



National Pg 3 2 killed in Handeni road accident



National Pg 4 'Cut costs of feasibility studies'



National Pg 5 Minister demands review of contract



Nearly half of Kenyans earn below Sh30,000



FORESTRY OFFICERS

Page 3



LAND OWNERS

Page 5



OLD BUILDINGS

Page 6



Bahi accident: Govt will pay for treatment, travel

By Guardian Reporter, Dodoama



Residents of Nadjoki village in Simanjiro District, Manyara Region, prepare food yesterday in the area where their houses were demolished following a land ownership dispute with those of the neighbouring Terati village. Sources said some of those rendered homeless were putting up at the residences of relatives. Photo: Correspondent Asraji Mvungi

THE government has said it will pay all treatment costs for over 60 victims of a train accident that occurred at the weekend in Bahi District, Dodoma Region.

The train which derailed at Kigwe area on Saturday night killed three passengers and left 66 others injured, who were taken to Bahi District Hospital and the Dodoma Regional Referral Hospital.

Visiting those admitted at the referral hospital, Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan said that the government will make sure that all patients received full treatment and settle the bills.

"Upon their recovery and discharge from hospital, the government will also transport all of them to their destinations," she stated.

Dr Ernest Ibenzi, the Medical Officer in charge at the referral hospital, told reporters here yesterday that 33 out of the 66 injured at the passenger had already been discharged from the facility.

The Tanzania Railways Corporation (TRC) said in a statement that the passenger train travelling from Dar es Salaam to Kigoma crashed in Bahi District at a distance of 58 kilometers from Dodoma, carrying

TURN TO PAGE 2



Tanzanian hospitality woos Russian tourists

By Guardian Correspondent, Arusha

A GROUP of Russian tourists holidaying in the country have expressed satisfaction with their experience so far, promising to be good ambassadors when they go back home.

Speaking here at the weekend, the tourists said they got value for money for unique attractions and improved services beginning at points of entry, including the Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA).

The visitors are part of a group of 57

tourists from Russia who are in the country for the end of year holidays said they also received warm welcome and generosity from the people of Zanzibar.

Leisan Saleen, one of the tourists said that they were happy with the generosity of Tanzanians. "The country has unique tourist attractions and blessed with a range of natural endowments."

The Russian tourists are now heading to Tarangire and Ngorongoro national parks, officials said

KIA Acting Manager Christina Mwakatobe appealed to stakeholders to further improve service provision to continue attracting more foreign and local visitors.

"Hospitality is one of the crucial aspects in service provision; you need to ensure a better customer experience to continue attracting even more visitors," she said.

Geographically KIA is the best sub-regional connecting point for flights from

Anxiety as dogs savage wildlife in Ngorongoro

By Correspondent Marc Nkwame, Arusha

CONSERVATIONISTS are baffled and aghast after video clips emerged on social media at the weekend showing seemingly trained dogs pursue and kill herbivores within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.

In one video, a pack of the hounds surrounded and attacked a large wildebeest as occupants of tourist vehicles nearby watched helplessly. Another clip showed three dogs killing and eventually eating an antelope.

Conservationists now demand to know how the dogs, whose attacks appear to suggest that they are trained, found their



It seems the dogs are currently starved for food and are now out to fend for themselves

way into the strictly conserved precinct and how their owners had the audacity of hunting wildlife.

Dr Edward Kohi, the principal researcher at the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI), said that the presence of such dogs was a serious matter, pointing out that the hounds appear to be domesticated Maasai dogs and not a trained sub-species.

"It seems the dogs are currently starved for food and are now out to fend for themselves," he said, noting further that with trained dogs costing over 1m/- it was impossible for pastoralists living in Ngorongoro to buy such pets as they

TURN TO PAGE 2

Laxity: Rujewa water board now disbanded

By Guardian Correspondent, Mbarali

WATER deputy minister Maryprisca Mahundi (pictured) has dissolved the Rujewa Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (Rujewa-WSSA) board of directors in Mbeya Region for poor service delivery.

Clement Kivegalo, the director general of the Rural and Urban Water and Sanitation Agency (RUWASA) was directed by the deputy minister to sack



its current manager for Mbarali District, Job Mwakasala for failing to supervise water projects and issuing reports that the ministry saw as falsified.

Deputy minister Mahundi reached the decision at the weekend during a tour to inspect implementation of water projects in the district, where she said residents face acute shortage of piped water. At the same time many projects have been mismanaged and abandoned, and even those completed no water comes out of the taps, she explained.

Upon inspecting the projects, she said the Rujewa-WSSA Board has not performed its duties as required, as she had discovered that "the RUWASA manager for Mbarali District submitted

TURN TO PAGE 2



9 770856 542009 >

TURN TO PAGE 2

Bahi accident: Govt will pay for treatment, travel

FROM PAGE 1

720 passengers.

Those who perished are two women and a child, identified as having been in the second carriage. Those injured were admitted at the two hospitals within the proximity and were undergoing treatment.

Briefing the vice president, Dr Ibenzi said the 33 patients had been discharged by yesterday morning. Many of the casualties had broken limbs and six of them had already been put to surgery.

VP Samia wished them quick recovery, promising that the government will ensure they get proper treatment and upon recovery, will be transported to their destinations.

She praised the TRC management for quick response and the hospital for readiness to start treatment on the victims. "We wish you a quick recovery and I promise that the government will do everything possible to ensure you get the right treatment," she said.

Minister for Home Affairs George Simbachawene arrived there shortly, and attributed the accident to the ongoing rainfall in the area which damaged the railway infrastructures, including stacked mud on the rails.

"TRC was still investigating the matter and will come up with a detailed report about the accident," he said, summing up that the muddy rail patch is "all we have for now."

He applauded health sector staff in the region for their responsiveness and cooperation of all medical units to save the lives of the injured, especially those admitted in intensive care units.

The train was carrying passengers from Dar es Salaam to up-country regions of Tabora, Katavi, Kigoma and Mwanza, with six of the 12 wagons derailed at around 7 pm local time in the

Kigwe-Bahi area.

The earlier statement said that TRC officials, along with security staff, were investigating the cause of the deadly accident, as officials quickly dawned on the fact that heavy rains in the central zone was likely to explain the accident.

Railway Unit police officer Malale Bwana said at the hospital that the train was moving awkwardly during the afternoon at it reached Gode Gode in Mpwapwa.

"Afternoon (at 1600) we stopped at Gode Gode, as the rain loaded sand on the railroad, forcing a stop there, and between Bahi and Kigwe village the same situation came up as rain had washed out the concrete on the railroad," he explained.

Regional Commissioner Dr Binlith Mahenge was on the scene of the accident yesterday, urging the public to ignore reports circulating on social media on the incident.

"Some of the injured who were admitted at Bahi Hospital have been treated and allowed to leave because they were not critically injured," he further noted.

Those who were not injured would be transported to Manyoni where they are expected to continue with their journey, the RC added.



TRC was still investigating the matter and will come up with a detailed report about the accident," he said, summing up that the muddy rail patch is "all we have for now"



Bunda district commissioner Lydia Bupilipili (R) briefs Works and Transport minister Dr Leonard Chamuriho (L) yesterday on the ongoing implementation of the 121.9-km Nyamuswa-Bunda-Kisorya and 51-km Bulamba-Kisorya road projects in Mara Region. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

Anxiety as dogs savage wildlife in Ngorongoro

FROM PAGE 1

would rather invest in cattle.

The researcher raised worries about rabid infections in the area should the dogs be allowed to multiply. TAWIRI has a vaccination program against rabies, he stated.

At a recent Editors Forum event organized by the Ngorongoro park management for senior media practitioners, it came to light that the park was under serious threat from rising population numbers plus livestock - and now it seems domestic carnivores are also a problem.

The NCAA Commissioner of Conservation, Dr Freddy Manongi cited the recent case of a hyena which killed 30 sheep from a Maasai household, pointing out that the killing had a rare ferocity which suggests that it was infected by rabies. The matter is still under investigation, he remarked.

"When it was annexed from the then Serengeti Game Reserve to form the Conservation Area in 1959, Ngorongoro had 8000 nomadic pastoralist, the number has since catapulted to over 100,000 permanent residents,"

he stated.

With the increasing population and diminishing grazing areas due to invasive species, human-wildlife conflicts are poised to multiply, he declared.

Similarly, 60 years ago the Maasai within NCAA kept less than 200,000 livestock between them, but as of 2019 the number of cattle, goats and sheep has quadrupled to over 800,000 kept animals.

Recent developments show that large ferocious domestic dogs are now commonplace and these have started to attack and

kill wildlife in an otherwise calm environment for herbivores.

Joyce Mgaya, head of public relations and NCAA Acting Senior Assistant Commissioner of Conservation, said the NCAA management understands that the area is a World Heritage Site and had started to work on the issue.

Experts say that while humans and animals reproduce, the land they occupy does not expand and therefore serious and determined interventions are needed to save the conservation area, measuring 8,292 square kilometers.



Tanzania Forest Services Agency commissioner Prof Dos Santos Silayo (L, foreground) seeks explanation at the weekend from the agency's manager in Mbinga District, Kelvin Mpiluka (R), on the public's reaction to an invitation to access tree seedlings for planting in their localities. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

Laxity: Rujewa water board now disbanded

FROM PAGE 1

falsified reports on the district's water situation that said water availability was at 69.9 per cent while the actual situation showed it was below 30 per cent."

The manager was provided with funds for the implementation of various water projects including the Ruduga-Mawindi Project that was expected to cost more than 12bn/- but so far no work has been done on it, leaving abandoned equipment at the site, she elaborated.

"Many water projects in Mbarali are in a state of hopelessness beyond description, mostly due to gross negligence from RUWASA officials in the district. Hence I direct you, RUWASA Director General to remove from position, the Rujewa-WSSA Manager and where needed other officials so that we start with a new team," she ordered.

"I have dissolved the water board and I direct that a new one be formed which should exclude all former members as they have nothing new to offer to the people of the district," the deputy minister declared.

Mbarali District Commissioner

Reuben Mfune said the district is faced with an acute shortage of piped water, as opposed to reports issued by RUWASA officials to leaders who visit the district.

"RUWASA says the availability of water was at 69.9 per cent, but actually it was under 30 per cent, even though the projects and waterless pipes exist," he said.

RUWASA Director General Kivegalo pledged to send a team of engineers from other regions to implement the stalled projects, noting that his officials were not speaking the truth on the situation.

The projects would be completed in order for the people access to the vital commodity, he added.

RUWASA says the availability of water was at 69.9 per cent, but actually it was under 30 per cent, even though the projects and waterless pipes exist

Tanzanian hospitality woos Russian tourists

FROM PAGE 1

terminals located in Zambia, Malawi, DR Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi heading to overseas destinations of Asia, Europe and the far East.

The airport has installed new airfield ground lighting and

floodlights along its aprons, resurfaced the runways and created continuous loop linking runways and taxiways to eliminate delays in landing and take-off.

A Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB) marketing officer, Francis Malugu expressed the hope that

more tourists will flock into the country following the approval of Covid-19 vaccines that are now being administered in a number of countries.

Stakeholders and the public in general need to support the government's efforts in improving

the tourism sector for the national interest, he said, while tour operators group leader Peter Robert said the various initiatives taken by the government to improve the sector contribute to the rising number of visitors.

"We are now receiving many

visitors compared to the previous period," he affirmed, showing good promise for the sector which contributes 17.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 25 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings.

Tanzania is currently receiving

1.2 million tourists per year, but before the Covid-19 pandemic the government targeted that by 2025, the country should have reached five million tourist arrivals annually. This would grow forex earnings to \$6 billion from \$2.5 billion per annum on average..



Singida regional commissioner Dr Rehema Nchimbi (R) pictured at the weekend presenting a dummy cheque for 91m/- which Mkalama District Council has extended in the form of loans to groups of women, youths and people with disabilities. Left is Iramba East legislator Francis Isack. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

Minister condemns people taking unfair advantage of PwD

By Guardian Reporter

THE Deputy Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office responsible for people living with disabilities, Umyy Nderiananga, has strongly condemned the behaviour of some people who had used persons with disabilities (PwDs) into street beggars so as to earn income.

According to her, there are some people who are taking advantage of the PwDs by putting them in one house and then use them to earn money.

In her impromptu visit to various areas where the persons with disabilities are kept in Tandale Street, Dar es Salaam Region, Nderiananga expressed her sadness over the acts of abuse done to the disabled.

"These acts are against human rights, there are some people 'dealers' who have been transporting people with disabilities from upcountry bringing them to Dar es Salaam to make them street beggars, this is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated," she said.

The deputy minister added: "It is shocking to see some people using disabled people to earn money, why are you taking these people and making them become beggars for your own interests? The government will not turn a blind eye to this, we will hunt all the culprits wherever they are," she explained.

According to her, PwDs have for a long time been seen as a trifling group in society's eyes which is totally not true. These people have all the rights like any other human being, so they should be respected.

She said that the government

has formed policies and laws to ensure that the group is well protected and lived happily.

She urged the general public to support the government by revealing all people behind the illegal business.

Nderiananga also used the opportunity to educate persons with disabilities to stop allowing people to use them but rather utilise how they can to improve their lives.

"There are a lot of economic opportunities that favour everyone including people with disabilities, the government also has loans provided to the group through district councils so as to enable them to initiate income-generating activities," the deputy minister explained.

Kinondoni District Commissioner Daniel Chongolo said that he will follow up the matter to ensure that stern measures are put in place to fight the illegal business.

One of the persons with disabilities, Steven Fortunatus urged the government and stakeholders to support them, become self-reliant because being in the streets as beggars is a disgrace to them but they are forced by dishonest people to do so.



She urged the general public to support the government by revealing all people behind the illegal business

2 killed, five injured in Handeni road accident

By Guardian Correspondents, Tanga

TWO people have been killed and five seriously injured after a passenger bus belonging to Kimotco Mberesero Generation overturned at Maili 10 in Handeni District, Tanga Region.

Tanga Regional Police Commander, Blasius Chatanda said the accident occurred on January 2 this year. He linked the accident with the driver's negligence and speeding.

"The driver lost control over the vehicle for speeding, leading

into the accident. The passenger bus was heading to Dar es Salaam from Arusha," said the RPC adding there were 45 passengers on board.

RPC Chatanda said the injured were taken to Magunga hospital in Korogwe District. He said some of them were discharged yesterday while those still admitted are responding to medical treatment.

He added that the bus driver is also admitted at the hospital.

Chatanda mentioned the dead as the bus conductor

and a nine-year old child. The bodies are preserved at Magunga hospital.

Mid-December 2020, 14 family members died in a grisly road accident at Mkiwa village, Ikungi District in Singida Region.

Singida Regional Commissioner, Dr Rehema Nchimbi, ordered security organs responsible for road safety to intensify operations and patrols.

According to Singida Regional Police Commander (RPC) Sweetbert Njewike, 14 of the 15 victims died on the spot after their

mini-bus collided head-on with a truck on Sunday at 3:30 p.m.

The RPC explained that the accident occurred along the Singida– Dodoma highway involving a minibus heading to Itigi from Mwanza and a truck that was heading to Kahama District from Dar es Salaam.

According to the Police, it is suspected the minibus driver lost control over the vehicle for speeding, leading into the collision with the truck. The RPC said the minibus driver died on the spot.

Forestry officers to be transferred - govt

By Guardian Reporter

Natural Resources and Tourism minister Dr Damas Ndumbaro has called upon all district forestry officers to stop issuing permits for tree cutting when they never participated in tree planting or even tending them and even having no plans of their own to plant trees.

Dr Ndumbaro also said the ministry plans to transfer forestry officers in all local councils to Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS) to make them directly accountable to the ministry instead of the Ministry for Regional Administration and Local Government in order to increase performance in the protection of forests as well as increase the tree planting pace in the country.

Dr Ndumbaro gave the remarks when launching the house of the Chief Conservator of the 39,496-hectare Wino Tree Farm that provides part time employment to 40,000 people in Madaba district council in Ruvuma Region.

He said many forestry officers in the local councils have been issuing permits for wanton cutting trees endangering the existence of many forests,

He said the 2020-26 CCM election manifesto directs each local council to plant 1.5 million trees, hence he called on forestry

officers to supervise the exercise especially during the current rain season.

However, the minister stressed that among forestry officers' priorities was to collect revenue via permits for tree cutting instead of supervising, protecting and developing tree planting in their districts.

Meanwhile, Dr Ndumbaro said the ministry plans to amend laws to make all forest areas be directly managed

by the central government to save the forests from the ongoing destruction, especially those forests under the custody of district councils.

"I am urging TFS to submit recommendations on how to shift the management of the forests from the councils to the central government," he added.

He also called on all forestry officers to stop all livestock grazing in the forest reserves.



Nestlé Good food, Good life

DISTRIBUTORS REQUIRED

Nestlé Tanzania liaison office, is seeking distribution partners to distribute its products in the following regions:

- Northern Tanzania region (Tanga, Kilimanjaro, Arusha and Manyara)
- Central Tanzania region (Morogoro, Dodoma and Singida)
- Southern highlands (Iringa, Mbeya, Songwe, Rukwa and Katavi)


We are seeking a distributor who is business-savvy and hungry for growth with the ability to accelerate our topline growth through retail penetration and customer expansion. The business will offer lucrative returns for the successful partner.

The requirements to qualify as a distributor include:

- Extensive knowledge of the region including routes, outlets and ability to forecast the business potential. (Monthly, quarterly and annually)
- Bank guarantee of TZS. 300M from a tier 1 or 2 bank.
- Working capital of TZS. 500 million.
- An office with internet connectivity.
- Adequate warehousing space (at least 2000sq).
- Competent sales and support team comprising of minimum 2 order booking sales people, 2 Van sales people and 1 data clerk.
- Able to provide at the minimum, the following vehicles: Two 3-ton van for Van selling across the regions and 3 retail vans, one dedicated to each region mentioned above
- Should be a registered company in Tanzania, complying with all legal requirements and with audited results for the last three financial years.
- Experience in managing a distribution business will be an added advantage.

Applications by interested parties should be addressed to the party below indicating their area of interest and should be received by no later than **January 15th 2021**.

The Business Development Manager
Nestlé Tanzania Liaison office
P.O.Box.105665
Dar es Salaam
Tanzania.



USAID | TANZANIA
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Next Generation

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, posts this Request for Information (RFI) to inform Tanzanian Organizations an upcoming OVC Next Generation activity designed to increase access to and use of health/HIV, social, and protection services among OVC and youth. The purpose of this RFI is to solicit feedback from Tanzanian, American, and other organizations on the draft program description which is available on the link below.

This RFI is not a Request for Application or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and in no way commits USAID to issue a NOFO or to make an award. Please note that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to or preclude any organization or individual from any Request for Application that may be subsequently issued as any/all comments received will be strictly for information gathering purposes only. USAID will not pay for any costs associated with responding to this RFI. Information received in response to this RFI shall become the property of USAID. Therefore, information that cannot be shared should not be sent.

To see the full RFI notice and detailed information including instructions on how to respond, please visit www.grants.gov for an opportunity titled **720-621-21-RFI-00001** or follow the following link:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=330535>.

The full notice and other information will be available under the "related documents" tab.

Responses must be received by email only to the addresses provided in the full RFI notice. Response due date and time is **January 14, 2021, 8:00AM East Africa Time**. Phone calls will not be entertained, and hard copy submissions will not be accepted.

If you have a problem accessing the full RFI notice on the provided website link, please write to anganga@usaid.gov and usaidtco@usaid.gov with **ACCESS TO OVC NextGen RFI** on the email subject line.

'Ensure supply of raw materials for fertiliser satisfies domestic demand'

By Guardian Reporter

TANZANIA Fertiliser Regulatory Authority (TFRA) has called upon fertiliser producers in the country to utilise opportunities on the availability of essential raw materials in fertiliser production and its supplements to satisfy the country's demand.

Dr Stephan Ngailo, TFRA managing director issued the call at the weekend in Dodoma at the opening of a training to empower the country's fertiliser producers.

Dr Ngailo said Tanzania has abundant mineral reserves including those used in fertiliser production including phosphate that provide investment opportunities in the sector to assure farmers of the availability of abundant quality fertiliser at affordable price.

"I ask you to use the opportunity to develop the fertiliser sector by investing in fertiliser making factories to assure farmers of availability of the agricultural input," he said.

He said fertiliser production will also assist in increasing job opportunities for the youth.

Dr Ngailo said fertiliser factories and supplements satisfy only five per cent of the fertiliser demand in the country per year, equivalent to 600,000 tonnes.

He said this is contributed by various challenges including lack of essential and adequate information on fertiliser production and its supplements as well as other investment challenges.

He explained that the training is expected to mobilise investment in fertiliser production in the country, saying as for now

nearly 90 per cent of the input is imported.

Dr Ngailo added that local fertiliser production would also boost balance of trade with foreign countries, increase employment opportunities and reduce delay in the availability of fertiliser thereby increasing domestic income.

The training brought together fertiliser producers, dealers and various other government officials concerned in industries and coordination in fertiliser imports from outside the country as well as TFRA officials.

Topics presented included fertiliser chemical and biological knowledge, knowledge in fertiliser production industry, energy and investment.

TFRA was established by Act No. 9 of 2009 as amended in 2014 and was aimed to manage and control the country's fertiliser quality and its trade and licensing fertiliser dealers.

TFRA also issues permits for the manufacture, importation and distribution of fertiliser in the country as well providing various guidelines as needed in regard to fertiliser business.



I ask you to use the opportunity to develop the fertiliser sector by investing in fertiliser making factories to assure farmers of availability of the agricultural input



Network Limited operations manager Lumuliko Mengele (C) names 'Patapata na Tigo-Pesa' raffle winners in Dar es Salaam at the weekend. With him are Tigo business manager Ibrahim Mfalla (L) and Gaming Board of Tanzania official Elibariki Elibariki. Photo: Correspondent Jumanne Juma

By Guardian Reporter

Works and Transport minister Eng. Leonard Chamuriho has directed TANROADS in Mara Region to ensure it reduces the costs of projects especially when they conduct feasibility studies.

He gave the instruction during his visit in Bunda District to inspect the construction of the 121.9 kms Nyamuswa-Bunda-Kisorya road that includes the 51kms at tarmac level Buyamba-Kisorya road section.

During his inspection,

Reduce project costs during feasibility studies, minister advises TANROADS

Chamuriho said the Nansio road that links Nyamuswa-Bunda to Kisorya was essential to the residents of Bunda District as it will open many social opportunities for them including transporting of their produce.

Bunda District Commissioner Lydia Bupilipili praised the project's contractor as well TANROADS for the good job done.

She said: "The pace was terrific and had provided employment opportunities to Bunda District residents and Mara Region in general."

Submitting his work implementation report, Mara Region's TANROADS manager Eng. Mlima Ngaile said the project contract was signed and the work was to be completed within two

years, but due to the contractor's fast pace, he promised to complete the work before the expiry of the agreed period.

"The project cost was 46.5bn/- and is being supervised by a TANROADS advisory firm and so far the contractor has begun various initial works that are 50 per cent complete," Eng. Ngaile added.



Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development deputy minister Dr Angelina Mabula (L) pictured at the weekend symbolically presenting to the head of Mkuranga District Council's Lands department, Musa Kichumu, real time kinematic survey (RTK) equipment worth 39m/- bought by the council. Photo: Correspondent Munir Shemweta

Govt orders land owners to have building permits

By Guardian Reporter

MINISTER for Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development William Lukuvi has directed land owners in the country to ensure that they obtain building permits before they begin any kind of construction on the said plots.

According to him, the move aims to curb unplanned settlements that in turn affects urban planning development.

He made the remarks in the

Coast Region over the weekend that everyone has to adhere to the country's laws governing land matters.

"The law states clearly that any land owner willing to develop or commence construction on a plot has to seek for a special permit which is provided by the urban, city or municipal councils. The law prohibits any construction to be carried out without the permit," he said.

He said that all land officers

and urban planners should work hard to ensure that the law is well observed to fight unplanned human settlements.

He said the ongoing exercise to formalise unplanned human settlements only focuses on the buildings that have been already built but the new ones have to be constructed as per the country's laws.

The minister said that the government's formalisation process is aimed at making land assets an important

warranty that can pull out many poor families from abject poverty.

He wanted land experts to continue educating the public in town and cities to build in designated and surveyed plots which include obtaining building permits before embarking on construction.

"Strong measures should be taken to prevent this. We want sustainable cities where citizens live and build in accordance with the law," he added.

DC issues deadline on signing of contracts by tanzanite firms, miners to ensure fair deal to all

By Guardian Correspondent, Simanjiro

SIMANJIRO district commissioner Zephania Chaula has given 30 days to the Mirerani resident mineral officer and the secretary of Manyara Region Mining Association (MAREMA) Mirerani branch to prepare a list of people owning tanzanite mines that should include copies of contracts in regard to their payments to small miners.

He also instructed owners of all mines in the district who entered into contract with small miners for the payment of 10 per cent to provide them with work identity cards, and given letters praising the implementation of the directive.

Chaula's directives were given at the weekend when he was addressing tanzanite miners at Mirerani mining town on various challenges facing them.

He said 'Apolo' was a big group of miners and it was important to examine their benefits because mining work was being carried out by them hence they needed protection.

He said the procedure, if followed, will remove conflicts between the Apolo group and mines owners, citing whenever they become sick no body was held responsible for their treatment.

"Any mine owner who will not abide by the directive will be inviting problems for himself, after one month I will make a follow up on the directive's implementation in all mines," DC Chaula said.

Mirerani resident minerals

officer Fabian Mshai said they will implement the directive given by the DC, adding that there were some mines owners who had already implemented the directive by having contracts in regard to benefits of members of the Apolo group engaged in mining activities.

The Chairman of Tanzanite minerals committee, Money Yusuf said, in his mine had already entered into contract with his miners to pay them 20 per cent from minerals' production, according to each miner's qualifications.

Samweli Rugemaliza, one of the miners said there was still the problem over the availability of explosives equipment at the Tanzanite mines.



Any mine owner who will not abide by the directive will be inviting problems for himself, after one month I will make a follow up on the directive's implementation in all mines

Minerals minister calls for review of contract

By Guardian Reporter

MINERALS minister Dotto Biteko has directed the Tanzania Mining Commission to review the contract between the State Mining Corporation (Stamico) and TANZAM 2000 Ltd, an investor at Buckreef Gold Company Ltd located at Mnekezi village in Geita District, Mwanza Region.

He made the directive during his official tour at the mine to inspect the construction progress. The minister also held a meeting with mine's top management.

"The mining commission must go through all the signed contracts because of the many shortcomings; I want the mine to start operations before coming back here during the parliaments' budget meetings later this year," said the minister.

Representative of TANZAM 2000 Ltd, Khalaf Rashid promised to work on the minister's directives for Tanzanians to start benefiting from the minerals.

The mines' engineer Gaston Mujwahuzi said once completed the gold mine will have two separate plants. He said one of the plants will have a capacity to refine 40 tonnes of gold concentrates in an hour and the other one with a capacity of 220 tonnes.

Meanwhile, the minister Biteko ordered authorities in Geita Region to register all the small artisanal miners conducting activities at Nyarugusu ward, in Geita District. He said the move will curb illegal exportation of gold.

The region's minerals officer, Eng Daniel Mapunda said they have so far provided over 1,500 mining licences, of the number, 600 are in Geita District and

800 in Nyarugusu ward. He added that only 300 artisanal miners conducting activities at Nyarugusu have been registered.

Last year, Parliament's Energy and Minerals Committee chairman, Dustan Kitandula advised the government to terminate the contract with the investor claiming that TANZAM 2000 Ltd investor violated a number of conditions stipulated in the contract such as procurement of machines without consulting Stamico.

Kitandula said the investor has failed to improve the gold mine since 2011 when the contract was signed.

He said termination of the contract would not affect the government because it has so far lost millions in terms of revenues due to delayed implementation.

The MPs also suggested Stamico to hand over its operations of some mines to artisanal miners to continue collecting revenues.

Stamico entered into an agreement with private firms—Tanzam 2000 Ltd, a subsidiary of Tanzanian Royalty Exploration Corporation (TRX) from Canada to operate Buckreef Gold Company Ltd from October 2011.

According to the contract, Stamico owns 45 per cent of the shares and Tanzam 2000 Ltd 55 per cent. The joint venture project includes a license for special mining activities—SML 04/92 and a mineral exploration contract.

Stamico, a state owned enterprise which was reestablished in 2015 with the aim of increasing the contribution of the mineral sector to the national economy and creating employment opportunities to Tanzanians.



A senior official with the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (L, gesturing) briefs Natural Resources and Tourism minister Dr Damas Ndumbaro (2nd-L, foreground - in hat) at Madaba in Ruvuma Region at the weekend. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

WHO welcomes India's COVID-19 vaccine approval

NEW DELHI

THE World Health Organisation (WHO) yesterday welcomed India's decision giving emergency use authorization to Covid-19 vaccines.

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region said, "World Health Organization welcomes India's decision giving emergency use authorization to Covid-19 vaccines."

"The use of vaccine in prioritised populations, along with the continued implementation of other public health measures and

community participation, will be important in reducing impact of Covid-19," Singh added in a tweet.

Drugs Controller General of India VG Somani has formally announced the approval for the emergency-use of two coronavirus vaccines, one developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University and the other by local company Bharat Biotech.

"CDSCO (Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation) accepts the subject expert committee reform rations on Serum and Bharat Biotech Covid vaccines," Somani during a press

conference. "Vaccines of M/s Serum and M/s Bharat Biotech are being approved for restricted use in emergency situations," Somani read out from a written statement.

Somani said the overall efficacy of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine was 70.42% and that of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin was "safe and provides a robust immune response".

"We will never approve anything if there is slightest of safety concern. The vaccines are 100% safe. Some side effects like mild fever, pain and allergy are common for every vaccine," he added.

The subject expert committee (SEC) under the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) had recommended Oxford-AstraZeneca's vaccine, which is being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII) as Covishield, for emergency use and Covaxin for restricted use.

Even before getting the approval from the apex drug controller of India, SII stockpiled about 40-50 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, which involved a major risk in case its application got turned down by the drug regulator. Overall, Serum's investment on Covishield is around \$100 million.



Water deputy minister Maryprisca Mahundi (2nd-R, foreground) is briefed by Rural Water Agency officials in Mbarali District at the weekend on a long-abandoned Ilongo water well project. Photo: Correspondent Nebart Msokwa

Africa's private and public sectors advised to team up in exploring free trade area

By Special Correspondent, Addis

Ababa

FOR the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to deliver on its promises, the private and public sectors on the continent must work together, said the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Vera Songwe.

At the virtual launch of trading on the AfCFTA over the weekend, Songwe said if done properly, AfCFTA 'will be the plan that turbo charges investment, innovation and ultimately growth and prosperity for Africa.'

Songwe was one of the speakers at the event who included three African heads of state and the Secretary General of the AfCFTA Mr. Wamkele Mene, who praised the ECA and other development partners who supported the AfCFTA to see the treaty become a reality. Apart from the ECA, other development partners included the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Afreximbank.

Three heads of state from South Africa, Ghana and Niger also spoke at the ceremony.

President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, the Chairman of the African Union, said while the start of trading represented a milestone for the people, member states should ensure the creation of a conducive environment for the continent's young people and women to benefit from the opportunities presented by the agreement.

President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger congratulated African leaders who helped to shape the agreement, saying the commencement of trading was 'one of the best new year's gifts for the whole continent.'

In his own remarks, President Nana Akufo-Addo, whose country is hosting the secretariat,

described the launch as an important step towards realizing the goal of continental integration. According to Mr. Mene, 'Today Africa is trading under the AfCFTA; this is Africa's time.'

With 54 member states signing it of which 34 had ratified, the agreement was a strong signal that Africa was ready to commence trading on the basis of new rules and preferences that would ensure an integrated African market, said Mr. Mene.

The AfCFTA is the largest trading agreement in the world since the creation of the World Trade organization (WTO) with the potential to unite more than 1.2 billion people in a \$2.5 trillion economic bloc and usher in a new era of development. It has the potential to generate a range of benefits through supporting trade creation, structural transformation, productive employment and poverty reduction.

The agreement entered into force on 30 May 2019 after the treaty was ratified by 22 countries -- the minimum number required under the treaty.

Trading was initially scheduled to start on 1 July 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced the date to be moved forward by six months.

Eritrea is the only country which has yet to make any commitment to the continental body.

The ECA through its African Trade Policy Centre has been working with the AU to deepen Africa's trade integration through the effective implementation of the agreement by supporting the AfCFTA ratification process through policy advocacy.

The ECA is also assisting the member-states to develop national strategies for the implementation of the AfCFTA in partnership with the AUC, International Trade Centre (ITC), UNCTAD and a selection of independent trade experts with the financial support of the European Union (EU).

By Special Correspondent

IITA scientist Dixon named among top 20 influential plant breeders in Africa

THE Director of Development and Delivery Office of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Dr Alfred Dixon, has been named among the top 20 most influential plant breeders in Africa. He was named alongside two other IITA scientists - Abebe Menkir and John Derera.

The Southern African Plant Breeders' Association (SAPBA) recently published the list which has 20 internationally renowned plant breeders working in various agricultural research and science development institutions in Africa.

Fondly referred to as "Dr Cassava" by his peers, Dr Dixon, who manages and coordinates interdisciplinary research on cassava improvement in sub-Saharan Africa, is recognized for developing over 400

improved cassava varieties for a range of agro-ecologies and cropping systems on the African continent.

Few months ago, the Nigerian government approved the renaming of one of the six top-performing cassava varieties in the country, after him. The variety, which is now known as Dixon, was formally identified as TMS-980581.

Currently serving as the Technical Adviser to an IITA cassava seed system project known as Building an Economically Sustainable, Integrated Cassava Seed System, Phase 2 (BASICS-ID), Dixon, who has authored and co-authored over 350 scientific publications, was the Project

Leader of the IITA Integrated Cassava Project that supported Presidential Initiatives on Cassava Transformation in Africa. Recently, he also led the Cassava Weed Management Project which developed the Six Steps to Cassava Weed Management toolkit that's currently helping cassava farmers in Nigeria, Tanzania and several other African countries. The toolkit has been integrated into AKILIMO and is currently being disseminated under the IITA African Cassava Agronomy Initiative (ACAI). AKILIMO is an all-in-one agronomic recommendation package for cassava farming system.

Apart from building and maintaining links and

partnerships between research projects and national root crops programs in Africa, Dr Dixon facilitates linkages with government leaders, policy makers and other institutions working on cassava in and outside Africa, towards improving the productivity of cassava on the continent.

In recognition of his meritorious contribution to agriculture in Nigeria, Dr. Dixon was conferred with the traditional title: Balogun Agbe, by the Olukoyi of Ikoyiland, Ikoyi, Osun State in 2004. The CGIAR System also recognized him as "a great example of CGIAR scientists at work", an award conferred on him in 2005.

Elders in Mbeya call upon govt to get rid of dilapidated buildings

By Guardian Correspondent, Mbeya

ELDERS association, comprising development stakeholders, has appealed to Mbeya City Council authorities to improve the investment environment in various sectors especially the building sector in order to improve the city's landscape that still has a lot of old buildings.

The more than 20 elders went to the office of Mbeya City director Amede Ng'wanidako at the weekend to submit their views on investment, saying dilapidated buildings should be demolished and new ones built.

Speaking at the meeting, retired councillor for Nzovwe Ward Gerson Mwandete who held the post from 1994 to 2004 said the place where the former market stood at the city centre that burned down in 2010 should be erected a modern sky scraper to beautify the city.

He said the government should withdraw title deeds of holders of plots who have failed to develop their buildings since the first phase government and should be given to others who are ready to develop them.

He mentioned some of the plots as including one owned by PSSSF in Sisimba Ward that has become an eyesore.

He also mentioned the 10 acre at RRM area near Nanenane bus stand that has not been developed for a very long time and has now become a sanctuary for muggers.

"These areas should be given to other investors who are able to build modern schools, colleges, hospitals and even modern hotels, but as for now they seem to be abandoned," Mwandete said.

Former Member of Parliament for Mbeya City constituency Mwaieseje Polisa, the first MP after the introduction of multiparty system asked for the increase of secondary schools with Forms V and VI, saying they should at least reach 20 to cater for many students who join higher schools.

He said during the time when the government was mobilising for the industrial economy, the number of educated people should be increased to have many experts to run industries.

The retired headmaster of Mwakaleli secondary school in Rungwe District Andalisiye Mwaihabu who was the school head between 1982 and 1994 said the elders were supporting government efforts to change Tanzania's economic system.

For his part, Ng'wanidako the City director said if city officials including councilors and the residents in general worked together in development activities, the was the possibility for Mbeya City landscape to change.

He said Mbeya City need huge investment for such changes because for many decades it was regarded as the main gate for countries in southern Africa including Zambia, DRC Congo, Zimbabwe and South Africa.



These areas should be given to other investors who are able to build modern schools, colleges, hospitals and even modern hotels, but as for now they seem to be abandoned



Dodoma district commissioner Josephat Maganga (R) presents ignition key at the weekend to William Mwachila of Ipagala, winner of a car in Vodacom Tanzania's 'Shangwe Shangwena' raffle. Looking on (2nd-R) is the mobile phone service provider's Central Zone manager, Grace Chambua. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

PM gives DED two days to provide transport for students and teachers

By Guardian Reporter

PRIME Minister Kassim Majaliwa has given two days to executive director of Tunduru District Council in Ruvuma Region Gasper Balyomi to provide transport for Tunduru secondary school to serve students and teachers of the school.

The PM gave the directive on Saturday during his inspection of the school after the Tunduru South Member of Parliament Daimu Mpakate told him the school was faced with an acute transport problem.

"Director, on Monday (today)

bring a vehicle here already inscribed with the name of the school to provide transport to our teachers and students. The school has 600 students and more than 28 teachers, hence it must have its own transport," said the PM.

In regard to the refurbishment done to the school, the PM said he was satisfied with the work and praised the headmaster Amini Limia and the building committee for the good work done.

He said when the fifth phase government came to power it initiated the strategy to refurbish all old schools in the country at the cost of more than 700bn/-

Ruvuma Region was allocated 3.7bn/- for refurbishment of all old schools including Tunduru secondary school.

The PM also used the opportunity to appeal to students to abide by the laid down laws, regulations and other school procedures in order to stay well at the school.

He said he was pleased with the students pass mark in national examinations in the last three years whereby Form VI students pass mark was 90 per cent, adding that in this year's examinations he was expecting 100 per cent pass mark.

Earlier the headmaster, Amini Limia said they received more than 792m/- from the government via EP4R for the refurbishment of 15 school dilapidated buildings that were built 38 years ago.

He said the refurbishment also included the construction of two more buildings and 12 new pit latrines for students.

Tunduru secondary school is among old schools in the country established in 1982 and caters for boy students for Forms V and VI in PCM, PCB, PGM, CBG, HGL, HGK and HKL combinations. It has 682 students and 28 teachers.

AfCFTA to offer 1.5 bn jobs, achieve trade exchange worth \$3.4 tn - EJB

By Guardian Reporter and Agencies

THE African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is expected to offer jobs for more than 1.5 billion people, with a projected trade exchange worth \$3.4 trillion, the trade committee of the Egyptian Junior Businessmen Association (EJB) said in a statement released yesterday.

Head of the committee Mohamed Abdelrahman said that most African states are entirely dependent on imports from outside the continent, a matter which increases the poverty rates and badly affects the continent's supply chains, especially amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Yet, Abdelrahman noted that the agreement faces many major challenges, topped by linking African markets with African producers and the product with the consumer, adding that trade exchange among African countries is difficult.

He underlined that problems would emerge by the beginning of the implementation of the agreement, pointing to some countries' concerns about opening their markets for neighbouring countries.

He added that the dependency of African countries on goods from China, Europe, and the United States is another challenge that the agreement faces, which has experienced many problems during the lockdown period.

In July 2020, AfCFTA was due to come into force, but it witnessed a delay due to the COVID-19 crisis and its related lockdown measures. AfCFTA is the biggest trade deal in the world in terms of the number of participating countries since the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1994.

The AfCFTA agreement is merging 54 African countries of 1.3 billion people in one market within an economic bloc with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion, according to the African Centre for Economic Transformation.

Once in place, AfCFTA is projected to grow by 33 percent, and Africa's total trade deficit is expected to be cut in half. Moreover, it could generate a total consumer and business spending of \$6.7 trillion by 2030, according to ACET.



Tourists and Zanzibar residents view newly caught tuna weighing some 75 kg each, as found at Shangani in Zanzibar at the weekend. Photo: Correspondent Martin Kabemba

Milo villagers decry poor state of roads

By Guardian Correspondent, Njombe

RESIDENTS of Madilu and Milo wards in Ludewa District, Njombe Region have decry poor state of roads in the area, saying the situation becomes worse when it comes to accessing healthcare services and it also leads to huge losses of their farm produce.

According to the residents, the roads connecting Madilu and Milo and the district headquarters have been neglected hence transporting their produce to the market had become very difficult due to impassable roads.

They were speaking over the weekend when Ludewa MP Joseph Kamonga visited the two wards. The legislator was accompanied by the Njombe Regional Manager of the Rural and Urban Roads Agency (TARURA) Ibrahim Kibassa.

"For many years now a road from Madilu to Mundindi through Ilawa and Ilindinda had been damaged to such an extent that it is also has become impassable something that affects daily activities including making it difficult also transport goods or even transport patients to health facilities," said John Mgina, one of the residents.

He added: "The situation becomes worse during the rainy season where bus owners also hike fares to take villagers to the town."

Mariam Mhagama said pregnant mothers are the ones who are mostly at risk due to the lack of good roads. Some of the women have been delivering on the way to health centres due to poor roads.

MP Kamonga urged the TARURA manager in Njombe Region to use available registered groups in the wards and give them tenders to renovate the roads while waiting for mega construction projects.

He urged the government to set enough budget for the Madilu road so as to construct it and thus stimulate economic activities in the areas.

"There is a road from Madilu to Lugalawa through Lupungulu mountain, this is a very important road that needs immediate rehabilitation because it is used by many people who go to seek health services at Lugalawa hospital," he added.

Ibrahim Kibassa, TARURA manager in Njombe agreed to use small registered groups to identify roads that need immediate rehabilitation.

"In the 2020/21 fiscal year, the government has set aside over 4bn/- for the construction of various roads in various districts of Njombe Region whereby Ludewa will receive 1.2bn/- for rehabilitation of roads," he said.

According to Kibassa, even the contractor to carry out the construction project in Ludewa had been found and what remains is for the rainy season to end.

Traditional leaders fight against child marriages in rural Zambia

LUSAKA

HAD it not been for the intervention of the village head, Precious Moyo, a 16-year-old girl at the Kabeleka village in Lusaka would still be languishing in a marriage with no hope of a better future.

“My parents were struggling to provide for all six of us children. It was then that my peers suggested that I get married so as to lessen my family’s financial burden,” she recounted.

But after just a few weeks into the supposed marriage, the village head person upon learning of Precious’s ordeal decided to confront her parents and had her removed from the arrangement and taken back to school.

Like many developing countries, Zambia still grapples with child marriages. Many girls particularly from lower-income environments in Zambia are married off at a very young age and in the process denied access to education and dignified life.

However, the past few years have seen a reduction in incidences of child brides particularly in rural Zambia because most traditional leaders in the country have made it their mission to end child marriages.

It is for this reason that stories with a much happier ending such as that of Precious are becoming all too common in rural Zambia where child marriages were once very rife.

Many traditional leaders, including chiefs, village heads as well as village development committees, have continued to spearhead the fight against child marriages as well as a host of other gender-based violence challenges in rural Zambia and their efforts are bearing fruit.

“We have, through the Chikwanda Anti-GBV Foundation, an initiative of the royal establishment, managed to prevent child marriages and also successfully retrieved a lot of young girls from such arrangements. A good number of the girls have since gone back to school,” Chief Chikwanda of Chikwanda Chiefdom in Mpika district, Northern Zambia, said in an interview.

His royal highness further revealed that because of education and sensitization programs that his administration has been undertaking over the years, most families now apprehend the dangers of child marriage, including maternal death and greater risk of contracting a range of sexually transmitted infections.

“Communities now also appreciate the fact that marrying off young girls is retrogressive in that it not only robs the child involved in a better future but also denies our village the chance to develop. Educated children are an asset to both their immediate communities and the country as a whole,” he added.



The flouting of traffic regulations continues unabated on roads in many parts of Tanzania, with the cost high indeed. Correspondent Jumanne Juma captured this scene at Kitunda Kivule on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam yesterday.

Africa’s largest entrepreneurial intervention leads way on COVID-19 economic recovery

By Special Correspondent

THE Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF), Africa’s leading philanthropy dedicated to empowering African entrepreneurs, opens applications on its TEFConnect digital platform on January 1, 2021.

This year’s intervention prioritises the economic recovery of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and young African entrepreneurs, following the Covid-19 disruption to economic activities.

To address the unique challenges arising from the pandemic, lift

millions out of poverty and create sustainable employment across the continent, the Foundation’s Entrepreneurship Programme will empower 1,000 young African entrepreneurs, selected from the 2020 cohort. The Foundation will also open applications to an additional 2,400 young entrepreneurs in 2021, in collaboration with global partners.

The Tony Elumelu Foundation, which celebrated ten years of impact in 2020, is empowering a new generation of African entrepreneurs, through the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme.

Successful applicants receive a world-class business training, mentorship, non-refundable seed capital up to \$5,000, and global networking opportunities. The Programme is open to entrepreneurs across Africa, both new start-ups and existing young businesses, operating in any sector.

CEO of the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Ifeyinwa Ugochukwu stated, “The Tony Elumelu Foundation now more than ever is demonstrating our commitment to unleashing the potential of young African entrepreneurs, the key to Africa’s long-term economic

transformation. The pandemic has created challenges across the continent, but we know that with the Tony Elumelu Foundation’s tried and tested Programme, we can execute the largest Covid-19 economic recovery plan for African SMEs and break the cycle of poverty in Africa.”

The Tony Elumelu Foundation’s \$100million Entrepreneurship Programme, launched in 2015 to empower 10,000 entrepreneurs over 10 years, is now entering its 7th year and has empowered to date, over 9,000 young African entrepreneurs from 54 African countries.



Bishop Dankton Rweikila of Power of Good Fire church leads peace prayers at Chanika in suburban Dar es Salaam yesterday. Photo: Correspondent Jumanne Juma

ADDIS ABABA

AU urges Africa to ensure economic recovery from COVID-19 this year

AFRICAN Union (AU) Commission chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat on Friday called on the African continent to ensure economic recovery from the brunt of COVID-19 pandemic as the New Year begins.

“As we mark the end of the year 2020, we also mark the end of one of the most extraordinary and challenging years in living memory,” the chairperson of the 55-member pan-African bloc said in a

statement. Mahamat warned that “the challenging task of protecting our health and livelihoods, while ensuring recovery of our economies, still lies ahead as we begin a new year.”

According to Mahamat, the AU’s continental response initiative, as part of the bloc’s aspiration in supporting member states

with preparedness, response and recovery from public health emergencies, kicked in early and fast by the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

Mahamat’s remarks came as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the African continent reached 2,759,313 as of Friday, the Africa CDC said.

The continental disease control and prevention agency said in a statement that the death toll from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has reached 65,480 as of Friday evening.

The public health agency of the AU also said that a total of 2,289,156 people infected with COVID-19 have recovered across the continent so far.

Senegalese women equip remote clinics with solar power

KAOLACK, Senegal

An organisation run by women in Senegal, ElleSolaire, was supplying solar panels to light up country homes that are off the power grid. But with the outbreak of the coronavirus, and health care stretched, ElleSolaire has switched to providing the panels to underequipped, remote health clinics, where women are often forced to give birth in the dark.

Senegalese women adorned in colorful wax fabric clothes laugh and dance around in the village of Tiamene Diogo. They are celebrating because the local clinic that provides prenatal care will soon have electric lights and fans.

Head nurse Issaka Dia says with more than 2,500 people from six villages, there are about eight births each month, many of which he attends to at night using only the light from his mobile phone.

He says he’s so happy. He feels like they can now work day and night, even in the heat.

The remote region in western Senegal is off the electric grid, so the clinic will be powered by the sun.

Since 2018, the woman-run ElleSolaire has been installing solar power in rural households.

With the coronavirus pandemic stretching health care, the company began equipping remote clinics.

Kelly Lavelle is the founder and executive director.

“We’ve been just amazed at the reception,” said Lavelle. “The reception we’ve seen today is a point in case. It’s sad in a way that we’ve had to wait for COVID to hit for us to stop and think about the health clinics. But I’m really pleased that we’ve managed to pivot this into an opportunity.”

The organization also provides new skills for women like Jeanne Thiaw, ElleSolaire’s women’s coordinator. She used to scrape by with child care and cleaning jobs.

She says that although she could pay the rent before, she could not feed her family because she didn’t have the means.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, Thiaw and her co-workers have installed solar-powered lights, fans, and mobile phone chargers at 23 remote clinics.

More than one million Senegalese lack access to power, according to USAID, and the World Health Organization says rates of maternal mortality are high.

Oumar Samb is a project evaluator with Senegal’s Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection.

He says when women arrive to give birth in the night or in the day and all the machines are down, it’s obviously a danger for the woman in labor and for the newborn. Access to solar energy for these rural women can be lifesaving, he says.

And that, say the women, is progress worth celebrating.

China's poverty reduction offers lessons for Africa

CHINA has declared victory over extreme poverty following painstaking implementation of carefully designed decades-long poverty reduction programs. China now holds the record as the country with the most consequential feat against penury, having lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty.

This success has not only earned Beijing admiration from around the world, but is also a powerful example of what is possible when government and people work together on a specific vision.

In many ways, China is an inspiration to the African continent as far as poverty reduction is concerned. Africa is home to the largest number of developing economies, while China is now the largest developing economy, aiming for moderately prosperous status. With more than 30 percent of Africans still living in extreme poverty-constituting over 70 percent of the world's poor-it is not hard to understand why China's enviable milestones in poverty reduction continue to resonate with governments and citizens in Africa.

For instance, much work on eliminating poverty from the face of the Earth should be actualized in Africa to realize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. If nothing is done differently, the World Bank estimates that up to 90 percent of global poverty will be on the continent by 2030. This is worrisome, because the year 2030 is also the UN's deadline for

eliminating poverty in all forms.

China's poverty reduction in rural areas, anchored on agriculture modernisation, offers good insights for Africa's socioeconomic transformation. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the nation's agriculture has undergone a series of improvements spanning land reforms, agricultural cooperatives and marketization. Hoisted by modern farming methods, targeted institutions as well as progressive policies, the shift from subsistence to comprehensive agricultural production economically empowered China's rural majority and formed a key component of poverty reduction.

To feed its rapidly growing population of 1.2 billion people, Africa must move beyond traditional, one-dimensional agriculture into a multifaceted enterprise driven by science and technology. In this way, the continent can realize higher inputs, low consumption, high quality and efficiency in its agricultural value chains.

The African Union has set the task of ending hunger on the continent by 2025-a task made more challenging by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which is pushing millions more African households into extreme poverty.

Given that the majority of Africa's population live in rural areas, effective poverty reduction programs should target that group, and agriculture remains the strongest vehicle to deliver economic sustainability and food security.

Think of Apps for local needs, not wide markets

EFFORTS are being made to reach out to young innovators in the information and communication technology industry, where the capacity to innovate and create usable applications is seemingly on the rise. What lacks is concurrent openings in terms of market access, where such applications can be used and developers paid a fee for its routine use, as an income. That would be the best scenario but then as usual, not all products get markets.

As a matter of fact, applications that are developed here and there need to find usage not in a commercial sense per se but as part of the techno-communicational background for various other initiatives to succeed. In other words such applications need to relate to demand, if indeed there is a problem that has cropped up that can't be solved by available apps, or where any such apps need to be improved for better results, such ideas can work. They definitely will be limited in scope, and they are not, in the first place, what young innovators wish for.

There will hence be some gaps in what young innovators expect or seek to see happening, and efforts by the government to assist youths so in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) so that they can take charge in social and economic development. The government is pledging to create a conducive environment for developing and sustaining young innovators in the market, but the process is complicated. Unlike other consumables or usable commodities where quantity is relevant, here is actually a liability.

Usually there aren't so many needs on a particular day that need or would make use of a new application, as what exists takes

care of most day to day needs, for instance creating forums where a limited number of people have access or are concerned with it, like a wedding preparations committee. In addition, most applications that are thought up or develop relate more to routine communication, as one or other form of chatting, not really the storage and retrieving of information. Innovations of this sort go back to major search engines, not apps.

Dr Faustine Ndugulile, the minister for Communications and Information Technology, expressed an ardent wish to assist young innovators at an official tour of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) and the College of Information and Communication Technologies (CoICT) of the University of Dar es Salaam mid last week. He said that young innovators have been coming up with a number of ICT applications which address routine challenges in the delivery of social and economic services but most of them are not recognized, developed and given a chance in the market. That is after all the market.

At the heart of the problem really is a matter of philosophy, where innovation in ICT comes up like any other produce on the market, and the normal expectation that with some effort from ministerial agencies, things will be well. That is to forget that ICT around the world isn't just a tool of simplifying tasks but also cutting out swathes of employment opportunities as the skills are no longer needed. Young innovators will make themselves relevant like other small entrepreneurs when they go around marketing an app for shopkeepers, commuter buses or motorcycle riders to use or hawkers, and get a few per day as he goes around. It could pay.

The Guardian Limited Key Contacts

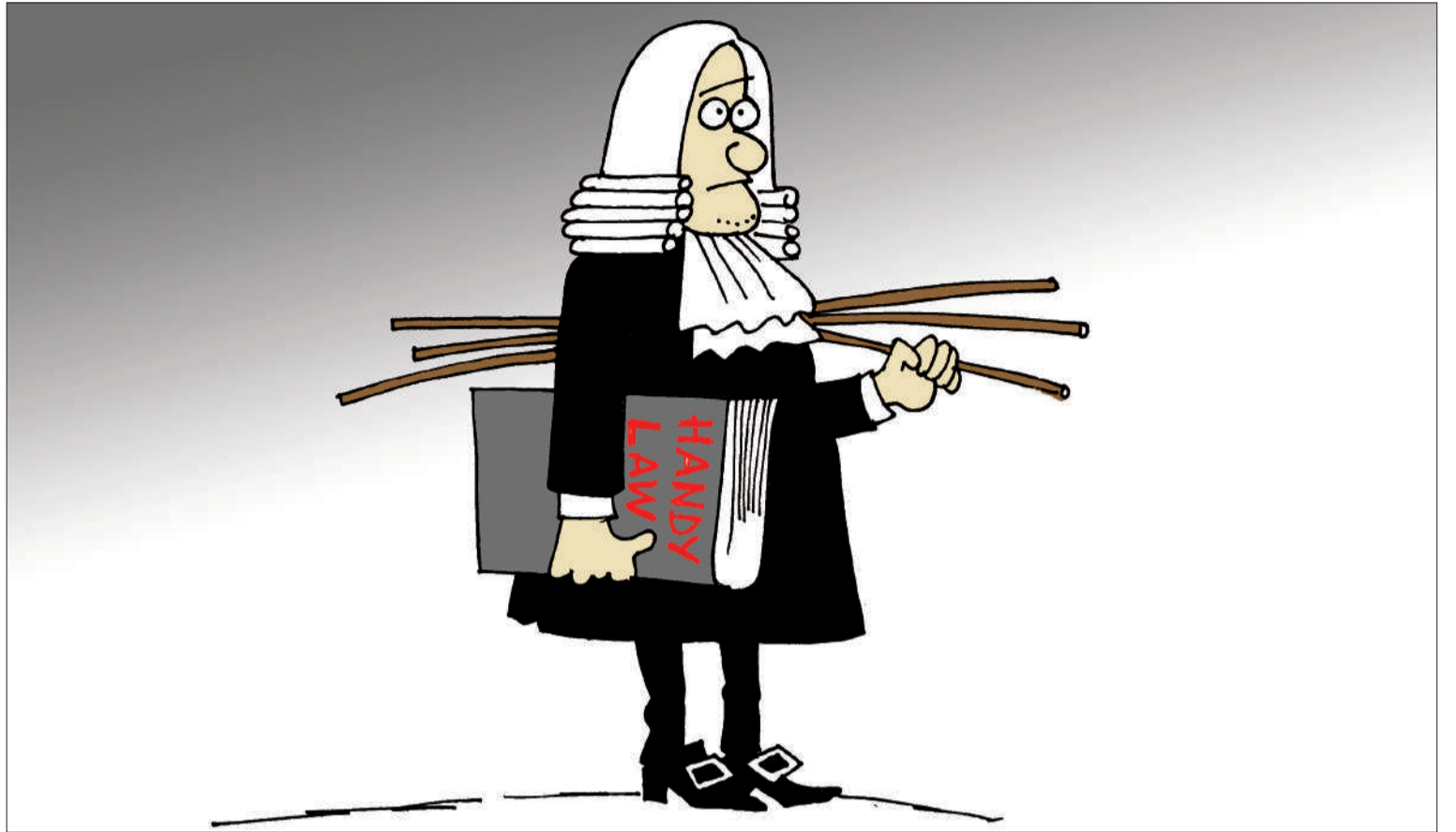
Managing Editor: WALLACE MAUGGO
Circulation Manager: EMMANUEL LYIMO

Newsdesk

News Editor: LUSEKELO PHILEMON
0757154767
General line: 0745700710
E-mail: guardian@guardian.co.tz

Advertising

Mobile: 0782253676
E-mails: advertise@guardian.co.tz
Website: www.ippmedia.com
epaper.ippmedia.com



By Caroline Gaudron

CAROLINE Gaudron is the strategic support manager for MSF in Mozambique, focusing on the conflict in Cabo Delgado province. Here she describes the chaos and challenges for people trying to survive, having fled extreme violence in the province.

Every day, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams see hundreds, some days thousands, of desperate yet determined people arrive by boat, by truck and by foot at Pemba, the capital of the resource-rich province Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique, and other nearby towns. They have left everything behind to stay alive. They all have a terrible story to tell - a decapitated husband, a kidnapped wife, a son from whom they have no news. The insurgents attacked their village, burned down their house, took away their meagre possessions.

Since the first attack on Mocimboa da Praia in October 2017, Cabo Delgado has been ravaged by fighting between the Mozambican army and a non-state armed group, Al-Shabaab. In recent months, it seems the violence and living conditions have worsened.

This seemingly blessed region, with white sand beaches and turquoise water, now more resembles hell for many of its inhabitants. The daily life of the people caught in the crossfire consists of ambushes, assassinations, looting and kidnappings.

Those who can, flee - a half a million people already have. But what about those who cannot leave their villages? Some have gone without electricity for months. Administration buildings, schools and health centres have been closed for even longer. A trip to farm your field means risking a bad encounter and perhaps never coming back. These people are simply trying to survive a nightmare that has lasted more than three years.

Health care workers have not been spared from the violence. In May, insurgents attacked the health centre in Macomia where MSF worked. Some of our staff were sleeping at home and ran with their families into the bush. Others were working and had to flee without their families and hide. Some of our colleagues remained hidden for days and nights in the bush on the top of a hill, where they watched what was happening in Macomia below, and saw their own homes burning.

It took several days for some of them to arrive in Pemba in very bad shape. We were calling all

Displaced by violence, trying to stay alive in Mozambique

of them every day to get news, but their phones had run out of battery. After several days, we finally received the good news that they all had survived.

A trip to farm your field means risking a bad encounter and perhaps never coming back. These people are simply trying to survive a nightmare that has lasted more than three years.

Caroline Gaudron
Fleeing means leaving everything behind; taking only a few things and leaving, without knowing whether it will be possible to return one day. It also means undertaking a journey fraught with pitfalls. Most of the people who leave are women and children. Many of them walk for over 200 kilometres, their belongings on their heads, a baby hanging on their back, a little one holding their hand.

They spend the nights outside. They are in hiding, fearful of being seen by a group of insurgents or of running into soldiers who may suspect them of being insurgents themselves. Both groups wear the same uniform and are nearly impossible to distinguish between.

When possible, people prefer to make the journey in a chapa, or truck, crammed with others who share the same destiny, alongside packages and animals. Others choose to embark on a fishing boat that threatens to sink under the weight of its many passengers at any moment, and which does not protect them from an attack since the insurgents also move by sea, travelling from island to island.

On 1 November, Cabo Delgado made international news when 40 people reportedly drowned when an overloaded boat hit rocks and sank between Ibo and Matama islands. Other boats saved 32 of the passengers.

Life in 25 de Junho displaced people's camp

"Going back home is a big dream of mine. I dream about going home every day..."

Jorge has been living in the 25 de Junho Camp for Internally Displaced People since he was forced to leave his home in Quissanga, Mozambique, after an armed group attacked his village on 24 September 2020, torching homes and people's belongings.

"Everyone either left the village or hid in the bushes. Some managed to leave on the same day, on foot during the night," says Jorge. "Others tried to find their

family members... find out where they were, if their children had tried to escape. And that's why I only left on 27 September; I was looking for my family."

While Jorge's family is safe, they are not all together, spread out across Cabo Delgado province. Over the last three years, Cabo Delgado has been ravaged by fighting which has forced half a million people to flee their homes and leave their livelihoods behind. Many have lost more than just their belongings in their search for safety.

"My family is everywhere, in different places in the province. On the journey here we lost my nephew. He drowned. We are suffering," confides Momade, who made his way by boat to 25 de Junho, where he has been living since March 2019.

The boat journey is dangerous, as the vessels are often overcrowded and have been known to sink under the weight of the desperate passengers.

Many of the IDPs at 25 de Junho are haunted by memories of losing loved ones.

"I lost my sister and my nephew. They were beheaded," Sufu recalls. For Sufu, returning to his village is not an option.

"We are not safe. I need to go anywhere that is not back home".

Read more about the people who have been forced to leave their homes in Cabo Delgado

Read less

After all this suffering, the displaced people finally reach their destination to find, most of the time, total destitution and misery. If they are lucky enough to be greeted by relatives or friends, they may be given a little place in a crowded house, where they will share the modest food supplies and amenities with their generous hosts and often two or three other families. But the majority of people are not so fortunate.

Thousands of people are stranded in makeshift camps. They take shelter in schools that fill up quickly and then around them, under plastic sheeting or tents crowded with several families. The sanitary facilities are insufficient, and the lack of drinking water is dramatic - the perfect conditions for a cholera outbreak.

Overcrowding also increases the risk of transmission of diseases like measles and COVID-19. The rainy season recently began, and people without mosquito nets risk contracting malaria. Those with

chronic diseases, like HIV, can't get medications.

These communities have neither the infrastructure nor the resources to accommodate the influx of displaced people: their fields do not produce enough food, water is scarce, local health facilities are overwhelmed. They do what they can, but tensions rise under the pressure. Local authorities have made major efforts but cannot cope with the catastrophic level of demand. Local and international non-governmental organisations are trying to deal with the most urgent needs but are far from covering the extent of the crisis.

MSF has launched several mobile medical teams that do thousands of medical consultations... but it is just a drop in the bucket. There are thousands of people who we cannot reach.

Caroline Gaudron
At MSF, we have launched several mobile medical teams that go to different camps and do thousands of medical consultations, while health promotion teams provide public health information. We also have teams of specialists in logistics, water and sanitation, who are building latrines in the camps and providing drinking water.

It is good and important work, but it is just a drop in the bucket. There are thousands of people who we cannot reach. A tragedy is unfolding under our eyes: an incessant influx of new people with growing needs and clearly insufficient humanitarian aid to help them.

The demands are just too vast, and the humanitarian workers, supplies and funding are too scarce. The obstacles to bringing in more humanitarian assistance we have so far not been able to overcome. Things will have to change and soon.

After surviving unimaginable violence and a treacherous exodus, hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans now must contend with terrible diseases and hunger, and yet it feels as though their stories have been overlooked by the international community in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I call on the international community to join MSF in recognising the urgent crisis in Cabo Delgado, and the Mozambican government to facilitate the response of international humanitarian organisations before it is too late.

Christmas in annus horribilis

By Chiedu Okoye

Annus horribilis is a Latin phrase, meaning 'horrible year'. It is complementary to annus mirabilis, which means 'wonderful year'.

Is Christmas not the most celebrated and popular religious festival in our today's world? Christmas ranks higher than other religious festivals in popularity because Christians and non-Christians alike celebrate the Christmas festival. From New Delhi, India to Jakarta, Indonesia; and from Nairobi, Kenya to Melbourne, Australia, people from different races who profess religious faiths other than Christianity celebrate Christmas. And for many years, the peoples of the world have been celebrating Christmas, joyously.

But what is Christmas? Simply put, it is the commemoration and remembrance of the birthday of Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God. He paid the ransom for our sins by accepting to die on the cross for us. He is our redeemer and Messiah. So, those who exercise faith in Him will have eternal life.

Concerning His birth, we have different harmonious narrative accounts recorded in the synoptic gospel of the Bible. His nativity story has it that he was born of Immaculate Conception to parents, who belonged to lowly stations in life. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter. Both had not been sexually involved with each other when Joseph discovered that she was pregnant with a baby. So, he was contemplating putting her

away when an angel of the Lord advised him against taking that course of action, telling him the reasons. He heeded the angel's piece of advice.

During His stay on earth, Jesus propagated and spread the message of love. Love was the doctrinal base of His teachings, although He dwelt on such religious issues as forgiveness, repentance, paradise, and others. His revolutionary teachings, which his people deemed capable of upturning their ways of life, contributed majorly to His crucifixion on the cross. By His death on the cross, He paid the ransom for our sins. Now, whosoever believes in His name and obeys His command shall not perish but have eternal life.

Being a great religious personage and prophet, His birthday deserves remembering and commemorating. His phenomenal deeds, which are recorded in the new testament of the Bible, bear him out as a great religious teacher, prophet, and miracle worker. He's a demigod, who's partly human and partly divine. He brought dead people back to life, converted water into wine, and calmed tempestuous sea. And his radical and revolutionary teachings have greatly influenced our way of life.

So, over the centuries, since his death on the cross, the peoples of the world have been celebrating his birthday. However, some Christian sects such as the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Jehovah Witnesses do not commemorate his birthday on the grounds that Jesus Christ didn't instruct us to celebrate his birthday. And, other people who



do not mark Christ's birthday aver that it was improbable that Jesus Christ was born on December 25 based on the narrative accounts of His birth, which are recorded in the Bible.

More so, legends and other lores have it that Saturnalia, a pagan festival, was Christianized into Christmas. Whether or not Jesus Christ's exact birthday was December 25 is immaterial to us now as every December 25 is set aside for the celebration of His birthday.

Now, another Christmas is around the corner. We know that we have entered the Yuletide season when the deciduous trees start shedding their leaves. Then, our lips will become chapped. And houses near the roads will be coated with dust, which is

ochre in colour, and which is the earth's colour. When we start feeling a chill in the air, it is the unmistakable sign of the coming of Christmas.

As the Christmas day approaches, people get into a frenzy of preparation for the festival. They will buy new clothes and pairs of shoes for their children and relations. Others will have their houses dabbled with a coat of paint so as to beautify them. And people with the financial wherewithal may buy cars during the period for the celebration of Christmas.

That is how we celebrate Christmas in this part of the world. Besides the fact that it is the world's remembrance of the birth of Christ, it is the time for mass home-coming of a people

to their natal homes. Again, during the period, couples do solemnize their marital unions in churches. And, in many towns, chieftaincy titles will be bestowed and conferred on high-flying individuals, who have reached the acme in their careers and endeavours.

But sadly, the true meaning of Christmas as well as the reason for celebrating it is lost on many Christians in the Christendom. Do they know that Jesus Christ for whom they are commemorating Christmas stands for love? Instead of demonstrating acts of charity through their deeds during the Christmas period, many rich people engage in ostentatious and flamboyant display of their wealth. And during the period, young people do engage in

illicit sexual concupiscence with the consequences of some school girls having unintended pregnancies. Again, during past yuletide seasons, many young people had died in unavoidable car accidents, which were caused by their drunk-driving.

Jesus Christ for whom we celebrate and mark Christmas performed acts of charity during His earthly life and ministry. It behooves us to follow Christ's examples by being our brother's keepers during the yuletide and beyond. More so, were Jesus Christ alive today, he would not approve of people participating in bacchanalian orgies in the name of celebrating Christmas. Jesus Christ lived a chaste life, and he was not known for indulging in epicurean and hedonistic deeds.

As we celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ, who is our redeemer, we should reflect on his deeds and teachings. If we abide by Jesus Christ's commands, which are captured vividly in the synoptic gospel of the Bible, we will be able to tame and rein in our proclivities for doing evil deeds. A world that is filled by people who are Christ-like in their natures will be an oasis of peace and unity.

It is an indisputable fact that the year 2020 is an annus horribilis. It has spun Covid-19 pandemic and #endsars bloody protests, causing loss of lives and limbs, and hurting our mono-economy severely. So do we have cause to celebrate 2020 Christmas by throwing bacchanalian parties and spending money extravagantly instead of engaging in sober reflection and helping the dirt-poor?

Legacy of Braille benefits millions

By Special Correspondent

World Braille Day is an international day on 4 January and celebrates awareness of the importance of braille as a means of communication in the full realisation of the human rights for blind and visually impaired people. The date for the event was chosen by the United Nations General Assembly via a proclamation in November 2018, and marks the birthday of Louis Braille, creator of this writing system. The first World Braille Day was celebrated on January 4, 2019.

Braille is a system of touch reading and writing for blind persons in which raised dots represent the letters of the alphabet. It also contains equivalents for punctuation marks and provides symbols to show letter groupings.

Braille is read by moving the hand or hands from left to right along each line. The reading process usually involves both hands, and the index fingers generally do the reading. The average reading speed is about 125 words per minute. But, greater speeds of up to 200 words per minute are possible.

By using the braille alphabet, people who are blind can review and study the written word. They can also become aware of different written conventions such as spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and footnotes.

Most importantly, braille gives blind individuals access to a wide range of reading materials including recreational and educational reading, financial statements and restaurant menus. Equally important are contracts, regulations,



insurance policies, directories, and cookbooks that are all part of daily adult life. Through braille, people who are blind can also pursue hobbies and cultural enrichment with materials such as music scores, hymnals, playing cards, and board games.

Various other methods had been attempted over the years to enable reading for the blind. However, many of them were raised versions of print letters. It is generally accepted that the braille system has succeeded because it is based on a rational sequence of signs devised for the fingertips, rather than imitating signs devised for the eyes.

The history of braille

goes all the way back to the early 1800s. A man named Charles Barbier who served in Napoleon Bonaparte's French army developed a unique system known as "night writing" so soldiers could communicate safely during the night. As a military veteran, Barbier saw several soldiers killed because they used lamps after dark to read combat messages. As a result of the light shining from the lamps, enemy combatants knew where the French soldiers were

and inevitably led to the loss of many men.

Louis Braille was born in the village of Coupvray, France on January 4, 1809. He lost his sight at a very young age after he accidentally stabbed himself in the eye with his father's awl. Braille's father was a leather-worker and poked holes in the leather goods he produced with the awl.

At eleven years old, Braille found inspiration to modify Charles Barbier's "night writing" code in an effort to

create an efficient written communication system for fellow blind individuals. One year earlier he was enrolled at the National Institute of the Blind in Paris. He spent the better part of the next nine years developing and refining the system of raised dots that has come to be known by his name, Braille.

After all of Braille's work, the code was now based on cells with only 6-dots instead of 12 (like the example shown below). This crucial improvement meant that a fingertip could encompass the entire cell unit with one impression and move rapidly from one cell to the next. Over time, braille gradually came to be accepted throughout the world as the

fundamental form of written communication for blind individuals. Today it remains basically as he invented it.

However, there have been some small modifications to the braille system, particularly the addition of contractions representing groups of letters or whole words that appear frequently in a language. The use of contractions permits faster braille reading. It also helps reduce the size of braille books, making them much less cumbersome.

Braille passed away in 1853 at the age of 43, a year before his home country of France adopted braille as its official communication system for blind individuals. A few years later in 1860, braille made its way "across the pond" to America where it was adopted by The Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis.

Louis Braille's legacy has enlightened the lives of millions of people who are blind. As a result, blind individuals from all over the world benefit from Braille's work daily. Today, we transcribe braille code in many different languages worldwide. Louis would be very proud to know his creation has given literacy to countless numbers of people over the decades. Consequently, people who are blind can enjoy all the printed-word has to offer just like everyone else. The effect is tremendously empowering and helps them achieve success in school and their careers.

Several groups have been established over the last century to modify and standardize the braille code. Visit the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) for the latest news and developments on braille.

Nigeria at a crossroads on what to do about the poorest

By Tope Fasua

Our people are already suspicious and totally cynical of the intentions of government and even other strata of leadership... This is where that type of leadership that will redefine the destiny of Nigeria, get all the blames for everything done for good or ill, and not be around when the sacrifices start to pay off, is needed. Yes, we need a suicidal kind of leadership. Any takers please?

As I drove out of my office last Friday, I noticed a slight commotion on the opposite side of the express road. I sighted a truck belonging to the Abuja Environmental Protection Board, and soon enough, I saw this poor woman, begging on her knees as agents of the (AEPB) seized her wares and were about to empty these into the back of their wagon. Instinctively I just knew I had to plead for this woman. I had seen so many heartbreaking situations such as this and had not been able to do anything about them, but this time I drove across the road and blocked the truck. I came down to intervene and asked the AEPB team what they had to gain by giving this middle-aged poor woman grief that afternoon. The team lead was a stern-looking rough guy, who made to challenge me. I told him I came in peace but there was no way I was going to watch them take the wares that may not have been worth more than N2,000 from this woman.

The guy barked at me; "Oga Senator! Na una make the law. If you want to challenge me...!" To which I quickly answered: "Stop there my brother", people are suffering in this country and we cannot make their lives worse". He calmed down a bit, and said to me: "Na you go pay her fine o!", after which he told the truck driver: "Collect N5,000 for fuel from Oga make we go". I peeped into the back of the truck and saw loads of oranges and other knick-knacks they had seized from poor hawkers for the day. Certainly, many souls were already distraught that Friday afternoon; a lot of people had lost at least some of the hope they had. Say, how many of us - educated and fortunate - can take such trauma; going out on a day and having your hope dashed, being set back, maybe even with this resulting in defaulting on some high-interest loan we had obtained as leverage? I started thinking of how many people had been disappointed down the food chain, branded as liars, never trusted again as a result of their tiny survival wares being seized and destroyed? These were poor enforcers further damaging the poor. Of course, amid laughter and brickbats, I gave them N2,000 for their fuel, gave the lady N1,000 for her trauma and asked her to take her wares (like some kpof-kpof and drinks), into the street corner. There was a construction site there that she had tried to service.

The AEPB guys have been in overdrive lately; Christmas is coming. I do support keeping the streets clean and devoid of street hawkers and all, but that strategy seems to have broken down in Nigeria. You cannot keep seizing, wasting and burning the livelihoods of these extremely poor people without coming out with some really revolutionary approach to take them out of poverty once and for all. Our poor people are not being led out of their poverty. They are only being traumatised instead. And that is a big cause for concern, especially since Nigeria's unacceptable poverty has become a global issue of discourse.

The next day I made a dash to Lagos, and as part of my itinerary, I had to make a dash to Ogba, Ikeja; a suburb. I had lived near there before relocating to Abuja and my idea was that Ogba is not particularly one of the poorest areas of Lagos. But when I got to the place, opposite Excellence Hotel, my heart sank. Since I stopped living in Lagos in 2001, things have only gone worse for this area and the people. I saw very deprived people, many with broken limbs. Others with obvious drug problems. The majority of people living in this area had stress written all over their faces. I



saw broken dreams. I was reminded of why most Nigerians have given up on themselves and the prospects of living in a good country. The plaza I visited itself was dirty and run down. Yet there were Nigerians trying to make ends meet as entrepreneurs there. A gift shop here, a lawyer's chambers there. Grime everywhere. This urban area is not renewing itself. Ok, there was a six-story building by the junction, the best effort perhaps at urban renewal. I imagined the six-story rather being swallowed up by the rundown surroundings. Beyond the dilapidation of infrastructure really, is the dilapidation and devaluation of the people. Our people.

All the strategies our governments have been applying have not made a dent, yet the population of the abjectly poor - the woman selling N2,000 worth of oranges for her and her children's survival, the drug-addled area boy, the runaway bus conductor whose parents cannot tell where he is... - keeps ballooning in geometric proportion.

On the upside, my Uber driver was this interesting chap from Adamawa (you could mistake him for an Igbo man from his accent, even though he says because he is dark most people think he is a Ghanaian). He told me the interesting story of how he managed to purchase the Toyota Corolla from Ecobank for a mere N84,000, just weeks after he had almost given up on life. He said he borrowed N10,000 and laid it down on the altar of a church and told God it was all over if he wasn't fixed. Then the miracle happened such that upon disengagement from Ecobank as a driver, the N84,000 was deducted from his entitlement and he had some change. He has been managing his life ever since. I asked him what University he attended - as I have met so many well-educated Nigerians in that circuit. He said he had only a Secondary School Certificate, but he believes if he meets the Queen of England he will hold his own. For one who used a word like 'apathy' in the normal cause of conversation and spoke impeccably, you can imagine how intelligent this guy, Jerry, is. When I prodded why he still will not continue his education, given the availability of all sorts of online learning, he answered very responsibly that he believed his junior ones whom he is supporting, now need the education more than he does. He seemed to have accepted his estate as a successful Uber driver. At least I met one person who luckily hadn't been broken.

Back to the issue. Nigerian youths fired a very effective salvo recently by way of the #EndSARS protest. The pros and cons of that effort have been well-discussed, but like our people say, for as long as you have lice on your scalp, you will always have blood in your fingernails when

you scratch it. The problems of this country have not been adequately and honestly dissected. The kind of people who were at the forefront of #EndSARS were very privileged, in comparison to the tens of millions who have been rammed down into despair by our dishonesty and laziness of thought. All the strategies our governments have been applying have not made a dent, yet the population of the abjectly poor - the woman selling N2,000 worth of oranges for her and her children's survival, the drug-addled area boy, the runaway bus conductor whose parents cannot tell where he is, the mentally-challenged plodding the streets of our urban areas with no place to sleep, the excluded, the forgotten, the non-existent - keeps ballooning in geometric proportion. Nigeria's brand of capitalism has since collapsed. I must admit though, reading a communication from Femi Adeshina recently, that the Buhari administration has been a bit more activist in pushing out some palliatives, especially those encouraging youths to go into entrepreneurship. One could argue that the times have forced the government's hands - COVID-19 came and the world is in a recession, with every country borrowing and trying to spend their way out.

The inefficiency and corruption that decimates every good idea in Nigeria continues to rear its head. Old ways are still largely intact. Our 2021 budget is still based on the 'envelop system', meaning that ministries and agencies of government still conjure up what they think they will need and are merely given a random haircut off their requests. This opens us all to more inefficiency, misappropriation and fraud. Our top politicians continue to max out on their own conveniences, even when it is obvious that they are not scratching the surface of the problem and one wonders why they asked to serve in the first place if they hadn't contemplated the enormity of the human crisis Nigeria is under. What I saw in Lagos is only a microcosm of what is present all over Nigeria. I didn't even get to the real inner-city Lagos but I remember what I saw around Itire during the campaigns. I also understand that urban poverty can be so crushing because nobody has anybody's back, unlike in our rural areas.

What Nigeria will require from a focused and determined government will be enormous, and as I stated earlier, revolutionary. Gurus define leadership as the ability to take your followers to where they NEED, not want, to be - whether they like or understand why or not; in fact, taking them kicking and screaming when necessary. The kind of poverty I am talking about here is the type that has eroded the minds of millions of our people. Many just move around mindlessly

every day. No work. No destination. Or maybe with the hope of running into someone to 'rag' - as in a rag day - for a few bucks. In time, these otherwise normal people fall into drug use, little crimes, and all sorts. Something needs to be done to actively reset the minds and lives of too many millions of our people. The government that will do that work must give everything of itself, and more. No time for luxuries. No time for even basics. Total, 100 per cent honesty. The actions to be taken to help these people may not even be democratic in nature. I recall comedian Michael Che saying he does not vote because he thinks that is such an important and technical duty and he wonders why anyone will trust him to perform such a duty. So, democracy and voting will not save these people, only a benevolent sacrificial leader/government can. These Nigerians I am talking about need fundamental help. The upside is that if they get the needed uplift, turnaround and positive revolution in their lives - including a new orientation towards more productivity and better choices - they will give so much back to their nation and the crawling or recessing GDP will grow in leaps and bounds. This is however a medium to long term idea that must however begin immediately. Nigeria needs urban renewal. Nigerian needs rural renewal. Nigerian needs a renewal of our minds. Nigerian needs an education, environmental, health, security and agricultural revolution. No matter what we do - given that all the problems cannot be solved all at once - we must place the people right at the centre of the solutions.

More specifically, we know that investment in education is the most profitable of investments. The return on investment (ROI) for education is ginormous under every circumstance. Nigeria should be declaring a major emergency that takes the 15 million odd children off the streets and into some sort of active education, where they will be taught by all of us - including people who can volunteer their times from the private sector. These millions of people need basic shelter. Too many of our people live in absolutely ramshackle conditions, which already messes with their minds. When you have so many people living in disheveled, stinking, unkempt situations, such as what we take for granted here, it is no wonder that the products of their minds can only be generally ugly. We need to give our people a new vision. We need a communicator as a leader... and a philosopher too. And s/he must be a doer... an action man or woman. Successive Nigerian governments have deceived themselves about having housing programs that don't even make any impression. Most of our spending goes to luxury housing, which

mostly remain uninhabited. No government has spoken - for a single day - about which type of prototype houses our poorest should live in, much less build one for them. At best they all try and build for civil servants who are less than 2 per cent of the population (even those ones are not covered up to 5 per cent). You then wonder where all the money goes. This idea is a bit hard for me to express but express I must. Nigeria needs urban renewal. Nigerian needs rural renewal. Nigerian needs a renewal of our minds. Nigerian needs an education, environmental, health, security and agricultural revolution. No matter what we do - given that all the problems cannot be solved all at once - we must place the people right at the centre of the solutions. The energy of the people must be used to prime and reboot the economy. Only this can save Nigeria. We will never be able to achieve a country where everyone is rich, but what keeps deepening everyday is not acceptable. Brutalising people further is even less acceptable; it is simply inhumane. We seize their wares and okadas. We burn some and convert the rest to personal use. We watch as they string shanties together. We look away, until one person brings a proposal about gentrifying that area. Then we brutally demolish and throw families on the streets; no alternatives, no plans, only to replace their shanties with glistening 'luxury apartments'. Yes, every apartment project in Nigeria is 'luxury'.

The sheer abandonment and lack of a honest, revolutionary plan is why these people unleashed on Nigeria recently and looted to their fill. The problems are enormous though, and I keep saying that Nigeria as a country should be one where leaders decline to serve because of the sheer enormity of the tasks at hand. That is if people think deeply before accepting roles. If it is all about oneself, or about getting famous and rich, it certainly is not worth the trouble. Still, all of us must chip in on this human crisis threatening to consume the country - if it hasn't already. We should note that the people themselves will resist any profound change. Our people are already suspicious and totally cynical of the intentions of government and even other strata of leadership (corporate, religious, traditional, etc). This is where that type of leadership that will redefine the destiny of Nigeria, get all the blames for everything done for good or ill, and not be around when the sacrifices start to pay off, is needed. Yes, we need a suicidal kind of leadership. Any takers please?

Tope Fasua, an economist, author, blogger, entrepreneur, and recent presidential candidate of the Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party (ANRP),

South African game reserves forced to cull animals as Covid hits tourism

By Jason Burke

IMPALA run through the thorn bush, ibis fly above the lake and lightning forks over the horizon as a storm rolls in from the Drakensberg mountains.

The visitors driven across the 10,000 or more hectares of the Nambiti game reserve in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province see what they think is an unchanged, and unchanging natural landscape.

Njabulo Hodla, the assistant manager of the reserve, sees something else: thickening undergrowth that someone must cut back, tracks which need clearing, fences to repair and animals that will have to be culled eventually, each another victim of Covid. "It's tough, really tough. I've never seen a season like it," said the 31-year-old, who has worked at Nambiti since 2008.

Across the continent Covid has hit South Africa the hardest with more than a million confirmed cases and 29,000 deaths according to official figures. As elsewhere in Africa, the pandemic has wreaked massive economic damage, with thousands of businesses failing and tens of millions unable to earn a living. The economy shed 2.2m jobs in the second quarter of 2020.

The huge tourist industry - which employs around one in every 20 workers and provides just under 3% of GDP - has been devastated.

Once the December holiday season meant tens of thousands of foreign visitors spending hundreds, even thousands, of dollars every day. Now, with the rate of new infections in the country soaring as authorities struggle to check a second wave, no one expects the tourists to come back soon.

South Africa's 500 or so private game reserves are often in more remote and impoverished parts of the country. They spend considerable amounts each month to feed and care for the animals. Many have been forced to close permanently, lay



Three kudu in Nambiti game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal where visitor numbers have slumped.

off staff and sell, or even shoot, animals. Other have survived - just.

"Reserves like ours went from quite a nice income supporting 300 jobs and a massive conservation project to literally nothing. We fell off a wall," said Clarke Smith, chairman of Nambiti. "We are still feeling the pain ... and the impact on the region is very marked."

Nambiti is a community-owned project, unlike many, so a substantial proportion of profits and an annual lease are paid to local villages. This year, these revenues are much reduced and, with many employees of the reserve still on reduced hours or at home, the coming months will be very difficult.

"Instead of an end-of-year bonus, people are taking home only half a salary, or nothing," said Hodla, who grew up in one of the nearby villages. "The communities round here are just on the line. The reserve plays a major role. Everyone knows someone who works here."

Many fear that if the crisis continues for many more

months, hundreds of thousands of hectares across South Africa that have been converted to more lucrative game reserves in recent decades will revert to cattle or cereal farming - with a massive loss of habitat for endangered animals and other species.

But if the business of wildlife conservation has been hit badly, so too has that of safeguarding other parts of the country's heritage.

Like many parts of rural South Africa, the north of KwaZulu province suffered from acute unemployment, massive health problems including TB and HIV, and deep poverty even before the pandemic. Industries have been gutted in recent decades, with many mines and factories closing.

In some places, such losses have been partially compensated by what has been a booming trade in battlefield tourism. Tens of thousands of British visitors have come to walk the sites where British troops fought Zulus in the bloody war of 1879 that consolidated the imperial

hold on southern Africa.

The battlefields of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift are the main attraction for British tourists usually old enough to be fans of the 1964 film *Zulu* that dramatised the story of the catastrophic British defeat and last-ditch stand at the sites.

This winter - or summer in the southern hemisphere - both battlefields are "empty", the memorials, graves and museums deserted.

"There is no work. We are just sitting there. The situation is so bad. There is a drought and no crops in our fields, and a sack of mealie [maize flour] costs twice as much as it did back in the spring," said Dalton Ngobese, a local guide, who has not worked since March.

With the tourists gone, so too are the hawkers who sold ethnic craft, snacks and water. A portion of the entrance fee to the battlefield site goes to schools, so this source of revenue too has dried up.

The accommodation lodges were shut for much of the sum-

mer, and have only recently reopened, welcoming far fewer guests. The lodges provide jobs and also fund support programmes for local students, charitable foundations, orphanages and other projects.

"If we are suffering, the entire community takes a knock," said Shane Evans, manager of the Isandlwana Lodge, which hosted groups touring the battlefield.

In the village of Isandlwana, there is resignation. With so few jobs locally, men have traditionally travelled to Johannesburg, six hours' drive north, to work in mines or, more recently, hotels. But both industries are suffering too and most of Isandlwana's residents who had jobs have lost them.

Government aid has been patchy, and a huge burden for a country still battling the legacies of the racist, repressive apartheid regime. The ruling African National Congress, in power since 1994, is accused of incompetence and corruption, but also has to deal with a flagging economy, tens of millions of people in poverty and massive debts. A job support programme has been guaranteed until the end of the year, but money is slow to come through.

One consequence in the villages around Isandlwana is that crime is rising, with cattle theft and burglary getting worse, said Ngobese. A recent drought has meant local communities around the battlefields have been unable to plant the crops that traditionally supplement incomes and diet.

Nellie Buthelezi's husband was among those laid off by the local government in swingeing job cuts earlier this year, while the lodge where she works has been shut since March. The 41-year-old mother of four has lived in Isandlwana all her life and cannot remember times ever being as bad.

"Food is expensive, and it goes so fast. We've got no money for rent," she said. "We just hope to God for a better new year."

New research finds method to create safe camel milk products

By Special Correspondent

A Research project conducted by the National Food Institute of Technical University of Denmark (DTU) has found a new formula to make safer camel milk products.

Africa is home to more than 80 percent of the global camel population, with 60 percent found in the eastern African countries of Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Able to tolerate the high temperatures and droughts typical of Africa, camels are an important source of food in these regions.

East Africa currently accounts for 66 percent of the world's camel milk production. But a lack of cooling facilities and an inconsistent supply of water and electricity in Africa can often lead to the undesired spontaneous fermentation of camel milk.

Spontaneous fermentation generally increases the levels of contaminants like bacteria in foods and contributes to foodborne diseases. In Africa alone, foodborne diseases contribute to at least 137,000 deaths and 91 million acute illnesses annually, according to the Global Food Safety Partnership.

In partnership with the University of Copenhagen, Chr. Hansen - a global bioscience company that aims to use bacteria to grow safe, nutritious food products - and Haramaya University in Ethiopia, DTU wanted to find a way to improve the fermentation process of camel milk.

"A big improvement would be to start the fermentation by [the] addition of a safe and reliable starter culture," Egon Bech Hansen, professor at DTU and co-author of the study, tells Food Tank.

Researchers aimed to find a starter culture to begin the fermentation process in camel milk. During their research, they found that two strains of lactic acid bacteria could be used as a starter culture for camel milk due to their antimicrobial properties. When used alongside other food safety practices like proper heating and cooling, these strains can inhibit the growth of pathogens in raw and pasteurized camel milk.

Currently, camel milk is sold in local markets or roadside stalls in East Africa. But, if safely treated, the products' shelf life can be extended. The process would also enable producers to create and sell other camel milk products, like cheese or butter. With safer camel milk and camel milk products, camel milk farmers can reap greater economic benefits. "When you make products that can travel a little further than just to the local market, it can generate an income," Hansen shares with Food Tank.

When compared to cow's milk, camel milk has a similar composition of fat, protein, and carbohydrates and is rich in vitamins. Camel milk has also been shown to control diabetes, a chronic disease that has affected over 19 million adults in Africa, according to the International Diabetes Foundation.

Community radio wins hearts as it helps to improve health services in Kahama District

By Correspondent Rose Mwalongo

THE year 2020 would always be memorable in so many ways to the world owing to an outbreak of COVID 19 that saw a lot of people lose their lives. Tanzania was not spared on it as in some areas, the fear for the pandemic in areas such as Kahama was so critical that its natives decided to shun away from the hospital assuming that going there meant acquiring the disease they so considered as a straight ticket to hell or heaven.

As you read this piece, the situation is a thing of the past, thanks be to the awareness creation by Kahama FM, a UNESCO supported community radio in Tanzania, under its SDC project.

The radio is located in Kahama, Shinyanga in the mining belt of Tanzania and a home to international trade resulting from the district being an inland port and a transit corridor for the landlocked countries of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and DRC.

It is due to its strategic location that the area has seen a lot of people come and go to the area for the sake of business and other social issues, a situation that made it vulnerable to the pandemic at the time.

This reporter conducted an interview with Dr. Lucas



David, Kahama District Medical Officer to establish the major effects of COVID 19 in his district where he admits that the pandemic brought so much fear in the region that the number of patients who came for treatment at the time of the pandemic went down reaching a point where a ward of 43 patients had only 3 people.

This posed even a serious

threat to their health as it meant falling sick and remaining at home without treatment to their ailment a situation that put their lives under siege.

Dr. David recalls of using Kahama FM to allay public fears where most people thought that going to the hospital meant getting Corona and falling sick from the disease meant death.

According to the doctor, his office utilized the radio station to air messages on the pandemic by the ministry, Prime Minister as well as the President of the United Republic of Tanzania whose encouraging messages saw more believers seek divine intervention on the pandemic.

"The radio had straight impact in curbing the pandemic. Kahama District Hos-

pital serves almost 100,000 patients per year while serving 700 to 900 patients on a daily basis.

Apart from the pandemic, the radio has been instrumental towards the construction of a waiting room for patients who in the past had to brave the rain, the wind and what have you whenever they brought their ailing relatives to the hospital.

In 2019, Kahama FM pursued and aired a story on patients and relatives sleeping under the trees while waiting for medical services at the Kahama District Hospital where a few months later, a mining company reacted to the news and constructed a waiting room.

Dr Lucas Ngamutwa the DMO admits the impact from the radio programmes adding "Kahama FM took part in a ward meeting where a councillor raised concern over the lack of a waiting room for patients at the hospital. The radio picked the issue and aired the story where immediately after, Barrick Gold Mine donated funds enabling the construction of a waiting room for relatives and patients."

This reporter managed to see several relatives and patients seated at the newly built waiting room where they shared over how the situation was before its construction.

Delayed coronavirus vaccine in Africa is risking a moral catastrophe, CDC chief says

By Maggie Fick

THE world risks a "moral catastrophe" if COVID-19 vaccinations are delayed in Africa while wealthier regions inoculate their entire populations, the head of the continent's disease control body has said.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hopes significant vaccination campaigns on the continent will begin in April, its head, John Nkengasong, told reporters.

"That's a long way to go given that this virus transmits very quickly," he said, adding that in Africa, "the second wave is here with a vengeance."

Cases of the new coronavirus increased by nearly 19% since last week and deaths increased by 26%, according to Africa CDC data. Africa has recorded 2.7 million coronavirus infections and 64,000 deaths as of last week, it says.

South Africa, where a new variant of the virus has been detected, recorded 82,000 cases in the past week, he said.

"We cannot delay, we need those vaccines and need them now," Nkengasong said.

The major blockers to vaccinations beginning in Africa are global availability of doses and financing, he said.

Wealthy nations have acquired vaccines in excess of what they need, he said.

"We don't have to get into a moral crisis, where these things are stocked in the developed world and we in Africa are struggling to have," Nkengasong said.

The African Union is in talks with the European Union, Canada, and pharmaceutical companies to secure doses, he said, to secure vaccines in addition to what Africa has been promised by the World Health Organization's COVAX program. COVAX is a global scheme to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to poorer countries.

"This would easily become a moral catastrophe if we should not come together as one to address going forward as early as possible in 2021 and meet Africa at its point of need."

Ending Ethiopia's armed conflicts: A modest proposal

Dr. Mehari Taddele Maru

In my March 5, 2019 article, can Ethiopia make the transit to stability? I discussed in more detail the causes and dynamics of the political changes in Ethiopia, leading to unintended consequences with far-reaching implications for the stability of the country. I also considered five scenarios - Consensus Federalism, Transitional Government, Dictatorship, Confederate Ethiopia and Fragmentation - that may come about over a couple of years.

In a nutshell, I argued that central to all the protracted armed conflicts Ethiopians have fought, and the political problems they now face are questions with deep roots in the Ethiopian state.

Sooner than later, as information trickles in from the conflict zone, the many casualties, violations and destruction will unravel complex issues within and outside the country.

Unavoidably, a militaristic government preoccupied with marginal functions of the state, in which the security of the regime trumps all other aspects of human security in its pursuit of purported national pride will face more, not less challenges.

The current armed conflicts are outcome of these perennial challenges. To be sure, the desire for unity is ever-present among the peoples of Ethiopia. What the country has always lacked, and still lacks, is just and democratic governance over its many and widely diverse cultures, religions and elements of community identity.

The ever-increasing demand for self-determination and self-rule is an outcome of the short supply of democratic constitutional governance. Ethiopia's problems, then, are solved by more federalism of cultures, not less. Then what is the cause of the armed conflicts in Ethiopia now and before? And what are the way forward?

The causes Ethiopia faces what Francis Deng calls a 'war of visions' as to its future. On the one hand, there is the vision of centralization, the basis of which is to reclaim quasi-unitarist powers that have been - at least de jure - dismantled over decades. That vision brings back memories of Ethiopia's highly contested history of forcible assimilation. The same unitarist governance style, albeit including a mild level remnant decentralization, is what is now in the making.

Feeding on extreme nationalism and quasi-imperial ambitions, proponents of this vision are hellbent on securing and monopolizing power through whatever means are available. When possible, they employ

constitutional norms and when necessary, unconstitutional, brutal, oppressive means including the genocidal conflicts on those who resist. This is a vision that is inherently undemocratic, antagonistic to multiculturalism, and even fascistic.

On the other side is a vision of federalism, power in the hands of the constituent units, greater devolution of power, more autonomy, confederal arrangements, self-determination and even, where necessary, independence from the central authority. Spanning the two extremes are overlapping visions based on maintaining the current constitution through various rectification processes.

Proposed solutions A war of visions can only be resolved only through a comprehensive and all-inclusive dialogue, the first step towards which would be the recognition that there can be no military solution to the war of visions.

The solution lies in building bridges between communities and narrowing the gulf between the visions of the different political constituencies. To do this, the best option of all would be a national dialogue. National dialogues do not necessarily resolve all a country's problems, and they can be long-winded in reaching some agreements. They do, however, offer three primary benefits over simplistic processes of negotiation between political parties and armed forces.

First, unlike fragmented negotiations and exclusive 'elite' agreements between political parties, armed or otherwise, national dialogues offer inclusiveness to all political and social forces of any significance. In addition to encompassing armed political parties, a national dialogue could offer a framework to bring in those groups that have not so far taken up arms, reducing their incentive to rebel and hopefully prompting them to request inclusion in the dialogue.

Secondly, an inclusive dialogue provides a minimum common ground for tolerance, including the cessation of hostilities, a formal ceasefire, and a declaration of principles for sustainable, peaceful conflict resolution. Thirdly, a national dialogue that draws on collective wisdom helps define the country's problems and narrow the differences between competing visions of the future.

1. Cessation of all forms of hostilities, including media war

To chart a transitional pathway towards a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Ethiopia, armed conflicts and the media wars must stop. All parties should publicly declare a cessation of all physical and ver-



Ethiopian refugees, fleeing the armed conflict Tigray region, cross the Tekeze river into Hamdayet, Sudan

bal hostilities and pledge to remain peaceful.

2. UN-mandated investigation into all atrocities and violations of international law

Without ascertaining the facts and truths behind assassinations, atrocities, displacement and armed conflict, Ethiopian communities will find it extremely difficult to advance to the next level of reconciliation and accountability.

Given the existence of highly polarized political forces, interference with, and pressure to influence, shape, or inform the investigation's outcome will be intense, making such an inquiry complicated and sensitive. Leaving aside the questions posed on the credibility of Ethiopian institutions, international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are widely considered partial and have been vilified and attacked from various quarters.

For these reasons, only a publicly trusted and independent body with the appropriate will and resources can conduct such an investigation and only the UN is equipped to discharge such a heavy responsibility. The UN has expressed its readiness to conduct such an investigation. The result of such an investigation constitutes possibly the most important of those few factors that may determine the fate and direction of the country's political future.

The argument in favor of a UN-mandated investigation rests on the public perception that the UN is the only institution that enjoys the necessary high level of trust in terms of integrity and capacity. It has the resources, the trust and the experience for the job. Given the backing of

domestic political actors and the international community, the UN could readily insulate itself from unwarranted interference while executing such a mandate.

3. An all-inclusive and comprehensive national dialogue

The end-state of the dialogue may need to be an all-inclusive and comprehensive National Constitutive Dialogue (NCD) for reconciliation and the creation of consensus-based governance that can deliver stability, legitimacy, and constitutional democracy. Such a process has to take into account the realities on the ground, including the armed conflict in Tigray, the detention of leading figures in opposition parties, political detentions, atrocities, assassinations and human displacement.

Envisioning the desired end-state requires selflessness and frank consultation, as well as compromise on bridging proposals. Each political constituency needs to articulate the concerns and aspirations for itself and the country, as a shared polity.

For this to happen, the various parties and stakeholders need to:

Renounce the use of force to resolve disputes;

Indicate their willingness to compromise and search for common ground and the peaceful resolution of disagreements and disputes;

Recognize that dialogue is evolutionary in nature and offers the opportunity to engage in defining problems, articulating concerns, expressing aspirations, sharing visions and convincing all parties of the benefits of a cooperative approach;

Take confidence- and trust-building measures between parties and stakeholders to identify three critical issues: (1) concerns and interests; (2) needs and aspirations; and (3) points of convergence and divergence;

Envision constitutional democratic governance based on the will of the people;

Agree on an inclusive and transparent process that articulates the particular concerns and aspirations of each party and at the same time, seeks sustainable solutions to current problems and fosters a commonly shared vision; and

Cooperate with the UN, AU and other multilateral organizations involved in resolving the armed conflict.

Specific recommendations: design and conduct of

an all-inclusive dialogue

Factors vital to the success of the dialogue:

A design for successful dialogue needs to be guided by a strategy because the defined end-state and goals determine the design. That design needs to elaborate on those factors vital for success. The effectiveness and eventual success of the strategy will depend on addressing the following vital [1] factors:

Cessation of hostilities: Signing up to an agreement for a cessation of hostilities (or non-violence pact) by all parties and armed groups, before or at the start of the dialogue, should be a precondition for participation.

Inclusivity of, and broad consultation with, all key stakeholders to enhance legitimacy and sustainability: Inclusivity encompasses the participation and representation of critical stakeholders, conflict-affected communities, and representatives of Ethiopian society in general.

Establishing the political will of all parties and key stakeholders and sanctioning violations: to generate political will through concrete measures, to include targeted individual sanctions, regional travel bans, asset freezes and exclusion from political office. Robust and coercive compliance mechanisms: specific enforcement measures against violators. Such an approach would inform stakeholders of the sanctions that would await potential violators and more importantly, would deter potential violators from attempting to disrupt the dialogue.

Gender: representation: participation of women is critical for the success of dialogue. Transparency: transparency in the process is essential to its success. While recognizing the need for some confidentiality, regular progress reports updates are critical.

Structure of the dialogue forum includes core agenda items; criteria for the determination of participants; rules governing participation; seating arrangements; and dates and venues.

Consultations with key stakeholders in a pre-dialogue forum, with written position papers solicited on key issues.

Participants of such a dialogue may include, but are not limited to, the following: all political parties; armed groups; key stakeholders. These

include representatives of segments of society capable of exercising influence over their own constituencies and political and armed groups. The process may also include factions likely to engage in future conflict should their concerns not be addressed in the dialogue. Key stakeholders are to be identified in a pre-consultation phase of stakeholder mapping;

the dialogue's design will be informed and shaped by stakeholder mapping in pre-forum consultations, and by participants' key findings.

The dialogue design should include a realistic timeline and an implementation road-map.

Communications strategy There will be a need for a communication strategy, the aim of which is effectively to engage with stakeholders, publicize progress in the dialogue, build and maintain trust, address misinformation, and change behavior and perceptions where necessary. A communications plan needs to set out:

Key strategic messages; means and mechanisms for communication;

clear protocols for the release of information;

regular sessions to discuss press releases and interviews; and

regular updates to partners and stakeholders.

The role of the international community

Intrinsic factors for such dialogue's success are the political will exhibited by the parties, and their expressed determination to ensure its implementation. The international community, particularly the UN Security Council, the EU, the AU and IGAD, can contribute to the success of the dialogue through:

Authorizing a UN-mandated investigation into all atrocities;

generating political will among all stakeholders and warring parties by applying strong political and diplomatic support to the dialogue;

speaking in one voice on issues of human rights, humanitarian affairs and accountability;

enforcing Security Council-sanctioned, robust compliance measures and coercive enforcement mechanisms; and

allocating resources and technical support and exercising strong oversight, enforcement, and punitive mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the dialogue.

THE GUARDIAN SIMPLE WORD FIT // THE GUARDIAN CROSSWORD --00 161 00--

In this puzzle you have no clues, only a list of words that all fit into the grid. The Guardian have given you a head start

CROSSWORD

3 LETTERS: ORE, CRY, ICE
 4 LETTERS: LOAD, SOME, AIDE, GOLD, MALL, ODDS, RACE
 5 LETTERS: DODGE, ADAPT, SEMEN, ACRES, CHEER
 6 LETTERS: ASSIST, EMPIRE, AGENDA, ENDURE, MAIDEN
 7 LETTERS: MANDELA
 8 LETTERS: CLIMATES
 10 LETTERS: SUGARCANES

WORD-FIT

CLUES: Across
 1 Young nation in Africa
 5 female reproductive cells
 7 a church decree
 8 a tripod frame used to support an artist's canvas
 10 a donkey
 11 to choose, to pick
 13 a chemical substance soluble in water, sour in taste, that reddens litmus paper
 15 a literary composition expressing personal observation
 17 Judges in sports
 19 thought
 20 something forming a border

Down:
 1 a thick soup
 2 a strong wish
 3 freehold tenure based on uninterrupted possession to awake
 4 the exchange of goods for money
 7 the middle
 9 responded to something
 12 lake Victoria in Kenya
 14 fear, horror
 16 a soft lustre on a surface
 17 one of many narrow bones surrounding the chest
 18 money charged for something

By Maged: 0755492740 | ted@magazine@gmail.com

BUSINESS

TECH SAVVY

Welcoming 2021 in digital style

By Abdulmajid Nsekela



As we welcome a new year 2021, I personally take time to reflect, the year gone by, milestones we have reached and challenges we encountered during the course of the year. We ushered in 2020 with high hopes and thirst for success backed by plans and many targets. Like everyone else, CRDB Bank Plc also welcomed the year with anxiety to improve livelihoods of Tanzanians.

To us, 2020 was a third year of implementing our three-year strategic business plan for 2018-22 period. The plan is primarily focused on improving our service delivery with more investment in digital platforms which ease access to banking services and products.

Looking back in 2019, over 80 percent of customer transactions were done on our digital platforms, our target was to reach 90 percent last year. One can easily see how we planned to improve and innovate enabling digital tools and platforms. This meant deploying most of our services and products digitally including account opening, tax and utility bills payments, loans, forex and bancassurance.

I don't think anyone had the coronavirus pandemic in their business plan at the beginning of the year. To us, the priority was to our people, staff members, customers, partners and the business itself. We improved our business strategy to ensure safety of the people and enable them navigate through Covid-19 challenges.

Mobilization to boost digital banking utilization

In order to address this challenge, the bank launched a campaign to mobilize use of digital banking platforms dubbed 'Popote Inatiki'. This campaign was designed to respond to health experts' advice that people should resort to digital banking tools and avoid cash transactions. The good thing is that, the bank had already invested heavily in digital banking channels ahead of the Covid-19 outbreak hence we simply resorted to sensitizing customers on usage.

Through the campaign, customers have learnt various digital platforms that they can use to access banking services without visiting a physical branch. Alternative banking channels such as SimBanking, SimAccount, Internet Banking CRDB Wakalas were given priority in serving customers. This did not only mean that services were delivered safely to customers but also, we managed to include many more Tanzanians who were not accessing formal financial services.

The success of 'Popote Inatiki' campaign prompted us to launch another campaign called,

'Tupo Mtaani Kwako'. The two campaigns have helped us bring our services closer to customers and provide financial education to more than 100,000 people, both in urban and rural areas of the whole country. This was a major success for the bank.

Innovation in the midst of challenges

In order to navigate safely, we felt that we needed to have an inclusive system which will enable us collect opinions from customers and Tanzanians in general, that will help us come up with customized solutions. The bank successfully rolled out an innovative digital solution to collect customer feedback. The QR Code system allows customers and the public submit their suggestion from anywhere and at any time. I thank our customers for the massive response, so far, we have received over 5,000 suggestions which have helped us improve services.

During the year, the bank also introduced digital loans targeting retired customers and senior citizens known as Pension Advance. This innovative product was inspired by the fact that many retirees needed to be served without compromising their health. This product allows retirees to get up to Tshs 1m loan through SimBanking Application. Pension Advance joins a list of digital loans being disbursed by the bank alongside Salary Advance, Boom Advance and Jiwezeshe targeting petty traders (Machingas). All of these loans are interest free.

Assisting businesses navigate through COVID-19

Apart from its deadly health impacts, Covid-19 has also caused a major global economic downturn. Many businesses have been affected globally

stability of the financial sector and business environment in general.

Supporting Tanzania agenda

Over the course of 24 years, CRDB Bank has been pro-actively supporting meaningful socio-economic development in the country through our Corporate Social Investment (CSI) policy which puts an emphasis on health, education and the environment. Through this policy, the bank believes that strengthening the health sector is an important investment in order to groom a healthy nation.

Based on our understanding of the challenges which the sector was going through, we organized an online symposium for stakeholders in the health sector. We discussed the various hurdles being encountered but also offered our support to help them improve services rendered to Tanzanians. Over 600 health service providers and other stakeholders from across the country were able to attend and access these opportunities.

In addition, we also did direct contributions to support the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. Through our CSI policy, we contributed over Tshs 200m to back the fight against the virus. We also made direct contributions of personal protective gear to frontline health workers and other related institution, our staff members and customers.

In 2020, we also launched three major initiatives through our CSI policy, namely: CRDB Bank Marathon, 'Pendezesha' Tanzania in partnership with Vice President's Office and CRDB Bank Taifa Cup in partnership Tanzania Basketball Federation (TBF).

Achievements in 2020 and future expectations

Despite of the numerous challenges faced in 2020, our bank continued to perform well in the market. As the third quarter report shows, revenue grew by 31 percent to Tshs 120bn compared to Tshs 92bn made during a corresponding period in 2019, this also equals the cumulative profit we made during FY 2019.

I am writing this article with immeasurable happiness to inform you that CRDB has achieved its target of having 90 percent of transactions done on digital platforms. The digital way of banking has also helped customers navigate safely both human and business impact of Covid 19.

We are welcoming 2021 in digital style. This year, our target is to invest even more in digital outlets and deploy most of our services digitally. Are you ready to experience a digital lifestyle and embrace the future of banking? I humbly welcome you to join CRDB Bank. Wishing you all a Happy New Year 2021!

Abdulmajid Nsekela (pictured) is CRDB Bank Group CEO and Managing Director.

INTEGRATION

Africa heralds onset of a free trade pact after years of talks

ADDIS ABABA

The first goods will begin to flow under an Africa-wide free-trade pact on Friday, the culmination of more than five years of negotiations on cutting cross-border tariffs.

The accord comes to fruition at a time when trade tensions are rising across much of the rest of the world. The 55-nation Africa Union marked the occasion in a ceremony that came just hours after the UK left the European Union's single market and a new post-Brexit trade agreement entered into force.

It's "a day in which we take Africa a step closer to a vision of an integrated Africa, a vision of an integrated market on the African continent," Wamkele Mene, the secretary general of the African Continental Free Trade Area, said during the event.

The treaty seeks to lower or eliminate cross-border tariffs on most goods, facilitate the movement of capital and people, promote investment and pave the way for a continent-wide customs union. The bloc has a potential market of 1.2 billion people with a combined gross domestic product of \$2.5 trillion, and could be the world's biggest free-trade zone by area when the treaty becomes fully operational by 2030. The accord will assist the continent

to recover from the "devastating impact" of the coronavirus pandemic, said South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who holds the AU's rotating chairmanship.

Intra-African trade fell to 14.5% of the total in 2019, from 15% the year before. The free-trade pact could bolster the proportion to 22%, and commerce within the continent could rise to more than \$231 billion even if all other conditions remained unchanged, the African Export-Import Bank said in report published on Dec. 15. Internal shipments accounted for 52% of total trade in Asia and 72% in Europe, according to Afreximbank data.

All but one of the 55 nations recognised by the African Union have signed to join the area and more than half have ratified the accord. Eritrea, which has a largely closed economy, is the sole holdout. The pact will help Africa to industrialise on a big scale, said President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, the host country of the bloc's secretariat.

All outstanding issues relating to the bloc's various operation instruments, such as an online platform for tariff negotiations and a digital payment and settlement system, would be finalised and made operational by the end of March, Akufo-Addo said.



Wamkele Mene, secretary general of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

PAUPERS

Nearly half of Kenyans earn below Sh30,000

NAIROBI

Nearly half of workers in the formal sector earn less than Sh30,000 per month, reflecting Kenya's pay inequality and the burden households face in acquiring basic items like rent and food.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) data, released last week, show 45.9 percent or 1.34 million of 2.92 million workers in the formal sector took home less than Sh30,000 last year. The share of workers earning less than Sh30,000 has remained little changed since 2014, a pointer that Kenya's economic growth over the period has failed to offer low-earning employees a sharper pay rise. Those earning more than Sh100,000 accounted for 2.9 percent of the 2.92 million formal workers captured in the data, the wage inequality among formal workers.

The number of workers earning less than Sh30,000 has grown in last five years from 1.2 million workers to hit 1.34 million at end of last year,

with the pay inequality wider among national government employees. Some 56 percent of Kenyans working in the public service took home less than Sh30,000 compared to 46 percent of their peers in the private sector and 48 percent of county workers.

Those who earn between Sh25,000 and Sh29,999 are 19.78 percent or 579,311 workers followed by those in the Sh20,000 and Sh24,999 bracket at 16.48 percent (482, 588 workers) while those earning below Sh20,000 are 284,656 workers. This category of workers would struggle to live in decent housing in major towns like Nairobi and struggle to meet other basic items like food, medical and school fees.

The average rent price of a one bedroom house was Sh12,071 last month, according to KNBS data, about half the net pay of the 1.2 million Kenya's formal workers. Some 2.92 million workers were captured in the KNBS report as formal employees, an increase from 2.37 million in 2014. This means that the economy has

been generating low income jobs over the five years. The earnings inequality has partly been attributed to the previous centralised system of government, which guided sharing of resources since Independence.

The devolved system of government, which took off in 2013, raised hopes of addressing the economic imbalance, as analysts say there is a need to offer incentives to attract private investors to counties and spread wealth.

Modest economic activity in the past two years has entrenched the income inequality with fewer jobs and stagnant pay hurting the middle class most. While Kenya's economy expanded 5.8 percent last year from 4.8 percent in 2017, private sector activity – which translates to jobs and higher pay – has remained muted.

Teachers and other employees in the education sector make up the biggest chunk of those earning less than Sh30,000 a month. About 284,256 tutors or 21.1 percent earned less than Sh30,000 while workers in the security sector come second at



Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta.

11.7 percent or 157,088 workers.

The data shows that agriculture, fishing, forestry, Information Technology (IT), education, security and transport sectors make the list of industries with the highest number of workers taking home less than

Sh10,000 a month.

Some 11,239 workers in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors take home less than Sh10,000 followed by 3,494 workers in the security sector and education sector with 2,412 workers. Kenya's actual labour earnings across the country remain unclear, with most workers employed in the informal sector.

The private sector continues to dish out the biggest pay cheque in excess of Sh1 trillion last year or more than 70 percent of the total wage earnings, making them more lucrative for job seekers. National government employees who took home more than Sh100,000 per month were 2.18 percent, revealing the elite club where monthly salaries average Sh500,000.

The club includes lawmakers, Cabinet Secretaries, Principal Secretaries and directors of State parastatals. An additional 9,616 workers in the public and private sectors joined the elite class of those taking home more than Sh100,000 to hit 84,807 from 75,291 workers five

years ago.

The education sector has the highest number of Kenyans in the elite class with 18,465 workers followed by financial and insurance sectors at 11,903 while the retail industry comes third at 11,274 workers.

Tax leakage

The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) has questioned the data, saying that a sharp increase in imports of luxury items and multi-million-shilling investments in real estate have opened its eyes to a potentially massive tax leakage, which if tapped could yield billions of shillings in additional revenues to the Exchequer.

The KRA's argument is supported by the fact that only a few Kenyans have officially registered as belonging to the high-income earners' bracket despite the growth in conspicuous consumption in areas such as Nairobi. The taxman reckons there are workers who earn extra cash from ventures such as real estate, dividends and royalties, but fail to declare the additional income.

ASSURANCE

Simiyu RAS pledges continued support on Airtel investment

By Guardian Reporter, Simiyu

THE government in Simiyu Region will continue to back private investments including those made by Airtel Tanzania Plc whose fourth generation network and Airtel Money Branch shops were launched last week.

Simiyu Regional Administrative Secretary, Miriam Mmbanga said while launching the 4G network and Airtel Money Branch shops that Airtel Tanzania's investment has improved communication services especially in rural areas of the region.

"Forabigtelecommunication company Airtel Tanzania, coming to invest so heavily in our region is something that we appreciate. I want to assure Airtel that the regional government is fully supporting your investment and we ensure its safety," Mmbanga said.

She said many companies investigate to know whether their investments will yield returns before making a decision to do so in order to avoid losses. "This has been a different case for Airtel in Simiyu and so I take this opportunity to thank you especially because our rural areas are all covered with reliable telecommunication services," the RAS added.

Mmbanga added that Simiyu is one of the regions in the country endowed with natural wealth such as good soils for cotton cultivation but also various mineral



Baridist district commissioner Festo Kiswaga (R) and Airtel territory sales manager for Simiyu, Godlisten Pallangyo, display Airtel 4G placards at the district over the weekend. Several Airtel Money Branch shops were also launched. Photo courtesy of Airtel.

resources. "I can assure you that Airtel's investments in Simiyu will yield results because we have people who work hard and who need good communication services," she noted.

Briefing the RAS, Airtel Territory Sales Manager for Simiyu, Godlisten Pallangyo said the telco has a long term plan of upgrading its services to 4G status countrywide so

as to serve better and attract more customers and especially those living in rural areas.

"We all understand the challenges facing Tanzanians living in rural areas in communication hence our goal is to do away with such challenges and make sure they enjoy reliable services as their urban peers," Pallangyo said.

He pointed out that for that reason, Airtel has upgraded all

of its communication towers in the region to 4G status to allow customers and residents freedom to communication efficiently. "Our Airtel 4G network comes with modern technology which means that customers enjoy fast and reliable communication services but also money transactions through Airtel Money," he added.

Pallangyo urged residents

of Simiyu to utilise the 4G network economically but also the Airtel Money Branch shops to improve their businesses. "Our company has also launched Airtel Money Branch shops in every district of Simiyu Region. Airtel Tanzania will continue investing in improving its services and products to match the daily digital life of our customers," Pallangyo pledged.

LOCKDOWN

Zimbabwe tightening Covid-19 restrictions, businesses at big risk

HARARE

Air travel still allowed, with arrivals and returning residents needing to present certificates showing they are free of infection. Zimbabwe extended a nationwide curfew, banned gatherings and ordered non-essential businesses closed for a month on Saturday in an effort to curb a surge in coronavirus infections.

Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga, who is also health minister, said some of the tighter restrictions were effective immediately and included a 6pm to 6am curfew and a ban on inter-city travel. From Tuesday, non-essential businesses would also be suspended, he said. "People must stay at home save for buying food and medicines or transporting sick relatives," Chiwenga told a news conference.

"Only essential services are to remain open such as hospitals, pharmacies and supermarkets, with only essential staff allowed to come to work," Chiwenga said, adding such services would have reduced hours and be subject to the night curfew.

Earlier on Saturday, government spokesman Nick Mangwana wrote on Twitter that "we are being overwhelmed and overrun by this virus." Chiwenga said air travel was still allowed, with arrivals and returning residents being required to present certificates showing themselves to be free of Covid-19.

Zimbabwe first introduced a tough lockdown in March but had gradually eased the restrictions. It has recorded a total of 14 084 cases and 369 deaths. Last week, the government postponed the reopening of schools planned for Monday, due to a surge in coronavirus infections and a tropical storm that swept through the region.

ON-RECORD

Gold heads for best year in a decade with dollar on the ropes

SINGAPORE

Gold is poised to cap the biggest annual advance in a decade after a tumultuous year, with gains this month aided by the dollar's decline to the lowest level since April 2018. Silver has surged almost 50% in 2020.

Bullion hit a record in August as investors sought haven assets amid the pandemic. The surge was buttressed by unprecedented waves of stimulus, including from the Federal Reserve, which fanned concerns of currency debasement. Holdings in bullion-backed exchange-traded funds set an all-time high in October, although they've since ebbed with the roll-out of vaccines.

Gold for immediate delivery was 0.2% higher at \$1 897.67 an ounce at 10:18 a.m. in Singapore. That's up 6.8% this month, and 25% higher over 2020, poised for the biggest full-year advance since 2010. The Bloomberg Dollar Spot Index is heading for a third, straight quarterly loss.

Ahead of 2021, some banks have signalled that the traditional haven may now struggle to extend its gains. Gold and other precious metals will likely come under pressure next year as financial markets normalise and the yield curve steepens, Morgan Stanley said in a note earlier this month.

Others have struck a more positive tone. While bullion's rally has been blunted by vaccine progress, there's still support from monetary and fiscal policies, according to HSBC Securities (USA) Inc. A Joe Biden administration may be gold-positive from a fiscal-spending perspective, it said in a December 9 note. Spot silver traded at \$26.6448 an ounce, up 49% this year. Palladium is on course for a fifth consecutive annual gain, with a rise of more than 20% in 2020. Platinum has climbed 11%.

INTEGRATION

Kagame hails launch of trading under AfCFTA

KIGALI

As African countries kick off trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, President Paul Kagame has welcomed the latest development. The African Union launched the start of the trading of the Continental Free Trade Area on January 1, marking a significant milestone towards the world's largest free-trade zone.

"Cheers to the launch of Trading #AfCFTA, to those who put it all together and the rest of us who have to join in to make it work and worthwhile!!" Kagame said on Twitter. The launch is a culmination of years-long negotiations between African countries, which started in 2018 when a landmark agreement was signed in Kigali by leaders of 44 countries.

So far, 54 countries out of 55 have signed the agreement, 33 have ratified it, and over 40 have submitted their offers. This signals that Africa is ready to start trading as a single market. The agreement envisions a continen-

tal market of 1.2 billion people, with a combined Gross Domestic Product of more than \$3.4 trillion.

The agreement will also boost the level of intra-Africa trade. The launch of the trading takes Africa a step closer to the vision of an integrated market on the African continent as it will boost the continent's manufacturing capability and increase exports.

"This African Continental Free Trade Area should not just be a trade agreement, it should actually be an instrument for Africa's development," Wamkele Mene, the Secretary-General of AfCFTA Secretariat said during the launch.

By 2025, the continent has the opportunity to lift out of poverty 100 million Africans majority of whom are women, cross-border traders, if it implements the AfCFTA effectively, according to the African Development Bank.

Immense opportunity

Mene said the start of trading offers an immense opportunity for the continent to overcome

smallness of national economies, and to overcome a lack of economies of scale. "We have to take active steps to make sure that we place Africa on a path to accelerated industrial development so that by 2035 we are able to double intra-African trade," he noted.

It also means that trading across borders amongst African countries will be easier and cheaper. It also means increased opportunities for thousands of entrepreneurs and businesses. Investors, too, will be able to do business on a single set of trade and investment rules across the African continent, overcoming market fragmentation that has characterized the continent for decades.

The President of the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), Benedict Oramah said 400 African banks are on board to provide trade finance support to African businesses. That number is expected to increase to 500 banks soon with a combined \$8bn trade finance capacity in the next 18 months.



Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

EXPANSION

Equity Group gets approval to merge two banks in DRC

NAIROBI

Equity Group has received regulatory approval to merge the newly acquired Banque Commerciale Du Congo (BCDC) with the unit it has been operating in the market since 2015.

The lender said Wednesday that it has received nod from the Central Bank of Congo and will now proceed to merge BCDC with Equity Bank Congo (EBC), which it bought from ProCredit Bank about five years ago.

The combined outfit will become Equi-

ty Banque Commercial du Congo (Equity BCDC) and comes after the lender completed the acquisition of 66.53 percent stake in BCDC last August for \$95 million (\$10.37 billion).

Equity Group chief executive James Mwangi said the merged outfit will have a single obligator limit—the maximum amount a bank is allowed to lend a single borrower in relation to the total shareholders' fund—of \$4.36 billion (\$4 million).

"This will enable our customers in DRC



Equity Group chief executive officer James Mwangi speaks at a past event.

to access higher credit limits to grow and expand their business ventures," said Mr Mwangi. "Our customer will access with ease the advanced digital banking, and merchant banking services with a suite of payment cards from international card associations."

Equity holds 86.6 percent shareholding in EBC and the merger will see its stake in Equity BCDC become 77.5 percent.

The other stake is held by International Finance Corporation, DRC government and minority shareholders.

All branches and other outlets of both EBC and BCDC will see their name and brand identity change to Equity BCDC. Equity said the managing directors of the two banks—Yves Cuyppers and Celestin Muntuabu—and their principal deputies will continue serving in the management committee with the combined board members forming the pioneer board of Equity BCDC.

WORLD

UK starts new journey after Brexit saga

LONDON

UNITED Kingdom on Friday began a new year and life outside the European Union, after leaving the bloc's single market trading rules to go it alone for the first time in nearly half a century.

Brexit, which has dominated politics on both sides of the Channel since 2016, became reality an hour before midnight, ending the UK's 48-year obligation to follow Brussels' rules.

Free movement of more than 500 million people between Britain and the 27 EU states ended.

More rigorous customs checks returned for the first time in decades, despite the hard-fought brokering of a tariff-and quota-free trade deal.

New Year's Day newspapers reflected the historic but still deeply divisive change, which will have repercussions for generations to come.

The pro-Brexit Daily Express' front-page photograph showed the White Cliffs of Dover an enduring symbol of Britishness with "Freedom" written on a Union flag.

"Our Future. Our Britain. Our Destiny," its headline says.

The pro-EU Independent, though, was less sure: "Off the hook or cut

adrift?" it asked, reflecting widespread uncertainty at the path the country had now chosen. As dawn broke on 2021, attention turned to Britain's borders, particularly its key Channel seaports, to see if the end to seamless trade and travel would cause delays and disruption.

But with New Year's Day a public holiday followed by a weekend, and the government having announced the phased introduction of checks, few immediate problems were envisaged.

"The traffic forecast for the next few days is very light," said John Keefe, spokesman for Eurotunnel, which transports freight, cars and coaches under the Channel.

Practical changes

As the first ferry left the British port of Dover early on Friday, truckers rolling into Calais of France had to deal for the first time with the new rules for transporting goods to and from mainland Europe.

The Road Haulage Association, an industry body, estimates that nearly 220 million new forms will now need to be filled in every year to allow trade to flow with EU countries, including permits to even drive on the roads leading to ports like Dover.



People watch the first truck, from Estonia, entering the Eurotunnel terminal, January 1, 2021 in Coquelles, northern France. (XINHUA)

Ferry group Stena Line said on Friday that six freight loads bound for EU member Ireland were turned away at Holyhead port in north Wales for not having the correct paperwork.

Other practical changes include how long Britons can visit their holiday homes on the continent, to travel with pets, and an end to British involvement in an EU student program.

Holidaymakers and business travelers used to seamless EU travel could face delays, although fears Britons will have to get international permits to drive in Europe were averted by a separate accord.

British fishermen are disgruntled at a compromise in the free trade agreement to allow continued access for EU boats in British waters, which has raised fears of clashes at sea.

The key financial services sector also faces an anxious wait to learn on what basis it can keep dealing with Europe, after being largely omitted from the trade deal along with services in general, which account for 80 percent of Britain's economy.

In Northern Ireland, the border with Ireland will be closely watched to ensure movement is unrestricted key to a 1998 peace deal that ended 30 years of violence.

And in pro-EU Scotland, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon gave a clear sign of a looming battle ahead for a new vote on independence.

"Scotland will be back soon, Europe. Keep the light on," she said on

social media. Despite the uncertainty, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is bullishly optimistic, writing in Friday's Daily Telegraph that Brexit presented "opportunities unknown to modern memory".

He said Britain had been given "a safe European home" since joining the then Common Market in 1973, but added that "the world has changed out of all recognition, and so has the UK. We need to keep pace with developments on the west coast of America and in the Pearl River delta. We need the Brexit-given chance to turbo-charge those sectors in which we excel."

The divisions over Brexit, both political and social, remain deep and are likely to last for years, despite a muted end to the saga overshadowed by the global health crisis.

Opinion polls indicate that most Britons want to move on and are far more worried about the worsening coronavirus pandemic, which has left more than 73,500 dead in Britain alone.

Johnson, who survived several days in intensive care with COVID-19 last April, warned of tough times ahead but said a UK-developed vaccine offered grounds for hope.

But his desire for a prosperous, more globally focused Britain could yet see a resurgence of Brexit wrangling, as the country finds out what its new trading terms mean in reality.

Agencies

China-Europe freight trains makes institutional innovation to improve efficiency

CHINA-EUROPE freight trains departing Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan province, delivered surprisingly remarkable performance despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 2,000 trips were made in the January-November period this year, up 55 percent from a year ago.

The point-to-point transport offered by the freight services were a major reason for the rocketing figure, said Yang Qiling, general manager of the Chengdu International Railway Port Investment & Development (Group) Co., Ltd.

Massive quantities of cargos were passed on to railway transportation as maritime and air transportation has been impacted by COVID-19. Preventative

medical materials were the first to drive the cargo growth handled by the China-Europe freight trains, followed by huge demand for imports and exports, Yang introduced.

A slew of favorable policies also contributed to the growth, Yang explained, citing the Chengdu International Railway Port, which was approved to be one of the first land port logistics hubs in China in September last year, as well as an economic development zone established in the port August this year. Thanks to the favorable policies, the port enjoys gradually maturing logistics, and a number of foreign trade enterprises and platforms have been established around it. Institutional innovation leads

to constantly improving customs clearance efficiency and service quality. Home appliance manufacturer Konka started building assembly lines for TVs in Chengdu's Qingbaijiang district last December, aiming to export its products to Europe. Zhang Wenwu, general manager of the corporation's manufacturing department once worried about the shipping of the products, as the TVs are expected to be delivered to a wide range of destinations but in small quantities.

It was the customized transportation services launched by the Chengdu International Railway Port that eased Zhang's concerns. The services are tailored for clients who book only a single or a few containers of a train, so

that Konka's products can be sent to as many European countries as possible. At present, there are multiple routes being opened, and they run stably in two-way directions.

Since 2017, the Chengdu International Railway Port has launched a "single waybill" mechanism for multimodal transport, so as to relieve foreign trade enterprises' burden of settlement and financing when they ship cargos to other countries on rail tracks.

In the past, trade settlement and financing couldn't be finished with waybills as different countries have different rules on rail transport, and waybills were not able to prove the property right of the cargos. Aiming to re-

form the standards, operation rules, cargo safety and financial settlement, the "single waybill" mechanism has largely improved trade facilitation.

The first train operated under the mechanism departed Tilburg in the Netherlands for Chengdu in April 2017.

Not long ago, a fully loaded freight train arrived at the Chengdu International Railway Port from Russia. Zhong Tao, who received orders from the train, told People's Daily that small and micro enterprises, which are vulnerable capital-wise, had big troubles purchasing products from overseas, as rail waybills were not able to function when it came to financing.

People's Daily

Israel dismisses 'nonsense' Iran charge it seeks to trick US into war

JERUSALEM

An Israeli official yesterday dismissed as "nonsense" an allegation by the Iranian foreign minister that Israel was trying to trick the United States into waging war on Iran.

It was Israel that needed to be on alert for possible Iranian strikes on the one-year anniversary yesterday of the assassination of Tehran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, in a U.S. drone strike in Iraq,

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said on Kan public radio.

Washington blames Iran-backed militia for regular rocket attacks on U.S. facilities in Iraq, including near the U.S. embassy. No known Iran-backed groups have claimed responsibility.

On Saturday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Twitter: "New intelligence from Iraq indicate that Israeli agent-provocateurs are plotting attacks against Ameri-



cans - putting an outgoing (President Donald) Trump in a bind with a fake casus belli. "Be careful of a trap, @real-

DonaldTrump. Any fireworks will backfire badly, particularly against your same BFFs," Zarif wrote, in what appeared to be a veiled threat against Israel.

Steinitz (pictured) said the remarks showed that Iran, after mounting U.S. sanctions, billed as curbing its nuclear programme and involvement in regional conflict-zones, was "under pressure - economic pressure, and pressure in terms of national security".

"We hear this nonsense by Zarif, that Israel would set off terrorist attacks against the United States - this really is total nonsense," Steinitz told Kan public radio.

"But on the other hand it is a warning sign - a warning sign that Iran is taking aim at Israel, is looking for excuses to lash out at Israel, and therefore we need to have our finger on the pulse and be at the highest state of alert."

Agencies

IN a speech at the annual Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing from Dec. 16 to 18, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, reviewed the country's economic work in 2020, analyzed the current situation and arranged the economic work for next year, charting the course for China's steady growth in the coming year.

The meeting serves as an important window for the world to take the pulse of the general tone of China's economic policies next year, through which the world has a clearer perception that the Chinese economy with strong resilience and enormous vitality will inject more confidence and momentum into the global recovery and growth in the post-COVID-19 era. Just like heroes rise in chaos, it is in

China aims to maintain steady economic growth in 2021

difficulties that a country distinguishes itself.

This year is an unusual year in the history of the People's Republic of China, as the country faces severe and complicated international situations, arduous tasks in seeking reform, development and stability at home, and heavy blows from the COVID-19 epidemic in particular, the meeting said.

China has made historic achievements that have satisfied the people and impressed the world as the leadership has maintained strategic focus, made accurate judgment on situations, made well-planned deployment, took decisive actions and made arduous efforts.

The country was among the first to contain the virus, resume work and production and resume positive growth. It has become the only major economy in the world that has secured positive growth this year.

China's GDP is expected to exceed 100 trillion yuan (\$15.31 trillion) in 2020, and its share of the global total will rise from last year's 16.3 percent to about 17.5 percent.

The international society has generally expressed optimism about China's economic prospects. According to a report by The Wall Street Journal, gauges of Chinese economic activity signal a broadening recovery in China's economy. BlackRock, the world's largest

money management firm, said that China is a distinct pole of global growth. The British think tank Oxford Economics and U.S. bank giant Goldman Sachs Group raised their forecast on China's economic growth in 2021.

What's the secret of China's hard-won economic achievements? In times of crisis, the whole Party, the whole nation and the Chinese people of all ethnic groups can always rely on the authority of the CPC Central Committee to rise to challenges, said the Central Economic Work Conference.

The meeting regarded putting people first as the fundamental premise of making correct deci-

sions and viewed the institutional strengths of the country as the fundamental guarantee for gathering great strengths in overcoming difficulties.

Scientific decision-making and creativity are the fundamental ways to transforming crises into opportunities, while scientific and technological self-reliance and self-strengthening provide primary support for development, the meeting said.

These represent China's in-depth understanding of developing economy in the face of severe challenges through the country's practice of taking both domestic and international situations into consideration

and coordinating epidemic control and economic and social development. They are also a source of inspiration for the world based on China's economic development.

Those who recognize the trend are wise and those who ride the trend will win.

In today's world, the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged the world economy into recession and hit hard societies and people's livelihoods. Its impact is even worse than that of the 2008 global financial crisis, and the outlook for economic recovery remains highly uncertain.

China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development at present and for the foreseeable future, but it will surely face new changes in both opportunities and challenges. People's Daily

US Senate control, and Biden's agenda, at stake as Georgia runoff elections loom

CUTHBERT, GA.

CONTROL of the U.S. Senate - and with it, the likely fate of President-elect Joe Biden's legislative agenda - will be on the ballot on Tuesday when voters in Georgia decide twin runoff elections.

The high-stakes campaign that has unfolded since Nov. 3, when Biden defeated President Donald Trump in the presidential election, has obliterated spending records and spurred unprecedented turnout. Political groups have flooded the southern state with a tsunami of television advertising.

Both Biden, a Democrat, and Trump, a Republican, will visit on Monday, underscoring the political stakes of the contests.

If either or both Republican incumbent senators - David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler - win on Tuesday, their party would retain a narrow majority, effectively giving Senate Republicans veto power over Biden's most ambitious goals. A Democratic sweep would produce a 50-50 split, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris holding the tiebreaker that determines control.

Democrat Jon Ossoff, a documentary filmmaker, is challenging Perdue, while the Rev. Raphael Warnock, senior pastor at the historic Black church Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, will take on Loeffler.

Biden's narrow Georgia victory in November - the first in a generation for a Democratic presidential candidate - completed the state's shift from a Republican stronghold to a fiercely competitive battleground.

The Jan. 5 head-to-head runoffs were triggered when no candidate reached 50% in either race in November. Polls suggest the contests are virtual dead heats.

Early voting has shattered runoff records, with 3 million ballots already cast.

"These are crazy numbers," said Michael McDonald, a University of Florida political science professor tracking the Georgia vote.

Black turnout, critical to the Democrats' chances, has been robust; about one-third of the ballots have come from self-identified Black voters, up from around 27% in November.

"Democrats need to see an electorate like this in order to be able to win the election," McDonald said. But he said it was impossible to predict the final outcome, cautioning that Republicans could turn out in higher numbers on Election Day.

Bobby Jenkins, the Democratic chair in rural Randolph County, said he felt good about his county's high early voting figures after an aggressive door-to-door push to get out the Black vote.

"It's going to hinge on how many Republicans turn out on Election Day," he said.

The races have drawn a staggering \$490 million in ad spending, according to the tracking firm AdImpact. Biden's political team has directed at least \$18 million to the Democratic effort, according to a person familiar with the matter, including staff, data support and fundraising. Agencies

India to make virus vaccines free, OKs AstraZeneca-Oxford shot

NEW DELHI

INDIAN Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Saturday that COVID-19 vaccines would be made available for free across the country.

Vardhan said in a tweet that 30 million frontline workers will be included in the first phase of inoculations. The first batch will include 10 million healthcare workers.

The government is also finalizing plans to inoculate 270 million people who are considered priority, including the elderly, by July, Vardhan said at a press conference.

Vardhan was at a hospital in Delhi to review the dry run of vaccination that was started Saturday morning across the country.

Vardhan appealed to people not to be misguided by rumours regarding the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javdekar said a coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University being produced locally by the Serum Institute of India Ltd - the world's largest vaccine maker by volume - was approved Friday.

"India is possibly the only country where four vaccine candidates are ready," Javdekar said at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's briefing on Saturday in New Delhi. "Yesterday one vaccine has been approved for emergency use, Serum's Covishield."

The approval means India can begin to vaccinate its population of about 1.3 billion.

Agencies

Russia all set to launch e-visa issuance system

MOSCOW

A SYSTEM to issue short-stay, single entry e-visas to foreign nationals has been set up in Russia but its launch date will depend on the coronavirus situation, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The project initially started in 2017 but e-visa holders were only allowed to enter Russia through certain crossing points in the Far Eastern Federal District, St. Petersburg, the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions and did not have the right to leave those regions. Now, foreign nationals holding e-visas will be able to cross the border in many Russian regions and travel

across the entire country. Experts believe that as a result, the tourist inflow will rise by 20-25%.

The Russian government approved rules for the issuance of e-visas in November.

Applications can be filed on a special website run by the Foreign Ministry or through a mobile app. Applicants need to upload their photos and passport scans and pay a \$40 visa fee (children under six years get e-visas for free).

E-visas, valid for 60 days, will be issued within four days. E-visa holders will be allowed to spend up to 16 days in Russia.

Portugal assumes EU presidency, aiming at recovery from COVID-19 pandemic

LISBON

PORTUGAL on Friday officially took over the presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) as many countries of the club are still grappling with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa said that his priorities after assuming the presidency would be the "success of the vaccination" against COVID-19 and the "economic and social recovery of Europe."

"For the next six months, Portugal will be at the helm of the European Union (EU)," he said on Twitter, stressing the motto of the Portuguese presidency -- "Time to act: for a fair, green and digital recovery."

He also announced intention to reinforce the "strategic autonomy of a European Union open to the world." "It is therefore time to act together as a community of values and shared prosperity," Costa said in his first official message when he assumed the presidency.

To achieve the EU's economic recovery, according to Portuguese Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva, a priority would be the implementation of a recovery package totaling 1.82 trillion euros (2.23 trillion U.S. dollars), which is to be distributed until the year 2027 among the 27 EU member states.

Antonio Casimiro, a researcher of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, told Xinhua that the EU is seeing rays of hope for recovery due to the beginning of COVID-19 vaccination.

However, he said that "Portugal will soon be faced with a major problem: the definition of the role of each member country and the responsibility of the EU in fighting the pandemic." According to Casimiro, to combat the pandemic and achieve recovery of the COVID-laden economy, the EU has to take collaborative actions and reconfigure "what are the responsibilities of each state and the European Union."

This may even lead to a reanalysis and revision of the treaties that govern relations within the European bloc, such as the "Lisbon Treaty," the constitutional basis of the EU, said Casimiro.

Gustavo Batista, a professor of law and international relations, told Xinhua that the Portuguese presidency also coincides with a time when Germany, France and Britain, which is no longer an EU member, are playing a less decisive role in the block.

"They were the locomotives, which made the EU move forward. Then came other countries that stayed more at the peripheral level, either because their economies were not central or because they were not so strategic," he said. According to the professor, the fact that Portugal, which is also a peripheral country both economically and geographically, takes over the European command, means that these secondary countries are gaining more importance.

"This was well signaled in this year of a pandemic when after a series of discussions, it was possible to unlock more visceral, more profound economic aid to countries that do not possess the same economic positions like Germany, France and Holland," says the professor.

With regard to extra-community relations, according to Casimiro, there is a "triangulation between Europeans, North Americans and Chinese. That balance is very complex -- but it will have to be considered -- and the mission is with Portugal."

While the EU's relationship with the United States under the incoming Joe Biden administration is still unclear, China will surely not be regarded as an obstacle or an enemy, because it is still the main economic partner of the EU today, said Batista. It is undeniable that the Chinese economy will play an increasingly important role in the future, he explained.

Xinhua

Pope calls Maradona a fragile poet; decries doping cheats

ROME

POPE Francis has hailed fellow Argentine Diego Maradona as a "poet" on the pitch, but also acknowledged his frailty away from the sport.

In a wide-ranging interview with Italian sports daily La Gazzetta dello Sport published on Saturday, Francis recalled his own days playing soccer as a child with a ball made of rags and laid bare his scorn for doping cheats.

Francis is a big soccer fan and met Maradona, who died in November, several times after becoming pope in 2013.

"On the field he was a poet, a great champion who gave joy to millions of people, in Argentina as in Naples. He was also a very fragile man," Francis said.

Maradona played for Napoli from 1984 to 1991 winning two Serie A titles and the UEFA Cup. In 1986, he captained the Argentine team to victory in the World Cup.

Despite his love for the game, Francis said he was living in Germany at the time and was not able to see the final played in Mexico against West Germany. He only discovered the result the next day when a student wrote "Viva Argentina" on the blackboard during a language class.

"I personally remember it as a victory of loneliness because I had no one to share the joy of that sporting victory with," he said.

Francis said he himself had no talent for the sport and was forced by his companions to play in goal.

"But being a goalkeeper was a great school of life for me. The goalkeeper must be ready to respond to dangers that can come from all sides," he said.

Being poor, he recalled how he and his friends could not afford a proper ball, so had to improvise: "All we needed was a ball made of rags to have fun and perform."

While extolling the virtues of sport, Francis took aim at athletes who took performance enhancing drugs.

"Doping in sport is not only cheating, it is a shortcut that destroys dignity," he said. "Better a clean defeat than a dirty victory. I wish this for the whole world, not just the world of sport."



Pope Francis greets Argentine former football star Diego Armando Maradona prior to a meeting with members of the Scholas Occurrentes at the Vatican on Sept 4, 2014. (File photo)

Wang Yi: China-Africa friendship emerges still stronger from COVID-19 test

CHINESE State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the friendship between China and Africa emerged still stronger from the test of COVID-19 in 2020.

Wang made the remarks in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency and China Media Group.

The following is a transcript of that interview on the international situation and China's diplomacy in 2020.

Question: COVID-19 hit the world with unprecedented impact. What is your assessment of the international situation and China's diplomacy in 2020?

Wang Yi: It has been an extraordinary year for China and the world. The sudden onslaught of COVID-19 has accelerated the once-in-a-century transformation in an increasingly fluid and changing world. The devastating virus, economic recession and governance difficulties are clear challenges facing humanity. On the other hand, unilateralism, protectionism and power politics are standing in the way of international cooperation. People across the world have increasingly come to see that all countries share a common stake and need to stand together in the face of difficulties. The vision of a community with a shared future for mankind thus enjoys stronger support. More and more members of the international community now choose solidarity over division, openness over isolation and cooperation over confrontation.

Here in China, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has rallied the nation behind a common purpose, and secured major strategic gains in the fight against COVID-19. We have also scored decisive successes in the three critical battles against poverty, pollution and potential risks. The whole country is on course to fully build a moderately prosperous society. The recent Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee set a great vision for China's development in the coming years and charted the course for national rejuvenation. The unity and perseverance of the Chinese people have impressed the world. The resilience and dynamism of China's development have won global recognition.

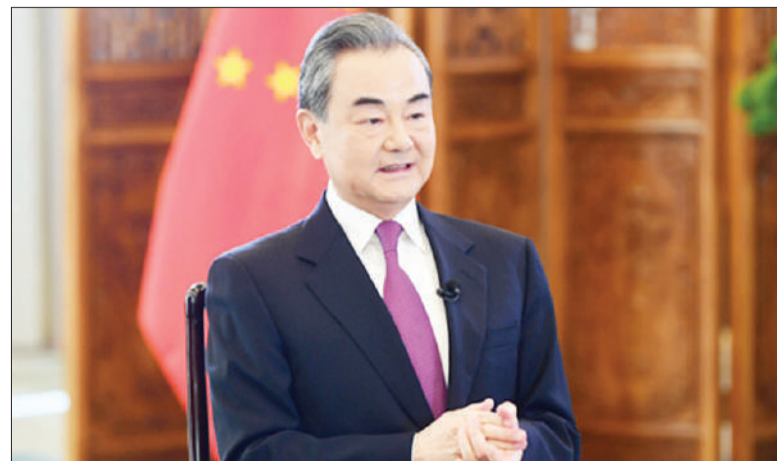
In 2020, we in the foreign service have forged ahead and tackled the challenges head on. Under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core and following Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, we have advanced China's foreign relations by taking into account both domestic needs and the international context. Guided by President Xi's leadership and personal engagement and focusing on forging a joint response to COVID-19, we have worked tirelessly to serve the country and contribute to the world. Fighting the coronavirus and the "political virus" at the same time, we have done our best to safeguard national interests and global stability.

We have built a strong defense against the virus at our borders. We have made utmost efforts to facilitate COVID-19 response and safe reopening of economy at home, and provide consular assistance and protection to Chinese nationals abroad. We piloted "fast tracks" and "green lanes" to speed up the flow of essential personnel and goods, and helped keep industrial and supply chains stable and open, contributing to the full establishment of a moderately prosperous society in China.

We have helped erect an international bulwark against the coronavirus. Having actively engaged in the international response to COVID-19, China launched an emergency global humanitarian campaign of a scale unseen since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, and helped build consensus on a global response to COVID-19, contributing to the building of a global community of health for all.

We have made more friends in the world. China has deepened friendship and cooperation with all countries, making active efforts to develop relations with major powers, achieving solid progress in building a community with a shared future with neighbors, protecting and advancing the shared interests of the developing world, and working for a new type of international relations.

We have shared benefits generated by China's opening-up with the world. China has signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and concluded negotiations on a China-EU investment agreement.



Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi gives an interview

We have vigorously advanced high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, and highlighted public health, green development and digital transformation in advancing the Belt and Road Initiative. All these efforts have injected much needed impetus into the global recovery.

We have been firm in safeguarding our national interests. We have responded resolutely and rationally to unjustified moves by the United States. We have handled issues relating to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet with justified, strong and proportionate countermeasures and won one fierce battle after another in international organizations, vigorously safeguarding China's sovereignty, dignity and development interests.

We have spearheaded multilateral cooperation. Unswerving in advocating multilateralism, China has supported international cooperation on climate change. We have announced our ambitious goal to peak carbon dioxide emissions and achieve carbon neutrality in the upgraded Nationally Determined Contributions. We have put forward a Global Initiative on Data Security to advance the reform of the global governance system.

In challenging times like this, one's mettle is tested. We are confident that through concerted efforts, the people in China and across the world will prevail over the virus, end the crisis and win an ultimate victory. China, on course toward national rejuvenation, is generating global opportunities and embracing openness and cooperation. We will make greater contributions to world peace and development.

Question: The pandemic has made "cloud diplomacy" a major form of interactions between countries. Through this virtual platform, President Xi Jinping has communicated with many foreign leaders and heads of international organizations and attended multiple important international conferences. What role has "cloud diplomacy" played in China's foreign relations in 2020?

Wang Yi: COVID-19, which caught everyone by surprise, has hit the "pause" button on face-to-face interactions between countries. But China's diplomacy has not paused in the face of the difficulties. We have neither shied away from any challenges, nor fallen silent on any major issues.

The biggest highlight in China's foreign relations has been the "cloud diplomacy" conducted at the head-of-state level. Summit diplomacy, which is the highest form of diplomacy, has been the compass guiding China's external relations. In 2020, President Xi Jinping personally planned, oversaw and engaged in "cloud diplomacy", having 87 meetings and phone calls with foreign leaders and heads of international organizations and attending 22 important bilateral or multilateral events.

Through "cloud diplomacy", President Xi Jinping has championed solidarity in the world's fight against COVID-19. At the height of this global battle, President Xi sent out this clear message: virus respects no borders and disease doesn't distinguish between races; humankind is a community with a shared future; solidarity and cooperation is the most powerful weapon to defeat the virus. Advocating science-based response, he called for joint efforts to enhance global prevention and control, develop vaccines, build a strong line of defense against the virus, and oppose politicization and stigmatization. This has helped galvanize international anti-COVID-19 cooperation.

Through "cloud diplomacy", President Xi Jinping has boosted confidence in world economic recovery. As the world economy slid toward recession, President Xi offered a series of proposals in light of China's experience in coordinating pandemic response and economic and social development, including maintaining the smooth functioning of the world economy, leveraging the digital economy, making development more inclusive and beneficial for all, and building an open world economy. This has brought hope for the world economy to step out of the doldrums.

Through "cloud diplomacy", President Xi Jinping has pointed the way forward for reforming the global governance system. As global governance was severely impacted, President Xi, with his keen grasp of the trend of the times, laid out China's vision for global governance featuring extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and articulated China's unequivocal commitment to multilateralism and to fairer and more equitable global governance.

All in all, with "cloud diplomacy", China has demonstrated its sense of responsibility, contributed its wisdom and expanded the ways it conducts foreign relations.

Question: How has China contributed to and supported the global COVID-19 response?

Wang Yi: The coronavirus is a common enemy of humanity. To defeat it is the shared responsibility of the international community. Facing this global health crisis, China has called for global cooperation since the start and worked with other countries to fight the pandemic, giving meaning to the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind.

China's contributions and support to the global response are best seen in the following six respects:

We raced against time and were the first country to report cases to the world. More and more research suggests that the pandemic was likely to have been caused by separate outbreaks in multiple places in the world. When hit by an unknown coronavirus, China took immediate actions to carry out epidemiological investigation, identify the pathogen and publicize key information including the genome sequencing of the virus. All this sounded alarm bells across the world.

We took the most rigorous control measures to fight the virus. Putting people and life first, we effectively controlled the virus within the shortest possible time, and steadily resumed economic and social activities in our country. We made an early contribution to building a strong global line of defense against the virus.

We conducted the largest-scale online exchanges on epidemic response with the support of science and technology. We organized over 100 video meetings with experts from other countries, opened an online knowledge center to share China's experiences with all countries, and published eight updated versions of diagnosis and therapeutic solutions and seven updated versions of prevention and control protocols. We shared our experience with other countries without any reservation.

We provided urgently needed assistance by launching the largest global emergency humanitarian campaign since the founding of New China. We provided assistance to over 150 countries and 10 international organizations, sent 36 medical teams to 34 countries in need and provided funding to WHO and other relevant UN agencies. We stood with other countries and peoples to help them prevail over

the virus.

We did our best as the largest manufacturer of medical supplies. We provided countries around the world with over 220 billion masks, 2.25 billion protective suits and over 1 billion testing kits. "Made in China" products became a key source of supply for the global fight against the pandemic.

We were the first to pledge to make vaccines a global public good, bearing in mind the greater good of humanity. To help other developing countries access affordable vaccines, we engaged in active collaboration on the R&D of drugs and vaccines, which brings hope to heavily-hit developing countries.

As the pandemic is far from over, we must never slacken our joint response. China will continue to advance global cooperation on epidemic response, strengthen joint prevention and control, and assist countries and regions in need. We will never slacken such efforts until humanity secures a final victory against COVID-19.

Question: What role has the Foreign Ministry played during the nation's battle against COVID-19 and how has the Ministry put its people-centered philosophy into action?

Wang Yi: The principle of for the people and by the people has been a source of strength for the Communist Party of China. It is also the defining feature of China's diplomacy. This human touch of China's diplomacy has been further demonstrated during the test of COVID-19. Throughout the year 2020, we have pooled every resource available and lost no time in delivering people-centered diplomacy. We have defied risks and danger to put up a firm line of defense for our fellow Chinese in every corner of the world.

We have stood at the forefront of preventing imported cases, doing everything we could to lock in the hard-won gains in controlling the coronavirus at home. We have stood at the forefront of serving domestic development, giving diplomatic support to the national endeavor of finishing building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and securing victory against extreme poverty. We have stood at the forefront of advocating international cooperation against COVID-19, making our contribution to forging a global synergy in this battle. We have stood at the forefront of fighting misinformation, rebutting attempts of politicization and stigmatization. We were determined to make sure that the objective narrative and collective memory of the battle against the pandemic would not be distorted by lies.

COVID-19 may have suspended flights, yet it has not hindered the solicitude of the motherland for the well-being of its sons and daughters abroad. COVID-19 has brought challenges to our consular work, yet the safety of overseas Chinese has remained our priority no matter what. Consular services have continued uninterrupted, so has our consular work in general.

Continues tomorrow

The
Guardian

SPORT

Results not age key factor for Federer now, says Woodbridge

MELBOURNE

ROGER Federer's results in 2021 are more likely than any age milestone to determine when his glittering career comes to an end, said Australian Todd Woodbridge, who thinks the Swiss master may yet have another Wimbledon triumph in him.

Last week the holder of 20 Grand Slam singles titles confirmed that fitness issues after two knee operations in 2020 mean that fans will not see him in action at the Australian Open in February for the first time in more than two decades.

"A player of his stature, at some point when you're not winning, you start to wonder about why you're only making the quarter-finals, when you're used to being in the final," Woodbridge told Channel Nine this week.

"It doesn't give the same adrenaline rush as it always has, and that's when you start to think to yourself that you've got other things to do with your life."

A semi-final defeat in Melbourne in 2020 was Federer's last competitive match, and playing five-setters in the Australian summer heat after a lengthy injury and 14 days quarantine would have been a tricky proposition for the 39-year-old.

Federer has not missed a trip to Melbourne Park since a loss in qualifying in 1999.

Yves Allegro, Federer's fellow Swiss and former doubles partner, feels skipping the Australian Open was a logical decision.

"All his career, Roger Federer only lined up if he was 100% physically," Allegro told the 20min web-

site www.20min.ch. "So he made the right decision, especially since he has plenty of time left to prepare for his main goals of Wimbledon and the Olympics."

Participating at a fifth Olympics featured prominently in Federer's agenda, and the postponement of the Tokyo Games by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic worked perfectly for the Swiss, who would otherwise have missed it due to injury.

The last of his major titles might have come on the Melbourne hardcourts in 2018, but Federer may see Wimbledon's grasscourts, where he has won eight titles and made the final in 2019, as the most realistic surface to add to his tally.

"For Roger to continue on, he'll have to be able to manage his body when he does come back," said Woodbridge, who won 22 Grand Slam doubles titles.

"His goals, I assume, would be to play at the Olympics and at Wimbledon. Wimbledon is the major that I see him being able to win at this stage of his career."

Federer is plotting a return in late February and the current men's calendar would suggest that the ATP 500 event in Rotterdam from March 1 could be the first stop in 2021 for the world number five.

The Swiss proved that he can quickly get back into his groove when he won the 2017 Australian Open despite missing the second half of 2016 season because of knee surgery.

REUTERS



Question marks over Australia-India test after boycott threat reports

SYDNEY

THE schedule for Australia's test series against India was under threat again on Sunday after reports the tourists were unhappy at the prospect of re-entering strict quarantine for the fourth test in Brisbane.

The third test in the four-match series is slated to start at Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday after Cricket Australia decided not to move the match in the wake of an outbreak of COVID-19 cases in the city's northern beaches.

On Monday, both squads will fly to New South Wales, which reported eight new locally transmitted cases of the virus and ramped up social distancing measures on Sunday.

Queensland state has closed its border with New South Wales and although agreement has been reached to allow the players to fly to Brisbane for the fourth test on Jan. 15, they will have to quarantine having been in Sydney.

"No different from anyone else, if they are coming from a declared hotspot they will have to quarantine," Queensland's chief health officer, Doctor Jeanette Young, said on Sunday.

"That is a discussion Cricket Australia will need to have with the players."

Reports in the Australian media, citing sources within the touring party, said India's players, many of whom have been in some form of quarantine or other for six months, would refuse to travel if they were going to be subjected to a hard lockdown.

A spokesman for the India team did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the reports.

India's players underwent 14 days of strict quarantine after their arrival in Australia but have since enjoyed more freedom while preparing for and playing matches in Adelaide, Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

There are still some restrictions, however, and five Indian players were placed in isolation on Saturday after a video surfaced showing them eating inside a Melbourne restaurant on New Year's Day.

The Australian and Indian cricket boards are investigating the alleged breach of biosecurity protocols with precedent suggesting the players might be fined for their actions.

Sydney, which at one stage looked like losing the third test to Melbourne, would be the most likely beneficiary if it was decided to move the fourth match from Brisbane.

The acting Premier of New South Wales state, John Barilaro, told reporters on Sunday that the government was focusing on staging the third test safely in front of a crowd of up to 20,000 fans.

"We're going to commit to the test we have," he said. "If an opportunity arises post that, we'll take that opportunity then."

Australia batsman Matthew Wade rejected the idea that there was now uncertainty over the schedule.

"There's a lot of talk out there but for us as a group and me personally, we'll go Sydney and play the SCG and then we'll go to Brisbane and play the Gabba," he told reporters.

"Until the powers that be knock on the door and tell us that that's going to change, we just roll onto the next game..."

REUTERS



Azam FC forward, Richard Djodi (C), dribbles past Polisi Tanzania's players in a recent Vodacom Premier League duel, which took place Dar es Salaam. PHOTO: CORRESPONDENT JUMANNE JUMA.

Why style modernization in our soccer will take a while longer

BY CORRESPONDENT MICHAEL ENEZA

STEREOTYPE characterizations of soccer on the basis of presumed psychological dispositions of players and unavoidably their coaches, while on the pitch.

Part of this outlook stems from the way the football game developed from industrial England to the other parts of Europe and then South America, and in due course, the sort of style inputs or differences of approach that soccer development brought about.

There are no hard and fast rules or lines in which this took place but some discernible patterns reigned for years.

To a certain extent these approaches to the game have arisen from the difference between what is needed in defence and in attack, and what should be primary when a team is on the pitch.

At the same time the way teams defend or attack does not entirely depend on the philosophy of a coach or habit of how soccer is played in a country but individual abilities of players, and it is always a challenge how individual prowess or ability is 'farmed' into the total 'skills package.' Exceptional players quite often determine the pace.

England was the mother country for the sport, and infused with it the traditional 2-3-5 pattern, where the game is centred up-

front, starting play with a goal kick and then the battle starts for controlling the ball and moving it to scoring - or back to the other goal.

This is what has generally changed in modern soccer, that the goal kick is no longer ceremonially a centre piece of the pattern of play, as no assurance is possible that the ball so put into play lands or is collected by the right player. It is to depend on luck, not design.

Coaches soon realized that defending is always the most important part, to avoid conceding rather than to push to score upfront, in which case the 2-3-5 pattern was altered.

At an earlier stage the Brazilians came up with 4-2-4, still laying plenty of emphasis on attack but intensely mindful of defence and creating links in between, and with their three World Cup titles up to 1970, they appeared to be masters of the game.

Then a rival philosophy arose from the Netherlands, of 'all in attack and all in defence,' or 'total football.'

Basically this is the standard pattern of soccer that it seen in the UEFA circuit (Europe) and to that extent most other areas, but there are variations on how it has been mastered.

Even with individual trainers or upper end coaches, variations are noticeable in the way they supervise the game, from an early ide-

alism where only 'textbook' football is allowed to an older period in their coaching careers where there is a lot more 'indulgence' in what the players do. This has now been codified into a psychological rule, of letting players 'express themselves,' play the football they enjoy, and this way one gets the best out of them, etc.

This latter assertion plays into 'hedonistic' view of football where style is kingpin, ability to mesmerize opponents, and in this aspect the biggest names in world soccer are those who had that ability, not clinical finishers lacking that gusto or panache.

Thinking of the late Diego Armando Maradona one has the classic sort of player, dribbler per excellence with moves that are rehearsed but unstoppable, similar to Stanley Mathews earlier and Brazilian star winger Garrincha.

Maradona and Garrincha were not necessarily the most physically fit players on the pitch, but played with flair and brilliance, and won millions of admirers.

It is however to Germany that the real game is credited, though in part it is an offshoot of the Netherlands philosophy of 'all in attack and all in defence.'

It is a game of mathematical passing, use of open spaces, marking spaces rather than players, seeking controlled space to find one another easily, whether

it is by narrowing the space into the 18 meter box or spreading out to play longer passes towards the goal.

But what it seeks is to start the game with a throw to the nearest player, and then plotting towards goal starts.

This kind of mood has failed to settle into Tanzanian football, if one watches one or two matches on the premier league.

Only sporadically does it come up that teams try to play settled football of guarding space and looking for one another as the game itself, and more mindful of possession at the ball leaves the goalkeeper, and not where it will land, the distance from the other goalkeeper.

The game here is ruled by a traditional and, admittedly, somewhat primitive outlook of seeing a long goal kick as essential in attack.

Trying to figure out why this is the case brings up at least one psychological explanation, namely the clear reality of a non-professional mindset on the terraces and not surprisingly as well, in the backrooms.

This kind of mindset has its centre of action movement towards the goal and either some witty dribbling or fancy shot that plants the ball at the back of the net. The crowd is impatient, so possession soccer is impossible.

Zambian forward now skips Simba SC, Yanga to join Al Ahly

BY CORRESPONDENT NASSIR NCHIMBI

ZAMBIAN striker, Walter Bwalya (pictured), who has for some time turned out to be a transfer target for Tanzania's Simba SC and Yanga, has official joined Africa football giants, Egypt's Al Ahly, on a four-year deal from the country's other side, El-Gouna.

Al Ahly announced the signing of Bwalya after failing to sign Mamelodi Sundowns forward, Uruguayan Gastón Sirino.

Bwalya had entered Simba and Yanga's radar for the first time in 2018 after doing well with his Zambian club, Nkana, in the first round of the CAF Champions League, although the club was eliminated by Simba with 4-3 loss.

Simba and Yanga had tried to approach the player but the latter remained focused on achieving his dream of featuring for more prominent clubs in the African continent.

Bwalya has been a revelation since his arrival in Egypt in July 2019 from Nkana, scoring 16 goals in 35 appearances for El-Gouna.

Last season, he scored 13 goals in 30 games to help them avoid rel-



egation, before scoring three in five matches this season as El-Gouna currently sit top of the Egypt Premier League.

He becomes Al Ahly's first winter signing as the team's coach, Pitso Mosimane, was keen on signing a new striker ahead of the FIFA Club World Cup.

Al Ahly decided to sign Bwalya despite impressive performances by the side's striker, Mohamed Sherif, this season.

There was as well the return of Salah Mohsen and Ahmed Yasser Rayan from their loan spells, as well as the presence of Marwan Mohsen.

Bwalya is a 25-year-old who played as a striker for El-Gouna for the last season-and-a-half, joining them from Zambian club Nkana.

He was linked with moves to both Zamalek and Pyramids FC of Egypt, but it looks like Al Ahly was the club, who managed to snatch his signature on a four-year deal.

Bwalya becomes the first Zambian to play for African champions Al Ahly and will hope to re-deliver his fine performances with the side, nicknamed 'Reds'.

Pochettino's passion should endear new coach to PSG fans

PARIS

Mauricio Pochettino's passion and pedigree as a former Paris Saint-Germain player are likely to endear the Argentine coach to the club's supporters -- though dealing with the demanding Qatari owners could prove trickier.

Pochettino, named on Saturday as successor to the German Thomas Tuchel, will be given substantial resources to make the French champions kings of Europe and he inherits a team that already contains the most expensive player in history in Neymar and another of the costliest, Kylian Mbappe.

He led Tottenham to the Champions League final but, like Tuchel this year, fell at the final hurdle. Pochettino's side lost 2-0 to Liverpool in Madrid in 2019 while PSG went down by a single goal to Bayern Munich in Lisbon in August.

Since his departure from Spurs in November 2019 after guiding the north London club to four successive top-four Premier League finishes, 48-year-old Pochettino has laid low.

His decline at Spurs was puzzling, coming so soon after the club reached the European showpiece but he appeared frustrated at a lack of reinforcements to the squad and reportedly fell out with some of his players.

He has been continually linked with Manchester United but with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer steadying the ship at Old Trafford so successfully, Pochettino was available to take over the hot seat at the Parc des Princes, where he played from 2001 to 2003.

- 'Great charisma' -
Pochettino built his playing career as an uncompromising central defender largely for his beloved Espanyol -- the poor relations to city rivals Barcelona -- but it was not just his

toughness on the pitch that marked him out as a natural leader.

"Pochettino had great charisma in the dressing room," Paco Flores, who coached an Espanyol team including Pochettino to the 2000 Copa del Rey, told the Guardian in 2013.

"He never, ever accepted defeat and there was a huge amount of respect for him, almost like the hierarchy when you're doing military service.

"He was a leader, a strong personality. There was also a powerful communion between players and fans and he saw the importance of that."

Pochettino displayed that passion at Tottenham, most memorably after they beat Ajax in Amsterdam to reach the Champions League final. He tearfully embraced his players, his face screwed up in raw emotion.

Perhaps the quality that earned him most credit at Spurs was his ability to bring on young talent such as Dele Alli. It might not have been a coincidence that as Tuchel's star waned at PSG, the club were linked with Alli, a star of England's 2018 World Cup team but now little used by Pochettino's successor Jose Mourinho.

Pochettino is often described by his former players -- after coaching Espanyol he cut his teeth in England at Premier League club Southampton -- as a coach who demands absolute commitment.

But he will have to balance that with the task of handling Neymar, who appears to be treated with kid gloves by PSG's owners.

Tuchel was reportedly abruptly asked to leave after making comments in an interview that were deemed critical of his Qatari bosses. Pochettino will have to keep his emotions in check.

AFP

Arteta sees brighter future for Arsenal after pivotal week

LONDON

MIKEL Arteta said the prospects for Arsenal's season are "completely different" after thrashing West Brom 4-0 to complete three Premier League wins in eight days.

Prior to last weekend, the Gunners had gone eight league games without a win to find themselves battling at the bottom end of the table.

But nine points from nine has propelled Arsenal back into contention for the European places as they climb to 11th and within three points of the top six.

"I'm so happy we were able to achieve the target that we had because the table looks completely different," said Arteta, who had found his job under threat just four months on from winning the FA Cup.

"The energy we have around the place is much better and wins bring a lot of confidence. You can see that today in the way the team played."

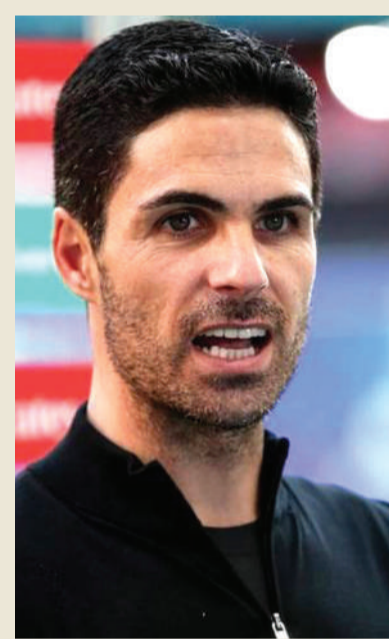
West Brom are yet to win in four games since Sam Allardyce took charge and the former England manager needs to quickly instill the defensive discipline he has made his trademark at previous clubs if his new team are to have any chance of survival.

The Baggies have shocked Manchester City and Liverpool by claiming 1-1 draws on the road in recent weeks, but have now conceded 12 goals in Allardyce's first three home games.

"I think we need to work out a way to make sure we are not as sloppy as we are at conceding goals," said Allardyce, whose side remain second bottom, six points from safety.

"That seems to be by defending deeper like we did at Man City and Liverpool. It seems like when we do try and open up then we leave opportunities for the opposition and we're not able to cope."

Arteta's decision to finally put faith in his crop of talented youngsters has turned his side's season around. Bukayo Saka was again the shining light, while Kieran Tierney and Emile Smith Rowe also im-



pressed.

Arsenal's poor run was principally caused by a struggle to score goals, but they were a threat from the off despite the treacherous conditions on a snow covered surface.

Sam Johnstone denied Hector Bellerin and Saka inside the first 10 minutes, but he was powerless to stop Tierney's stunning opener on 23 minutes.

The Scotland international left Darnell Furlong trailing in his wake before cutting inside onto his weaker right foot and curling into the top corner.

Arsenal's second was reminiscent of their flowing football at the height of the Arsene Wenger era as Saka fed Lacazette, whose brilliant pass played Smith Rowe in behind the West Brom defence and he squared for Saka to tap into an empty net.

The one way traffic continued after the break and some comical West Brom defending led to the third as Semi Ajayi smashed a dangerous cross off his own post and the ball broke to Lacazette to apply a simple finish.

Moments later another raid from Tierney down the left teed up Lacazette for another finish from point-blank range for his fourth goal in three games.

AFP

Analysis: World football's uncertainties as pandemic rages

BY ROB HARRIS

THE disconcerting familiarity of games played in empty stadiums ushered in a new year which carried over the same uncertainties facing world football.

With a second wave of COVID-19 ravaging so many countries -- accelerated by mutant strains -- even continuing competitions without disruption remains a challenge.

Bringing supporters back to games was tried across Europe but increasingly rolled back as 2020 ended, until the turnstiles were closed completely. Games in all major European leagues will be played to the backdrop of silence at the start of 2021, the sterile environment devoid of the raucous atmospheres which players feed off.

Keeping the show continuing -- before the mass rollout of vaccines -- is the focus for competition organizers, avoiding lengthy pauses with no games that can lead to costly rebates to broadcasters.

The English Premier League continued playing over the Christmas period. But now that the league is reporting a record number of coronavirus cases, ensuring matches and training sessions aren't spreading infections should be the priority.

"I know it might not be a nice thing to say, but they're tough times for everybody," Chelsea manager Frank Lampard said Friday. "We enjoy watching our football, but safety and health have to come first."

What 2020 showed world football is that, however much governing bodies like UEFA express a determination not to be derailed by a virus outbreak, the pandemic can ultimately take decisions out of their hands.

Postponed last year, planning for the rescheduled European Championship remains in flux. Before UEFA can think about whether fans will be allowed into



Everton and West Ham players commemorate COVID-19 victims during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and West Ham at Goodison Park in Liverpool, England, Friday, Jan. 1, 2021. (AP)

games, it first has to consider where the matches will be staged.

The logistics were already most challenging for the Euros -- playing in 12 cities in 12 stadiums across Europe -- even before COVID-19 came along. Alternative plans are being considered that could considerably scale back the number of venues used if circumstances haven't improved enough. Staging the delayed Gold Cup and Copa America across the Americas are less tricky operations across June and July but still rely on protecting the team environments from being breached by coronavirus outbreaks.

If organizing a 24-team competition across Europe during a pandemic wasn't time-consuming enough for the governing body, UEFA has to resolve another complex situation. The future of its club competitions also remains in flux, with disputes over the Champions League format requiring a resolution.

The power struggles that were dividing European football at the dawn of 2020 persist.

"There is no more time for egoistic ideas -- there is no more time for selfishness," UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said in the hours after reluctantly calling off Euro 2020 for last year. "This is a reset of the world football."

But almost 10 months on, Ceferin is

still mediating between the conflicting priorities of clubs and leagues determined to reshape or protect the Champions League.

There are ongoing threats of launching breakaway competitions as the elite teams -- seemingly led by Real Madrid -- chase bigger windfalls while alienating the powerful clubs from the majority of smaller teams. Talk of a European Super League could only intensify as the powerhouses endure an unusual season of upheaval with Juventus, Barcelona, Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain all starting the new year not topping their leagues.

An overhaul of the English leagues by the six biggest teams was foiled last year when a seemingly benevolent offer -- to help clubs struggling financially during the pandemic -- was unmasked as what looked like a naive power grab. But the demise of "Project Big Picture" did not dampen the desire for revolution.

It was the activism of players, though, that shone in 2020 and emboldens them in the new year to use their platforms on the field to bring about change helping wider society.

In England, players continue to take a knee before kickoff -- filling the stadium silence with powerful symbolism in the pursuit of greater diversity in the

game and an end to racism. Manchester United and England striker Marcus Rashford showed how a player can challenge a government on child hunger and force an about-turn in policy.

Health matters away from the pandemic and poverty caused by it also consume football as concerns grow about the long-term impact of heading the ball.

The new year brings about one of the most significant changes to prevent players suffering from brain injuries as concussion substitutes are trialed from this month. It could also be the year heading is scaled back, in training at least, as studies highlight the dementia risks for former professionals.

"Just heading a ball, one does not get a concussion," said Michael Grey, a neuroscientist at University of East Anglia in England. "Yet the brain is still wobbling around inside the cranium, there's still a little bit of damage that goes on. And it's that damage over years of heading the ball that creates the neurodegeneration."

It is a sobering warning that puts all the squabbling over competition formats, video assistant referees and match postponement decisions during the pandemic into perspective.

AP

Domenech's return to football as Nantes coach revives ghosts of France's 2010 World Cup disaster

BY JULIEN LAURENS, ESPN CORRESPONDENT

It is not the Christmas present Nantes fans were hoping for, and the reaction to the announcement of Raymond Domenech's appointment as the club's new manager has been brutal and even violent at times. His contract is only through the end of the 2020-21 season as Nantes need to stabilize -- they're only three points above the relegation zone in Ligue 1 ahead of the Breton Derby vs. Rennes on Jan. 6 -- but the hostility has been notable since his appointment on Dec. 26.

It's been 27 years since Domenech's last game as a club manager, when he was in charge of Lyon against Zinedine Zidane (the player) and Bordeaux, and more than 10 years after his last game as national team head coach with France against South Africa at the 2010 World Cup. That tournament remains indelible in the minds of French football fans both for the on-field mediocrity and off-field drama. After their final game that summer, a 2-1 group stage defeat against the tournament hosts, Domenech refused to shake hands with their coach, Carlos Alberto Parreira, because six months earlier, the Brazilian had said les Bleus should not have qualified for the competition because Thierry Henry "cheated" with his handball against Ireland.

That's Domenech in a nutshell: often resentful and bitter, he never forgets anything. He reads everything written about him; he also watches and listens to everything said about him. He's highly intelligent, a great talker, charming when he wants to be and loves an argument. He's also the most divisive coach in French football's history after his tenure as France head coach between 2004 and 2010.

That six-year saga with the French national team is unrivaled when it comes to Domenech's career in the sport. He started his tenure so badly, despite having players like Thierry Henry, Nicolas Anelka, Patrick Vieira and David Trezeguet in his squad, that France were at risk of missing the 2006 World Cup. It was a time when Domenech would, for example, explain that he couldn't play two defenders who had Leo star signs in the same team. It wouldn't be the first or the last time that Domenech, a believer

in astrology, used it to pick his teams.

To save the nation from embarrassment, Zinedine Zidane, Claude Makelele and Lilian Thuram came out of international retirement and took the team to Germany 2006. Once there, Zidane took charge of the squad and even stopped talking to Domenech, but les Bleus famously lost the final against Italy on penalties and Zidane was sent off for head-butting Marco Materazzi. Domenech never accepted that people didn't give him credit for the team reaching the final.

In the end, the post-Zidane era would prove to be even tougher for Domenech and France. After a pathetic elimination in the group stage of Euro 2008, in which Domenech never managed to deal with the tensions between his squad's younger stars (Samir Nasri, Karim Benzema) and older players (Thuram, Willy Sagnol, Makelele), he thought it was a good idea in the last game's post-match interview live on French TV to ask his girlfriend to marry him instead of taking any responsibility for the fiasco or offering any explanation for it. (Later, he claimed "it was an error in communication. I felt a moment of humanity when I should have stayed cold and professional.")

The 2010 World Cup cycle was the obvious nadir. There was the game against Ireland in which Henry's handball put France into the tournament, the fall-out with Henry and Anelka and the players' strike at the tournament, all of which swirled around Les Bleus' group-stage

exit, with one draw against Uruguay and defeats to Mexico and South Africa.

Domenech's contract with the French national team expired after that tournament and since then, he has focused on theatre and acting, serving as an occasional pundit on his wife's TV show and being the head of the managers' union. Though he was never far from controversy. He complained when Nantes chose to appoint Claudio Ranieri back in the summer of 2017, delaying his appointment given that he felt the Italian was too old to coach in Ligue 1. Indeed, Ranieri was 65 at the time when the age limit for coaching was 65 in France. The former Leicester boss got a derogation and everyone was fine with it, apart from Domenech.

The whole argument prompted Ranieri to respond in a press conference: "Domenech? If he wants to talk to me about theatre, then maybe I would listen. But if he wants to talk to me about football, then I will never ever listen to him." The video clip went viral on social media once it was reposted a few days ago before Domenech's appointment; oh, and Domenech turns 69 at the end of January.

To say that his return to club management is a surprise is a massive understatement. No-one saw this one coming and no-one wanted to believe it. Yet Waldemar Kita, the controversial Nantes owner, made it happen.

Why Domenech? It has little to do with his managerial abilities given his extended absence from the job. The

more likely answer is connected to his personality, and Kita loves characters. It's also a big publicity coup for the club. Kita, who made his fortune in cosmetic surgery, knows too well that there is no such thing as bad publicity even as Nantes' die-hard fans openly root for him to sell the club. (Fan protests over Kita's ownership earlier in December even required riot police and tear gas to disperse supporters.) If you're talking about his club and about him, he is happy.

Domenech also knew that his appointment would trigger a lot of anger, but he loves the attention as well as the challenge. His remarks about the new job were diplomatic and spoke to his love of a difficult situation: "I'm looking forward to working with the staff and doing everything possible to ensure that the club regain its rightful status." He loves when there is adversity. (In that respect, he and Kita are actually very similar.)

Will they be a match made in heaven? Only time will tell. Nantes are currently in 16th place in Ligue 1, three points ahead of the relegation zone. They have not won in eight games (four draws and four losses) and there's so much work to be done to steady the ship, let alone trying to make this season a positive one. His first training session on Wednesday was wrecked by fans blaring "Welcome to the circus!" via a loud-speaker as the players went through their routines, an ominous sign of things to come.

Gwiji by David Chikoko



SPORT

Analysis: World football's uncertainties as pandemic rages

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT, PAGE 19

Depleted bowling line up an opportunity for new names, says Karunaratne

COLOMBO

NO-one wants to say it outright but the second Test between South Africa and Sri Lanka is shaping up to be a mismatch even before the first ball is bowled.

The spate of injuries to the Sri Lankan squad could see them go into the match without at least four players from the first Test, including senior batsman Dinesh Chandimal, and sans their most experienced bowler Suranga Lakmal, who has not recovered sufficiently from a hamstring injury to play any part in this series.

After South Africa's commanding win at SuperSport Park, it's difficult to see how Sri Lanka will avoid a series defeat. But sport is full of surprises so you may read this a few days after the match ends and laugh at the bullishness of the writer (who always enjoys being proved wrong), but for now, let's work with what we know.

South Africa, the same South Africa who had only won one of their last nine Test before this series began, and only one of their last four series, are brimming with confidence after their innings-and-45-run win and Sri Lanka are going to battle to come up with a competitive combination.

South Africa are also firing warning shots about how they hope to assert themselves more and not allow their wounded visitors space to get back on their feet.

"We've obviously got to try and throw the first punch, which we didn't do in the first Test. It's almost like we waited for them to make a play and put ourselves under a lot of pressure with them scoring almost 400 runs," Dean Elgar said. "We know if we strike first with the ball we will put them under a lot of pressure especially on a wicket at the Wanderers that generally assists seam bowling."

Ah, the Wanderers. It won't have its usual hostile crowd but the hosts expect the surface to make up for that and have packed their squad with extra quicks in anticipation of the green mamba. But they have also suffered their setbacks and can't choose three of them.

Miguel Pretorius and Glenton Sturman have been released from the squad with a shoulder and quad injury respectively while Kagiso Rabada will not be available for selection as he continues to be monitored after recovering from a groin injury.

South Africa are still spoilt for choice, especially when compared to

Sri Lanka, and have left-armer Beuran Hendricks and allrounder Dwaine Pretorius in reserve but all being well with Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Lutho Sipamla and Wiaan Mulder, the attack could be unchanged. And then there's also the possibility that South Africa will have to bat first, which will come with the challenge of navigating the same strip that they hope will confound Sri Lanka.

It is worth remembering that in the year before the Boxing Day Test, South Africa did not post a score over 300 in an innings in any format and their batsmen were low on confidence. Elgar, for one, has not forgotten.

"We also have to start well with the bat," Elgar said.

"Being able to score 600 was a very good effort but we're also aware that we faced a bowling attack that was hit with quite a few injuries. We know we've got to start again. We are playing on a different pitch. We know Wanderers is a place where if you apply yourself as a batter you can score nicely."

Almost all of South Africa's line-up showed the ability to dig in at SuperSport Park but it was the way the two senior batsmen - Elgar and Faf du Plessis, who scored 95 and 199 respectively - played that Elgar was most hearted by.

"A lot of guys had good starts. A guy like Aiden (Markram) who has had time away from the Proteas with injuries - it's nice to see him come and show his form that he had in domestic cricket. That was a confidence booster," he said.

"But it was very important for myself and Faf to put our hands up and lead from the front. We haven't had a lot of leaders in the last year. It was important for us to put in big performances. And it was also awesome to see a guy like Keshav Maharaj coming out and scoring runs."

For all their self-assurance, South Africa are trying to keep perspective and know that one Test (or even one series) win does not take away from the work they have to do. Without Rabada, their attack "is very inexperienced", with the four from Boxing Day sharing only 16 Test caps between them.

"They are quite young. The language we have been speaking around them is trying to keep it as simple and basic as possible," Elgar said.

Still, Elgar added that the pack showed off "some of the best bowling I have seen in the nets" at their training session on New Year's Day and so, "there is a lot of confidence going in". AGENCIES

DCC clobbers Unisoft Rising Stars in 2021 DC Gymkhana Cup tourney

By Guardian Reporter

DAR Cricket Club (DCC) recorded a comprehensive 46-run victory over Unisoft Rising Stars in this season's Dar es Salaam Cricket (DC) Gymkhana Cup competition's clash, which took place in Dar es Salaam on Sunday.

The event, hosted by the regional cricket body, DC, is part of its effort to raise cricket standard in the country.

Sajad Ratansi and Faizan Osman put solid performance with the bat as the DCC registered 126 runs for the loss of five wickets in 20 overs once they secured a chance to start batting in the match, which took place at Dar es Salaam Gymkhana Club's oval.

They were first forced to contend with an early dismissal of an experienced skipper, Adil Kassam, who could manage nine runs in his brief spell.

Osman, who opened the innings with Kassam, made up for his fellow opener's failure to live up to expectations, scoring 29 runs, comprising a six.

Assad Aziz ended with 16 runs which included two fours and Ratansi then stepped up to significantly improve his club's total, nailing 28 runs which consisted of two fours.

A brief spell Umar Fateh who ended with six runs, Hozefa Hussein and Ally Hafidh closed DCC's innings out with bat in hand, posting 12 runs not out and five runs not out respectively.

Unisoft Rising Stars' skipper Mandeep Singh and Gaurav Mehta had im-



Dar Cricket Club (DCC)'s vice-captain, Dharmin Parmar, puts his bowling skills to show when the side locked horns with Gymkhana Club in the previous season's Dar es Salaam Cricket (DC) Caravans T20 Cup tournament in the city. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DCC

pressive bowling figures during their team's bowling spell, posting two wickets apiece.

In response, Unisoft Rising Stars lost steam in the chase, given they were skittled for 80 runs in 19.1 overs.

They got off to a shaky start, experiencing three quick dismissals of their key performers, openers Sachin Patil and Anson Mathew, and Amritbir Singh who was slotted in at number three.

None of the trio had

managed to notch double digit figure, given Patil and Singh were dismissed for duck, Mathew ended with one run.

There was yet more early dismissal, given Vinod Kumar Kannara could only notch five runs and was dismissed by DCC's Hiren Sharma.

Skipper Singh, to some extent, brought his team's skid to a halt, posting 22 runs, which, in the end, had him turn out to be the team's batsman with most runs in their innings.

Dhaval Patel and Rahul Raj sought to keep Unisoft Rising Stars within reach of successful chase, notching 12 runs not out and 12 runs respectively.

They could nevertheless not get their club out of trouble, as their fellow batsmen failed to live up to expectations.

The DCC's Hiren Sharma and Abdulwahid Mohamed mercilessly ripped Unisoft Rising Stars' batting unit apart, and in the end, frustrated the chase.

Mohamed was, in the

end, the bowler with most wickets in the DCC, posting three and giving away 16 runs in four overs.

Sharma took two wickets and gave away 16 runs in four overs. He conceded four wides in his spell, which saw him end with an economy rate of 4.00.

Two more ties were set to take place the same day, Aga Khan SC was set to lock horns with Strikers in one of the matches, the other pitted Alaf Aces against K&P Constructions side.

TFF releases fixtures for Taifa Stars' international friendlies

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

TANZANIA'S senior national soccer team, Taifa Stars, are expected to begin their 2021 duties with two international friendly matches against the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) national team, bringing together two neighbouring countries, according to the fixtures released on Friday by Tanzania Football Federation (TFF).

According to TFF, Taifa Stars will play two matches against DRC on January 10-13, with both clashes serving as build-up encounters for the 2021 Africa Nations Championship (CHAN) finals, which will take place in Cameroon.

Five days after the friendly games, Taifa Stars will begin

a campaign for making their presence felt in the continental showpiece.

Taifa Stars have been put in Group D of the showpiece with Guinea, Namibia and Zambia.

Taifa Stars will play Zambia in their opening tie on January 19, the Tanzanian team will later lock horns with Namibia on January 23 and complete the Group D matches with a date against Guinea on January 27.

The senior national team is under Burundian tactician, Etienne Ndayiragije, who announced a provisional squad made up of 30 players at the end of last year to prepare for the showpiece.

Tanzania knocked Kenya's Harambee Stars out of the first round of the CHAN qualifiers with 4-1 victory over the latter on penalties after goalless draw in both



Senior national soccer team 'Taifa Stars' players participate in training in Dar es Salaam recently to shape up for 2021 Africa Nations Championship (CHAN) finals. PHOTO: CORRESPONDENT JUMANNE JUMA

Dar es Salaam and Nairobi to seal a place in the second round.

In the second round, Tanzania took on Sudan, who won 1-0 in Dar es Salaam but later lost 2-1 to the former at home.

Tanzania advanced to the CHAN finals on the away goal advantage after the aggregate score had ended 2-2.

In Taifa Stars' last friendly match, which had the squad locking horns with Burundi national team, the former lost the game 1-0. Midfielder, Said Ntibanzokiza, scored for Burundi on the 86th minute of the game, which took place in Dar es Salaam on October 11 last year.

In preparation for the forthcoming international friendlies and CHAN finals, Taifa Stars' head coach Ndayiragije announced a provisional squad consisting of 30 players that will later be trimmed to form a final squad, which will take part in the CHAN competition.

The squad is only made up of players who play in the Mainland Premier League. Five of them are from youth teams.

The youthful players are Abdulrazack Hamza of Mbeya City FC (U-20), Khelfine Salum of Azam FC (U-20), Samwel Jackson of Ifhefu FC (U-20), Omari Omari (national U-17 team) and Paschal Gaudence of Azam FC (U-20).

Meanwhile, Rwanda Football Federation (FERWAF) has requested four Tanzanian referees to officiate a special tournament that will be held in Rwanda.

The referees with the International Football Association (FIFA) badges are Elly Sasi and Mfaume Nassoro, others include the assistant referees, Frank Komba and Soud Lila.

The competition will take place from January 7-11 as part of Rwanda national side's preparations for CHAN finals and will involve Namibia, Congo Brazzaville and the hosts, Rwanda.

Flexibles by David Chikoko

