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Zanzibar signs up 200MW wind-based power project

By Rahma Suleiman, Zanzibar

ZANZIBAR has announced plans to begin generating electricity using wind power by the end of this year.

Joseph Kilangi, the Water, Energy and Minerals principal secretary, made this affirmation late on Thursday, following the signing of an agreement between Seel Oilfield Service based in Dubai, Sany Renewable Energy of China and the Zanzibar Electricity Corporation (ZECO).

The 200-megawatt wind power project with an estimated cost of \$180m will involve the installation of modern equipment to ensure efficient electricity production, he said.

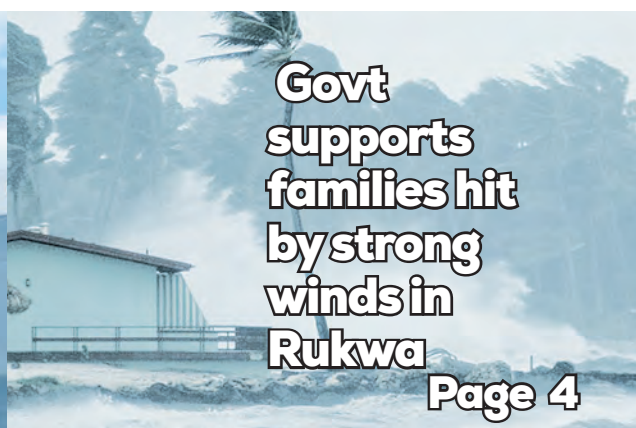
The project will be carried out in two phases, with the first phase expected to generate 120 megawatts-100 megawatts for Unguja and 20 megawatts for Pemba, slated for completion within a year, he said.

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Zanzibar completes major repairs on MV Mapinduzi II

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Govt supports families hit by strong winds in Rukwa

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Compensate villagers in Engaruka Ward equitably, NDC told

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President Samia Suluhu Hassan addresses participants at the 2023/24 Best Taxpayer Awards ceremony in Dar es Salaam on Thursday evening. Photo: State House

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CECAFA backs Karia for CAF executive committee ctical overhaul

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Keys stands between Sabalenka and third straight Australian Open title

Marburg scare: One dies, another is in hospital, 281 being watched

By Guardian Reporter

THE government has confirmed that one person has died in an outbreak of the Marburg virus disease in Kagera Region, with

another patient receiving treatment at Biharamulo Hospital.

Dr Ntuli Kapologwe, the director of preventive services at the Health ministry, said in a press briefing yesterday in Bukoba that as of Thursday, two cases

of Marburg virus had been reported, one of which resulted in a fatality.

The second patient is reported to be in stable condition and responding well to treatment, he said, noting that 281 individuals

who had close contact with confirmed cases are being closely monitored.

That will take a period of 21

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Dr Pindi Chana (L), the Natural Resources and Tourism minister, and the UN Tourism director general Zurab Pololikashvili, showcasing the contract documents for Tanzania to host the 2nd UN Tourism regional forum on gastronomy tourism for Africa set for March 11 to 13 in Dar es Salaam, shortly after signing the agreement at the organization's headquarters in the Spanish capital of Madrid yesterday. Photo: MNRT

Gastronomy tourism meet: Tanzania signs pact as host

By Guardian Correspondent, Madrid

THE government and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism) have signed an agreement that will make Tanzania the host of the second regional forum on gastronomy tourism for Africa.

Dr Pindi Chana, the Natural Resources and Tourism minister, and Zurab Pololikashvili, the director general of UN Tourism, signed the agreement at the UN Tourism headquarters in the Spanish capital yesterday.

The event, which is expected to draw over 300 participants from around the world, is set to take place in Dar es Salaam from March 11 to 13, the minister affirmed, showing Tanzania's enthusiasm in hosting the upcoming forum.

The country looks forward to learning

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Samia condemns tax evasion, tells TRA to ensure level playing field

By Guardian Reporter

PRESIDENT Samia Suluhu Hassan has condemned the malpractice of tax evasion, asking the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) to ensure that all individuals and entities with a legal obligation to pay taxes meet

their obligation.

Speaking at the Taxpayers' Appreciation Awards for fiscal 2023/24 in Dar es Salaam late on Thursday, the president said that tax evasion hampers the country's development and delays the government's ability to implement its plans.

The habit has a negative impact on vital services such as the timely provision of medicine to health centres, while disrupting fairness in business.

"Those who evade taxes gain an unfair advantage over compliant businesses, creating an uneven

playing field," she affirmed, asking TRA to ensure that every taxpayer contributes their fair share, thus ensuring a level playing field for all businesses.

TRA officials need to uphold integrity in their operations, eliminating practices that foster inequity in

tax collection, she said, cautioning against corruption.

Swift action must be taken against employees who enable or promote unfair tax practices, she said on the direction of the TRA commissioner general, to take swift action against revenue officials undermining fair-

ness in tax payments or fostering corruption.

Investigations need to be conducted on employees for immediate and impartial removal of any

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from other nations' experiences in promoting gastronomy tourism, she stated, noting that the agreement is a milestone for Tanzania as it prepares to showcase its rich culinary heritage "and strengthen its position as a leading destination for gastronomy tourism."

"We are honoured to host this forum, which will provide us with an excellent opportunity to learn from global leaders in food tourism. Through this event, we aim to build the capacity of our chefs, diversifying local cuisines to offer tourists authentic Tanzanian dishes. We also want to explore opportunities that will arise from this forum to better promote gastronomy tourism in our country," the minister explained. She also underscored ongoing cooperation between Tanzania and UN Tourism, particularly in developing policies, enhancing skills, strengthening human resources and creating strategic frameworks to boost the tourism sector.

Fostering a strategic approach to tourism growth is a key area, she said, pointing at the role of UN Tourism in shaping global tourism policies, promoting sustainable tourism and

fostering economic growth via the sector.

In his remarks, the UN executive, reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to promoting Africa as a viable and attractive tourism destination, with gastronomy tourism increasingly an aspect of that effort.

"UN Tourism is dedicated to positioning Africa as a vibrant, accessible, and diverse tourism destination. Gastronomy is an integral part of this, and we want to encourage Tanzania to use all available platforms to promote this forum, including collaborating with renowned chefs and influential public figures who specialize in African cuisine," he elaborated. Stressing the importance of ensuring a smooth visa application process and accessible travel options for participants attending the forum, he appealed to the host authorities to ensure that the visa application process and flight arrangements are as efficient and user-friendly as possible.

Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB) chairman Ambassador Ramadhani Dau attended the ceremony as well as our ambassador to Spain, Ali Jabir Mwadini, the director of tourism Dr Thereza Mugobi, TTB board member Said Kamugisha and UN officials.



Zanzibar President Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi speaks with Muslim believers after Friday prayers at Malindi Mosque in Unguja Urban District yesterday. Photo: State House

Zanzibar signs up 200MW wind-based power project

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The government set a one-year timeline for completion to ensure the project progresses swiftly, he said, stressing the wish to closely work with the partners to ensure that the project meets its scheduled deadline.

The government's goal is to reduce reliance on a single source of energy and to ensure sustainable, sufficient power supply for industries

and households, in line with the rapid development and growing investments, he further stated.

He reassured the public that the government had thoroughly researched Zanzibar's wind capacity, and affirmed that the region has sufficient wind resources to support the project.

"We have not rushed into this decision without conducting proper research. We

have verified that Zanzibar has the wind resources necessary to generate substantial amounts of electricity," he asserted.

The wind power project is expected to address long-standing unreliable electricity supply characterized by frequent outages and insufficient power availability across the islands, he stated.

Zanzibar is becoming in-

creasingly attractive to investors, and reliable electricity is essential to support the pace of growth and meet the growing energy demands of households and businesses, he said.

For Pemba, the wind energy project will include a dedicated station to support the growing investment take ups there, he said, while Haji Muhamed Haji, the ZECO general man-

ager underscored the importance of the wind power project in addressing the energy challenges on the islands.

Saeed Al Jabry, the Seel Oilfield Services Ltd CEO, confirmed that work on the project starts immediately after the agreement is signed, stressing the company's readiness to proceed and meet the project's completion deadline.



Former Ambassador Dr Wilbrod Slaa, in the custody of prison officers, arrives at the High Court of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam yesterday for a hearing on the legality of his denied bail, following allegations of publishing false information on social media. Photo: Correspondent Imani Nathaniel

Samia condemns tax evasion, tells TRA to ensure level playing field

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staff involved in corrupt practices, facilitating tax evasion, she stated.

She reiterated the government's goal as to foster an enabling environment for work, business and facilitating economic growth, pointing out that the Tax Reform Commission was set up last year to evaluate the country's tax system.

It was tasked with making recommendations for its improvement with a view to developing a tax system that is equitable, transparent and easy

to comply with, while offering competitive tax rates.

That would simplify and stimulate economic activities, ensure higher tax revenue, accelerate development and reduce budgetary dependence.

She similarly encouraged TRA to leverage digital systems to efficiently connect with taxpayers, in view of investments made in building a digital economy. She also reminded business practitioners against using counterfeit electronic fiscal devices (EFD) to issue receipts or fake electronic

tax stamps (ETS) for excisable goods to evade taxes.

She similarly dwelt on the misuse of transfer pricing by some companies, affirming that it is an injustice to the government and the citizenry as a whole.

"Addressing these issues is critical, and I urge TRA to remain vigilant and take firm action against such practices," she emphasised.

She asked Finance minister Dr Mwigulu Nchemba to address the backlog of pending tax cases at the Tax Appeals Board and Tax Appeals Tribunal.

Lodging the cases demonstrates the taxpayers' right to appeal, but they need to be resolved swiftly to ensure justice and maintain efficient revenue collection, she said.

The capacity of these institutions must be strengthened to handle cases without compromising the quality of their decisions, she stated.

Hamisi Livembe, the chairman of the Tanzania Business Community Association, otherwise known as the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (TCCIA) acknowledged the breadth of reforms to improve the business

environment. The lingering concern is the burdens of unpaid debts from audits that had not been conducted on time, some dating back three to five years.

"We request TRA to reduce the audit timeline from five years to three," he said, while Paul Makanza, the Tanzania Private Sector Foundation (TPSF) vice-chairman said the private sector was ready to collaborate with the government, TRA and various ministries to foster economic growth and boost tax revenues.

Marburg scare: One dies, another is in hospital, 281 being watched

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days to validate that no symptoms of the virus can be detected, he said, highlighting that strict health protocols are in place to prevent further spread of the virus.

Despite the confirmed cases in two wards of Biharamulo District, daily activities are being carried out as usual, he said, expressing confidence in actions being taken on the ground to ensure that everyone adheres to requirements of vital health measures to stem the outbreak from spreading further.

All necessary steps have been taken to contain the outbreak, with local communities strictly following health guidelines, he emphasised.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) provided 7.55bn/- early this week to support the country's efforts to combat the outbreak, he said, noting that health authorities were monitoring the situation. The public is urged to remain vigilant and follow all recommended health guidelines to prevent further transmission of the virus, he said.

Dr Grace Magembe, the chief medical officer, also took part in the briefing, stating that the number of suspected cases fluctuates as individuals present themselves for testing when they feel the symptoms.

As of yesterday, 15 people were being investigated as potential cases, she said, noting that of the individuals who underwent testing for the virus, all results came back negative. They will be retested after 72 hours for final confirmation, she stated.

Marburg shares similar symptoms with malaria, urinary tract infections (UTIs) and typhoid fever, which is why patients seeking treatment for these conditions are also being screened for Marburg, she stated.

Earlier this week, President Samia Suluhu Hassan reassured Tanzanians and the international community that despite the recent Marburg case, Tanzania remains a safe destination.

"We have built substantial experience in managing such outbreaks, and our preparedness allows us to keep the situation under control," she had stated.

Zanzibar implements energy tariff upsurges for customers

By Guardian Reporter, Zanzibar

THE public relations manager for the Zanzibar Utilities Regulatory Authority (ZURA) has unveiled new electricity tariffs, sparking mixed reactions from both residential and business consumers.

For residential users and small businesses in categories Z0-Z1, the tariff for the first 50 units per month has risen from 79/- to 84/- per unit. However, for those consuming more than 50 units, the rate has been significantly reduced, dropping from 480/- to 290/- per unit, providing some relief for higher-usage consumers.

Speaking at a press conference earlier this week, Mbarak Hassan Haji, ZURA public relations manager, explained that the tariff adjustments were made in response to the growing demand for electricity in Zanzibar. He reassured the public that consultations were conducted with stakeholders before the changes were implemented.

"Before adjusting the tariffs, we engaged with various stakeholders to ensure that the changes would be beneficial and fair," Haji said. "The new rates reflect the increasing demand for electricity and the need to ensure a sustainable supply for all users." For consumers in categories Z1-Z2, which include those using between 1 and 1,500 kWh, the price has increased from

266/- to 280/- per unit. Larger consumers, including major businesses and light industries in categories Z2-Z3, are also facing price hikes. The tariff for category Z2 users has increased from 206/- to 217/- per unit, while category Z3 users will now pay 178/- per unit, up from 169/-.

Consumers with high power demands, measured in kilovolt-amperes (KVA), will continue to pay the rate of 16,000/- per unit, maintaining their previous rate.

A notable positive development for consumers is that ZECO has decided to keep the service and demand charges unchanged. The service charge for small consumers remains at 2,100/-, while larger consumers will continue to pay 150,000/- for the demand charge.

The tariff adjustments have been met with mixed reactions. Residential users and small businesses in the lower consumption categories have expressed concern over the increase in rates for the first 50 units, while large businesses and industries are worried about the impact of higher rates on their operational costs.

Despite the concerns, the Zanzibar government has reiterated that the tariff adjustments are necessary to ensure the continued stability and expansion of the island's electricity infrastructure, particularly as demand for electricity continues to rise with the growing population and economic activity.



Minister for Health, Jenista Mhagama (C), claps shortly after inaugurating the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute (JKCI) clinic at Oysterbay branch in Dar es Salaam yesterday. Left is the JKCI Executive Director Dr. Peter Kisenge. Photo: Correspondent Christina Mwakangale

JKCI adds new cardiac clinic in Dar es Salaam

By Correspondent Christina Mwakangale

HEALTH minister Jenista Mhagama yesterday inaugurated the new cardiac clinic in Dar es Salaam, emphasising the government's ongoing efforts to expand and improve specialised heart care services in the country.

The facility has been established by Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute (JKCI).

Speaking at the event, minister Mhagama praised the establishment of new JKCI clinics, which now include three locations, the main JKCI headquarters in Upanga,

along with the newly launched branches in Oyster Bay and Kawe.

She noted that the expansion of these facilities helps to reduce government costs by providing local heart treatment, thereby eliminating the need for patients to travel abroad for specialised care.

"This growth in the number of JKCI clinics directly supports the government's broader healthcare goals. By training local healthcare professionals and investing over 30bn/-, we are ensuring that specialised care is accessible within the country, which saves significant resources," Mhagama said.

She emphasised the importance of addressing heart disease, referencing the World Health Organisation's 2019 report, which stated that heart-related diseases are responsible for 17 million deaths annually, accounting for 32 per cent of global mortality.

"The existence of JKCI has made a significant impact in reducing heart-related deaths in our country," Mhagama said.

She added: "To continue building on this success, we need to increase awareness locally and internationally, promote our

services, and collaborate with embassies. These efforts will also boost medical tourism."

Dr Peter Kisenge, Executive Director of JKCI, said the institute has spent over 2bn/- to establish and enhance infrastructure for the two new clinics, including JKCI-Oyster Bay.

He mentioned that JKCI now operates four service centres in Dar es Salaam—Upanga, Kawe, Oyster Bay, and Dar Group—with mobile health services extending to other regions of Tanzania.

"When we first began heart treatments,

JKCI performed 365 surgeries annually. Today, we perform over 3,000 surgeries a year, including complex open-heart procedures," Dr Kisenge said.

He added: "With an investment of over 2.2bn/-, we have expanded our services at both the Kawe and Oyster Bay clinics, offering not only heart care but also nutritional counselling to improve overall health."

Dr Kisenge also announced that the Oyster Bay branch will offer online consultations, increasing accessibility for patients across Tanzania who may not be able to visit in person.



Goba residents fetching water from holes they dug in the Tegeta River in Dar es Salaam, yesterday for domestic use due to clean water being available only once a week. Photo: Correspondent Miraji Msala

Government provides humanitarian aid to 32 homes hit by strong winds

By Guardian Correspondent, Rukwa

THE government has provided humanitarian aid to 32 families hit by strong winds. They included Lyowa and Matai wards in Kalambo District, Rukwa Region.

During the handover ceremony held earlier this week, Kalambo District Commissioner (DC) Dr Lazaro Komba explained that 32 families had been severely impacted by adverse weather conditions. Strong winds swept across Lyowa Ward, causing significant damage to their homes and leaving them homeless.

Dr Komba outlined the details of the donation, which included 442 pieces of timber, 400 pieces of galvanised steel, and 103 kilograms of nails.

Reflecting on the incident, the DC recalled that on September 20 last year, around 65 families in the area were also displaced when their houses were damaged by strong winds.

"The actual damage caused by strong winds was assessed, and it was found that 32 families urgently required humanitarian assistance to help repair their homes and provide them with shelter," Dr Komba said.

He noted that seven of the affected families were from Namlangwa village, 12 from Matai B village, and 13 from Kateka village.

DC Komba further instructed the Tanzania Forest Services (TFS) in the district to distribute tree seedlings to the affected communities within seven days. These trees will be planted in designated areas

to help mitigate the risks of future cyclones and strong winds.

He emphasised that every resident has a responsibility to plant trees around homes and in public spaces as part of a broader effort to reduce the impact of natural disasters. He also urged people to build stronger, more durable houses to avoid the recurrence of such destruction in the future.

"This is a collective effort to ensure our communities are better prepared for natural disasters. We must all take action to protect ourselves and our property from the dangers posed by extreme weather," Dr Komba stated.

Erasto Mwasanga, the planning and coordination officer for Kalambo District Council, said the government's swift response aims to support affected families and encourage long-term resilience against the challenges posed by climate-related disasters.



This is a collective effort to ensure our communities are better prepared for natural disasters. We must all take action to protect ourselves and our property from the dangers posed by extreme weather

Detectives urged to uphold professionalism in criminal investigations, says Iringa RPC

By Correspondent Friday Simbaya, Iringa

DETECTIVES handling criminal cases, especially those involving human DNA evidence, have been urged to maintain the highest level of professionalism and strictly adhere to established work protocols.

Iringa Regional Police Commander (RPC), Senior Assistant Commissioner of Police (SACP) Allan Bukumbi, made the call

on Thursday during a specialised training session for officers and investigators involved in criminal investigations.

The training focused particularly on handling cases that require the analysis and use of human DNA evidence.

Commander Bukumbi emphasised the significance of professionalism and adherence to work protocols in enhancing the effectiveness and reliability of investigations. He urged

all law enforcement personnel to stay committed to the principles that govern their work to increase the overall efficiency of the police force in solving criminal cases.

"The success of our investigations depends largely on how we carry out our duties, especially when dealing with sensitive evidence such as DNA. We must remain professional at all times, ensuring that all procedures are followed meticulously to guar-

antee the credibility of our findings," he said.

The one-day training session brought together a group of seasoned experts from the Office of the Chief Government Chemist and the police headquarters, who shared their knowledge on the proper handling of criminal evidence and DNA analysis. The session provided an opportunity for investigators to enhance their skills in collecting, processing, and submitting forensic evi-

dence.

Joyce Njisywa, an expert from the Chief Government Chemist Laboratory Authority in Dodoma, underscored the importance of the training. She explained that the goal of the session was to ensure that the samples collected and submitted by police officers meet the necessary standards required to produce accurate, reliable, and impactful results.

"The integrity of our criminal investigations depends heav-

ily on the quality of the evidence presented. This training helps investigators understand how to properly handle DNA samples and submit them for analysis in ways that maintain their authenticity and precision," Njisywa said.

The police have been conducting a series of training programmes across the country in collaboration with civil institutions and forensic experts. These initiatives aim to foster knowledge exchange and improve the

overall efficiency of police operations in criminal investigations, ensuring that officers are well-equipped to handle increasingly complex cases involving scientific evidence.

In addition to the specialised DNA training, the police has been focused on enhancing various aspects of criminal investigations, from the proper documentation of evidence to modernising forensic tools and techniques.



Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office (Labor, Youth, Employment, and Persons with Disabilities), Patrobas Katambi (R), addresses social welfare and IT officers from councils in Mwanza, Kagera, Geita, Simiyu, Shinyanga, and Mara regions during the launch of the Disabled Persons Management Information System (PD-MIS) in Mwanza on Thursday.. Photo: Correspondent

Zanzibar completes major repairs on MV Mapinduzi

By Guardian Reporter, Zanzibar

ZANZIBAR government has said that necessary repairs on MV Mapinduzi II have been completed and that the vessel is in excellent condition and expected to resume operations by March, this year.

Minister for Infrastructure, Communication, and Transport, Dr Khalid Salum Mohamed, announced on Thursday that the government was forced to carry out extensive repairs on the MV Mapinduzi II following a prolonged mechanical and engine default.

Dr Khalid made the statement after inspecting the vessel, which is currently undergoing final repairs at Malindi port in Zanzibar. He explained that the repair work took longer than initially anticipated, as several parts of the ship were beyond repair and had to be sourced outside Zanzibar.

The minister revealed that three trial runs had already been conducted with the involvement of engineers from KOOKJE, the South Korean-based company contracted for carrying out the repairs.

He said the trials were essential to ensure the vessel's proper functioning and address any technical issues before it can be cleared for operating services.

Dr Khalid added that by mid-February, MV Mapinduzi II will undergo long-distance trials, including a trip to Pemba and Cherezoni, Mombasa, for deck inspections. Further final repairs, including repainting of the deck area, will be carried out to ensure the vessel meets international safety and operational standards.

Captain Abubakar Mzee Ali expressed confidence that the vessel is in good condition, with only minor adjustments remaining. The ship is expected to be ready for passenger services soon.

The total cost of repairs amounted to approximately \$3.8 million, with a significant portion allocated to sourcing replacement parts and conducting quality checks. The vessel is scheduled to undergo final repairs and maintenance in Mombasa, Kenya.

The successful maintenance is expected to greatly benefit the local economy, enhancing transport infrastructure for both residents and tourists.

Minister calls on public servants to respect people with disabilities

By Guardian Reporter, Mwanza

PATROBAS Katambi, the Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office (Labour, Youth, Employment, and People with Disabilities), has called on public servants to stop stigmatising people with disabilities and instead they should provide them with the services, re-

spect, and care.

Katambi made the statement on Thursday during the opening of the training on electronic data and database system for people with disabilities. The training, attended by social welfare and IT officers from various regions and local authorities, aims to enhance the effectiveness of services for people with

disabilities. In his remarks, Katambi emphasised the importance of treating people with disabilities with dignity and empathy, noting that disability is often a circumstance beyond one's control and should never lead to discrimination. He urged the officials to apply the skills learned from the training to improve the lives of people with

disabilities nationwide.

"By doing so, we will help people with disabilities even if it's just by 15 per cent. You, as professionals, are making a significant contribution. Let's carry out this work with dedication and genuine heart to serve those in need," Katambi said.

Henry Mwaijega, Mwanza City planning officer, shared statistics in-

dicating that there are 10,896 individuals with disabilities in Mwanza. This includes 5,362 with physical disabilities, 1,416 who are blind, 1,862 with vision impairment, 2,004 with mental health challenges, and 609 with albinism.

Mwaijega also highlighted the ongoing efforts to ensure equal access to education and support services

for people with disabilities. Initiatives include the construction of specialised classrooms and the distribution of essential equipment, such as sunscreen lotion for people with albinism, two classrooms built with the help of the Desk and Chair Foundation, 52 mobility chairs, and 70 white canes for the visually impaired.



CPA Gladness Mollé (R), Senior Officer of Financial Analysis, Policy, Research, and Planning Department at the Capital Markets and Securities Authority (CMSA), educates traders and entrepreneurs on investment matters at Kiranyi Ward, Arusha District Council yesterday, as part of the third phase of the Ministry of Finance's programme to educate citizens on financial matters. Photo: Courtesy of Ministry of Finance

COPRA focuses on fair pricing, economic prospects for farmers

By Guardian Correspondent, Mara

FARMERS across the country have been urged to be free to set the prices for their crops, taking into account the true value and accurate measurements to ensure they earn better income.

Irene Mlola, Director-General of the Cereals and Other Produce Regulatory Authority (COPRA), made the remarks during the stakeholders' meeting on pigeon peas and chickpeas pricing. The meeting aimed to help farmers' secure better prices for their crops during the harvest season.

Mlola emphasised COPRA's commitment to ensuring transparency and fairness in the trade of grains and mixed crops, including pigeon peas and chickpeas. She also highlighted that transport permits would be issued to registered buyers who purchase crops through the systems established by the government. "COPRA is dedicated to ensuring that the trade of grains and mixed crops is carried out fairly. Transport permits will be issued to registered buyers," Mlola stated.

She reiterated that COPRA's goal is to ensure economic benefits for both farmers and buyers. Mlola also encouraged farmers and buyers to fully utilise the opportunities provided by the authority to maximise the benefits of growing crops regionally and nationally.

She reminded farmers of the government's substantial investment in the agriculture sector and urged them to leverage the support to increase production and boost profits.

Mara Regional Commissioner Col. Evans Mtambi urged residents to take advantage of the numerous economic opportunities emerging from pigeon pea and chickpea value chains, particularly through government-established systems. He noted that warehouse receipt schemes and digital commodity auctions would help farmers sell their produce at fair prices.

"The introduction of warehouse receipt systems will protect farmers from exploitation through inaccurate measurements and help them secure better profits," Mtambi explained.

He assured farmers that these systems would help them achieve better prices and end fraudulent practices involving false measurements.

Kikwete urges church leaders to promote unity and peace

By Guardian Correspondent, Morogoro

FORMER President Jakaya Kikwete has urged Tanzanians to stop using religion as a pretext to sow hatred and division, actions that stir up conflict and undermine peace.

Kikwete, who is the founder of the Peace and Reconciliation Association of Tanzania (JMAT), called on religious leaders to stand

firm in ensuring that Tanzania remains peaceful, stable, and united. His comments came on Thursday during a JMAT Central Committee meeting, where he emphasised that peace and stability cannot be bought but must be cultivated through unity, solidarity, and brotherhood.

Kikwete reflected on the origins of JMAT, which emerged from his presidency after religious conflict

between Muslims and Christians. The dispute, which started as a small issue in Katoro, escalated into violence, resulting in deaths, injuries, and property damage.

"We had to intervene, regulating media outlets fuelling the conflict," Kikwete said. "As Sheikh Alhad Mussa Salum, JMAT Chairman, noted, we organised one of the largest meetings of religious leaders to foster understanding, marking the

beginning of JMAT."

He praised JMAT's efforts in addressing conflicts, particularly between farmers and pastoralists, acknowledging the significant reduction in such disputes since the association's formation in 2015. Kikwete also urged greater attention to youth, ensuring they grow up embracing Tanzania's values while resisting the negative influences of globalisa-

tion.

The former president condemned media outlets that contribute to unrest, warning that such behaviour would not be tolerated. Sheikh Salum clarified that JMAT is not an interfaith platform but a unifying institution focused on peace and stability, while respecting each faith's freedom to worship.

Morogoro Regional Commis-

sioner Adam Malima highlighted improvements in the region since JMAT's establishment, particularly in resolving land disputes between farmers and herders.

Azim Dewji, Chairman of the JMAT Board of Trustees, emphasised that peace is everyone's responsibility, including political parties, which must engage in dignified politics for the good of all Tanzanians.



An officer from Airpay Company, Wema Kilongola (L) registers information of the entrepreneurship group members into the digital loan application system, aimed at simplifying loan application and disbursement processes offered by the Zanzibar Economic Empowerment Agency (ZEEA) at Gombani in Pemba, yesterday. Photo: Correspondent

Egypt urges intensified efforts to secure Red Sea, Horn of Africa

CAIRO

EGYPTIAN President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi has urged intensified efforts to maintain peace and security in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, stressing the region's strategic importance to global stability.

Sisi made the remarks on Thursday at a joint press conference with visiting Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud following their meeting earlier in the day, the Egyptian Presidency said in a statement.

"We agreed on the need to intensify efforts to maintain peace and security in that vital region, which affects global security," Sisi said, referring to the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.

He highlighted the outcome of the October 2024 Asmara Summit among Egypt, Somalia, and Eritrea, describing it as "significant progress in relations and coordination among our countries," and stressed the importance of building on the summit by holding a second trilateral meeting "to fortify this partnership."

Earlier this month, Cairo hosted the first meeting of a new tril-

ateral committee with Somalia and Eritrea to follow up on the October summit between the leaders of the three countries.

Sisi reaffirmed Egypt's commitment to supporting Somalia, describing it as "a fundamental pillar for the Horn of Africa's stability."

According to the statement, the two presidents signed a joint political declaration to elevate bilateral relations to the level of strategic partnership. Some memoranda of understanding were also signed between the two countries.

The Somalia presidency has not issued a statement yet regarding the meeting, but said Wednesday that during Hassan's official visit to Egypt, he would discuss with Sisi strengthening joint counter-terrorism efforts, enhancing economic and development cooperation, and advancing cooperation on regional peace and security, among other topics.

The Red Sea's security is critical for ensuring uninterrupted global trade through the Suez Canal, a key economic lifeline for Egypt that has experienced revenue losses due to regional instability.

Zanzibar launches digital loan system to empower residents

By Guardian Reporter, Pemba

THE Zanzibar Economic Empowerment Agency (ZEEA) has introduced digital loan system aimed at providing residents with quicker access to funds, helping them to expand their businesses and improve their economic status.

The newly introduced system, which replaces the traditional paper-based loan application process, is expected to streamline loan requests and ensure timely disbursement of funds.

Speaking during the launch of the training for officials involved in the loan ap-

plication process, he said they include representatives from local councils, youth officers, and leaders of special interest groups—ZEEA's loan officer, Suleiman Ali Hamad, outlined the benefits of the new digital platform.

"From now on, all loan applications will be processed online, eliminating the need for paper submissions. This digital shift will ensure that citizens can access funds more efficiently," Hamad said.

He added that the training would equip participants with the knowledge to guide their communities on using

the new system for loans applications.

Haji Mohamed Haji, ZEEA's Pemba coordinator, highlighted one of the platform's key requirements: loan applicants must belong to officially registered groups, and all members must possess the Zanzibar resident ID card.

Zuwena Abdalla Suleiman, savings and loan officer at the Pemba Cooperative Development Department, emphasised that cooperative leaders must meet specific qualifications for their groups to qualify for the loans.

"If a leader does not meet the required criteria, the group must amend

its constitution and replace the leader. This is why we are providing education to ensure that everyone meets the necessary standards, including having the Zanzibar resident ID," she explained.

Majid Makilla, inclusive finance officer at Airpay Tanzania, the company behind the digital loan system, assured participants that the platform is designed to be reliable and accessible at all times.

"We are committed to ensuring the system functions smoothly so that applicants can submit their requests on

time and receive assistance promptly," Makilla said.

He also announced plans to produce instructional videos to guide citizens through the loan application process on the digital platform.

The launch of this digital loan system marks a significant milestone in Zanzibar's efforts to promote economic growth, enhance financial inclusion, and provide equitable access to credit. This initiative is part of broader efforts to empower local communities and stimulate the island's economy by improving access to financial resources.



Minister for Industry and Trade, Dr Selemani Jafo (L), greets Dr Nicolaus Shombe, Managing Director of the National Development Corporation (NDC), upon his arrival at Engaruka in Arusha yesterday to announce the commencement of compensation for citizens, paving the way for the Magadi Soda project. Photo: Correspondent Joseph Mwendapole

Six Dar residents remanded over alleged EFD fraud case

By Guardian Correspondent

SIX Dar es Salaam residents facing charges of economic sabotage for allegedly defrauding the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) through the manipulation of Electronic Fiscal Devices (EFD) remain in remand as investigations into the case continue.

The defendants stand accused of manipulating Electronic Fiscal Devices (EFDs), leading to a loss of 2bn/- for the national revenue agency. Those charged include Stanislaus Mushi (27) and Nemence Mushi (29), residents of Malamba Mawili in Ubungo District. Rose Nanga (33), marketing accountant from Kimara, Ubungo District. Hussein Mlezi (37), computer specialist from Kijichi, Mbagala Kuu, Temeke District. Others are Edwin Mark (22), businessman from Yombo Vituka, Temeke District, Salim Salehe (45) an artist from Vingunguti, Ilala District.

The charges against the accused include the fraudulent use of EFD machines and allegedly manipulating the system to cause significant financial losses to the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA). They are also accused of fraudulently obtaining a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) and to register Value Added

Tax (VAT) by using deceptive methods.

Government state attorneys Rhoda Maingu and Auni Chilamula informed the Kinondoni Resident Magistrate Court in Dar es Salaam earlier this week that the case had been called for mention and that investigations were still ongoing. They requested an additional mention date.

In response, defence attorney Estei Madulu argued that delays in the investigation should not hinder the case's progress. He stated that criminal cases should proceed once brought before the court, with investigations completed beforehand.

"Let us resolve this matter in one of two ways: either the case proceeds, or it is transferred to the court with the appropriate jurisdiction, rather than merely stating that the investigation is ongoing," said Madulu.

Presiding Magistrate Amos Rweikiza explained that Chief Resident Magistrate Radhamani Rugeimalira, who is handling the case, was unavailable due to other work commitments. Rweikiza ruled that the defendants would remain in custody until the next mention date, scheduled for 5 February 2025.

'6.2bn/- earmarked for compensation to 595 residents be paid before February 15, 2025'

By Correspondent Joseph Mwendapole

THE government has said 6.2bn/- out of 14.4bn/- earmarked for compensating to 595 citizens from four villages in Engaruka Ward, Monduli District, Arusha Region, should be paid before February 15, 2025.

The villagers from Engaruka Chini, Mbaash, Idonyonado, and Irenendeni are being compensated to make way for the commencement of Soda Ash project. This initiative is expected to bring significant economic benefits to both the region and the country at large.

Speaking to the local community on Thursday, Dr Selemani Jafo, the Minister for Industry and Trade, explained that the compensation is part of a broader strategy to implement projects that will contribute significantly to the development of the industrial sector, create employment opportunities, and boost the national economy.

"The funds are part of a major plan to

support projects with great potential to grow our industries and improve the livelihoods of Tanzanians. The Soda Ash project, in particular, will create jobs and generate substantial revenue for the nation," Dr Jafo said.

He also instructed the National Development Corporation (NDC) to ensure that payments are made equitably and that any complaints from affected citizens are promptly addressed. The minister further directed the development of city plans to facilitate the construction of hotels and other essential community services, urging citizens to take advantage of the employment and business opportunities arising from the project.

Jafo emphasised that NDC should prioritise securing qualified and capable investors who will bring tangible benefits to the country, including the use of domestic raw materials to conserve foreign currency otherwise spent on imports.

The minister also addressed concerns raised by critics who claimed that the project would pose health risks. He assured the public that NDC had secured Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) certificate from the National Environment Management Council (NEMC), confirming that soda ash mining in the Engaruka area would not harm the local flamingo population or the environment.

Dr Jafo added that the government has plans in place to ensure that the roads in Engaruka area are well-maintained and accessible, while also ensuring the provision of reliable electricity (KV 33) to support the industries. The government is also focused on ensuring access to essential social services, including education, healthcare, and clean, safe water.

Geoffrey Pinda, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Human Settlements Development, reiterated the commitment to collaborate with the people of

Longido and Monduli districts to establish clear boundaries and land-use plans for the Engaruka villages in order to prevent conflicts.

"Residents should not be divided by border disputes between Longido and Monduli districts. We must set clear boundaries and work towards development. The ministry will continue to cooperate fully with Arusha Regional Commissioner on this matter," Pinda said.

He also instructed land officials from Monduli and Longido to fully participate in the exercise to restore lost border stones and resolve any issues related to boundary disputes.

Mariam Ditopile, vice-chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Industry, Trade, Agriculture, and Livestock, commended the ministry for resolving the long-standing issue and emphasised the need for fair and just compensation.

Dr Nicolaus Shombe, the Managing Director of NDC, explained that Soda Ash project, which has been in the pipeline for over 20 years, will involve the construction of two large factories estimated cost of 1.6trn/-.

The project is expected to utilise up to 60,884 acres of land and will help Tanzania significantly reduce its reliance on soda ash imports, especially from Botswana and other countries.

"Through this project, Tanzania will save substantial foreign currency that would have been spent on imports, as soda ash will now be produced locally in Engaruka area," Dr Shombe said.

The NDC has already provided financial education to the local residents. Dr Shombe confirmed that individuals receiving compensation will be required to vacate the area within 90 days to allow for the smooth implementation of the project.

French embassy, TLS contact simplify travel visa application for Tanzanians

By Guardian Reporter and Agencies

FRENCH Embassy in Tanzania has taken steps to facilitate visa applications for Tanzanian citizens traveling to France for purposes such as business, education, employment and tourism.

In collaboration with the TLScontact visa application centre, the French Embassy has recently formalised an agreement aimed at simplifying the visa application process for Tanzanian travellers.

This partnership between the French Embassy and TLScontact is designed to improve the efficiency and accessibility of visa applications for Tanzanian citizens, enhancing the overall experience for those wishing to visit France.

The initiative aims to streamline the process of obtaining necessary documentation, ensuring that applicants benefit from a seamless and supportive experience.

According to Anne-Sophie Avé, the French Ambassador to Tanzania, the collaboration with TLScontact demonstrates the embassy's commitment to improving service quality, reducing waiting times, and making visa services more accessible.

The ambassador highlighted that the process of welcoming visa applicants, managing waiting periods, and processing applications requires considerable time and effort.

Considering the large number of individuals visiting the embassy daily, it is

evident that both applicants and embassy personnel invest significant time in reviewing and processing applications before visas can be issued.

To address these time-consuming tasks, the French Embassy will work closely with TLScontact to enhance the efficiency of visa service delivery.

"We anticipate that this transition will enable more applicants to secure appointments more swiftly, potentially allowing them to receive their visas within a two-week period. We will soon assess the initial outcomes, but we are optimistic that applicants will experience shorter wait times and faster processing," stated the ambassador.

TLScontact will oversee the initial submission of visa applications, significantly reducing processing times for applicants while ensuring a smooth and supportive experience.

Previously, applicants for French visas faced waiting periods of up to three months to secure appointments, often disrupting travel plans that required timely visa acquisition.



We anticipate that this transition will enable more applicants to secure appointments more swiftly, potentially allowing them to receive their



Japhet Hasunga (C), Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee (PAC), briefs journalists following an inspection of the ongoing construction of Msalato International Airport in Dodoma on Thursday. Photo: Courtesy of the Ministry of Works

Youth urged to embrace modern technologies to spur productivity

By Guardian Correspondent, Wanging'ombe

YOUTH have been urged to become catalysts for change in the agriculture sector by embracing modern technologies to boost productivity and enhance economic opportunities.

Fredi Kamande, Coordinator of Youth Employment for Food and Agriculture (YEFFA) programme under the Alliance for Green Revolu-

tion in Africa (AGRA), made the call recently, during a training session for 61 young people from Njombe and Wanging'ombe districts held at Ilembula Ward.

Kamande explained that the participants received specialised training in agricultural tools management and innovative agricultural technologies.

"The goal of this training is to improve the agriculture sector by enhancing productivity and effi-

ciency through modern technologies, ensuring youth take up farming with the knowledge they have," Kamande said.

He added that the initiative also aims to empower young people with self-employment opportunities while addressing challenges related to access to agricultural technologies across the country.

"We aim to empower youth to become ambassadors of change in the agricultural sector by adopting

modern technologies," Kamande said. YEFFA project, managed by AGRA with funding from the Mastercard Foundation, focuses on transforming agriculture through innovative technologies.

"It also provides young people with opportunities to develop their skills and secure sustainable employment, aligning with Tanzania's national goal of growing the agriculture sector by 10 percent by 2030," Kamande said.

Earlier, Njombe Regional Commissioner Anthony Mtaka urged farmers in the region to adopt modern technologies to improve productivity and enhance the quality of their crops.

"The use of modern farming tools is the foundation of agricultural transformation. Farmers in Njombe should adopt technologies to boost production and grow our region's economy," Mtaka said. He stressed that the region is fo-

cused on contributing to national agricultural goals while ensuring that youth gain valuable skills and employment in modern agricultural technologies.

Franco Musha, one of the youth, said that many young people are hesitant to venture into farming due to the use of outdated tools.

However, he believes the availability of modern equipment will inspire more youth to engage in agriculture.

Global tourism almost return to pre-pandemic level in 2024

MADRID

INTERNATIONAL tourist arrivals rose by 11 percent in 2024, with 1.4 billion people traveling internationally, according to the World Tourism Barometer published by UN Tourism on Tuesday.

The data, which is published on the eve of the FITUR international tourism exhibition in Madrid, means that numbers have recovered to 99 percent of levels seen in 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili welcomed the results. He said: "In 2024, global tourism completed its recovery from the pandemic and, in many places, tourist arrivals and especially earnings are already higher than in 2019."

Growth is expected to continue throughout 2025, he said, "driven by strong demand contributing to the socio-economic development of both mature and emerging destinations."

Madrid-based UN Tourism reports that Asia and the Pacific region saw 316 million international travelers in 2024, 33 percent (78 million people) higher than in 2023, and 87 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

An aerial drone photo taken on Oct. 10, 2023 shows the view of Shibadong Village of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, central China's

Hunan Province. Seven villages in China have been honoured as Best Tourism Villages by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) in its 2024 selection, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

While Europe saw 747 million international arrivals in 2024, one percent up on 2019 and 5 percent higher than in 2023, the Middle East witnessed the biggest growth compared to 2019, with a 32 percent rise in arrivals to 95 million. Africa also performed strongly, with a 12 percent increase in international tourists compared to 2023.

One reason for the growth is that international air capacity and air traffic returned to pre-pandemic levels over the previous 12 months, UN Tourism said.

The rise in the number of travelers was also reflected in spending, with receipts reaching 1.6 trillion U.S. dollars in 2024, a 4 percent increase from 2019 and 3 percent higher than in 2023.

The outlook for the future also seems bright. UN Tourism predicts a growth between 3-5 percent in 2025 compared with 2024, and a "continued recovery of Asia and the Pacific and solid growth in most other regions" should global economic conditions remain stable and geopolitical conflicts not escalate.



Mwita Marwa, Chief Mechanic at the Dodoma Workshop for Persons with Disabilities (KAWADO), assembles a three-wheel bicycle at his factory in Sabasaba Market, Dodoma yesterday. Once completed, each bicycle is sold at a price ranging from 600,000/- to 1.3m/- .Photo: Correspondent Peter Mkwavila

Mwigulu stresses on productive investments in financial markets

By Correspondent James Kandoyo

MINISTER for Finance Mwigulu Nchemba has called on financial institutions across Tanzania to prioritize productive investments in financial and capital markets to support the government's revenue goals.

Speaking yesterday at the ceremony marking the list-

ing of Azania Bank's bonds on the Dar es Salaam Stock Exchange (DSE), Nchemba emphasized the importance of sustainable markets that attract foreign capital and drive financial sector growth.

"We need markets that foster investment and promote sector development," he said.

He highlighted the bond listing as a key indicator of a modern economy, enhancing

transparency and accountability. Nchemba also encouraged other institutions to adopt innovative strategies, citing Azania Bank's successful use of bond issuance to mobilize resources.

"Bond listing enhances liquidity and strengthens the Dar es Salaam Stock Exchange," he added.

Nchemba urged investors to capitalize on high-yield opportunities in the bond market,

which he identified as crucial for advancing the National Financial Inclusion Strategy and broadening access to financial services.

Nicodemus Mkama, CEO of the Capital Markets and Securities Authority (CMSA), noted that the bond issuance was approved on September 26 after the bank met all CMSA requirements.

Mkama praised the bond's

overwhelming success, with a subscription rate of 210.9 percent, raising 63.27bn/- more than double the target of 30 billion.

Notably, 70 percent of the sales came from retail investors, while 30 percent were from institutional investors. Local investors accounted for 98.4 percent of the participants.

Mkama credited government policies for the bond's

success, highlighting Tanzania's strengthening capital markets, which continue to attract both local and international investors. "With continued leadership and innovative strategies, Tanzania is on track for further economic growth and wider access to financial services," he noted.

Mkama expressed immense pride in the success of the bond issuance, emphasizing the pivotal role of government policies

in facilitating this achievement.

"The event underscored the growing strength of Tanzania's capital markets, which continue to attract both local and international investors. With the government's continued leadership and innovative strategies, Tanzania is poised for even stronger economic growth and broader access to financial services for its citizens," he added.

Mayotte schools ready to reopen after devastating Cyclone Chido

MAYOTTE

JUST over a month after Cyclone Chido devastated the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte, schools are preparing for the return of students next week.

Teachers and administrative staff were called back to work on Monday to find some classrooms destroyed, while others were missing a roof or windows.

At the Lycée de Petite Terre high school in Mamoudzou, locals and firefighters were still working to consolidate some of the main buildings.

"We deployed over 60 people on this site, aiming to secure as many classrooms as possible so that students can come back to safe buildings," says Colonel Olivier Bruyère, south-east squad chief.

"We took out anything that could cause injuries and we're covering everything with tarpaulin to keep things dry." Classes are due to start next week, after they were postponed due to the threat of another cyclone, underlying the challenges faced by the island.

Lycée de Petite Terre's assistant headmistress, Peggy Guillerez, says the school was impacted. "Notably, we had built a superb student's union building but it was, in large part, destroyed. But beyond that, compared to others, the damage is minimal," she says.

"There are about 12 rooms that we cannot use which is not that many with regards to the size of the school."

Many people, including students and teachers, are still without shelter, water, or electricity following Cyclone Chido. As a result, schools are not certain how many of the island's 117,000 children will show up to class. The cyclone was the worst to hit the island in nearly a century.



Muheza District Council Executive Director in Tanga Region, Jumaa Mhina (C), speaks during the opening of a workers' council meeting to discuss the proposed development budget plan for the 2025/2026 financial year, in the district on Thursday. Others are Stratton Lufyagila (R) a Regional Secretary of the Tanzania Union of Government and Health Employees (TUGHE), Nyenza Adam (2nd R) a Secretary of the district workers' council, Athumani Kayumba (2nd L), a Regional Secretary of the Tanzania Local Government Workers' Union (TALGWA) and the Penina Mkunduge Acting regional Secretary of the Tanzania Teachers' Union (TTU). Photo: Correspondent Steven William

Juba suspends social media access for months over violence in Sudan

JUBA

SOUTH Sudan has directed telecom companies to block access to social media for a maximum of three months, citing concerns over dissemination of graphic content relating to the ongoing violence against South Sudanese in neighbouring Sudan.

The country's communications industry regulator, the National Communication Authority (NCA) ordered all internet

service providers and telecom operators to block access to all social media accounts, effective from Wednesday midnight.

"This is due to the recent upheaval in Sudan that has exposed South Sudanese population to unprecedented levels of extreme violence through social media posts," NCA Director General Napoleon Adok Gai said in a statement issued in Juba.

Gai said the South Sudanese refugees in

Wad Madani city of Sudan were targeted by violent attacks, which resulted in the deaths of women and children. The incidents were subsequently captured in videos and shared on social media without regard.

Several South Sudanese have been angered by footage from Sudan that showed killings of South Sudanese nationals by the Sudan Armed Forces on January 11 in Wad Madani.

The footage sparked two days of deadly

violent riots, particularly in Juba, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, and Warrap State.

The angry South Sudanese rioters attacked Sudanese-owned shops and looted goods, and also vandalised them, in revenge for the killings of South Sudanese nationals.

The NCA said the social media ban is necessary to prevent the spread of violent content, particularly videos depicting brutal attacks on women and children

which were widely shared on social media sites.

Gai said the blockage of social media will last for a minimum of 30 days and the directives may be lifted as soon as the situation is contained.

The contents depicted violate the country's local laws and pose a significant threat to public safety and mental health, especially to vulnerable groups, the official added.

Telecom operators in South Sudan, in-



Work to clear debris blocking the flow of rainwater in progress at Mbezi River near the Makongo Bridge in Dar es Salaam yesterday. Photo: Correspondent Miraji Msala

Humanitarian agencies seek \$1.4bn for Somalia in 2025, United Nations

MOGADISHU

THE United Nations and humanitarian partners have unveiled the 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), which aims to raise \$1.42 billion to help 4.6 million people in Somalia.

George Conway, deputy special representative of the UN Secretary General, called on the international community "to support our efforts with urgent funding and resources, ensuring that no one is left behind in this ongoing crisis" in a statement issued in Mogadishu.

The 2025 HNRP advocates for scaled-up development and climate financing to address the structural drivers of needs, build resilience, and reduce the risk of future disasters.

Conway said food insecurity and malnutrition remain widespread across Somalia as a result of recurrent shocks.

"We are committed to providing lifesaving assistance to those most in need, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly," Conway said.

According to the UN, the humanitarian situation in Somalia saw slight improvements in 2024 as compared to previous years, which were marked by widespread conflict, devastating droughts and flooding.

The UN said the improvements are linked to investments in early warning, preparedness and improved collaboration between the humanitarian community and the authorities, and increased response capacity of the government.

Africa, Europe reaffirm support for new green hydrogen pipeline project

By Special Correspondent

ITALY, Austria, Germany, Algeria and Tunisia have reaffirmed their commitment to developing a pipeline that will transport renewable hydrogen from North Africa to Europe, according to the Italian energy ministry.

The planned 3,300-kilometer (2,050-mile) pipeline, dubbed the SouthH2 Corridor, aims to ship green hydrogen from the African coast to Italy and then northward to Austria and Germany.

Ministers and officials from the five nations, along with Ditte Juul Jørgensen, Director-General for Energy of the European Commission, participated in meetings and discussions on Tuesday regarding the project.

The European Commission recognizes the SouthH2 Corridor as a Project of Common Interest (PCI), potentially opening the door for EU funding for parts of the infrastructure.

The project will utilize more than 65% repurposed existing infrastructure, with new

pipeline segments constructed where necessary. Organizers say the corridor has political backing and strong support from companies involved in hydrogen production and offtake along the entire route.

The pipeline is expected to be operational by 2030. "SouthH2 Corridor will further boost Italy's role as a European energy hub," said Antonio Tajani, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The announcement comes as green

hydrogen projects in Europe have faced recent challenges, including persistently high costs and uncertainty surrounding future demand.

Denmark, for instance, announced in October that it now expects to commission a cross-border green hydrogen pipeline to Germany in 2031, three years later than originally planned.

Shell and Equinor have also abandoned plans for low-carbon hydrogen production and transportation in northern Europe due to insufficient demand.

Research firm BloombergNEF said last month that green hydrogen will likely struggle to compete on price with gray hydrogen, which is produced from natural gas, until at least 2050—a much longer timeframe than previously anticipated.

BloombergNEF's recent report on hydrogen prices found that green hydrogen, produced via electrolysis using renewable energy, will not achieve price parity with gray hydrogen by mid-century, as costs have more than tripled from the 2023 forecast.

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Poor Math score wakeup call to authorities to devise new ways

THOSE following examination results presentation by the Executive Secretary of National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) Dr. Said Mohamed, finding the big results could have been a problem. It is one thing noticing overall results, and another finding out what were the crucial results, as it is the latter that inform the public of the more deep set trends. That is how a section of the media zeroed on the Math pass rates, and then on division I to III levels.

Rapidly, a total of 221,953 candidates, or 42.96 percent, achieved division I-III in last year's exam, while in 2023, precisely 197,426 candidates (37.42 percent) achieved division I-III, indicating an improvement of 5.54 percent in the latest examinations. In that case just slightly less than 43 percent of candidates obtained division I to III in the past year's secondary school leaving certificate exams, while the pass rate for Mathematics remained at around 26 per cent. They are the key results in scanning the report.

The issue is how far the public needs to worry as to the pass rate for Basic Mathematics remaining well below average, standing at 25.35 percent. In a way that is a matter of opinion but traditionally Math isn't everyone's cup of tea, as it is often regarded as the key to other spheres of learning, especially in science, but in many other regards it is treated as abstract, irrelevant m day to day life.

For one thing, most people don't use more than basic adding and subtraction in cash operations, in which case what makes a dif-

ference between those who pass Math and those who flunk is the degree to which one is mentally tuned to Math. It is the same with other subjects, and a pupil is a sort of failure if he or she is not tuned well to a breadth of subjects, or nearly all the subjects. It is often a truism that being tuned to just one sphere in class can change the prospects of an individual, to excel in that sphere later.

In that case not much needs to be worried about if performance in Basic Mathematics is quite low, even as it has shown considerable improvement over the past decade. The pass rate increased from 16.76 percent in 2015 to 25.35 percent in 2024, and while this will not be a linear increase noticed every year, it at least shows that learning conditions are improving. Pass rates for Math are now roughly proximate to overall scores, implying that the greater pain of learning difficulty that is felt in Math scores is diminished.

Definitely, further efforts are required to improve teaching of the subject in schools, but the issue is less the Math than the overall score, to raise the division I to III levels, which strictly speaking ought to be above 50 percent. Perhaps this is something that the teaching profession can figure out how to introduce in the current discussion for Vision 2050. Such proficiency, even if somewhat irrelevant for literacy on day to day needs, is vital to build a generation of young people who find it easy to adapt in a science and technology world, taking up technical pursuits with ease.

Business aptitude relevant while land formalisation is huge prize

REPORTS say that the Business Registration and Licensing Agency (BRELA) has moved to empower 1,500 university students with essential knowledge on business formalization. This related to procedures or mechanisms to start a company, in some comprehension of business regulations or trademark registration. It is entirely possible there may be ten out of the number who are likely to have the aptitude to put to use such training, as ability to start an enterprise that makes a produce with a trademark is scarce.

The reports indicated that the training held in Morogoro at mid-week covered best practices for providing commercial services to ensure that legal requirements are met. There are details like securing and maintaining business or company name, gaining legal protection, enhancing opportunities to attract partners, increasing market access and qualifying for various tenders. All these spheres are relatively straightforward when taught in class, and often it is a different matter when put into practice, hence many start-ups fail.

There is plenty of truth in the view that business formalisation contributes to national income growth, and not just via the fees businesses pay annually. Fees for starting a business are an excise sort of duty, whereas it is the taxes that one pays if that enterprise is successful, or has its feet in the ground, that matters, especially as it goes in tandem with creating jobs. Instead of showing the higher learners how to start a company, putting across some bits of knowledge on how start-ups fail or succeed could be of much use.

Hence it is useful to skip the revenues generated at the point of starting a company and more so on what a firm generates to the

public authorities if it succeeds, and indeed the people it will enable to have more hope in life by being tied to its activities. The key aspect here is youth accessing capital and meanwhile the consumption market for goods and services needs to be growing, neither of which was anticipated by the registration body. In a sense it was not their fault, but they need to take up the issue too.

Focusing on these preliminary revenue figures indicates that the life cycle of business start-ups isn't something that preoccupies the registration body. Indeed its top executives may not regularly be spending their late hours figuring out how many of those they registered actually succeed, for when that is the case, they will indeed help to increase government coffers for recurrent and development expenditure. To wit, in the coming years when development aid looks like it will diminish and most countries seek for business ties chiefly, public institutions will start taking interest in how to enable industry or enterprises to succeed, for big results.

There is also a social cost in seeking to inspire the youth to merely take up their limited familiarity with this or that sphere of business and create an impression that ability to actually start a company is next to stepping into success. There are hidden factors that come into play, for instance different family backgrounds and how far there is viable support in that sphere. Without land formalization in the sense of transferable occupancy titles, the penetration of capital will be slow as it only takes up individual peri-urban plots or tired housing units. Transferable titles open access to credit in a more reliable manner, not 10 percent of council revenues or SACCOS.

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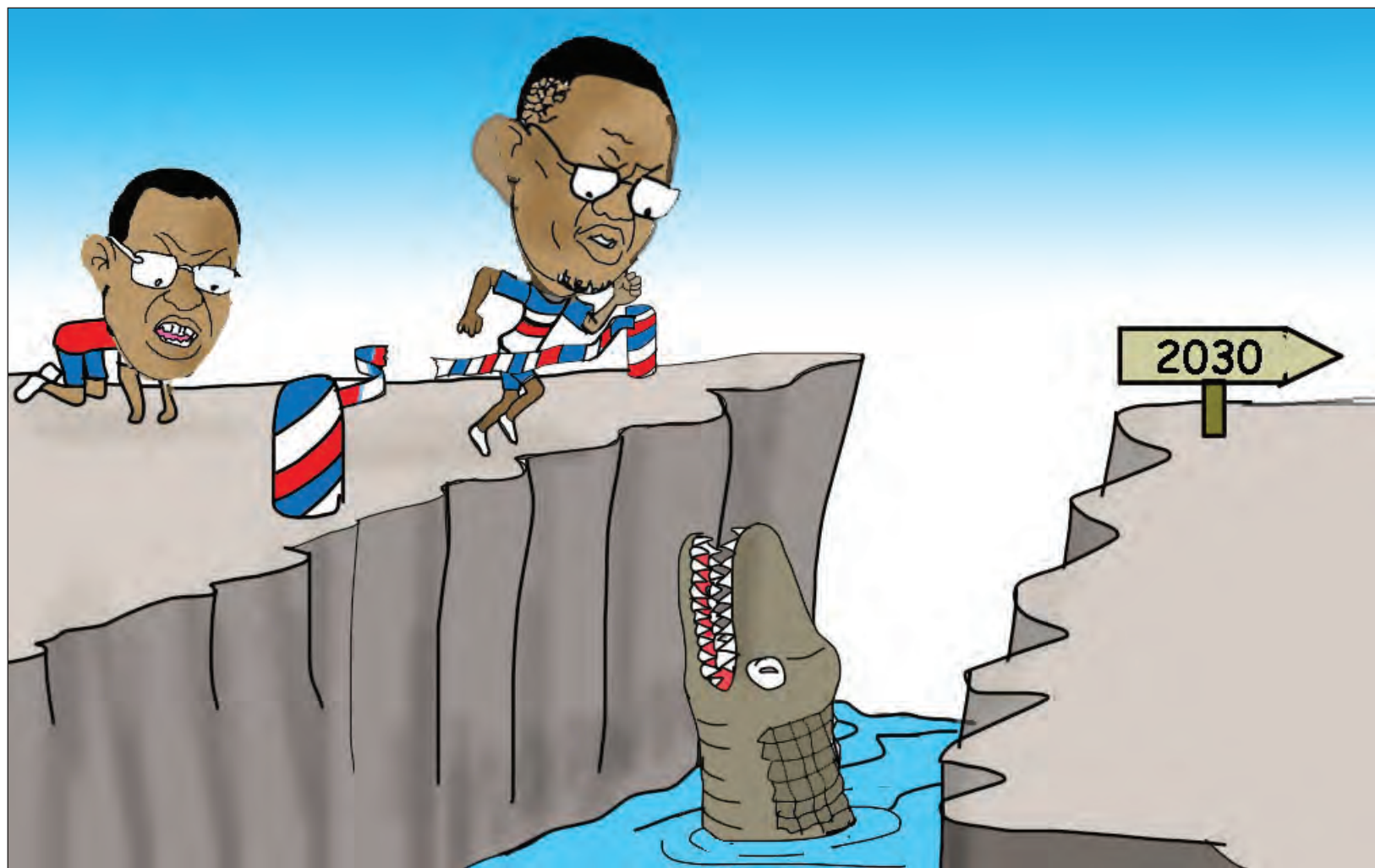
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Africa, Europe must join forces to protect our ocean by pressing pause on deep sea mining

By Nancy Karigithu, Pascal Lamy

DEEP-SEA mining may not be on the official agenda this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, but restoring public trust in international cooperation is. Perhaps the most significant commitment African and European leaders can make here to restore trust in their ability to solve complicated problems, and one that safeguards our planet's health and interconnected ocean, is to call for a pause on deep-sea mining in international waters.

As co-chairs of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, an initiative of the European Commission, in partnership with the African Union Commission, and facilitated by the Africa-Europe Foundation, we have already begun discussing how both continents could benefit from greater collaboration in fisheries management, marine pollution, and habitat protection, especially in the face of climate change.

Now, with Global North mining corporations pushing the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to approve commercial deep-sea mining in 2025 with no agreed regulations and no environmental safeguards, we must urgently turn our attention and global influence to the ocean floor.

Already, permits have been granted to prospect for potato-sized polymetallic nodules that contain elements like cobalt and nickel. Unfortunately, the mining process amounts to dragging bulldozers across the seafloor thousands of meters below the surface and vacuuming the nodules back up to ships where they are cleaned with high-pressure hoses, leaving vast clouds of silt in their wakes.

Scientists have increasingly been sounding the alarm about the potential impacts of the operations on fragile marine habitats, with the likelihood that deep-sea mining could irreversibly destroy species and ecosystems. Once thought to be nearly devoid of life, and contrary to the traditional knowledge of indigenous and coastal communities, new research has revealed an environment teeming with numerous species of fish, squid, and crustaceans (many only recently discovered) that play an essential role in the wider global ocean system, including African and European fisheries.

Other research suggests that disturbing seabed sediments could disrupt our planet's largest carbon sink and potentially release carbon into the atmosphere and compound the climate crisis when we can least afford it.

Both continents depend on a healthy marine environment for fisheries, tourism and food security. Yet, even as they struggle to manage unprecedented pressures from over-exploitation, rapidly warming waters, pollution and acidification, deep-sea mining looms as a potentially catastrophic threat with far-reaching impacts that do not recognize national borders. Proponents of the mining, possibly even some in Davos, argue that it is necessary to satisfy growing demand for batteries used

in the burgeoning electric vehicle market. But with research suggesting that deep-sea metals are not needed to fuel the green transition, including the astronomical costs and growing liabilities with the industry, companies have already begun moving away from the industry to invest in alternatives, including innovative battery chemistries and recycled materials. It is unlikely that deep-sea mining would ever be profitable without large government subsidies that could be better spent on improved refining and processing capacity, renewable technologies and energy efficiency.

Given these enormous risks (and questionable benefits), an Africa-Europe led pause on deep-sea mining is simply a prudent application of the precautionary approach that has guided marine conservation and international environmental treaties for decades. It would also align with key principles set out in the UN High Seas Treaty, such as conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing.

Moreover, it would lay the groundwork for even greater collaboration, including ocean research initiatives, marine genetic resources found in the deep ocean, ocean planning, applied local community and indigenous knowledge, and the establishment of dedicated research institutions that draw on the immense talent and experience available in both continents.

Political momentum against deep-sea mining is building. Today, 32 countries have announced their support for a moratorium, a precautionary pause, or an outright ban, joined also by scores of indigenous and civil society groups, major companies, financial institutions, science and policy experts from around the world.

If we have learned one lesson from working on global challenges over the past few decades it is how enormously difficult it is to bring about change once powerful interests become entrenched.

This year, deep-sea mining corporations are pressuring the ISA to approve full-scale commercial operations. Without immediate action from world leaders at Davos, deep-sea mining and its destruction, could become entrenched for decades. Africa and Europe have a unique opportunity to demonstrate the value of international cooperation by stopping this harmful practice before it starts.

The United Nations agreement on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction or BBNJ Agreement, also referred to by some stakeholders as the High Seas Treaty or Global Ocean Treaty, is a legally binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. There is some controversy over the popular-

ized name of the agreement. It is an agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The text was finalised during an intergovernmental conference at the UN on 4 March 2023 and adopted on 19 June 2023. Both states and regional economic integration organizations can become parties to the treaty.

In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) had voted to convene an intergovernmental conference (IGC) to consider establishing an international legally binding instrument (ILBI) on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). This was considered necessary because UNCLOS did not provide a framework for areas beyond national jurisdiction. There was a particular concern for marine biodiversity and the impact of overfishing on global fish stocks and ecosystem stability.

The treaty addresses four themes: (1) marine genetic resources (MGRs) and their Digital sequence information, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits; (2) area-based management tools (ABMTs), including marine protected areas (MPAs); (3) environmental impact assessments (EIAs); and (4) capacity building and transfer of marine technology (CB&TMT). The area-based management tools and environmental impact assessments relate mainly to conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, while the marine genetic resources and capacity building and transfer of marine technology include issues of economic justice and equity.

Greenpeace called it "the biggest conservation victory ever". The main achievement is the new possibility to create marine protected areas in international waters. By doing so the agreement now makes it possible to protect 30 percent of the oceans by 2030 (part of the 30 by 30 target). Though the agreement does not directly address climate change, it also serves as a step towards protecting the ecosystems that store carbon in sediments.

The treaty has 75 articles and its main purpose is "to take stewardship of the world's oceans for present and future generations, care for and protect the marine environment and ensure its responsible use, maintain the integrity of undersea ecosystems and conserve marine biological diversity's inherent value". The treaty recognizes traditional knowledge. It has articles regarding the "polluter-pays" principle, and different impacts of human activities including areas beyond the national jurisdiction of the countries making those activities. The agreement was adopted by the 193 United Nations Member States.

Before the treaty can enter into force, it needs to be ratified by at least

60 UN member states. This process is likely to take some time. The former treaty, UNCLOS, was adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1994. As of October 2024, UNCLOS has 170 parties.[16] The European Union pledged financial support for the process of ratification and implementation of the treaty. International waters are the areas shown in dark blue in this map, i.e. outside exclusive economic zones, which are in light blue.

The world's oceans are facing a severe decline in biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems due to threats related to climate change and the expansion of human activities, such as shipping, overfishing, plastic pollution and deep-sea mining. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a more cohesive ocean governance framework, since the existing framework is too fragmented and incomplete to effectively secure conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The High Seas treaty aims to address the regulatory gaps,[18] by promoting coherence and coordination with and among existing institutions, frameworks, and bodies.[19]

The areas beyond national jurisdiction comprise the 'high seas' (water column) and the 'area' (seabeds), making up about two-thirds of the ocean. The areas are currently regulated by different regional and sectoral agreements, such as regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). However, they can only implement measures within their own respective mandates and cooperation is lacking. Additionally, only a few areas are covered, leaving the majority effectively unregulated. The remaining one-third of the ocean falls under national jurisdiction and is situated within the exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The exclusive economic zones extend 200 nautical miles (about 370 km) from the territorial sea baseline. The zones are established under UNCLOS, giving coastal states the jurisdiction over the living and non-living resources within the water and the seabeds.

Pascal Lamy, Co-chair of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, Vice-President of the Paris Peace Forum, Former Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, and Former European Commissioner on Trade Commissioner; and Ambassador Nancy Karigithu, Co-chair of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, Kenya's Ambassador and Special Envoy & Advisor to the President on Maritime and Blue Economy and former Principal Secretary for Shipping and Maritime Affairs for the Government of Kenya.

It's possible to have transparent, free and fair election

By Telesphor Magobe

LAST week, we briefly looked at climate change which continues tormenting the world and people in different ways.

We particularly focused on a right to a clean, safe and healthy environment as provided for in section 4(1) of the Environmental Management Act, 2004. The law also gives us "the duty to safeguard and enhance the environment and to inform the relevant authority of any activity and phenomenon that may affect the environment significantly" (section 6). It is through this that we can take care of nature.

Today, I invite you to briefly look at our right to a just electoral process (electoral integrity) and our duty to make it happen. We can do this keeping in mind that this year Tanzanians will have the general election to elect the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Councillors.

To start with we can recall Article 8 of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (R.E. 2005), which establishes the government of the people. Sub-article (1) states that "The United Republic of Tanzania is a state which adheres to the principles of democracy and social justice and accordingly - (a) Sovereignty resides in the people and it is from [them] that the government... shall derive all its power and authority; (b) the primary objective of the government shall be the welfare of the people; (c)



the government shall be accountable to the people; and (d) the people shall participate in the affairs of their government in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution."

Last year, we had the local government election and according to Minister of State in the President's Office (Regional Administration and Local Government) Mohamed Mchengerwa, in the election of local government chairpersons, the ruling party (CCM) won overwhelmingly (99.01 per cent), followed by Chadema (0.79 per cent), ACT-Wazalendo (0.09 per cent), CUF (0.08 per cent), NCCR-Mageuzi (0.01 per cent), UMD (0.01 per cent) and NDC (0.01) of all votes.

However, some concerns were raised, one of them being ballot stuffing. Although some government and CCM leaders had assured election stakeholders that the electoral flaws experienced during the 2019 local government election wouldn't be repeated, there was not much difference from the 2019 local government election because similar complaints were raised again.

We are now remaining with the general election later this year and stakeholders, including opposition parties, have called for reform to ensure past electoral flaws don't recur. Since as we have seen above "sovereignty resides in the people and it is from [them] that the government... shall derive all its power and authority", then it follows that the wishes of the people during elections must always be respected for it is through this that we can claim to heed the principles of democracy and social justice.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in its "Global State of Democracy 2024: Strengthening the Legitimacy of Elections in a Time of Radical Uncertainty" report talks about "electoral integrity" based on two key principles - the

credibility of the entire electoral cycle (as opposed to merely voting and vote counting) and the legitimacy of global norms (as stipulated in various international human rights instruments before, during and after the general election. In this, philosophers remind us that in order for something to be good, 1) it must be good itself, 2) in its means of achieving it and 3) in its end (results).

As regards the general election later this year, these three elements constitute what the report calls "electoral integrity" without which we just have what is called "electoral fraud". So, as we prepare for the general election, let us make up our mind that this year we're going to hold transparent, free and fair general election.

Meanwhile, Chama cha Maendeleo na Demokrasia (Chadema), the main opposition party in Tanzania, just concluded its general meeting which started on January 20-21, 2025 during which it also elected its national leaders.

Antipas Tundu Lissu was elected Chadema

National Chairperson, John Heche was elected Chadema National Deputy Chairperson and Said Mzee Said was elected Chadema National Deputy Chairperson for Zanzibar. John Mnyika was reappointed Chadema National Secretary-General and Amari Golugwa was appointed Chadema Deputy Secretary-General.

Lissu won by 51.5 per cent of all votes cast against his close competitor former Chadema National Chairperson Freeman Mbowe, who won by 48.3 per cent of all votes cast. Mbowe, who has been in top party leadership for 21 years, conceded defeat, and thanked the new national party chairperson and his team for the victory and for taking over the responsibility to lead the main opposition party for the next five years.

On various occasions Lissu has made it clear that "no reform, no election", referring to the necessity to have a just electoral process which leads to the election of leaders according to the wishes of voters. This includes having an independent national electoral commission, an enabling election environment and enabling election provisions. Stressing this need for reform, Lissu said, "participating in an unjust electoral process translates into endorsing it."

Chadema's election has been commended by various stakeholders for reflecting transparency, and a free and fair election worth emulating by other political parties. As we prepare for the general election later this year, it is important that the electoral process becomes transparent, free and fair. It is possible to hold an election in which all stakeholders can accept its results and this can be only done if all election stakeholders observe election integrity and detest electoral fraud.

Today's quote: "Democracy is the only system that persists in asking the powers that be whether they are the powers that ought to be."

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The Law and You



The path forward: Harnessing technology, innovation in agriculture in Eastern Africa

By Farayi Zimudzi

AS we step into 2025, the Eastern Africa sub-region finds itself at a crossroads, facing significant opportunities and, at the same time, unprecedented challenges to its agricultural systems.

With a population of over 280 million, including 30 million pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, the sub-region is endowed with immense resources.

The vast arable land, abundant livestock, fisheries, and aquaculture resources, along with rich biodiversity, make it a favourable place for agriculture-centred economic transformation.

Yet, droughts, floods, landslides, and the emergence of pests such as Desert Locusts and Fall Armyworms, continually threaten its agricultural sector. Conflict has also been a challenge in parts of the sub-region.

Largely due to the limited application of technologies and innovation, climate change, conflicts, and rising food costs have hampered development and resilience-building efforts.

Recent reports released by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) indicated that, in 2023, an estimated 10.7 per cent of the global population - 864 million people - were food insecure at severe levels. Africa shouldered 58 per cent of these people.

In Eastern Africa, the number is even higher as the number of food-insecure people has increased by 50 million since 2019. The IGAD Regional Focus of the 2024 Global Report on Food Crises reveals that about 63 million people, or 25 per cent of the population in seven IGAD countries, are experiencing acute food insecurity in 2024.

This indicates that the Subregion is home to more than 50 per cent of Africa's chronically hungry, yet its population share in Africa is barely 25 per cent. Amidst these challenges, the need for technology and innovation has never been more urgent.

These tools can accelerate the transformation of agri-food systems in the sub-region, by making them more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, leading to better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life for all.

The role of technology and innovation in revitalising agriculture is emerging as a beacon of hope, offering new solutions to build resilience, improve productivity, and ensure food security and nutrition.

From drought-resistant seeds to smart irrigation systems, data-driven decision-making tools, drones, and satellite imagery, technological advancements are unlocking new possibilities for farmers, herders, and food processors to achieve better production in both terrestrial and marine resources, without compromising nature.

Let me cite some examples from FAO's experience in the sub-region. We employed drones, satellites, and ground surveillance to provide real-time data on locust movements, enabling the government of Somalia to make a targeted intervention in the management of Desert Locust before damage to crops and pastures occurred.



In Ethiopia, we have introduced better grain storage technologies, such as improved silos and hermetic bags, which have helped preserve crops, reduced food wastage, and enabled households to eat safer food - among other benefits.

We have collaborated with local governments in South Sudan to implement early warning systems to provide timely information on droughts, floods, and other climate-related disasters. With technology and innovation, improved production and processing systems enhance diversification, where healthy, nutritious, and safe foods can be more accessible to communities, ensuring better nutrition.

This is particularly critical given the fact that the average prevalence of stunting in Eastern Africa is significantly higher than the global average, impacting a large percentage of children under five years old.

Chronic malnutrition, like stunting, can severely hinder cognitive development and learning potential in children, impacting their future health and economic opportunities.

Renewable energy solutions such as solar, wind, biofuel, hydropower, and geothermal energy, along with community-based initiatives for reforestation, and innovative waste management systems can greatly help to protect the land, water, and vegetation. These can ensure a better environment that is the basis for agri-food systems transformation.

Before and when disaster strikes, technology, and innovation facilitate anticipatory and response actions, building resilience, and realising rural transformation, guaranteeing a better life for smallholders and vulnerable communities.

The adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, like precision farming and agroforestry, supported by early warning systems for extreme weather events using mobile technology - can empower the youth and local communities to adapt to the Subregion's unique challenges like severe weather events, invasions of swarms, droughts, and floods.

Apart from averting disasters, the "Better Life" principle at FAO emphasises the importance of improving the well-being

and livelihoods of people, by ensuring sustainable agri-food systems and creating jobs for women and youth. In Eastern Africa, the youth population is rapidly growing, constituting about 70 per cent of the population.

This demographic offers a tremendous opportunity for agricultural transformation, as young people are increasingly seeking alternatives to traditional agriculture, especially in rural areas where unemployment rates are high.

The agriculture sector, however, remains a key employer, with the potential for youth engagement through innovative technologies and practices such as digital farming, agro-processing, and sustainable agriculture. Youth-led initiatives, such as mobile apps for agricultural advice, precision farming using drones and sensors, and e-commerce platforms for agricultural products, are reshaping farming and offering new pathways to economic empowerment.

Despite robust policies at national and Subregional levels, there remains a significant gap in the implementation of these policies, especially those related to youth in agriculture.

The implementation of these policies can help the youth access the necessary skills, capital, and infrastructure to engage in agriculture. Promising initiatives like the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the "Youth in Agriculture" strategies provide frameworks for action, but the challenge lies in translating them into tangible outcomes.

We all have a role to play in supporting the transformation of agri-food systems to benefit rural communities, the youth, and women, particularly those who are most vulnerable to disasters and shocks.

We need to empower small-scale producers, family farmers, and other actors at different stages of agri-food systems to access and use inclusive, affordable, and context-specific innovations and technologies, aiming to achieve sustainability. Rigorous analyses and modelling are crucial for the development of innovative policies and technologies.

These must be backed by the provisions of statistics, geospatial data, and information to ensure better decision-making at all levels. All this entails partnerships as no one entity can do it alone. The writer is the FAO Subregional Coordinator for Eastern Africa and Representative to the AU and UNECA.

By John Cannon

Scientists are tracking global wildlife's contributions to humanity



Plains bison in the background at the Wolakota Bison Release on the Rosebud-Sioux Reservation in South Dakota

IN October 2020, the hoofbeats of American bison thumped across the prairie of the Rosebud Reservation for the first time in more than a century. Years in the works, the release of 100 bison (*Bison bison*) in the U.S. state of South Dakota resulted from collaboration between the Sicangu Lakota Oyate Nation, WWF and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The goal was to bring a critical species back to the North American Great Plains, from which they'd nearly been exterminated in the 1800s.

In doing so, the hope was to reinvigorate the relationships between North America's largest land animal, the landscape and its people. For the Indigenous Sicangu Lakota Oyate, the release marked a resurgent spiritual connection, one based on an ancient kinship they share with the bison.

The return is expected to reap more quantifiable rewards, too. Thanks to their habits and bulk, bison shape the environment in unique and profound ways. Their hooves aerate the soil, stimulating the growth of grasses, which pull carbon from the atmosphere. Their restless feeding habits and predilection for wallowing leave behind pockets of habitat favored by a variety of birds. And their dung and urine leave behind nutrients and seeds.

The Rosebud Reservation bison offer just one example of how bringing back wildlife to a landscape enhances the value of what scientists call nature's contributions to people (NCPs), according to Rebecca Chaplin-Kramer, WWF's global biodiversity lead scientist.

"Without some rewilding – without, in this case, bringing back this keystone species – you're not going to get the same benefits" as you would from only protecting the land, Chaplin-Kramer said.

In new research, she and her colleagues set out to understand in detail wildlife's contributions to people, or WCPs, the world over.

To begin, the team combed through ecological research for examples of how wild vertebrates on land, in freshwater and marine environments affect people. Of course, wildlife's impacts aren't always positive for people. In parts of the world, for example, the threats that large, free-roaming herbivores pose to crops are certainly viewed negatively by farmers. But the team also cataloged research demonstrating the often invisible benefits animals provide to people.

They then mapped these impacts onto an NCP classification system first laid out in 2018 by IPBES, the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Chaplin-Kramer's team found that wildlife is integral to at least 12 of IPBES's 18 NCPs. Examples of NCPs supported by wildlife include the creation of habitat and the regulation of water, as well as the inspiration people get from seeing animals in their environment and the importance of species to cultural identity.

The researchers published their findings in the inaugural issue of the journal *Nature Reviews Biodiversity* on Jan. 15.

But why focus on NCPs? Chaplin-Kramer explained that, while satellite imagery and remote sensing are typically the go-to method for measuring ecosystem health, "That's not necessarily the most important component of what we actually care about." She and her colleagues cautioned that

when scientists use only remote sensing to assess the important services ecosystems offer to humanity, the world's "wildlife was getting left behind."

That's because researchers often use vegetation cover as a proxy for ecosystem health. But that doesn't account for the added value offered by the species that inhabit those places. And critically, overlooking the contributions of wildlife in the present day could result in those species not being prized and actively protected, which could mean their services disappear in the future as populations fall, then vanish.

"We often keep species and ecosystem targets separate in monitoring," Chaplin-Kramer said, adding that we risk "winding up with empty forests."

"Maybe we keep our forest cover, but they're devoid of the life that actually provides the benefits that we're used to receiving," she said.

This is especially concerning due to the drastic declines seen in wildlife planetwide. Scientists say we're living through the sixth mass extinction of life on Earth, this time propelled by human activity, with some species dying out altogether and the populations of others dwindling at worrying rates. WWF's 2024 Living Planet report tracked a 73% decline in wildlife numbers globally. A 2023 study calculated that 48% of all vertebrates are trending downward, while a new study published Jan. 8 revealed that around 25% of freshwater animals could go extinct, including fish on which human communities rely for food.

"Species extinction is a travesty," Chaplin-Kramer said, "but just lowering their abundances is when we're going to start to see declining function."

While that's concerning, she noted that surviving populations also provide an opportunity: "These declines are something we can reverse, and can do something about," Chaplin-Kramer said. "It's not too late."

Some benefits that wildlife offer are more obvious than others – the food fish provide to people, for example. Others are harder to recognize or quantify, though often no less impor-

tant. Think the cultural value the American bison embodies for the First Nations of the American plains, or the way in which restored bison populations improve grassland habitat and carbon storage – a hedge against human-caused climate change.

"Having a broad and diverse assessment of wildlife contributions to people is valuable because, as the authors point out, many contributions are not immediately visible and can be indirect," said Sarah Weiskopf, a research ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's National Climate Adaptation Science Center, in an email. "This can make them easy to overlook and lead to unintended consequences of [policy] decisions."

Lacking a complete picture of the services nature provides, including the species integral to those services, could result in inadequate or misdirected land protection, land use, and species conservation initiatives.

"Many studies mapping and projecting nature's contributions to people do not explicitly consider biodiversity, especially wildlife, which can lead to overly optimistic assessments," Weiskopf said. "Accurate understanding of nature's contributions to people and how drivers of change will affect nature's contributions ... are important for developing effective policies to meet conservation and sustainable development goals."

Achieving this deep understanding is no easy matter, but it's a goal Chaplin-Kramer said is attainable. She pointed to the 21st-century research methods that have "gone gangbusters" in teasing apart ecosystem services as a useful WCP model. Techniques such as eDNA, acoustic monitoring and camera traps could fill in the knowledge gaps about what wild species bring to ecosystems. New satellites slated to be deployed in 2025 by NASA, the U.S. space agency, could also provide a more detailed view from above.

"I'm super optimistic," Chaplin-Kramer said. The study's authors say they hope stronger links between wildlife and the enriching services they offer to humanity will lead to more effective conservation policies.

Many conservationists are advocating urgency to ensure needed resources are put in place quickly to protect biodiversity and, by extension, wildlife services. And that process appears to be moving ahead, though more slowly than some would wish. Nearly half the conservation goals set by the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) cited ecosystem services and NCPs. But the October 2024 COP16 biodiversity summit in Cali, Colombia, left many wanting a stronger GBF commitment by the world's nations, especially financially. There are hopes for more progress at the upcoming resumption of U.N. biodiversity discussions in Rome starting Feb. 25.

It's still early days for the American bison to begin replicating the sorts of ecological engineering feats that the species brought to the prairie in earlier times. But scientists say they expect restoration to act as a demonstration of how species elevate ecosystems for the benefit of humanity.

"We have to be reframing the way that we talk about ecosystem services so that it includes species because we can't miss those opportunities," Chaplin-Kramer said. "There's just too little time."

In Nicaragua, people 'Speak in a Low Voice' or stay silent

By Ivan Olivares

THIS affirmation has been confirmed by Nicaraguans who returned to their country on vacation at the end of 2024 and have told CONFIDENCIAL about their experiences. They all chose to be identified with pseudonyms because, although they don't live in Nicaragua, they are still afraid of reprisals from the regime headed by Daniel Ortega and his wife and vice president Rosario Murillo.

"Since before 2018, but particularly starting then and continuing up to now, a state of terror has been installed in Nicaragua in which the general population is afraid to share their political opinions, including their opinions on topics that are not necessarily political, but from the regime's point of view are seen as critical issues that contradict the official discourse," says sociologist Elvira Cuadra, director of the Center for Transdisciplinary Studies of Central America (Cetcam). She says that religious issues and the economy are among the topics about which people fear speaking out in Nicaragua, she adds.

Two Nicaraguan men in their late 20s – Everth, a worker in the commercial sector, and Benjamín, a university student studying Business

Administration – and Josefa, an office worker nearing retirement, recounted how when they were in Nicaragua, the people they were in contact with didn't talk about politics. They also remarked that the streets were less bustling than how they remembered.

"[This kind of] behavior is understandable, considering that the regime employs a number of different mechanisms to restrict and nullify freedom of expression and freedom of thought in Nicaragua. We have seen cases of people imprisoned for simply expressing an opinion, either verbally or on their social media accounts. The regime has passed different laws with the purpose of silencing critical voices and even silencing people's opinions and expressions of discontent with certain situations," says Cuadra.

The fear of speaking out or expressing opinions in Nicaragua

Everth, who has been away from Nicaragua for a little over a year, points out that he used to see "an occasional flag" of the Sandinista Front in various places he would see or visit, but that on this last trip these flags were everywhere. He said the "the headquarters of the White Cross, which is located in



Expressing opinions on any subject can cause the regime to brand someone as an opponent, so many choose to remain silent

Don Bosco," was surrounded by red and black flags.

Although his trip to Nicaragua was for a very short time, Everth says he didn't talk politics with people. He said it wasn't for lack of interest or opportunity, but because he didn't know how people would react because, as he says, "in Nicaragua fear is always right on the surface."

"If I say something negative about the Sandinista Front to someone I don't know well, it could very well get me into trouble or I could suffer reprisals. It could also be that people think I'm trying to

get information from them, to see if they speak badly of the government. That's why I didn't dare to talk about politics in Nicaragua – except with my family – and it was very clear to me that there is very little out-loud political talk," says Everth.

The laws passed by the regime have imposed "a cloud of self-censorship on the population in general because people are afraid of reprisals," says sociologist Cuadra. She asserts that "there is a set of surveillance mechanisms controlling the population, and that these are being im-

plemented by people close to the regime who are monitoring and trying to identify people who are dissatisfied and what they are expressing."

The most avoided conversation topic: politics

Benjamín also visited Nicaragua in December 2024, going to the cities of Granada and Ticuantepe. Although he acknowledges he wasn't in contact with many people, he says that "when I had the chance to do so, we did not talk about politics."

"I think people are keeping a low profile because they understand that the less they talk about politics or the Sandinista party, the better off they will be. It's not because they have nothing to say. People don't say anything – or they try to just say that everything is fine – in order to go unnoticed, as a form of self-protection," Benjamín continued.

Benjamín said he sensed a "cloud of self-censorship" due to the fear of speaking out in Nicaragua. About his time in the country, he expressed: "I felt everything was too quiet. It wasn't the talkative Nicaragua I remember. I felt it was silent, submissive." He recalls that in the Central Park of Granada there was a recreational activity organized by the government party, and that the park was full of peo-

ple, but also of policemen who were guarding the activity. "I think people are just trying to cope with the situation," he says.

Josefa's experience was slightly different. In her case, she says "I didn't hear anyone talk about anything," and that in Nicaragua, "I saw people acting normal," although something that caught her attention was that "I didn't see many children in the neighborhood. There weren't many children who could get together to go play outside. The streets felt desolate."

Silence and fewer people in Rivas and Granada

Everth had a similar experience. He highlighted two elements. The first was the number of people who were entering Nicaragua. The second was "the desolate climate. It was a strange atmosphere, it was not the same as when I left Nicaragua. The people seemed very distant, not as friendly as before," he lamented. On the economic front, Everth noted that in the past, there were always many street vendors at the Rivas bus terminal, but this time there were very few, almost none. "Two street vendors in the whole terminal," he says. Although there were quite a few people, he noticed that while there were about 15 modules, only three were op-

erating. The rest were closed, and one of them displayed a "For Rent" sign.

Benjamín felt that many things had changed in the country in the almost year and a half since he left. "I don't know, it felt more solitary. I felt everything was quieter, with less noise. Although I was only there for a short time, I was there in December, when there is normally much more movement in the streets," he said.

Of his visit to Granada, Benjamín said that "it was strange to see the Calle La Calzada so empty. Too empty for a Thursday or Friday night. There wasn't much movement," although he says there were tour guides offering very low cost packages to go to the isletas [little islands in the lake]. "Maybe because business was bad," he speculates. "I didn't ask because I had no plans to go to the isletas," he clarifies.

Elvira Cuadra concludes that people are pretending that they're happy, that they're fine, and that they keep their criticisms or expressions of discontent quiet, sharing them only in very trusted spaces, "or they keep them to themselves because they don't dare express them in front of other people. All this creates a fiction of normality."

Coal-reliant SA provinces struggle with just transition

By Vivian Chime

ALL but one of South Africa's nine provinces, including coal-dependent Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Free State, have limited or no plans to support communities and local workers through a green transition, meaning poorer groups could be left behind, new analysis has shown.

South Africa was the first country to sign a multi-billion-dollar Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with rich countries in 2021, aimed at supporting an economy-wide transition away from coal towards clean energy in a way that supports communities and workers who now rely on the fossil fuel industry as well as women, youth and children.

That makes the country a point of reference for how to achieve a green transition that is socially and economically fair. So far it has created a national just energy transition investment plan, signed its Climate Change Act into law, and launched a just energy transition funding platform to connect grant funders with projects to help workers acquire new skills or develop communities in innovative ways.

But a new report by international research group Net Zero Tracker and South South North, a South Africa-based non-profit, said eight provinces - Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Free State, Limpopo, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and North West - are lagging behind on just transition in their local climate plans despite coal dependence in some provinces and high unemployment in the others.

The analysis - which reviewed 32 government entities at national, provincial and city level, plus 18 major corporations in South Africa - highlighted significant opportunities to support poorer regions that are reliant on coal production and coal power and those least

prepared to deal with a shift away from high-carbon energy.

The rich province of Western Cape was the only one leading in climate action, with a comprehensive net zero target and extensive just transition considerations integrated into regional policies. Other regions that either have net zero or emissions reduction targets are KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Gauteng, although they are falling behind on just transition.

Out of the 11 cities reviewed in the analysis, only the two biggest - Cape Town and Johannesburg - had robust just transition considerations. The others were found to have minimal or no just transition focus.

The researchers said there is a need for more structured plans in coal-reliant provinces especially to support workers at mines and power plants fired by the polluting fuel.

Blessing Manale, acting executive director of South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), told Climate Home "there is a disjoint between national and local policies", despite the country's strong climate commitments and its aim to ensure that the risks and opportunities in the transition are "equitably shared", with affected workers able to pursue sustainable livelihoods in the future.

Samson Mbewe, the paper's lead author from South North, told Climate Home that "without such integration, poorer provinces risk being excluded from the socio-economic benefits of decarbonisation, exacerbating existing inequalities."

In a 2023 Climate Home article, coal workers in Ermelo, a community in Mpumalanga, said they felt left out of the country's energy transition. With 80 percent of the community's 80,000 residents employed by state-owned energy and transport companies, residents fear their livelihoods will be gone when the Camden coal power station in the area goes offline by



Duvha power station, located in Mpumalanga, South Africa, is scheduled to be decommissioned between 2031 and 2034. (Photo: Ashraf Hendricks)

2030.

Mbewe said Mpumalanga faces a significant risk of job losses and community destabilisation without robust just transition measures to help workers find new sources of income, such as retraining, social support and investment in alternative industries. "Women and informal workers in these regions are particularly vulnerable, as they often lack access to social safety nets and alternative employment opportunities," he said.

Local governments struggling Manale of the Presidential Climate Commission said climate action in South Africa is "stymied by governance, resource and capacity issues" that impact the state in general. But, he added, local government authorities face the biggest challenges in implementing effective climate policies, including "capacity constraints, corruption and structural failures, variable political-will and mixed messaging", as set out in a report by his body on the state of climate action.

There is a need to bolster political will across government tiers, as well as "aligning local initiatives with national directives" to improve climate responses, he added. Stronger monitoring, evaluation and learning processes could help track the effectiveness of policy implementation and its contribution to achieving climate and just transition goals, he suggested.

He called for investment in, and commit-

ment to, a just transition - including at the local level - to ensure that South Africa's decarbonisation and adaptation goals are met.

"Local governments must appreciate the circumstances of people who are most vulnerable to climate change and ensure that their needs and aspirations are factored into decision-making guided by the principles of equity and redress and sustainability," Manale said.

The new report also found that the climate plans of some global brands - including Apple, Amazon and Google as well as some automakers - in South Africa show limited engagement with just transition commitments, especially with having specific plans to support communities and vulnerable groups.

Mbewe said the three tech giants did not reference just transition principles in their Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks and "their strategies lack plans for supporting local communities". These multinationals "often overlook the critical role they play in fostering equitable transitions within host countries", he added.

The oversight may be because multinationals headquartered in developed countries tend to follow their parent-company climate policies without adapting them for the different regions they work in or taking into account "key considerations" such as tackling poverty or advancing sustainable development in a way that reduces inequal-

ity in the Global South, Mbewe said.

Camilla Hyslop, data lead at Net Zero Tracker, said the fact that corporate plans "lack detail on how they will work on the ground here in South Africa" sometimes results in companies entirely overlooking the need for a low-carbon transition - "just or otherwise".

Amazon spokesperson Margaret Callahan disagreed with the analysis in the report, telling Climate Home the e-commerce company is engaging in just transition work across South Africa. Ongoing projects include community water replenishment, an Amazon Web Services Skills Center in the country, and financial support for South African companies via a "Climate Gender Equity Fund" launched in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"This report omits these projects and is not an accurate depiction of our work in the region," Callahan added.

Apple and Google did not respond to a request for comment.

Manale of the PCC said some companies may be neglecting just transition in their plans because "at present South Africa does not have any mandatory ESG standards, nor are there regulations". However, a sustainability disclosures module was introduced in 2024 that allows companies to "voluntarily" report sustainability data according to international standards, he noted.

Mbewe called for better coordination to ensure that foreign firms align with South African climate policies, as well as a stronger focus on multinationals' just transition principles requiring them to consult more broadly and disclose their resulting strategies and commitments.

Hughes Fire forces 50,000 to evacuate

By Agencies

FIREFIGHTERS fought to maintain the upper hand on a huge and rapidly moving wildfire that swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles and resulted in more than 50,000 people being put under evacuation orders or warnings.

The Hughes Fire broke out late Wednesday morning and in less than a day had charred nearly 16 square miles (41 square kilometers) of trees and brush near Lake Castaic, a popular recreation area about 40 miles (64 kilometers) from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a third week.

Though the region was under a red flag warning for critical fire risk, winds were not as fast as they had been when those fires broke out, allowing for firefighting aircraft to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the latest blaze. By Wednesday night, about 14 percent of the Hughes Fire had been contained.

"The situation that we're in today is very different from the situation we were in 16 days ago," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said Wednesday evening.

Red flag warnings were extended through 10 a.m. Friday in LA and Ventura counties. Officials remained

concerned that the Palisades and Eaton fires could break their containment lines as firefighters continue watching for hot spots.

An evacuation warning was issued for Sherman Oaks where there was an approximately 10 acres (4 hectares) brush fire burning on the Sepulveda Pass near the I-405 Freeway. The blaze was first reported just after 11 p.m. Wednesday.

More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate from the Hughes Fire, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said. There were no reports of homes or other structures burned.

Parts of Interstate 5 near the Hughes Fire that had been closed reopened Wednesday evening.

A 30-mile (48-kilometer) stretch of the major north-south artery had been closed for emergency vehicles, to move equipment and to prevent accidents due to smoke billowing across it. Crews on the ground and in water-dropping aircraft tried to prevent the wind-driven fire from moving across the interstate and toward Castaic.

Marrone said that because winds were not as strong as they were two weeks ago, aircraft crews were able to drop fire retardant on the south side of the fire, where the flames were moving, he said. More than 4,000 firefighters were assigned to



the fire, he said.

Winds in the area were gusting at 42 mph (67 kph) in the afternoon. They had reached as high as 65 mph (105 KPH) in some mountain pockets by Wednesday night, according to David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Kayla Amara drove to Castaic's Stonegate neighbourhood to collect items from the home of a friend who had rushed to pick up her daughter from preschool. As Amara was pack-

ing the car, she learned the fire had exploded in size and decided to hose down the property.

"Other people are hosing down their houses, too. I hope there's a house here to return to," Amara said as police cars raced through the streets and flames engulfed trees on a hillside in the distance.

Amara, a nurse who lives in nearby Valencia, said she's been on edge for weeks as major blazes devastated Southern California.

"It's been stressful with those other fires, but now that this one is close to home it's just super stressful," she said.

To the south, Los Angeles officials began to prepare for potential rain even as some residents were allowed to return to the charred Pacific Palisades and Altadena areas. Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the National Weather

Service.

"Rains are in the forecast and the threat of mud and debris flow in our fire-impacted communities is real," Supervisor Kathryn Barger said during a Wednesday morning news conference.

Fire crews were filling sandbags for communities while county workers installed barriers and cleared drainage pipes and basins.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass warned that winds could carry ash and advised Angelenos to visit the city's website

to learn how to protect themselves from toxic air during the latest Santa Ana wind event. LA County public health director Barbara Ferrer cautioned that the ash could contain heavy metals, arsenic and other harmful materials.

"Even a brief exposure can potentially cause skin irritation and lead to more serious problems," Ferrer said Wednesday, asking people to wear protective gear while cleaning up.

The low humidity, bone-dry vegetation and strong winds came as firefighters continued battling the Palisades and Eaton fires, which have killed at least 28 people and destroyed more than 14,000 structures since they broke out Jan. 7. Containment of the Palisades Fire reached 70 percent, and the Eaton Fire was at 95 percent.

Luna said Wednesday that his department was still investigating 22 active missing person reports in both fire zones. All of those reported missing are adults, he said.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating the causes of the fires but has not released any findings.

Several lawsuits have been filed by people who lost their homes in the Eaton Fire, alleging Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the blaze. On Tuesday, a judge overseeing one of the lawsuits ordered the utility to produce data from circuits in the area where the fire started.



Banks lower rates on FX deposits as supply rises

LAGOS

Banks are beginning to reduce their interest rates on foreign exchange (FX) deposits as dollar supply improves.

Olusegun Alebiosu, chief executive officer of First Bank of Nigeria, revealed during an executive roundtable hosted by PwC and BusinessDay on Thursday, noting that the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) returned some FX swaps to some banks in January 2025.

"This move signals that banks now have sufficient FX to return to customers, contributing to a drop in foreign deposit currency rates," he said.

A senior bank official in another Tier-1 bank confirmed this, noting that FX supplies have improved across banks, easing pressure on the economy.

BusinessDay earlier reported that some banks have resumed selling Personal Travel Allowance (PTA) and Business Travel Allowance (BTA) to their customers, signaling foreign exchange availability after previous challenges tied to supply shortages.

The development comes as financial institutions adjust to evolving market conditions and apex bank policy changes.

Ayokunle Olubunmi, head of financial institution ratings at Agosto Consulting, offered insight into the dynamics of the foreign exchange market.

He explained that when the gap between official and parallel market rates was small, there was little incentive for customers to approach banks for PTA.

There were instances when the official market rate exceeded the parallel market rate, prompting individuals to favour the latter, he said.

However, Olubunmi noted that the widening margin between these rates has now driven more Nigerians to seek PTA and BTA directly from banks.

The shift aligns with policy adjustments implemented by the CBN over the past year to stabilise the foreign exchange market.

Early in 2024, the CBN had directed International Money Transfer Operators (IMTOs) to quote exchange rates for Naira payouts based on prevailing market prices, reflecting a move toward market-determined rates.

In February 2024, the CBN removed restrictions on the spread for interbank foreign exchange transactions and lifted limits on the sales of interbank proceeds. It also mandated that PTA and BTA payouts be made exclusively through electronic channels, a measure analysts at Afrinvest Securities Limited believed would mitigate foreign exchange round-tripping in this segment.

In other to streamline this process, the apex bank said it had approved the release of the Nigerian Foreign Exchange (FX) Code and will officially launch the same on January 28, 2025.

The FX code serves as a guideline to the banking industry to promote the ethical conduct of authorised dealers in the Nigerian Foreign Exchange Market (NFEM).

"The bank will formally launch the Code at the CBN Head Office Auditorium, Abuja, on Tuesday, January 28, 2025," the CBN said in a notice published on its website.

According to Taiwo Oyedele, chairman of Nigeria's Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms during the PwC event, the new

FX code introduced by the CBN would enhance transparency and "about \$20 million every day is off the market."

Oyedele argued that the proposed tax reforms, if effected this year, would also give the exchange rate a soft landing, easing its pressures and enhancing fiscal sustainability.

"Some of the reforms we are doing from the fiscal standpoint will take about \$4 billion pressure off the market as well," the tax chief said.

According to data from the apex bank, the naira began the year at an official exchange rate of N1,538.50 per dollar on January 2, 2025. By the end of the first trading week, it had slightly depreciated to N1,544.50 per dollar, reflecting a marginal decline of 0.4 percent.

On January 22, the naira closed at N1,553 per dollar compared to N1,551.9 at the Nigerian Foreign Exchange Market (NFEM).

Uche Uwaleke, director of the Institute of Capital Market Studies at Nasarawa State University, forecasts a positive trajectory for the naira, attributing this outlook to lower petrol and food importation as well as increased fuel exports this year.

Uwaleke pointed to the reduced importation of petroleum products as a major driver of the naira rebound.

"With increased domestic refining capacity, we expect a significant decline in fuel imports, which will ease pressure on foreign exchange demand and strengthen the naira," he explained.

He further highlighted the potential impact of increased earnings from the export of petroleum products.

"As Nigeria boosts its export capacity, foreign exchange inflows will improve, supporting the local currency," Uwaleke noted.

Another factor, according to him, is the reduction in food imports, stemming from improved agricultural output.

Uwaleke also emphasised the role of foreign portfolio investments and diaspora remittances in supporting the naira, noting that, "Increased foreign investments and remittances from Nigerians abroad will inject much-needed liquidity into the economy."

He stressed the importance of strong external reserves, noting that maintaining robust external reserves is vital for shielding the economy from external shocks and enhancing investor confidence.

Nigeria's ambitious target to rein inflation to 15 percent in 2025 is not out of thought provided that the exchange rate continues to stabilise, according to Taiwo Oyedele.

Oyedele, who featured in a panel session at the PwC economic outlook and 2025 budget review in partnership with BusinessDay, said with base effect inflation is expected to decline to 25 percent, stating that FX had the biggest effect on prices last year.

This comes against the backdrop of varying views that the target may not be feasible even after the consumer price index (CPI) rebasing later this month.

"You say every time that 15 percent is not possible. And I do understand why they're saying it's not possible. If you look at the average inflation for 2024, it's 33 percent. If things remain as bad as they were in 2024, in 2025, nominally, inflation will be 25 percent," Oyedele said.

Govt introduces ICT awards to honour innovators, start-ups

By Francis Kajubi

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and the ICT Commission, in partnership with SoftVentures and the Tanzania Internet Service Providers Association (TISPA), have introduced the TEHAMA Awards 2025 to recognize innovators and start-up business owners in the local market.

Addressing journalists in Dar es Salaam yesterday, Dr. Nkundwe Mwasaga, Director General of the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Commission said that the TEHAMA Awards 2025 will recognize outstanding contributions in Tanzania's ICT sector.

The event is set to take place on February 21 in Arusha city.

He said the awards will be offered to celebrate individuals, organizations, and initiatives that drive digital transformation, foster innovation, and promote inclusion.

According to him, the awards presentation event will serve as a key platform for industry leaders, policymakers, and innovators to connect, collaborate, and accelerate the country's digital economy.

"We invite innovators, ICT leaders, startups, public and private sector institutions, and organizations across Tanzania to



Dr. Nkundwe Mwasaga, ICT Commission Director General

participate in this year's awards by submitting their nominations in ten categories namely Innovation in ICT Products or Services, Best Use of ICT and ICT for Social Impact," said Dr. Mwasaga.

He mentioned other categories as Young ICT Achiever, Women in ICT, ICT Security, Public Sector ICT Project, Sustainable ICT, the TISPA Awards for Best Internet Connectivity Provider, and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology Lifetime Achievement in

ICT.

According to him, with a total of 22 awards to be presented, each of the above categories carries several subcategories that reflect different sectors and industries. Nominations are open until February 10th, 2025 to be submitted through a specially designed website.

Mohammed Mashaka, Director of Information Systems Development, and Services in the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology said that the government

is out to create conducive environment toward a digital economy that is inclusive for all.

Joseph Rwegoshora, TISPA's Technical Associate said that the company has concluded joining hands with the government in accelerating the ICT sector to higher levels of prosperity.

According to him, in the wake of an inclusive digital economy, the Tanzania Internet Service Providers Association (TISPA) is set to collaborate with the government in realizing

the anticipated mission.

"TISPA is an industry body representing internet service providers and ICT stakeholders. It advocates for digital inclusion, policy development, and the expansion of ICT infrastructure to support Tanzania's growing digital economy," said Rwegoshora.

Daniel Mhina, Founding Partner, SoftVenture Solutions Limited said that the company considers the awards the best motive towards boosting innovation and accelerating the growth of start-ups.

He asserted that the company is committed to developing innovative community-driven solutions, promoting the circular economy within the ICT industry, and driving continuous learning and development.

"By partnering with key stakeholders, SoftVentures bridges the gap between technology and sustainable progress, ensuring measurable impact in Tanzania and beyond," he said.

Mhina affirmed that a company is an innovation-driven organization dedicated to leveraging technology for sustainable development. With a mission to catalyze impactful solutions, SoftVentures empowers communities, transforms markets, and fosters collaboration through ICT.

Firm set to lobby for cargo vessels at Tanga port

By Correspondent Cheji Bakari, Tanga

SIMBA Supply Chain Solutions (SSCS), a leading logistics company through its latest service SimbaTerminals, plans to bring a vessel carrying cargo to Tanga Port every two to three months in 2025.

Awadh Massawe the company's manager made the announcement early this week after receiving a large ship MV-WL UGLICH with IMO number 9674373 with Hong Kong flagship docked at the port which brought 7,000 tons of nitrate cargo from Russia.

He underscored that with its first operation in Tanga Port the company's ongoing efforts are to strengthen its presence in the region.

Massawe commended the company's directors and its board at large for successfully attracting both local and international clients to use Tanga Port, as part of Simba Terminals' broader strategy to expand operations and enhance service offerings.

Massawe assured that the company would efficiently unload and transport the goods to clients both within Tanzania and abroad.

"This delivery marks the ninth vessel the company has received since beginning operations at Tanga Port".

"Having successfully handled 7,000 tons of nitrate, we are confident in our ability to efficiently unload and deliver this shipment to our clients, both domestic and international. Our fleet consists of between 700 and 800 vehicles," Massawe said.

Simba Terminals has also made substantial investments in new equip-



MV-WL UGLICH with IMO number 9674373 with Hong Kong flagship docked at the port which brought 7,000 tons of nitrate cargo from Russia. PHOTO: Cheji Bakari.

ment, including machinery designed to ensure efficient handling of goods before they reach customers.

Massawe further noted that these investments have contributed to the company's improved performance at Tanga Port, especially when compared to neighboring ports.

"The upgrades have been crucial in building trust and loyalty among clients," he said.

"The company's success has been significantly bolstered by the government's substantial investments, under the leadership of President Samia Suluhu Hassan after the

government allocated over 429 billion Tanzanian shillings to upgrade Tanga Port, including deepening its channels to accommodate larger vessels".

Massawe attributed the company's continued success to the strong collaboration with all relevant authorities involved in port operations.

He encouraged both local and international customers, particularly from countries like the DRC and Zambia, to continue utilizing Tanga Port to take advantage of the enhanced services resulting from these investments.

"Looking ahead, the deepening of Tanga Port

is expected to increase government revenue and improve the livelihoods of residents".

Massawe also urged other stakeholders to recognize the port's potential and called on the government to further invest in expanding cargo storage capacity.

He said that this growth will help ensure Tanga Port remains a vital hub for both local and international trade, driving benefits for Tanzania's economy.

Simba Terminals in Tanga now enhances this offering with activities including bulk FIBC Bagging Services, Container

and stripping Services, container stuffing services, marine port services, maritime labor services, ship agency services, and warehousing services.

With a primary focus on the regional mining industry, Simba Terminals is working with major players in handling South-bound Chemical Reagents such as Hydrated Lime, Sulphur, Ammonium Nitrate (AN), Sodium Metabisulphite (SMBS), Magnesium Oxide (MgO), and others, northbound metals such as Copper, Cobalt, Nickel, Tin and other minerals from the East African Region.

Bank of Japan raises rates to highest percent in 17 years

TOKYO

Japan's central bank has increased the cost of borrowing to its highest level in 17 years after consumer price rises accelerated in December.

The move by the Bank of Japan (BOJ) to raise its short-term policy rate to "around 0.5 per cent" comes just hours after the latest economic data showed prices rose last month at the fastest pace in 16 months.

The BOJ's last interest rate hike in July, along with a weak jobs report from the US, caught investors around the world by surprise, which triggered a stock market selloff.

The bank's governor, Kazuo Ueda, signalled this latest rate hike in advance in a bid to avoid another market shock.

According to official figures released on Friday, core consumer prices in Japan increased by 3% in December from a year earlier.

The decision marks the BOJ's first rate hike since July and came just days after Donald Trump returned to the White House.

During the election campaign Trump threatened to impose tariffs on all imports into the US, which could have an impact on exporting countries like Japan.

By raising rates now the bank will have more scope to cut rates in the

future if it needs to boost the economy.

The move highlights the central bank's plans to steadily increase rates to around one percent - a level seen as neither boosting or slowing the economy.

The BOJ signalled that interest rates will continue to rise from ultra-low levels.

Neil Newman, the head of strategy at Astris Advisory Japan said: "rates will continue to rise as wages increase, inflation remains above two percent and there is some growth in the economy."

"We look for another 25-basis point hike in six months," said Stefan Angrick, a Japan economist at Moody's Analytics.

Last year, the BOJ raised the cost of borrowing for the first time since 2007 after rates had been kept down for years as the country struggled with stagnant price growth.

That hike meant that there were no longer any countries left with negative interest rates.

When negative rates are in force people have to pay to deposit money in a bank. They have been used by several countries as a way of encouraging people to spend their money rather than putting it in a bank.

The Bank of the Japan (BOJ) increased its key interest rate from -0.1 percent to a range of 0%-0.1



percent. It comes as wages have jumped after consumer prices rose.

In 2016, the bank cut the rate below zero in an attempt to stimulate the country's stagnating economy.

The hike means that there are no longer any countries left with negative interest rates.

When negative rates are in force people have to pay to deposit money in a bank. They have been used by several countries as a way of encouraging people to spend their money rather than putting it in a bank.

The BOJ also abandoned a policy

known as yield curve control (YCC), which saw it buying Japanese government bonds to control interest rates.

YCC policy has been in place since 2016 but has been criticised for distorting markets by keeping long-term interest rates from rising.

In a statement announcing the decision, the BOJ said it will keep buying "broadly the same amount" of government bonds as before and ramp up purchases in case yields rise rapidly.

Expectations that the BOJ would

finally raise rates had been growing since governor Kazuo Ueda took office in April last year.

The latest official figures showed that even though the rate of price rises has been slowing, Japan's core consumer inflation held at the bank's 2% target in January.

The decision to finally hike rates hinged on the country's major corporations increasing wages for their workers to help them cope with the rising cost of living. Nobuko Kobayashi from consulting firm EY-Parthenon told the BBC.

Earlier this month, Japan's biggest companies agreed to raise salaries by 5.28% - the biggest wage hike in more than three decades.

Wages in the country had flatlined since the late 1990s as consumer prices rose very slowly or even fell.

But the return of inflation could be both good and bad news for the economy, Kobayashi says.

"Good, if Japan can stimulate productivity and domestic demand. Bad, if inflation stays externally-driven by things like war and supply chain disruptions."

Looking ahead, the BOJ has signalled that there will not be further rate hikes for now as it anticipates that "accommodative financial conditions will be maintained for the time being".

"With inflation coming off the boil now, it seems likely that trade unions will push for smaller pay hikes in next year's talks," wrote Marcel Thieliant of research firm Capital Economics.

"With wage growth peaking this year, we still expect inflation to fall below the BOJ's target by the end of the year so the Bank won't feel the need to lift its policy rate any further."

In February, Japan's main stock index the Nikkei 225 hit an all-time closing high, surpassing the previous record set 34 years ago.



President of the Presidential Council of Libya, Mohamed Younis Menfi

Libyan top leader set to visit Tanzania

TRIPOLI

Towards strengthening relations between Tanzania and Libya, the President of the Presidential Council of Libya, Mohamed Younis Menfi, will visit Tanzania to strengthen economic ties.

Accompanied by a special delegation and senior officials for a summit of African heads of state on the energy sector is expected to take place at the end of this month in Dar es Salaam.

According to a statement circulated to the press, one of the businessmen in the mining sector from Libya, Mohamed Abubakar, said that the arrival of a delegation of senior leaders from their country will open the doors of cooperation between Tanzania and Libya, Abubakar concluded.

Among those accompanying him on this trip will be the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy of Libya.

The aim is to reach agreements in various sectors including Education, Economy, and Trade. Additionally, some contracts will be signed during this visit.

To ensure cooperation and productivity in Oil Services, the Libyan Oil Energy Company is set to begin its operations in Tanzania. In the economic and business sector, one of the banks in Libya will enter into agreements to open its branch in Tanzania, specifically the Sahel and Sahara Bank, along with various initiatives to boost the economy and trade.

Libya is also expected to strengthen religious ties by supporting Islamic institutions that provide social assistance and help various orphanages.

It should be remembered that the Ambassador of Libya to Tanzania, Abdelmajed Shetawi mentioned this earlier when he met with President Samia Suluhu Hassan in March 2024 when he presented his credentials.

Rolls-Royce strikes £9bn nuclear submarine deal

DERBY

A £9bn deal for nuclear submarine reactors has been agreed between the Ministry of Defence and Rolls-Royce - the biggest ever between the two.

Defence Secretary John Healey announced the agreement on Friday during a visit to the firm's nuclear reactor production facility in Derby.

The eight-year contract, called Unity, is designed to make the design, manufacture and support services for reactors more efficient and environmentally friendly.

It is hoped it will create more than 1,000 UK jobs and safeguard 4,000 other roles.

The government said the agreement would streamline previous contracts and incentives, and provide more efficient delivery, leading to savings of £400m.

As well as providing support to the current UK Royal Navy submarine fleet, Unity includes the build and commission of new Dreadnought Class submarines and the beginning of contracts for the new Aukus defence alliance.

In March 2023, it was announced Rolls-Royce would provide the reactors for the new fleet of nuclear submarines in a defence agreement between the UK, US and Australia.

The submarines will be built in Britain and Australia but use technology from all three countries.

The company opened a new Nuclear Skills Academy in Derby in 2022, designed to provide 200 apprenticeships each year for at least a decade.

Healey used the visit to highlight the government's "triple lock" on the nuclear deterrent, which includes building four new nuclear submarines in Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria, maintaining the UK's continuous at sea nuclear deterrent and delivering all future upgrades needed.

He said: "This investment in Britain's defence will deliver a long-term boost to British business, jobs and national security."

"In line with our Plan for Change, this deal with Rolls-Royce, a historic British success story, will support high-skilled UK jobs, who equip the thou-



Rolls-Royce is already expanding its submarine division, including new warehouses in Derby

sands of submariners that keep us all safe.

"We are showing defence can be an engine for growth, while also driving better value for taxpayer money."

Steve Carlier, president of Rolls-Royce Submarines, said: "We're delighted to announce the Unity contract, which confirms our commitment to the Royal Navy and the Defence Nuclear Enterprise."

"This long-term contract enables us to invest in the right skills, equipment and facilities to play our part in protecting UK interests at home and overseas." Rolls-Royce Submarines is already doubling the size of its Raynesway site and has recently started moving into specially-built warehouses in Pride Park.

General secretary of the Unite union, Sharon Graham, said: "This announcement is good news for British jobs, good news for Derby and good news for our economy."

"Rolls-Royce has a world class workforce and the government is right to invest in it."

"UK defence spending must be used to promote decent quality jobs and skills and to protect our manufacturing base."

"The government must now follow the same principles

when making major defence spending decisions in future, including on fast jet planes and Army helicopters."

Derby-based Rolls-Royce will provide the reactors for the new fleet in a defence agreement between the UK, US and Australia (Aukus).

Ian Bestwick, from Unite, said the contract was "massive" for the city.

The deal will "create thousands of jobs in the UK in the decades ahead", the government said.

Most of the jobs "will be concentrated in Barrow-in-Furness with further roles created elsewhere along the supply chain, including in Derby", the MoD added.

The submarines will be built in Britain and Australia but use technology from all three countries.

Speaking to the BBC, Mr Bestwick said the deal not only benefited peace in the Indo-Pacific region but also "the industry, Derby and the country".

He said: "We don't know the true number but it could be thousands of jobs for many years to come."

"We've been gearing up to hopefully get this contract over the line and we've been recruit-

ing heavily against the current programmes we've got so it's been 18 months to two years in the making."

"It's immeasurable, for Derby, for Rolls-Royce, the fantastic union members in the supply chain - it's absolutely massive."

Union GMB said the pact was a "historic opportunity" to boost UK defence manufacturing.

National officer Matt Roberts said: "In Barrow-in-Furness and in Derby, GMB Union members are at the cutting edge of defence design and manufacturing."

"As their union, we welcome the news of a central role for UK defence manufacturing in this agreement, working closely with our Australian allies."

Steve Carlier, president of Rolls-Royce Submarines Ltd, added: "This is great news for Rolls-Royce and for the country as a whole with the creation of more UK jobs and an opportunity to showcase British innovation and expertise on the world stage."

In an announcement in San Diego, California, on Monday, US President Joe Biden said the attack craft would be "nuclear-powered not nuclear-armed".

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the plan

- which will cost up to A\$368bn (£201bn) over 30 years - marked the "biggest single investment in Australia's defence capability in all of its history".

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak added: "The Aukus partnership, and the submarines we are building in British shipyards, are a tangible demonstration of our commitment to global security."

Australia becomes just the second after the UK to receive Washington's elite nuclear propulsion technology.

As part of the arrangement, Australian navy sailors will be sent to US and UK submarine bases from this year to learn how to use the nuclear-powered submarines.

From 2027, the US and UK will also base a small number of nuclear submarines in Perth, Western Australia, before Canberra will buy three US-model Virginia-class submarines in the early 2030s - with options to purchase two more.

Rolls-Royce opened a new Nuclear Skills Academy in Derby in 2022, which will provide 200 apprenticeships each year for at least the next decade and "ensure a steady pipeline of future talent into the industry", the firm said.

New grief apps want to 'optimise' it for you

NEWYORK

People are turning to 'grief apps' to cope with the loss of family and friends. But the new world of death data raises troubling questions.

When Nitika's father passed away unexpectedly in 2023, she was a continent away from her support system. She had moved from India to Canada only a year prior, and was the first in her friend group to grapple with the death of a parent. "Living far away from my family and dealing with this massive loss was unbearable. I often felt lost and lonely," says Nitika, who asked to withhold her full name to protect her privacy.

Then she came across an Instagram post from the grief app Untangle, which offers "personalised bereavement support" through virtual support groups and moderated forums, boosted with built-in AI features. Nitika downloaded the app. At first, she just read other people's posts, drawing strength from how others' experiences mirrored her own. The similarities made her feel less alone, and she started posting. "I mustered the courage to write about my story, and since then this app became my best friend," Nitika says.

In soothingly serifed fonts and tasteful colour palettes that are muted but never sombre, Untangle and a number of other new "grief apps", including DayNew and Empathy, seek to remake mourning for the modern era. They have the potential to democratise access to support that can otherwise be hard to find. But in doing so, privacy experts say these apps are introducing corporate technology - and all the problems of the digital age - into the vulnerability of grief.

The apps come with libraries of content dedicated to grief and mental health. Users can connect with other mourners and share photos and stories of their loved ones. Some apps offer AI features such as journaling prompts, personalised to-do lists, and advice from chatbot. A few include administrative checklists and expert consultations to manage the mountain of legal and financial paperwork that comes with death.

"It's optimised healing," says Karine Nissim Hirschhorn, co-founder of DayNew, an app that provides support for loss and other traumatic life changes. "It's essentially your therapist, your best friend and your personal assistant in your pocket, helping you see the whole journey and create one workflow for it."

But mourning is messy. It doesn't typically hew to a workflow, and some argue it shouldn't.

Grief apps introduce a new wrinkle to the ongoing conversation about which experiences can and should be mediated by apps and the companies behind them. Like almost all other apps, grief apps collect personal data. In the past, you might lose a loved one and decide to speak with a therapist or join an online or in-person support group. You wouldn't have to worry how infor-

mation you shared was being stored, or whether details about you were being tracked and sold by your psychologist or the group facilitator. Of course, if you couldn't pay for therapy or find a group, you might also find yourself without support of any kind.

"I think the biggest draw is that we could potentially increase access to resources that people might not otherwise have," says Adrian Aguilera, a psychologist and professor at UC Berkeley who studies digital mental health interventions. The most important thing grief apps can provide is consistency and accessibility, he says, and our pre-existing comfort with virtual interfaces can make them a natural-feeling extension of real life. "Social connection is one of the best aspects of digital technologies", especially if you don't have access to a peer or care provider.

But how much of your privacy would you trade to technology companies for accessibility, support and connection? And if grief apps replace support systems that have historically been made up of humans, does the comfort still feel the same?

In the months after her mum died, Sofia Root, from Pennsylvania, US, felt a swirl of emotions: isolation, desperation, sorrow, anger, boredom. She was "not an online person, for the most part", Root says, but she joined a few Reddit communities based around loss. It helped a bit. "Every now and then you get that little dopamine rush when you read something you can relate to, and it just distracts you from your own issues for a minute."

Then, like Nitika, she was served an Instagram ad for Untangle. She gave the app a try, and soon noticed a comment from one of the community managers on another user's post. To Root, the comment sounded like it was written by artificial intelligence. "The idea that they might be using AI to produce something that's supposed to be about connecting with real people, it seemed a little fraudulent to me," Root says. "It goes back to that isolation."

Untangle does have AI-enabled features, including internal tools for employees, and personalised recommendations for breathing exercises and meditations. But the company maintains it doesn't use AI to respond to users' posts.

Emily Cummins, chief executive of Untangle, recalls the incident. "I spoke about it with that community manager, because she was actually horrified that someone thought that she was an AI," Cummins says. "My belief is probably that people feel a bit uncomfortable that they'd be talking to an automated system when they're at a really vulnerable time."

But the liberal sprinkling of artificial intelligence throughout grief apps can introduce doubt. When amplified by the overwhelming cycle of grief, that doubt can be enough to do damage. Root reached out to the community manager, who assured her she hadn't



used AI to draft the comment, but it was all too much. Feeling betrayed, Root deleted the app. "Interacting on this stupid little smartphone, with just your thumbs? It's not gonna replace what you lost, and it's only gonna take you so far," Root says.

Root, for one, says she found more comfort speaking to other people grappling with loss than she did from a therapist. Nitika says the community she found on Untangle helped her feel heard. "We often talk to each other now, as we learn to live this life again," she says. "These people [and the] community understand me, and

that was the most important part of me using this app."

Health apps sometimes exist in a grey area when it comes to laws that regulate personal data. When you talk to a therapist in the US, the UK and the EU, for example, you can rest assured the law protects your privacy.

But if you type the same information into an app that isn't connected to an official medical provider, the rules aren't always clear. And whether or not regulations are in place, once your data is collected, it can be impossible to know where it ends up next.

For example, consum-

er DNA testing company 23andMe lost more than 6.9 million people's data to hackers after a security lapse in 2023. That same year, the US Federal Trade Commission fined both the therapy app BetterHelp and prescription coupon company GoodRX for sharing user data with Google and other advertising companies.

"A year down the road we [could] have a discussion like, 'Oh, the data set belonging to this grief app has been hacked,'" says Murat Kantarcioglu, a professor at the University of Texas at Dallas who studies data privacy and

computer science. Having consulted for tech start-ups in the past, Kantarcioglu says: "These guys are working with [venture capitalists], and at the end of the day, there are money pressures. You have to hit the milestone for your next tranche of money, you have to show some growth." If an app flounders, the company might refine its privacy policy to allow it to better monetise your data, he says.

Beyond those concerns, 90 percent of digital health start-ups fail within the first five years of operation. When they do, even the most privacy-minded companies may end

up selling or ceding consumer data to less noble organisations, Kantarcioglu says.

Kantarcioglu is unequivocal. When it comes to grief apps, "I would never use this," he says.

There's plenty at stake. In their app store privacy disclosures, the companies say they collect everything from contact info to unique ID numbers that identify your phone. If you're using DayNew's administrative functions, it collects financial information. Untangle can gather location data.

And using any one of these apps creates a record that you're seeking mental health support. That's in addition to the data users give them voluntarily, like mood data, photos and journal entries.

Untangle, DayNew and Empathy are firm that they don't sell or otherwise monetise user data with third parties, though they sometimes share limited information with digital advertising companies such as Google to market their own products.

Representatives from Empathy and DayNew say that if their companies were to fold, user data would not be sold unless their entire businesses were acquired by another company, in which case the information would be part of the deal. Cummins of Untangle says she hasn't considered this issue. "I haven't really thought about that, because hopefully [Untangle] won't be in that position," she says.



ITV PGM SCHEDULE

SATURDAY 25 Jan	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:00 HABARI	8:00 AI Jazeera	9:00 Watoto wetu	10:05 Shika Bamba 5	10:35 Hawavumi lakini wamo	11:30 Chetu ni chetu rpt	12:15 Art and lifestyle	12:50 ITV Top 10 rpt	13:50 Soap rpt: Laws of love	15:45 Igizo: Bongo DSM	16:10 Igizo: Haikufuma	17:00 Shamsam za Pwani	18:00 Hapa na Pale	18:10 Mjue zaidi rpt	19:00 Jungu kuu	19:30 Shika Bamba	20:00 HABARI	21:05 Kipindi maalum: Tatu	21:15 Mzuka	21:45 Igizo: Haikufuma	21:55 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	22:15 Supa Min Jackpot	21:55 Art and Lifestyle	22:15 ITV Top 10	23:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	23:40 Soap: Uzalo rpt	00:30 AI Jazeera			
SUNDAY 26 Jan	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:00 HABARI	8:00 AI Jazeera	9:00 Watoto wetu	10:05 Shika Bamba 5	10:35 Hawavumi lakini wamo	11:30 Chetu ni chetu rpt	12:15 Art and lifestyle	12:50 ITV Top 10 rpt	13:50 Soap rpt: Laws of love	15:45 Igizo: Bongo DSM	16:10 Igizo: Haikufuma	17:00 Shamsam za Pwani	18:00 Hapa na Pale	18:10 Mjue zaidi rpt	19:00 Jungu kuu	19:30 Shika Bamba	20:00 HABARI	21:05 Kipindi maalum: Tatu	21:15 Mzuka	21:45 Igizo: Haikufuma	21:55 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	22:15 Supa Min Jackpot	21:55 Art and Lifestyle	22:15 ITV Top 10	23:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	23:40 Soap: Uzalo rpt	00:30 AI Jazeera			
MONDAY 27 Jan	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Kumekucha Michezo	8:55 Habari za saa	9:00 Kumekucha Kishindo	9:30 Soap: Laws of love	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:25 Jagina	10:55 Habari za saa	11:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:00 AI Jazeera	12:30 Aya ya jamii	12:55 Habari za saa	13:00 Igizo: Bongo DSM rpt	13:20 Shikabamba	13:50 Usafiri wako	13:55 Habari za saa	14:00 Usafiri wako	14:20 Igizo rpt: Haikufuma	14:55 Habari za saa	15:00 Meza Huru	15:30 Watoto wetu	16:00 Music: The Base	16:30 Hapa na Pale	16:40 Kumekucha	16:50 Habari za saa	17:00 Ripoti maalum: Maisha ni Nyumba	17:30 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	17:55 Supa Jackpot	21:50 Chetu ni chetu
TUESDAY 28 Jan	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Kumekucha Michezo	8:55 Habari za saa	9:00 Kumekucha Kishindo	9:30 Soap: Laws of love	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:25 Jagina	10:55 Habari za saa	11:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:00 AI Jazeera	12:30 Aya ya jamii	12:55 Habari za saa	13:00 Igizo: Bongo DSM rpt	13:20 Shikabamba	13:50 Usafiri wako	13:55 Habari za saa	14:00 Usafiri wako	14:20 Igizo rpt: Haikufuma	14:55 Habari za saa	15:00 Meza Huru	15:30 Watoto wetu	16:00 Music: The Base	16:30 Hapa na Pale	16:40 Kumekucha	16:50 Habari za saa	17:00 Ripoti maalum: Maisha ni Nyumba	17:30 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	17:55 Supa Jackpot	21:50 Chetu ni chetu
WEDNESDAY 29 Jan	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Kumekucha Michezo	8:55 Habari za saa	9:00 Kumekucha kishindo	9:30 Soap: Laws of love	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:25 Jagina	10:55 Habari za saa	11:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:00 AI Jazeera	12:30 Aya ya jamii	12:55 Habari za saa	13:00 Igizo: Bongo DSM	13:20 Bundesliga	13:50 Habari za saa	14:00 Dakika 45 rpt	14:15 Habari za saa	14:30 Chetu ni chetu rpt	14:40 Soap: Uzalo	14:55 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	15:00 Meza Huru	15:30 Watoto wetu	16:00 Music: The Base	16:30 Hapa na Pale	16:40 Kumekucha	16:50 Habari za saa	17:00 Ripoti maalum: Mchezo	17:30 Supa Jackpot	21:50 Chetu ni chetu
THURSDAY 30 Jan	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Kumekucha Michezo	8:55 Habari za saa	9:00 Kumekucha kishindo	9:30 Soap: Laws of love	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:25 Jagina	10:55 Habari za saa	11:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:00 AI Jazeera	12:30 Aya ya jamii	12:55 Habari za saa	13:00 Igizo: Bongo DSM rpt	13:20 Shikabamba	13:50 Usafiri wako	13:55 Habari za saa	14:00 Usafiri wako	14:20 Igizo rpt: Haikufuma	14:55 Habari za saa	15:00 Meza Huru	15:30 Watoto wetu	16:00 Music: The Base	16:30 Hapa na Pale	16:40 Kumekucha	16:50 Habari za saa	17:00 Ripoti maalum: Maisha ni Nyumba	17:30 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	17:55 Supa Jackpot	21:50 Chetu ni chetu
FRIDAY 31 Jan	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Kumekucha Michezo	8:55 Habari za saa	9:00 Kumekucha kishindo	9:30 Soap: Laws of love	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:25 Jagina	10:55 Habari za saa	11:00 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:00 AI Jazeera	12:30 Aya ya jamii	12:55 Habari za saa	13:00 Igizo: Bongo DSM	13:20 Bundesliga	13:50 Habari za saa	14:00 Dakika 45 rpt	14:15 Habari za saa	14:30 Chetu ni chetu rpt	14:40 Soap: Uzalo	14:55 Kipindi maalum: Mchezo	15:00 Meza Huru	15:30 Watoto wetu	16:00 Music: The Base	16:30 Hapa na Pale	16:40 Kumekucha	16:50 Habari za saa	17:00 Ripoti maalum: Mchezo	17:30 Supa Jackpot	21:50 Chetu ni chetu
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WORLD

Judge blocks Donald Trump's plan to end US birthright citizenship

WASHINGTON

A federal judge in Seattle has temporarily blocked Donald Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship in the US. US District Court Judge John Coughenour called Trump's executive order "blatantly unconstitutional" and issued a restraining order blocking it from going into force after a 25-minute hearing on Thursday.

Under a long-standing interpretation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, nearly anyone born inside the US is automatically given citizenship.

Trump hopes to end that rule for children born to parents who are in the country illegally or temporarily.

Four states - Washington, Arizona, Illinois and Oregon - asked for the order to be paused while the federal court considers the states' legal challenge.

During arguments, Judge Coughenour asked a lawyer for the Trump administration "where were the lawyers" when the executive order was drafted by Trump's team, and chastised him for his claim that the order is constitutional.

"It boggles my mind," the judge said. The executive order will be put on hold for 14 days pending further legal proceedings.

Trump, who has issued a range of

unilateral actions since returning to the US presidency on Monday, has long vowed to make this particular change.

His executive order called on US government departments and agencies to deny the granting of citizenship to the children of migrants who are either in the US illegally or on temporary visas.

It would have applied to children born on 19 February and onwards, according to legal filings in the case by the Department of Justice (DoJ).

There have been reports that the administration was planning to enforce the order by withholding documents, such as passports, from people it deems ineligible for citizenship.

The judge's order also put a temporary stop to any enforcement of the order by federal agencies.

In their lawsuit, the four states challenging the order argue that the 14th Amendment and US law "automatically confer citizenship upon individuals born in the United States" and that the president does not have the power to amend the Constitution.

They add that if the order is implemented, residents of those states will "suffer immediate and irreparable harm".

"The individuals who are stripped of their United States citizenship will be rendered undocumented, subject to



President Donald Trump holds up a signed executive order aiming to declassify remaining federal records relating to the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr., in the Oval Office of the White House, Jan 23, 2025, in Washington. (PHOTO / AP)

removal or detention, and many will be stateless," the lawsuit states.

Trump's Department of Justice argued that the case brought by the states does not warrant the "extraordinary measure" of a temporary restraining order, but the judge disagreed.

The 14th Amendment, adopted in 1868, states in part: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States".

The DoJ argued that the clause "and subject to the jurisdiction thereof", excludes children of non-citizens who are in the US unlawfully, and added that the order is "an integral part" of Trump's goal to address the country's "broken immigration system and the ongoing crisis at the southern border".

There were 255,000 children born to undocumented mothers in the US in 2022, according to the states' legal challenge.

The amendment has been interpreted by courts as granting citizenship to anyone born on US territory, with very limited exceptions such as the children of foreign diplomats.

Without a direct amendment to the US Constitution - which requires a two-thirds vote in both chambers

of Congress, plus the approval by America's states - experts say the issue is likely to be ultimately decided by the courts.

Lawyers for the federal government said they planned to appeal the ruling, and that they expected the case to end up in front of the US Supreme Court.

The birthright citizenship amendment dates back to the days after the US Civil War, and settled the question of the citizenship of freed, American-born former slaves.

Lane Polozola, a lawyer for Washington state, argued in court that Trump's order would bring the nation back "to one of our... darkest chapters".

Judge Coughenour, who paused the executive order, has served in the Western District of Washington court since 1981 after he was appointed by then-president Ronald Reagan, a Republican.

A group of 18 other Democratic-led states, along with the District of Columbia and the city of San Francisco, have filed a separate challenge to the executive order.

Trump's order is also facing a legal challenge from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

NATO partners should consider feasibility outcome from joining military bloc - diplomat

MOSCOW



NATO member states that participated in the meeting of the Military Committee in Brussels should consider whether it was worth linking their fate with the military bloc, which had been recently involved in numerous conflicts and wars, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.

Earlier in the month, Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer stated that Heads of General Staffs of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and other 23 partner states took part in the meeting of the NATO Military Committee in Brussels.

"We call on the countries that participated in this event, which are not yet stuck in NATO's web and had not pledged to serve in the interests of the so-called golden billion, to reflect on their own national interests and think about whether it is worth tying their fate to the military bloc, which has a decades-long experience of aggression, wars, conflicts, destroyed states as well as millions of civilian casualties," Zakharova said.

Zakharova noted that NATO members' proposed scheme of cooperation remains unchanged, however, "such experiments" eventually end up with NATO's interference in the internal affairs of other countries, a change in foreign policy as well as the imposition of pseudo-values and the destruction of the national code.

"[NATO's perspective] partners are initially being convinced of the need to reform the defense and security spheres, of course, they provide assistance particularly regarding this area, and then they gradually exert NATO standards, then they begin to act from within the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and form a pro-Western elite through education," Zakharova added.

Morocco says over 78,000 illegal migration attempts aborted in 2024

RABAT

MOROCCO aborted 78,685 irregular migration attempts in 2024, thanks to the resilience of its border and coastal surveillance systems, according to data from the Ministry of the Interior.

In 2024, the Kingdom continued to face constant and growing migratory pressure in an unstable regional environment fraught with multiple threats, the Ministry stressed. A share of 58% of irregular foreign migrants came from West Africa, 12% from the Maghreb and 9% from East and Central Africa.

A total of 332 smuggling networks have also been dismantled, according to the same source. These networks are constantly developing their stratagems and pooling their services and criminal activities. In this respect, 14 assaults and attempted assaults on Sebta and Melilla were recorded, involving over 4,290 migrants.

Also, 18,645 migrants were rescued at sea and provided with assistance, medical support, accommodation and guidance. In addition, some 6,135 irregular migrants benefited from voluntary returns to their countries of origin, in coordination with their diplomatic legations, as part of the protective approach of the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA).

These efforts reflect Morocco's major contribution to regional security and the fight against cross-border trafficking networks. They also reflect the Kingdom's commitment, in solidarity with all its partners, to a collective approach to the challenges of migration.

UN chief condemns rebel advances in eastern DRC

KINSHASA

THE UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed alarm on Thursday over the resumption of hostilities by the March 23 Movement (M23) rebellion in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as a key regional city is under threat.

Guterres condemned the renewed offensive launched by the M23 at the beginning of the year and its expansion into the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, including the recent seizure of Sake, which increased the threat to Goma, North Kivu's capital and an important and populated city, read a statement by his spokesperson, Stephane Dujarric. Sake, a city about 20 kilometers from Goma, is considered Goma's last barrier.

UK teenager jailed for minimum of 52 years for Southport girls' murders

LONDON

A BRITISH teenager who killed three young girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance event was jailed for at least 52 years on Thursday, for an attack Prime Minister Keir Starmer called one of the most harrowing moments in Britain's history.

Axel Rudakubana, 18, admitted killing the girls and stabbing 10 others last July in the northern English town of Southport, an atrocity that shocked Britain and was followed by days of nationwide rioting.

Prosecutor Deanna Heer told Liverpool Crown Court that Rudakubana was obsessed with violence and genocide, and two of his victims suffered such terrible injuries they were "difficult to explain as anything other than sadistic in nature".

Judge Julian Goose said Rudakubana should serve a minimum of 52 years. He said he could not impose a full life sentence as Rudakubana was 17 when the attack took place but he was unlikely ever to be released.

Twice during Thursday's hearing, Rudakubana was removed from the dock after shouting he was unwell. He refused to return to court to hear his sentence.

The court was shown harrowing



A handout image released by Merseyside Police and received in London on January 23, 2025, shows a replica of the knife used in the attack by Axel Rudakubana. (PHOTO / AFP)

video footage of screaming girls fleeing the building. One bloodied girl collapsed outside, provoking gasps and sobs from the court's public gallery.

"He targeted us because we were women and girls, vulnerable and easy prey," Leanne Lucas, 36, the yoga teacher who organized the event and was stabbed five times, told the court.

Bebe King, six, Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and Alice Dasilva Aguiar, nine, were killed. They were among 26 children attending the summer vacation event.

Two suffered at least 85 and 122 sharp force injuries Heer said, saying it appeared he had tried to decapitate one of them.

After his arrest, Rudakubana told police: "I'm glad those kids are dead, it makes me happy."

Images and documents found on a computer at his home showed a long obsession with violence, killing and genocide, Heer said.

Rudakubana also admitted possessing an al Qaeda training manual and producing ricin, a deadly poison which the judge said it was likely the teenager would have used.

Murders not considered terrorism Heer said the murders were not considered terrorism as Rudakubana was not inspired by any particular political or religious ideology. Material mocking religions including Islam,

Judaism and Christianity had been found on his devices.

"It is not possible to identify any particular terrorist cause," Heer said. "Rather, the evidence suggests that the defendant's purpose was the commission of mass murder as an end in itself."

Rudakubana had been diagnosed with autism but his lawyer, Stan Reiz, said he did not have a mental disorder that explained his actions and there was little he could offer in mitigation for "such wickedness".

Heer said Rudakubana had in 2019 contacted a helpline for children and asked: "What should I do if I want to kill somebody?"

Soon afterwards, he was expelled from school after admitting bringing in a knife 10 times, and was arrested with a knife in his backpack after returning and attacking a pupil with a hockey stick, Heer said.

Rudakubana had been referred to a counter-radicalization scheme, Prevent, after researching school shootings, uploading images of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to Instagram and researching an attack in London, but no action was taken.

The government has ordered a public inquiry, saying there were grave questions to answer.

Fear of deportation empties California's farm fields, threatening food prices

SACRAMENTO

FEAR of deportation has led to a sharp drop in farm worker attendance across California's agricultural heartland, leaving crops unharvested following U.S. President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, local news outlets have reported.

In Bakersfield, located in Kern County, California, residents reported sightings of U.S. Border Patrol agents in unmarked Chevrolet Suburbans allegedly targeting field workers. Sara Fuentes, a manager at a local gas station, told the California non-profit news site CalMatters that plainclothes agents detained individuals outside her store

and only stopped those who "looked like they worked in the fields." Fuentes added that a typical morning rush of farm workers buying breakfast never materialized that day - an indication that fear kept them away from work.

The immediate impact is evident in Kern County, one of the nation's most productive agricultural regions. Over the last two weeks, growers have seen sharp declines in their workforce attendance, which they attribute to heightened immigration crackdowns.

Citrus grower and former Kern County Farm Bureau president, Peter Belluomini, reported that his usual harvest crew dropped from 30

workers to just five, saying many were "hiding at home" out of fear. He told Ag Alert, the weekly newspaper of the California Farm Bureau Federation, that his farm could not harvest the expected volume of citrus because so few workers showed up. Casey Creamer, president of the citrus growers' trade association California Citrus Mutual, echoed these concerns.

"We're in the middle of our citrus harvest," Creamer told CalMatters. "This sent shockwaves through the entire community. People aren't going to work, and kids aren't going to school." Creamer noted that 75 percent of the workforce did not report to

the fields during this critical harvesting period. Such disruptions highlighted California agriculture's reliance on immigrant labor. The Central Valley, which produces roughly a quarter of the nation's food, depends heavily on farm workers, many of whom lack legal authorization to work in the United States.

A 2022 survey from the U.S. Department of Labor found that 42 percent of farm workers nationwide were undocumented, and the California Farm Bureau estimated that around half of California's agricultural workforce was undocumented. The potential economic fallout of la-

bor shortages and deportations looms large. Richard S. Gearhart, an associate professor of economics at California State University-Bakersfield, described the loss of a significant portion of the farm labor force as "absolute economic devastation" and warned of a "recession-level event if this becomes the new long-term norm."

Meanwhile, farmers share similar worries in Monterey County on the California coast, which includes the famed Salinas Valley - often called "the Salad Bowl of the World." Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, told NBC News that the region re-

quired about 55,000 migrant workers for harvest season starting in late April. Even the threat of deportation, he noted, could deter many from coming to work, potentially leaving lettuce, strawberries, broccoli, and other crops to wither in the fields. Concerns have mounted since the Department of Homeland Security announced it would roll back Obama-era guidelines that limited immigration enforcement in sensitive areas such as hospitals, places of worship, and schools.

Agricultural experts warned that the existing farm labor shortage, when combined with a possible 25 percent tariff on Mexican and

Canadian imports threatened by the Trump administration, could drive up food prices nationwide. Citing 2022 data in a Harvard Business School report, Mexico supplied 51 percent of fresh fruit imports and 69 percent of fresh vegetable imports to the United States, while Canada accounted for 2 percent of fresh fruit imports and 20 percent of fresh vegetable imports. "At a time when many local farms are already facing labor shortages, disruptions like these adversely affect local agricultural production," said Kern County Farm Bureau President Jenny Holtermann in a social media statement.

Xinhua

More Gaza funding needed to hit ceasefire targets, UN official says

GENEVA

FUNDING shortages may affect the UN's ability to maintain aid flows at target levels throughout the Gaza ceasefire deal, a UN official told Reuters.

Fifteen months of war has left more than 47,000 Palestinians dead and most of Gaza in ruins, with hundreds of thousands of people homeless and reliant on outside aid for survival.

Daily deliveries have surged tenfold since the Sunday deal, according to UN data, surpassing the 600 trucks a day target set out for the first seven weeks of the ceasefire.

Muhammad Hadi, Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, told Reuters late on Thursday he was "very happy" with how the first few days had gone, but flagged funding as a concern.

"Funding is an issue. We need immediate funding to make sure that we continue providing the aid for the 42 days, but also

after the 42 days, because we're hopeful that we'll go from phase one to phase two," he said, after returning from Gaza earlier this week.

He described scenes of widespread joy and relief across the enclave, with many Gazans smiling and eager to return to the remnants of their homes and find work.

"I've received clear messages from the people: they don't want to continue depending on humanitarian aid. They want to rebuild their lives... We can't afford to let them down."

The UN is seeking \$4.1 billion for the occupied Palestinian territories this year, with nearly 90 percent set to go to Gaza. It is currently 3.6 percent funded.

Asked how the UN had managed to ramp up supplies so quickly, he cited an improvement in security for aid convoys, saying he saw local police everywhere during his visit. "The looting has reduced drastically," he said.



Palestinians chase humanitarian aid trucks that arrived through the Kerem Shalom crossing from Egypt into the Gaza Strip, in Rafah, Jan 21, 2025. AP

One of the remaining challenges for aid workers is the difficulty of moving food and supplies through the damaged streets of Gaza with many thousands of Palestinians on the move.

He said this could get worse from the weekend when many thousands of people are expected to be allowed to return to northern Gaza, under the terms of the ceasefire deal.

Hamas to name 4 Israeli detainees for release as Gaza ceasefire holds

GAZA

A senior official from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) said on Thursday that the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip is holding despite Israeli violations.

Hamas leader in the West Bank Zaher Jabarin said in statements published on the movement's website that the ceasefire agreement is proceeding "despite some violations" by Israel.

Jabarin did not elaborate on the nature of these violations. However, since the ceasefire took effect last Sunday, five Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza. The Israeli army claimed they were targeting armed individuals posing a threat to its forces.

Jabarin added that, as part of the agreement, Hamas will hand over the names of four Israeli detainees to the me-

diators on Friday, enabling the Israeli side to submit the names of the Palestinian prisoners set for release, which will include those serving long-term and life sentences, representing all Palestinian factions.

Jabarin also said the agreement includes inspecting vehicles traveling from southern to northern Gaza through the Netzarim axis, with oversight by Egyptian and Qatari monitors.

He also mentioned that Hamas "did not prefer a phased agreement", and that "we stressed the importance of connecting all stages together."

"Negotiations for the second phase will begin in two weeks, focusing on three key issues: a full withdrawal from Gaza, establishing a permanent ceasefire, and a comprehensive prisoner exchange,"



Nour Abu Al Zamar salvage items from under the rubble of her destroyed family home, in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, Jan 21, 2025, days after the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into effect. AP

he added.

On Gaza's reconstruction, Jabarin emphasized that "accelerating the reconstruction process is a top priority for

the movement, with agreed-upon mechanisms in place and mediators serving as guarantors."

Regarding the operation of

the Rafah border crossing, Jabarin emphasized that it is a matter between Palestine and Egypt, and the mechanism for its operation will be announced in the coming days.

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas took effect at 11:15 am local time (0915 GMT) on Sunday.

In a joint statement on Wednesday, the mediating countries -- Egypt, Qatar and the United States announced that Hamas and Israel had reached an agreement for a prisoner and detainee exchange and a return to sustainable calm, paving the way for a permanent ceasefire between the two sides.

The agreement is divided into three phases. In the first phase, which will last 42 days, 33 Israeli hostages will be released, while Israel will free over 1,890 Palestinian prisoners during the same period.

What to watch about China's Spring Festival travel rush

BEIJING

CHUNYUN, the world's largest annual human migration, officially kicked off on Jan. 14 in China ahead of the Spring Festival. Authorities predict travel volumes will hit new highs during the 40-day travel rush.

The latest episode of the China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency, spotlighted key trends shaping this year's travel season, including record-breaking travel numbers, booming tourism, transformative technologies, the rise of electric vehicles and a surge in inbound travel.

TRAVEL PEAK

The annual travel frenzy is driven by the movement of people working, studying or living far from their hometowns as they head back to celebrate China's most important festival.

It is estimated that 9 billion passenger trips will be made, with car journeys accounting for 80 percent. Railway trips are projected to surpass 510 million, while air passenger volume will likely exceed 90 million.

Faced with such a massive travel demand, transportation systems are undergoing

their annual tests. "Safety remains our top priority," Wang Xiuchun, an official of the Ministry of Transport, said on the show.

Rail and aviation authorities have deployed robust safety measures to ensure secure and efficient operations, including addressing weather-related challenges and improving risk prevention.

TOURISM TAKING OFF

While family reunions remained the primary reason for travel, tourism saw a notable surge this year.

Wang predicted a 25-percent increase in travel for leisure purposes. Popular destinations include tropical hotspots like Hainan and Yunnan, as well as winter wonderlands in Heilongjiang, Jilin and Xinjiang, said Shang Kejia, an official of the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Local tourism authorities are seizing the opportunity to attract visitors with unique offerings. Guangzhou's Flower City Square is holding a spectacular lantern festival, while Tianjin's cruise market is already bustling with holiday travelers. Harbin, the host of the 9th Asian Winter Games, is blending winter sports with holiday festivities, a combination that is a real boost to the



Passengers have their tickets checked before boarding trains at the Chengdu East Railway Station in Chengdu, southwest China's Sichuan Province, Jan. 14, 2025. (Xinhua/Wang Xi)

ice-and-snow economy.

"The way people celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year is becoming more diverse and enriched, reflecting changing travel habits," said Shang.

TECHNOLOGY RESHAPING TRAVEL

Technology has also reshaped the Spring Festival migration. Online purchases now account for over 93 percent of railway ticket sales,

said Zhu Wenzhong from China State Railway Group Co., Ltd.

As of 9 a.m. Tuesday, 12306, the railway booking platform, had sold 235 million tickets since Dec. 31. Travelers no longer need paper tickets, as ID cards grant seamless access to trains. The app also offers a wide range of additional services like hotel bookings, car rentals and food delivery.

Beyond ticketing, innova-

tions like smart inspection robots, drone-assisted traffic monitoring, and highway ice warning systems are also helping ensure safer and smoother journeys.

RISE OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES

New energy vehicles (NEVs) are joining the chunyun in growing numbers. NEVs accounted for 15.9 percent of road trips during the

National Day holiday in October last year, and their share is expected to rise further this Spring Festival, experts said.

To meet the rising charging demand, the country has accelerated the construction of charging infrastructure. By the end of 2024, 98 percent of highway service areas had charging facilities, with 35,000 charging stations in place. "Aside from a few remote, high-altitude areas, nearly all

WEF urges cooperation, warning trade barriers serve no-one's interest

DAVOS, Switzerland

AMID unprecedented global uncertainty and rising protectionism, the ongoing World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting has emphasized the urgent need for an open, inclusive global economy and strengthened international cooperation to address economic challenges and ensure a sustainable recovery.

Weak recovery

The global economy is poised for another year of uncertainty and uneven growth, according to the WEF's latest Chief Economists Outlook, which was launched ahead of the annual meeting that is themed "Collaboration for the Intelligent Age" this year.

The outlook said 56 percent of surveyed chief economists expected the global economy to weaken in 2025, compared to only 17 percent anticipating improvement. In addition, key discussions at the annual meeting were dominated by phrases such as "extremely high uncertainty" and "at a crossroads".

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released an update to its global outlook on Jan 17, projecting global economic growth at 3.3 percent both in 2025 and 2026. However, the figure is below the average annual growth rate of 3.7 percent from 2000 to 2019.

Global solution for global problems

The escalation of geopolitical conflicts and regional instability have brought the level of global cooperation to a low point, according to the Global Cooperation Barometer 2025 report released by the WEF on Jan 7.

Speaking at the WEF annual meeting on Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noted that the world has entered a new era of harsh geopolitical competition. "We will need to work together to avoid a global race to the bottom because it is in no-one's interest to break the bonds in the global economy," she said.

While acknowledging the current climate of competition and inward-looking tendencies in many countries, WEF President Borge Brende has reiterated that cooperation remains the only way to address the world's common challenges. "For global problems, you have to find global solutions," he told Xinhua in an interview.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a stark warning about mounting global crises, including the climate crisis and geopolitical divisions. Calling the challenges a "Pandora's box of troubles", Guterres urged the international community to prioritize collaboration. "As a global community, we must live up to these responsibilities," he said, echoing the WEF's call for unity.

Free trade, no protectionism

Protectionism emerged as a focal point of concern at the meeting. The WEF's Chief Economists Outlook report warned that rising trade barriers and geopolitical conflicts could cause lasting disruptions to trade patterns. Over half of surveyed economists foresee a grim future driven by trade barriers, soaring public debt, and uneven recovery.

The IMF also warned against unilateral measures such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers or subsidies that could hurt trading partners and spur retaliation.

Brende warned that decoupling would have a significant negative impact on the global economy. The IMF estimates that severe decoupling, combined with high tariffs, could shrink the global economy by as much as 7 percent. He urged all countries to engage in dialogue, address tariff issues constructively, and avoid the pitfalls of decoupling and protectionism.

The World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala also voiced strong opposition to protectionism.

service areas now offer charging options," said Hua Lei, an official with the Ministry of Transport.

In 2024, China's NEV production and sales hit record highs, exceeding 12.8 million units, which solidified the country's position as the global NEV leader for a tenth consecutive year.

CHINA TRAVEL

Another notable highlight this year is the surge in inbound tourism. According to preliminary statistics, ticket bookings for inbound flights during the chunyun period surged 47 percent year on year, Shang said.

"China Travel" has become a trending topic, globally. In 2024, 64.88 million foreign visitors traveled to the country, an 82.9 percent increase from the previous year. In particular, visa-free entries involved 20.12 million visits, more than double that of 2023.

China's commitment to opening-up is driving this tourism boom.

Expanded visa policies, such as mutual visa waivers with 25 countries, unilateral visa-free policies for 38 countries, and transit visa exemptions for 54 countries, are making it easier for tourists to explore China.



Keys stands between Sabalenka and third straight Australian Open title in Melbourne

MELBOURNE

DEFENDING champion Aryna Sabalenka will battle American 19th seed Madison Keys in the final today looking to become the first woman since Martina Hingis from 1997-99 to win the Australian Open title three times in a row.

Also today, the men's doubles final sees Italians Simone Bolelli and Andrea Pavoncelli take on Briton Henry Patten and Harri Heliövaara of Finland.

'THREE-PEAT' DREAM CAN BECOME REALITY FOR SABALENKA

Sabalenka will be the overwhelming favourite to defeat Keys and complete the "three-peat" after prevailing in four of their five previous meetings, with the Belarusian slowly and steadily finding her best form in the major that has defined her career.

Although she has not shown the same kind of devastating form as her last two Melbourne Park campaigns, Sabalenka's mental toughness, consistency and sheer power have come to the fore at crucial times.

Victory today would see her become the sixth woman to win three straight Australian Open titles, joining Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Steffi Graf, Monica Seles and Hingis.

"It's crazy that I'm in a situation where I have a chance to put my name next to legends," said Sabalenka, who is bidding for her fourth Grand Slam title after winning the 2024 U.S. Open. "I couldn't dream about that. It's going to mean a lot."

The first world number one to reach the final at Melbourne Park since local favourite Ash Barty in 2022, Sabalenka can expect huge support as she goes for her 21st straight win on Rod Laver Arena.

"I just feel at home," Sabalenka added.

"Last year I thought, 'Okay, I feel at home, I feel so good here, I feel all the support'. This year I feel it even more. It feels like coming home to my home Slam."

KEYS READY TO SPRING ONE MORE SURPRISE

Despite an impressive start to 2025, few would have expected Keys (pictured) to get this far but the 29-year-old is a worthy finalist having beaten

world number two Iga Swiatek in the last four.

Swiatek was the third top 10 seed to lose to Keys after the American defeated sixth seed Elena Rybakina in the last 16 and 10th seed Danielle Collins in the third round.

Keys lost to compatriot Sloane Stephens in her only previous trip to a Grand Slam final at the 2017 U.S. Open, and the Adelaide champion knows she will have to raise her game to a different level to stand a chance against Sabalenka on Saturday.

The Belarusian was up against her best friend Paula Badosa in the semi-finals but showed the Spaniard no mercy on the way to her fifth straight hardcourt major final.

"What's really impressive is her mentality," Keys said.

"Her ability to always go for it, no matter what the score is, is really impressive. She plays such fearless tennis and has the ability to play so well that way. It's very unique."

Sabalenka's coach Anton Dubrov said the Belarusian's ability to keep up the pressure in matches had made her more dangerous.

"The opponents, they know they're going to face Aryna, and she can change all the time. They understand they have also to be on the same level all the time," he said.

"These top players, (the reason they are there) is because of the pressure, they just keep it there all the time."

Keys showed just how dangerous she can be when she blanked Sabalenka in the opening set of their U.S. Open semi-final two years ago, before eventually losing the next two in tiebreaks.

Playing at her 46th Grand Slam tournament, she will bid to become the fifth U.S. player since 2000 to win an Australian Open title after Lindsay Davenport (2000), Jennifer Capriati (2001, 2002), Serena Williams (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2017) and Sofia Kenin (2020).

"She's playing incredible tennis as well," Sabalenka said of fellow big-hitter Keys, who is also on a 11-match winning streak this season.

"She's a very aggressive player, serving well, moving well. I saw her matches here. She's in a great shape. It's going to be a great battle."

REUTERS

Anthony Davis now leads surging Lakers past Celtics

By Field Level Media

ANTHONY Davis recorded 24 points, eight rebounds and three blocked shots to help the Los Angeles Lakers roll to an easy 117-96 victory over the visiting Boston Celtics on Thursday night.

Austin Reaves had 23 points and six assists and LeBron James added 20 points, 14 rebounds and six assists for Los Angeles, which won for the fourth time in the past five games.

Dalton Knecht added 13 points, Gabe Vincent had 12 points on four 3-pointers and Rui Hachimura added 10 points and seven rebounds for the Lakers.

Kristaps Porzingis had 22 points and seven rebounds for the Celtics, who have split their past 10 games after beginning the season with 26 wins in 35 games.

Jaylen Brown had 17 points and eight rebounds and Jayson Tatum added 16 points, six rebounds and five assists for Boston, which sustained its largest loss of the season.

Los Angeles led by as many as 28 and was about to post its largest margin of victory for the second straight game until Boston's Jaden Springer hoisted a 3-pointer that went through the net as time expired.

The referees confirmed Springer got the shot off in time, meaning the Lakers' 23-point win over Washington on Monday remains their top blowout win.

Los Angeles shot 47.2 percent from the field, including 15 of 35 from 3-point range.

The Celtics made 38.5 percent of their shots and were 14 of 41 from behind the arc. Springer had 10 points for Boston.

The Lakers led by 15 after three quarters before James scored six points during a 9-0 burst to open the fourth quarter to give Los Angeles a 92-68 lead.

Vincent drilled a 3-pointer as the Los Angeles lead reached



Los Angeles Lakers forward Anthony Davis (3) dunks the ball against the Boston Celtics in the first half at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, California, USA on Thursday. Agencies

95-70 with 8:54 remaining as it became apparent Boston wasn't going to make a charge on the second end of a back-to-back.

Earlier, the Lakers led 48-32 after a 3-pointer by Reaves with 6:48 left in the first half. Hachimura and Knecht drained consecutive treys to make it 64-43 with 2:01 remaining.

Los Angeles was up 67-48 at the break with Davis leading the way with 14 points. Porzingis had 17 in the half for Boston.

Tatum drained consecutive 3-pointers in the third quarter as Boston trimmed its deficit to 74-62 with 7:19 left. The Lakers later pushed the lead back up to 18 on two straight hoops by Jaxson Hayes before the Celtics moved within 83-68 entering the final quarter.

Meanwhile, James Harden recorded his second triple-double of the season and the host Los Angeles Clippers sent the Washington Wizards to their 12th consecutive loss in a 110-93 rout on Thursday.

On his way to an 83rd career triple-double, Harden grabbed

12 rebounds, dished 13 assists and posted 17 points as one of seven Clippers to finish in double-figure scoring. Among them was Mo Bamba, who scored 11 of his 13 points off the bench in less than four minutes to open the second quarter.

Bamba's outburst, which included three made 3-pointers, was part of a 21-4 run that began in the first quarter and carried over into the second. Los Angeles held Washington without a field goal for 7:28, overlapping with the pivotal Clippers run.

Los Angeles never trailed and pushed its lead to as many as 27 points. Washington tried to fight back in the second half, pulling within 12 points midway through the fourth quarter at the end of an 11-4 run.

Kyle Kuzma, who scored just two points before the brief surge, posted five quick points.

The Clippers answered and snuffed off any hope of a Wizards comeback, however, when Norman Powell fueled a 10-0 run. Powell scored eight of his team-high 22 points in the de-

cisive burst.

Following Powell was Derrick Jones Jr., who scored all 19 of his points in the game's first 26:31. Ivica Zubac scored 11 points and grabbed nine rebounds, and Kawhi Leonard went for 15 points and seven rebounds.

Amir Coffey rounded out Los Angeles' double-figure scoring with 10 points off the bench.

On defense, the Clippers held Washington to just 32-of-94 shooting from the floor, including 11-of-46 from 3-point range. Jordan Poole, who scored a game-high 24 points, shot 4-of-12 from outside but went just 6-of-19 from the field overall.

Kuzma shot 3-of-12 and Alex Sarr, who finished with 14 points and 10 rebounds, shot 6-of-14.

The loss dropped Washington to 0-4 on its six-game Western Conference road swing. The 12 consecutive games the Wizards have dropped put them four away from matching their season-long skid of 16, which lasted from Nov. 2 through Dec. 5.

REUTERS

Zverev fresh for Australian Open final after being spared gruelling Djokovic test

MELBOURNE

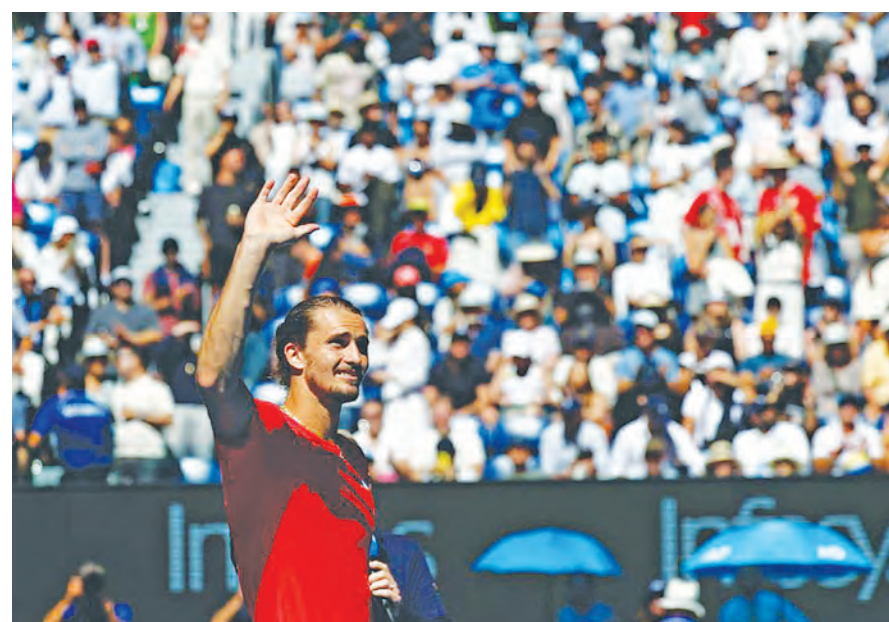
ALEXANDER Zverev said he felt ready to challenge for a long-awaited Grand Slam title at the Australian Open after being spared a heavy workout in the semi-finals due to Novak Djokovic's retirement.

Second seed Zverev advanced to his third Grand Slam final, and first at Melbourne Park, when 10-times champion Djokovic succumbed to a torn muscle in his upper left leg and pulled out after losing the first set 7-6(5) yesterday.

Zverev had expected a much longer battle with the Serbian great than the hour and 21 minutes spent on Rod Laver Arena, but the German felt it would not affect his rhythm going into Sunday's final against either Jannik Sinner or Ben Shelton.

"I still think that I played a high-level set. I think we both did," Zverev told reporters.

"So in that regard, I



Germany's Alexander Zverev waves to the crowd as he walks off court after Serbia's Novak Djokovic retires from their Australian Open semi final match at Melbourne Park, in Melbourne, Australia yesterday. REUTERS

still played tennis, right? It's not like it was a withdrawal from the get-go, and I would have had, what, four days off.

"That would have been maybe a bit too much because then you feel like you're starting a new tournament.

"It's nothing that, of course, I wished for, but it happened.

"I'm obviously happy that I have another

shot at winning a Grand Slam."

The wiry 27-year-old has been tipped for Grand Slam success since his teenage years but fell agonisingly short in the 2020 U.S. Open final when he squandered a two-set lead to lose to Dominic Thiem.

He had to wait another four years before his next chance in a major final but was again over-

hauled in five sets by the brilliant Carlos Alcaraz at the French Open.

Admitting that he had tired in the final sets at Roland Garros, Zverev reunited with trainer Jez Green in the off-season to build the fitness needed to compete with Alcaraz and the game's top players.

He also revealed he had sought Djokovic's advice in Shanghai

last year after feeling crushed by his quarter-final exit at the U.S. Open where he lost to 12th seed and eventual runner-up Taylor Fritz.

"I was just asking him how it was for him when he was having difficult moments, you know, 2016, '17 and all that, how he was coming back," said Zverev.

"He was always very open to me. We had very long chats there, as well. We practised quite a lot together in Shanghai, funnily enough."

Zverev admonished fans for booing Djokovic as he exited the court yesterday and thanked the Serb for throwing his support behind him for tomorrow's final.

"That means a lot to me, especially from Novak, who I admire and respect so much," he said.

"As I said, I'm looking forward to Sunday. I do feel like I have done the work, and I do feel like I'm ready for it."

REUTERS

Napoli's Conte out to end Juve's unbeaten run and preserve his own

By Trevor Stynes

LEADERS Napoli continue their title bid when they host Juventus this weekend, with manager Antonio Conte looking to end his former club's unbeaten league run and protect his own record as the last coach to avoid defeat in an entire Serie A season.

Juve will arrive in Naples today pitting Conte against the Turin club where he spent most of his career and had the majority of his success, both as player and coach.

As a tenacious midfielder, Conte won Serie A five times with Juventus, along with the Champions League, while as manager he won the league in his three seasons in charge at the club.

In his debut campaign on the Juve bench in 2011-12 Conte's side were undefeated in the league, a feat which has not been achieved since, and after also winning league titles with Inter Milan and Chelsea, he is now targeting success in Naples.

After seeing off third-placed Atalanta last weekend, Napoli may have turned the Scudetto battle into a two-horse race, with champions Inter three points behind albeit with a game in hand.

That 3-2 loss has left Atalanta seven points off top spot and proved Napoli have got what it takes to succeed this season, especially with a manager of Conte's calibre at the helm.

WINNING RUN

Initially Conte spoke of a rebuilding phase at Napoli and they were thumped 3-0 by Hellas Verona on the opening day. However, his side then went on a run of eight wins in nine, only dropping points in a draw at Juventus.

Napoli lost Victor Osimhen, their top scorer for the past three seasons, when the striker joined Galatasaray on loan early in the campaign but Conte just carried on regardless.

He will undoubtedly do the same after the club sold Georgia winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, one of the key players in the Scudetto win two seasons ago, to Paris St Germain last week.

What would once have been seen as a nail in the coffin for any title hopes has instead been shrugged off and Conte has the advantage of having a lot fewer games to play than his rivals.

Napoli have only the league to worry about, while Inter, Atalanta and Juve are all involved in the Champions League and are still in the Coppa Italia while all three were in Saudi Arabia earlier this month for the Italian Super Cup.

Thiago Motta's Juventus are unbeaten in Serie A despite looking far from impressive, having drawn 13 games and won only eight, and even if they do repeat Conte's feat, it won't necessarily bring a league title.

Juve are in fifth place, 13 points off Napoli, with Conte's team leading the way with 16 wins, two draws and three defeats. **REUTERS**

Hungry Rice showing more attacking bite, says Arteta

LONDON

ARSENAL midfielder Declan Rice is back to his best level with more attacking bite to his game, manager Mikel Arteta said of the club's record signing, who scored the opener in his side's 3-0 win over Dinamo Zagreb on Wednesday.

Rice netted his first Champions League goal inside two minutes to pave the way for a routine victory against the Croatian side that made Arsenal's place in the last 16 of the competition a virtual certainty.

"His intent, his purpose, especially attacking the positions he is taking and how he's driving with the ball," Arteta said of the England international. "There is another bite to his game and today he could have scored two goals."

"In the last few weeks he had some big, big open chances to score to affect the game, so overall, I'm very happy because we need to affect the game from those positions and he's certainly capable of doing that."

Rice rarely disappoints for Arsenal although he had looked jaded in the first half of the season and was left out of the starting lineup for three Premier League games.

A fully firing Rice will be crucial to Arsenal's pursuit of Liverpool in the Premier League title race and for them to progress deep in the Champions League.

"He's played so much football in the last two years, and as well, on top of that, we have moved him from one position to another. So, all the factors, but the good thing with Declan is he's so consistent, so reliable," Arteta said.

"He's always there, and when he creates those sparks, those moments, in the opposition's box, it's a great thing to have."

Arteta said that while Rice is a key cog in his team's ambitions, his levels need to be consistently high.

"Everybody has to be on their toes. He's not different to that and you can see that when he's fresher and he's in the condition that he is, he's a big player for us," Arteta said. **REUTERS**

Fragile Man City host Chelsea after shock defeat in Paris

LONDON

JUST when Manchester City appeared to have resumed normal service, Pep Guardiola's side once again find themselves under the microscope as they prepare to host top-four rivals Chelsea in the Premier League's big weekend clash today.

A 6-0 hammering of Ipswich Town last weekend looked like the moment the champions had put all the frustrations of the first half of the season to bed in spectacular fashion.

But it proved something of an illusion as a horrible capitulation to Paris St Germain on Wednesday left City in grave danger of being eliminated from the Champions League.

City led 2-0 in the French capital but ended up losing 4-2 -- a defeat that left them 25th in the 36-team table and needing to win their last game to stand a chance of a playoff spot.

Chelsea, who ended



a five-game winless streak in the Premier League when they beat Wolverhampton Wanderers on Monday, will relish the chance to put another dent in City's ego.

Enzo Maresca's side's title challenge may have faded but they are in fourth spot, two points ahead of fifth-placed City and the mood will be buoyant as they head to The Etihad.

When the sides met at Stam-

ford Bridge on the opening day of the season, City won 2-0 and few would have given Chelsea much chance of being above Guardiola's side come January.

But the new reality, at least for this season, is that City are in a scrap with the likes of Chelsea, Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest, Newcastle United and even Bournemouth to try and ensure they are in the Champions League next season.

Third-placed Forest, level with Arsenal in second on 44 points, are at seventh-placed Bournemouth (37) today.

Newcastle United, who are sixth with 38, travel to bottom club Southampton seeking to bounce back from their crushing 4-1 home defeat by Bournemouth last weekend.

Leaders Liverpool, six points clear of Arsenal and Forest with a game in hand, host third-bot-

tom Ipswich today, while Arsenal travel to lowly Wolverhampton Wanderers knowing they need to start putting together a long winning streak.

WOEFUL CAMPAIGNS

Tomorrow's focus is on two clubs desperately trying to turn around woeful league campaigns.

Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou reportedly still has the backing of the club's top brass despite his side sitting 15th in the table with 24 points, eight off the drop zone.

They have won once in their last 10 league games but a visit from a Leicester City side who have lost seven in succession offers a chance to turn the corner. Another flop, however, would pile enormous pressure on Australian Postecoglou.

Manchester United are 13th and only two points above Spurs. Manager Carlos Amorim last week claimed they could be the worst United side ever -- remarks he qualified on Wednesday by saying the criticism was more about him than his players.

United face 10th-placed Fulham at Craven Cottage tomorrow when Aston Villa in eighth host struggling West Ham United. **REUTERS**

Man City's new 'golden boy' Marmoush out to shine in Premier League

By Hatem Maher

MANCHESTER City's new signing Omar Marmoush, described as a 'golden boy' by Mohamed Salah, will be hoping to carve out a career as successful as his Egypt teammate - albeit in his own way - after completing a move to the Premier League.

City will rely on the versatile forward, who joined from Eintracht Frankfurt on a 4-1/2-year deal on Thursday, to breathe life into the club's disappointing season, with last season's champions 12 points adrift of leaders Liverpool.

British media reported that the deal is worth around 70 million euros (\$72.93 million) plus bonuses. Marmoush's broad skill set should help City, who have uncharacteristically struggled for efficiency at times this season, despite their wealth of attacking talent.

The 25-year-old (pictured), primarily a forward but equally adept on the wing, put on some dazzling displays in his second season in Frankfurt, tormenting defenders with his mazy runs and goalscoring prowess.

Marmoush's 15 goals, which make him the second highest scorer in the Bundesliga this term behind Bayern Munich's Harry Kane, have come in different ways: poacher's finishes, long-range shots, one-on-one efforts and more.

Particularly impressive has been his ability to run at defenders, exploit gaps and finish off sweeping counter-attacks, as well as his new-found proficiency at set-pieces.



These attributes have drawn comparisons to Liverpool's Salah, who is also enjoying a stellar season with 18 Premier League goals and 13 assists in 21 games.

Salah, however, cautioned last year that such comparisons could place undue pressure on Marmoush, saying his Egypt teammate needed to "live his own experience."

Marmoush echoed that sentiment.

"Salah is the best player in Egypt's history. We always talk, and I always try to learn from his experiences," he told Egyptian television channel DMC in an interview aired on Friday.

"But at the same time, I want to create my own story."

EGYPTIAN SURPRISE Marmoush's career began in the youth ranks of Egypt's Wadi Degla, a Cairo-based club with a modest fan base.

Former Egypt and Tottenham Hotspur striker Mido, who was the coach of Degla's first team back then, predicted in 2016 that Marmoush would

be "the surprise of Egyptian football".

"I watched him in his beginnings, and he was always motivated. His story is inspirational," Mido said in November.

Marmoush embarked on his European journey when he sealed a move to Wolfsburg in 2017. He initially played for their Under-23 team before making his Bundesliga debut in a 4-1 win over Bayer Leverkusen in May 2020.

Loan spells at St Pauli and VfB Stuttgart followed before Marmoush joined Frankfurt on a free transfer in the close season in 2023, scoring 12 league

goals in his first campaign to help his new team book a place in the Europa League.

At international level, Marmoush marked his Egypt debut under then coach Carlos Queiroz with a screamer in a 1-0 World Cup qualifying victory over Libya in October 2021. He has made a total of 35 appearances for his country, scoring six goals.

City manager Pep Guardiola will be hoping he continues his trajectory and breathes life into a disappointing season so far.

(\$1 = 0.9598 euros)

REUTERS

CAF General Secretary Mosengo-Omba cleared of fraud allegation

GENEVA

THE Confederation of African Football (CAF) said on Thursday that the Swiss Public Prosecutor's Office will not initiate legal proceedings against CAF General Secretary Veron Mosengo-Omba after finding no basis to do so.

Mosengo-Omba had been under investigation for alleged suspicious payments involving Swiss bank accounts, as disclosed last September by the Federal Criminal Court of Switzerland.

He denied any wrongdoing and met with the Swiss Public Prosecutor's Office in November to answer questions relating to the preliminary investigation.

"CAF welcomes the decision of the Swiss Public Prosecutor's Office and is pleased that there continues to be adherence and compliance within CAF and the CAF Secretariat, with the culture and commitment to ethics, transparency and governance that was introduced since the Presidency of Dr Patrice Motsepe," CAF said in a statement.

Mosengo-Omba formerly worked at FIFA before taking over as CAF's general secretary four years ago. **REUTERS**

Gwiji by David Chikoko



SPORT

Fragile Manchester City host Chelsea after shock defeat in Paris

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Yanga vow to bounce back, eye victory over Copco FC in Federation Cup clash



By Correspondent Seth Mapoli

YOUNG Africans SC (Yanga) will return to action today in the Federation Cup Round of 64, taking on Copco FC at the KMC Complex. The match kicks off at 4:00 PM EAT.

Young Africans head into this match seeking redemption following their recent disappointment in the CAF Champions League, where they were eliminated qualifying to the quarterfinal stage by MC Alger after a goalless draw in the last group stage match, having needed a win to progress.

Now, the team will look to use today's encounter as an opportunity to rebuild confidence and reignite their winning momentum.

Head coach Sead Ramovic (pictured) has emphasized the team's focus on defending their Federation Cup title.

Last season, Young Africans emerged victorious in the competition, and they are de-

termined to replicate that success this year.

Speaking ahead of the match, Ramovic expressed his confidence in his squad and their ability to perform.

"Our goal is to win tomorrow's game against Copco and ultimately retain the Federation Cup," said Ramovic. "It's not just about having 11 great players; all 25 players in our squad are exceptional and ready for this match."

Ramovic also acknowledged the importance of treating every opponent with respect, including Copco FC.

"We may not know much about our opponents, but we respect them. We are well-prepared and focused on achieving a positive result," he added.

On the other side, Copco FC's head coach, Lukas Mlingwa, admitted that his team is aware of Young Africans' individual and collective strengths but remains optimistic about exploiting their weaknesses.

Mlingwa emphasized that his team

is prepared to give their best and challenge the reigning champions.

"We know Yanga's quality as a team and the talent of their individual players, but we also understand their vulnerabilities. We will do our best to capitalize on those weaknesses," Mlingwa stated.

After today's match, Young Africans will shift their focus back to the Premier League, where they have a busy schedule ahead.

On February 1, they face Kagera Sugar, followed by a clash against KenGold on February 5, and a game against JKT Tanzania on February 10.

Young Africans will aim to maintain their strong form in domestic competitions as they continue their quest for glory on all fronts.

As defending champions of the Federation Cup, Young Africans understand the expectations that come with their status.

Their journey begins today against Copco FC, and the players, technical bench, and fans are all eager to see the team deliver a commanding performance.

Today's match offers Young Africans an opportunity to not only advance to the next round of the competition but also to boost morale and showcase their championship ambitions.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the CAF Champions League elimination, Young Africans head coach Ramovic, faced criticism over his comments on the quality of the Tanzania Mainland Premier League.

The club's Media and Communication Officer, Ali Kamwe, has clarified that Ramovic's remarks were misunderstood by many stakeholders, who took to social media and sports programs to debate the issue.

"Many people misinterpreted what

the coach said. He did not call the Tanzanian league weak; instead, he was referring to the urgency and intensity of play in the league's matches," Kamwe explained.

He noted that Ramovic's use of the term "intensity" was misconstrued.

"Intensity refers to the speed, urgency, and response during a game both when a team has possession and when it doesn't. It has nothing to do with the quality of the league.

"For example, the English Premier League has more intensity compared to the French Ligue 1, but that doesn't make the French league weak," Kamwe elaborated.

He urged analysts and stakeholders to approach the discussion with a better understanding.

"The quality of the league and the intensity of play are two different things. Some analysts and stakeholders are misleading the public by criticizing our coach unfairly.

"The difficulty we face against Tanzanian teams isn't as high as that in leagues like Algeria, South Africa, Morocco, or Tunisia, where teams play with more intensity and speed. We need to adapt to that level of competition to succeed internationally," he added.

Kamwe also reflected on the team's performance in the CAF Champions League, attributing their exit to a below-par display in their final match.

"It was a bad day for us. We didn't play at 100 percent of our capacity. I spoke to the players after the match and told them I wish we had performed at even 60 percent of the level we showed against Al Hilal Omdurman in Mauritania.

"MC Alger barely survived at Mkapa, but that's football some days are good, and others are not," he remarked.



Simba retain faith in Joshua Mutale despite slow start

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

SIMBA SC have reaffirmed their belief in Zambian winger Joshua Mutale, retaining him during the recent transfer window despite his struggles to make a significant impact since joining the team in July last year.

The former Power Dynamos player (pictured) has been given another opportunity to prove his worth, with Simba's management deciding to keep him after thorough discussions during the transfer window.

Mutale now faces the challenge of stepping up his performance in the second half of the Tanzania Mainland Premier League, which resumes early next month.

Sources within the club indicate that management conducted a comprehensive evaluation of each player's performance during the midseason break.

Mutale's case sparked debate, with some members advocating for his release due to his underwhelming contributions so far.

However, the decision ultimately swung in his favour, influenced by his potential, age, and injury setbacks.

"When Mutale was signed, the club had high expectations for him," a source revealed. "Unfortunately, injuries and a lack of form have hindered his ability to contribute significantly. However, influential figures within Simba argued that he deserves a second chance, especially given his young age and potential."

Since joining Simba on a three-year deal from Power Dynamos, Mutale has played 10 league matches, clocking 438 minutes without scoring or providing an assist.

This lack of tangible contributions led to his exclusion from the CAF Confederation Cup squad to accommodate new signing Ellie Mpanzu.

Mpanzu's immediate impact has added pressure on Mutale. The Congolese winger made his mark during Simba's 2-0 victory over CS Constantine in the CAF Confederation Cup, assisting Kibu Denis to secure Simba's top spot in Group A.

Despite the competition for places, Simba's management sees Mutale's retention as an opportunity for the player to redeem himself and fight for his place in the squad.

"He has been given a second chance because of his injury challenges. His future at Simba now depends on his performances moving forward," the source added.

Simba are currently leading the Premier League table with 40 points and will resume their campaign against Tabora United at the Ali Hassan Mwinyi Stadium in Tabora.

Before that, they are set to face Kilimanjaro Wonders in the Federation Cup round of 64 at the KMC Complex tomorrow.

Simba's journey in the CAF Confederation Cup continues with a quarter-final clash against one of ASEC Mimosas, Stellenbosch FC, or Al Masry SC.

The club remains focused on maintaining their domestic dominance while eyeing continental glory.

CECAFA backs Karia for CAF executive committee

By Correspondent Seth Mapoli

THE Council of East and Central African Football Associations (CECAFA) has officially announced that its president, Wallace Karia, will be the sole candidate from the region for the Confederation of African Football (CAF) executive committee elections scheduled for March 2025.

This development follows the withdrawal of Moses Magogo, the president of the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA), who stepped aside in a gesture of unity and support for Karia's candidacy.

A statement issued by CECAFA confirmed Karia's unopposed bid for the position, emphasizing the region's collective decision to back the Tanzania Football Federation (TFF) president (pictured).

CECAFA has also declared its support for Souleiman Hassan Waberi, president of the Djibouti Football Federation, in his bid for a seat on the FIFA Council.

The council represents football's global governing body and plays a critical role in shaping the sport worldwide.



"Members of the Council of East and Central African Football Associations (CECAFA) have agreed to support Souleiman Hassan Waberi for the FIFA Council position in the upcoming elections," the CECAFA statement read.

The decision to back both Karia and Waberi was made during the CECAFA Ordinary General Assembly held on January 22, 2025, at the Imperial Plaza Hotel in Juba, South Sudan.

The assembly brought together regional football leaders to deliberate on key is-

suues and align their strategies ahead of the CAF and FIFA elections.

In a show of solidarity, CECAFA praised Magogo's decision to step down from the CAF executive committee race, describing it as a "brotherly spirit" move that prioritizes regional unity over individual aspirations.

"At the Assembly, the President of the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA), Hassim Moses Magogo, announced that he will not continue his bid for the position of CAF Executive

Committee Delegate and will leave the position to the President of the Tanzania Football Federation (TFF), Karia," CECAFA's statement added.

If elected, Karia will become the second Tanzanian to serve on the CAF executive committee, following in the footsteps of Leodegar Tenga, who previously held the position.

Karia's candidacy represents a significant milestone for Tanzania and CECAFA, as the region seeks greater representation and influence within African football's top decision-making body.

Meanwhile, CECAFA's endorsement of Waberi highlights the region's ambition to have a stronger presence on the global stage.

Waberi, who has been at the helm of Djiboutian football since 2012, has been recognized for his efforts to develop the game in his country and beyond. CECAFA expressed confidence in his leadership and ability to contribute to FIFA's global agenda.

"The FIFA Council, the entire region, has decided to support Waberi, who is also the President of the Djibouti Football Federation," the

statement continued.

The upcoming CAF and FIFA elections will be closely watched as they shape the future of football governance in Africa and the world.

CECAFA's united front reflects its determination to enhance its influence and ensure the region's voice is heard in key decision-making processes.

Karia's candidacy and Waberi's bid signify CECAFA's strategic push to position East and Central Africa as a significant player in football politics.

Both leaders have expressed their commitment to advancing football development in the region and beyond, making their potential election a pivotal moment for CECAFA's ambitions.

With Karia poised to secure his place on the CAF executive committee and Waberi vying for a seat on the FIFA Council, CECAFA is set to make its mark on both the continental and global football stages.

The elections will take place in March 2025, and the region will be hoping for a successful outcome that solidifies its influence in the sport.

Flexibles by David Chikoko

