



Makete to address child stunting

Page 3



AfDB champions home-grown solutions

Page 5



CDTI Rector emerges CRDB overall winner

Page 6

Refrain from fights during polls, political parties told

Every human being has been given with reason so everyone who needs to show leadership has to follow democratic guidelines already put in place

By Guardian Correspondent, Mbeya

RELIGIOUS leaders have called upon political parties in the country to refrain from internal wrangles at this time when the country prepares for the civic polls next year and the 2025 general elections.

Political parties should instead promote peace and unity, thus creating a better environment to elect leaders in a democratic way that doesn't affect the country's peace.

Bishop Dr Hudson Mwaijunga, in a Christmas homily yesterday at the Tanzania Assemblies of God (TAG) church here, said that for Tanzanians to get the best leaders, there should be calm in activities of political parties.

The country is heading towards local government elections next year so political parties must remain peaceful and create a better environment for Tanzanians to elect leaders

TURN TO PAGE 2



Children enjoy Christmas Day riding a horse in an outing with their parents along Coco Beach, Oysterbay in Dar es Salaam. Photo: Correspondent Miraji Msala

By Guardian Reporter

TMA five day forecast cautious for 15 regions

THE Tanzania Meteorological Authority (TMA) has predicted heavy rains in upwards of 15 regions beginning yesterday, with potential flooding and disruptions.

A TMA statement yesterday warned residents to take precautions in Dodoma, Singida, Mbeya, Songwe, Njombe, Iringa regions and southern parts of Morogoro Region as these

areas are likely to experience heavy rainfall, citing other areas as, Geita, Katavi, Kigoma, Tabora, Mwanza, Rukwa, and Shinyanga.

The drenching conditions were slated to commence yesterday and persist for three

TURN TO PAGE 2



SSP Deus Sokoni, legal officer with the traffic police, inspects registration numbers of buses the police barred from plying their normal routes citing visible defects, at the main Mbeya city bus terminal. On the right is the regional traffic police, SSP Hussein Gawile. Photo: Correspondent Nebart Msokwa

'Kigongo-Busisi Bridge construction not stalled'

Water is being supplied to those areas and work is on-going for supplying water to upwards of 33 villages in Shilalo and Mbalika wards in Misungwi District

By Guardian Correspondent, Mwanza

CONSTRUCTION of the Kigongo-Busisi Bridge, earlier slated to be completed in February 2024, will be completed in the coming year, top administrators affirm.

Paul Chacha, the district commissioner for Misungwi in Mwanza Region, its construction is progressing well and the contractor's speed is satisfying. He was optimistic that its construction will be completed within schedule, which is 36 months and not 48 months as suggested in some opposition remarks in the lakeside city lately.

Rejecting speculations that the project was now stalled, the DC said the contract for the project can be accessed online, "but people do not want to trouble themselves looking at it." Reports show that the government signed the contract with the contractor mid-2019 and before resource mobilisation was conducted, COVID-19 set in, disrupting supply chains especially for the Chinese contracting firms.

He said that until the end of March 2021, the contractor had received a quarter of the finances at 87bn/-, which has since risen to 400bn/- and the project is 81 percent complete.

Shabani Itutu, an Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC) vice chairman, recently said that Misungwi District is one among areas with large government projects, including the JPM Bridge, intimating that its implementation was now stalled, asserting that by the four year projection since 2019 implementation was to be completed a year ago.

He said that the contract for the project was for 36 months but until late March 2021, the project was still in the resource mobilization stage, similarly mentioning that the district has a massive water project at Kashwashwa that supplies water to Shinyanga and Tabora regions while the area lacks clean and safe water supply.

The DC said the water project was developed for Kahama and Shinyanga regions as well as pumping water to Singida, Dodoma and Tabora regions.

Water is being supplied to those areas and work is on-going for supplying water to upwards of 33 villages in Shilalo and Mbalika wards in Misungwi District, he added.

SPORTS

Page 20



Kilimanjaro Stars set to face Zanzibar Heroes in friendly

Page 19



Sir Jim Ratcliffe will have no honeymoon as he faces urgent problems at Manchester United



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Refrain from fights during polls, political parties told

FROM PAGE 1

who will lead the country accordingly, he stated.

What Tanzanians do not like to see during elections is misunderstandings among politicians, especially within the same party, mostly disagreeing over choice of candidates and thus leadership positions.

Every human being has been given with reason so everyone who needs to show leadership has to follow democratic guidelines already put in place, he said, raising a finger at corruption in elections, underlining that Tanzanians detest corruption and other ills conflicting with the country's laws and culture.

The government needs to ensure that it prevents disruptive incidents with a democratic voting environment so that the polls are held in a fair, peaceful and peaceful manner, he said at a service attended by religious leaders from Malawi next door, as part of strengthening good neighbourliness.

Bishop Daniel Masamba, Assemblies of God Church prelate in Lilongwe city in Malawi, said the good relationship between Tanzania and Malawi helps strengthen the economy and spiritual services between citizens of the two countries.

In his Christmas service homily he

said the two countries have kindred peoples on the border and often share spiritual things, with observers noting that a number of adherents from Mozambique, DRC and Zambia attended the Kawe Christmas service with 'Arise and Shine' spiritual assembly.

The bishop affirmed that there are many Tanzanians who come to Malawi to do business and Malawians crossing the border to do business, affirming that it is a good thing making people feel like they belong to one family. Spiritual cooperation between our churches is more easily fostered, he said.

Rev. Dr. Eliona Kimaro of the Kijitonyama parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) in his Christmas homily warned leaders from promoting themselves and instead look at the needs of the next generation.

There is a need for leaders to prepare a better foundation for the next generation instead of focusing on personal interests, he stated, citing the shining example of the late state founders like Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and Sheikh Abeid Amani Karume.

They were always thinking about the people and of their personal welfare, so leaders should stop thinking about the next election. Their focus should be on the future of the next generation, he added.

Sudan's former prime minister seeks urgent talks to end war

KHARTOUM

FORMER Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, head of the Coordination of Civilian Democratic Forces (Taqaaddum) has called for an immediate meeting with the Commander-in-Chief of the Sudanese Army and the Commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to discuss halting the ongoing conflict.

In a message posted on social media, Hamdok stated, "On behalf of Taqaaddum, I have sent two formal letters to Lt Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Commander of the Armed Forces, and Lt Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, RSF Commander requesting an urgent meeting to explore avenues for ending the war that has claimed countless lives, displaced communities, and ravaged infrastructure, threatening the very survival of Sudan."

The proposed meeting aims to "examine ways to cease hostilities through a negotiated political settlement in line with Taqaaddum's roadmap, which "seeks to end the war that has caused immense suffering, displacement, looting, and theft, torn the nation apart, and triggered a devastating humanitarian crisis. Prolonging this conflict jeopardizes Sudan's very existence," reads a separate statement issued by Taqaaddum.

The expansion of the conflict into the Jazira region in central Sudan has exacerbated the plight of Sudanese civilians, who face displacement, plunder, and theft.

This has prompted condemnation from several Forces for Freedom and Change to condemn the unjustified attack on Al-Jazirah State.

On December 24, the Sudanese Congress Party and the Unionist Alliance have joined calls condemning attacks and looting of civilians' houses and demanded to protect them.

On November 29, Taqaaddum adopted a roadmap outlining a path to ending the war and establishing democratic civilian rule through a negotiated political settlement, signed by the army, the RSF, and all civilian forces, except the Islamist National Congress Party and affiliated groups.

On October 26, a coalition of political forces and civil society groups appointed former Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok as the chairperson of the Taqaaddum committee to oversee preparations for the coalition's founding conference.

Since his appointment, Hamdok has actively engaged in meetings with regional stakeholders to garner support for ending the war.

AGENCIES

DRC presidential election: Partial results give Tshisekedi a clear lead

KINSHASA

THE Democratic Republic of Congo's Electoral Commission (Céni) continued to release partial results from the December 20-21 presidential election, with incumbent leader Félix Tshisekedi leading by a wide margin of over 80 per cent of the vote.

The results announced so far relate to 1,876,827 voters, out of a total of nearly 44 million registered in the vast country of around 100 million inhabitants.

At this stage of the vote count, according to the Céni, Félix Tshisekedi, who has been in power since the beginning of 2019 and is running for a second five-year term, has achieved a score of 81.4 per cent.

He was followed by businessman and former governor of Katanga (southeast) Moïse Katumbi (15.18 per cent) and the other opponent Martin Fayulu (1.2 per cent).

Other candidates in the running, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege, failed to reach 1 per cent.

The Céni has not established the turnout rate, but has decided to gradually release the results of the presidential elections from Friday. These were held at the same time as the legislative, provincial and local elections, for which the results will be published at

a later date.

The quadruple ballot had been scheduled for one day, the 20th, but was extended due to a number of logistical problems, officially by one day but extending into Christmas in some remote areas.

Opposition candidates have been denouncing the "chaos" and "irregularities" that marred the vote since the very first day.

Some are planning a demonstration for next Wednesday, while others are calling for the elections to be cancelled outright. The Catholic Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, described the elections as a "gigantic mess" during his Christmas mass on Sunday evening.

Like some fifteen embassies before him, the prelate called for "prudence and restraint" in a country with a troubled political history, often marked by violence, whose subsoil is immensely rich in minerals but whose population is predominantly poor.

In addition to the suspicion of opponents since the start of the electoral process, the campaign has been poisoned by the security situation in the east of the DRC, which has seen a peak in tension over the past two years with the resurgence of the M23 rebellion, supported by Rwanda.

AGENCIES



Health Minister Umy Mwalimu speaks with Bombo Referral Hospital Chief Medical Officer Dr Naima Yusuf (2nd L) shortly after distributing gifts for Christmas to mothers who given births at the maternity ward over the weekend. Left is Doris Molel foundation director and Bombo hospital matron Beatrice Rimoy. Photo: Correspondent Oscar Assenga

TMA five day forecast cautious for 15 regions

FROM PAGE 1

days, with the five-day forecast emphatic about the need to take the necessary precautions, promising weather updates to keep the public informed.

"We encourage everyone to stay vigilant and follow any advisories issued by local authorities," it said, raising public worries over likelihood of heavy rainfall, leading to flash floods, land-

slides as well as road damage in those areas.

One aspect of caution in the TMA statement was the need to secure loose objects around households and properties, as well as avoiding to cross flooded rivers or streams.

In August, TMA announced that most parts of the country were set to receive above normal rains during the end of

year season, similarly influenced by oceanic El Nino conditions.

Relatively normal rains were anticipated over Mara, northern parts of Simiyu Region, along with most of Arusha, Manyara and Kilimanjaro regions.

Three weeks ago, more than 80 people died and thousands were displaced as a massive mudslide swept through Katesh Township in Hanang District,

Manyara Region following overnight heavy rains.

The torrential rain caused a slice of Mount Hanang to collapse, with the raging mud covering homes and anything that stood in its way, an incident that prompted President Samia Suluhu Hassan to cut short a visit to the COP28 conference to visit the befallen community.



Mohamed Jabir an employee in the Community Development, Gender and Children ministry in Zanzibar provides education on effects of of sexual abuse on the youth at the Anglican Church in Unguja over the weekend. Photo: Guardian Correspondent

Singida set to launch regional education fund to support high performing students

By Guardian Correspondent, Singida

SINGIDA Region is set to launch Regional Education Fund to financially support high performing students who failed to continue with their studies due to their parents' inability to pay for their education.

The initiative was announced by Singida Regional Commissioner, Peter Serukamba, during a recent Regional Consultative Committee (RCC) meeting after discovering that some students who passed their exams failed to proceed to secondary education because of their parents' inability to finance their education.

"If we want to see our children excel and have outstanding performance, we must have a Regional Education Fund that will support students who exhibit good performance at school whose parents cannot afford to pay for their education," he said.

Serukamba said a procedure to identify such students whose parents are financially challenged will commence in their residential areas through village leaders and heads of schools.

The Regional Commissioner said among the things that will pioneer a student's success include holding frequent meetings with district commissioners, education officers, councillors,

and ward executives to follow-up on students who skip classes and ensure food is available in schools.

Dr Fatuma Mganga, Singida Regional Administrative Secretary, expressed optimism on the initiative to start a regional education fund adding it can be implemented at 100 per cent capacity while citing an example from Bahi district in Dodoma region which saw the plan succeed.

"The same initiative which is already being implemented in Bahi district through livestock permits which generated close to 60- percent in revenue in auctions where 2000/- was charged per cow. Later on, the initiative was

approved by the councillors and the charges rose to 4000/- from the initial 2000/-," she said.

Dr Mganga also highlighted after collecting the revenue generated, the chairperson of Bahi District Council visited villages and wards to offer the funds to poor families, and the only requirement was the child to exhibit good performance in school for his/her needs like uniforms to be met.

She stated further that the region can scout for a potential source of revenue and use Bahi district's example where the money collected can help meet the needs of children in the respective district.

By Guardian Reporter, Dodoma

CROSAT calls on presence of safer quality seeds system

MEMBERS of the Crop Science Association of Tanzania (CROSAT) have suggested for the presence of a quality seeds system and safer usage of pesticides to boost production in the agricultural sector

They gave the statement during a second annual meeting where the key agenda was on proper use of seeds and pesticides.

Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Sokoine University (SUA), Prof Maulid Mwatawala said when researchers and members of CROSAT use their expertise and knowledge they will be able to help the country's agricultural sector.

"I am engaged in plant health, where we do research that will help farmers address problematic plants, many

farmers use wrong pesticides or use them excessively contrary to the indicated amount; this affects the environment, the health of consumers and the crops," he said.

He said there are alternative methods including the use of friendly insecticides and alternative farming methods.

He also said researchers have done a great job to ensure the availability of international markets that depend on exported farm produce that is not impacted by insects

"Recently, Tanzania gained an agreement to sell its Avocados in India and other countries. Previously, we were banned from exporting to these coun-

tries for more than 10 years, because our products had pests. Consumers in those countries feared we could take the pests to their countries," he said

"Avocados were highly impacted by hazardous flies but the Agriculture Ministry recently issued guidelines on how we can develop production of avocados and how we can deal with pests and diseases so that we can produce quality avocados," he added.

Prof Joseph Ndunguru, Director of Tanzania Plant Health Pesticide Authority (TPHPA) said the objective of the meeting was to exchange ideas, expertise and experience to add value to the various crops

He said as a member and Director of

the authority, one among their key responsibilities is to supervise the use of pesticides and health of plants.

He said the existence of the association is vital to use the platform to obtain information on developments taking place in the agricultural sector.

"The use of pesticides in agriculture is important but it is crucial to ensure that farmers use them properly to get positive results," he said.

Prof Kallunde Sibuga, Chairman of the meeting who is the Senior Lec-

turer of the Crop Science and Horticulture at Sokoine University in Morogoro, emphasized on the importance of quality seeds and proper use of pesticides.

He said CROSAT aims to address paramount issues that affect crop production and ensure food security.

According to CROSAT Secretary General, Patrick Ngwediagi, there is a need to have a strong seed system that will enable the availability and accessibility of quality seeds

He added that the system will also oversee the proper and safer utilization of pesticides to protect human health and the environment.

"Considering the existence of the reformed constitution, CROSAT verifies its role to defend the policy and plans that support these objectives," he pointed out.

The two-day meeting provided an opportunity for discussions and engagement in knowledge sharing, bringing together experts, policy makers, researchers and other stakeholders who have invested in crop science and development in agriculture.



Kilimanjaro National Park senior officers led by the Chief Conservation Officer of the Park Gladys Ngu'umbi (2nd L) congratulate NBC workers and Kilimanjaro region tourism stakeholders including journalists shortly after arrived from the historical event of climbing Mt Kilimanjaro aimed to install POS machine at the Kilimanjaro peak to attract the tourists.

Makete DC urges more efforts in campaign to addressing stunting

By Guardian Correspondent, Makete

MAKETE District Commissioner Juma Sweda has called for collaborative efforts in the campaign to address stunting among children in the district.

He made the call during a meeting of the Makete Development Association (MDA) which was held in the district adding that Njombe was among the regions with high rates of stunting.

"The issue of good nutrition is a challenge; people have to know the cause of stunting, it starts from a child of zero years, that's when the problem becomes very huge, you find that someone doesn't understand even if the lessons can be given for months many of them do not know that it is stunting," he said.

He said that if society does not fight stunting from the age of 0 to five years, there is risk of having a stunted generation because even a woman will have a greater chance of giving birth to a stunted child.

Sweda said the time has come for the people of Makete who are outside to return and make reforms in investment in agriculture and invest in sectors such tourism which is among the potential areas of investment.

Previously, the Chairman of the Makete Development Association (MDA) Clement Sanga said that the association was ready to support the district's efforts to eradicate stunting by providing daily cows to schools.

"This is a voluntary association but it is for the development of our dis-

trict, especially the Makete community natives who are outside but who are here," said Sanga.

MDA Secretary General Award Mpandila said that in order to make Makete transformative, they are already encouraging the building of better houses to promote the beauty of the region as well as bringing about an economic revolution.

District Executive Director for Makete district Council, William Makufwe said they intend to make the district the center of wheat production in the country.

"1,000 tons will be cultivated on 14,000 hectares and save 551bn/- used to import the crop, we are also supportive of the soil testing programme to start farming," said Makufwe.

Stakeholders urged to supporting people with special needs through donations of various food supplies

By Guardian Correspondent, Singida

IN celebrating Christmas and New Year holidays, the public has been called upon to support people with special needs through donations of various items including food.

Chairman of the Union of natives of Ikungi District (IDEA) in Singida Region who reside outside the region Hamisi Mpinda made the call when the association handed over aid of various items to students with special needs studying at Ikungi Primary School.

However, Mpinda mentioned some of the items which were handed over to the school that has students with special needs, such as powdered soap, notebooks, soapy water and walking sticks for people with low vision.

Acting Executive Director for Ikungi District Council, Dr Anthony Mwangolombe, hailed the association for the gesture saying more people should turn out to do the same.

"We need more of this at the school because most of the students are in dire need of items to support them personally," stressed the acting director.

IDEA secretary in Ikungi District, Getruda Zakaria mentioned some of the goals of the union as participating in the movement to bring economic and social development such as education, health, water and starting various projects in the district.

However, the secretary mentioned some of the challenges they have as not having the opportunity to collaborate fully with the institutions in the district because most of its members reside outside the district.

Receiving the items, the District Administrative Secretary, Rashidi Mohamedi Rashidi, advised the union to look at the possibility of expanding its capacity to ensure that it reaches all the districts of Singida Region.

Ikungi Mixed primary school has a total of 833 students, among them, students with special needs, including those with skin disabilities, physical disabilities, the blind and the visually impaired.

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APPLICATION FOR LICENCE UNDER THE CONVERGED LICENSING FRAMEWORK

NOTICE is hereby given to the public that the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority has received application for Licence under the Converged Licensing Framework from the following applicant:-

S/N	NAME OF APPLICANT	TYPE OF LICENCE	SHAREHOLDERS /NATIONALITY	SHARE S%
1.	Sprint Marketing and Technology Limited	National Application Services Without Network Facilities and Network Services Licence	1. Lucas Zawadi Kiangi- Tanzanian 2. Vaibhav Srivastava- Indian	51 49

Pursuant to Section 8 Of Electronic and Postal Communications Act, Cap 306 of the Laws of Tanzania, written comments are hereby invited from any interested person in respect of the grant of licence to the applicant to reach the Authority, within 14 days of publication of this notice. Such comments will be taken into consideration when the Authority considers the application.

Comments should be addressed to:

Director General
Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority
P. O Bo 474 14414 DARES SALAAM
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Holidays
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Saint Peter's Oysterbay parish priest Alister Makubi, leads baptism in Dar es Salaam yesterday. All Photos: Correspondent Miraji Msala



St Peter's Oysterbay church worshippers follow service during the baptism in Dar es Salaam yesterday.



Saint Peter's Oysterbay parish assistant priest Chinnadurai Selvaraj (L) administer baptism to Evelyne Joseph in Dar es Salaam yesterday.



Sellers of balloons wait for parents accompanied by their children to buy the festival artifacts at Mlimani City area on Christmas Day in Dare s Salaam



Time to enjoy by horse riding hired along Coco Beach, Oysterbay in Dar es Salaam with a ride priced at 3000/-



Dar es Salaam residents celebrate Christmas by swimming at Coco Beach on Monday.



Parents and guardians enjoy a sea breeze at Coco Beach, Oysterbay in Dar es Salaam on Monday.



Dar es Salaam residents enjoy swimming at Coco Beach during the Christmas Day.



Singida Region Administrative Secretary Dr Fatuma Mganga (2nd L) presents salon equipment to Emmy Gervas one of the 902 entrepreneurs. The gadgets were issued by Brac Maendeleo Tanzania (BMT) in Manyoni and Singida Districts. Other items donated by BMT included sewing machines. Left is Singida Council community development officer Hana Churi and BMT regional manager Isihaka Mirambo. Photo: Correspondent Thobias Mwanakatwe

Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema pardons 588 prisoners

LUSAKA

Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema has pardoned 588 inmates in various correctional facilities across the country.

The freed prisoners include 11 elderly and one mother with a baby,

according to the Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security Jack Mwiimb.

Mwimb told journalists in the capital Lusaka that the life sentence of an inmate was commuted to 35 years while two inmates on death row have their sentences commuted to life.

The pardoning of the inmates by President Hichilema was in line with Article 97 of the country's Constitution which confers authority on the president to pardon or substitute punishments imposed on convicted persons.

The minister said the pardoned

inmates had demonstrated good conduct after undergoing rehabilitation processes that will enable them integrate well into the society.

The president's decision has been met with praise, particularly from human rights organizations.



Endiamtu ward executive officer in Mirerani Simanjiro District, Manyara Region Charles Msangya discusses education strategies to parents and guardians of primary and secondary schools the importance of donating food to the students. Photo: Correspondent Gift Thadey

At least 160 dead and 300 wounded after attacks by armed gangs in Nigeria

NIGERIA

ARMED groups have killed at least 160 people in central Nigeria in a series of attacks on villages, local government officials said.

The toll marked a sharp rise from the initial figure reported by the army on Sunday evening of just 16 dead in a region plagued for several years by religious and ethnic tensions.

"As many as 113 persons have been confirmed killed as Saturday hostilities persisted to early hours of Monday," Monday Kassah, head of the local government in Bokkos, Plateau State told the media.

Armed groups, locally called "bandits", launched "well-coordinated" attacks in "not fewer than 20 different communities" and torched houses, Kassah said.

"We found more than 300 wounded people" who were transferred to hospitals in Bokkos, Jos and Barkin

Ladi, he said.

A provisional toll by the local Red Cross reported 104 deaths in 18 villages in the Bokkos region.

At least 50 people were also reported dead in several villages in the Barkin Ladi area, according to Dickson Chollom, a member of the state parliament.

He condemned the attacks and called on the security forces to act swiftly.

"We will not succumb to the tactics of these merchants of death. We are united in our pursuit of justice and lasting peace," Chollom said.

The attacks started in the Bokkos area and spilled into neighbouring Barkin Ladi where 30 people were found dead, according to local chairman Danjuma Dakil.

On Sunday, Plateau State governor Caleb Mutfwang condemned the violence, calling it "barbaric, brutal and unjustified".

"Proactive measures will be taken by the government to curb ongoing attacks against innocent civilians," said Gyang Bere, the governor's spokesperson.

Gunfire could still be heard on late Monday afternoon, according to a source from the region, which is on the dividing line between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mainly Christian south.

Markus Amorudu, a resident of Mushu village, said people were sleeping when shots rang out.

"We were scared because we weren't expecting an attack. People hid, but the assailants captured many of us, some were killed, others wounded," he said.

Amnesty International criticised the government after the attacks, saying in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that "the Nigerian authorities have been failing to end frequent deadly attacks on rural communities of Plateau State".

North-west and central Nigeria have been long terrorised by bandit militias operating from bases deep in forests and raiding villages to loot and kidnap residents for ransom.

Competition for natural resources between nomadic herders and farmers, intensified by rapid population growth and climate pressures, has also exacerbated social tensions and sparked violence.

A jihadist conflict has raged in north-eastern Nigeria since 2009, killing tens of thousands of people and displacing around 2 million, as Boko Haram battles for supremacy with rivals linked to the Islamic State group.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a former Lagos governor elected in February in a highly contested ballot, has promised to attract more investment to Africa's largest economy and most populous country to tackle its persistent security challenges.

AfDB champions home-grown solutions to the Africa's debt challenges - policy director

By Guardian Reporter

Africa.

THE African Development Bank Group is facilitating the establishment of the African Debt Managers Initiative Network (ADMIN), which will bring together experts to find home-grown solutions to the continent's debt challenges.

Eric Ogunleye, acting Director and Division Manager for Policy Management at the African Development Bank's African Development Institute, told debt managers from across Africa that the network would facilitate capacity development for institutions and practitioners on the continent, in particular, reorienting them towards responsible borrowing and transparent debt management.

He was speaking at a meeting in Abuja recently to advance the formation of the network.

"The ADMIN will help identify and raise awareness of common areas for policy dialogue and capacity building for debt management and sustainability in the African Development Bank's regional member countries and facilitate interventions by the Bank and other institutions working on public debt management issues in Africa," Ogunleye said.

Debt vulnerability and distress are rising in Africa, requiring concerted efforts to address and reverse the trend. According to official figures, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa's debt burden had increased rapidly, with debt service payments averaging about 18 percent of total government revenues.

One of the factors driving debt accumulation across Africa over the past decade has been the shift by countries towards costly commercial debt. This shift has been associated with less transparent loan terms compounded by debt collateralisation, domestic arrears accumulation, and increasing contingent liabilities from state-owned enterprises and public-private partnerships.

As part of a continental effort to address the challenges, the African Development Bank has developed strategic instruments to guide debt management in Africa.

These include launching a Public Finance Management Academy for Africa (PFMA), which is deepening partnerships with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other global and regional public finance management institutions in

The Bank also identified weak governance, inefficient and large public investment programmes, and rising defence spending as causes of debt accumulation. In some cases, countries had "hidden debt" obligations that were not on the public books.

Ogunleye said the African Debt Managers Initiative Network will seek partnership and collaboration with development partners engaged in debt sustainability and public financial management. It will mobilise innovative debt financing, design and implement sound debt management administration and reporting systems, and conduct debt sustainability and risk assessments.

Nigeria's Debt Management Office Director General, Patience Oniha, said an African debt managers' network is important because African countries have many debt similarities, adding that it allows practitioners to share common challenges, explore opportunities, learn from each other, and advance public debt and financial management.

"The African Development Bank is taking things several steps further through an institutional structure like the African Debt Managers Initiative Network. The network brings us together and exposes us to more knowledge, skills, and partnerships," Oniha stressed.

According to the African Development Outlook 2022, 23 African countries reached a high risk of debt distress at the end of February 2022 (16 at high risk and seven already in distress).

Of the nine low-income countries (LICs) in debt distress globally, eight were in Africa; at the same time, of the 27 LICs at high risk of debt distress globally, 13 were in Africa; and of the 26 LICs at moderate risk of debt distress globally, 17 were in Africa.

This is despite the international financial community's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), the Common Framework, and the IMF's general allocation of \$650 billion equivalent of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) on 23 August 2021.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is eroding the safety margins, exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine crisis, leading to increased spending amid revenue shortfalls. This trend could completely deplete the remaining fragile fiscal buffers if left unchecked.

New initiative to boost use of data for mental health research in Africa

NAIROBI

that the prize seeks to address.

THE African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in partnership with Wellcome, is set to unveil a new initiative in 2024 that aims to address existing gaps in our understanding of anxiety, depression and psychosis and improve evidence-based decisions making practice in Africa.

The Mental Health Data Prize-Africa is embarking on a transformative journey, harnessing existing data and data-driven insights to ignite innovation and reshape the mental health landscape through research that solves challenges while enhancing the continent's data capabilities.

Under the initiative, multidisciplinary teams will be set up to generate scalable innovations and data driven insights that can contribute to our understanding of anxiety, depression and psychosis in Africa.

"The prize is a clarion call to the entire mental health fraternity across Africa to unite in the fight against anxiety, depression and psychosis, which are the most prevalent disorders in the region and globally. It exists to drive excellence and innovation in harnessing data to solve some of our biggest mental health challenges by bringing together the best minds in mental health research and data analytics from across the continent," said Catherine Kyobutungi, the Executive Director at APHRC.

Dr Kyobutungi noted that significant gaps exist in data on mental health in Africa, limiting the understanding of the scale of the challenge as well as available evidence to inform interventions against anxiety, depression and psychosis, challenges

Ekin Bolukbasi, the Data Prize Manager at Wellcome said: "This ground-breaking prize demonstrates our commitment to help create a world where no one is held back by mental health problems. It aims to advance mental health science by transforming its ability to address existing challenges in continent through prevention, management and treatment. Together, we have the opportunity to improve understanding of the trajectory and resolution of common mental disorders for a better and more resilient future for all".

The Wellcome-funded prize is the first of its kind and is open to innovators, researchers and startups, whose initiatives will be competing for up to 5-10 awards, each valued at £200,000 that come with funding over 12 months.

As part of the initiative, interested individuals can sign up for a free capacity building program over five months. This is meant to help them unlock the full potential of data science, advanced statistical analysis and machine learning algorithms tailored for mental health applications in the continent.

APHRC will assist in forming multidisciplinary teams, match-making individuals, and providing access to identified data sources.

The World Health Organization estimates that 116 million people in Africa were living with a mental condition before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high prevalence of mental health conditions has been driven by challenges of daily living, widespread conflict, public health emergencies and other factors.

Z'bar to make more efforts to strengthen conducive businesses environment, says Deputy Vice President

By Guardian Reporter, Zanzibar

THE government in Zanzibar has pledged to continue putting in place better business infrastructure for small scale entrepreneurs to enable them conduct businesses in a modern and conducive environment.

It is considered that by facilitating good business environment, traders would be able to increase their income, thus contributing to the national economy.

Deputy Vice President of Zanzibar, Hemed Suleiman gave the statement as he laid the foundation stone for Chuiini Kwanyanya market project in Magharibi 'A' District, an event which is part of celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of Zanzibar revolution.

He said the government has built the markets to address the challenges faced by small scale entrepreneurs and ensure the infrastructure benefits Isle residents as well as prohibit unqualified contractors from taking on development projects which may result in government loss.

Hemed stated that for a long time traders have been complaining about the absence of conducive areas for them to conduct their activities which earn them incomes. He said the government will continue to offer them capital and affordable loans for their economic sustainability.

The Deputy Vice President said it is important for leaders to be accountable and act justly by serving the public with valour to support the efforts of the President of Zanzibar, Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi towards bringing development to the people.

Hemed lauded the contractor of the project and the consultant for the considerable progress achieved as he urged them to make sure the project is complete in accordance with the signed agreement.

Minister of State - President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government - Zanzibar, Masoud Ali

Mohammed said the progress reached by the contractors follows directives given by top government leaders.

Masoud said the ministry will ensure the project is implemented at required standards as well as value for money.

Issa Mahfoudh Haji, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry said the Chuiini market construction project will include a marketplace and a commuter bus station to cater for the needs of customers visiting the market.

He added that with completion of the market, residents in Chuiini and neighbouring villages will do away with the trouble of travelling long distances to get services as the 32bn/- market will provide room for 3200 traders to trade in the market and create a total of 5000 employment opportunities.

Shadya Mohd Fauz, Associate Consultant at Zanzibar Building Association (ZBA) said the project is in final stages as it has reached 75 percent completion.



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Pugu resident in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam collects spilled charcoal for domestic use. Photo: Correspondent Jumanne Juma

Rector at CDTI emerges overall winner of CRDB Bank Sim-banking campaign

By Marc Nkwame, Arusha

A Rector at the Community Development Training Institute (CDTI) in Tengeru, Arusha Region, Dr Bakari George has emerged the overall winner of the just concluded CRDB Bank Sim-banking campaign, driving off in a new Toyota Vanguard Sports Utility Vehicle during an event held at the Financial Institution's Usa-River branch in Meru District.

Dr George was presented with the prize car by Stephen Adili, the CRDB

head of consumer banking, who explained that the mobile banking system is proving to be popular among bank customers.

"We encourage people to turn to virtual banking to guarantee safety, convenience and fast modes of transactions," said Adili, adding that the CRDB Bank keeps improving the application on a daily basis.

As it happens, the Principal was the overall winner in the 'Benki ni Sim Banking,' campaign targeting to promote CRDB clients to use the bank's

smartphone applications to conduct cash transactions.

During the campaign which was conducted throughout the year, ending in the final week of December, more than six brand new cars were issued, a number of laptop computers issued to mostly students, over 200 smartphones and cash prizes valued at 300 million/-.

The other five cars were all Toyota Crown Saloon cars that were awarded to winners who happen to have all been based in Dar-es-salaam City.

The main vehicle prize, Toyota Vanguard, got a winner in Arusha in the person of CDTI College Principal, Dr Bakari George. The car is worth more than 40 million/- and came with a full tank and a comprehensive insurance cover for a full year.

"It is easier, cheaper and more convenient to use sim banking for people like us who live far from urban centers," said George, adding that most people still prefer to carry out banking procedures at tellers' counters, though Sim-banking is more convenient.

The CRDB Bank's smart banking application features Intra-Bank Funds Transfer to any bank account within the Bank network; Funds transfer to mobile money; Bills Payments; Airtime purchase and access salary advance.

Uganda sets official date for vanilla harvesting to maintain quality, weed out errant middlemen

KAMPALA

UGANDA through its Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) has officially designated January 5th to April 5th, 2024 as the nationwide harvest date for vanilla to help farmers maintain the crop's quality for better prices and weed out errant middlemen whose dubious activities around harvest time deny the growers their full rightful earnings.

The official declaration date for vanilla is established through essential activities, including assessing vanilla maturity, conducting tests for glycovanillin availability, collecting pollination data, and convening meetings with various stakeholders to determine the finalized date.

According to Rt. Major Fred Bwino Kyakulaga, the State Minister for Agriculture, the government has implemented seasonal harvesting dates for the crop in response to concerns from farmers about vanilla theft and fluctuating prices.

"By standardizing harvest times, we are aiming to ensure consistent quality for international exports to not only improve Uganda's vanilla reputation and fetch higher export prices but also benefit farmers with fairer margins," said Kyakulaga, speaking at the Uganda Media Centre over the weekend.

Uganda has two harvesting seasons in a year for vanilla which include June-July and December-January seasons.

Other than the harvest of immature beans by farmers, the other key challenge the growers face around the harvest period is being swindled by middlemen who offer meagre prices for the crop even when the market prices are better.

"We have heard of some rogue traders who cheat farmers and buy

their crops at low prices even when the global prices are good. And this is why we urge farmers to do harvesting at the appropriate set time so that their produce reaches the market within the legally allowed time," said the state minister.

On their side, the Association of Vanilla Exporters in Uganda is also educating the growers on proper harvesting, quality and pricing of the queen of spices to help them avoid being misguided by bad middlemen.

According to Prossy Tumushabe, farmers should avoid traders who come to them with varying prices from what the ministry has announced.

MAAIF has also embarked on a nationwide registration process of vanilla farmers to capture the vital details of the growers to enable the ministry to respond well to the needs.

"There is already a circular going around in the major vanilla growing districts to tackle the challenges in the sector," said Kyakulaga.

The ministry's main intervention is to create a conducive environment and provide regulatory mechanisms that can support the sector well.

Vanilla has a global production of 12,226 tons of which Madagascar leads by 78 percent, Uganda produces 9 percent, Papua New Guinea 7 percent, Mexico 2 percent and India 1 percent.

Kyakulaga emphasized the importance of vanilla cultivation in Uganda, underscoring that more than 65,000 farmers in 38 districts depend on this crop.

Presently, Uganda's annual vanilla production exceeds 250 metric tons, adding approximately \$18 million to the national revenue.

The global vanilla market is estimated at a staggering \$2 billion, illustrating the potential for Ugandan farmers to thrive in this lucrative sector.



A technician repairs steel boxes for school students at the Veterinary open market in Dar es Salaam yesterday. Photo: Correspondent Jumanne Juma

Zimbabwe bans public rallies as threat of cholera outbreak grows

HARARE

THE government has banned gatherings in parts of Beitbridge after cases of cholera were detected in some parts of the district.

All burials will be supervised in those areas where public activities have also been banned, according to a notice by the Health and Child Care ministry.

"All gatherings are temporarily

banned in affected areas of ward 14, Lot 11," the government said in a notice signed by Beitbridge District Medical officer, Lenos Samhere.

"Other gatherings shall be sanctioned by the Health and Child Care ministry."

He said all funerals should be supervised by the ministry of Health officials while handshakes were discouraged as a public health measure.

Samhere advised food outlets to exercise caution and adhere to proper sanitary measures including the provision of toilets.

Running water and soap is expected to be provided while waste management is encouraged.

A first cholera case was detected on February 12, 2023 in Chegutu, Mashonaland West before spreading across the country.

Beitbridge has emerged as a cholera hotspot.

As of December 18, 2023, 12 287 suspected cases including 1 527 culture confirmed cases had been reported in all the 10 provinces of the country.

Between 2008 and 2009 more than 5000 people succumbed to the disease in Zimbabwe with the bulk of these deaths recorded in Beitbridge alone.



Musoma Rural constituency MP in Mara Region Prof Sospeter Muhongo airs his views at the meeting to discuss strategies to bring about development, which involved various stakeholders including Members of Parliament from the region.

Councillors want the 10 pc council loan increased to benefit more people

By Guardian Correspondent, Moshi

AS the government prepares to restore the 10 per cent loans which were provided by district councils in January 2024, some stakeholders including councillors have advised the government to increase the set budget to 15 per cent of the districts' internal revenues.

Kahe Ward Councillor, in Moshi Rural District, Kilimanjaro Region, Aloyce Mumburi gave the advice over the weekend when speaking at the 12th annual general meeting of the Community Development Organization (TUSONGE).

He said the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Governments should consider reviewing the set budget for the district loans so that many people can benefit.

The law directs each council to allocate 10 per cent from its own revenue sources to issue loans to women, youths and people with disabilities.

In April this year, the government announced the suspension of the local council loans for the remaining duration of financial year 2022/23 that is April to June 2023. The announcement was made by Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa in the National Assembly in Dodoma.

The 10 percent loan is a revolving loan scheme from the local government distributed on the 4-4-2 formula, for Youth, Women, and People with Disabilities respectively.

Mumburi said: "We want the government to increase the allocated budget of 10 percent to 15 percent or more. The responsible ministry should see possibilities to increase the amount the councils are likely to collect more revenues."

He added that increasing the loan amount would make each of the three groups get 5 percent instead of the current 4-4-2 formula which sees people with disabilities getting 2 percent.

Meanwhile, one of the beneficiaries of projects implemented by the organization, Analise Mmari, resident of Ivaeny Ward, Siha District, said

that since she was trained on life and business skills, she has been able to generate an income, and thus improves her living standards.

"I have benefitted from projects implemented by TUSONGE, because at first, I did not have a toilet. But through the business training as well as encouragement to do savings, I have been able to build a toilet," she added.

"With the monies I have been saving, I will next year purchase some construction materials to accomplish my plans to construct a modern living house," she said, calling upon other women and entrepreneurs to build a culture of saving and also join the Village Community Banks (VICOPA) to access loans.

Another beneficiary, Imelda Massawe from Biriri Ward, Siha District said that through the various projects implemented by TUSONGE, she has been able to build a business stall. She said that having a permanent business area has enabled her to borrow money from financial institutions.

Mary Laizer, a resident of Majengo village said: "I have benefited a lot from the TUSONGE projects; I have trained on entrepreneurship as well as poultry farming whereas I now own 70 chickens."

Majengo said that poultry farming has relieved her since she can sell both chicken and eggs.

“ We want the government to increase the allocated budget of 10 percent to 15 percent or more. The responsible ministry should see possibilities to increase the amount the councils are likely to collect more revenues

Chinese task force to draw-up TAZARA revitalisation plan

By Guardian Correspondent

CHINA Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) has sent a task force to undertake a comprehensive business and technical inspection of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, having been appointed to negotiate a potential deal for a Chinese

operator to revitalise the line which was built with Chinese funding and expertise in 1979.

Inspections are to be carried out from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania to Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia. CCECC will also assess bi-national operator TAZARA's operational and business model, and draw up proposals for the

future which will be submitted to the two owning governments. This will include a business case for operations, a financing plan which would be facilitated by China Development Bank, and proposals for local taxation policies and related matters.

The 11-member task force is led by Peng Danyang, Managing Director of

the Ethiopia-Djibouti Railway which operates under a public-private partnership between the governments of Ethiopia and Djibouti and CCECC subsidiary Railway Operation Ltd.

It is envisaged that the plan will be drawn up and negotiations with the national stakeholders completed by the end of April 2024.



Bombo Referral Hospital Chief Medical Officer Dr Naima Yusuf (L) presents a Christmas and New Year gifts to hospital's statistics officer Rashid Lukumbuja as the hospital's tradition. Photo: Correspondent Oscar Assenga

Technology 2024: Tanzania pioneers 3D printing into technology in East Africa

By Correspondent Marc Nkwame, Arusha

WITH major digital innovations expected to be realised in the course of the New Year 2024, Tanzania is spearheading the advent of "Three Dimension," printing in East Africa, a technology set to transform manufacturing and revolutionize construction sectors.

A specialized 3D training and printing laboratory has just been established at the Arusha Science Campus located in the Oljoro Ward in the outskirts of the City with the facility set pioneer the new additive form of manufacturing, construction and creating images into reality.

"The future of technology lies in Artificial Intelligence and 3D printing," explained the Director of Arusha Science High School, Professor Nuhu Hemed Hatibu who is an accomplished scientist and agricultural engineer.

"Three-Dimension Printing will take over the tasks of manually erecting structures or constructing panels, parts and even organs," pointed out Prof Hatibu adding that young people taking science and engineering subjects need to focus on the new technology.

According to the don, 3D will also solve most of the current problems in the country; need a new house? Simply design the building and print the entire building.

"At the moment we have installed small 3D printers for education purposes, however in future the students themselves will be able to put together larger printers that can actually produce giant structures such

as buildings, vehicle panels and shells, furniture and other objects," explained the scientist.

The project is being undertaken with support from technological experts from leading California-based innovation firms in the United States of America.

Theja Bathula is one such expert who admits that the future is all about Artificial Intelligence and 3D printing.

"It means anything that a human mind can imagine can be produced at a press of the button," explained Bathula. Asked whether people will now be able to order food online and download it through 3D printing, the scientist said it may not be possible now but it will be in the near future.

Arusha Science High School, on the other hand, is the only institution in the country which has successfully built a solar powered vehicle right from scratch and the students are already working on a second prototype.

Speaking of cars, Tanzanians will no longer have to worry about importing different varieties of motor vehicles for fear of unavailable spare parts, because with the new additive technology; all car parts, including body panels can be produced, albeit cheaply, using 3D printing.

“ It means anything that a human mind can imagine can be produced at a press of the button

Two teens drown in Lake Victoria on Christmas Day

By Rashul Adidi

TWO teens drowned Monday evening in Lake Victoria, before one of the bodies was washed ashore at Masese Landing Site, Jinja South East Division in Jinja City.

Brian Mungdit, an eyewitness, said one of the teens went swimming but "disappeared" in the water, adding that when his colleague went to search for him, he, too, didn't return, triggering a frantic search for both. "One first responder to the lake

was overwhelmed by the waters, and after not making it far into the water, he returned empty-handed," Mungdit said.

He, however, added that when Police arrived at the scene, one body had been discovered and brought ashore by the local divers, while focus had shifted to finding the second body.

The body was identified as that of 12-year-old Fazali Mukungu Ebere, a pupil at Happy Hour primary school.

The second body was retrieved

after a long search by the police marine team on Tuesday morning.

The victim was identified as 10-year-old Akisham Wambadde, a pupil at Nakayonyi primary school.

However, tempers and emotions flared after Wambadde's body was retrieved from the water as relatives and police clashed over whether to first take it to Jinja hospital mortuary for post-mortem or not.

Police later surrendered the body to the relatives to be taken for burial.

According to Mungdit, children have

been drowning at the same point, recalling January 1, 2023, when a similar tragedy happened.

"We heard colleagues screaming for help and mobilised very fast, but unfortunately, we couldn't rescue the child alive," said Mr Richard Mutenyo, another eyewitness after the first body was recovered.

According to Kiira Region Police Spokesperson, James Mubi, the two went to swim at Masese pier without an adult person to monitor their activities and movements.

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Clerics right about hasty riches, even as the problem is jobs and of poverty

CHRISTMAS homilies from leading clergymen noticeably addressed the issue of wealth aspirations among young people, and some worries on increases in cries on mental health challenges. Senior priests affirmed that the lust for fast achievements among the youth was a dominant psychological inclination governing what youths do from one day to another. One priest said the youth often lack wisdom and refuse to rely on working hard, putting their faith in day dreaming for riches, either in the streets, or plotting thefts if they are employed, etc.

These remarks are poignant with truth, and call into awareness a situation of emergency of aspirations where people at various levels of age or social stratum see success as a matter of lottery, luck or clever machination. Obviously that isn't how success in life is actually built, but there is no clear alternative formula either, as old formulas like education have failed to work, with college graduates seeking money for bus fare from uneducated relatives doing trades of one sort or another. The fault line was with what clerics posed as a way to build one's life, working hard, reflecting the widely agreed wisdom that is relevant to an extent.

Working hard presumes that one has gainful activity at hand and is capable of inclining life's expectations to that activity. For those with some education, it is having a job where one's skills are put to use that basically matters or makes sense in life, whereas the wisdom is to tell them that they ought to forget choosing jobs, which also implies they should forget their education and skills, tone down their aspirations in life, etc. That is where the day dreaming starts, and at times actual planning on how to acquire riches, or at times actually achieving.

One area where the clerics focused attention was the risk of getting into trouble, where theft and misuse of public funds was raised as examples. This too was a mitigated view of things

as it was a way of covering up the real reason of thefts of public funds, and instead combined it with other issues - for instance spending their time betting or engaging in mobile phone lotteries of all sorts. In addition, thefts as such are burglaries, grabbing bags in the streets, armed robberies in petrol stations, etc, which mostly relate to corruption in the police force.

Ills of siphoning of public funds into private pockets are not the acts of isolated individuals who risk running into trouble as top clerics were suggesting but an aspect of common place solidarity, uniting people of various cadres. The clerics are obviously aware that when there is an instance of misconduct say in implementing a development project, just three individuals can intervene, namely the sector minister, the prime minister or the president (the VP covers a rather narrow sphere). Why is it that the district executive director does not notice or take action that a school or dispensary has been built at insufficient level of quality, or cash use?

The reason is the collegiality around the situation, since the councillors know how proceeds were conducted there, or in other situations it is a department of branch of ministerial department which knows how cash was spent.

Ministers often make efforts to intervene in such situations and pick up fights with sections of civil society, for instance the minister for Lands has lately directed ward and village authorities not to involve themselves in selling land, that which is public land in the vicinity or generally falls under customary law.

They are supposed to be custodians of the land and make impressions that they represent village needs or interests when land exchanges hands, like when an investor seeks for land. As a matter of fact village leaders are routinely accused of collaborating or arranging in selling village land, which implies the land should remain in place for clans to expand there. It is a tricky issue.

Africa's health sector can tap 'tech talent' if markets work

A POLICY paradox is developing in most African countries are battling to find something to do for young post-school and post-college talents in information technology as such, as everyone agrees that this is a vital skill, but is being drained for lack of anything worthwhile to do. The matter came up noticeably at a meeting of health sector technologists in the Zambian capital of Lusaka lately, where there was a call to develop policies to support young tech experts to create a digitally skilled healthcare workforce, and achieve universal quality healthcare aspirations. There are examples in recent health disasters that push policy advisers in this direction, by creating regional and international awareness on these objectives, etc.

Some health sector technology experts point at the Covid-19 scare in the past and now also threatening to reactivate in some parts of the world, and even in Africa, which leads to the need for digital innovation enabling people to access health services from any location. That highlights the need for tapping into the technological skills of the continent's young population in fashioning responses to public health emergencies, not just of a global scale like Covid-19 but smaller threats like habitual diseases, infectious and non-infectious that we constantly worry about. It is a matter of finding ways to mainstream technology in localities.

The pursuit of universal healthcare coverage that is now gripping attentions of policy makers all over Africa was one such aspect that calls for greater use of tech talent, which experts say it can help in achieving universal health coverage as an aspect of strengthening public health. While it is quite clear that

governments need to build a digital strategy for health sector workers and in that context bring in youths, the issue is whether this is an element of cutting costs or adding extra costs. A well resources health sector becomes more efficient by adding technology to its service panel, while an inefficient one can just pay salaries, avoid techno.

One thing that upsets the discussion is that it is part of an inclusive strategy not for patients firstly but for those who hold those skills, since Africa is a young continent with a lot of young people who are technologically inclined. The need to harness their skills and look at healthcare solutions that call for the use of their skills is hence what is being discussed. Some people would say it is to put the cart before the horse, as it is the modernisation of healthcare which ought to need a technology element to spread it further and adequately. It is care for patients that ought to need technology, not employing technology talent that knocks at health.

An economy which can harness skills of technology talents is one that is modernising each passing day, with economic activity anchored in the private sector and needing to sharpen skills each day. This can be through creating networks with potential patients falling under one or other insurance firm, which seeks to network instructions in one or other area so that -people don't fall sick too easily and cost the company lots of money for treatment. When the public sector is dominant in the health insurance sphere, there is a tendency at employing auxiliary staff as community health officers, perhaps to arrest people throwing dirt, as the predisposition to check diseases isn't technically polished, linked with hiring relatives, etc.



Railways rehab, expansion plan will transform industry

By Special Correspondent

THE growing need to restore the National Railways of Zimbabwe to full operational status is now being attended to with the African Export Import Bank prepared to lend US\$115 million to initiate the process.

The railways are not dead. They still move 2.3 million tonnes of cargo a year, but this is a little over 16 percent of the 14 million tonnes they moved in the 1990s and just under 13 percent of the 18 million tonnes a year the network is theoretically capable of moving each year. So we have a long way to go.

The cost is high. Of that US\$115 million, US\$34 million is to restore a critical 254km, about 9 percent of the total 2 760km of track owned by NRZ, that are subject to cautions.

In addition, the communications infrastructure on the network needs to be overhauled. Efficient single-track operations, where trains pass each other with one in a siding, require almost instant signalling so only one train at a time is in the box between two sidings, but without the inefficiency of having the trains in both directions halted while checks are made.

The sort of money required can be most easily apprehended when we look at the other US\$81 million of the loan. That will buy nine locomotives and 315 wagons, and fairly obviously a far larger fleet will be required when the railways are back to full operation.

The NRZ will need to ensure that

operations are highly efficient, since they need to generate revenue to repay this loans, repay other financing that may be required, and build up their own capital resources.

But that first major injection of finance is needed to gain that initial operational capacity that can generate revenue which in turn will encourage others to move in.

Much of the present system, including its major backbone main lines, was built with borrowed money in the 1890s and the early 1900s using, even by the standards of Cecil Rhodes, was highly creative financing involving multiple issues of debentures backed by each section of track, which in turn produced some financing and ownership oddities.

Rhodes created four companies to build and own the track from the South African border with Botswana through Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia and the line down to Beira.

The complex financial arrangements of what amounted to first and second mortgages on each section of track created a list running over several pages.

Eventually everything was consolidated in the late 1920s and the tri-country network in the British territories was nationalised in 1947 and later the Zambian and Botswana sections were split off.

So using a set of interested investors and some rational debt to rehabilitate the system and the fleet is not new, but it does require each step to be carefully worked out to ensure that the extra revenue generated will be adequate to service debt and provide returns for investors.

In many cases the scheduling of the

upgrades has to be done so that large sections of the network are upgraded simultaneously to ensure that there is that revenue.

Since a lot of the debt and investor relations will require Government guarantees and Government backing there will need to be very close co-ordination and consultation between the railways and the Finance and Transport Ministries, and the sort of debt we may be talking about will need to be notified to Parliament.

Over the weekend NRZ chairperson Mike Madiro not only discussed the coming Afeximbank loan and why it was needed, but also explained why we had to rehabilitate and then grow the railways, rather than rely on using haulage trucks more and more.

Railways are intrinsically more efficient than road transport and therefore significantly cheaper to operate per tonne per kilometre.

Internally within Zimbabwe there is growing bulk traffic. For example we need to move some types of grain from the north-eastern provinces to the other side of the country; we need to move sugar and ethanol from the Lowveld to the markets; we need to move coal and other resources, remembering that there are now moves to get tobacco farmers to use more coal rather than chop trees down when they cure their leaf.

The upgrade and introduction of mineral processing will often mean we need to move a lot of ore and semi-processed ores to the final processing plant, with often just one or two such

plants being needed.

Then come the exports. And here Mr Madiro's stress on the full use of the whole Southern African network becomes vital both for exports within the region and exports further afield via the ports of the region.

Zimbabwe is poised to renter the export markets for grains, and needs to keep the transport costs low to compete especially considering the premiums we pay our farmers. Markets will probably be regional, but under AfCFTA open markets.

We are already a major coke exporter to regional markets, and this trade is likely to grow with other processed materials added.

The giant steelworks being built at Manhize will need railways to dispatch competitive products around Zimbabwe, into the region and further afield. Our mineral production has quadrupled in the last five years, and while more local processing cuts the volume needed to be moved, the size of the growth suggests more trainloads and more trucks will be needed.

All this means that the NRZ needs to be returned to what it should be, and then grown further.

If AfCFTA is going to work properly, it means African farmers, miners and industrialists will earn more, rather than see their profits slashed by huge transport costs to get their products to markets.

So while trucks work, the greater the bulk, the greater the volume and the longer the distance means that railways assume ever greater advantages.

Holistic approach vital to ease Ethiopia's external debt stress

By Special Correspondent

DESPITE the propensity of the administration of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) to paint a rosy picture about the state of the Ethiopian, the hard truth is it continues to be in a precarious position and will take a long time to stand on its own two feet. The impressive growth it's touted to have registered since the premier came to power over five-and-half-years ago has not translated into a dividend for the majority poor who are still mired in the clutches of abject poverty. For a nation endowed with vast tracts of arable land, the largest number of livestock in Africa, a substantial surface and sub-surface water resource, climatic conditions suitable to varied agricultural activities, numerous tourist destinations, a considerable mineral wealth, and a youthful productive force, it's paradoxical and indeed an embarrassment for it to be the poster child for aid dependence.

The cost of servicing Ethiopia's high levels of external debt, which was valued to stand at USD 28.2 billion at the end of March, has been one of the headwinds the Ethiopian economy has suffered from for quite a while now. For the best part of the last half century or so the perennial

budget deficit of the government has been made up for through, among others, external borrowing. The burden this placed on the economy particularly began to be backbreaking following the global economic downturn induced by the COVID-19 outbreak. Coupled with the two-year civil war in northern Ethiopia as well as the raft of conflicts ravaging various parts of the country, the unprecedented level of foreign exchange crunch and inflationary pressure has exacerbated the risk of both total debt and external debt distress. Consequently, it was forced to go hand in cap to ask for debt relief under the G20 Common Framework, an agreement of the G20 and Paris Club of countries that aims to streamline debt restructuring efforts of low-income countries eligible for the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI).

The gravity of the mounting external debt stress that Ethiopia is facing was laid bare when it failed to make a USD 33 million coupon payment on its USD 1 Eurobond that was due December 11. The failure to honor the interest payment came after the Ethiopian government's efforts to renegotiate the bond terms with a core group of bondholders prior to the December 11 deadline fell through. The Ministry of Finance's messaging on the

reason behind its inability to meet the payment target seems to be muddled, however. While it was quoted last week as indicating that it was "not in a position to pay" the \$33 million coupon because of the nation's "fragile external position, a statement it issued this said week said "Ethiopia's decision to withhold the December coupon payment on its Eurobond... stems from the intention to treat all its external creditors equitably," implying that it deliberately declined to service the coupon payment. If Ethiopia does not conclude a deal with the bondholders before the two-week grace period it enjoys under the bond terms, it is set to join the likes of Zambia and Ghana among African nations to default on their Eurobond repayment in recent years.

If Ethiopia were to default on its external debt, the ensuing consequences are bound to be dire. First, it could result in a further downgrading of its credit worthiness by credit-rating agencies. In fact, Fitch did exactly that just this week citing an increased likelihood of default. Such move makes it more difficult for the country to access international capital markets in the future and borrow at affordable rates. Defaulting on debt obligations would signal to foreign investors that Ethiopia may not be able to meet its

financial commitments, prompting a decrease in foreign direct investment and a loss of investor confidence. Moreover, if international lenders perceive Ethiopia as a higher credit risk, the borrowing costs for Ethiopia are liable to go up. This could lead to reduced government spending, austerity measures, and potential social unrest, further impacting the livelihoods of citizens and hindering progress in poverty reduction efforts. However, it's important to note that the impacts of defaulting on external debt can vary depending on specific circumstances, negotiation outcomes, and the response of international financial actors.

Ethiopia's mounting external debt stress requires a holistic approach. First and foremost, the country's creditors need to work constructively with government officials on how to go about forging a mutually beneficial deal that alleviates its debt stress. This helps secure an outcome that protects the interest of all parties, which a default most certainly does not. On the domestic front, the government and all other stakeholders must do whatever is necessary to ensure that peace and stability prevail in Ethiopia given it's impossible to engage in any meaningful effort aimed at addressing the debt stress in the absence of law and order.



FDI : Tackling poor signaling in Nigeria

By Dakuku Peterside

NIGERIA faces unprecedented economic uncertainties and desperately needs to “bend the curve” on most economic indices. Even the optimistic people among us struggle with what to hold onto to defend our slide into economic quagmire. This results from several years of economic mismanagement and the devastating global impact of COVID-19.

We need urgent economic recovery, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows are fundamental to support such recovery. We must make a great effort to restore and increase capital inflows through FDI; attracting such capital must be a key strategy of this government.

Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, underscores the importance of FDI when he argues, “Foreign direct investment can be a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction in developing countries.” This administration understands this, and Mr. President is leading the campaign to attract FDI. He is rolling out the red carpet for global investors to come to Nigeria to invest. However, the result of such an effort is yet to manifest, and some may argue that it is too early to appreciate the outcome. But I assume that although the economic propaganda and narrative, the body language of Mr. President, and the economic decisions he has made so far are FDI friendly, the signals coming out of Nigeria are counter-intuitive to this effort. And we know that in economic perception, signals matter, sometimes even more than reality.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, argues that “FDI is not just about money; it’s about creating an environment that fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic prosperity.” The message from the Nigerian economic environment is antithetical to our FDI drive narrative and calls for capital inflow. We have yet to create an environment that fosters innovation, enterprise, and productivity. This is the anchor for FDI.

To be fair to the BAT government, it has taken some measures to boost foreign investment, including tax reforms at its formative stage, repealing laws that allowed retrospective taxation, overhauling the foreign exchange regime, clearing all FX deficits, and offering incentives.

These signals, albeit substantial, are poor compared to the competing negative signals emanating from our political economy that global capitalists pay very close attention to. International capital investments are not products of whimsical and serendipitous decisions. They



High inflation and high interest rates are combined to stifle business. We are and have remained a mono-product economy. Nigeria has historically been heavily dependent on oil exports. The lack of diversification in the economy makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices, affecting investor confidence.



are based on analysing short- and long-term economic facts and realities. No amount of window dressing of the fundamentals would convince foreign investors to come to Nigeria unless core economic facts back our rhetoric. What strong signals are we emitting?

Our business environment has become so toxic in recent times that we are not retaining FDIs that came in the past. Global manufacturing conglomerates and oil multinational companies are quickly moving out of Nigeria and are not replaced by new ones (Not a peculiarly Nigerian problem, though: Kenya and Ghana - but particularly the former - are facing similar problems!). Nigeria is the second most indebted country to foreign airlines because of non-repatriation of earnings.

Our foreign exchange regime is still weak, and the value of the Naira is collapsing like a pack of cards. Imagine an investor brought in \$1m at the rate of N500 per dollar (N500,000,000) at the beginning of this year and by the end of the year makes a 20% profit (N100,000,000). If the exchange rate now is N1000 per dollar, the total value of his investment will shrink by 40% (\$600k against the original \$1m invested). This volatility will scare most would-be investors, especially investors focusing on the short run. Even at that, the investor is likely to struggle to get FX to repatriate profit or sometimes even import raw mate-

rials.

Poverty and economic hardship have reduced the purchasing power of the people, and demand for non-essential products and services is dwindling. Our micro and macroeconomic environment is harsh and has thrown some erstwhile middle-class Nigerians across the poverty lines. There is no gainsaying; we are the world’s poverty capital, and we have accepted our fate, and nothing measurable has been done about it.

High inflation and high interest rates are combined to stifle business. We are and have remained a mono-product economy. Nigeria has historically been heavily dependent on oil exports. The lack of diversification in the economy makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in oil prices, affecting investor confidence.

Politically, we have made some democratic gains, but we are still struggling with the rule of law. A viable business environment thrives when the rules of business engagement are clear and sacrosanct. And when there is a breach, a transparent judicial process ensures justice. However, our judiciary has significantly lost the confidence of many of our citizens and foreign investors. Court processes take forever to resolve disputes.

Corruption is rampant and has eaten deep into the system. This has led to a high cost of governance and decay in the system. Government offi-

cial’s lifestyle is inconsistent with that of those who need support or investment. Nigeria is heavily indebted and has continued to borrow, most painfully, to cover recurrent expenditure and service debts.

Public and private sector organisations have to deal with the burden of bureaucracy and red tape. There is a sense of pervasive hopelessness and despondency among the youth, who comprise more than 70% of the population. The paradox is that the high youth population is now a curse rather than a blessing. We have a dearth of highly educated and skilled youths, yet many have “japaed” or are planning to do so. Never in our history have we had this unprecedented exodus of trained professionals in all spheres.

We have weak institutions, weak infrastructure, and massive insecurity. We have a complex regulatory environment with many bureaucratic hurdles, which has affected the ease of doing business. Starting and operating a company could be more efficient and more investor friendly. Multiple taxation and other unnecessary interference impede business confidence.

Besides, the state of infrastructure in Nigeria, including transportation, energy, and telecommunications, is disturbing and anti-investment. Infrastructural development is the backbone of business, and investors may hesitate to invest in a country where

inadequate infrastructure can hamper business operations.

The level of insecurity is alarming. Some regions in Nigeria have experienced security challenges, including incidents related to terrorism, secessionist agitations, civil unrest, kidnapping, high-level criminality, and general low-level insecurity. These concerns impact the perceived safety of investments and lead investors to consider more stable environments.

All these signals mentioned above are powerful and are dousing the poor signals this administration’s effort is putting out. So, we must go back to basics. Addressing these challenges and implementing reforms in governance, infrastructure, and the business environment can help improve Nigeria’s attractiveness to foreign investors.

The Nigerian government has recognised these issues and has been working on initiatives to promote economic reforms and improve the investment climate. The situation can evolve, and ongoing efforts to address these challenges may positively impact FDI. Let’s continue with the hardcore reforms that will improve our economic outlook in the medium to long term. The sacrifices we make now will reward our posterity.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General of WTO, argues that, “FDI is not just about capital inflow; it’s about knowledge transfer, technology sharing, and building sustainable partnerships.” We must explore options beyond capital flow and look at knowledge, technology, and skill flows.

In our globalised world, attracting foreign direct investment is essential for the competitiveness and development of any nation. Foreign direct investment is a vote of confidence in a country’s future economic potential. Therefore, prosperous countries can attract and retain foreign direct investment by providing a stable and business-friendly environment.

Arun Jaitley, former Indian Minister of Finance, posits that, “The flow of foreign direct investment is like a river - it seeks the path of least resistance, and nations must build bridges, not barriers.” We must create an environment with the least resistant barriers to allow a free flow of capital, talent, and technology.

Undoubtedly, we know that FDI is a powerful engine for job creation, technology transfer, and economic development and like rainwater, it nourishes the growth and development of the economy. We must send strong signals that we are open for business and create the right environment. Nigeria is a sleeping giant, and when the world sees that we have woken up for business, the FDI will flow freely without theatricals.

Africa and the imperative of climate action beyond emissions ranking



By Mohammed Dahiru Aminu

WHILE one may argue that Africa still maintains relatively low emissions, factoring in the concept of proxy emissions, it becomes reasonable to advocate for mitigation efforts in the more advanced countries producing industrialised goods imported into Africa, such as steel and refined petroleum products.

...while Africa may not be a top GHG emitter, the continent holds a pivotal role in shaping the future global climate landscape. By prioritising climate mitigation, African countries can simultaneously address pressing environmental challenges, unlock economic opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to the shared goal of a sustainable and resilient world.

In my role as a climate policy scientist who travels across Africa for research, policy development, advocacy, and collaboration to address the most pressing challenge of our time, I often find myself being asked by the people I meet to reconcile the fact of Africa's lower GHG emissions - in comparison to major industrialised countries - and the global call for an urgent climate action in Africa. I often come across people who believe that given the global emissions statistics, persuading African countries to actively engage in climate mitigation efforts ought not be made a paramount task for Africa and its people. It is true that Africa contributes the least to global warming in both absolute and per capita terms, such that it accounts for less than 4 per cent of global GHG emissions. But it is also true that Africa emits its GHG by proxy. The context of proxy emissions does not only suggest that African countries are not the top contributors to global GHG emissions in absolute terms, but also connotes that nations are not free of the products of industrialisation - often imported to improve the continent's economic development and technological progress.

For example, according to World Steel Association, all sub-Saharan African countries and majority of other African countries are net importers of steel products. According to data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), between January 2015 and April 2022, South Africa imported about 10,773.4 metric tons of steel. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that direct carbon dioxide emissions due to crude steel production is 1.4 metric tons of carbon dioxide

Farmers planting during a rainy season in Dali, North Darfur, Sudan. Credit: UN Photo / Albert Farran



The seedlings are growing well, and we are bringing water from the ojo de agua for our own consumption with a hose. We are also going to be able to improve our crops after two very difficult years. But we have to keep fighting because the water problem will continue as long as we have this climate

per ton of steel produced.

Other estimates even claim that the figures could be slightly higher, reaching 1.85 tons of carbon dioxide per ton of steel. These suggest that South African steel imports within the period under OECD's review could reach somewhere between 15,082.67 to 19,392.12 tons of direct carbon dioxide emissions.

In volume terms, to make sense of the significance of 1 ton of carbon dioxide, we could take the average car's emission of around 2.3 kilogrammes of carbon dioxide per litre of gasoline burned. Thus, driving around 4,500 miles - about 7,242.05 kilometres - in an average car that utilises one gallon per 25 miles could result in one ton of carbon dioxide emissions. Also, while the carbon intensity of electricity varies by region and energy sources, consuming around 10,000 to 12,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity, depending on the energy mix, could result in one ton of carbon dioxide emissions. Air travel

could also provide another example in demonstrating the significance of carbon footprints. If we can imagine that a roundtrip from New York to London can emit around one ton of carbon dioxide per passenger.

While one may argue that Africa still maintains relatively low emissions, factoring in the concept of proxy emissions, it becomes reasonable to advocate for mitigation efforts in the more advanced countries producing industrialised goods imported into Africa, such as steel and refined petroleum products.

Estimating the exact carbon dioxide emissions resulting from all African countries becoming fully industrialised or transitioning to a manufacturing economy is a complex task and involves numerous variables. The idea that industrialisation can play a crucial role in reducing poverty in Africa is not new and can be supported by various economic theories and historical examples that border on the potential for economic

growth, jobs creation, and improvement of living standards. The European Union (EU), comprising 27 member states, has a population of slightly over 448 million people, yet in 2022 the region produced 2,641 terawatt-hours of electricity to meet its energy demand. Africa has a population of approximately 1.4 billion people, with only a total installed capacity of 244.64 million kilowatts of electricity as of 2021. If we take the EU as a standard for Africa's industrialisation, in the context of Africa's population, the continent will need to produce about 4,953 terawatt-hours of electricity per annum.

While one may argue that Africa still maintains relatively low emissions, factoring in the concept of proxy emissions, it becomes reasonable to advocate for mitigation efforts in the more advanced countries producing industrialised goods imported into Africa, such as steel and refined petroleum products. However, it is crucial to recognise that despite Africa's

current lower emissions, the continent must strategically plan for full development and industrialisation, surpassing the energy needs of the EU. Africa can achieve this future by avoiding the climate mistakes made by industrialised nations. Like any region, the future of Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, political, and environmental factors. Industrialisation has historically been associated with higher productivity, income growth and poverty reduction, thus the failure to industrialise Africa may lead to continued reliance on traditional and often subsistence-based economic activities, invariably contributing to persistent poverty. If Africa does not pursue industrialisation in a sustainable manner, several challenges and consequences would arise. To mitigate these challenges, it is essential for African countries to pursue industrialisation strategies that are sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally friendly - all of which require careful planning, investment in education and skills development, supportive policies, and collaboration with the international community.

Embracing climate action in Africa also presents the opportunity for the youth to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship - and African leaders can help empower the younger generation by fostering the culture of environmental responsibility and driving a positive change toward innovation. As Africa's population grows, the health and wellbeing of Africans is important for the continent's productivity.

But this is not the time to panic. African leaders should view the climate challenge as an opportunity for a promising future for the continent. Africa is vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change - from extreme weather events to agricultural pattern shifts. By supporting mitigation efforts in the continent and beyond, African leaders would build resilience against the impacts and safeguard their communities and ecosystems. By embracing climate-friendly policies and technologies, African leaders would help to catalyse sustainable economic development to foster long-term economic resilience. By actively participating in global climate initiatives, African leaders would enhance the continent's standing on the international stage to attract funding and strengthen diplomatic ties.

By taking advantage of Africa's abundant renewable energy resources, including solar and wind, African leaders would be ensuring that their countries can leapfrog to cleaner energy alternatives and contribute to the global shift towards sustainable energy systems. As climate change continues to threaten Africa's unique biodiversity, its leaders can help to ensure that mitigation efforts are pitched towards protecting endangered species, the preservation of ecosystems, and maintaining the delicate balance of nature, upon which many communities depend for their livelihoods.

Embracing climate action in Africa also presents the opportunity for the youth to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship - and African leaders can help empower the younger generation by fostering the culture of environmental responsibility and driving a positive change toward innovation. As Africa's population grows, the health and wellbeing of Africans is important for the continent's productivity. Climate change contributes to the spread of diseases, it impacts water and food security, and exacerbates health challenges.

The role played by African leaders in climate change mitigation would directly benefit public health and ensure a healthier and more prosperous future for Africa's populations. As climate-induced challenges lead to displacement and migration, the prevention of further creation of climate refugees and maintaining social stability within and between African nations will depend on the mitigation measures championed by African leaders. Finally, while Africa may not be a top GHG emitter, the continent holds a pivotal role in shaping the future global climate landscape. By prioritising climate mitigation, African countries can simultaneously address pressing environmental challenges, unlock economic opportunities, and contribute meaningfully to the shared goal of a sustainable and resilient world.

World malaria report 2023: A call for actions to address growing threats

By Martin Lukindu

THE World Health Organization's World Malaria Report 2023, released this month, paints a concerning picture of the global state of malaria in 2022. Despite continued efforts, malaria remains a significant public health challenge, with both malaria incidence and mortality higher now than they were before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scenario is exacerbated by the growing impact of climate change, which, alongside other challenges, threatens to reverse progress in the fight against the disease.

Compared to 2021, the report indicates an increase in global malaria cases, which rose to approximately 249 million in 2022.

Global deaths from the disease were estimated at 608,000, a nearly 6 percent increase since 2019. Particularly alarming is the continued high burden of the disease in Africa.

The African region disproportionately bore the brunt of the malaria burden in 2022, accounting for 94 percent of global malaria cases and 95% of all malaria deaths.

About 78 percent of these deaths occurred in children under the age of five. Uganda, where I live and work, is part of a group of five countries, including Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, identified by the report as collectively accounting for a majority of the increase in global malaria cases.

This year's report places a special focus on climate change as a critical factor threatening progress in the fight against malaria. Climate-related disruptions, such as extreme weather events, have exacerbated the spread of the disease.

For instance, the 2022 floods in



Children in mosquito nets to protect themselves from malaria

Pakistan led to an increase of over 2 million malaria cases, highlighting how climate change can directly influence malaria transmission. Another notable example is the expansion of malaria into African highlands, regions previously less affected due to their cooler climate.

Such shifts underscore how climate change can impact the dynamics of malaria transmission and further complicate ef-

forts to control and eliminate the disease.

Alongside climate change, other challenges are threatening efforts to fight malaria. Growing resistance to available control tools, such as insecticides and antimalarial drugs, remains an increasing concern.

The report also highlights the threat posed by the emergence and spread of the *Anopheles stephensi* mosquito in East Africa, a species particularly

adept at breeding in urban settings and highly resistant to insecticides.

These factors, coupled with health system challenges and a significant funding gap -- which reached US\$3.7 billion in 2022 -- paint a picture of a battle against malaria that is becoming increasingly complex.

Overall, despite sustained efforts, the world remains off track to meet the targets of the WHO Global Technical Strat-

egy for Malaria 2016-2030.

In 2022, there were over 58 malaria cases for every 1,000 people at risk, more than double the target rate. Similarly, the global malaria mortality rate stood at around 14 deaths per 100,000 people at risk, which is over twice the target of just under 7.

Despite these challenges, there have also been achievements. Recent progress includes the launch of the first

malaria vaccine, RTS/S/AS01, and the endorsement by WHO of a second vaccine, R21/Matrix-M.

The deployment of new dual-active ingredient insecticide-treated nets and expanded malaria prevention for high-risk children have been crucial advancements offering new avenues for combating the disease.

The report underscores that the path towards malaria elimination will require a comprehensive and integrated approach. This means significantly ramping up both financing and political commitment to support the fight against the disease.

It will also mean using data strategically and harnessing innovation to develop new malaria control tools that can complement existing interventions and address growing challenges.

To make headway, the report recommends that innovation focus on the development of more efficient and affordable products that are less susceptible to changes in temperature.

As noted by WHO Regional Director for Africa Dr Matshidiso Moeti: "To forge ahead toward a malaria-free future, we need a concerted effort to tackle these diverse threats that fosters innovation, resource mobilization and collaborative strategies."

The fight against malaria, especially in the context of climate change, demands a renewed commitment to developing new and improved tools, strategically enhancing intervention strategies, actively boosting funding, and advancing research.

Now, more than ever, is the time to unite against malaria, with a heightened focus on innovation and collaboration, in Africa and across the globe.

COMESA and African consumers' movement moot plan to the end of plastic pollution

KIGALI

JOSEPH Mukasa is a young man in his early twenties. He wakes up every morning to join hundreds of his fellow young people in collecting littered plastic bottles around the Metropolitan districts of Kampala, and Wakiso in Uganda.

The young people pile the bottles into sacks and deliver them to waiting trucks, which then take them to recycling plants.

With this heavy plastic pollution problem in their face, the COMESA Competition Commission and the African Consumers movement are working to close lobbying gaps in ensuring consumers' voices are included in the global plastic pollution treaty, currently being pushed by the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to be in place at least by 2024.

COMESA and the African Consumers' movement are particularly interested in having a switch from plastic water bottles to glass bottles, and having strict adherence to recycling by industries still producing plastics.

United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world's highest-level decision-making body for matters related to the environment, with a universal membership of all 193 Member States.

Environmental experts and officials of different consumer protection associations in Africa who spoke to The New Times underscored the need to reduce plastic production, eliminate single-use and short-lived plastic products, and switch to non-plastic substitutes.

"We are working closely with COMESA in addressing this prob-

lem, because what is evident is that our voices are not heard at the global level in lobbying for issues affecting the lives of our consumers like plastic pollution. Governments all over the world should force industries to recycle the plastics they produce," said Damien Ndizeye, the Executive Director of the Rwanda Consumer Rights Protection Organisation (ADECOR).

Ndizeye says large industries all over the world should have designated disposal places in different communities for those plastics, from where they should be picked for recycling purposes.

The third round of fresh negotiations about the treaty took place in Nairobi, Kenya last month, with participants underscoring the urgency of the treaty due to the ongoing global plastic pollution crisis, where approximately 430 million tonnes of plastic are produced annually.

"Governments should ban the production of single use plastic products like water bottles, and instead provide incentives like soft loans for Small and Medium enterprises to shift towards production of glass containers," said Micheal Mungoma, the Director of Programs at Youth Education Network (YED) an organization in Kenya.

Daudi Sumba, the Regional director of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), an international organization that protects nature, said: "We need to think out of the box. Consumers are the ones directly affected by plastic pollution as these are causing deadly diseases like cancer to them. We want the UN to find more ways of how the voices of consumers from the lowest level can be included in these talks,"

Africa's refugee crisis deepens: UN budget shortfalls amplify hunger

By Roger Alfani and Nicole Eggers

SHORTFALLS in the operating budget of the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, and the World Food Program have brought increased precocity into the daily lives of millions of displaced people across the continent.

Having fled violence, famine and insecurity in search of survival, many African refugees now find themselves faced with similar circumstances in the very spaces designed to protect them. Most notably, over the past year, refugees in Central and East Africa have watched as their food rations and living stipends -- already meager -- have been cut to unsustainably low levels.

In Africa's largest refugee-hosting country, Uganda, the budget for UNHCR programs is currently funded at only 39 percent of its needs. Burundi, which has experienced a 35 percent increase in its refugee population since 2018, as well as a large increase in the number of returned Burundian refugees, has seen its own budget increase by only 12 percent in that same period.

The reasons for these shortfalls are multifaceted, including the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, which has affected food production and resulted in an increase of prices. Though refugees themselves say they are offered little explanation -- "They just tell us that the order came from Geneva," one refugee told us in reference to UNHCR's headquarters in the Swiss capital.

The resulting cuts in food security programs have had devastating effects on refugee families and communities.

We spent three months in Africa



this past summer interviewing over 200 refugees across seven refugee camps and urban refugee havens in Burundi, Uganda and Kenya. While we were there to primarily investigate the role of faith and religious community among refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, our interviews touched on many aspects of the refugee experience. All names used in this article have been changed to protect the interviewee's identity.

In Burundi, for example, a number of refugees explained to us how 2023's rations for their daily dietary staple -- corn flour used to make a hard porridge known locally as "bukari" -- had been cut from 10 kilograms (22 pounds) per month to three kilograms (6.6 pounds). One refugee in the Bwagiriza refugee settlement in Burundi, Jean-Claude, explained how if you try to divide that amount of food into 30 piles, one for each day, it's "just not enough." Ultimately, he said, "You worry because you have

no idea how you will finish the month. Little by little, the quantity of food goes down at home."

Stories like Jean Claude's offer a glimpse of the psychological stress that refugees experience daily as they engage in an unending search for enough food to feed their families -- a search that too frequently fails.

To make matters worse, rising inflation has meant that the ability of refugees to draw on whatever modest resources they may possess to supplement their diets has been greatly undermined.

For parents, this leads to further trauma of explaining to their hungry children that there will be no food. One young mother in the Rwamwanja refugee settlement in Uganda told us how, in a desperate ploy to delay disappointment, she put an empty pot of water on the stove to boil just so that her children would go to bed with the hope that there would be food to eat in the morning.

"Whole families become sick. Some neighbours ate some roots because of hunger. All of them were vomiting," a refugee mother named Mauwa explained to us in Burundi. "Mother, father, children ...we are forced to eat food that doesn't agree with us and makes us sick to our stomachs."

Amina, a Congolese refugee living in Bwagiriza, described how, following days of not eating, her young child became violently ill after consuming some corn porridge, her severely malnourished body no longer able to digest it. The child's condition should have been treatable, but because budget cuts had also recently ended medical transport assistance, they were unable to get to the hospital quickly enough and ultimately the child died.

"There is no food. There is no health care," she said. "We are being trampled. You reach a point where you have nothing. You will just die."

The many silver linings of Tinubu's 7 months in office



By Bayo Onanuga

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu waving to his people in one of the national celebrations in Nigeria

THE removal of fuel subsidy and the move to merge foreign exchange rates, two headline reforms introduced by the Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration since late May, triggered problems such as high fuel prices and the depreciation of the naira, two monstrosities which combined to cause a general spike in costs of services and goods.

Today, many Nigerians complain of a rise in the cost of living.

According to the latest NBS report, Nigeria's inflation, which rose to 26.7 per cent in September, again rose to 28.2 per cent in November from 27.33 per cent in October. Food Inflation remains untamed, rising from 31.52 per cent in October to 32.84 per cent in November 2023.

To compound the economic problems, few multinational companies such as GlaxoSmithKline, Procter & Gamble have announced their exit from our country, complaining about the difficult operating environment and the scarcity of dollar.

The truth is that the new policies alone are not solely responsible for the economic problems we are facing today. We were destined for the tough and rough patch, where we are today because of the prevailing conditions before Tinubu took over on 29 May.

As at June 2023, budget deficit was N10.8 trillion. Actual Debt service was 98.95 per cent of revenue, far higher than the projected 59.37 per cent. Inflow into the country's foreign reserve came in trickles. And so bad was the state of affairs that Nigeria could not remit about \$800 million fund of foreign airlines. JP Morgan exposed our near insolvency by claiming in a report that our net foreign reserve was just about \$3.7 billion, not the \$33 billion-plus flaunted by Emeffele's CBN.

President Tinubu, who promised during the campaign to take hard and difficult decisions, moved to tackle the economic problems from Day One, by first dispensing with the wasteful fuel subsidy that was billed to consume about N7 trillion this year, five times more than what was provisioned for capital spending.

President Tinubu is quite aware of the side effects of his move to reset our economy. Though his administration has earned plaudits from the World Bank, the IMF and rating agencies such as Moody's and Fitch,

he is not carried away by the praises.

He is focused on turning the economy around for growth, development and prosperity.

The moves are yielding some good effects. Amidst what some sections of the media perceive as general gloom, some silver linings are emerging, signposting that with a little more patience, our material conditions will improve and inflation will be tamed. For businesses, operating conditions will also improve.

In its third-quarter report for the year, the NBS reported that GDP grew by 2.54 per cent. In a similar period in 2022, GDP recorded a growth of 2.25 per cent. To demonstrate that the sun may be shining on us again, the 2.54 per cent GDP growth recorded in Q3, was also higher than the 2.51 per cent recorded in Q2.

The service sector, made up of information and communication, financial and insurance, was responsible for the growth witnessed in Q3. It had a 3.99 per cent growth, contributing 52.7 per cent of the aggregate GDP. The agriculture sector declined from 1.34 per cent growth in Q2 to 1.3 per cent in Q3.

Growth was also recorded in construction and real estate, metal ores (69.76%), coal mining (58.03%), chemical and pharmaceutical products (6.77%), Cement (4.2%) and construction (3.89%). Oil reported a negative growth of 0.85%, a major improvement to the negative 22.67% recorded at the same period last year. It was -13.43 in Q2 of 2022.

The improvement in the oil sector and its contribution to GDP has been attributed to the improvement in the security of oil infrastructure and operations, leading to increased production. Going forward in this Q4 and 2024, the NNPC Limited is confident that the sector will continue to climb the curve.

In the same Q3, according to NBS, the Industrial sector grew by 0.46%, an uptick compared with Q3 2022, when it had a negative 8% growth, even in the era of P&G and GSK exit.

An interesting revelation in the NBS Q3 report was the big jump in the vol-

ume of trade, from N12.16 trillion in Q2 to N18.8 trillion. Trade volume in the same period in 2022 was N12.28 trillion. We also recorded a trade surplus of N1.89 trillion in Q3, an increase from the N708.8 billion in Q2 2023. In Q3 in 2022, we recorded a trade deficit of N409.39 billion.

The value of exports in the third quarter was N10.35 trillion, far higher by 60.78 per cent than the N6.44 trillion posted in Q2 2023. Crude oil dominated the export, accounting for 82.5 per cent, a confirmation that our country is pumping out more oil for export, unlike the previous years.

Just as our exports increased, imports also increased, rising from N5.73 trillion in Q2 2023 to N8.46 trillion in Q3, a rise of 60.8 per cent. The imports recorded in the quarter were also higher in value compared to Q3 2022, which was N6.34 trillion.

As the Minister of Budget and National Planning, Atiku Bagudu noted in a recent report, economic prosperity in our country will be achieved with the reforms being implemented, supported by strong monetary and fiscal policies, food supply management and other intervention programmes.

President Tinubu, who has never shied away from acknowledging the temporary pains triggered by the reforms, gave an assurance in a recent newspaper interview that his Administration will continue to take proactive measures to wrestle with the problems. Many of these measures are already being taken and in the New Year, we expect the silver linings, which are at present understated, to blossom into rays of sunshine to be experienced by all Nigerians.

The Commander in Chief needs to demonstrate leadership on this matter.

A safe and secure Nigeria is the overarching objective of all the country's security agencies. But their operations are too often besmirched with rivalries, leading to working at cross-purposes to the peril of national security. When these activities take violent and fatal dimensions, they breed gangrene that must be excised

Muhammed, the Commander of the 23rd Armoured Brigade of the Nigerian Army in Yola, to the fracas that: "The police shot at our men at a checkpoint. Our men went to rescue him, and they fired at those too."

Such a reckless response does not show leadership and capacity in crisis management. The deployment of 12 APCs could not have been for the rescue of a soldier at a Police headquarters but was for other purposes - assault, intimidation, harassment and ultimately to kill. The death of Inspector David was collateral damage in the performative military action. In the same vein, instead of addressing why its operatives laid siege to the Ikoyi office of EFCC, the SSS spokesman, Peter Afunanya, waffled about the irrelevance of which agency originally owns the building.

It did not occur to the SSS image-maker that the EFCC did not catapult itself into the office complex, but the federal authorities had undoubtedly allocated the space for the Commission to operate from, for the good of the country. If there was any need whatsoever for the agency to reclaim the building for operational reasons, going beyond the realm of official channels to do so was injurious to esprit de corps and unity of purpose in crime-fighting.

Service chiefs have also exhibited symptoms of this malady, perhaps in a heightened dimension, given their enormous powers. A former Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai, for instance, demonstrated this in 2019 in a case that involved soldiers of the 93 Battalion. The troops opened fire on a police team at a checkpoint in Jalingo, in Taraba State, killing three police officers and a civilian in a determined criminal effort to set free Hamisu Wadume, a notorious kingpin of the underworld in the Benue-Taraba territory. Wadume was being taken to the state capital by a special police squad saddled with the responsibility of apprehending him to face justice. He had earlier implicated some soldiers as his confederates in the criminal enterprise of kidnapping and robbery. His confession, when he was finally nabbed, was telling. He said: "The soldiers then took me to their headquarters and cut off the handcuff from my hands and set me free. I have been hiding since then until now that police arrested me again." The then Inspector-General, Muhammed Adamu, tried as much as he could to get the Chief of Army Staff to release the 10 military men who killed the police officers at the checkpoint, in order to set a manacled felon free, to face the full wrath of the law, but to no avail.

An order of Justice Binta Nyako of a Federal High Court for the army authorities to release the suspects for trial was flagrantly disobeyed. The Inspector General of Police charged Wadume on 16 counts in February 2020, which bordered on murder, terrorism, kidnapping and illegal arms running. As usual, Muhammadu Buhari, the president at that time, remained aloof while the two armed services danced naked in the public square.

When security agencies work at cross-purposes, the sharing of intelligence among them becomes difficult, if not impossible, amid festering insecurity in all parts of the country. Nigeria cannot afford to be giving a carte blanche to Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists, kidnappers, bandits and other non-state criminal actors, due to the ego of some military personnel who see themselves as being above the law. Military officers appear to consider police personnel as inferior security officers of the state whom they could easily trample upon.

This is intriguing because police personnel are statutorily charged with internal security or maintenance of law and order in the federation. More often than not, the violations of traffic regulations and police demand for compliance provide the tinderbox for some of these unfortunate occurrences.

That was why ASP Hezekiah Abiona was stabbed to death by a naval officer in December 2020 in Lagos. However, the Police are not without blemish. This was evident in the 2005 fracas at Ojuelegba, Lagos, which claimed the lives of three persons and led to the burning of over 40 vehicles. Soldiers who boarded a commercial vehicle for free had prevented the alleged payment of a N20 bribe by the driver to corrupt and irresponsible policemen, which led to the unpleasant situation that followed.

To be clear, these absurdities permeate security services when discipline and professionalism have taken flight. It is hoped that the assault on the Yola police headquarters by soldiers; the NAF personnel's criminal bid to free fraudsters; and soldiers' entanglement in Wadume's skein are sour grapes the services should have nothing to do with any more. The President and Service Chiefs have the duty to put an end to the episodes of embarrassment of officials of national security agencies in full public glare. The Commander in Chief needs to demonstrate leadership on this matter

Inflation takes joy out of festive season shopping

French plant sign of the Huawei's commitment

PARIS

HUAWEI Technologies Co's planned factory in France shows its commitment to serve the European market with openness despite challenges and geopolitical uncertainties, experts said.

The comments came after Zhang Minggang, deputy general manager of Huawei France, said in a video interview with France Inter, a major French public radio channel and part of Radio France, that the plant, with an investment of 200 million euros (\$215 million), is expected to be operational by the end of 2025.

Zhang said the plant, located in the city of Brumath in France's Northeast Grand-Est region, will create 500 local jobs.

Huawei said in a statement in 2020 that the factory, its first overseas plant, aims to produce a billion euros worth of mobile network technology solutions for the Chinese telecom equipment maker's European customers annually.

Dong Yifan, an assistant research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the Beijing-based China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said Huawei has been facing increasing pressure from the United States and some of its allies in Europe, due to so-called national security concerns.

However, no factual evidence to back such concerns has been

displayed, Dong said, adding that building a factory in France shows Huawei's openness and its commitment to serving the European market.

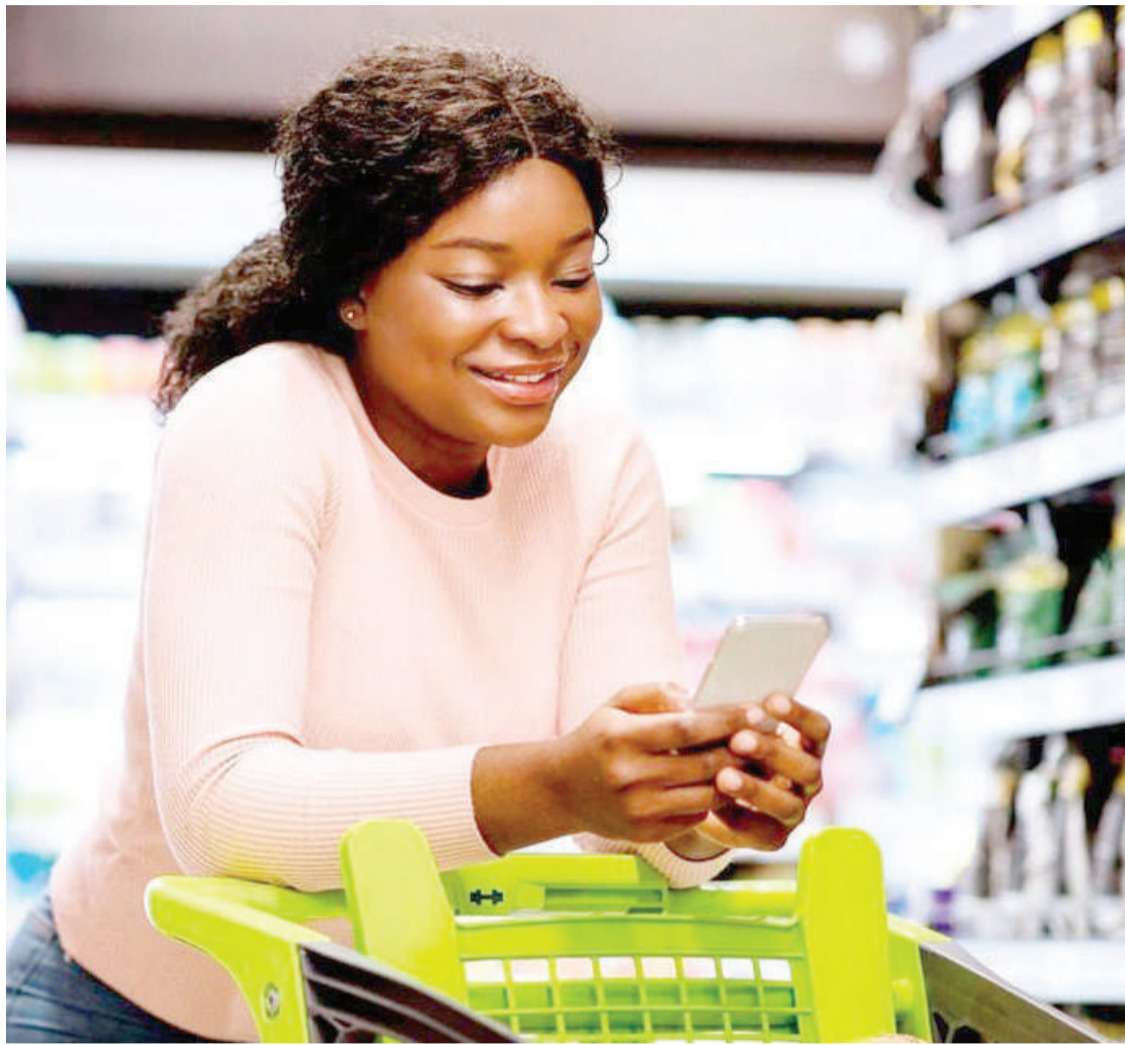
The plant will also have a demo center, showcasing the wireless base station production, software loading and testing process. The center will be open to carriers, governments and related authorities, demonstrating Huawei's positive stance on Europe's call for digital sovereignty, Huawei has said previously.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said Europe is an important market for Huawei and it is seen by founder Ren Zhengfei as a second home for the company.

The plant, which will be highly automated and intelligent, can help drive the technical competitiveness of the European industry and boost the resilience of local supply chains as well as infrastructure, Xiang said.

The factory is part of Huawei's broader plan to invest in France, where it has been present since 2003.

Huawei has also announced other projects, such as a research center in Paris, to support digital transformation in the country and the development of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and 6G.



Commodities buyer making her payments through mobile money.

NAIROBI

AS Kenyan families celebrate Christmas and New Year, a shadow looms over dining tables: inflation.

Data reveals that the prices of essential festive food items have surged at unprecedented rates, leaving consumers grappling with higher expenses during what should be a joyous time. A spot check by the Business Daily found that the prices of vegetables such as coriander, bell pepper, tomatoes, meats, and wheat flour – items that many families use during the holiday season – have almost doubled, forcing some households to chop them off the menu.

"We used to buy bell peppers and coriander (dhania) at more affordable prices. However, their prices have gone up. Regrettably, this rise is affecting our businesses. Consumers are now buying must-have ingredients such as onions and tomatoes, avoiding other items due to high prices," says Stella Mwangi, a seller at Nairobi's Zimmerman estate.

One kilo of carrot now goes for Sh177 compared to Sh77 last Christmas season. Onions which used to sell for Sh108 a kilo last year have jumped

to Sh229. Bell pepper used in meats, salads and vegetable rice has also become a luxury as one piece of red and yellow now goes for Sh80. Alcohol prices have also gone up with a 750ml bottle of spirits now retailing at Sh1,550 this holiday season compared to Sh1,400 last holiday.

A 500ml bottle of beer is also more expensive by Sh23, meaning that Kenyans have to spend more in bars. Sugar, used in many Christmas snacks has experienced the biggest jump of Sh160 with two kilos now going for Sh436 from Sh276 last Christmas season.

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics' annual consumer price index, over the past year, the prices of essential commodities have consistently risen. In the food sector alone, 9 out of 12 basic commodities have witnessed an increase in prices, impacting the daily lives of ordinary citizens. Beef, wheat flour and potatoes have also become expensive.

The high costs are forcing consumers to rethink their shopping lists. Some are opting for smaller holiday gatherings, while others are exploring alternative ingredients and dishes that are more budget-friendly.

"It's deeply frustrating that we can't indulge in the rich, explosive flavours we once enjoyed because how many bell peppers can you buy for Sh80? Even basic ingredients like spring onions that you'd find in our grandmother's gardens are now expensive. At this rate, I've even contemplated cutting out onions altogether due to these exorbitant prices. It's a challenging and disheartening situation for many of us," says Mary Njoki, a buyer at a market in Nairobi's Zimmerman.

Restaurants are also feeling the pinch. Some eateries which used to bulk-shop in markets are mulling over adjusting their menus or adding prices. "If you stay here for long, you will see how very few customers will come to buy this fresh produce. So I decided that I will soon just sell onions and tomatoes alone, and drop the rest of the vegetables," said Ms Mwangi, the Zimmerman market trader.

More than half of Kenyan households cut their spending on food and 10 per cent of homes sold their assets in the race to survive sky-high inflation and economic shocks from the worst drought in 40 years.

This is the verdict of a World Bank survey on how Kenyans coped with the high cost of living, which has remained above

the government ceiling of 7.5 per cent since July.

Drought has made food costly and denied income to persons who rely on agriculture, which accounts for nearly a third of Kenya's GDP.

As a result, 52 per cent of Kenyan households cut their food shopping basket in an environment where companies have frozen salaries as they recover from Covid-19 economic hardships.

About 35 per cent of households reduced consumption of non-food items, which are deemed non-essential, while 10 per cent sold their assets to survive the economic shocks.

"Just under 95 per cent of households used at least one strategy to cope in June 2022. Close to half of households (52 per cent) reduced food consumption and over a third (35 per cent) reduced consumption of non-food items. Some 10 per cent sold productive assets," said the World Bank on how Kenyans coped in the six months to June.

"Regression analyses reveal that agricultural households cutting consumption to cope with shocks were more likely to be households with young children and those headed by women."

Kenya's inflation has since June breached the target range of 2.5-7.5 per cent, prompting the CBK's Monetary Policy Committee to raise benchmark interest rates to curb consumer spending.

Since May, the MPC has raised the benchmark interest rate by 175 basis points to 8.75 percent, signaling lenders to raise the cost of borrowing.

Increasing the key policy lending rate makes borrowing more expensive, and this is expected to reduce spending by businesses and families with the ultimate goal of lowering prices of goods and services.

"Further, most households reported an increase in prices of essential food items and over half of rural households reported being unable to access core staple food such as beans or maize."

Costly commodities have hit workers hard given that the average real wages, adjusted for inflation, stood at negative 3.83 percent last year compared to negative 0.59 percent in 2020.

Employers say the real wages will take longer to improve amid the recovery of the economy from Covid-19 economic hardships, which delivered layoffs, pay cuts and business closures.



A view shows a Huawei logo at Huawei Technologies France headquarters in Boulogne-Billancourt.

Ethiopia defaults on Eurobond repayment

ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia became Africa's third default in as many years on Tuesday after it failed to make a \$33 million "coupon" payment on its only international government bond.

Africa's second most populous country announced earlier this month that it intended to formally go into default, having been under severe financial strain in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and a two-year civil war that ended in November 2022.

It had been supposed to make the payment on December 11, but technically had up until Tuesday to provide the money due to a 14-day 'grace period' clause written into the \$1 billion bond.

According to two sources familiar with the situation, bondholders had not been paid the coupon as of the end of Friday December 22, the last international banking working day before the grace period expires.

Ethiopian government officials did not respond to requests for comment on Friday or over the

weekend, but the widely-expected default will see it join two other African nations, Zambia and Ghana, in a full-scale "Common Framework" restructuring.

The East African country first requested debt relief under the G20-led initiative in early 2021.

Progress was initially delayed by the civil war but, with its foreign exchange reserves depleted and inflation soaring, Ethiopia's official sector government creditors, including China agreed to a debt service suspension deal in November.

On December 8, the government said parallel negotiations it had been having with pension funds and other private sector creditors that hold its bond had broken down.

Credit ratings agency S&P Global then downgraded the bond, to "Default" on December 15 on the assumption that the coupon payment would not be made.

The annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank might have returned to Africa after 50 years with good news of projected eco-

nomical rebound for the continent, but critics say they did little to address the continent's main problem today – debt.

IMF has indeed predicted that African economies will bounce back to pre-pandemic growth rates next year. But from Marrakesh, only Zambia has come back with debt respite after entering a deal with creditors, including China and France, to restructure its loans, allowing it headroom to deal with its internal challenges.

Zambia, which in 2020 became the first African country to default on its loans after the pandemic, had accumulated a debt of \$32.8 million as of December 2022 and is currently among the 10 countries on the continent that are in debt distress.

Other countries unable to service their loans – including Ghana, Somalia, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the Republic of Congo – are yet to reach any deal with their creditors.

Beside these, 10 other African countries, including Kenya and

Rwanda, are at high risk of defaulting on their debts as loan servicing costs soar, says IMF.

Even for countries not in distress, the cost of servicing loans has nearly doubled since the pandemic. IMF figures show that yields on African Eurobonds are currently over 12 percent, compared to seven percent before the pandemic, worsening the funding squeeze facing the continent.

In a recent report, IMF warned that the continent's average debt-to-GDP ratio hit 60.8 percent this year and could rise by a further 10 percent in the next five years if countries don't implement crucial reforms to cut fiscal deficits.

Many Pan-African experts and activists, however, have faulted IMF's austerity advice to Africa, blaming it for the debt crisis.

"World Bank and IMF have been operating in Africa for decades with a lot of influence and power in implementing economic development strategies across the continent," said economist Fadhel Kaboub in an interview with a local outlet.

"So, when we talk about Africa being in a debt trap today, it's one of two things. It's either recognising that the IMF and World Bank have failed miserably in their development mission with the continent or they're actually very skilled at using their influence to entrap the continent in this trap of external debt."

Johannesburg-based international charity ActionAid, in a report criticising IMF's work in Africa, said the austerity measures prescribed by the lender are in fact hurting State spending on crucial sectors like health-care and education. It called for a change that prioritises development over debt repayments, shifting away from austerity and fiscal fundamentalism, and advancing progressive alternatives.

IMF, however, blames Africa's growing debt unsustainability on the continent's shift to commercial and non-concessional debts.

"The shares of domestic debt and commercial debt in the total for sub-Saharan African countries have increased since the early 2000s, while the share of



National Bank of Ethiopia Governor Mamo Mihretu speaking during a past interview.

bilateral and multilateral debt has shrunk from 50.0 percent in 2000 to 21.6 percent in 2021," the lender said in a report.

This shift, IMF says, has further complicated debt restructuring negotiations, slimming chances of possible successful debt reworks, as more and diverse creditors are involved.

When Rwanda took bold steps in fight against climate change



Environment Minister Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya officiates the launch of Rwanda's Carbon Market Framework, recently, at COP28 in Dubai, UAE.

By Correspondent Friday Simbaya, Iringa

Bajaji Iringa Drivers Union (UMBI) has enabled more than 260 young drivers to get loans worth 2.80bn/- from banks and financial institutions since its establishment in 2017.

Speaking to the Guardian recently, the chairman of UMBI Norbert Sumka (pictured), said that the loans were given by various financial institutions in the Iringa region, including FINCA Microfinance Bank and Mufindi Community Bank PLC (MUCOBA).

He has this enabled them to buy 260 three wheelers (Bajajis) using a lease and purchase arrangement.

"With 300 members has contributed to reduce the tide of unemployment, mainly youths, particularly those graduating from colleges," said Sumka.

He explained that the group was established after he saw young people driving private rickshaws for a long time with no economic benefits.

"Therefore, we encourage other young people to come here in the UMBI group, so that they can be guaranteed to get loans..." said Sumka.

But, he noted that UMBI is facing the challenge of capital, because when they go to the bank to get a loan, they are told to have fixed deposit as borrowing security.

Fredrick Andea Nyaluke is one of the beneficiaries and a borrower from UMBI, said that through the group, he has been able to borrow three rickshaws since 2018.

He has said three bajajis help him run his life and he has managed to build a house and able to meet essential needs of his family, including sending children to fee-paying schools (English medium schools).

Nyaluke explained that bajajis he own have also given him the confidence to go to the bank and borrow any loan and return it, but before that he had no that experience.

"...but through the UMBI group I have become the owner of three bajajis and I am able to go

to a financial institution and borrow a loan and repay it back," he boasted.

"The call to my fellow youths is that they refuse to be slaves and take the decision to join the group, so that they can be guaranteed for a loan for buying a bajaji and drive their own bajaji," said Nyaluke.

"The difference is that, when I drive my bajaji and earn a day's income, it becomes mine, when he drives the boss's, the day's income remains his boss's, so I ask the young people to join the group so that they can own their own rickshaws," he urged his young colleagues.

Nyaluke asked young people who are also running private contracts of bajajis to come and register with the union, so that they can get loans for small businesses through the group's lawyer.

"We have received a lot of complaints from some of our fellow youths who operate bajaji on contracts from individuals, that when the time comes to end the contracts, the bosses change the decision and break the contracts, leaving the young people helpless," he explained.

Meanwhile, the Manager of MUCOBA Bank Plc, Iringa Branch Denis Rweyendera, has said that they expect to provide a loan of ten (10) bajaji, worth more than 80mn/- to the group, so that they can finally lend to their members.

'Efforts for gaming sector's healthy growth is stressed'

TIANJIN

CHINA'S domestic video game approvals in December hit a 17-month high, signaling the country's dedicated efforts to foster healthy and high-quality development of the sector, analysts said.

On Monday, the National Press and Publication Administration granted licenses to 105 domestic games, the maximum such permits issued since July 2022. On Friday, China also approved a new batch of 40 foreign video games.

The recent approvals "strongly demonstrate the regulator's supportive stance toward the development of online games", the Game Publishing Committee of the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association said in a statement published on its official WeChat account.

Zhang Yi, CEO and chief analyst at iiMedia Research, said the new move is sending a positive signal to the gaming market, and it is helping to address the concerns caused by the recently released guidelines aimed at curbing excessive spending on online gaming.

"December's new game titles include those operated by leading Chinese tech and internet companies such as Tencent and NetEase, showcasing large companies' strong commitment to and confidence in the domestic gaming market," he said.

Zhang said he believes the new release will help further stimulate market vitality, bring more high-quality products to the market and better cater to the gamers' demand.

Data from the NPPA showed that a total of 1,075 game titles were approved this year, of which 977 were domestically produced and 98 were imported. The total number of approved game titles last year was 512 and the same for 2021 was 748.

The Game Publishing Committee said the data for the past three years indicates a gradual increase in the stability of the license issuance policy, as well as a noticeable recovery in the gaming market.

Despite the positive signal, shares of several Chinese gaming companies, including Giant Network Group Co and Kingnet Network Co, hit a limit down on Monday.

The shares of major Chinese online gaming companies, including Tencent and NetEase, plunged on Friday after China issued draft guidelines detailing rules that online games will not be allowed to offer incentives and rewards for daily logins, or for first and consecutive in-game purchases.

On Saturday, the NPPA provided updates on the draft proposals aimed at fostering prosperous and healthy sector development. It said it will continue to gather opinions from different parties to refine the draft proposals, including market concerns over proposed rules.

Thomas Chong, an equity analyst at Jefferies Hong Kong Ltd, said the significant share price correction of online gaming stocks was mainly due to the concerns over a sector crackdown, noting that comments from the NPPA together with ongoing game approvals address such market concerns.

"In fact, the draft proposals from the NPPA aim to fine-tune the rules after its takeover of the supervision of the gaming industry from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2019," Chong

said. "We expect the market to watch out for developments on final implementations in the coming months. We believe market concerns over a sector crackdown are overdone."

Tencent Games said the draft rules will not change the reasonable business models and operations of gaming companies. It said the regulations offer more clarity about the country's supportive attitude toward the industry, and has provided guidance in encouraging high-quality original games.

NetEase Games said there is no "intrinsic impact on business", adding that the draft proposals aim to foster high-quality and healthy industry development.

Zhang Shule, an independent commentator on the IT and gaming industry, said the draft guidelines aim to establish further regulations for license approvals, specifying details such as the approval process, and this year's normalization of license approval ensures the stable development of the gaming industry.

"The final implementation will bring a surge in approved game titles in the future," he said. "This implies that, when addressing the problems in the gaming industry's management, a diverse landscape of games is expected to emerge, entering a new era of competition based on creativity and technology."



Stellar performance to backward integration

LAGOS

DESPITE the inclement operating environment in Nigeria, Chams Holding Company Plc's (Chams HoldCo) has topped the list of quoted companies with over 600 percent capital gain on the Nigerian Exchange Limited, NGX.

The Company's Group Managing Director, Mrs Mayowa Olaniyan, had in September this year, presented the Facts Behind its Figures to the Management of NGX and Stockbrokers, when she assured the investing public of brighter days ahead.

Prompted by media enquiries at the weekend, Olaniyan unveiled some of the driving forces behind the Company's resilience and topnotch performance.

She stated, "Chams Holdco's impressive financial performance is a result of meticulous backward integration efforts. Collaborating with strategic partners, CCNL is set to introduce new production lines for SIM cards and is looking to become a net exporter of its products to other African countries.

"The company's strategic moves, including the expansion of its card production capabilities, the successful onboarding of major players, and the groundbreaking venture into local SIM card production, stand out as key contributors to its financial surge. Chams Holdco's ability to adapt to market dynamics and pioneer innovative solutions is undoubtedly shaping its trajectory as a frontrunner in Nigeria's rapidly evolving tech landscape.

"Card Center Nigeria Limited (CCNL), has been a key player in this success story. Widely recognized for its production of financial cards, CCNL has strategically diversified into the local production of SIM cards for Telecoms and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operating in Nigeria. This move aligns with Chams' commitment to innovation and signifies a bold step towards reducing industry reliance on foreign exchange and ensuring cost-effectiveness in the production of SIM cards."



A gaming fan takes part in an online King of Glory playing competition.

Stock market maintains bullish run, defies Christmas sentiment

LAGOS

THE Nigeria stock market, last week, maintained bullish run defying the usual Christmas sentiment characterised by sell pressures.

Consequently, investors gained over N894 billion Week-on-Week, WoW, as the Nigerian Exchange Limited, NGX, market capitalisation surged to N40.506 trillion from N39.612 trillion the previous week.

Similarly, another stock market gauge, the NGX All Share Index, ASI, recorded unprecedented mark to hit another new all-time high of 74,289.02 basis points on Thursday after breaking out the 74,000 psychological line to reveal the impact of price appreciation of large cap stocks, positive sentiments and buyers' conviction in the midst of weak macroeconomic indices and increasing headwinds.



However, on Friday the stock market recorded its first loss of the week under review as

sell pressure on MTN led to the reduction on its price by 3.8%, followed by Zenith Bank

1.94%, UBA 1.54%, International Breweries 8.33%, and FCMB 5.19% which impacted nega-

tively on the NGX ASI to close at 74,023.27 points. Analysis of the week's activi-

ties showed that NGX ASI up 2.3% W/W, as the Month-to-Date, MtD and Year-to-Date, YtD gains declined to +3.7% and +44.4%, respectively.

Meanwhile, the financial services industry (measured by volume) led the activity chart with 1,756 billion shares valued at N24.641 billion traded in 17,589 deals; thus contributing 70.9% and 45.81% to the total stock turnover volume and value respectively. The Conglomerates industry followed with 222.965 million shares valued N1.781 billion in 2573 deals. The third place was Services industry with a turnover of 93.820 million shares worth N528.510 million in 2166 deals.

Commenting on market outlook, Analysts at InvestData Consulting Limited, said: "

We expect positive sentiments and profit taking to continue on bargain hunting for dividend paying stocks ahead of Christmas holidays in the midst of sector rotation and portfolio rebalancing on the strength of the better-than-expected corporate numbers released and high yields. However, we note that 2024 is beginning dividend season ahead.

Meanwhile, all eyes are on the fiscal and monetary authorities to give direction of the government reforms and policies so far."

Clean energy is key to CO2 global goals

XINJIANG

Expanding the use of green hydrogen will be crucial for China to achieve deep cuts in carbon emissions while ensuring domestic energy security, as the future growth of power generation will mainly come from non-fossil resources, according to think tanks.

Green hydrogen, produced through the electrolysis of water using renewable energy sources, has emerged as a clean and versatile fuel with the potential to revolutionize various sectors, said the CNPC Economics and Technology Research Institute, China National Petroleum Corp.

Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the institute, said hydrogen's ability to produce energy without emitting carbon dioxide makes it a promising solution for decarbonizing sectors that are challenging to directly electrify, such as heavy industry, aviation and long-haul overland transportation.

By serving as a clean fuel alternative, hydrogen can replace traditional fossil fuels while playing a crucial role in consuming and storing renewable energy, making it an indispensable energy alternative for achieving deep emissions reductions at the terminal stage, Wu said.

Currently, hydrogen is mainly produced from carbon and natural gas without using carbon capture, utilization and storage technology. It therefore generates massive carbon emissions during the process, known as "gray hydrogen". "Blue hydrogen" has its carbon emissions captured and stored, or reused.

Projected demand for hydrogen is expected to soar over the next few decades, according to a recently released report by the institute.

The institute expects hydrogen, as a pivotal option for deep decarbonization at the terminal end, will see its consumption in China surpass 36 million metric tons in 2023, making the country the world's largest producer and consumer for the 13th consecutive year.

As China relies heavily on oil and natural gas imports, with dependency currently reaching 71.2 percent and 40.2 percent, respectively, hydrogen will make China less reliant on traditional fossil fuels and accelerate energy transition, said global consultancy Accenture.

Accenture said local authorities in China are already promulgating detailed policies to seize emerging opportunities, following the release of a national plan

aimed at promoting the development of the hydrogen energy industry.

Provinces across the nation are coming up with plans to develop green hydrogen, especially renewable energy-rich regions and more developed areas, either leveraging their location conditions or creating new industry clusters to develop the whole value chain of green hydrogen, it said.

China issued its 2021-35 plan for hydrogen energy development earlier this year, aiming to have some 50,000 hydrogen-fueled vehicles on the road and a batch of hydrogen fueling stations by 2025, and produce 100,000-200,000 tons of green hydrogen per year – part of government efforts to further promote high-quality hydrogen energy development.

Many domestic companies have been stepping up efforts to formulate hydrogen plans in recent years.

China Petroleum and Chemical Corp completed construction of the nation's largest photovoltaic green hydrogen production project in August, which is expected to produce 20,000 tons of green hydrogen annually when at full capacity, a significant breakthrough in China's scaled industrial application of green hydrogen.

This is part of the company's planned \$4.6 billion investment in the hydrogen sector through 2025, aiming to boost annual hydrogen production capacity to 500,000 tons by 2025.

State Power Investment Corp Ltd has also proposed ambitious hydrogen strategies, including its demonstration project in the Xizang autonomous region focusing on using hydrogen to overcome the issue of the intermittence of renewable power.

China produced about 33 million tons of hydrogen in 2021, making it the world's largest hydrogen producer.

Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, said China's green hydrogen production costs are declining as a result of increased technological breakthroughs.

As China is currently the world's largest hydrogen producer and consumer, it has substantial room for further development, said Luo.

Considering uncertainty in demand, infrastructure, technology and policy at emerging stages of the green hydrogen sector, Accenture recommends companies operating in the sector take into consideration all related risks.



MONDAY - WEDNESDAY FROM 10:30 PM



ITV	18:00	19:30	20:15	21:00	22:00	23:00	00:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	20:00	21:00	22:00	23:00	00:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	20:00	21:00	22:00	23:00	00:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	20:00	21:00	22:00	23:00	00:00																		
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THURSDAY 28 DEC	5:00 Soap rpt: Uzalo	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:30 HABARI	8:00 Al Jazeera	9:30 Soap rpt: In Love with Ramon	10:00 Watoto wetu	10:30 Shamba lulu	11:00 Ripoti maalum rpt	12:00 Al Jazeera	12:30 Jarida la wanawake rpt	13:00 Kipindi maalum rpt: BOT	13:30 Jungu kuu rpt	14:00 Shamsham za pwani rpt	15:00 Meza huru	16:30 Watoto wetu	17:00 The Base	18:00 Jiji Letu	18:15 Top ten	19:00 Shamba lulu	19:30 Soap: In Love with Ramon	20:00 Habari	21:05 Kipima Joto	23:00 The Base	00:00 Al Jazeera	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:00 Habari	8:00 Al Jazeera	9:00 Watoto wetu	10:05 Shika Bamba 5	10:35 Mjue Zaidi rpt	11:15 Chetu ni chetu rpt	11:50 Hawavumi lakini wamo	12:50 Art and lifestyle	13:20 Shamba lulu	5:30 Uwanja wa Mazoezi	6:00 HABARI	6:40 Kumekucha	7:00 Habari	8:00 Al Jazeera	9:00 Kumekucha Michezo rpt	10:00 Meza Huru Rpt	11:30 Tomorrow Today rpt	12:00 Dw News Africa rpt	12:30 Our Earth	13:00 Telenovela rpt: The Three Sides of Ana	14:00 Culinary rpt	14:30 Ripoti Maalum	15:00 Dk 45 rpt	16:00 Dw News Africa rpt	16:30 The Monday Agenda rpt	17:30 Meza huru	19:00 Rev	19:00 Out & About Rpt	20:00 Aibu Yako
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WORLD

Iran rejects US accusation of attacking tanker in Indian Ocean

TEHRAN

IRANIAN Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Monday rejected the US accusation that an Iranian drone attacked a chemical tanker operating in the Indian Ocean.

He made the remarks at a press conference in Tehran while reacting to a

Saturday statement by the US Defense Department, in which the US claimed that "the motor vessel CHEM PLUTO, a Liberia-flagged, Japanese-owned, and Netherlands-operated chemical tanker was struck by a drone fired from Iran."

"The US accusations were endless," Kanaani said, rejecting them as "worth-

less" and saying they are aimed at diverting the global public opinion and covering up the US government's full-fledged support for the Israeli attacks in Gaza and made with clear political objectives and motivations."

Kanaani said Iran has always been part of the efforts to ensure the security and safety of maritime transportation and trade through international waters and acted responsibly to that end.

According to the US Defense Department's statement, the chemical tanker was struck at approximately 10 am local time (0600 GMT) on Saturday in the Indian Ocean, 200 nautical miles from the coast of India.

"There were no casualties, and a fire on board the tanker has been extinguished," the statement added. Over the past weeks, several commercial ships were reportedly targeted in the Red Sea by the Yemen-based Houthi group, who said its missile and drone strikes were launched as a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The US and British officials have accused Iran of "being behind the attacks," which was strongly rejected by Iran as "baseless."

Iranian authorities have repeatedly stressed that the resistance groups in the region did not take orders from Iran and decided and acted based on their nations' own interests. **Agencies**



In this photo dated Oct 3, 2022, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani speaks during a press conference in Tehran, Iran. AFP

Israeli PM inspects north Gaza, vows to continue fight

JERUSALEM / GAZA / TEHRAN

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu toured the northern Gaza Strip on Monday and vowed to continue the fight, the prime minister's office said.

Netanyahu visited the Palestinian enclave, where an ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has raged, together with Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Amir Baram, the office said.

"We don't stop. The war continues to the end until we finish them, nothing less," Netanyahu told Israeli soldiers.

Meanwhile, at least two soldiers were killed on Monday in battles in Gaza, said the Israeli military, bringing the total death toll of Israeli soldiers since the outbreak of the conflict to 156.

Since the army began its offensive in response to Hamas' surprise attack on Oct 7, in which about 1,200 Israelis were killed and 240 hostages were taken, large parts of Gaza have been devastated and most of its 2.3 million population have been displaced.

At least 20,674 Palestinians were killed and 54,536 others wounded in the enclave, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry on Monday.

In the past 24 hours, 250 Palestinians have died in the 25 air and ground operations launched by Israeli forces across the enclave, the ministry said.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry

condemned Israel for disregarding international calls for a halt of the military offensive against Palestinian civilians and for restraining settler militias.

The ministry also emphasized the need for a United Nations Security Council ceasefire resolution to be adopted to allow for a safe and speedy delivery of aid and ensure the security of Palestinian civilians.

Also on Monday, Hamas denied that it had rejected an Egyptian proposal to end the conflict in Gaza and exchange prisoners with Israel as reported by some media outlets.

Ezat al-Rashq, a member of Hamas' Political Bureau, said in a statement that the group "confirmed that there are no negotiations except with a comprehensive cessation of the Israeli aggression."

Rashq added Hamas' leadership "is vigorously seeking to halt the aggression and killing against our people entirely, not temporarily."

"Our people want the aggression to stop, not temporary truces or partial calm followed by continued aggression," he said.

Reuters, citing two Egyptian security sources, reported on Monday that "Hamas and the allied Islamic Jihad have rejected an Egyptian proposal that they relinquish power in the Gaza Strip in return for a permanent ceasefire."

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman on Monday strongly condemned the "brutal" Israeli bombardment of central Gaza's al-Maghazi



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, center, wears a protective vest and helmet as he receives a security briefing with commanders and soldiers in the northern Gaza Strip, on Monday. AP

refugee camp that killed at least 70 Palestinians on Sunday.

At a weekly press conference in Tehran, Nasser Kanaani said it was regrettable that when many people prayed in sympathy and solidarity for the Palestinians, Israel did not stop its "crimes" and killing in Gaza.

Kanaani called on the international community to take practical and deterrent measures to prevent Israel's continued killing of Palestinians.

When commenting on a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Friday demanding immediate and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Gaza, the spokesman said it once again showed the US full support for Israel.

He condemned the US for its reluctance to consent to "the inclusion of any paragraph" in a resolution to stop Israel's "criminal" attacks against the coastal enclave, referring to the

US veto of a Russian amendment that would have restored the call for a "suspension of hostilities," as well as its abstention in the vote for the Friday-adopted UNSC resolution on Gaza.

Kanaani said, unlike what Palestinians expect and the international community demands, the resolution is "contentless and impossible to implement," since it is not possible to send aid to the enclave under relentless Israeli bombardments.

Blast rocks market in Cameroon's restive Anglophone region on Christmas Day, with no casualties

YAOUNDE

AN improvised explosive device exploded on Christmas Day morning in Bamenda, the chief town of Cameroon's Anglophone region of Northwest that has been ravaged by years of armed separatist conflict, several local and security sources said.

The blast struck a market in the T Junction neighborhood of the city, setting three makeshift shops ablaze, a security source in the region told Xinhua. "Fortunately the market closed for today, and that is why there were no casualties or injuries." "We heard the sound of an explosion. It was so loud and the sound caused panic among

residents," James Mbah, a resident of the city, told Xinhua over the phone.

Last week, separatist fighters warned that Christmas would not be celebrated in Cameroon's two Anglophone regions of Northwest and Southwest because the feast falls on Monday, which has been imposed by them since 2017 as "ghost

town day" during which all sorts of activities in the two regions do not function. "We are all spending Christmas at home. The streets are empty and people are just afraid of the unknown and don't want to step out," Mbah said.

On Sunday, the region's governor Adolphe Lele L'Afrique said extra security would be provided

to churches and other places of worship because of Christmas. "Our brave security forces will ensure the safety and security of everyone so that they can celebrate Christmas in peace. People need to collaborate with security forces as well," the official told reporters after a security meeting in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. **Xinhua**

Germany envoy appreciates Indians celebrating Christmas

NEW DELHI

GERMAN Ambassador to India, Philipp Ackermann, appreciated the huge number of Indians celebrating the Christmas festival with so much joy and enthusiasm.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), he said that Christmas is not a festival only for Christians and in India, a huge number of non-Christians are celebrating it.

"Merry Christmas & frohe Weihnachten", Ackermann posted on X (formerly Twitter).

In a video message, the German envoy said, "Christmas is not only for Christians. When you are in India, you realise how many people celebrate Christmas who are not Christians. This is something I appreciate a lot".

"The way Indians are embracing this celebration and this day of peace and joy is wonderful. I wish everybody Merry Christmas and Frohe Weihnachten," he added.

Meanwhile, the city markets in the national capital are dazzling for the Christmas celebration.

The Khan market in Delhi is lined up with stalls selling Santa caps, trees, reindeer, wreaths, candles and other items of decor.

Meanwhile, churches, educational institutes and private buildings in the national capital are all decked up with lights and festive decorations ahead of Christmas.

Bakeries across the city are working overtime as cake shops are witnessing an increase in traffic ahead of the festivities.

Christmas is observed to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. Carol singing, dazzling Christmas lights, and decked-out Christmas trees entice folks to join in the celebrations on December 25.

Christmas is an annual festival celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed by billions of people worldwide on December 25 as a religious and cultural event.

The Sacred Heart Cathedral Catholic Church in Delhi was decorated ahead of Christmas.

Many parts of India come alive with the festive spirit of Christmas. Churches from Coimbatore to Srinagar have all been adorned and lit up to celebrate the festival.

While Christmas is known for the spirit of togetherness, it is also a time to indulge and spend some time away with the family.

ANI

COVID, flu surge in US amid holidays, increasing health risks

LOS ANGELES

THE United States has seen an uptick in flu and COVID-19 cases amid holidays, and health experts are concerned about the increasing health risks brought by the simultaneous spread of respiratory illnesses.

The amount of respiratory illnesses causing people to seek healthcare is elevated or increasing across most areas of the country, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This rise is attributed to several factors, including holiday gatherings, a high number of unvaccinated individuals, and the emergence of a new, potentially more transmissible variant of the coronavirus, according to health experts.

Seasonal influenza activity is elevated in the United States, and continues to increase in most parts of the country, the latest CDC data showed. There have been at least 5.3 million illnesses, 54,000 hospitalizations, and 3,200 deaths from flu in the United States so far this season, according to CDC estimates.

The number of weekly flu hospital admissions continues to increase, with over 9,800 patients admitted to hospitals with flu in the week ending Dec. 16, according to the CDC.

A total of 14 flu-associated pediatric deaths have been reported in the country this season. Nationally, laboratory test positivity for flu and emergency department visits due to flu are increasing, according to the CDC.

Meanwhile, a new coronavirus subvariant JN.1 is spreading fast in the United States, becoming a significant contributor to new COVID-19 cases in the country. JN.1 is currently the fastest growing variant and the dominant one in the United States, and is responsible for over 44 percent of new infections across the country, up from the previously reported 21.4 percent, according to the CDC.

The CDC estimated that JN.1 is strongest in the Northeast regions including New Jersey and New York, where it accounts for nearly 57 percent of cases.

JN.1, which is closely related to the variant BA.2.86 that the CDC has been tracking since August, was first detected in the United States in September 2023. JN.1 is likely more transmissible than other variants "or better at evading our immune systems than other circulating variants," said the CDC.

Xinhua

How Hamas attack diminishes chances of resolution to Israel-Palestine conflict

TEL AVIV

THE decades old Israel-Palestine issue has been a matter that has kept the world divided at large. Although almost all major nations have advocated for a two-state solution, it was never other than the Oslo Accords (1993), that the two parties ever came close to any agreement.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict has considerably dimmed prospects for a near-future resolution between Israel and Palestine as Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "I won't allow 'Hamastan' to turn into 'Fatahstan' even if this is the wish of Israel's staunchest ally".

Twenty years after Oslo Accord, Hamas launched an attack on October 7, 2023 on Israel and IDF replied it by a strong counteroffensive and bombardment of Gaza. The manner

in which this Israel-Hamas war is progressing, it has pushed the chances of the two sides reaching an agreement in any foreseeable future.

October 7 attacks

It was the Jewish festival of Sukkot. The whole of Israel was having a sound sleep when over 2000 Hamas terrorists breached the borders and started a brutal massacre, killing and raping innocent civilians. Emerging videos showed extremely horrific visuals from Israel. More than 1200 people including some foreigners, were killed and over 240 people were held as hostages by Hamas.

After the attacks, Netanyahu in a strong statement said that the country is at "war" with the "enemy" and will come out victorious. He also vowed to turn all Hamas outfits in Gaza into "rubble".

"All of the places which Hamas is deployed, hiding and operating in, that wicked city, we will turn them into rubble," he said in a statement.

The October 7 attack came as a severe blow to the robust Israeli intelligence and security system. In response, Israel launched a strong counteroffensive against the Hamas terror units in Gaza.

Countries including India, condemned the attack and expressed full support and solidarity with Israel. However, with time as Israeli attacks and bombardments led to mounting civilian death toll and visuals showing the deplorable humanitarian condition in Gaza, Tel Aviv has also received global criticism. According to the Gaza health ministry, over 20,000 people including 8000 children have been killed in Gaza in Israeli strikes.

In the month of December, in a truce

brokered by Qatar, Israel and Hamas reached an agreement for a pause in fighting, alongside the release in which over 100 hostages (both Israeli and foreign nationals) were released from Hamas captivity. Israel also released around 240 Palestinian prisoners including children during the deal, CNN reported.

However, the deal was short-lived, and subsequent accusations of truce violations prolonged the conflict, with around 130 hostages still in Hamas captivity, while the US and other countries continue to manage another hostage deal.

Timing of the attack

There have been many speculations regarding Hamas choosing this particular time for attacking Israel. Israel has throughout maintained that there was an "Iranian hand" behind the attack.

It has also accused Tehran of pumping billions of dollars to continue the "terror machine" of Hamas. According to Tel Aviv, and as also pointed out by several experts, both Hamas and Iran were irked by Israel's growing acceptance by the Arab world.

"And the real empire of evil here starts in Tehran and spreads Islamic fundamentalism of the worst kind to the entire region," Israel President Herzog told ANI in November.

Earlier in March, China brokered a deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia -- two arch-rivals -- which was considered a major breakthrough after seven years of severed diplomatic relations. The two countries agreed to reestablish diplomatic ties after seven years of hostility, CNN reported.

In another breakthrough, Israel and Saudi Arabia were close to reaching an agreement, CNN reported. Saudi

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that his country was moving steadily in the direction of normalizing relations with Israel, the latter of which was also eager for the same.

In another development, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) that was announced during the sidelines of the G20 Summit in India was seen as a major inclusive moment of Israel with the Arab world.

Israel has alleged that it was because of this, that Iran and Hamas both wanted to derail the process.

"But somebody decided they wanted to derail this effort of inclusion of Israel and this huge peace vision of President Biden...this empire of evil Iran, who is working extra hours to undermine any inclusion of Israel in the region and any peace process," Herzog said.

ANI

Red tourism shakes off shadow cast by COVID-19

HUNAN

FOR 17-year-old Luo Yaqian, a two-day trip to the former residence of Chairman Mao Zedong in Shaoshan, Hunan province, inspired her to work hard to realize her goal of going to a reputable university.

The third-year student from Anhui No 2 High School in Yiyang, a city in Hunan, visited Shaoshan on Dec 11 on a trip organized by her school. All students from the school are due to visit Shaoshan in several groups.

During Luo's trip, the students visited Mao's former residence, his memorial hall and Mao Zedong Square. They also watched a movie and attended a lecture themed on Mao's younger days.

Luo said she was deeply inspired by the late Chinese leader. "Mao decided at an early age to leave his hometown to make a difference with his life. I am also determined to work hard and achieve good results in the national college entrance exam to realize my dream," she said.

In April, the authorities in Hunan launched a special study tour campaign for all primary and secondary school students to visit Shaoshan to make good use of the city's "red tourism" resources.

By the end of last month, more than 81,600 students had taken part in the study tours in 93 batches, local government figures show. The cost of these tours is covered by the government.

Mao, the People's Republic of China's first leader, was born in 1893 in Shaoshan village, about 100 kilometers from Changsha, capital of Hunan. He left his hometown for the first time when he was 17.

His former residence opened to visitors in 1951, since when increasing numbers have made pilgrimages to the

mountainous village.

Shaoshan has become one of China's major red tourism attractions – places in which Chinese revolutionaries were born, lived or fought

Key scenic areas in Shaoshan, including the square and Mao's former residence, have been upgraded to national 5A-class tourist attractions, the nation's top rating.

In Mao Zedong Square, the first stop on Luo's tour, she and her fellow students made a solemn vow.

"We, the younger generation, will hold high the great banner, shoulder the responsibility to achieve national rejuvenation, remember the words of leaders, and follow the footsteps of the Communist Party of China," the students said.

Luo said she had been taught about Mao by her parents and teachers since childhood, and the trip to Shaoshan reaffirmed her dream of becoming a servant for the people.

"I was impressed by the 73 patches on the late leader's pajamas. Although China has become wealthier, we should still reject self-indulgence and not waste things," she said.

Li Qingshan, 65, and his wife, Sun Zhuyun, 63, visited Shaoshan early this month from Qingdao, Shandong province, as they feared there would be too many visitors during the 130th anniversary of Mao's birth on Dec 26.

It was Li's second visit to Shaoshan, following one he made in the 1990s. "Shaoshan has definitely improved greatly over the years, and the local environment, roads and scenic spots are now much better," he said.

Li, who served in the military in Shenyang, Liaoning province, for several years in the late 1970s, admires Mao's skills as a military leader. "He was a true



A train leaves Shaoshan for Jingganshan in Xiangtan, Hunan province.

leader of the Chinese people, and dedicated himself to changing their destiny," he said.

When the couple arrived in the square, it was already packed with visitors waiting their turn to bow three times in tribute to Mao.

Some visitors paid for a two-man military-style escort to guide them to the foot of Mao's statue. After Li and his wife bowed three times to the statue, they had tears in their eyes.

Sun said: "People of my generation have lived through tough times, so we have deep feelings for Chairman Mao. He was a savior. Without him, we would not have been able to dream of living happy lives today."

Although today's living standards are much better than those in the past, she said people cannot forget the sacrifice made by Mao and other revolutionary leaders.

Childhood idol

Chen Jin, a second-year high school student from Sangzhi county, Zhangjiajie city, Hunan, said Mao has been his

idol since childhood, as his grandfather often told him stories of the late leader.

Visiting Shaoshan early this month with more than 1,000 of his fellow students on a trip organized by his school, Chen said, "I want to learn from Mao's fighting spirit, dedication to the people, and strength in the face of adversity, all of which are valuable lessons for young people."

"I also want to thank him for founding New China and changing the lives of Chinese people so that we now lead better lives."

Mo Hongjiu, vice-principal of Sangzhi No 1 High School, said it is very important for young students to take part in study tours to learn from Mao's experiences. Students from the school are due to visit Shaoshan in three groups.

The "red spirit" is deeply rooted in Chinese people's minds and should be passed on generation after generation, Mo added.

In addition to learning in class, study trips can help students gain a deeper understanding of the lives of revolutionaries, Mo said.

Guo Weiguo, director of the Shaoshan culture, tourism, radio and television, sports bureau, said the local tourism industry has witnessed a rapid recovery this year from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shaoshan received more than 6.52 million visitors from January to last month, a rise of 377 percent from last year and 13.6 percent from 2019. Tourism revenue during this period reached more than 5.5 billion yuan (\$771.1 million), a rise of 374 percent from last year and 13 percent from 2019.

Guo said two of the most popular live shows about Mao's life were performed 1,184 times from January to last month, attracting audiences of nearly 400,000, with ticket sales standing at 45 million.

The tourism boom has also helped local villagers escape poverty and live improved lives.

The villagers earn money by escorting visitors curious about Mao's birthplace, or those who want to experience the revolutionary times of years gone by.

Most of the villagers earn a decent living from tourism by running restaurants or inns, and selling Mao badges or statuettes as souvenirs.

Income rises

Mao Chunshan, Party secretary of Shaoshan village, said locals make money by opening eateries, homestays and shops selling souvenirs.

Some 70 percent of residents in Shaoshan village work in the tourism industry. They have opened nearly 200 homestays, along with restaurants and travel agencies, he said.

The villagers' average annual income rose to 35,000 yuan in 2021, up by 113 percent from 10 years ago, he said, adding, "Our income has risen year by year and our lives are better day by day."

Xinhua

Netanyahu tells world in Christmas message 'we're facing monsters'

TEL AVIV

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday evening released a Christmas message to Christians around the world in which he reminded people that Israel does not yet know peace.

"To our Christian friends around the world, Merry Christmas," he said.

"Christmas is supposed to be a time of goodwill to all men and peace on Earth," added Netanyahu. "Well, we don't have peace on Earth, not in our part anyway, and we certainly don't see goodwill to all men."

"We're facing monsters," he explained, "monsters who murdered children in front of their parents and parents in front of their children, who raped and beheaded women, who burned babies alive, who took babies hostages."

"This is a battle, not only of Israel against these barbarians, it's a battle of civilization against barbarism," declared Netanyahu. "And I know in this that we have your support."

The Prime Minister thanked Israel's friends for their support and their prayers saying that he wanted to assure them "as we stand together, we will also prevail. We shall win this war and secure our common values and our common future."

ANI

Global 2024 staple food supplies seen strained by El Nino, curbs

SINGAPORE

HIGH food prices in recent years have prompted farmers worldwide to plant more cereals and oilseeds, but consumers are set to face tighter supplies well into 2024, amid adverse El Nino weather, export restrictions and higher biofuel mandates.

Global wheat, corn and soybean prices - after several years of strong gains - are headed for losses in 2023 on easing Black Sea bottlenecks and fears of a global recession, although prices remain vulnerable to supply shocks and food inflation in the New Year, analysts and traders said.

"The supply picture for grains certainly improved in 2023 with bigger crops in some of the key places which matter. But we are not really out of the woods yet," said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at agriculture brokerage Ikon Commodities in Sydney.

"We have El Nino weather forecast until at least April-May (and) Brazil is almost certainly going to produce less corn."

El Nino and food production

The El Nino weather phenomenon, which brought dryness to large parts of Asia this year, is forecast to continue in the first half of 2024, putting at risk supplies of rice, wheat, palm oil and other farm products in some of the world's top agricultural exporters and importers.

Traders and officials expect Asian rice production in the first



A labourer looks on after unloading rice sacks at a main market in Colombo on Dec 13, 2023. AFP

half of 2024 to drop as dry planting conditions and shrinking reservoirs are likely to cut yields.

World rice supplies tightened this year already after the El Nino weather phenomenon cut into production, prompting India, by far the world's biggest exporter, to restrict shipments.

While other grains markets were losing value, rice prices rallied to their highest in 15 years in 2023, with quotations in some Asian export hubs gaining 40-45 percent.

India's next wheat crop is also being threatened by lack of moisture, which could force the world's second-largest wheat consumer to seek imports for the first time in six years as domestic inventories at state warehouses have dropped to their lowest in seven years.

Farmers down under

Come April, farmers in Australia, the world's No 2 wheat exporter, could be planting their crop in dry soils, after months of intense heat curbed yields for this year's crop and ended a three-dream run of record harvests.

This is likely to prompt buyers, including Indonesia, to seek larger volumes of wheat from other exporters in North America, Europe and the Black Sea region.

"The (wheat) supply situation in the current 2023/24 crop year is likely to deteriorate compared to last season," Commerzbank wrote in a note.

"This is because exports from important producer countries are likely to be significantly lower."

On the bright side for grain supplies, South American corn, wheat

and soybean production is expected to improve in 2024, although erratic weather in Brazil is leaving some doubt.

In Argentina, abundant rainfall over farming heartlands is likely to boost production of soybeans, corn and wheat in one of the world's largest grain exporting nations.

According to Argentina's Rosario grains exchange (BCR), 95 percent of early planted corn and 75 percent of soybeans are in "excellent to very good" conditions, thanks to rains since the end of October across the country's Pampas region.

Brazil is set for near-record farm output in 2024, although the country's soybean and corn production estimates have been reduced in recent weeks due to dry weather.

Global palm oil production is also likely to fall next year due to dry El Nino weather, supporting cooking oil prices that dropped more than 10 percent in 2023. The decline in output comes amid expectations of higher demand for making palm oil-based biodiesel and cooking oil.

"We see more upside price risk than down," said CoBank, a leading lender to the US agriculture sector.

"Global grain and oilseed stock inventories are tight by historic measures, the northern hemisphere will likely have a strong El Nino weather pattern during the growing season for the first time since 2015, the dollar should continue its recent decline, and global demand should return to its long-term growth trend."

Agencies

Putin praises liberation of Maryinka as success, thanks military servicemen

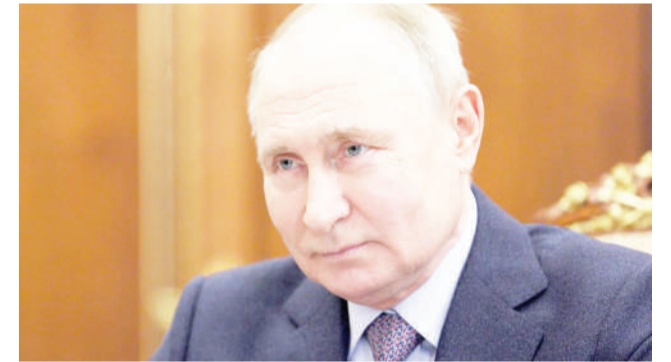
ST. PETERSBURG

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin has praised the liberation of Maryinka in the Donetsk People's Republic as a success and expressed gratitude to Russian military servicemen.

"This is a success," the president said at a meeting with Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, after listening to his report about the liberation of the settlement.

Putin congratulated the minister and said to him, "Pass on the warmest congratulations and words of gratitude to all the personnel, all the servicemen who took part at different times, at different stages in the battles to liberate Maryinka."

Putin is going to talk to Shoigu



separately to discuss further plans for the special military operation following the liberation of Maryinka. Putin previously said the progress gives Russian forces more room for maneuver in the area.

"We will talk separately about further plans. We talked today with the chief of the General Staff [of the Russian Armed Forces, Valery Gerasimov]. This is a separate topic. We will confer on what to do next," the president said.

Russia's 2024 presidential vote to give popular rebuff to outside attacks – elections head

MOSCOW

RUSSIA must hold its presidential election as it will give the country's citizenry the opportunity to demonstrate their power, maturity and unity, and will help repudiate aggressive pressure coming from unfriendly outside actors, Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairwoman Ella Pamfilova said in an interview with TASS.

When asked whether holding the presidential vote next year would be appropriate under current circumstances, the

elections chief said: "One can always find a pretext to say that now is not the time to hold elections, which is what a number of countries do to dismiss such elections as inconvenient."

"I believe that now as never before is the time to make the choice and hold the [presidential] election."

Because people feel the need to demonstrate their power, maturity and unity on a number of key issues that are directly related to the future destiny of the country," Pamfilova emphasized. According to her,

against the backdrop of external aggression, holding the presidential election in March 2024 will serve as "additional grounds for effectively repudiating [such malevolent outside pressure] through citizen-based, civilized and electoral means [that express the popular will of the Russian people]."

I believe that now as never before is the time to make the choice and hold

China pilots carbon-peaking projects to explore new path to carbon reduction

JUNCAO, which literally means "mushroom and grass" and can be used to grow edible mushrooms, has a strong capability to fix and store carbon.

Recently, a Juncao program was launched in Yancheng, east China's Jiangsu province to explore an integrated resource recycling model and set up an experimental base covering over 10 hectares.

The program, initiated under the cooperation between Jiangsu province and southeast China's Fujian province, introduced improved Juncao varieties from Fujian and grew them on mud flats in Yancheng. It serves as a vivid example, replicating successful experiences in achieving China's "dual carbon" goals.

According to a recent plan issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, China will launch carbon-peaking pilot projects in 100 cities and

zones nationwide to solve bottlenecks constraining the country's green and low-carbon development.

Resource endowments and development foundations vary across different regions. The carbon-peaking pilot projects aim to stimulate different regions' initiative and creativity, and accelerate the green transformation of development models by launching pilot tasks, implementing key projects, as well as innovating policies and mechanisms.

The projects aim to explore carbon-peaking pathways for different cities and zones, and provide operable, replicable and promotable experiences for the whole country, thus contributing to achieving carbon peaking and neutrality goals.

These pilot projects are pioneers in achieving "dual carbon" goals. They make attempts to explore and provide solutions for cities or zones facing similar situations.

They are carried out in economically advanced and major energy-consuming provinces, such as Jiangsu, Shandong and Guangdong, as well as in areas rich in traditional and new energy resources including Shanxi, Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi.

The pilot plan determines goals and tasks by considering the geographical features, functional orientations, resource endowments and development foundations of different regions, which will help explore diversified pathways to green and low-carbon transformation.

These projects, starting from certain regions, aim to find the universal principles for and play a role model in achieving carbon peaking and neutrality nationwide.

Many piloted regions have already made positive attempts. For instance, Inner Mongolia has been striving to establish a national ecological carbon sink supply base; factories in Anhui are promoting green manufacturing; offshore wind power generation has become a highlight along the 4,000-kilometer coastline in Guangdong.

In addition to the pioneering efforts to achieve "dual carbon" goals, piloted regions have also deepened reforms in strengthening sci-tech innovation, improving policy mechanisms and en-

hancing public participation. As a result, a batch of innovative measures and experiences in reforms have been generated.

As the largest developing country, China faces the ambitious target of completing the world's most dramatic reduction in carbon emission intensity, and realizing carbon neutrality from carbon peaking in the shortest time in global history. In this process, leveraging the role played by these pilot projects can help explore the optimal path at a relatively lower cost.

These pilot projects, carried out in small scopes and at the primary level, are explorations with controllable risks and tremendous space for innovation. They can stimulate people's pioneering spirit and find rich, effective and

differentiated pathways.

The successful experiences gained through these grassroots projects will then be promoted on a larger scale with the country's governance resources.

The positive interaction and organic combination of top-level design and primary-level exploration has enabled China to form a dynamic cycle that involves initial trials, result analysis and promotion of successful experiences, which lowers risks and improves efficiency. Statistics show a steady decline in the proportion of coal in China's primary energy consumption - 68.5 percent in 2012, 60.6 percent in 2017 and 56.2 percent in 2022.

At the same time, China's new energy vehicle ownership has seen significant annual growth -

220,000 in 2014, over 1.53 million in 2017 and 13.1 million in 2022.

These figures mirror the strong momentum of green development in China, the world's second-largest economy. Guided by the carbon-peaking pilot projects, innovative explorations are taking place nationwide, and a beautiful picture outlined by "dual carbon" goals is unfolding.

People's Daily

Many piloted regions have already made positive attempts. For instance, Inner Mongolia has been striving to establish a national

Arch-rivals Simba SC and Yanga with their tails up

By Correspondent Lloyd Elipokea

HEADING into their must-win, make-or-break clash against Wydad AC here at home last Tuesday, Simba SC's hopes of progressing to the last eight of the CAF Champions League had been hanging by a thread.

Indeed, ahead of the club's consequential duel against the Moroccan giants, Simba SC had been precariously in the last spot of Group B following a largely underwhelming start to their Group Stage campaign.

Knowing that a win was necessary, Simba SC faced off against Wydad AC at the magnificent Benjamin Mkapa Stadium here in Dar es Salaam where the atmosphere was wholly electric.

And, with the vast assemblage of Simba SC fans cheering them on, the Msimbazi Street outfit sought to go on the front foot right from the off.

This effort to dominate the proceedings paid dividends for Simba SC in the 36th minute when the club's threatening winger Willy Onana unleashed a humdinger of a shot from outside the box which flew into Wydad AC's net to give the hosts the deserved lead.

Merely two minutes later, Simba SC doubled their advantage through their dangerous man Onana, who notched up his second goal after receiving a lovely pass from his teammate Mzimiru Yassin.

No other player from either side got onto the score



Yanga's players, right fullback Kouassi Attohoul (4th L), and Ivorian midfielder Pacôme Zouzoua (2nd R), challenge Medeama SC's midfielder, Manuel Mantey, when the clubs took on each other in a 2023/24 CAF Champions League clash which took place at Benjamin Mkapa Stadium in Dar es Salaam on December 20 and ended in a 3-0 win for Yanga. PHOTO: CORRESPONDENT JUMANNE JUMA

sheet during the remainder of the first half and so Simba SC joyously went into the half-time breather two-nil ahead of their outplayed Moroccan opponents.

Try as they might, Wydad AC simply could not find a way back into the game as their inhospitable hosts Simba SC held on for an

impressive 2-0 win against the erstwhile African champions.

On the back of that splendid result, Simba SC has now propelled itself from the lowly last spot to second place in Group B, which is a distinctly dramatic turnaround in the club's fortunes.

It is hoped then that the Msimbazi Street side will stick to winning ways during the remainder of the CAF Champions League Group Stage as berths in the elite quarterfinal stage are at stake.

Meanwhile, as Simba SC was brilliantly reviving the club's dwindling hopes of

advancing beyond the Group Stage, their bitter nemeses, Yanga, were trying their damndest to achieve an extraordinary fight-back of their own.

Indeed, the build-up to Yanga's all-important confrontation against Ghanaian side, Medeama SC, last Wednesday in a crunch Group D showdown had been marked by concern and worry among the Jangwani Street side's legions of aficionados as the Tanzanian juggernauts had been mired in last place in the group, which of course meant that Yanga were in dire straits.

With either do-or-die clash set to take place at the spectacular Benjamin Mkapa Stadium in Dar es Salaam, many in the country had been hoping that the sea of Yanga fans in attendance would tip the scales in favour of the domestic heavyweights.

Thankfully, once the contest had gotten underway, Yanga proved to be a cut above their Ghanaian rivals as they went to secure a commanding 3-0 victory against Medeama SC.

And, just like Simba's dramatic improvement from out of the blue, Yanga has now ascended to second place in Group D whereas just a little while ago, they had been languishing in last place.

It should be recalled though that both Simba SC and Yanga have not yet sealed their spots in the quarterfinals of the CAF Champions League.

However, their recent remarkable form has given many Tanzanians good reason to hope for better things to come from both sides in the New Year.

Leaving a legacy outside Simba SC and Yanga a myth

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

THIS season's NBC Premier League has witnessed seven coaches facing the sack, whereas several others have resigned from their posts after mere 13 rounds.

The latest notable figures in local football, Hemed Suleiman 'Morocco' and Mecky Mexime, parted ways with Geita Gold FC and Kagera Sugar respectively.

They followed in the footsteps of another popular local tactician Fred Felix, alias 'Minziro', who was fired by Tanzania Prisons several weeks back.

The Guardian analyzes how life as a coach in Tanzania is challenging, particularly when a coach is not taking charge of renowned clubs Simba SC and Yanga, and sometimes Azam FC.

Former Yanga head coach Cedric Kaze, who was also the assistant coach at the same club later on, took the reins of Namungo FC at the beginning of the 2023/24 season but left the post just after six games without a win.

Kaze aimed at leading a mid-table team after leaving Yanga, a team that will leave history for playing possessive football with an identity, why not carve his niche at Yanga?

The Burundian coach wanted full authority over his team, something that can hardly be achieved at Yanga.

He yearned to take charge of an outfit with players who would respect him and let him make visionary decisions for the team. He made sense of his vision due to the nature of today's football.

It might be the same reason that led Spanish coach, Pep Guardiola, to prompt Barcelona to show talented footballers Ronaldinho Gaucho, Samuel Eto'o, and Deco de Souza the exit door when the tactician was promoted as the club's first team coach in the 2008/9 season.

He needed players that were open to his tactical approach, the former was too big for the club, especially for a young coach coming from the youth ranks.

If a soccer fanatic digs deep into Kaze's scenario, was Namungo FC the team of his size? Did he need a much more modest team?

Looking at his resume when he arrived at Yanga during his first stint, he boasted a resume that qualified him to lead the club per his vision.

Namungo FC was the team of his dreams, he could stick around and turn things around and leave a mark at the club, but things did not work according to the plan and, due to a series of poor results, he resigned.

Namungo FC might have fired Kaze but the two parties agreed to part mutually in the sense that the coach will announce that he has resigned.

Through an Instagram post issued by the Lindi-based side, it is wisdom that is used mostly by and of the developed countries' leagues, where a coach is fired but asked to write a resignation letter to protect his resume after leaving the club.

One thing Kaze was not familiar with is that it is hard for a person to fulfill his/her dreams as a coach in Tanzania.

Why has Azam FC failed to fulfill the squad's dream in the league despite possessing almost everything needed for a professional team? Kaze should have asked himself that question.

The issue is that it is hard to have a perspective of local football when a tactician is coaching either Simba SC or Yanga. Life is

easy for players, leaders, and any other official at either of the two clubs.

Once an individual leaves Simba SC and Yanga buildings as either a coach or player and moves to other local teams, it is the moment the reality check hits harder on the person's face, it has happened to many coaches and Kaze is the latest example.

Kaze thought he would take charge of a club that is competitive and plays a certain brand of football once he had left Yanga, what he did not know is that Simba SC and Yanga players sometimes play to serve the fans.

They hardly put solid showing to simply please the technical bench led by the coach, they work hard to impress the fans who are either in the stands or at home watching on TV.

At Namungo FC, Kaze witnessed players playing with ease, hardly worrying about the club's failure to get good results and nothing motivates them to be the best.

When a footballer is turning out for either Simba SC or Yanga, once the two outfits either register a draw or suffer defeat, the outcomes make huge headlines and may bring about either a coach or players' dismissal.

Namungo FC played six games with no win and no fan criticized the club even though Kaze's future at the Lindi club was not at risk.

What would have happened had such results been registered by either Simba SC or Yanga with the Burundian coach at the helm of either of the two clubs' technical bench?

Brazilian tactician Roberto Oliveira lost only one league match when coaching Simba SC, following the club's 5-1 loss to Yanga and, after three days, he was fired. Kaze though had room for improvement at Namungo FC.

What Kaze was supposed to be aware of is Namungo FC, in most cases, travels by bus to various regions to honour league fixtures.

It is a different scenario to the one found at either Yanga or Simba SC which normally travel by plane to play league ties.

Namungo FC faces poor officiating in various fixtures and games are always tough because the outfit faces clubs that feel they can match its prowess.

Congolese coach Mwinyi Zahera is among the coaches that have faced the sack this season, having parted ways with Coastal Union. He had in the past coached Yanga who was financially weak but still managed to finish second in the league.

If an individual asks him what happened at Polisi Tanzania when he was coaching the club last season, we will need a whole column to have his analysis.

The truth is life is difficult for players and coaches when they are not at either Simba SC or Yanga.

Sometimes a person might think local football was designed for the two clubs which are perceived to have the legitimacy to achieve everything whereas other sides lack such privilege.

Simba SC and Yanga are fortunate to have a huge number of fans, something that has made their progress unmatched.

Every team that turns out to be successful normally ends up as a one-season wonder, soccer followers should remember Mbeya City FC which finished fourth in the 2003/04 Premier League.

The outfit sold the majority of its best players, some of whom went to Yanga and others went to Simba SC and other clubs.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Eastern and Coastal Diocese choir performs during the Christmas service which took place at the church in Dar es Salaam on Monday. PHOTO: CORRESPONDENT JUMANNE JUMA

Tanzania set to face Namibia in 2024 CAF Futsal qualifications

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

TANZANIA will face Namibia in the 2024 CAF Futsal Africa Cup of Nations Qualifiers first leg in Windhoek on February 2-4 before the two squads face each other in the reverse fixture on February 9-10 in Dar es Salaam.

The qualifiers' draw took place at the CAF headquarters in Cairo, Egypt recently

to determine the qualifiers' fixtures set to take place in February next year.

Tanzania will be making a debut in the competition since its invention in 1996 as major plans are underway to spearhead the development of the game.

The fast-paced competition makes a return for the seventh time and will see a total of 10 nations battle it out for a place in next year's finals.

Current champions, Morocco, Egypt as well as Angola - who are all the highest-ranked nations in the competition - will gain automatic entry.

Winners of the five fixtures - set to be played on the home and away basis - will then join the three nations to constitute the final eight.

The first leg of the qualifiers' fixtures will be played between February 2-4 while

the return leg, which will decide squads that will make up the final five, will be played between February 9-11.

CAF Futsal Africa Cup of Nations' previous winners

1996 - Egypt, 2000 - Egypt, 2004 - Egypt, 2008 - Libya, 2016 - Morocco, 2020 - Morocco. CAF will soon confirm the official hosts and dates of the competition set

to take place in 2024.

Morocco, Egypt, and Angola who are the three highest-ranked nations will be exempted from the qualifiers and will automatically advance to the competition.

CAF Futsal Africa Cup of Nations 2024 Qualifiers fixtures:

Mozambique vs Zambia, Namibia vs Tanzania, Libya vs Algeria, Ghana vs Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon vs Mauritania.

The year of Bellingham? Jude stands on the brink of greatness and trophies in 2024

By Richard Jolly

IT was an unashamedly ambitious acceptance speech. When Jude Bellingham received the Golden Boy award, he declared: "I want to win everything". Given the sense of boundless possibility that surrounds him, he just might. England will enter Euro 2024 after 58 years of hurt, a wait for a trophy that has lasted almost three times as long as Bellingham's lifetime, but his progress has been swifter and his prowess greater even than expected. Triumph in Berlin in July, and it may be the Bellingham effect. Or perhaps that will instead bring Real Madrid the Champions League.

His Golden Boy award came with 485 votes out of a possible 500: 45 of the 50 judges ranked him Europe's best player under 21, the other five the second best. He ranked 18th in the Ballon d'Or and it already feels a safe assumption that it will be his lowest position for a year. As Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo shuffle off the stage, the two prime candidates to replace them as the outstanding players in the world had seemed to be Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland.

But Bellingham's stellar 2023 suggests they will have competition. He ends the year as the midfielder who is the top scorer in La Liga, only a goal away from having the same status in the Champions League. When Karim Benzema, himself the 2022 Ballon d'Or winner, surprised Real by choosing to leave for Saudi Arabia, there were questions about whether Mbappe would prove his successor. Instead, in a way, Bellingham has been: Carlo Ancelotti has configured a striker-less formation which has given Bellingham licence to get forward, but he has done so with an aptitude that few anticipated.

And, should his second half of the season be as productive as the first, Bellingham would find himself in rare company. In the last 15 years, the only players to win the Pichichi Trophy, the award for the top scorer in La Liga, are Messi, Ronaldo, Benzema, Robert Lewandowski and Luis Suarez: each a great, none a midfielder by trade.

"We're all surprised by the amount of goals Jude has scored," Ancelotti said. "He's incredible, extraordinary." And yet the most remarkable element is not the number of his goals as much as the quality and the timing. An injury-time winner in his first El Clasico - when he had already scored a high-class goal from 25 yards - was a case in point. In the Champions League, there was the mesmerizing solo run away at Napoli, in the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona. Throw in a propensity to deliver late winners - against Getafe and Union Berlin as well as Barcelona - and Bellingham can feel the player for the big moment, as well as the big occasion.

England's autumn felt proof. He refuses to be intimidated: not by playing for Real, not by the stage. Bellingham was the dominant player against Scotland at Hampden Park, again when Italy visited Wembley.

The shift in Gareth Southgate's tactics, to using him as a No 10, is a reflection he can be the match-winner, that his double act with Harry Kane could be decisive. England are building around Bellingham: which, as in past tournaments players like Steven Gerrard were given roles that did not really suit them, makes sense.

Go back to the first half of Bellingham's 2023 and various elements stand out. He captained Borussia Dortmund in a Champions League knockout tie when still a teenager. But there was the knee injury that meant he was an unused substitute for their final-day draw with Mainz: given his transformative powers, it is tempting to wonder if a fit Bellingham would have ended Bayern Munich's decade-long reign and wrenched the Bundesliga title from their grasp.

He nevertheless left Germany as the Bundesliga player of the season, potentially setting him up for a rare double if he can take the equivalent prize in Spain a year later. This year suggested that, rather than returning home, he may prove England's greatest exile: Liverpool were long-term suitors, Jurgen Klopp open in his admiration for Bellingham, Jordan Henderson seemingly trying to sell Anfield to his England teammate, but they accepted the inevitable even before an £88m deal with Real was agreed. But his wanderlust means there is an excitement to the Brummie boy; because his club football has been played in the Bundesliga and now La Liga, English audiences don't tend to see him every week.

But it does mean Bellingham walks in the footsteps of the legends. The story is well known now that he wore the No 22 shirt because an all-rounder of a midfielder was in part a 4, and an 8 and a 10. For Real, he has been a false nine of sorts, while wearing the No 5 that used to belong to Zinedine Zidane. Ancelotti, who coached the Frenchman, reflected: "What I see is [Bellingham's] ability to get into the box. Zidane didn't have that. And the individual quality which Zidane had, Bellingham doesn't have." But for the Italian, who has spent four decades playing with and coaching the game's greats but called Bellingham "a gift for football". For Real Madrid and England, Bellingham may prove the gift that keeps on giving in 2024.

THE INDEPENDENT

Sir Jim Ratcliffe will have no honeymoon as he faces urgent problems at Manchester United



Sir Jim Ratcliffe

Richard Jolly

WHEN Sir Jim Ratcliffe was born, Manchester United were champions of England. If that was an unusual status for them then - Sir Matt Busby's triumph in 1952 was United's first in 41 years - the chances are that Ratcliffe hopes their 21st title will come with him in the boardroom. It has taken him seven decades to travel the seven miles from his Failsforth birthplace to Old Trafford and a status as co-owner of United. That, and the accumulation of remarkable wealth: some £1.3bn has been required for the petrochemicals tycoon to purchase a 25 per cent stake in the club.

Now the Glazer family's share of United is lower than it has been at any stage since their 2005 leveraged buyout. If one era has not ended, another has begun. Change is coming to the Old Trafford boardroom; perhaps to other levels of a club that has underachieved on the pitch in the last decade, too. The questions revolve around how much and how quickly; around who, and why, and when.

Ratcliffe and Ineos do not intend to be silent partners; a minority stake could still give Ratcliffe decision-making powers, particularly control over the footballing side of affairs. The Ineos powerbrokers Jean-Claude Blanc and Sir Dave Brailsford have already been at the club's Carrington training ground for a meeting with interim CEO Patrick Stewart and football director John Murtough.

It could prove one of many: the deal with Ratcliffe was agreed weeks ago. Since then, little seems to have happened, but it has offered Ineos an opportunity to form their own appraisal.

That assessment process is likely to continue over a six-to-eight-week approval process; not every decision will necessarily be made on day one.

Some of the issues are already known. One of the two biggest positions at the club needs filling, with a replacement required for Richard Arnold, the outgoing chief executive; Stewart, the lawyer who is the club's general counsel, is in temporary charge and could perhaps revert to his legal duties. Arnold's brief tenure made him a transitional figure; United may want his successor to set the direction of the club for a longer term. Blanc, formerly a marketing executive for Paris Saint-Germain and chief executive at Juventus, has been tipped as a possible successor. The Frenchman currently has a wider role as chief executive of Ineos Sport; their portfolio also includes running, sailing, rugby, Formula One, and cycling. Brailsford's specialism is on two wheels, but he might have a licence to roam, to weigh in as and where he sees fit.

There are questions about personnel, others about bricks and mortar. Visiting fans have taken to choring "Old Trafford is falling down"; if that is an exaggeration, the leaking roof has acquired its own infamy. A lack of investment in the infrastructure is part of the case against the Glazers, with revenues instead diverted to interest repayments and dividends to them. There was belated recognition that United needed an upgrade: under Arnold they appointed the consultants Legends International and Populous to draw up plans to redevelop Old Trafford.

Ratcliffe is reportedly willing to invest some £245m of his fortune in the overhaul, but United's new regime must decide if



Sir Jim Ratcliffe

it entails renovating the current ground, expanding the South Stand, or knocking down the stadium and building another on the plot. A need for the capital for a project that could cost £1bn was a reason for the strategic review that culminated in the decision to sell a minority stake to Ratcliffe, rather than the whole club to the Qatari Sheikh Jassim.

But whatever decision is taken, it will take years to realise the vision. Perhaps the same may be said on the field, too. In a sense, Ratcliffe's arrival is ill-timed for some incumbents at Old Trafford. A few months ago, there was the feeling that, after stumbling around in their wilderness years, United were finally plotting the correct course. Now the picture is cloudier again, which could offer a mandate for change.

Recent events have suggested that running United is an obstacle course, and many have hit barriers. In reality, such mistakes - from the mishandling of the investigation into Mason Greenwood to the (apparently) raw chicken served at Old Trafford recently - only reflect the actions of a select few, but they contribute to a broader picture of a club that has been both criticised and mocked.

On-field fortunes are the most obvious barometer of a club and, earlier in the takeover process, it was easier to argue that United were headed in the right direction. The noises from the Ineos camp were that they would back manager Erik ten Hag. United's current regime - the Glazers, Arnold and Murtough - have done so, but United's mixed form and underwhelming performances this season have raised the possibility that the Dutchman is not as much the solution as part of the problem.

United now find themselves

out of the Carabao Cup, off the pace in the race for the top four in the Premier League, with the embarrassment of an early Champions League exit compounded by the reality that they are out of Europe altogether.

This season has felt more like regression than progression; Ten Hag has said the club must aim to win the Premier League and the Champions League. Neither is realistic now, but he would argue that changing the culture of the club and raising standards takes time; that tough decisions - like exiling the £73m winger Jadon Sancho - need taking; that the club need to be willing to dispense with those who don't share the manager's drive.

Equally, there is an acceptance at Old Trafford that recruitment has been an issue, with United's spending since Sir Alex Ferguson retired standing at around £1.5bn, and without a title challenge to show for it.

Many of the mistakes predate Ten Hag and Murtough, but the transfer expenditure could prompt a change in strategy and, perhaps, in personnel. But, barring sales, Financial Fair Play limitations mean they don't have much scope to spend in January, regardless of a windfall from Ratcliffe.

This is in part because around £400m has been spent in Ten Hag's reign, almost half of it on footballers he has previously managed, and with questionable returns. Ratcliffe questioned the decision to pay £63m for Casemiro, bought at 30, while there has been too little return from this summer's investments. Ten Hag prospered at Ajax when others, principally Marc Overmars, had responsibility for transfers. United have overpaid for some players - not this summer's arrivals, they argue, though others would dispute such claims - but

it invites scrutiny of Murtough, who may have given Ten Hag too much leeway.

The names of Paul Mitchell, who will leave Monaco, and Dougie Freedman, currently of Crystal Palace, have been mooted as possible technical directors. For some, the ideal appointment may be someone in the mould of Michael Edwards, the architect of Liverpool's rise. A potential target is Dan Ashworth, though Newcastle would probably seek to resist offers for an influential figure at St James' Park.

There is nevertheless a feeling that Murtough has helped build a structure that United were lacking. Deputy football director Andy O'Boyle, director of football operations David Harrison, director of football negotiations Matt Hargreaves and head of women's football Polly Bancroft have all been brought in since his promotion in 2021. United did not have a data science department; now they have one, headed by Dominic Jordan. United believe they have hired well; in time, it may become clear whether Ratcliffe concurs.

In October, a multimillion-pound training base for the women's and academy teams was opened at Carrington. United were being run from Mayfair by former executive vice-chair Ed Woodward; there is a very different feel now. But if they were playing catch-up compared to their rivals, the impact of such appointments - should they be correct - will not necessarily be reflected in results straight away.

There is nevertheless an acceptance that improvement is needed, along with an apparent willingness to embrace Ineos's ideas. Brailsford has enjoyed success in cycling, from the Olympic Games to the Tour de France; some of the group's ideas may prove to be transferable to football.

Over the years, though, Ratcliffe's expertise has been in making money. United recently posted record revenues of £648m, which are projected to rise again - though being out of the Champions League, without even the consolation of the Europa League, will presumably prevent them from hitting the £680m that the club had deemed possible this year.

It shows that United remains a commercial superpower - an achievement, in part, of Arnold and Woodward. There are, though, those who believe that their income ought to be higher still.

But the next domestic Premier League television deal will only represent a rise of 4 per cent per year on the previous contract, not the kind of jump that could have justified Ratcliffe's decision to pay £1.3bn for a quarter of United.

Which can bring the issue down to a lifelong fan's motivation. Is this a business decision, a vehicle for his ambitions, a trophy asset, or a billionaire's plaything? Whichever it is, Ratcliffe must envisage following in the footsteps of United's other knights, Busby and Ferguson, by witnessing his teams take the title. But, just as they did, he inherits a club in need of regeneration.

THE INDEPENDENT

Pele 'would have been sad' at state of Brazil team, says son

RIO DE JANEIRO

PELE "would have been sad" at the state of the current Brazilian national team, his son Edinho has told AFP in an interview days before the first anniversary of his death on Friday.

Brazil have struggled in qualifying for the 2026 World Cup and presently occupy sixth place in the South American table, the last spot that affords direct qualification.

The Seleccion have struggled without their biggest current star, Neymar, who is a long-term injury absentee after tearing knee liga-

ments. "This crisis didn't appear overnight, there are big and complex problems," said Edinho, 53, who is one of Pele's seven children.

"We are experiencing a decline... we still have great players but in previous times we had more high-level players than we do today."

Edinho, who was raised by his mother as Pele and her separated shortly after they moved to New York when he signed for New York Cosmos in 1975 but grew closer to him in later life, added: "There is no doubt, if (Pele) had been there this year, he would

have been very sad." Santos, the Brazilian club where Pele spent most of

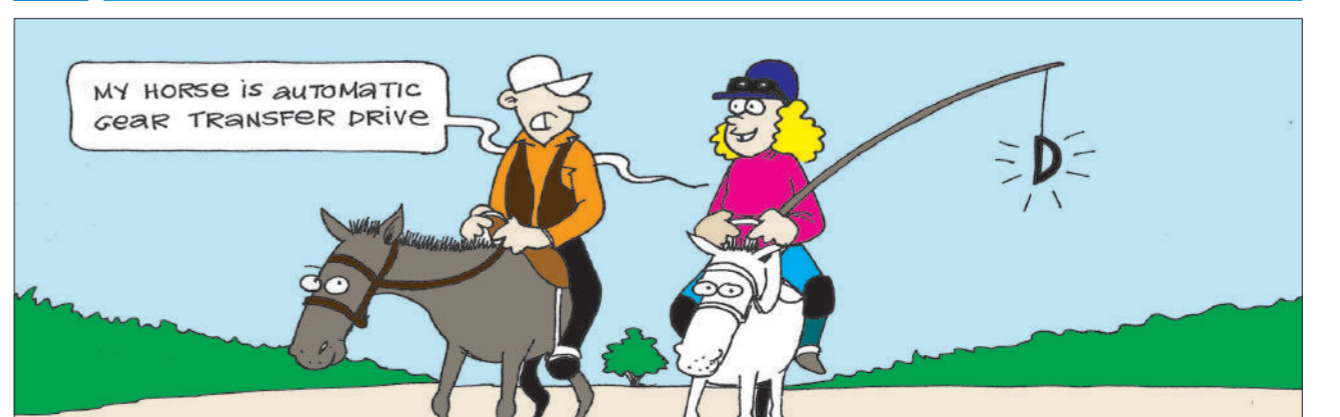
his career, are also going through a tough period after they were relegated to

the second division for the first time in its 111-year history. The club is wracked

by financial problems and boardroom rifts.

AFP

Gwiji by David Chikoko



SPORT

Kilimanjaro Stars set to take on Zanzibar Heroes in friendly

Pele 'would have been sad' at state of Brazil team, says son

PAGE 19



Bandari FC pulls out of 2024 Mapinduzi Cup

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

KENYA'S Bandari FC has withdrawn from the eagerly anticipated 2024 Mapinduzi Cup slated to kick off on Thursday at Amaan Stadium in Zanzibar over concerns raised by the Football Kenya Federation.

The Football Kenya Federation (FKF) Premier League side, which had been gearing up to represent Kenya in the prestigious tournament, was slated to participate alongside three other foreign clubs.

The organizer of this year's Mapinduzi Cup, Zanzibar Football Federation (ZFF), has announced a lucrative prize fund for the winners.

Kenyan club, Bandari FC, will miss out on an opportunity to compete for the 100m/- (approximately Ksh. 12.5 million) on offer this year.

The winner will pocket 100m/-, while the second-placed team will receive 70m/- (approximately Ksh. 4.35 million). The team that finishes third will pocket 50m/- (approximately Ksh. 3.1 million).

The prize money offered at the two-week tournament exceeds what the winner of the FKF Premier League earns after 34 rounds of matches. The winner of the local league will earn 5m/- at the end of this season.

The FKF has declined to allow Bandari FC to take part in this year's Mapinduzi Cup tournament, insisting that the squad's absence may disrupt the local league.

According to FKF, Bandari FC's vice chairman expressed concerns that participating in the Mapinduzi Cup would disrupt the smooth running of the Kenyan league.

"The federation has told us participating in the tournament will affect the smooth running of the league," Mbarak said.

Mbarak, however, emphasized that they had made arrangements to minimize the impact on their league schedule.

The official pointed out: "But we had made arrangements. If we made it to the final (of the tournament), only one league assignment against Nzoia (Sugar) would have been affected."

"I'd reached out with a proposal on how to reschedule the match, and our opponents had no problem with that," he added.

Despite the outfit's willingness to accommodate the league's concerns and rearrange fixtures, Bandari FC was left with no choice but to withdraw from the Mapinduzi Cup, disappointing fans who were eagerly anticipating the club's participation.

Apart from the prize package, Bandari FC was hoping to use the tournament to offer the outfit's footballers an opportunity to garner exposure. Bandari FC is the only Kenyan club invited to the tournament.

Mapinduzi Cup's other invited teams are Azam FC, Mlandege FC, Singida Fountain Gate FC, Yanga SC, Jamhuri FC, and Simba SC.

The Mapinduzi Cup tournament is organized by the government of Zanzibar in conjunction with ZFF to commemorate Zanzibar's Revolution Day, which is marked annually.

Azam FC has won the Mapinduzi Cup a record five times, while Simba has lifted it three times, Mtibwa Sugar and Young Africans SC twice.

Zanzibar's Jamhuri, KMKM SC, Zanzibar Police, Mafunzo FC, Miembeni FC, and Malindi SC each lifted the title once, while Uganda's sides KCCA FC and URA FC have also lifted the trophy once.



Kenya's Bandari FC players.

By Correspondent Nassir Nchimbi

MAINLAND Tanzania football team 'Kilimanjaro Stars' is today set to face Zanzibar Heroes in a friendly at Amaan Stadium in the Isles.

The friendly tie has also been organized to open the venue following the completion of the facility's renovation, with Zanzibar President Hussein Ali Mwinyi gracing the ceremony.

Tanzania's senior national side's head coach, Adel Amrouche, said the friendly duel between Kilimanjaro Stars and Zanzibar Heroes will help to project his squad development ahead of the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) finals.

Amrouche has listed new players who are expected to make their debut for the senior national team and punch their ticket to the squad for the AFCON finals should they impress him.

The Belgo-Algerian tactician could not include Feisal Salum (Azam FC), Mudathir Yahya (Young Africans SC), and Ibrahim Bacca (Young Africans SC) in the Kilimanjaro Stars, given they are among the well-known players making Zanzibar Heroes.

Zanzibar Heroes is under



Some of the Zanzibar soccer squad 'Zanzibar Heroes' players are pictured taking part in the squad's training session in the Isles recently in preparation for a friendly clash against Mainland Tanzania's team, Kilimanjaro Stars, slated for today. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ZANZIBAR FOOTBALL FEDERATION

the tutelage of Hemed Suleiman and he already paraded a list of 29 players who have been in camp preparing for the encounter.

Amrouche, now temporarily taking charge of Kilimanjaro Stars, assembled 25 players for today's tense encounter

with skipper Mbwana Samatta missing from the list of four strikers who have been trusted for the game.

The head coach stated: "It is a good platform for our players to come together and play as we prepare for the upcoming AFCON games of which we

need to do well to stand a good chance of doing well in our group."

"Through this match and any friendly game that we will play before going to the AFCON competition will give us the light to see where we are heading and what to achieve

through areas we have to improve," Amrouche pointed out.

Taifa Stars' provisional squad:
Goalkeepers: Aishi Manula (Singida Fountain Gate FC), and Kwesi Kawawa (Karislunds IF, Sweden).

Defenders: Bakari Mwamnyeto (Young Africans SC), Dickson Job (Young Africans), Lusajo Mwaikenda (Azam FC), Nickson Kibabage (Young Africans SC), Israel Mwenda (Simba SC), Adam Kasa (IFK Haninge, Sweden), Zion Nditi (Aldershot Town, England), Mark John (Kingston FC, Australia), Miano Danito (Villena CF, Spain) and Mohamed Hussein (Simba SC).

Midfielders: Adolf Bitegeko (Volsungur IF, Iceland), Yusuph Kagoma (Singida Fountain Gate FC), Roberto Yohana (Forfar Athletic, Scotland), Mzamiru Yassin (Simba SC), Edwin Balua (Tanzania Prisons), Said Hamis (Jedinstov UB, Serbia), Tarryn Allarakhia (Wealdstone, England) and Sospeter Bajana (Azam FC).

Strikers: Ladack Chasambi (Mtibwa Sugar), Abdulhamis Suleiman (Azam FC), Simon Msuva and Kibu Denis (Simba SC).

However, in the AFCON finals, Tanzania's envoys are one of Group F squads and their first game is set for January 17 when they play against Morocco in the opening match of the group.

Tanzania will take on Zambia on January 21 before winding up the squad's campaign with a match versus DR Congo on January 24 in another tie which promises to be entertaining.

Kilimanjaro Stars' squad for Zanzibar Heroes friendly unveiled

By Correspondent Seth Mapoli

TANZANIA'S senior national soccer team's head coach Adel Amrouche has unveiled a 25-man squad that will embark on preparations for the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations finals.

The team also makes the Mainland Tanzania squad slated for a noteworthy friendly match against Zanzibar's 'Zanzibar Heroes' to be held in the Isles later today.

The highly anticipated clash marks the grand opening of the newly revamped Amaan Stadium in Zanzibar, showcasing the country's dedication to sporting infrastructure development.

Beyond the celebratory atmosphere, the match holds immense significance for both sides. For Amrouche, it presents a crucial opportunity to assess his players and solidify team selection for the upcoming 2024 AFCON tournament.

Tanzania faces a daunting challenge in Group F of the continental showpiece, pitted against continental giants Morocco, DR Congo, and 2012 AF-

CON champion Zambia. Every opportunity to refine tactics and build cohesion is vital.

Football fans across the continent are already looking ahead to the next edition, 2023 AFCON. Hosted by Ivory Coast, the tournament promises to be another thrilling spectacle, bringing together the best national teams in Africa.

The kickoff for the 2023 AFCON is scheduled for January 13, as Ivory Coast plays host, extending a warm welcome to Guinea-Bissau.

Meanwhile, the postponement of domestic league matches offers Taifa Stars a welcome window to focus solely on AFCON preparations.

This friendly against Zanzibar, known for its spirited brand of football, provides a valuable test against familiar opponents.

Taifa Stars' provisional squad, which has some of the footballers making Kilimanjaro Stars' squad, comprises goalkeepers Kwesi Kawawa (Karislunds IF), Beno Kakolanya (Singida Fountain Gate FC), and Aishi Manula of Simba SC.

Defenders include Bakari Mwamnyeto, Dickson Job, and Nickson Kibabage (Yanga), Israel Mwenda, Mohamed Hussein (Simba SC), Lusajo Mwaikenda (Azam FC), Adam Kasa (IFK Haninge), Zion Chebe Nditi (Aldershot Town), Mark John (Kingston FC), and Miano Danilo of Villena CF.

Midfielders are Adolf Bitegeko (Volsungur IF), Yusuph Kagoma (Singida Fountain Gate FC), Roberto Yohana (Forfar Athletic), Mzamiru Yassin (Simba SC), Edwin Balua (Tanzania Prisons), Said Hamis (Jedinstov UB), Tarryn Allarakhia (Wealdstone), and Sospeter Bojana of Azam FC.

The attacking lineup features Simon Msuva, Ladack Chasambi (Mtibwa Sugar), Kibu Denis (Simba SC), and Abdulhamis Suleiman 'Sopu,' currently with Azam FC.

The inclusion of Azam FC's talented defender Lusajo Mwaikenda, Chasambi from Mtibwa Sugar, and young overseas prospects like Zion Chebe Nditi and Tarryn Allarakhia demonstrate Amrouche's willingness to explore promising options.

The return of experienced forward Msuva, currently a free agent, adds firepower to the attack, bolstering Tanzania's offensive options.

Zanzibar Heroes' head coach Hemed Suleiman has called the entire squad of 29 players, the goalkeepers are Ahmed Ali (Uhamiaji), Ibrahim Abdallah (Singida Fountain Gate FC), Yakoub Suleiman (JKU SC).

The defenders are Adeyem Saleh (Dodoma Jiji FC), Ibrahim Hamad (Yanga) and Suwedi Juma of JKU, Abdallah



Taifa Stars' head coach, Adel Amrouche.

Flexibles by David Chikoko

