valves on the masks designed to aid breathing could potentially allow infectious air to spread considerably to the front. Countries and health organisations are divided over the benefits of wearing face coverings, but the University of Edinburgh researchers hope the study offers governments guidance on Covid-19 containment policy.

Some countries, such as Germany and the Czech Republic, have made it

compulsory in public places while the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the UK government, for example, have recommended face coverings in crowded places where it isn't always possible to maintain social distancing.

France has introduced €135 fines to those not wearing face coverings on metro lines or buses, while similar measures are in place in New York. "I have generally been impressed by the effectiveness of all the face coverings we tested," said Dr Ignazio Maria Viola, who co-ordinated the research. "However,

we discovered that some face coverings allow the emergence of downward or backward jets that people are not aware of and that could be a major hazard to others around them."

Dr Felicity Mehendale, a surgeon at the Centre for Global Health at the university, said it was "reassuring to see the handmade mask worked just as well as the surgical mask to stop the wearer's breath flowing directly forwards." But she warned the backward jets meant people needed to be careful when standing behind or beside someone wearing a mask.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Meet the women turning plastic waste into a communal fortune

CAPE TOWN

These recyclers are leading SA's drive for environmental sustainability. The necessity for a collective effort in sustainable waste management has inspired the following organisations, created by women, to make a difference, both environmentally and socially.

Salphy Nkoana - the Masupatsela Co-operative

The group has been operating in Tembisa, Gauteng since 2011 and is supported by Ekurhuleni Municipality. It was started by chairperson Salphy Nkoana with the help of other women to reduce poverty in the community. They collect recyclables from more than 600 homes, shopping centres and schools.

"We wake up early in the morning to collect recycling materials from PET (polyethylene terephthalate plastic) to brown and green bottles and others from the street, and by going door-to-door within the community," Salphy explains.

"By doing this we educate people about recycling and its key elements - reduce, reuse and recycle - which is then followed by a handout of refuse bags provided to us by the Ekurhuleni Municipality." She went on to explain, "When we create this awareness, people also want to collect materials and sell to us. We encourage this too as it generates an income for many in the community." After collecting the materials they come back to the yard built for them by the municipality and sort out the recyclables before selling them to factories.

"This place has really changed my life. I can now put food on the table and provide for my family. I am even able to pay school fees for my son to attend a



Salphy Nkoana (R) and Cheri Scholtz doing their work.

special needs school, and now he's performing better than he ever has!" This project in the Eastern Cape is based on the principle of exchange. It gives children the opportunity to exchange recyclable items for food, stationery, toiletries, clothing and even toys.

Children earn Mula points from the weight of recyclables which they bring to the Mula collecting point at the Allanridge Civic Centre each Wednesday. In return they exchange the points they have earned for food, clothing, educational items or toys. There are more than 700 children registered at the Mula project.

Created in 2015 by Quinette Goosen, Glinise Howard and Olive Grimsel, the swap shop project benefits up to 300 impoverished households a week and

has, to date, removed 73 902kg of PET plastic from the community. An amazing accomplishment.

"Our focus is on children. The Mula is about offering children the opportunity to exchange plastic and cardboard recyclables for food, clothing, educational material or toys which are available from our on-site shop," said Quinette.

Cheri Scholtz - PETCO
Headed up by chief executive officer Cheri Scholtz, PETCO was established in 2004 as a way to self-regulate and fund the recycling industry and efforts. Cheri said the challenge for PETCO lies in how to "be more effective in linking the formal and informal PET plastic recycling economies through on-going mentorship and enterprise development."

"According to a poverty trends report

released by Statistics South Africa last year, female-headed households remain significantly poorer than their male counterparts. We believe PET waste collection and recycling can provide job creation and income-earning opportunities for women trapped in the cycle of poverty."

She says that, "in 2017 alone, 215 billion plastic bottles were recycled. This saved 578,000m³ of landfill and created 64 000 income-generating opportunities in the process. "So yes, we should recycle, but let's be practical about solutions that make sense for us and for our circumstances." She says that there is however still lot of work to be done to bring in more women in the core recycling business and believes they are now poised to do just that.

Cameroonian pastor who claimed he could cure Covid-19 dies from the virus

YAUNDEY

Popular Cameroonian pastor Franklin Ndifor, who laid his hands on many of his followers to "cure" them of Covid-19, has left his supporters in a state of panic after dying from the virus.

On Saturday, according to Voice of America, police had to force their way into his home in Douala to gain access as his followers had blocked the entrances, praying for his resurrection. The pastor had been a candidate in the central African country's previous presidential election.

Speaking to the publication, Doctor Gaelle Nnanga said the pastor died less than a week after being diagnosed with the coronavirus. Dr Nnanga said members of Ndifor's Kingship International Ministries Church had called him to help the pastor when they found out their leader was in agony. When the medical team he leads arrived, Ndifor was having severe respiratory difficulties. He died less than 10 minutes after they started treating him.

The pastor was buried in front of his house on the day of his death but his supporters sang and prayed for his resurrection throughout the

weekend as they believe he is a prophet and had been on a "spiritual retreat with God" and would return.

Speaking to the publication, one of his followers, Rigobert Che, said that on Wednesday the "prophet" had prayed for him and several dozen people diagnosed with Covid-19, and some who suspected they were carriers or had symptoms.

Che believes Ndifor's death had panicked those who'd been visiting him for prayers and for a cure. "If you, the person that claims you are curing Covid-19, you are dead, what

about the fellow people that were affected by Covid-19? Now that he is dead, I do not know how the people he was laying hands on will be healed," he said.

According to the Cameroon Tribune, the 39-year-old pastor was recently seen distributing anti-coronavirus material to community members in Douala. Ndifor came seventh out of nine candidates in 2018's presidential election, with 23 687 votes. So far there have been 3 529 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country and 140 deaths, reports the Daily Mail.



Pastor Franklin Ndifor.

LOCKDOWN

Indoor games sell out as Kenyans chess, puzzle away their boredom

NAIROBI

As Covid-19 gifts people more time at home and with their families, Kenyans are increasingly turning to rolling dice, playing cards, or fixing jigsaw puzzles for hours on end to beat boredom.

In the past several weeks, there has been a surge in demand for indoor games – from chess boards, pool tables, scrabble boards and word power crosswords sets with toy shops reporting a boom in sales.

ToyWorld Kenya, for instance, is recording higher sales than usual and it is putting high-volume delivery plans for the next months with the expectation of more buyers. “People are buying more board games including scrabbles, Uno, Chess, Ludo and Monopoly especially Kumuliki – the Kenyan monopoly-like game,” said Vinay Shah, ToyWorld sales director.

With rising consumers’ orders, the games are depleting fast, pushing retailers to stock more. “There is a demand for games played on a table, home yards or shades and anywhere people can gather together,” he added.

In times when most businesses have no

customers and some have closed stores, some toyshops estimates that the number of customers buying board games has risen by about 60 per cent. Their best-sellers are puzzles, Lego, remote-controlled toy cars, and slides.

The toy shop has also seen an uptick in orders for table tennis, bikes, and swings in its five stores, with most buyers opting to have their games delivered at home instead of coming to buy. Games might also seem to be the perfect business for supermarkets. They are seeing more adults buying games for themselves. “Sales at leisure and sports section is now high than before,” said John Nduati, who works at Tuskys Ongata Rongai which has sold Monopoly sets, Scrabble Mattel, LudoShakes and Ladder games.

“Chess games for both children and adults are no longer in stock but we have ordered for more. Balls and scrabbles for adults are also selling fast. However, items involving water games have almost stalled and as a result, we are not selling much of implements such as goggles, swimming gear, and floaters,” he added.

Create a distraction
According to Godfrey Muire, in-charge of trampolines at Decathlon,



Kenyans enjoying a game of cards.

a store at Nairobi’s The Hub, that is recording brisk business, there has been a growing interest in racket sports, games that normally require players to keep a distance. Hence people are buying balls and shuttlecock.

“Most people are buying table tennis and badminton cliparts. However, the same has been limited to squash probably because it is highly regulated in

terms of rules,” he said, adding that the store has also seen a rise in the sale of bicycles.

“Racing bikes have attracted much interest from buyers,” he said. While the outbreak has forced most sports around the world to shut down, games have not only found a special place in living rooms and backyards. In April, demand was on skipping ropes, kettlebells, and dumbbells

as the closure of gyms and swimming pools forced many to exercise at home.

Cynthia Mutisya, who has taken a liking for indoor games, says the coronavirus pandemic has afforded her time to play with her father and niece, helping her unwind and regenerate new ideas. “It has given me more time with my family. I’m learning new things about them. I have also

improved my cooking skills. We also talk a lot, brainstorm, farm,” she says.

The family living in Ruiru is currently playing Monopoly, water guns and cards. “I bought my Monopoly set in a supermarket. It has been a great way of involving everyone. And the fun with allocating tasks such as the ‘banker’, buying utilities, paying fines and others play-out choices instil responsibility that is important in life. We play it for hours, depending on the number of people,” she said.

Even if you do not end up solving a puzzle, psychologists say, the consistency of doing an activity that creates a distraction every day can be reassuring in itself. Cynthia, who is a nurse, says the games relieve anxiety and stress associated with staying at home, social distancing, not travelling, living alone, and not being able to visit family and friends.

“As a nurse, I value games and fun because of their effect on mental health,” she says. She has adopted a schedule that includes time for fun from 5pm. “I grab a cup of coffee, watch a movie, or play games with my family or sometimes I take a walk in the neighbourhood. Other times I try out new recipes or just laugh through Tik Tok and YouTube videos,” she says.

ALERT

Why smokers appear to be particularly vulnerable to severe Covid-19 infections

NEW YORK

New research from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (CSHL) suggests that cigarette smokers may be more susceptible to Covid-19.

The research suggests that smoking encourages the lungs to produce more ACE2 (angiotensin-converting enzyme 2), the protein that makes it so easy for the SARS-Cov-2 to adhere to and infect the cells in the body.

This research was discussed in a news release and published in the journal Developmental Cell on 16 May 2020. One thing that the researchers from CSHL noticed is the dramatic differences in how patients with Covid-19 experience their symptoms. In most cases, people experience mild illness that can be treated, but some cases require hospitalisation and may even lead to death. They also noted three vulnerable groups who seem to be more prone to severe Covid-19: men, older adults and smokers.

CSHL Fellow Jason Sheltzer and Google engineer Joan Smith wanted to investigate these differences in Covid-19 infections and looked at previous data to determine if the vulnerable groups had anything in common.

“We started gathering all the data we could find. When we put it all together and started analysing it, we saw that both mice that had been exposed to smoke in a laboratory and humans who were current smokers had significant upregulation of ACE2,” explained Sheltzer.

The data didn’t suggest that age or gender directly affected the ACE2 levels in the body, but smoking influenced the level of ACE2 in the lungs, according to Sheltzer. However, these high levels of ACE2 in smokers’ lungs seem to be temporary and quitting smoking could possibly lower the ACE2 levels.

According to Sheltzer, high ACE2 levels are produced by the so-called goblet cells – mucus-producing cells in the airway – which are often increased by smoking.

Now’s the time to quit

With the tobacco ban expected to be lifted when most districts in the country go down to Level 3, many people will be glad to hear that they will freely be able to purchase cigarettes. But if you are concerned about your respiratory health and you think that now is a good opportunity to quit, you can read more here for tips on how to quit.



A smoker has a puff

PASTERPRENEURS

Pastors asking for offerings during Covid-19 pandemic leave Christians divided

JOHANNESBURG

The migration of church services to online platforms due to the Covid-19 lockdown has also brought forward the debate of offerings and tithes for church-goers and members.

Many on social media have felt that because of the tough times everyone is going through, it should not be expected of Christians to pay tithes and offerings. A video of pastor, reality TV star and presenter Bishop Israel Makamu encouraging his members to make a seed offering has gone viral, leaving many divided.

In the video, the pastor says even in these tough times, the best thing people can do is to offer so they can succeed financially. Reacting to the video, some called on churches to be regulated while others criticised Makamu for asking for offerings during a time when people are jobless, hungry and struggling.

But for many, there is nothing wrong with pastors reminding members to

make offers online. Moses Shivambu, a Christian and senior member of a Tembisa-based church, believes people should steer away from judging the practices of churches.

“I am against false prophets and everything they stand for. Most of them are all about the money and scamming our people, by all means let’s all condemn that. However, there are churches that are run for the benefit of people’s spiritual and physical beings – churches that adhere not only to the rules of the Bible but also abide by the laws of the country.

“People should understand that the church operates as an NPO and its only ‘income’ is from its general membership. In many churches the pastor is not even a signatory to any of the organisations’ bank accounts to make sure there is transparency in how the finances are run – for the benefit of the organisation.

“Without speaking for Makamu, [Prophet Shepherd] Bushiri or whichever other pastor is trending there

on the social-media platforms, I will say though that I think there is also a need for people to understand that for Christians, offering and seed planting is Biblical and will not stop now because there are elements of self-enrichment that have spoiled the reputation of churches. Imagine being unemployed and living in a shack with no food, and a pastor knocks on your door to give you food bought with the money ‘offered’ by Christians who are financially able to do so. You will never understand what [that] does for both the giver and receiver. So please think of that before painting all churches with the same brush,” Moses tells Move!.

Speaking to Move!, 59-year-old Sponono Makgatho says she received food parcels from three local churches since the lockdown started. “I had to wait a little longer for my food parcels from Sassa. Had it not been for those churches, my son and I were this close to going begging on the streets. It was bad,” she says.



Bishop Israel Makamu.

COVID-19

Civil weddings permitted but taxi-motos, upcountry travel still banned for 15 days

KIGALI

The cabinet on Monday, May 18, further eased the nationwide novel coronavirus lockdown but largely maintained existing measures to control the spread of the virus.

The decision came on the day Rwanda recorded five new cases of coronavirus, bringing the tally of positive cases to 297. Out of these, 203 have since recovered after another six people recovered from the virus on Monday, leaving active cases at 94. The country has not recorded any coronavirus related death.

The cabinet maintained the curfew but reduced it by one hour, from 8p.m to 9p.m (until 5a.m), and decided that couples can now hold a civil wedding with only 15 attendees. The new measures will run for a period of 15 days, through June. Under the new measures which will run for 15 days until June 1, the government eased some restrictions.

In a statement released Monday evening and signed by Prime Minister Edouard Ngirente, the Government also announced that inter-provincial travel (including to and out of City of Kigali) and taxi-moto transport will resume on June

1. The following are some of the latest Covid-19 decisions:

When the total lockdown was partially lifted on May 1, the Government introduced a curfew from 8p.m to 5a.m. The curfew was yesterday reduced by one hour and will now be observed between 9p.m to 5a.m.

Since late-March, social gatherings, including weddings, have been banned. Under the new guidelines, however, a civil marriage with 15 people is allowed to be carried out. But related ceremonies such as church services and receptions are not permitted.

Returnees will meet the cost of mandatory quarantine

The cabinet statement said that borders will remain closed, except for goods and cargo, as well as returning Rwandan citizens and legal residents. All returnees will be subjected to mandatory quarantine in accordance with existing health guidelines at their own cost. Quarantine services for people returning from abroad were initially free. The quarantine normally lasts for 14 days.

Motorcycle taxis to resume operations on June 1

Moto taxis have been suspended from carrying passengers since the lockdown was ordered on March 21. But they are allowed to carry goods and other essential supplies. This will continue to be the case until June 1.

The cabinet also retained major coronavirus preventive measures. For instance, schools remain closed until September, while churches and bars are still not allowed to open. Major preventive measures such as wearing masks, keeping the required 1-metre distance between people and washing hands remain a requirement for everyone.



BCCI won't push for World Cup postponement to open IPL window

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S cricket board will not push for the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia to be postponed but would consider staging the Indian Premier League (IPL) in the October/November slot if it becomes available, a senior BCCI official has told Reuters.

This year's IPL, which is worth almost \$530 million to the BCCI, has been indefinitely postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic while the World Cup, which is scheduled to begin on Oct. 18, is also in jeopardy.

Reports in Australian media have suggested India's influential board may look to push for the World Cup to be postponed to open up a window for the IPL.

World Cup contingency plans are on the agenda at next week's International Cricket Council (ICC) board meeting but BCCI treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal said India would not be recommending it be pushed back.

"Why should the BCCI suggest postponing the Twenty20 World Cup?" Dhumal told Reuters by telephone.

"We'll discuss it in the meeting and whatever is appropriate, (the ICC) will take a call.

"If the Australia government announces that the tournament will happen and Cricket Australia is confident they can handle it, it will be their call. BCCI would not suggest anything."

While Australia has seen new infections of the novel coronavirus slow to a trickle and is gradually easing travel curbs and social distancing restrictions, hosting a 16-team World Cup would be a Herculean task for Cricket Australia.

Dhumal questioned whether the tournament should go ahead if it had to be played without spectators and said the Australian government would play a key role in any decision.

"It all depends on what the Australian government says on this - whether they'd allow so many teams to come and play the tournament," he added.

"Will it make sense to play games without spectators? Will it make sense for CA to stage such a tournament like that? It's their call."

Cricket Australia chief executive Kevin Roberts was guarded about the prospects of staging the tournament as scheduled on Friday.

"We don't have clarity on that one, yet. But as the situation continues to improve, you never know what might be possible," he said.

"It's ultimately a decision for the ICC."

The ICC has said it was unlikely to make a final call on the fate of the World Cup until August but some boards are in the process

of making contingency plans in the event of a postponement.

While the BCCI recognised an open October-November window would suit the IPL, Dhumal said there was no point in making plans until there was some certainty about the World Cup.

"If we have the window available, and depending on what all can be organised, we'll decide accordingly," he added. "We can't presume that it's not happening and go on planning."

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, Australia are a "nine out of 10" chance to host India for a test series in the home summer and could also tour England for limited overs series beforehand, Cricket Australia boss Kevin Roberts said.

Cricket has been shut down since March due to the novel coronavirus outbreak and while travel curbs remain Australia has begun easing social distancing restrictions after infections slowed to a trickle.

"I guess there's no such thing as certainty in today's world so I can't say 10 (out of 10), but I'm going to say nine out of 10," Roberts told a roundtable held by Australia's News Corp when asked about the prospects of India touring.

"I'd be really surprised if we can't get the Indian tour away. But I wouldn't, hand on heart, suggest we'll have full crowds from the start."

"We'll just have to wait and see how that goes."

Australia had planned to tour England in July for one-day and Twenty20 series before the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the international schedule into doubt.

England are looking at hosting the West Indies and Pakistan in July and August.

Roberts said he had spoken to the England and Wales Cricket Board on Wednesday and there was "some chance" Australia could tour England after the West Indies and Pakistan tours.

"Obviously we won't jeopardise the safety of the players, but the best test of that is that the West Indian and Pakistan tours ... go off without a hitch," he said.

Advertisement
Roberts was less optimistic about Australia's chances of hosting the Twenty20 World Cup, scheduled to start in October, given the logistical challenge of bringing in 15 teams.

"We don't have clarity on that one, yet. But as the situation continues to improve, you never know what might be possible," he said.

"It's ultimately a decision for the ICC (International Cricket Council)."

REUTERS

The NBA seems on the cusp of a comeback plan

BY TIM REYNOLDS

SOMETHING is finally clear in the uncertain NBA: Players believe they're going to play games again this season.

The obvious questions – How? Where? When? – remain unanswered. Testing, part of the new normal of this coronavirus era, will be a major component to any return-to-play plan that the NBA comes up with. The Disney campus near Orlando, Florida makes so much sense, given its massive size, multiple courts and its ties to league broadcast partner ESPN. And the sooner games begin, the sooner the process of figuring out next season can start as well.

Several people familiar with the details of the conversations have told The Associated Press this week that players around the league are being urged to start getting mentally and physically ready for training camps that could be just a few weeks away. It might not be a unanimously approved notion, but 2-1/2 months into this pandemic-caused shutdown, the NBA finally seems on the cusp of being able to move forward.

"I have faith in Adam Silver and the NBA, and the NBA teams ... they're not going to have us come back if it's even a question of us getting hurt," Jared Dudley of the Los Angeles Lakers said this week. "And that's where the testing, being clean, and doing everything that I feel that they'll do to keep us safe."

Pick a scenario for the return-to-play plan, and someone has surely heard it already. Bringing back all 30 teams and resuming the regular season is an option. So is bringing back



In this Oct. 23, 2019, file photo, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver speaks during a news conference at Vivint Smart Home Arena in Salt Lake City. Something is finally clear in the uncertain NBA. Players believe they're going to play games again this season. The obvious questions like how, where and when remain unanswered. (AP Photo)

something like 20 teams and having an expanded playoff of sorts, a notion that essentially mirrors what the NHL is talking about these days. A condensed playoff has also been discussed.

The latest sign of momentum: Milwaukee owner Marc Lasry, speaking Thursday on CNBC, said the NBA's board of governors will meet again next week and that he believes "within the next six to eight weeks we should be playing."

Silver, the commissioner who has had to deal with a series of turbulent matters from the strained China relationship in the preseason, to the deaths of David Stern and Kobe Bryant in January, and now a pandemic that will almost certainly affect the league's financial health

for the next several years – is listening to any and all ideas.

"The direction that the league office has received from our teams is, again, all rules are off at this point given the situation we find ourselves in, that the country is in," Silver said last month. "If there is an opportunity to resume play, even if it looks different than what we've done historically, we should be modeling it."

The calendar dictates that those decisions are going to come soon, backed up by the fact that Silver told players two weeks ago that he wants to be able to bring forward a return-to-play plan in "two to four weeks." By that timeframe, the window is about to open.

"I'm really excited about the pos-

sibility of coming back," Cleveland forward Kevin Love said in remarks broadcast on the NBA's Twitter channel this week. "I think there's so much good that can come from it. ... People need that escape and as athletes too, we want to get back to what we love most."

It's going to be different. Fans won't be at games, barring some seismic shift in thinking. Home-court advantage won't exist since games will almost certainly all be at neutral sites. Even the Orlando Magic won't have the home-court edge; they might be able to use their own homes if the NBA comes to Central Florida, but it's not like the games will be in their arena.

And someone is probably going to test positive when play resumes. If that happens, he'll almost certainly have to sit out a minimum of two weeks. If a playoff series is held on an every-other-day basis, that means once someone is positive there's no way he can return to that series. Imagine if LeBron James or Giannis Antetokounmpo tests positive; the title chances for the Lakers and Milwaukee Bucks would basically be gone in an instant.

But in a season where the NBA is certainly going to lose money, quite possibly \$1 billion or more, there is an obvious appetite for getting back to work if safety can be assured.

"This has been like being an anxious kid that wants to do something but can't, or an anxious dog where you tell him to sit and he looks at you like 'C'mon bro' and his tail starts wagging because he's so excited," All-Star Bam Adebayo of the Miami Heat said. "It's been a whole spectrum of the unknown."

AP

Coates says Tokyo Games face 'real problems' due to COVID-19

MELBOURNE

TOKYO Games organisers face "real problems" staging the Olympics next year as coronavirus infections continue to soar, senior international Olympic official John Coates said.

Coates, Australia's Olympic chief and head of the International Olympic Committee's inspectorate for Tokyo, said organisers had to assume there would be no vaccine for COVID-19, or none in sufficient quantity, in time for the Games.

"We've got real problems because we've got athletes having to come from 206 different nations," Coates told a roundtable held by Australia's News Corp.

"Yesterday, there was 10,000 new cases in Brazil. Very few countries are as advanced in coping with this as (Australia)."

"(Japanese) Prime Minister (Shinzo) Abe says Games can only happen in 2021. We can't postpone it again and we have to assume that there won't be a vaccine or, if there is a vaccine, it won't be sufficient to share around the world."

In March, the IOC and Japanese government took the unprecedented decision to delay the Games, which had been due to start in July, for a year due to the coronavirus outbreak.

COVID-19 has infected more than five million people and killed about 334,000 people around the world, with countries like Brazil and the United States struggling with thousands of new cases every day.

Coates said Games organisers would need to start planning in October for what could be a "very different" Olympics if there were no signs COVID-19 was being eradicated.

"By October this year, if there are signs that it is being contained but not eradicated, then we are starting to work through – and we're preparing for it now – the different scenarios by which the sport could take place," he said.



John Coates

"Do we quarantine the Olympic Village? Do all athletes when they get there go into quarantine? Do we restrict having spectators at the venues? Do we separate the athletes from the mixed zone where the media are?"

"We'll have a whole range of scenarios we'll start to address this year on the basis that the Games will still take place for the athletes next year."

"But it could be a very different Games to what we're used to."

Meanwhile, in Tokyo, a media association has withdrawn its coronavirus-themed parody of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics logo after the local organising committee called it offensive and a violation of copyright.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club Japan had published on its website and in-house magazine a design adding protrusions to the circular Olympics logo in imitation of a COVID-19 particle.

"It's very offensive ... when you consider the people of the world who have suffered from the coronavirus," the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee CEO Toshiro Muto told reporters on Thursday.

He said it was an infringement of copyright but did not threaten legal action.

The press club quickly removed the design and apologised.

"We would like to express our sincere regrets to anyone who may have (been) offended on all

sides of this issue and to anyone who lost someone, let me express the deepest condolences," said club president Khaldon Azhari.

The Olympics have been postponed until July next year due to the coronavirus, which has killed about 800 people and infected 17,000 in Japan, though now doubts are growing over that timetable due to the protracted pandemic.

Azhari, speaking to media also on Thursday, said legal experts had advised the club would not have a strong case on the copyright issue and anyway did not consider it appropriate to enter a dispute during the pandemic.

REUTERS

Dar to host rest of VPL games

SPORT

Henderson has felt 'safe' since return to Liverpool training

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT, PAGE 19

By Guardian Reporter

DAR ES SALAAM will host the rest of this season's Vodacom Premier League games after President John Magufuli had issued permission for restart of soccer competitions and the rest of sporting activities in Tanzania.

Minister for Information, Culture, Arts and Sports, Harrison Mwakembe, issued the statement in Dar es Salaam yesterday, after attending a meeting which also involved officials of the Tanzania Football Federation (TFF) and Tanzania Premier League Board (TPLB).

Mwakembe stated that three venues, National Stadium, Uhuru Stadium and Azam Complex will



Mtibwa Sugar's fullback, Issa Rashid (R), negotiates his way past Polisi Tanzania forward, Sixtus Sabilo, during this season's Vodacom Premier League encounter, which took place in Morogoro. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MTIBWASUGAR

be used by the domestic top flight squads to feature in the teams' respective games.

A good number of the domestic top flight participating sides have 10 matches left whilst Yanga have 11 games remaining.

He disclosed the remaining stages of this season's Federation Cup will as well take place in Dar es Salaam.

The competition was, until sporting events were officially suspended early in March, in the quarterfinal stage.

Dar es Salaam's Azam FC, Simba SC and Yanga, Kagera's Kagera Sugar, Mtibwa's Ntanda FC, Mwanza's Alliance

FC, Lindi's Namungo FC and Tanga's Sahare All Stars, had sailed through to the quarter-finals.

Mwanza's CCM Kirumba Stadium and Nyamagana Stadium, the minister stated, are the venues which will host the rest of this season's First Division League (FDL).

Sporting activities had been on an indefinite suspension in the country, as directed by the government, with a view to containing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Speaking at Chamwino State House in Dodoma two days back after swearing in several officials he has ap-

pointed, Magufuli said he has opted to permit the restart of the tournaments on the mentioned date, following significant decrease in the Coronavirus cases in the country.

He requested Tanzanians to keep on featuring in sporting events as all statistics show there is no sportsman that has passed away after contracting the disease.

"I know everyone likes sports. Even Members of Parliament participate in sports. In this disease's statistics I'm not sure there is a sportsman that has passed away because of the disease. There are different types of sports and

every person has his or her favourite sport," he stated.

"I have decided that sports should restart. There is the Premier League, First Division League and Second Division League and so forth, they should resume on June 1," he disclosed.

He pointed out sports help citizens contain the disease, therefore the domestic soccer tournaments will resume. He hinted military games should as well restart.

"Procedures for accessing stadiums will be put in place by Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children but sports must resume."

This means Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, and Ministry of Information, Culture, Arts and Sports have been directed to seek better ways the sporting activities should be hosted with adherence to all precautions.

The President had on two occasions said he was thinking of granting the restart of sporting activities in the country but he did not confirm the dates for the restart of the events.

The restart of the competitions is obviously huge relief to sports followers in the country, particularly the Vodacom Premier League followers.

The enthusiasts were keenly looking forward to the resumption of the domestic top flight.

The tournament's participating sides will, therefore, be free to start team training to prepare for the rest of the event's fixture.

Defending champions, Simba, were, until the day the Vodacom Premier League was suspended, at the top of the domestic top flight log after notching 71 points.

Azam FC were holding second spot with 54 points, Yanga were positioned third with 52 points.

Most of the top flight teams have taken part in either 29 matches or 28 outings.

TONIGHT @ 9:00

UJENZI

TONIGHT on EATV
Find out how using glass blocks from Canghui Traders Limited can improve your home decor

And Tanfix Quality Choice has an innovative solution for wall fungus

It's all on Ujenzi at 9PM

eastafrica RADIO

88.1FM DAR ES SALAAM

06:00 Supa Breakfast
10:00 MAMAMIA
12:00 Kipenga Xtra
13:00 Planet Bongo
16:00 EA Drive
20:00 Kipenga
21:00 The Cruise

Australia confident of hosting India, could tour England

MELBOURNE

AUSTRALIA are a "nine out of 10" chance to host India for a test series in the home summer and could also tour England for limited overs series before hand, Cricket Australia boss Kevin Roberts said.

Cricket has been shut down since March due to the novel coronavirus outbreak and while travel curbs remain Australia has begun easing social distancing restrictions after infections slowed to a trickle.

"I guess there's no such thing as certainty in today's world so I can't say 10 (out of 10), but I'm going to say nine out of 10," Roberts told a roundtable held by Australia's News Corp when asked about the prospects of India touring.

"I'd be really surprised if we can't get the Indian tour away. But I wouldn't, hand on heart, suggest we'll have full crowds from the start.

"We'll just have to wait and see how that goes."

Australia had planned to tour England in July for one-day and Twenty20 series before the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the international schedule into doubt.

England are looking at hosting the West Indies and Pakistan in July and August.

Roberts said he had spoken to the England and Wales Cricket Board on Wednesday and there was "some chance" Australia could tour England after the West Indies and Pakistan tours.

"Obviously we won't jeopardise the safety of the players, but the best test of that is that the West Indian and Pakistan tours ... go off without a hitch," he said.

Roberts was less optimistic about Australia's chances of hosting the Twenty20 World Cup, scheduled to start in October, given the logistical challenge of bringing in 15 teams.

"We don't have clarity on that one, yet. But as the situation continues to improve, you never know what might be possible," he said.

"It's ultimately a decision for the ICC (International Cricket Council)."

REUTERS

Yanga to start training on June 1

By Correspondent Adam Fungamwango

VODACOM Premier League's Yanga have disclosed they will start participating in drills in Dar es Salaam on June 1 to prepare for the remainder of the domestic top flight's matches.

The government yesterday officially declared the league's participating sides, as well as clubs that play in this season's First Division League (FDL) and Second Division League (SDL), can start training to prepare for their respective competitions.

Sporting activities had been on an indefinite suspension in the country, as directed by the government, with a view to containing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hassan Bumbuli, Yanga's information officer, stated they have already informed all of the squad's players that are currently outside Dar es Salaam to make their way back.

Bumbuli said the squad will feature in training at the Tanzania Law School venue located at Ubungo.

"We will this week first seek to put the facility in good shape. The playing ground should be properly marked, good nets should be fixed on the goals with a view to training on June 1," he noted.

He said: "We had in the past been training there, we have paid for ground fee for a year."

"All these, nevertheless, should be done carefully, we therefore will wait for our team doctor to take care of health procedures and tell us what to do in a bid to train whilst taking precautions."



Yanga players take part in training in Dar es Salaam recently to prepare for the Vodacom Premier League. PHOTO: COURTESY OF YANGA

The government spokesman, Hassan Abbas, on Wednesday evening, pointed out domestic soccer players are officially free to attend team training to shape up for their respective events' games.

His statement has come shortly after President John Magufuli had, among others, officially issued permission for restart of sporting events in the country.

Scores of domestic sports fans welcomed Magufuli's pronouncement with acclamation.

Abbas disclosed much as players have

been given green light to start training, the players and their respective outfits' officials should keep on taking precautions and heeding to directives by Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children.

"We were all waiting for the President's pronouncement on granting restart of sporting activities. We are pleased the sporting activities have resumed," Abbas disclosed.

"The President was vividly genuine on the matter, in which he said domestic

leagues' organizers should start completing the rest of their respective tournaments' games from June completed precautionary measures."

"Much as there has been significant decrease in the Covid-19 cases in the country, the disease is still in our midst, therefore, health precautionary measures will be taken by the government."

Abbas insisted it is impossible for the domestic leagues' games to start on June 1 whereas there is no squad, which has attended full team training.

Flexibles

by David Chikoko

I COULD SLEEP OVER YOUR PLACE, SAY THE WARDROBE WAS TOO SMALL...

