



[President of Central African Republic appeals for help in fending off rebels who are advancing on the capital. The president of Central African Republic (CAR) has urgently called on France and other foreign powers to help his government fend off rebels who are quickly seizing territory and approaching the capital. Speaking to crowds in Bangui, a city of some 600,000, Francois Bozize on Thursday pleaded with foreign powers to do what they could. He pointed in particular to France, Central African Republic's former colonial ruler.]

BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

RDC-RCA : La garde présidentielle congolaise à Bangui ?
jeudi, 27 décembre 2012/afrikarabia2.blogs.courrierinternational.com

La rébellion Séléka qui menace de renverser le régime du président François Bozizé en Centrafrique, affirme que la RDC aurait envoyé 300 soldats de la garde présidentielle à Bangui. La rébellion centrafricaine demande aux troupes congolaises de "ne pas rentrer dans le conflit". Ces troupes interviendraient dans le cadre de la force multinationale d'Afrique centrale (FOMAC) et seraient stationnées au camp Beya de Bangui.

Le président Joseph Kabila va-t-il prêter main forte à François Bozizé, menacé par une rébellion en Centrafrique ? C'est ce que croit savoir la coalition Séléka qui a repris les armes depuis le 10 décembre et progresse dangereusement vers Bangui. La rébellion affirme à Afrikarabia que "300 éléments de la garde présidentielle de République démocratique du Congo (RDC) ont été dépêchés à Bangui, via la Zongo". Les soldats congolais auraient été accueillis par un bataillon d'infanterie

amphibie et installés au camp Béya, le quartier général de l'armée centrafricaine. Selon la Séléka, ces militaires interviendraient dans le cadre de la force multinationale d'Afrique centrale (FOMAC) et pourraient être rejoints par d'autres pays, comme le Gabon. Les rebelles demandent aux troupes de la FOMAC de "rester neutre, de ne pas rentrer dans le conflit" et de "protéger la population des exactions de Bozizé".

A l'heure où les rebelles de la Séléka affirment se tenir "à moins de 30 km" de la capitale centrafricaine, l'envoi des troupes congolaises, si minces soient-elles, confirme l'isolement diplomatique du président Bozizé. Le Tchad, son plus fidèle allié, semble faire "le service minimum". Les troupes d'Idriss Déby, se sont prépositionnées dans le Nord et le Centre du pays, mais n'ont jamais constitué un obstacle pour l'avancée des rebelles. La coalition affirme "contourner" les forces tchadiennes, sans affrontement. La France et les Etats-unis, n'ont pas donné suite aux demandes d'assistance du président Bozizé, se contentant d'évacuer ou de protéger leurs ressortissants.

Côté congolais, rien n'a filtré sur la présence de troupes congolaises à Bangui. Deux questions restent pour le moment sans réponse : le parlement congolais est-il au courant de l'envoi de ces soldats ? et pourquoi le président Kabila dépêche-t-il des troupes en Centrafrique alors que sa propre armée peine à venir à bout des rebelles du M23 à l'Est de la RDC ?

Christophe RIGAUD - Afrikarabia

MISE A JOUR Jeudi 27 décembre à 22h00 : Les troupes de la garde présidentielle de RDC ont été vues par les rebelles de la coalition Séléka aux environs de Liton, à 22 km de Bangui. La rébellion affirme que ces éléments n'intervenaient visiblement pas dans le cadre de la FOMAC comme nous le disons dans l'article ci-dessus.

UGANDA :

SOUTH AFRICA :

South Africa president: Pets are "white culture"

AP/cbsnews.com/ December 27, 2012

JOHANNESBURG South Africa's president says a dog should not be man's best friend.

President Jacob Zuma made critical remarks about pet care that touch on sensitive race relations in South Africa, which was dominated by whites until apartheid was dismantled almost two decades ago, The Star newspaper reported Thursday.

The newspaper cited Zuma as saying in a speech Wednesday that the idea of having a pet is part of "white culture" and that people should focus on family welfare.

The president's office sought to clarify his remarks, saying he was encouraging "the previously oppressed African majority" to uphold its own culture. It also suggested the way in which the comments were reported, rather than the comments themselves, was divisive.

The president's remarks triggered a flurry of retorts from animal lovers on Twitter and other social media.

"Will I become 'more African' if I kick my dog, President Zuma," one person commented tartly.

Another lamented: "He keeps on dividing this country."

And another humorist wrote: "Well, that pretty much rules out that photo opportunity with Zuma, the Obamas, & their pet dog, Bo, in the White House."

The backdrop to the dog debate is the legacy of Western colonialism in Africa, as well as the bitter struggle against apartheid in South Africa that culminated in the first democratic elections in 1994. Poverty and economic imbalances remain a source of deep strain in the nation of 50 million.

During his speech to an appreciative crowd in KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma's home province, the president said people who love dogs more than people have a "lack of humanity" and that some people are trying in vain to "emulate whiteness," The Star reported.

"Even if you apply any kind of lotion and straighten your hair, you will never be white," he reportedly said.

In a statement, the South African presidency said Zuma was trying to "decolonize the African mind post-liberation" and enable people to take pride in their heritage and not feel pressure to adopt customs of minority cultures. Animals can be cared for, was the message, but not at the expense of people.

It said he gave examples of people loving animals more than other human beings -- letting a dog sit in the cab of a truck while a worker has to sit in the back in the rain, or rushing an animal to the veterinarian while ignoring sick relatives or workers.

Zuma has often said he seeks to protect South Africa's diversity and unify its disparate groups, but he has occasionally stirred controversy. In 2006, as deputy president, he said same-sex marriages, which are today protected under South African law, were "a disgrace to the nation and to God."

South Africa's Mandela recovering at Johannesburg home

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA The Associated Press/ Friday, December 28, 2012

The doctors treating former South African leader Nelson Mandela believe he should remain in Johannesburg for now to be close to medical facilities that can provide care to the 94-year-old, the government said yesterday.

Mandela left a hospital Wednesday evening after nearly three weeks of treatment there, and was brought to his home in the Johannesburg neighborhood of Houghton. The anti-apartheid icon, also known by his clan name, Madiba, has lived over the past year in the rural village of Qunu in Eastern Cape province, where he grew up.

"Where Madiba goes, in which period, in which times, is a matter that is entirely dependent on his own wishes. Whatever he wishes, we will do," presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said in an interview with eNCA, a South African television news channel.

"But right now, the doctors have considered it necessary and good that he should be in Houghton so that he's close to all the facilities where we can give him high care," Maharaj said.

Mandela was admitted Dec. 8 to a hospital in the South African capital of Pretoria, 30 miles north of Johannesburg. The ex-president was treated for a lung infection and also had a procedure to remove gallstones.

"He is not yet fully recovered but he sufficiently moved forward so that he can be discharged," Maharaj said. He noted that Mandela had been in good spirits while receiving President Jacob Zuma and other visitors while he was hospitalized.

"Madiba was doing well, but as you know, when you're recovering there are ups and downs, slight ups and downs, and the doctors are looking for a steady progress and that began to be registered over the last few days," the spokesman told eNCA.

Mandela is revered around the world as a symbol of sacrifice and reconciliation, his legacy forged in the fight against apartheid, the system of white minority rule that imprisoned him for 27 years. The Nobel laureate served one five-year term as president after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

Maharaj said Mandela is able to see his family "more easily" now that he is at home, but he appealed to the public to respect the former president's privacy "to allow the best possible conditions for his full recovery."

TANZANIA :

Tanzania: From Analogue to Digital - New Era in Tanzania Broadcasting

By Ashery Mkama/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/28 December 2012

TANZANIA is preparing to switch off the analogue broadcasting system on December 31, 2012 to meet the deadline set by the East African Community (EAC) member states and ahead of the SADC deadline of December 31, 2013.

As the country comes close to the deadline for the migration from analogue to digital broadcasting, Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) recently launched a jingle and promotion song intended to promote the shift. The jingle and the promotional song aimed at educating, reminding and encouraging the public on the importance and benefits of using the new digital system also directs customers to maintain their previous television sets, as they will still be able to use them even after the deadline by connecting them with a decoder.

According to TCRA Director General, Prof John Nkoma, digital broadcasting has a lot of advantages compared to the analogue systems in terms of improved picture quality, more choice of content and other value added and quality services. TCRA has advised the public to buy decoders from registered agencies in addition to securing the devices' guarantees.

The authority further expects that the public will participate fully to make the exercise successful. "One of the main advantages of Digital TV for viewers is that broadcasters are able to embed digital data into the streams, such as programme information and interactive channel menus, clarified Prof Nkoma.

Another advantage is that digital data takes up less bandwidth, meaning more channels can be broadcast at the same time, enables viewers to get more TV channels more conveniently, gives viewers much more choice in what they watch and allows for follow up channels which broadcast the same programmes. "Viewers will be required to purchase decoders, not for prescribed channels, but for the comfort of enjoying clear images and reception in the comfort of their living rooms", said the TCRA CEO.

The Minister for Communications, Science and Technology, Prof Makame Mbarawa, recently advised broadcasters to put in place strategic plans of changing from music or mobile programmes to development programmes. Professor Mbarawa directed broadcasting stations to increase television programmes prioritizing public interest stories rather than spending a lot of time airing music programmes and foreign adverts as if there is nothing to broadcast.

"My call to you directors and owners of broadcasting stations is to ensure that there is a balance between rural and urban coverage due to the fact that majority of Tanzanians live in rural areas," said Prof Mbarawa. He insisted that the government will do its best to ensure that plans to switch from analogue to digital succeed so that Tanzanians benefit through the new technology.

The minister was speaking recently at the Annual Broadcasters' Conference (ABC) 2012 held in Dar es Salaam which brought together more than 200 delegates comprising licensed broadcasters operating in Tanzania. Other delegates were from national broadcasting organizations and regulators from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi as well as exhibitors of digital broadcasting equipment from Tanzania, Kenya, France, South Africa, Italy and United Kingdom.

A lecturer at the Institute of Journalism and Mass Communication (IJMC), Dr Ayoub Rioba, sharing his views at the Annual Broadcasters' Conference advised TCRA to concentrate on local content to allow freedom of creativity among broadcasters. "We should promote creative and talented broadcasters. Let's allow and help those talents to operate effectively by empowering them", said Dr Ayoub Rioba.

Commenting on the challenges of "Broadcasting Content in the Digital Environment," another participant, Mr Arliondo Lopez, said digital migration will enable more channels on the same frequencies maintaining, however, that digital content across multiple platforms will demand quality, creativity, knowledge and talent. "There is a need for the government and broadcasters to work together to meet the demand for local content which is more relevant and more liked by audiences", said Mr Lopez noting that broadcasters need to know the needs of their audiences.

He also challenged broadcasters to define a realistic and effective strategy to remain relevant in the digital environment. Opening a weeklong training seminar on "digital technology in electronic media in the Isle before the Annual Broadcasters' Conference, the Executive Secretary of the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission (ZBC), Mr Chande Omar, challenged media practitioners to be ready for the changes underscoring the need for the journos to acquire requisite skills.

"Technology is changing from analogue to digital, therefore, media practitioners should also change," said Mr Chande. However, Zanzibar Second Vice-President, Ambassador Seif Ali Iddi, recently said that the government would find workable ways to help poor people adapt to digital technology.

One of the ways, he said was negotiating with importers on possible reduction of prices of the gadgets. Kinondoni District Commissioner, Mr Jordan Rugimbana said recently that it was high time now that TCRA and other relevant authorities monitored very closely activities of telecom

companies to ensure provision of best services. Mr Rugimbana was concerned by text messages from telecom companies to their customers most of which he said were often misleading.

"There are messages for example asking customers to top up one's account with a promise that one's credit would be doubled but after recharging nothing happens," he said. The District Commissioner who was speaking during a telecommunication customer user's workshop to Kinondoni residents in Dar es Salaam further lashed out at companies which in their advertisements proclaim free mobile transaction while they actually charged the calls.

He also complained against poor customer service by some companies. "Sometimes customers are arbitrarily charged in connection with services they never demanded or subscribed automatically to services they do not need at all," he added. The DC also expressed concern over unregistered mobile phone numbers that remain in operation. He added that such numbers are most likely to be used by criminals.

TCRA Communications Manager Innocent Mungy, urged mobile phone operators to provide customers with an option to block unwanted text messages and phone calls. Customers, on the other hand, should ensure that they read and understand the terms and conditions set by the companies before subscribing to services or offers. Subscribers of mobile phone companies in Tanzania have, for a long time now, complained about the 'irritating' unsolicited messages (SMS) and phone calls, which are sometimes charged.

He said for some time now, it has been a trend by mobile phone operators to send unsolicited text messages and making phone calls to their customers informing them about new products, services and offers among others. TCRA in 2010 licensed three Multiplex Operators (MUX) namely Star Media Tanzania Ltd, Agape Associate Ltd and Basic Transmissions Ltd, for the provision of digital multiplexing, signal distribution and transmission services.

Tanzania: Mtwara Residents Oppose Gas Pipeline Construction Plan

By Hassan Simba/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/28 December 2012

HUNDREDS of Mtwara residents held a peaceful demonstration opposing the construction of gas pipeline from Mtwara to Dar es Salaam.

The protest began from Mtawanya village, 9 kilometres to Mtwara town through Msimbati road where the natural gas is being extracted. The demo which drew public interest from several districts including Tandahimba and Newala, were peaceful under tight police security.

According to coordinators of the demonstration, the Mtwara Regional Commissioner, Mr Joseph Simbakalia, was supposed to be the guest of honour, but he declined the offer and instead the procession was received by the Chairman of Union of political parties, Mr Hussein Mussa Amiri.

The Union is made up of Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), NCCR-Mageuzi, SAU, TLP, APPT Maendeleo, ADC, UDP and DP. The parties had one motto 'Gesi kwanza, vyama baadaye, hapa hakitoki kitu' (literally meaning, gas first political parties later, nothing will be taken away from here).

The main market and some roads in Mtwara town were temporarily closed down, to allow business people attend the demonstrations that passed through Nanga Heroes grounds. Some of the placards that were carried by the demonstrators carried messages that oppose the government's move to extract the natural gas and transport it to Dar es Salaam through the pipeline.

"Harbour in Bagamoyo, Industries in Bagamoyo, Gas in Dar es Salaam, Mtwara we must be stupid. The gas will not leave Mtwara even though we are illiterate. Gas first, political parties later", read one of the placards. Another one carried the following message: "We have been ignored and this must stop now".

Reading a joint report prepared by the Union of Political Parities, Mr Seleman Litope said the southern part of the country is often ignored. He cited the removal of a railway line, poor governance of cashew price, poor infrastructure and now the natural gas as some indicators of neglecting the southern area.

He explained that the union of eight political parties focused on ensuring their natural resource is not transported out of Mtwara to benefit others. "Construction of the pipeline should stop. The government is not open on how Mtwara residents will benefit.

President Jakaya Kikwete's decision goes against his own promise to the people of Mtwara in 2009, during one of his official tours that the region should be prepared to run industries," he noted. The two-page report questions the need to construct gas turbines to produce electricity in Dar es Salaam when there is an area already in Mtwara readily available for construction of such turbines.

Neither the Minister for Energy and Minerals, Prof Sospeter Muhongo, nor his Permanent Secretary Eliakim Maswi could be reached for comments. However, reliable information from the ministry had it that the ministry is aware of the concerns and some officials led by Maswi are expected to visit Mtwara and Lindi regions early January next year.

President Kikwete launched the construction of Mnazi Bay and Songosongo Natural Gas processing plant and a transportation pipeline last month, where he directed the Tanzania Electric Supply Company (Tanesco) to also start building power processing plants. He said that Tanesco should start building the power plants at designated centres, so when the project is completed may be able to produce 840 megawatts

KENYA :

Police officer killed in Mandera attack
By Cyrus Ombati/standardmedia.co.ke/28122012

A police officer was Thursday night shot dead and robbed his rifle in an attack by suspected militants in Mandera Town near the volatile Kenya-Somalia border.

The police constable was on foot patrol with his colleague at about 9 pm when they were confronted and ambushed by three men armed with pistols.

Police say the victim was shot in the neck and chin at close range and was pronounced dead on arrival at a local hospital.

The other officer escaped unhurt after he ducked into a ditch and engaged the gunmen in a shoot out. The gang picked the officer's G3 rifle and escaped with it but dropped the magazine that had 19 bullets.

The killing of the police officer is the latest incident targeting security agents and other government officials in the larger North Eastern region.

More than two dozens of security agents have been killed and similar number injured in well coordinated attacks believed to be staged by Somalia's Al Shabaab militants.

Police had been on high alert during the Christmas Holidays following reports that the militants planned a major terror attack on churches and other social joints and even kill and injure them.

North Eastern police boss Philip Tuimur said no arrest has been made in regard to the Thursday night attack but added security has been beefed up to avert such incidents.

Police say terror threats are still rife and are calling for public vigilance.

Officials say a message intercepted from the Somali Islamist extremist group Al Shabaab shows the rebels are being offered up to Sh890,000 to kill Kenyan security officers.

Garissa County Commissioner Maalim Mohammed said the rewards are enough incentive to motivate some youths in the eastern Kenyan county to carry out attacks against Kenyan army and police.

ANGOLA :

[Angola: Head of State Gets Year-End Greetings](#)

27 December 2012/AngolaPress

Luanda — The Angolan head of State, José Eduardo dos Santos, is receiving Thursday evening in the Luanda Presidential Palace year-end greetings.

The Angolan Statesman was initially greeted by the vice president, Manuel Vicente, followed by the speaker of the National Assembly, Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos.

José Eduardo dos Santos, flanked by the first lady, Ana Paula dos Santos, was also greeted by the chiefs of Supreme Court, Constitutional Court and Audit Court Cristiano André, Rui Ferreira and Julião António, respectively.

MPs, ministers, members of the civil society, former combatants and magistrates and others also participated at the year-end greeting ceremony.

The agenda includes a speech to the Nation by the head of State, preceded by the vice president's speech, on behalf of the Angolan people.

The last part of the ceremony includes dinner, music and cultural show.

AU/AFRICA :

CAR seeks foreign help against rebels

28 Dec 2012 /aljazeera.com

President of Central African Republic appeals for help in fending off rebels who are advancing on the capital.

The president of Central African Republic (CAR) has urgently called on France and other foreign powers to help his government fend off rebels who are quickly seizing territory and approaching the capital.

Speaking to crowds in Bangui, a city of some 600,000, Francois Bozize on Thursday pleaded with foreign powers to do what they could. He pointed in particular to France, Central African Republic's former colonial ruler.

"France has the means to stop (the rebels) but unfortunately they have done nothing for us until now," Bozize said.

But Paris declined to offer any military assistance.

Francois Hollande, the French president, said on Thursday his country wants to protect its interests in Central African Republic and not Bozize's government.

The comments came a day after dozens of protesters, angry about a lack of help against rebel forces, threw rocks at the French Embassy in Bangui and stole a French flag.

About 200 French soldiers are already in the country, providing technical support and helping to train the local army, according to the French defence ministry.

France is encouraging peace talks between the government and the rebels, with the French foreign ministry noting in a statement that negotiations are due to "begin shortly in Libreville (Gabon)".

Evacuation

Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister, meanwhile, spoke via phone with Bozize, asking the president to take responsibility for the safety of French nationals and diplomatic missions in Central African Republic.

US officials said on Thursday the State Department was closing its embassy in the country and ordered its diplomatic team to leave.

The US ambassador and about 40 others, including a number of Americans, were flown out of Bangui to Kenya, the officials said.

The UN Security Council issued a press statement late on Thursday reiterating its concern about the situation in the country and condemned the attacks.

Bozize's government earlier reached out to longtime ally Chad, which pledged to send 2,000 troops to bolster Central African Republic's own forces.

But it was unclear if the Chadian troops had all arrived, and even then, it is far from certain if the combined government forces could withstand rebel attacks.

At least four different rebel groups are involved, though their overall numbers could not immediately be confirmed.

'Thirst for justice'

Central African Republic, a landlocked nation of some 4.4 million people, has suffered decades of army revolts, coups and rebellions since gaining independence in 1960 and remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

The rebels behind the most recent instability signed a 2007 peace accord allowing them to join the regular army, but fighters' leaders say the deal wasn't fully implemented.

Already, the rebel forces have seized at least 10 towns across the sparsely populated north of the country, and residents in the capital now fear the insurgents could attack at any time, despite assurances by rebel leaders that they are willing to engage in dialogue instead of attacking Bangui.

The rebels have claimed that their actions are justified in light of the "thirst for justice, for peace, for security and for economic development of the people of Central African Republic".

African leader pleads for help as rebels close in

By Africa correspondent Ginny Stein, wires/ABC/AFP/Fri Dec 28, 2012

The leader of one of Africa's poorest and least-known countries has appealed for help from France and the US as rebel soldiers continue their advance toward the capital.

Rebels have already taken control of the Central African Republic's third largest city Bambari, and the diamond-rich area of Bria.

Now, president Francois Bozize - who himself seized power in a coup in 2003 - has appealed for international help to block rebels from the capital Bangui.

"We ask our French cousins and the United States of America, the great powers, to help us to push back the rebels... to allow for dialogue in Libreville to resolve the current crisis," Mr Bozize told supporters at a rally in Bangui.

"There is no question of allowing them to kill Central Africans, of letting them destroy houses and pillage, and holding a knife to our throats to demand dialogue."

"It is a plot against the Central African Republic, a plot against its people."

But former colonial power France, whose embassy in Bangui came under attack earlier this week by demonstrators angry at the lack of help from Paris, has vowed it will not intervene in the country.

This morning the United States said it was evacuating its embassy in the country and temporarily halting its operations amid security fears.

The US State Department said it had not broken off diplomatic ties with the country's beleaguered government, but warned US citizens not to travel to the mineral-rich but chronically unstable country.

The United Nations has already begun evacuating non-essential staff and described the mood in the

country as tense.

Journalist Hippolyte Marboua, who is in Bangui, says people are stockpiling food amid fears the rebels may try to enter the city in the coming days.

"My impression is that the government is no longer in a position to guarantee the security of the country," he said.

"The rebels are advancing and there's no resistance from the Central African armed forces.

"Meanwhile staff from NGOs and other international organisations have already started being evacuated."

The Central African Republic has been coup-free for the past few years, but it is a nation with a turbulent history.

One of its most infamous coup leaders, former president Jean-Bedel Bokassa, was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity, including cannibalism.

Que se passe-t-il exactement en Centrafrique?

le 28/12/2012/20minutes.fr

MONDE - Des mouvements rebelles déstabilisent le régime centrafricain, mais la France et les pays de la région refusent de s'investir dans le conflit. Retour sur la situation...

La Centrafrique, pays enclavé de cinq millions d'habitants, connaît des troubles politiques qui inquiètent les habitants. Alors que le président François Bozizé réclame l'aide de la France, François Hollande excluait ce jeudi toute intervention. 20 Minutes décrypte pour vous ce conflit.

Les forces en présence

Le pays connaît une grande instabilité depuis plusieurs années. Depuis 2007, un processus de paix est engagé, mais les rebelles reprochent au président de ne pas le respecter.

Le président François Bozizé est à la tête du pays depuis le coup d'État de 2003 qui l'a porté au pouvoir. Il est élu président en 2005 puis réélu en 2011, avec plus de 60% des voix. Sous-équipée, démotivée et mal organisée, l'armée régulière n'a opposé que peu de résistance à l'avancée fulgurante du groupe rebelle Séléka. Fin 2011, Amnesty International avait dénoncé la faible capacité du pouvoir centrafricain à lutter contre les rébellions. Avant l'ouverture d'éventuelles négociations, le gouvernement centrafricain exige que les rebelles quittent les villes occupées.

Les rebelles du Séléka. Au cours du mois de décembre, la coalition rebelle Séléka, formée en 2006, s'est emparée de plusieurs villes centrafricaines. Rassemblés autour de la volonté de renverser le président Bozizé, les 300 à 400 membres de la coalition ont assuré ne pas vouloir s'emparer du pouvoir. Dans un communiqué publié mercredi 26 décembre, la rébellion a demandé aux soldats de l'armée régulière de déposer les armes. La coalition a assuré ne pas vouloir s'emparer de la capitale Bangui, considérant inutile de livrer bataille face à un président «a déjà perdu le contrôle du pays».

Les renforts tchadiens. Arrivé la semaine dernière, le contingent tchadien est positionné à l'entrée de Bangui. Ils semblent être le dernier rempart contre l'avancée des rebelles vers la capitale. Le Tchad est un allié historique de François Bozizé et avait déjà envoyé des troupes pour l'aider à

prendre le pouvoir en 2003 puis en renfort en 2010.

Le rôle de la France

Ex-puissance coloniale, la France a longtemps possédé une importante base militaire en Centrafrique. Mille deux cents Français y vivent actuellement.

A Bangui, plusieurs centaines de personnes ont lancé mercredi des projectiles vers l'ambassade de France. Ces proches du pouvoir voulaient dénoncer la passivité de la France, ancienne puissance coloniale, devant l'avancée des rebelles. François Bozizé a lui-même demandé de l'aide à Paris et Washington pour «faire reculer les rebelles».

Mais c'est une fin de non-recevoir que lui a adressé François Hollande ce jeudi. Les militaires français de Centrafrique présents à l'aéroport de Bangui n'ont pas pour mission de «protéger un régime» a affirmé le président français. «Si nous sommes présents, ce n'est pas pour protéger un régime, c'est pour protéger nos ressortissants et nos intérêts et en aucune façon pour intervenir dans les affaires intérieures d'un pays, en l'occurrence la Centrafrique», a-t-il affirmé à la presse, ajoutant: «Ce temps là est terminé».

La situation sur place

Les pays de la région ne semblent pas non plus enclins ce jeudi soutenir François Bozizé. Même le Tchad, s'est refusé à le soutenir explicitement. N'Djamena a souligné qu'elles se cantonneraient à un rôle d'interposition. La force multinationale d'Afrique centrale (FOMAC), a annoncé jeudi l'envoi de nouvelles troupes pour sécuriser Bangui mais n'a donné aucun détail sur le nombre et la date d'arrivée de ces renforts. L'ONU et les Etats-Unis ont annoncé le retrait de la République centrafricaine de tous leurs employés jugés non indispensables et de leurs familles.

A.D. avec agences

Incendie à Lagos: enquête ouverte

AFP/le 27/12/2012

L'incendie aujourd'hui d'un entrepôt de feux d'artifice à Lagos a détruit plusieurs immeubles dans lequel une personne est décédée et 40 ont été blessées selon un nouveau bilan des autorités nigérianes qui estiment les dégâts à plusieurs centaines de milliers d'euros. "Le gouvernement a monté une équipe d'experts afin de déterminer la cause de l'explosion (...) et d'éviter que cela se reproduise", a déclaré Femi Osanyintolu, le chef de LASEMA (services d'urgence de l'Etat de Lagos).

Le sinistre est survenu dans le vaste marché de Jakara situé sur Lagos Island, l'un des quartiers les plus anciens et les plus peuplés de Lagos. Le feu a détruit un ensemble de bâtiments qui abritaient 1.500 magasins des voitures et des marchandises, causant des pertes s'élevant à plusieurs milliards de nairas (plusieurs centaines de milliers d'euros). "Nous avons réussi à empêcher que le feu ne se propage davantage", mais certains bâtiments étaient encore en feu aujourd'hui, a déclaré Femi Osanyintolu, précisant que des feux d'artifices pourraient s'y trouver.

Le gouverneur de Lagos, Babatunde Fashola, qui s'est rendu sur les lieux hier, "veut comprendre pourquoi quelqu'un a stocké des pétards dans un immeuble et violé la loi qui empêche de telles pratiques", a expliqué Fami Osanyintolu.

"Si vous observez les bâtiments affectés par le feu, vous verrez qu'ils ont été construits sans respecter les règles de construction" en vigueur, a-t-il ajouté. A l'aide de bulldozers, les autorités ont

commencé à détruire des bâtiments endommagés. "Nous avons identifié quatre immeubles fragilisés par le feu et nous en avons démolis trois", a ajouté Fami Osanyintolu. Hier, l'explosion et l'incendie ont provoqué la panique, certains habitants ont sauté par les fenêtres pour échapper aux flammes. D'autres ont évacué les marchandises de leurs magasins.

Des pétards continuaient à exploser bien après le début du sinistre, et ceci ajouté à l'épaisse fumée qui s'est propagée et à la violence de l'incendie ont rendu l'approche difficile pour les équipes de secours et les pompiers. Hier était un jour férié au Nigeria. Quelques magasins étaient cependant ouverts. La capitale économique du Nigeria, à l'urbanisme chaotique, compte 15 millions d'habitants. Elle est considérée comme la deuxième plus grande ville du continent africain après Le Caire.

UN/AFRICA :

Syrie: Brahimi veut un changement "réel", avec un cabinet de transition
le 27-12-2012/tempsreel.nouvelobs.com

DAMAS (AFP) - L'émissaire international Lakhdar Brahimi a appelé jeudi à la formation d'un gouvernement de transition doté de pleins pouvoirs en Syrie avant la tenue d'élections, soulignant que le changement dans le pays, en proie à un conflit meurtrier depuis 21 mois, devait être "réel".

Sur le terrain, des rebelles sont parvenus à pénétrer, après des mois de siège, dans l'aéroport militaire de Menagh, près d'Alep (nord), où de "violents combats" les opposent à l'armée, ont rapporté dans la soirée l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) et des militants.

L'opposition s'est dite ouverte à toute transition politique dès lors que le président Bachar al-Assad n'en faisait pas partie, une question épique sur laquelle M. Brahimi ne s'est pas clairement prononcé.

Mais le ministre russe des Affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov, a estimé que les chances s'amenuisaient d'aboutir à une transition négociée et a mis en garde contre un "chaos sanglant".

Les Syriens réclament "un changement réel et tout le monde comprend ce que cela veut dire", a affirmé M. Brahimi, sans évoquer le sort de M. Assad, au moment où Moscou démentait l'existence d'un accord avec Washington sur son maintien jusqu'à la fin de son mandat en 2014.

L'émissaire de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe a appelé de ses voeux "un gouvernement ayant tous les pouvoirs" durant la transition qui prendra fin avec des élections, sans en préciser l'échéance, une condition à laquelle l'opposition s'est dite ouverte si en sont exclus "la famille Assad et ceux qui ont fait du mal au peuple syrien".

M. Brahimi, qui n'a encore pas obtenu l'assentiment de Damas ou de l'opposition à une sortie de crise, a assuré qu'il n'avait aucun "projet complet" pour le moment, menaçant toutefois de recourir au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, jusqu'à présent paralysé par les veto russe et chinois à toute résolution condamnant Damas.

"Affrontements confessionnels"

Le médiateur a de nouveau évoqué l'accord sur les principes d'une transition en Syrie adopté le 30

juin à Genève par le Groupe d'action sur la Syrie. Pour lui, il y a dans ce texte "suffisamment d'éléments pour négocier une sortie de crise au cours des prochains mois".

Les membres de ce Groupe divergent toutefois sur l'interprétation de cet accord qui ne contient aucun appel au départ de M. Assad. Washington estime qu'il ouvre la voie à l'ère "post-Assad", tandis que Moscou et Pékin affirment qu'il revient aux Syriens de déterminer leur avenir.

M. Brahimi a enfin démenti la mise au point d'un plan de règlement russo-américain, dont la Russie a également nié l'existence.

"Il n'y a pas eu et il n'y a pas" de plan russo-américain sur un gouvernement de transition, avec maintien de M. Assad jusqu'aux prochaines présidentielles, comme l'affirmaient des informations de presse, a affirmé un porte-parole des Affaires étrangères russes.

"Placer le départ d'un président élu en pierre angulaire de tout dialogue est une violation de tous les accords obtenus" à Genève, a-t-il estimé.

M. Brahimi doit mener samedi en Russie de nouvelles discussions sur une solution au conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts selon l'OSDH et deux millions de déplacés, tandis que quatre millions de personnes ont désormais besoin d'aide humanitaire, selon l'ONU.

Alors que les Nations unies ont récemment dénoncé un conflit devenu "ouvertement communautaire", M. Brahimi a estimé que les divisions, "au début politiques, (... prenaient) désormais une forme affreuse, celle d'affrontements confessionnels".

Jeudi, les violences ont fait au moins 58 morts à travers le pays, selon un bilan provisoire de l'OSDH, qui s'appuie sur un réseau de militants et de sources médicales civiles et militaires.

Syria envoy seeks political change to end conflict

28/12 /euronews.com

The international envoy to Syria has warned that only political change will end the violence that has claimed 44,000 lives over the 21-month-old conflict.

Speaking after meeting Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, Lakhdar Brahimi called for a transitional government to rule until elections.

Brahimi's push for a transitional government suggested he was trying to build on an international agreement in Geneva six months ago which said a provisional body – which might include members of Assad's government as well as the opposition – should lead the country into a new election.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov added to the envoy's call for a peaceful solution when he told a senior Syrian diplomat that only a "broad inter-Syria dialogue and political process" could end the crisis.

Brahimi is due in Moscow on Saturday to discuss details of his peace plan. However, the latest video to emerge from Syria suggests neither side is willing to lay down their arms.

US/AFRICA :

US shuts embassy in Central African Republic

LOLITA C. BALDOR /AP/huffingtonpost.com/ December 27, 2012

WASHINGTON — The State Department has closed its embassy in the Central African Republic and ordered the ambassador and his diplomatic team to leave the country as rebels there continue to advance and violence escalates, U.S. officials said Thursday.

A Pentagon spokesman, Lt. Col. Todd Breasseale, said that at the State Department's request, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta had directed U.S. Africa Command to evacuate U.S. citizens and designated foreign nationals from the U.S. Embassy in Bangui "to safe havens in the region."

State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said the U.S. Embassy had temporarily suspended operations, but not diplomatic relations with the country.

"This decision is solely due to concerns about the security of our personnel and has no relation to our continuing and long-standing diplomatic relations" with the Central African Republic, Ventrell said in a statement.

Shortly after announcing the evacuation Thursday, the State Department warned U.S. citizens against travel to the Central African Republic, saying it could not "provide protection or routine consular services to U.S. citizens" and urging Americans who have decided to stay to "review their personal security situation and seriously consider departing" on commercial flights. Four days earlier, the State Department had issued a warning recommending against travel to the country and authorizing its non-emergency personnel in Bangui to leave.

U.S. officials said about 40 people were evacuated on an U.S. Air Force plane bound for Kenya. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the details of the operation.

The departure of Ambassador Laurence Wohlers and his staff comes as the president of the Central African Republic on Thursday urgently called on France and other foreign powers to help his government fend off rebels who are quickly seizing territory and approaching this capital city, but French officials declined to offer any military assistance.

Rebels have seized at least 10 towns across the sparsely populated north, and residents in the capital of 600,000 people fear insurgents could attack at any time.

The developments suggest the Central African Republic could be on the brink of another violent change in government, something not new to the impoverished country. The current president, Francois Bozize, himself came to power nearly a decade ago in the wake of a rebellion.

Speaking to crowds in Bangui, Bozize pleaded with foreign powers to do what they could. He pointed in particular to France, Central African Republic's former colonial ruler.

About 200 French soldiers are already in the country, providing technical support and helping to train the local army, according to the French defense ministry.

French President Francois Hollande said Thursday that France wants to protect its interests in Central African Republic and not Bozize's government. Paris is encouraging peace talks between

the government and the rebels.

President Barack Obama late last year sent about 100 U.S. special operations forces to the region – including Central African Republic – to assist in the hunt for Joseph Kony, the fugitive rebel leader of the notorious Lord's Resistance Army. Forces have been hunting the elusive warlord in Central African Republic, South Sudan and Congo.

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee contributed to this report.

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

Giant Australian radio-telescope work to start

December 28, 2012/theage.com.au

Australian scientists will soon begin work on the development of the largest and most capable radio-telescope ever made with the federal government promising almost \$19 million in funding.

Science and Research Minister Chris Evans on Thursday announced a new \$18.8 million research and development fund towards the international Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescope project.

The SKA will provide scientists with the farthest peek into the universe and, therefore, time.

That \$2 billion project will comprise 3000 dishes spanning South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and will be funded by a consortium of 20 nations.

Advertisement

Senator Evans said the fund ensured Australian science and industry benefitted from significant research and development work needed before construction started in 2016.

"Australia's science institutions and industry have world-class capability in this field and are well-placed to get involved in key elements of the research and development work," he said.

"This funding is about making sure that the Australian science community can team up with industry to compete with other global consortia on bids for pre-construction work packages."

Senator Evans said the government would work with companies with relevant expertise over coming months about their involvement in the pre-construction phase and co-ordinate with the international SKA Office, based in the UK.

"The SKA is an opportunity for Australia to showcase to the world our ability to successfully deliver scientific projects at this scale," he said.

Australian companies will be competing to develop system and sub-system designs, verification instruments, implementation plans and documentation for a range of work packages including the low frequency aperture arrays, dishes, site infrastructure and the central signal processor.

The project continues to move forward with October's formal ratification of the SKA Organisation's decision to locate elements of the SKA in Australia and southern Africa and the 2012 announcements by Sweden, Canada and Germany to join the project.

AAP

EU/AFRICA :

Russia invites Syrian opposition leader for talks

28 Dec 2012/telegraph.co.uk

Russia, one of the few powers to maintain links with the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, has sent an invitation for talks to the head of the opposition Syria National Coalition.

Mikhail Bogdanov, the deputy foreign minister, told the RIA Novosti news agency the talks with National Coalition head Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib could take place in Moscow or a foreign location like Geneva or Cairo.

"The invitation has been handed over, it is in the hands of Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib," Mr Bogdanov said.

Russia has so far strongly criticised moves by Western and anti-Assad Arab states to recognise the National Coalition as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people since the group was formed last month.

Yet Russia is also involved in a frantic round of year-end diplomacy seeking to end the crisis.

A Syrian deputy foreign minister visited Moscow on Thursday and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is to meet UN-Arab League peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi in the Russian capital on Saturday.

Russia had already indicated it was ready to hold talks with the Syrian opposition who until now have regarded Moscow with suspicion over its refusal to break ties with the Assad regime.

Mr Bogdanov also said he expected there to be a new three-way meeting between Mr Brahimi and US and Russian representatives on the Syrian crisis in January.

"We will hear what Lakhdar Brahimi says about the Syrian crisis and likely there will be a decision on a new 'triple B' meeting with Lakhdar Brahimi, (US Deputy Secretary of State) William Burns and Mikhail Bogdanov," he said.

"But this will be in January, after the (Russian New Year) holidays," Mr Bogdanov said.

Source: AFP

CAR appeals for French help against rebels, Paris balks

By Paul-Marin Ngoupana/Reuters/Thu Dec 27, 2012

BANGUI

(Reuters) - The president of the Central African Republic appealed on Thursday for France and the United States to help push back rebels threatening his government and the capital, but Paris said its troops were only ready to protect French nationals.

The exchanges came as regional African leaders tried to broker a ceasefire deal and as rebels said they had temporarily halted their advance on Bangui, the capital, to allow talks to take place.

Insurgents on motorbikes and in pickup trucks have driven to within 75 km (47 miles) of Bangui after weeks of fighting, threatening to end President Francois Bozize's nearly 10-year-stint in charge of the turbulent, resource-rich country.

French nuclear energy group Areva mines the Bakouma uranium deposit in the CAR's south - France's biggest commercial interest in its former colony.

The rebel advance has highlighted the instability of a country that has remained poor since independence from Paris in 1960 despite rich deposits of uranium, gold and diamonds. Average income is barely over \$2 a day.

Bozize on Thursday appealed for French and U.S. military support to stop the SELEKA rebel coalition, which has promised to overthrow him unless he implements a previous peace deal in full.

He told a crowd of anti-rebel protesters in the riverside capital that he had asked Paris and Washington to help move the rebels away from the capital to clear the way for peace talks which regional leaders say could be held soon in Libreville, Gabon.

"We are asking our cousins the French and the United States, which are major powers, to help us push back the rebels to their initial positions in a way that will permit talks in Libreville to resolve this crisis," Bozize said.

France has 250 soldiers in its landlocked former colony as part of a peacekeeping mission and Paris in the past has ousted or propped up governments - including by using air strikes to defend Bozize against rebels in 2006.

But French President Francois Hollande poured cold water on the latest request for help.

"If we have a presence, it's not to protect a regime, it's to protect our nationals and our interests and in no way to intervene in the internal business of a country, in this case the Central African Republic," Hollande said on the sidelines of a visit to a wholesale food market outside Paris.

"Those days are over," he said.

Some 1,200 French nationals live in the CAR, mostly in the capital, according to the French Foreign Ministry, where they typically work for mining firms or aid groups.

CEASEFIRE TALKS

The U.N. Security Council issued a statement saying its members "condemn the continued attacks

on several towns perpetrated by the 'SELEKA' coalition of armed groups which gravely undermine the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement and threaten the civilian population."

U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said the U.S. embassy had temporarily suspended operations and the U.S. ambassador and other embassy personnel had left the country.

Officials from around central Africa are due to meet in Bangui later on Thursday to open initial talks with the government and rebels.

A rebel spokesman said fighters had temporarily halted their advance to allow dialogue.

"We will not enter Bangui," Colonel Djouma Narkoyo, the rebel spokesman, told Reuters by telephone.

Previous rebel promises to stop advancing have been broken, and a diplomatic source said rebels had taken up positions around Bangui on Thursday, effectively surrounding it.

The atmosphere remained tense in the city the day after anti-rebel protests broke out, and residents were stocking up on food and water.

Government soldiers deployed at strategic sites and French troops reinforced security at the French embassy after protesters threw rocks at the building on Wednesday.

In Paris, the French Foreign Ministry said protecting foreigners and embassies was the responsibility of the CAR authorities.

"This message will once again be stressed to the CAR's charge d'affaires in Paris, who has been summoned this afternoon," a ministry spokesman said.

He also said France condemned the rebels for pursuing hostilities and urged all sides to commit to talks.

Bozize came to power in a 2003 rebellion that overthrew President Ange-Felix Patasse.

However, France is increasingly reluctant to directly intervene in conflicts in its former colonies. Since coming to power in May, Hollande has promised to end its shadowy relations with former colonies and put ties on a healthier footing.

A military source and an aid worker said the rebels had got as far as Damara, 75 km (47 miles) from Bangui, by late afternoon on Wednesday, having skirted Sibut, where some 150 Chadian soldiers had earlier been deployed to try and block a push south by a rebel coalition.

With a government that holds little sway outside the capital, some parts of the country have long endured the consequences of conflicts in troubled neighbors Chad, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo spilling over.

The Central African Republic is one of a number of nations in the region where U.S. Special Forces are helping local forces try to track down the Lords Resistance Army, a rebel group responsible for killing thousands of civilians across four African nations.

(Additional reporting by Leigh Thomas and Louis Charbonneau; Writing by Richard Valdmanis; Editing by Andrew Osborn and Paul Simao)

Discours de Noël: le Roi met en garde "contre les discours populistes"

le lundi 24 décembre 2012 /rtbf.be

Pour son traditionnel discours de Noël, le Roi Albert II a choisi comme thème majeur d'évoquer la crise cette année. Et il donne quelques pistes pour s'en sortir. Avec une mise en garde très remarquée "contre les discours populistes" de certains.

C'est un Roi grave pour une situation qui ne l'est pas moins. Il adresse d'abord un message de soutien aux travailleurs qui ont perdu leur emploi cette année à Ford Genk, dans la sidérurgie wallonne ou ailleurs. Et un Roi qui propose des recettes pour réagir à la crise : d'abord que tous les acteurs de la société belge "unissent leurs forces". Et de plaider pour l'amélioration de la compétitivité de nos entreprises, mais aussi mieux former les jeunes et valoriser la recherche. Et d'épingler le rôle important des partenaires sociaux pour rechercher des propositions communes en faveur de l'emploi. Et de souligner la nécessaire poursuite du redressement des finances publiques tout en organisant une relance, notamment dans un cadre européen.

Mais la mise en garde la plus forte de la part d'Albert II cible les discours "populistes" : "Soyons vigilants et montrons-nous lucides", insiste le Roi, face à des discours qui s'efforcent toujours de trouver des boucs émissaires à la crise, étrangers ou habitants d'une autre partie de leur pays.

La crise des années 30 et les réactions populistes de cette époque ne doivent pas être oubliées. "On a vu le mal que cela fit à nos démocraties" insiste le Roi. Il est difficile de ne pas y voir une allusion aux nationalistes flamands et à la N-VA de Bart De Wever en progrès constant. Après les communales d'octobre, et notamment la "marche sur l'hôtel de ville d'Anvers", le bourgmestre sp.a de Gand Daniël Termont avait déjà évoqué "'un langage digne des années trente et qui fait un peu peur". Ce sentiment avait alors été partagé le ministre fédéral PS Paul Magnette. Le Roi évite de citer directement les auteurs de ces discours-là.

Hors de Belgique et d'Europe, il se dit "consterné" par la situation à l'est de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC). Outre les violences, il pointe "l'intégrité du territoire congolais (qui) n'est pas respectée". Il a également un mot pour le docteur Denis Mukwege, un médecin connu pour son action en faveur des femmes victimes de viols.

Fabien Van Eeckhaut

Ci-dessous : le texte intégral du discours de Noël du Roi

Discours du Roi à l'occasion de Noël et du Nouvel An : 24 décembre 2012

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Tout d'abord, je voudrais m'adresser aux milliers de travailleurs qui cette année ont perdu leur emploi, que ce soit à Ford Genk, dans la sidérurgie wallonne ou ailleurs. Je comprends leur amertume et le désarroi de leurs familles.

Cette période de Noël et de Nouvel An nous donne l'occasion de réfléchir ensemble à notre attitude face aux difficultés économiques et aux pertes d'emplois.

Comme tous les pays européens, la Belgique n'est pas épargnée par la crise qui touche de nombreuses familles, même si notre pays y résiste mieux que la moyenne européenne.

Comment pouvons-nous réagir ?

1. Il me semble qu'une première réaction doit être, pour tous les acteurs de la société belge, d'unir leurs forces, pour présenter des réponses crédibles aux défis de l'emploi. Cela implique notamment une amélioration de la compétitivité de nos entreprises, ce que le gouvernement vient de favoriser par la réduction des charges des entreprises et la modération salariale. Un autre moyen est d'encourager une meilleure formation des jeunes par exemple par l'enseignement en alternance, c'est-à-dire un enseignement scolaire joint à une formation en entreprise. La revalorisation de l'enseignement technique contribuera également à améliorer encore cette formation. J'ai eu l'occasion de visiter certaines écoles techniques et j'ai été impressionné par la qualité de la formation qui y est dispensée.

Favoriser la recherche et la mise en œuvre des innovations, sont des moyens confirmés pour préparer la création des emplois de demain. Enfin, les partenaires sociaux, dans les domaines qui leur sont propres, peuvent aussi jouer un rôle important en élaborant des propositions communes en faveur de l'emploi.

2. Une deuxième réaction des autorités publiques sera de créer le cadre nécessaire à une reprise économique. Cela implique le courage de rétablir graduellement et de manière soutenable, à tous les niveaux, l'équilibre de nos finances publiques. Les autorités fédérales viennent de prendre des décisions importantes à ce propos.

3. Une troisième réaction doit à mon sens, se situer au niveau européen qui conditionne nos situations nationales. Là il s'agit, surtout pour les pays de la zone euro, de poursuivre le nécessaire redressement budgétaire tout en organisant une relance équilibrée qui devrait être soutenue par l'Union Européenne. Notre gouvernement s'est inscrit concrètement dans une telle approche positive, à la fois par ses décisions en Belgique et ses plaidoyers en Europe.

Outre la politique économique, veillons aussi à ce que nos jeunes développent de plus en plus cette ouverture à l'Europe avec sa diversité et la richesse de ses cultures. Je me réjouis à ce propos du succès des échanges Erasmus pour les étudiants. J'ai été frappé, lors de l'inauguration de la nouvelle école européenne à Laeken, de voir la joie des enfants de maternelle, du primaire ou du secondaire, venus de partout en Europe, et qui parlaient et chantaient en plusieurs langues. Pour eux, participer aux cultures différentes de notre continent, est la chose la plus naturelle au monde. Ils symbolisent l'Europe de demain.

4. Quatrièmement. En ces périodes difficiles, nous devons avoir une attention spéciale pour les plus vulnérables. Il est paradoxal de constater que dans un pays aussi prospère que le nôtre, on estime qu'il y a près de 15 % de la population qui risque de tomber dans la pauvreté. Il faut faire preuve de solidarité et aussi d'imagination pour favoriser de nouvelles voies de réintégration dans le monde du travail. La Belgique s'est engagée à faire sortir au moins 380.000 citoyens de la pauvreté d'ici 2020.

5. Cinquièmement. En ces temps perturbés que nous vivons, soyons vigilants, et montrons-nous lucides face aux discours populistes. Ils s'efforcent toujours de trouver des boucs émissaires à la crise, qu'il s'agisse de l'étranger ou des habitants d'une autre partie de leur pays. Ces discours existent aujourd'hui dans de nombreux pays européens et aussi chez nous.

La crise des années 30 et les réactions populistes de cette époque ne doivent pas être oubliées. On a vu le mal que cela fit à nos démocraties.

6. Enfin, malgré tant de graves préoccupations dans nos pays, restons ouverts à ce qui se passe

dans le reste du monde, surtout là où nous pouvons exercer une influence. A ce sujet, je suis consterné de voir que les drames des populations dans l'Est du Congo se poursuivent, avec tant de violences et de réfugiés, et que l'intégrité du territoire Congolais n'est pas respectée. Par ailleurs, la récente tentative d'assassinat du Docteur Mukwege, qui soulage les souffrances de tant de femmes dans cette région, et qui a reçu il y a 2 ans le Prix Roi Baudouin, illustre de façon dramatique cette tragédie. Tous ces développements ne peuvent nous laisser indifférents.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est de tout cœur que la Reine et moi, et notre famille, vous souhaitons à chacun et à chacune, quelle que soit votre situation, de passer des moments heureux avec vos proches en ces fêtes de Noël et de Nouvel An.

CHINA/AFRICA :

China-Africa trade likely to hit record high

(Xinhua)/December 28, 2012

BEIJING, Dec. 27 (Xinhua) -- China's foreign trade with African countries may hit a record high this year as a result of favorable trade policies, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said Thursday.

Trade between China and African countries reached 163.9 billion U.S. dollars in the first ten months, up 20 percent year on year, the MOC said.

Trade growth with Africa was 14 percentage points greater than the average level, the MOC said.

China has exempted tariffs on 60 percent of goods imported from 30 African countries since January this year in order to boost trade with the continent.

The government is also encouraging enterprises to invest in African countries by raising funds and giving preferential loans, according to the MOC.

Chinese non-financial direct investment in Africa hit 1.5 billion U.S. dollars between January and October, up 17 percent from the previous year.

More than 2,000 Chinese enterprises are engaging in African investment projects in the agriculture, telecommunications, energy, manufacturing and catering sectors.

In addition, Africa is now China's second-largest overseas market in terms of project contracting.

Chinese enterprises signed project contracts worth 38.2 billion U.S. dollars with African partners during the January-October period, up 27 percent year on year.

The projects mainly consist of infrastructure construction, including roads, bridges and ports, as well as water conservancy and electricity facilities.

INDIA/AFRICA :

Maruti Suzuki India mulls assembly plant in Africa as exports shrink

28 Dec, 2012/ Bloomberg

NEW DELHI: Maruti Suzuki IndiaBSE 1.19 %, the nation's biggest carmaker by volume, is considering setting up its first overseas assembly plant in Africa as it seeks to revive flagging exports.

The New Delhi-based company is scouting for new export markets and Africa is more or less untouched, Chairman RC Bhargava said in an interview. Countries that are on the cusp of motorisation may be key to Maruti's plan of doubling exports in the next four years as Europe struggles to recover from a slowdown, according to Mayank Pareek, head of sales.

"We will look at local assembly for two reasons," Bhargava said. "Firstly, there's usually a tax advantage. And second, there's pressure from governments in these countries to assemble models locally." A local manufacturing facility will help MarutiBSE 1.19 % drive down costs for buyers and boost sales in these emerging markets for basic models such as the Alto and M800, said Umesh Karne, an analyst at Brics Securities, who recommends buying the stock. Exports as a share of revenue shrank to 10% from two years earlier as sales of its A-Star compact hatchbacks dwindled in Europe, prompting the automaker to turn to Africa.

"Whenever import volumes rise above a certain threshold, countries impose duties, so after a certain point, Maruti will have to look for local assembly," said Mumbai-based Karne. "Africa is at the same level where India was about 10-15 years ago. Basic cars without airbags or other features will allow Maruti to offer low prices and sell large volumes."

Europe Demand

Maruti Mulls assembly plant in africa as exports shrink

Europe, which accounted for 70% of Maruti's exports three years ago, now contributes to 30% as the debt crisis in the region damped demand. Car sales this year are due to plunge to the least in the European Union since 1995, according to auto-industry group ACEA.

Algeria in northern Africa is the biggest market for Maruti, followed by Indonesia, Chile and Australia, Pareek said. Maruti also sells in South Africa, Morocco and Egypt. "The mix is completely reversed now," said Pareek. "If you had conceded that Europe is gone, you would've been finished. The whole idea is take up the challenge and find alternative markets."

The company is exploring Colombia and the Dominican Republic to boost sales, according to its annual report. The automaker will refrain from setting up factories in countries such as Indonesia and Thailand, where parent Suzuki Motor already has manufacturing facilities, Bhargava said.

BestSeller

Local sales at Maruti are set to rebound in the current financial year after dropping 11% in the previous 12 months. The latest version of its best-selling model Alto, which the company started selling in October, may revive growth to 6%, compared with a 1% expansion for the industry forecast by the SIAM.

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

EN BREF, CE 28 Décembre 2012 ... AGNEWS/DAM,NY, 28/12/2012