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BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

Congo RDC: L'ONU va déployer ses premiers drones dans l'est de la RDC :: CONGO DEMOCRATIC

camer.be/03122013

Les Nations unies s'apprêtent à déployer pour la première fois des drones non armés en République démocratique du Congo (RDC) pour surveiller les mouvements de forces rebelles et les frontières de ce pays en proie à une instabilité chronique.

C'est la première fois que l'ONU dote une de ses missions de maintien de la paix de cet outil de surveillance. Certains de ses responsables parlent déjà de l'utiliser en Côte d'Ivoire, au Soudan du Sud ou encore au Mali si l'expérience congolaise s'avère concluante.

Ces appareils sans pilote ont plusieurs avantages sur les avions et hélicoptères : ils peuvent survoler d'immenses territoires pendant des journées entières sans ravitailler, sont difficilement détectables et réclament relativement peu de personnel de maintenance.

Les deux premiers drones seront lancés mardi à partir de Goma (est de la RDC), a indiqué lundi l'ONU, à l'occasion d'une visite dans la capitale provinciale du Nord-Kivu du patron des opérations de maintien de la paix, Hervé Ladsous.

Selon un autre responsable des Nations unies, l'ONU mettra en service mardi deux drones et prévoit de se doter de cinq drones au total.

Il s'agit d'un "outil important pour aider la Monusco à remplir son mandat de protéger les civils" dans la région, a souligné le porte-parole de l'ONU, Martin Nesirky.

Ces appareils renforceront les moyens d'action de la Monusco (Mission de l'ONU en RDC), une des missions les plus importantes de l'ONU dans le monde avec 20.000 soldats et policiers, dont une nouvelle brigade d'intervention de 3.000 hommes chargés de traquer les rebelles dans l'est de la RDC.

Surveillance aérienne permanente

Riche en minerais, l'Est est depuis une vingtaine d'années la proie de dizaines de groupes armés qui tuent, violent, pillent, provoquent des déplacements massifs de population et recrutent des enfants. La Monusco a pris au fil des mois une posture de plus en plus offensive. Elle a participé activement, en soutien aux forces gouvernementales congolaises, aux combats qui ont abouti à la capitulation le 6 novembre du Mouvement du 23 mars (M23).

Kinshasa et l'ONU ont annoncé que les prochaines cibles seront les rebelles hutus rwandais du FDLR [Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda).

Le Rwanda et l'Ouganda ont été accusés par l'ONU de soutenir et d'armer le M23, ce que ces deux pays voisins ont toujours nié.

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU avait autorisé le déploiement de drones pour surveiller les groupes rebelles et les mouvements de troupes ou de matériel passant par la frontière entre la RDC et le Rwanda.

Un débat avait alors opposé les Occidentaux à la Russie et à certains pays africains qui s'inquiétaient de la manière dont les données recueillies par les drones pourraient être utilisées.

Le Rwanda, membre non permanent du Conseil, avait finalement accepté le déploiement des drones, son président Paul Kagame affirmant qu'il ne lui posait "aucun problème".

Selon le chef militaire de la Monusco, le général Carlos Alberto Dos Santos Cruz, la Mission devrait pouvoir assurer dès mars 2014 une surveillance aérienne 24 heures sur 24.

Les Nations unies ont commandé leurs premiers drones à la société Selex ES, filiale du géant italien Finmeccanica.

Le gouvernement ivoirien a de son côté réclamé des drones pour surveiller ses frontières et prévenir ainsi de nouvelles incursions de partisans de l'ex-président Laurent Gbagbo venus du Liberia.

Les commandants d'autres contingents de Casques bleus, comme celui installé au Soudan du Sud, se sont déclarés intéressés par ce nouvel outil.

De manière générale, la collecte directe d'informations joue un rôle croissant dans le maintien de la paix. Ainsi, les Pays-Bas vont envoyer 380 militaires et quatre hélicoptères au Mali. Leur tâche principale, selon des diplomates, sera la surveillance électronique des extrémistes islamistes dans le cadre de la Minusma (Mission internationale de soutien au Mali).

"Ils mèneront aussi des opérations d'espionnage traditionnelles, avec des moyens humains, c'est une évolution nécessaire pour l'ONU", explique un diplomate

© Source : Afp

Les présidents ougandais et congolais veulent une reprise des discussions avec le M23

Par RFI/mardi 03 décembre 2013

Le président ougandais, Yoweri Museveni, et son homologue de République démocratique du Congo (RDC), Joseph Kabila, se sont rencontrés, ce lundi 2 décembre à Entebbe, à une trentaine de kilomètres de Kampala. L'objectif de cette rencontre était de renouer avec le dialogue politique. Cette visite éclair de Joseph Kabila dans la capitale ougandaise intervient moins d'un mois après la défaite de la rébellion du M23. Les deux chefs d'Etat veulent une conclusion « rapide » des discussions entre RDC et M23.

En Ouganda, le président congolais avait une double mission. D'abord, celle de relancer le processus de paix avec les rebelles du Mouvement du 23-Mars. Ensuite, celle de réchauffer des relations, encore convalescentes, entre son pays et Kampala.

Toutefois, le bref communiqué publié à l'issue de la rencontre est très laconique. Il indique simplement que « les deux chefs d'Etat ont convenu que le dialogue de Kampala entre le gouvernement de RDC et le M23 doit être mené à terme, dès que possible, afin de faciliter le retour pacifique des ex-combattants du M23 et l'achèvement du processus de démobilisation. »

Le porte-parole du gouvernement ougandais a déclaré, quant à lui, que « les deux chefs d'Etat ont décidé que les négociations de paix doivent reprendre et être conclues rapidement ». Une déclaration qui ressemble plutôt à une injonction, confirmée d'ailleurs par le communiqué.

Une « déclaration », pas un « accord de paix »

Le 12 novembre, alors que tout semblait réglé, le gouvernement de Kinshasa et le M23 n'avaient pas signé le document proclamant officiellement la fin de la rébellion. Le pouvoir congolais - fort de sa victoire militaire - n'avait accepté de parapher qu'une simple « déclaration » et non un « accord de paix ».

Les deux chefs d'Etat, qui ont commencé leurs discussions par un entretien en tête-à-tête. Aurait-il, chacun, mis un peu d'eau dans leur vin ? En tout cas, le communiqué publié par la présidence ougandaise précise que « le président Kabila a réaffirmé sa détermination à débarrasser la RDC de toutes les autres forces négatives », c'est-à-dire tous les groupes armés qui pullulent dans l'est du pays.

UGANDA :

Kabila in Uganda for talks on stalled peace deal

Date: Dec 02, 2013/newvision

The Democratic Republic of Congo's president, Joseph Kabila, flew into Uganda on Monday for talks aimed at reviving a peace deal between his government and rebel fighters.

Kinshasa and the M23 rebels failed to seal a deal last month after wrangling over what it should be called - the rebels were ready to sign a peace agreement, but Congo's negotiators wanted to call it a declaration reflecting the rebels' defeat.

"I think (Kabila) wants to breathe new life into the process ... Uganda would implore DRC to sign this agreement with the rebels," Uganda government spokesman, Ofwono Opondo revealed.

M23 are the latest incarnation of Tutsi-led insurgents who have fought Congo's government in eastern regions near the border with Uganda and Rwanda for years, amid unrest fuelled by ethnicity, local politics and competition over land and mineral wealth.

Kabila's visit to Uganda, where he will meet with his Ugandan counterpart, Yoweri Museveni, comes after a 10-day tour of the main towns in eastern Congo.

During a Nov. 26 stop in Bunia, a town in Congo's far northeast, U.N.-backed Radio Okapi reported Kabila said he believed a solution to the dialogue with M23 could be completed by Dec. 15.

Kabila reiterated Kinshasa's position that Congo was seeking a statement from the rebels declaring the end of the movement. M23, however, has sought an "agreement" with the government.

Reuters

SOUTH AFRICA :

South Africa Charges Czech Gold Dealer With Mafia-Style Crimes

December 2, 2013/inquisitr.com

South Africa has charged a Czech gold dealer with mafia-style violence following an attempted murder.

The dealer, who allegedly has links to organized crime, was charged with attempted murder, kidnapping, and assault in a court in South Africa.

Radovan Krejcir and two others who are members of the elite police unit called the Hawks, have applied for bail and according to authorities have denied the charges.

Last week, Krejcir, 45, claimed he was assaulted by police, which granted him a trip to the hospital

to be treated for his alleged injuries.

The gold dealer was arrested in his home in Johannesburg, South Africa on November 23, stemming from the incident that took place in June of 2013.

Additionally to the charges he now faces in South Africa, Krejcir, is also wanted in his native Czech Republic after he was convicted in absentia last year on tax fraud charges.

According to a report in the Palm Ridge Regional Court, east of Johannesburg, the state says that the victim is a man whose brother was allegedly asked to smuggle drugs on Krejcir and his associates' behalf, and was kidnapped by Hawks members Samuel Modise Maropeng, 41, and George Jeff Nthoroane, 46.

The BBC reports prosecutors says that approximately 55 pounds of crystal meth did not arrive at its intended destination in Australia and the alleged dealer disappeared, so they went after his brother instead.

The gold dealer moved to South Africa in 2007 seeking asylum and claims that if he is extradited to the Czech Republic he will be killed.

The media in South Africa has been closely following Krejcir's moves as he is a known figure of the underworld.

Several of his associates were killed in different incidents recently and he himself survived an attempted assassination.

South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world, which many attribute to police corruption. Rape, murders, and other forms of crimes are a daily feature in news reports and newspapers.

Commuters Join Unions in Protest as Johannesburg Tolls Start

By Kamlesh Bhuckory/bloomberg.com/Dec 3, 2013

Sipho Mhlongo is angry. The 52-year-old has to drive 30 minutes from his home in Midrand to his workplace in Johannesburg, and a new toll could add about 15 rand (\$1.46) a day to the cost of the journey.

"It's unfair to us" as road users also pay taxes, the father of five, who works for Absa Bank in the northern suburb of Sandton, said in a Nov. 29 interview. "Now, I must think twice if I want to see my brother who stays in Soweto," a township almost 60 kilometers (37 miles) away on the other side of the city.

The electronic-tolling system, or e-tolls, in South Africa's most populous province of Gauteng went live today after more than two years of delays, costing car drivers that don't buy an electronic tag as much as 0.58 rand a kilometer. The project has been introduced amid opposition from road users and labor unions. About one million cars use the Gauteng e-toll roads every day, according to Vusi Mona, a spokesman for the South African National Roads Agency SOC Ltd., or Sanral, which is responsible for the levies.

The highways were upgraded to ease transport constraints in the build-up to the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, which was hosted by South Africa. The roads aren't new routes so their base structure

has already been paid for with taxes, according to the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance, which represents groups including drivers. A lack of alternative routes to travel the about 50 kilometers from Johannesburg to Pretoria, the capital, has also angered opposition groups.
'Completely Unworkable'

Talk radio stations including SAfm today reported lighter than usual traffic on the city's highways with untolled side routes heavily congested.

"We are convinced that the whole project is going to collapse," Patrick Craven, spokesman for the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the country's biggest labor group, said in a phone interview Nov. 29. "It is completely unworkable particularly given its unpopularity. The opposition is such a huge proportion of motorists in Gauteng."

OUTA is appealing to motorists not to buy e-tags -- the technology that enables the payment of the tolls -- because there is no law that requires road users to register, the South African Press Association reported.
Outstanding Debt

Sanral has built up outstanding debt, including bank loans, of 30.6 billion rand while waiting for the system to start after consumer groups challenged its introduction up to the country's highest court. About 1.3 billion rand of bonds mature on April 30, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The agency needs 270 million rand a month to repay its debt, SAPA said yesterday, citing Jeremy Gauntlett, legal counsel for Transport Minister Dipuo Peters.

User Pay

"The principle of user pay in terms of infrastructure must not be compromised," Public Enterprises Minister Malusi Gigaba said in a Nov. 28 interview. "The cost of refurbishing dilapidated, abandoned infrastructure is much more expensive than the cost of actually maintaining it on an ongoing basis. That's where I think the principle of user pay must come in."

Sanral isn't the only company banking on the e-toll roll-out. Kapsch TrafficCom AG (KTCG), the Austrian maker of toll-road systems that will operate the Gauteng e-tolls, said in June that the project will boost its revenue by more than 50 million euros (\$68 million) a year once it starts.

Kapsch first-half sales gained 16 percent to 235.9 million euros, the Vienna-based company said Nov. 27. In the fiscal year through March it posted three straight quarterly losses partly caused by delays to the South African e-toll project. The company's shares gained 6.4 percent on Sept. 26, the day South African President Jacob Zuma signed the bill into law.

Struck Off

Sanral is confident the majority of Gauteng road users will pay the e-toll, Mona said in an e-mailed response to questions on Nov. 29. Judge Maria Jansen of the High Court in Pretoria struck off a last-minute filing by the Freedom Front Plus political party to stop the implementation of the e-tolls, SAPA reported yesterday. It was scrapped as the applicant failed to make a proper case, the news agency cited Jansen as saying.

"It's something not good for us at the moment," said Jonathan Cloete, 37, who lives in Roodeport, west of Johannesburg, and works in security services. He will not be buying e-tags. "I'm going to challenge them and see what they come up with," he said.

Abandoned Indonesian Sailors Face South African Deportation

Anita Powell/voanews.com/December 02, 2013

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA — Seventy-five Indonesian sailors face deportation from South Africa after being stranded offshore following years of forced labor at sea.

The men were forced to work in grueling, inhumane conditions at sea for months or years without pay. Most of them are due one year's back wages, others are owed more. One man described working 20-hour shifts.

Their employers abandoned their vessels leaving the sailors to scrape out a living from the waters off Cape Town.

But about three months ago, South African officials impounded their trawlers for illegal fishing, leaving them in a legal no man's land. Unable to go ashore, they were confined to stinking, cramped quarters on a boat for months, dependent on charity.

Now, they are on South African soil, but in a deportation center near Johannesburg.

Cassiem Augustus, an inspector for the International Transport Workers Federation, says the sailors' situation is not entirely unique. He has previously worked with abandoned sailors aboard Taiwanese- and Iraqi-owned vessels and sued for back pay and repatriation on their behalf, with mixed results.

But, he says, because these particular sailors were so utterly abandoned, in this case by both the ship owners and the shipping agency, there is no one to pursue.

That is how he says they ended up in the unusual situation of facing deportation, which he says will only further hurt their livelihoods back home.

"Deportation is something that leads to stigma," Augustus said. "You cannot be able to come back to our country, that is what deportation means, although they have worked honestly, they were trying to earn an honest wage. And what should have happened, there should have been negotiations."

Fatima Allie of the Cape Town-based Islamic charity Nakhlistan says its workers were horrified by the sailors' living conditions when they were in Cape Town. The charity was called in to help in mid-November.

"They had no toiletries, they had no food, the electricity was going to be cut on the vessel, and they were not going to have flushing toilets," Allie said. "Nakhlistan has been feeding them on a daily basis. We have been taking meat and chicken and rice and water and toiletries and fish oil, potatoes, vegetables, noodles to the seamen because that is all that we could do."

Allie says the charity can not get to the men in a deportation center and called for governments to take over and help the men.

"What we would like to happen is for the Indonesian government to step in, because they are Indonesian citizens," she said. "Some of these crew members have not seen their families for five years. So it is really [a] sad situation."

Augustus also recommended that nations work together to ratify and enforce international agreements that prevent slave-like working conditions at sea.

But until things improve at home, more young Indonesian men are likely to take their chances on the high seas.

Although Indonesia has unemployment levels of 6.6 percent, the World Bank says youth unemployment stands near 22 percent.

Many Indonesians enter the fishing industry due to the promise of high wages, but they often lack the education and training to avoid being taken advantage of by unscrupulous ship owners.

TANZANIA :

GAIL in Talks for Stake in Tanzania Gas Blocks

By Saurabh Chaturvedi/online.wsj.com/Dec. 3, 2013

NEW DELHI—State-owned GAIL India Ltd. 532155.BY +1.95% said Tuesday that its talks with Ophir Energy OPHR.LN -1.01% PLC for a stake in its offshore gas assets in Tanzania are continuing and won't be affected by a share sale deal with Singapore state-owned firm Pavilion Energy last month.

"There are still options available with Ophir in Tanzania. They have sold 20%, but still have 20% stake in three blocks," Prabhat Singh, marketing director for GAIL, told reporters on the sidelines of a conference.

"We are in negotiations for a stake," he said.

Ophir Energy PLC sold a share of a giant natural-gas discovery off the coast of Tanzania to Singapore state-owned firm Pavilion Energy for \$1.3 billion, marking the first major transaction in Tanzania's natural-gas sector.

The deal was initially seen as a setback for GAIL's ambitions in Tanzania, where it has been talking with Ophir for buying a stake.

Giant GA -0.62% gas discoveries in Tanzania have sparked intense interest from Chinese, Indian and Thai state-run companies, which are eager to secure long-term natural gas supplies for their fast-growing economies.

Post the deal with the Singapore firm in Tanzania, Ophir holds a 20% stake in blocks 1, 3 and 4, an 80% operating interest in block 7 and a 70% operating interest in East Pande. Blocks 1, 3 and 4 are a joint venture with the BG Group, BG.LN -1.32% which holds 60% and operates the block.

India, that meets around three quarters of its energy needs through imports, has been pushing to build up a diversified portfolio of foreign assets to minimize its dependence on the Middle East.

Indian companies have recently signed two multibillion-dollar deals to buy into offshore natural-gas assets in Mozambique, the focus of the majority of deals in East Africa.

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KENYA :

Kenya 'refuses to give up Kenyatta records'

Date: Dec 02, 2013/newvision

THE HAGUE - The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor on Monday accused Kenya of failing to hand over records which she said were "relevant to critical issues" in President Uhuru Kenyatta's crimes against humanity trial.

"The Office of the Prosecutor requests the Chamber to find that the Government of Kenya has failed to comply with the April 2012 request to provide financial and other records of the accused," Fatou Bensouda said in papers filed before the Hague-based court.

"All of its previous attempts to secure the records have been exhausted," she added.

Kenya's leader is set to go on trial on February 5 on charges of masterminding some of the deadly 2007-8 post-election violence that killed over 1,000 people and left several hundred thousand others displaced in the east African country.

Bensouda said prosecutors believed the documents "may shed light on the scope of the accused's conduct, including the allegation that he financed the crimes with which he is charged."

"For 19 months the OTP's repeated requests have been met with obfuscation and intransigence," Bensouda added, asking judges to now refer the matter to the court's oversight and legislative body, the Assembly of States Parties.

The move is the latest in a legal tug-of-war between the ICC and Kenya, which wants immunity from prosecution for sitting heads of state under the court's founding Rome Statute.

Last week the east African powerhouse warned that putting Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto on trial in The Hague could compromise security in the often volatile region.

Ruto's trial began on September 10.

Both men have pledged their cooperation with the ICC, but both have also complained that the cases, which they are obliged to attend in the Netherlands, were hampering their running of the country.

Earlier this month, the UN Security Council rejected a draft resolution backed by African countries to suspend Kenyatta and Ruto's trials for a year.

African leaders frequently complain that the ICC discriminates against their continent.

The ICC has opened eight investigations since it was set up in 2003, all of them in Africa.

AFP

Oil in Kenya faces infrastructure, capacity challenges

Tuesday, 03 December 2013 /Posted by Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqu/brecorder.com

NAIROBI: Recent petroleum finds in Kenya's arid and under-developed north have caused excitement, but even if commercial production goes ahead, major challenges remain.

Kenya will need to invest in human resources, manage often unrealistic expectations and beef up infrastructure, preferably in conjunction with its neighbours, experts say.

East Africa has long lagged behind the west of the continent where oil was found back in the 1950s.

But in recent years Tullow Oil of Ireland has struck oil in the east, first in Uganda, where confirmed reserves of 1.7 billion barrels are located, and now, they hope, in Kenya.

"Companies have passed commercial thresholds," in Kenya, said Mwendia Nyaga, an independent consultant.

But given that they still need to work out the costs of extracting what they have found, Kenya has not yet officially "declared commercially viable resources", he said, even if companies see a "high possibility of production".

"In 2006, there was very little exploration onshore. The main operation was offshore," Nyaga said. "Today, every single licensing opportunity onshore has been taken."

Kenya has four basins: Anza, Mandera and the Tertiary Rift, where the Turkana finds lie, are all completely onshore, while the Lamu Basin extends offshore.

"The geology tells us that there is oil in the Great Rift Valley, running up and down," David Cowan, Africa Economist at Citigroup in London, told AFP.

Kenya no longer attracts only independents such as Tullow. Majors such as Total of France and Italy's Eni have started moving in.

"In East Africa the problem is not geology. Rather the question is what to do with the oil and gas produced," said Stanislas Drochon, analyst at IHS.

"For oil the difficulty is that the region is landlocked," he went on, referring to Uganda, Kenya's Turkana region and neighbouring South Sudan, which sends out its oil via Sudan.

For Kenya's Turkana region, populated largely by pastoralist communities who fight over land and water resources, all the infrastructure for getting oil out still has to be put in place.

Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda are currently in discussions over a pipeline network that will connect with a planned new deep-water port on the Kenyan coast.

The legal and regulatory framework in Kenya also needs beefing up, experts said.

A new version of Kenya's petroleum law, last revised in 1986, is being drawn up, notably in the light of new environmental requirements.

It will create a new upstream regulator and strengthen a number of other bodies, with the aim of leaving the ministry in charge of policy and creating a petroleum directorate responsible for ensuring that companies stick to the terms of their contracts.

The existing National Oil company NOCK will be the joint venture partner with oil companies.

Managing local expectations

Kenya also has human resources issues to address, including the inclusion of local communities who expect to see a share of the oil wealth.

"Kenya has comparatively well-trained human resources, you have engineers, but they haven't worked in the oil industry. You'll find plant operators, but you'll have to teach them the oil industry," Mwendia Nyaga said.

"One of the big challenges in the region is managing the huge expectations," said Drochon. "People expect to see prices at the pump drop immediately whereas anything to do with oil takes a long time." he said.

"There has to be engagement between contractors and the local community and government -- at national and county level -- in such a way that the local people see tangible benefits," said Martin Heya, petroleum commissioner at the Energy Ministry.

Oil producing communities must feel "tangible benefits both through employment and through local tenders for goods and services," he said.

Whilst Kenyan companies will be quick to supply non-technical services such as catering and transport, providing even semi-technical services will remain a challenge for years to come.

The revenue that Kenya derives from oil must be shared out between the national government, the county government and regional committees where the oil is found.

Heya wants to see the setting up of a sovereign fund to ensure future generations benefit from oil wealth and an equalisation fund. The latter is to cushion the effect of fluctuations in oil prices -- when prices are up more is saved and when they go down money can be withdrawn.

Tullow has already had a foretaste of what can happen if communities feel disgruntled.

It recently had to suspend operations on two blocks for the best part of two weeks after local people, backed by local politicians, marched on a drilling camp.

"If we neglect involving local people, local industries, then you have problems later, like in Nigeria," Nyaga said. "People... for example burst pipelines because they see it as a foreign industry that they don't benefit from."

Community expectations evolve, Nyaga emphasised, and companies need to take that on board. A company that builds a school for a community needs to recognise that the children who attend it will see themselves as its next generation of petroleum engineers.

Essar Telecom Kenya seeking investments to fund 3G expansion plans

Tue, Dec 03 2013/livemint.com

Mumbai: Essar Telecom Kenya Ltd, in which Essar Group promoters Shashikant Ruia and Ravikant Ruia own a 72% stake, is in talks with investors to fund its plans of expanding its 3G presence, The

Economic Times reported on Tuesday.

The company, which operates the yuMobile brand in Kenya, is planning to firm up investments from the start of 2014, the report said.

The group denied media reports that it plans to sell its Kenyan telecom operations to an Indian service provider.

yuMobile has a 10% share in the Kenyan market with 3.52 million users on its network, according to the Communications Commission of Kenya.

ANGOLA :

Angola Bans Islam? Officials Say No, The Country Hasn't

By Zachary Stieber, Epoch Times/December 2, 2013

Did Angola ban Islam? It doesn't appear so, although the country is taking measures against the Muslims.

Angola reportedly banned Islam about a week ago, with most English-language reports referencing French media.

The Lanouvelle Tribune was one of the French media outlets to report the supposed development.

"The process of legalization of Islam has not been approved by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights; their mosques would be closed until further notice," the outlet quoted Rosa Cruz, the country's minister of culture, as saying.

Angola has also closed 60 mosques across the majority-Christian country, the Tribune reported. Another French outlet, Agence Ecofin, published the same article as the Tribune, even though the two were cited separately by many reports.

Details about the situation are sketchy. One of the articles cited by IBTimes.com, for instance, references an article that is traced back to a fervent anti-Islam site, which has removed the original link to a story regarding the purported ban on Islam.

Following up on the shaky report, an unnamed Angolan official told IBTimes that there is no ban on Islam.

"The Republic of Angola ... it's a country that does not interfere in religion," the official at the Angolan Embassy in Washington, D.C. said. "We have a lot of religions there. It is freedom of religion. We have Catholic, Protestants, Baptists, Muslims and evangelical people."

Another official also denied the reports.

"At the moment, we don't have any information about that," the official said. "We're reading about it just like you on the Internet. We don't have any notice that what you're reading on the Internet is true."

Regarding the comments by Rosa Cruz, the official said "I cannot confirm if the Minister of Culture said that. I cannot find that in our press."

The U.S. State Department said in its 2012 International Religious Freedom Report that Angola has about 20 million people, with the Roman Catholic Church estimating that 55 percent of the population is Catholic. The government says that 70 percent of the population is.

Another 25 percent combines Christian and traditional beliefs, while another 15 percent is one of a range of denominations outside of Catholicism, according to the National Institute for Religious Affairs.

The “small Muslim community” is unofficially estimated at 80,000 to 90,000 people, “most of whom are migrants from West Africa or of Lebanese origin.

“Some Muslim sources put these figures closer to 500,000, but it is not possible to confirm the estimate.”

Further, “Muslim group leaders reported Muslims could not practice Islam freely because the government did not recognize Islam and selectively intervened to close mosques, schools, and community centers. Although government officials asserted the government protected religious groups without legal status and did not have a policy to close mosques or other Islamic facilities, there were several reports of local authorities closing mosques or preventing their construction.”

AU/AFRICA :

Barclays Africa invests in retail and business banking division

by Phakamisa Ndzabela/bdlive.co.za/03 décembre 2013

BARCLAYS Africa Group on Monday said it would invest R1.2bn over the next three years transforming its branch network and automated teller machines (ATMs) and digitising channels.

Barclays Africa Group, whose branches are branded Absa in South Africa, said it had spent some time acquiring skills from banks such as HSBC, Standard Bank and Nedbank, and had done an analysis of the challenges facing the retail and business banking division.

This formed part of a 12-point plan aimed at strengthening Barclays Africa Group’s South African retail and business banking divisions. In the six months to end-June, retail and business banking in South Africa made up more than half the headline earnings posted by the group.

Of the R4.6bn posted by Barclays Africa Group (previously listed as Absa on the JSE), about R2.9bn came from the retail and business banking division.

“We have committed R1.2bn to start transforming our branch network,” the head of the group’s retail and business banking division Craig Bond said in a media briefing on Monday.

Barclays Africa Group’s retail bank has 9.2-million customers in South Africa, 864 branches and 9,162 ATMs. Mr Bond, who used to work for Standard Bank in Hong Kong, said 70% of the bank’s branch leases would expire in the next 22 months, a situation that will see the bank close some of the branches and reopen in strategic areas in order to capture its market better.

Speaking candidly about the bank’s woes and the state of the bank that he found, Mr Bond conceded that Barclays Africa Group in South Africa had lost thousands of clients to Capitec, First

National Bank (FNB) and Standard Bank.

"When I got here in January it felt like an organisation that had lost its confidence," he said.

Due to the bank's strategy to pull back on personal loans, some customers had moved their transaction accounts to get a personal loan elsewhere, Mr Bond said.

"We definitely lost some middle-market clients to FNB and business banking to Standard Bank," Mr Bond said.

"We are very clear in our mind as we build the African franchise we have to build the business bank." He added that the bank was working on launching South Africa's cheapest bank account with a retailer.

One of the innovations in business banking has been the Absa Pebble, which is a point-of-sale card accepting device that is plugged into a smart phone.

He said this year was all about fixing the bank's lending book and this was now clean. "We spent a huge amount of time getting credit skills," Mr Bond said.

One of the Johannesburg-based analysts said Mr Bond brought in a breath of fresh air, which was good. However, it was important to note that Barclays Africa Group in South Africa was not operating in a vacuum.

"Everybody is also trying to ramp up their businesses. Capitec is not sitting on its laurels," an analyst said.

Mr Bond said the bank was increasingly digitising and leveraging off Barclays technology.

He said new ATMs had been rolled out in South Africa. These machines had the ability to print electronically stamped statements that were verifiable.

Mr Bond said over the past three to four years, Barclays Africa Group did a lot of sponsoring but not much advertising.

He said the bank would remain a sponsor to rugby, soccer and the Cape Epic, a mountain bike race in the Western Cape.

Outside South Africa, Barclays Africa Group wants to expand its credit card to five areas including Ghana and Uganda, said the chief of staff at Mr Bonds office, Paul Nel, on Monday.

Volvo plans to sell Eicher trucks in SE Asia, Africa

Pankaj Doval, TNN/timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Dec 3, 2013

INDORE: Swedish commercial vehicle giant Volvo plans to sell Eicher-branded trucks across various markets in south-east Asia and Africa using its sales network and has made India a global hub for sourcing medium-duty engines for trucks and buses.

The company has a 50:50 JV with Eicher's Lal family, Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicles (VECV), and plans to build up on this further, making products and engines not for only for India but also for its requirements in other countries.

VECV will be the driving force for the push in India and the company has seen investments of Rs 1,800 crore over the last few years for expansion and modernization of products as well as for setting up of capacity for engines meant for Volvo.

Siddhartha Lal, MD & CEO of Eicher Motors, said the new product line-up of VECV — called the Pro Series — will help the company gain market share, while eating into the customers of top makers Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland. "There has so far been a duopoly in the commercial vehicle space. This duopoly takes customers for granted and does not treat them well," he said, in an apparent reference to Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland, which account for the majority of sales in the heavy vehicles space.

The new products have been developed using Volvo's technology and processes, while Eicher chips in with its sales and distribution network as well as its strength in frugal engineering. On the engine side, VECV is the sole supplier for Volvo group's medium duty engines (5-litre and 8-litre) having an output between 180hp and 280hp. These engines are used across Volvo's truck brands in various continents, except for the US.

Vinod Aggarwal, CEO of VECV, said the commercial vehicle market in India continues to remain sluggish. Commercial vehicles volumes have fallen by 16% in the April-October 2013 period as the economic slowdown and ban on mining activities in various regions saw buyers pulling out.

UN/AFRICA :

Amnesty calls on UN to send troops to CAR

World Bulletin / News Desk/ 02 December 2013 Monday

Amnesty International described the urgency of sending United Nations peacekeeping troops to the Central African Republic as a matter of "life-and-death".

The London-based Amnesty International on Monday urged the UN Security Council to authorize the deployment of a robust peacekeeping force to the Central African Republic.

"The Security Council must request that the UN Secretary-General immediately start preparations for the deployment of a robust peacekeeping force, with a mandate to protect civilians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs)," Salil Shetty, AI Secretary General, said in a press release on the group's website.

"Troops on the ground must have the resources necessary to stop the ongoing abuses and rein in armed groups and forces that have already spun out of control over the past year," Shetty asserted.

"The consequences of this life-and-death decision will affect an entire country. If the Security Council does not act now to stem the horrific cycle of violence in the Central African Republic, that failure will hang heavily on the international community for years to come," asserted the Amnesty chief.

France, the country's former colonizer, has announced plans to triple the size of its current 410-troop contingent in CAR.

African countries have recently dispatched 2,500 peacekeeping troops to CAR to help stem the violence.

In March, the African country descended into violence after Seleka rebels – from the mostly-Muslim north – ousted President François Bozize, a Christian who had been in office for ten years and enjoyed the strong support of the country's Christian majority.

The months since have witnessed clashes between Seleka fighters and Christian militias – known as "anti-balaka" – that have recently emerged.

In September, more than 100 people were reportedly killed in clashes between the rival factions.

Nearly ten percent of the country's 4.6 million people have reportedly been displaced as a result of the fighting.

According to the CIA factbook, Christians account for around 50 percent of CAR's population and Muslims about 15 percent.

US/AFRICA :

Africa: U.S to Boost Public-Private Investment for Growth

3 December 2013/RNW/allafrica.com

As she begins a trip to Ghana, Liberia and Senegal this week, Elizabeth Littlefield, president and chief executive officer of the United States government's development finance agency, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), outlines how private-public investment partnerships can help boost growth.

A generation ago, many nations across sub-Saharan Africa had to promote their markets to global investors largely on the basis of promise, the bright future over the horizon.

Today, the case could not be more different. Tangible, compelling and vivid proof of progress is everywhere at hand. The rate of economic growth during the past decade has been roughly double the rates of the 1980s and 1990s.

Africa's economy once rose and fell in tandem with natural resource prices. Now most growth comes from sectors such as transportation, manufacturing, telecommunications, wholesale and retail.

While this is long-overdue good news, any African will tell you the news could easily be much better. Even as Africa grows each year, more than half of Africans - some 600 million people - still live without that basic prerequisite of a modern global economy, reliable electricity.

The number is hard to conceive. Imagine the productivity loss from a one-day blackout for every nation of Western Europe plus Japan and South Korea. The population of those nations combined roughly equals the number of Africans who live without power annually.

How can Africa fully compete when countless factories and computers go dark during rolling blackouts? How can it compete in an era of non-stop, round-the-clock communication when

millions go home to candles or lanterns?

Education is stunted. Healthcare suffers. Africa's power deficit is so pervasive that it shaves an estimated two percent off the continent's gross domestic product each year.

Africa: Obama - U.S Contribution to Global Aids Fund

By Dan Robinson/Voice of America (Washington, DC)/2 December 2013

White House — Marking the 25th annual observance of World AIDS Day, President Barack Obama said his administration remains committed to the global fight against AIDS. He also announced an increase in the potential total U.S. contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

The observance brought together the president and other U.S. officials, including Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius.

Obama reflected on how far the fight against HIV/AIDS has come since the devastation of the early days of the epidemic. He announced that a major goal of the PEPFAR (The President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief) program, begun by his predecessor, George W. Bush, had been achieved.

"Two years ago, I set new prevention and treatment targets for PEPFAR, like increasing the number of mothers we reach so that we prevent their children from becoming infected, and helping six million people get treatment by the end of 2013," he said. "Today, I'm proud to announce that we've not only reached our goal, we've exceeded our treatment target. So we've helped 6.7 million people receive lifesaving treatment. And we're going to keep at it."

The president has faced criticism from AIDS and health activists over what they call lagging U.S. contributions to PEPFAR, down 12 percent since 2010. PEPFAR began in 2003 with a \$15 billion U.S. commitment.

Obama said his administration has not just sustained PEPFAR efforts but "expanded them," and he noted efforts to ensure that contributions from other donors match those from the United States.

During the president's first term, the U.S. pledged \$4 billion to the Global Fund. For the current fiscal year budget, Obama requested \$1.65 billion -- conditional on other donors stepping up contributions.

Over the next three years, Obama said the U.S. will contribute \$1 for every \$2 pledged by donors, up to a potential total of \$5 billion. He urged donors attending the Global Fund meeting in Washington not to "leave money on the table" and said the U.S. will remain a global leader in the fight against AIDS.

"We will stand with you every step of this journey until we reach the day that we know is possible, when all men and women can protect themselves from infection; a day when all people with HIV have access to the treatments that extend their lives; the day when there are no babies being born with HIV or AIDS, and when we achieve, at long last, what was once hard to imagine -- and that's an AIDS-free generation," he said.

Secretary of State John Kerry said it is clear the world is "turning a very important corner" in the AIDS fight, but said the challenge ahead will require major continued commitments.

Kerry indirectly addressed criticism, saying achieving key goals of reducing infections, mortality and increasing access to treatment in Africa and elsewhere, were due to President Obama's insisting on "setting a new standard."

"The way that we have leveraged our commitments inspires greater contributions from other nations and we have shown, I think, therein, strategic leadership," he said.

Kerry cited South Africa, Rwanda and Namibia as examples of transitioning PEPFAR from providing direct aid to delivering support for "locally run and self-sustaining efforts."

Domestically, Obama announced his administration will redirect \$100 million to the National Institutes of Health to develop a new generation of therapies to fight HIV and AIDS.

"The United States should be at the forefront of new discoveries into how to put HIV into long-term remission without requiring lifelong therapies, or better yet, eliminate it completely," he said.

Also in his remarks Monday, the president noted that his signature health insurance reform law, which has been plagued by serious flaws, provides for free AIDS testing. And he noted that the law bars companies from denying health coverage to Americans, including those infected with HIV.

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

Mars mission: India gets help from South Africa to monitor 'Mangalyaan'

Ch Sushil Rao, TNN/timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Dec 3, 2013

HYDERABAD: India is not on its own when it concerns deep space exploration. While the country celebrates the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) 'Mangalyaan' of the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) on its path to the Mars orbit, South Africa too is part of India's big leap into space.

The Hartebeesthoek (HBK) ground station of the South African National Space Agency (SANSA) is providing satellite tracking, telemetry and command services to the Mars mission.

In fact on the big day when the PSLV-C25 with MOM was launched from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh on November 5, Sansa's Hartebeesthoek (HBK) ground station did its part for the mission. It received the satellite signal after it was launched in India. The ground station was involved in providing Malgalyaan with transfer-orbit support services subsequently.

There is a reason why the HBK ground station's services were sought by Isro. This is primarily because of its location as it is located closest to the satellite per pass. An Isro scientist Pandey Shyam was deputed to the HBK at the time of the launch of the Mar's Orbiter Mission itself to coordinate with HBK and Indian scientists in Isro.

The fact that the HBK ground station was chosen for support services for 300 launches across the globe is proof enough of the importance of Hartebeesthoek.

Isro scientists, however, had a moment of anxiety when there was loss of data from the South African ground station when the Trans-Mars Injection took place on December 1. For as long as five minutes, Isro had to wait for confirmation from Hartebeesthoek that the operation had been successful and MOM was into interplanetary space.

Sansa's ground station in Hartebeesthoek near Pretoria was started in 1960. The US agency, Nasa's has chose it as one of the 14 similar Satellite Tracking and Data Acquisition Network stations that were set up in various parts of the globe.

It is from Hartebeesthoek that the MOM's health is monitored. Information and data pertaining to the satellite is continuously sent to Indian scientists at Isro.

Ten Sports to hike ad rates for India-South Africa series by 20%

Tuesday, Dec 3, 2013/Place: New Delhi | Agency: DNA

Zee Entertainment's Ten Sports, which will broadcast live the upcoming India-South Africa cricket series, has raised advertisement rates by 20% effective today as it has already realised 90% of its series revenue target of Rs120 crore.

"We are hiking the rate for the 10% remaining slots by 20% from Tuesday," said Rajesh Sethi (pictured), CEO, Ten Sports.

The current rate is Rs4.25 lakh for a 10-second advertisement during the live telecast of one-day internationals (ODIs) and Rs1.25 lakh for Test matches.

Micromax is the co-presenter for the entire tour. Xolo, Vodafone, Havells, Go Daddy, We Chat, Daikin, Tata Motors and ITC are associates. Kent is the title sponsor and iBall the co-presenter for the studio show.

The channel has spent Rs10 crore in marketing and publicising the broadcast of the series, which is billed as one of the most eagerly awaited international cricket encounters.

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

EN BREF, CE 03 Décembre 2013 ... AGNEWS/ DAM, NY, 03/12/2013