



[Army begins operation against fighters as fighter jets and helicopter gunships deployed in country's northeast. Nigerian forces have launched attack on Boko Haram strongholds in the country's northeast region, security sources have told Reuters news agency, amid deployment of fighter jets and helicopter gunships. Soldiers raided areas in the Sambisa Game Reserve in Borno state where the armed group has established bases, two sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said on Thursday without giving details.]

BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

RDC CONGO :

RDC: 40 tués lors d'un affrontement dans l'Est entre l'armée et un groupe local-Libération
le 16 mai, 2013/radiokapi.net

Quarante personnes, dont 8 soldats congolais, ont été tuées dans des affrontements entre l'armée et un groupe de miliciens Mai-Mai, dans la province du Nord-Kivu (est de la République démocratique du Congo, RDC), a-t-on appris jeudi de source officielle.

Ces affrontements se sont produits mercredi à l'aube dans la ville de Beni, à environ 250 kilomètres au nord de Goma, capitale provinciale du Nord-Kivu.

«Le bilan est de 32 morts du côté des Mai-Mai et de 8 morts dans les rangs des FARDC» (armée

gouvernementale), a déclaré au cours d'une conférence de presse M. Mende, porte-parole du gouvernement et ministre de la Communication.

Un précédent bilan de source militaire locale faisait état de 21 morts: 17 miliciens et 4 soldats.

Selon le colonel Richard Bisamaza, responsable militaire du secteur, des Mai-Mai ont attaqué à l'aube l'état-major local de l'armée à Beni afin de libérer des camarades emprisonnés à la suite d'une incursion dans un quartier de la ville. Ils ont été mis en fuite après une heure d'échanges de tirs.

Plusieurs miliciens ont été lynchés par la foule, a précisé le ministre Mende.

«Le gouvernement félicite les bons citoyens (...) qui ont prêté mains fortes aux forces de défense et de sécurité tout en déplorant les excès perpétrés par quelques-uns», a-t-il commenté.

« La corruption gangrène tous les secteurs économiques de la RDC »

Le Potentiel/16 mai 2013

Le président de la Ligue contre la corruption et la fraude en République démocratique du Congo (LICOF), Oscar Rachidi, a affirmé jeudi 16 mai sur les ondes de RFI que «la corruption gangrène tous les secteurs économiques de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC) ».

« La corruption ne fait qu'avancer. Il n'y a jamais eu de recul parce que la corruption gangrène tous les secteurs économiques de la RDC. Même dans les banques on voit la corruption à ciel ouvert », a-t-il répondu à la question de savoir si la corruption avait avancé ou reculé en RDC.

Le secteur minier congolais gangrené

Le point noir en RDC étant généralement le secteur minier, les compagnies sous-évaluent leurs concessions et les revendent à « des sociétés de complaisance basées dans des paradis fiscaux » pour échapper à l'impôt.

Il y a six mois, le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) avait rompu avec la RD Congo à cause du « manque de transparence dans les transactions minières ». « Le secteur minier aujourd'hui, se trouve entre les mains des indiens, des libanais et des chinois. Et c'est une sonnette d'alarme que j'appuie pour que le président de la République soit informé que les responsables qui sont autour de lui s'organisent pour piller systématiquement la RDC », a affirmé Oscar Rachidi.

A en croire les calculs d'Africa Progress Panel de Koffi Annan, « cinq transactions de ce type ont causé une perte de plus d'un milliard de dollars américains à l'Etat congolais ».

Oscar Rachidi pense que certaines mesures draconiennes du chef de l'Etat sont indispensables et peuvent constituer d'une parade contre ce fléau, estimant que la position du FMI à l'égard de l'Etat congolais « peut pousser le gouvernement à ce qu'il y ait plus de transparence ».

Le chemin de fer congolais, autre secteur gangrené

Le président de la LICOF a déploré que se soient « volatilisés » les 218 millions USD débloqués par la Banque mondiale pour la Société nationale des chemins de fer congolais (SNCC).

« Je suis syndicaliste à la SNCC. Mais jusqu'aujourd'hui, on n'a acheté aucune locomotive, aucune

voiture à voyageur, aucun wagon. Même pas un mètre de chemin de fer n'a été réfectionné, au moment où les agents de la SNCC souffrent et font cinq mois pour toucher leurs salaires », a-t-il expliqué.

« Il y a un taux de mortalité élevé à la SNCC au niveau des agents et de leurs familles. Et il y a des divorces en cascades, parce que la femme, si elle reste à la maison sans manger, elle va se prostituer. Dans ce cas, c'est soit le mari qui déclare le divorce, soit c'est la femme qui décide de s'en aller », a-t-il relevé.

Selon Oscar Rachidi, « l'impunité caractérise notre système, même dans les banques où l'argent destiné à la paie des fonctionnaires est détourné par certaines autorités, au lieu qu'il serve à l'amélioration des conditions de vie des fonctionnaires qui touchent aujourd'hui 40 ou 50 dollars ».

Avant le système de bancarisation qui est une innovation du Premier ministre Matata Ponyo, les raquettes de chefs de bureaux sur les salaires des fonctionnaires et de l'armée, constituaient également un autre fléau dans notre pays.

« Les députés sont impliqués dans la corruption »

« Les députés on les connaît ! Ils sont impliqués dans la corruption. Comment voulez-vous qu'un député puisse demander un émolument de 14.000 dollars pendant qu'un fonctionnaire touche 40 dollars ? », s'est interrogé Oscar Rachidi.

Soutenant que « le vote d'un parlementaire congolais peut s'acheter », il a mis en garde contre toute tentative d'un éventuel projet de révision de la Constitution.

« Nous titrons encore la sonnette d'alarme pour dire que la révision de mla Constitution ne peut se faire qu'au niveau du référendum et non au niveau du Parlement. Si l'on ose faire ça, par exemple, revoir le mandat du président de la République qui était limité à deux pour le revoir à trois ou quatre, là l'on aura la colère de la population », a averti le président de la LICOF.

A son avis, « changer la constitution sans aller au référendum sera une catastrophe parce que la population n'acceptera pas », faisant remarquer « la Constitution a été votée au niveau référendaire ».

« S'il y a modification, on doit la soumettre à la sanction populaire », a-t-il estimé.

Sur le plan international, la RDC est placée au 167ème rang sur 176 pays. Et c'est dans ce difficile combat contre la corruption qu'est engagée la LICOF qui publie, chaque année, un rapport sur l'état de la corruption en RDC.

UGANDA :

Sri Lankan president Rajapaska praises Uganda's beauty

Date: May 17, 2013/By Vision Reporter

President Mahinda Rajapaska of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka has praised Uganda's tourism industry for its promotion and conservation efforts of wildlife and said they have greatly enhanced the country's national beauty.

President Rajapaska was in the country on a four-day official visit. He was among the high profile personalities who addressed the 7th Commonwealth local government conference at the Commonwealth Resort in Munyonyo.

He took time off for a tour of Murchison National Park where he planted a tree at Para Safari Lodge before taking a three-hour boat ride to the falls and later to the Nile Delta.

The two leaders exchanged pleasantries in a meeting that was also attended by the Minister of State for International affairs Okello Oryem, Members of Parliament and the Kamuli District LCV chairperson and member of the local government, Salaamu Musumba.

President Rajapaska who was accompanied by the Sri Lanka High Commissioner to Uganda Ambassador Velupillai Kananathan, the minister for external affairs Professor G.L. Peiris and Uganda's minister of state for tourism, Agnes Akiror, was later Thursday hosted to a luncheon by President Museveni at State House Entebbe shortly before the President saw his guest off.

SOUTH AFRICA :

South African Police Accused Of Using Torture

By Alex Crawford, Sky News Special Correspondent/Friday 17 May 2013

Recent alleged incidents of police brutality and torture in South Africa echo the apartheid era, a leading figure tells Sky News.

One of South Africa's leading anti-apartheid stalwarts has lambasted his country's police force after a string of accusations about their brutal methods - including torture.

Ronnie Kasrils, who served in the first democratically-elected South African Government, told Sky News: "This is not what we fought for. The Nelson Mandela I know would have been outraged at the police brutality."

The criticism from one of the leading lights of the anti-apartheid era will be keenly felt at a time when the country is still immersed in the inquiry into what went wrong at Marikana last August, when 34 striking miners were shot dead by police.

The police insist that more video monitoring by civilians has given the impression that police brutality is increasing.

But official statistics actually show a slight decrease.

Victims of police brutality who we interviewed simply do not believe the statistics. Instead they spoke about police methods which routinely involved having plastic bags put over their head, being beaten, kicked and hit with sjamboks (heavy whips usually made with animal hide).

One man, whose identity we are withholding after a request from his lawyer, is suing the Minister of Police after he says he was tortured by officers who extracted a false confession from him. He was then jailed without bail for more than two years as his case went to trial.

Another victim, a young Muslim woman this time, has mobile phone video which shows a police officer pinning her down on the ground outside her house and attempting to strangle her.

Naazneen Kadir said the two officers were called to her house in southern Johannesburg by neighbours who had complained she was making too much noise. She said she was dragged out of her house in her pyjamas without warning, and then brutally assaulted. Her mother can be seen on the video screaming and trying to pull the officers off her.

Ms Kadir has since been charged with assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest. She has counter-charged accusing them of assaulting her. She wept as she showed us the video.

"I just can't believe that police can do that. If you can't trust the police in your own home, who can you trust?" she said.

But a spokesman for the South African Police Service (SAPS) brushed the accusations aside, saying it was down to just "a few bad apples".

Brigadier Neville Malila said the feedback SAPS was getting was mostly positive and people were generally very appreciative of their efforts.

"They are getting the accolades," he told Sky News.

Under apartheid, the police were notorious for torturing and abusing prisoners - many of them political detainees. But those we spoke to told us the 'new' South Africa was horribly similar to the old - with police routinely brutalising civilians with a sense of impunity.

Mr Kasrils insisted lack of action by the ANC Government was partly to blame.

"This is systemic in the police force and someone has to take responsibility for it.," he said.

Amplats says South Africa miners report for morning shift

Fri May 17, 2013/Reuters

JOHANNESBURG |

(Reuters) - Miners at South Africa's Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) (AMSJ.J) reported for work on Friday, a company spokeswoman said, despite earlier calls for a strike by some union leaders.

Amplats spokeswoman Mpumi Sithole said all workers had reported for the morning shift at the world's biggest platinum miner and there had been no trouble.

"Everything is normal at Amplats this morning. Workers are going underground and there have been no incidents," Sithole said.

Unions and worker committees had threatened to start a strike on Friday in protest at Amplats' plans to cut as many as 6,000 jobs to try to restore the company to profitability.

The threats sent the company's shares to an eight year low of 286 rand on Thursday, close to half this year's high of 508.99 rand in January.

The rand also tumbled to its lowest since April 2009 amid concerns the labor unrest might spread through the rest of the mining sector, hitting growth in Africa's biggest economy.

More than 50 people were killed last year in labor unrest in South Africa's platinum belt, including 34 strikers gunned down by police at Lonmin's Marikana platinum mine, 120 km (70 miles) northwest of Johannesburg.

(Reporting by Sherilee Lakmidas; Editing by Ed Cropley)

TANZANIA :

Tanzania: Smile Communications Launches 4G LTE

17 May 2013/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)

Smile Communications Tanzania , a subsidiary of Smile Telecoms Holdings Limited has launched the first commercial Fourth Generation Long Term Evolution (4G LTE) broadband network in Tanzania.

Fiona McGloin, Country Manager of Smile Tanzania, sees the introduction of 4G LTE as another major milestone in the development of East Africa and the continent as a whole. "Our experience in providing services to our customers over the past six months in Dar es Salaam has demonstrated that access to the best, most flexible, fastest technology anywhere in the world results in increased usage and demand for broadband" she said during the launch in Dar es salaam.

According to Smile Group CEO Irene Charnley, the true benefits of 4G LTE lie in the radically improved user experience, and the ability of this global technology standard to enhance access to the most advanced form of communications whilst substantially reducing the costs of operations.

"4G LTE is making the internet come alive for our customers due to the quality of the user experience" says Charnley. "Surfing the internet, downloading music and movies without buffering, communicating via HD voice or uninterrupted HD video calling - the internet experience has become better, faster, easier, and more reliable.

"The introduction and accessibility to this groundbreaking 4G LTE technology will give impetus to Tanzanians and Tanzania to reach their full potential whilst simultaneously accelerating mobile broadband penetration across the continent, thereby boosting major economic activity. We've been waiting and hoping for the future.

With 4G LTE, the future is here!" she said. Smile Communications already has a presence in five countries across Africa, including Tanzania. The Smile 4G LTE broadband network, which already covers Dar es Salaam, will be rolled out in phases across Tanzania over the next two years "The company was founded on a simple vision - to provide affordable, high quality and easy-to-use broadband internet access and communication services to everyone across Africa, using low cost and innovative business models and the latest technologies," says Charnley.

"Today is a major milestone in making that vision a reality." In 2012, Smile began revolutionising communication in East Africa when it chose Tanzania as the first country in Africa in which to deploy its 4G LTE broadband network. After more than a year of extensive testing and valuable feedback provided by technosavvy trial customers, Smile made its 4G LTE broadband network

commercially available to its current customer base which ranges from SMEs and households, to hotspots and individuals in Dar es Salaam.

Smile 4G LTE is now commercially available across the city. The Smile 4G LTE network uses the most advanced telecommunications technology and standards available anywhere in the world, and will provide unparalleled speed, reliability, quality and ease of use. 4G LTE enables ultrahigh-speed internet access, accelerating broadband penetration and vastly improving the online experience.

The 4G LTE standard is at the cutting-edge of mobile telecommunications. The inherently flexible and constantly evolving nature of 4G LTE guarantees that it will remain the gold standard in mobile data and voice services for years to come.

Tanzania: Dar es Salaam Improves Mining Sector Governance

17 May 2013/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)

TANZANIA is still considered to be weak in the governance of its mining sector despite commendable improvements so far made, a new study indicates.

The Resource Governance Index for 2013 prepared by Revenue Watch Institute (RWI) shows that Tanzania has performed well in safeguards and quality control due to conflict of interest disclosure requirement and satisfactory checks on the budgetary process.

"Tanzania has performed well but it was not the best score. The general conclusion is that the country is still weak in governance of the mining sector," said the Senior Regional Associate of RWI, Mr Silas Olan'g, at the launching of the index in Dar es Salaam.

Under the safeguard and control pillar, Tanzania scored high especially with the establishment of the Mineral Audit Agency in 2009, which is seen as a major step towards improved governance.

However, it says that despite the establishment of the agency, there was limited opportunity for public scrutiny of the growing mineral industry that accounts for about three to five per cent of Tanzania's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

While its autonomy is questioned by some members of the civil society, its creation is generally regarded as a positive development and the agency's annual reports have increased public access to information.

The new index ranks Tanzania 27th out of 58 countries which is an improvement from the previous report under which it was among five countries with the lowest scores, according to Mr Olan'g. Tanzania's weak score is on the insufficient reporting requirement and lack of the freedom of information law that would have guaranteed access of information to the public.

The weak score is also attributed to what is seen as secrecy in mining contracts, revenue accrued from the mining firms and their production statistics. According to the index, Tanzania earned its highest score on oversight of the mining industry, a reflection of the checks and balance on the budgetary resources and requirement that public officials disclose conflict of interests.

However, the score has been overshadowed by poor performance on other components. It also said reports that the National Assembly will not debate the Controller and Auditor General's report for public accounts will undermine government efforts to promote transparency and accountability in

key sectors.

Revenue Watch's Resource Governance Index measures the quality of governance in the oil, gas and mining sector in 598 countries worldwide. For Tanzania, the index concentrated on the mining sector only, Mr Olan'g said.

The index looked at four areas of transparency and accountability - institutional and legal setting, reporting practices, safeguards and quality control and enabling environment. Norway was ranked the top while Myanmar emerged the last.

Tanzania: Row Over Form Four Failures

17 May 2013/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)

Dodoma — THE government has said that it would not hesitate to take action against technocrats who may have started a new system for marking Form Four exams of 2012, whose results have been cancelled.

The National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) decided to use Fixed Grade Ranges, shifting from traditional National Mean Difference (NMD), which also incorporated Continued Assessment (CA) reports. Answering a prompt question from Special seats MP Magdalena Sakaya (CUF) in Bunge, Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda said that what is currently awaited are deeper explanations from a Special Commission he set up to investigate the massive failures as the results indicated.

According to the PM, the Commission has not yet concluded the investigations but that it would soon conclude and give answers to the government on what exactly happened and who was involved.

"Let's wait, we will soon finish this work. And for those who may be pointed at as having been responsible for the mess, it would not be hard on our side as a government to bring them to account. It is clear that this is not a small matter," he said.

The PM was responding to MP Sakaya's questions where she also noted that the government's decision to nullify the Form Four exams, also knowing that it had changed a marking system was not a small matter. MP Sakaya wanted to know the government's position, noting that it was a big matter that needed big solutions.

"Education is the key to development. It is a bad precedent that such a move was made without involving all education stakeholders including education officers," she said. Responding, the PM said the Commission was going on with its work and the government would come out with genuine answers once the commission finishes its work regarding what happened to impact some bad form four results.

However, MP Sakaya maintained that the results had had a negative impact on the community, including some students taking their lives and others running away from their families because of the stigma that came with the results. "Hon. PM, don't you see it fit to hold to account government technocrats, starting with the Education Minister who approved the new system to be used? asked Sakaya.

Even as the PM asked MPs to await findings of the instated commission doing the investigation, he said that the government was ready to hold those confirmed responsible. In April, the government

stated in Parliament that it had decided to nullify the results whose examinations were done last year and outcome announced in February this year.

The government nullified 2012 Form Four Examination results and ordered the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) to standardize the results using 2011 rating system. A Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Policy, Coordination and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr William Lukuvi told the National Assembly that the decision was reached by the cabinet on April 29, this year.

The decision was based on recommendations made by a Special Commission formed by the Prime Minister to establish causes of massive failure recorded in last year's Form Four Examinations. "On April 29, this year, the cabinet received preliminary report of the Commission and approved its recommendations with immediate effect.

The cabinet decision focuses on justice and fairness to all students and teachers whose efforts were measured using new system without their knowledge," Mr Lukuvi told the MPs amid cheers. The minister stated that, according to the Commission, NECTA last year decided to use Fixed Grade Ranges, shifting from traditional National Mean Difference (NMD), which also incorporated Continued Assessment (CA) reports.

Tanzania: Dar es Salaam Commuter Trains - Easing Transport Nightmares, Helping Shape Passenger Dignity

By Marycelina Masha/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/17 May 2013

WHEN Transport Minister Dr Harrison Mwakyembe stood firm to ensure that the city of Dar es Salaam got commuter train services to help solve a looming crisis that was gradually building up due, to traffic jam, little did he know that his name would be the "emblem" of the trains.

Dr Mwakyembe raced against time to beat a deadline that he had set and managed to inaugurate the first trial of a commuter train service in October last year. By November, the same year, passengers had already accustomed themselves to the new means of transport.

Today, the city has what the public affectionately call the Mwakyembe trains, the fastest and most reliable means of public transport. Whenever passengers gather at the various spots, serving as the trains' sub stations, their conversations usually hinge on the trains which have conveniently shortened the time spent on the traffic jam, whenever they are heading to and from work.

"It has never happened before, not as far as I can remember. Just look at the huge number of people waiting to board the train. Dar commuters can have a laugh again," says a passenger. "This is what we call maendeleo, it's a product of innovative minds," says another, as the Ubungo Maziwa line train slowly approaches Tabata Relini area to pick up passengers.

Soon it will take off, roll into the Kwa Mnyamani, Bakhressa and Buguruni, before stopping at the Railway Station in the city centre. The train trip from Ubungo to the city centre roughly takes half an hour, or 45 minutes but not three hours as a daladala that is stuck in a traffic jam would take.

Sooner than later, workers driving private cars might wish to opt for the trains as they are assured of reaching their destinations in time. Amid challenges, the introduction of train services in Dar es Salaam is paying off, with more commuters looking for a slightest possibility to use the service so as to avoid the much dreaded daladalas.

Apart from being the fastest means to reach the city centre from the suburbs, the train's crew gives passengers befitting treatment, by giving instructions on a public address system. The customer care is one treatment that a passenger rarely gets in downtown Dar es Salaam.

While a soft music plays in the background, one crew member gives passengers the train's itineraries and wishes them a good day and the same is repeated in the evening. At no point would the crew shove off a late comer who runs to catch the train even after it has slowly started taking off, or use abusive language or double the fare as this happens with the daladala boys.

"It is thumbs up for Tanzania Railways, we never get such courtesy with commuter buses. They use foul language and treat us with contempt," says Anton Msigala, a regular bus commuter. "The ride is so smooth that even if you are not seated, there is more comfort in it than being on a commuter bus," puts in Alvar Mwakyusa, a journalist.

To show how much they care for students who have been harassed and humiliated by daladalas, the trains have reserved for them their own compartment. "They have a right to have a comfortable ride like other passengers, we don't allow adults to get into the students' compartment even when it is empty," says a ticketing officer, who roams up and down selling tickets to eligible passengers.

"It is easier to get onto the train when you already have a ticket, than struggle for it inside," the bus young man says. As the service becomes more and more popular, TRL undoubtedly faces challenges of making improvement to suit the growing demand.

A simple assessment of the wagons clearly shows that they are not conveniently built to accommodate people living with disabilities. The door-steps are so high that someone who is physically challenged cannot dare to climb into the train. While TRL's main objective is to conveniently help city residents arrive at their workplaces and return home in time, it still needs to sort out things for those who may still cling to their cars, believing that public transport is reserved for the low class.

Perhaps a first class couch could be introduced to make them change their minds. Otherwise they may never enjoy a ride on Mwakyembe trains. In his budget speech, 2013/14, the minister promised to further improve the existing commuter train services and told the National Assembly that plans were afoot to expand the commuter train services by introducing new railways.

Tanzania: Balanced Diet in Limelight Under New Nutrition Drive

By Abdulwakil Saiboko/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/17 May 2013

THE food fortification programme launched by the government will cover the whole country to ensure all Tanzanians get nutritious food with the ultimate aim of building healthier people.

President Jakaya Kikwete who graced the programme's official launch in Dar es Salaam, said emphasis will be in rural areas where farmers do not depend much on industrial foods. "We have embarked on the fortification of industrial products such as salt, cooking oil and flour.

But we understand that many people in the rural areas do not depend much on industrial foods. We will introduce the programme in their localities," he said. The president further noted that nutritious foodstuffs are not necessarily expensive although many people were not well informed on the types of food that constitute a balanced diet.

"We should eat vegetables, fruits, eggs and meat alongside other foodstuffs. We should understand

that eating too much fat and being obese does not mean that one is healthier. What matters is eating a balanced meal," he said.

President Kikwete blasted wrong traditional beliefs that have mostly denied children and women their right to eat nutritious food, saying that such cultures have affected millions of children and their mothers.

The Demographic and Health Survey 2010 shows that 42 per cent of children under five are stunted, 16 per cent are underweight while five per cent are wasted. Also, 59 per cent of children aged between 5 and 59 months have iron deficiency, while 33 per cent of children below six years have Vitamin A deficiency.

The survey also indicates that 11 per cent of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) have low weight, 41 per cent have iron deficiency while 58 per cent of expectant mothers have iron deficiency. About 40 per cent of breastfeeding women and 45 per cent of expectant mothers have Vitamin A deficiency.

President Kikwete elaborated that grain mills in both urban and rural areas will be provided with subsidised zinc to ensure that people get the minerals through flour. Cooking oil will also be fortified with Vitamin A and salt with iodine and the Tanzania Food and Drug Authority (TFDA) and Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC) have been instructed to ensure 100 per cent compliance.

Earlier, the president honoured various individuals and factories for their contribution to the sector. They include the Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, former president Ali Hassan Mwinyi and the founding Director of TFNC, Tumsifu Malentlema.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Dr Seif Rashid, said the government incurred losses amounting to 830bn/- per annum due to malnutrition. He added that 130 children are dying every day due to malnutrition-related complications, adding that persons hit by the malady are prone to various health complications.

Dr Rashid noted that Tanzania ranks number three in Africa in the list of most affected countries, calling for intensive programmes to address the matter. He added that various measures have been taken in an attempt to reverse the situation such as finalising nutrition strategy and implementation plan, establishment of high level national nutrition steering committee.

Other efforts include rapid establishment of nutrition focal persons in all districts councils and establishment of designated line in the national budget for nutrition in council's effective financial year 2012/13, among others.

KENYA :

Banks bypass agencies to open more branches, says CBK report

Thursday, May 16th 2013/By James Anyanzwa/standardmedia.co.ke

Commercial banks have stepped up efforts to open more branches.

The move is meant to tap into huge deposits and facilitate faster processing of loan applications

according to the Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) Bank Supervision Annual Report 2012.

Latest data from the CBK shows that total branch network of the Kenyan banks have risen by 20 per cent to 209 branches in the last three years despite agency banking model being in force.

“The total number of outlets grew to 1,272 in 2012, up from 1,063 in 2010,” says the report. CBK projects more branches as the county governments undertake various measures to increase their economic activities. The operationalisation of the Finance Act 2009, allowed banks to use third party agents to lower the costs and reach out to the unbanked.

They agents include petrol stations, supermarkets, shops, Saccos and small retail outlets.

More branches

Bank branches increased by 111 branches last year with Nairobi County accounting for the highest number of new branches in 2012.

Nairobi County recorded a growth of 53 branches followed by Mombasa County with 10 branches and Kiambu County nine branches. However, branchless banking model, which was proposed in the budget for 2009 /2010 financial year, allows banks to extend their footprint through agencies with wide distribution networks.

The introduction of agent banking has enabled financial institutions to provide banking services in a cost effective way, which has benefited customers. It has also enhanced financial access and inclusion, especially for the unbanked population.

It is argued agency banking is unlikely to undermine or destabilise the branch system. It may only rationalise it, since agents typically do not replace existing branches.

They only extend their reach and agents require branches as hubs for cash handling services and banks require locations which can provide oversight for surrounding agents.

“Commercial Banks are expected to leverage on additional cost effective distribution channels to offer financial services. Many Kenyans have remained unbanked due to the limited outreach by deposit taking institutions,” adds the report.

CBK approval

The current regulatory regime for branching requires that banks obtain specific approval from the Banking Supervision Department for each branch opening or location change.

However while this requirement incurs costs for banks and supervisors and may cause delays, there is little evidence that this requirement impedes plans of Kenyan banks for branch expansion.

While banks have been deploying traditional and new channels for business, the most rapidly growing network for financial transactions has been that of agents of M-Pesa, the mobile payment product offered by Safaricom.

It is estimated that 32 per cent of Kenya’s bankable population remains totally outside the orbit of financial services and many more are being served by the informal financial system.

Policy makers reckon that agency banking is necessary to achieve levels of financial inclusion

envisaged in Vision 2030 because the traditional banking infrastructure has high costs.

Three killed along Kenya-Ethiopia border in attack linked to militiamen

Friday, May 17th 2013/By Cyrus Ombati/standardmedia.co.ke

MANDERA, KENYA: Three people were Thursday night killed after militiamen believed to be from Ethiopia attacked a village at the main border.

Officials said tension was high along the Kenya-Ethiopia border after the militiamen killed three women in Malkamau area and escaped back to their country.

Sources said all the killed women were Degodia and link the attack to the ongoing inter clan attacks in the area.

There has been an inter clan fighting between Degodia and Gareh over control of resources in the larger Mandera County in the past month along leaving at least eight people dead now.

Police say the attack happened when a gang armed with guns crossed over and struck the village before returning back and there are fears of retaliations.

More police have been deployed to the area in efforts to address insecurity that has been on the rise.

A section of Mandera residents have so far surrendered 10 guns and more than 500 bullets following an ultimatum that was issued to them to surrender their illegally held weapons or face forceful disarmament.

The assorted weapons were handed over by residents to various chiefs in the area on Monday and Tuesday as part of the ultimatum that was issued by Inspector General of Police David Kimaiyo on Sunday.

But local police bosses said the weapons are not enough and urged the locals to continue surrendering them.

“These are not enough because we know there are many others in hundreds in the wrong hands there. We continue to urge them to surrender the weapons,” said North Eastern police boss Charlton Murithi.

It is not clear if the planned gun mop up will continue given not all have been surrendered.

The move by the local clans follows Kimaiyo’s order that they surrender their illegally held guns by today or face forceful disarmament.

“We order that those holding illegal firearms surrender them within the next three days or there will be forceful disarmament,” said Kimaiyo after a Sunday meeting adding the operation will be extended to the neighbouring districts.

They arrived in the area hours after a police officer and a civilian were killed in an attack by gunmen in a canteen at the local police station.

The police meeting with the locals was meant to plead with them to stop the fighting that has left at least four people dead and about 4,000 displaced since last week.

In the gun attack on the police station, gunmen also threw two grenades into the room where a group of police officers were glued on a television screen watching news killing a constable of police and an employee.

Four other police officers are admitted at a local hospital with multiple injuries following the 7 pm incident.

Kimaiyo said an additional 200 police officers will be deployed there to contain the situation and participate in the planned operation together with the military.

Insiders said the problem pits the two main clans- Degodia and Gareh living in the County and neighbouring ones over political issues.

Residents say the problem in the area is purely political and that some militiamen have taken advantage of the situation to terrorise the area.

“There is a feeling the Degodia were deliberately locked out of the elective posts in the last general election. This has spread to Ethiopia where the clans also live and it is becoming a major issue,” said a senior police officer in the area who added the planned deployment of the military may achieve little.

No single leader from the Degodia clan was elected or nominated in the concluded elections.

It is not the first time that the inter-clan wars erupt in the area. In 2010 a similar clash happened and led to the loss of more than 10 lives and destruction of property.

Army troops operating in the areas and police reinforcements have been asked to disarm local and foreign groups terrorising residents following a high-level meeting in Nairobi.

Deputy President William Ruto said the government had started talks with the Ethiopian government on disarming the groups and finding a solution to the rising insecurity in the region.

“The military has been asked to disarm and remove all the militias, both local and foreign. We are also going to engage diplomatically with the friendly nation of Ethiopia on border security,” Mr Ruto said.

Mr Ruto called on local leaders to continue meeting and find a solution to the problem.

Devolution and Planning Cabinet Secretary Anne Waiguru reports to work

Thursday, May 16th 2013/By Standard Digital Reporter

Nairobi, Kenya: Cabinet Secretary Devolution and Planning Anne Waiguru formally took office this morning, a day after she was sworn into office.

The Cabinet Secretary was received at her new office in the Treasury Building by Permanent Secretary Dr. Edward Sambili.

In brief remarks she made while assuming office, Ms. Waiguru said that she was honoured to serve in the new capacity, noting that the Ministry was key in ensuring that the Government under the leadership of President Uhuru Kenyatta achieves its objectives for the benefit of all Kenyans.

The Cabinet Secretary said that she was in the process of receiving comprehensive briefs on the overall planning docket from Permanent Secretary Dr. Sambili, and was scheduled to hold similar sessions with the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government Prof. Karega Mutahi in view of the new government structure that combined the devolution and planning mandates, effectively assigning the Ministry a wider role. These discussions, she noted, would facilitate the prioritizing of assignments and ensure focus as the Ministry embarks on its new mandate.

Ms. Waiguru observed however that there would be need for re-organization of the Ministry as with other government departments and dockets to guarantee effective delivery, adding that she looked forward to meeting other staff with whom she will serve in the Ministry.

As she takes on her new responsibility, Kenyans will be looking to Ms. Waiguru to fulfill high expectations based on her previous performance during her tenure at the Finance Ministry and particularly the central role she played in initiating the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) that enhanced the government's capacity to curb fraud in public spending.

ANGOLA :

Angola: Minister Commends Functioning of Media Outlets

16 May 2013/AngolaPress

Saurimo — Angolan Media minister, José Luís de Matos, Thursday in the eastern Lunda Sul province considered positive the functioning of the organs of the sector in that region.

The Cabinet minister was speaking to the press upon his arrival in Saurimo, Lunda Sul.

He said that in addition to assess the operation of the media outlets in the province, the visit also serves to learn of the development of the sector in the region and discuss its plight.

Accompanied by the provincial governor, Cândida Maria Guilherme Narciso, the minister has visited the National Radio of Angola (RNA), Public Television (TPA), News Paper (Edições Novembro), Angola News Agency (ANGOP), the future production Centre of TPA and Graphic of News Paper.

Still, under his visiting agenda, José Luís de Matos handed over the facilities of Angolan News Agency (ANGOP).

AU/AFRICA :

Nigerian forces target Boko Haram strongholds

17 May 2013/aljazeera.com

Army begins operation against fighters as fighter jets and helicopter gunships deployed in country's northeast.

Nigerian forces have launched attack on Boko Haram strongholds in the country's northeast region, security sources have told Reuters news agency, amid deployment of fighter jets and helicopter gunships.

Soldiers raided areas in the Sambisa Game Reserve in Borno state where the armed group has established bases, two sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said on Thursday without giving details.

Nigeria's military said that it was ready to launch air strikes against Boko Haram fighters as several thousand troops moved to the remote region to retake territory seized by the group.

A force of "several thousand" soldiers along with fighter jets and helicopter gunships have been deployed for the offensives in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa state, according to defence spokesman Brigadier General Chris Olukolade.

Telephone connections to Borno and Yobe were almost completely cut on Thursday, and a 12-hour overnight curfew has been imposed in Adamawa, following the other two states which are already under curfew.

The operation comes after President Goodluck Jonathan imposed a state of emergency in all three areas as he admitted that Boko Haram had "taken over" territory in the northeast and declared war against the government.

Upsurge in violence

The increased military presence follows an upsurge in violence against government and Christian targets in the northeast by Boko Haram, who want an Islamic state in Nigeria's north.

The offensive has been cautiously welcomed by some in Nigeria, but the army's reputation for excessive force is causing concern around the world.

Rights groups said they feared for the safety of civilians from combatants on both sides, but Jonathan's move enjoys widespread public support after more than three years of trying to contain the insurgency without notable success.

The United States expressed fears over a worsening "cycle of violence" on Wednesday, and warned that any "heavy-handed" tactics or disregard for human rights during the emergency operations could damage bilateral relations.

Rights groups have documented cases of abuses by Nigerian forces, including summary executions and random shootings.

"If the military continues its practice of targeting civilians, there is a risk of massive abuses during this offensive," Eric Guttschuss, from Human Rights Watch, said.

Africa: a new haven for the hospitality industry

by Arthur Gillis/bdlive.co.za/mai 17 2013

THE hospitality industry is an informal but solid indicator of a country or continent's economic wellbeing. The days of "build it and they will come" are long gone. In the present global economic

climate, if a hotel is going up, it is probably an indicator that there is substantial economic growth in an area that is sustainable over the long term.

Business travel is the lifeblood of the hospitality industry and the industry globally is looking at Africa with hungry eyes because much of the rest of the world's economy has gone to hell in a handbasket. Hospitality in Africa is built on business travel. If business is booming, the industry in general is healthy and sustainable, if not expanding. International hotel groups are increasingly looking to Africa because it is one of few regions with true development potential that is not built on futures or artificially bloated economies.

In 2000, The Economist labelled Africa "the hopeless continent". A label like that stings, but it also gives rise to the sort of pioneering spirit on which greatness is built. There is no doubt that we have faced many challenges, including war, corruption, famine and an unsustainable reliance on commodities exports, and there are still many challenges to overcome, but we have started learning our lessons and the Africa of today is very different from 20 years ago.

Economists Ricardo Hausmann and Cesar Hidalgo, researchers at the Harvard Centre for Economic Development, not long ago produced their Atlas of Economic Complexity and, in their global ranking of gross domestic product (GDP) growth to 2020, Uganda comes out number one. It is a shock to many people — a tiny, landlocked African nation leads a list predicting growth.

Even more "insane" is that their prediction includes in the top 10: Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Senegal, Malawi, and Zambia. Hausmann and Hidalgo project that these countries will grow faster than most others in the world, including emerging market favourites Brazil and China. In fact, 13 of the top 30 countries on the list for fast growth are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Among the big changes for Africa this millennium have been the hard lessons learnt in the 20 years after the 1970s commodities bubble burst. Africa has become less reliant upon energy and mineral exports and is using investment to grow infrastructure, manufacturing and technology.

A McKinsey Global Institute report on the Progress and Potential of African Economies sets an eight-year prediction of Africa's collective GDP at \$2.6-trillion. If you consider that, along with predictions of African consumer spending rising to about \$1.4-trillion by 2020 and 128-million households with discretionary income, it demonstrates a reduced reliance on mineral and energy exports and a greater emerging middle class in countries with healthier, well-rounded economies.

That is something hoteliers venturing into Africa should note; the growing middle class in Africa will travel more and more.

As much as international hospitality groups entering the African market view their potential guests as global business travellers, much of the trade in top hotels is domestic business and leisure, as well as cross-border executive travel stemming from regions forging greater co-operation and trade agreements. This is a different and selective market and outside the service realm of what many international groups consider to be the norm.

What does the future hold for the hospitality industry in Africa? There are about 200 hotels under construction; many are being developed by local entrepreneurs seeking to take advantage of their domestic economic growth nodes, while others are constructs from the larger international hotel companies seeking a foothold on a continent with so much economic potential.

West Africa is booming. Economic growth in Ghana is predicted to be more than 7% this year, and Nigeria is much the same. Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and is poised to take over from

South Africa as its economic powerhouse, making it attractive to hoteliers.

A number of countries in East Africa are also showing significant growth, despite troubled Somalia and Sudan. Uganda is one of those countries, with a predicated growth rate of about 5% this year.

With so much interest in Africa, what does it say about the future of hospitality on the continent, and by extension of the broader economic wellbeing?

Former United Nations head and Ghanaian Kofi Annan said: "To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there."

It is becoming self-evident that, as Africans, we know who we are and what we stand for.

And, for a change, we now have a clear development path to where we want to be.

- Gillis is CEO of the Protea Hospitality Group.

Orange to target aid to firms entering Africa

by Thabiso Mochiko/bdlive.co.za/17 mai 2013

ORANGE Business Services plans to double its revenues in Africa over the next five years as it ramps up its business to assist international companies that are expanding into the continent, the company said on Thursday.

Orange Business Services is the information technology (IT) arm of France Telecom, an international telecommunications operator. The company provides IT services and related infrastructure such as networking facilities and security to corporations. It has a presence in a number of countries in Africa including South Africa, Egypt, Morocco and Mauritius.

Jean-Luc Lasnier, GM and vice-president for Middle East and Africa at Orange Business Services, said growth would come from providing IT services to its clients on the continent.

The group would use its presence in South Africa as a base to expand in sub-Saharan Africa.

He said Orange Business Services's African focus was to work with multinationals established in emerging markets, who were seeking to expand their footprint on the continent.

Mr Lasnier said most of the multinationals that have a presence in Africa operated in South Africa. "Africa is a strategic region for us. We believe in Africa," he said.

Mr Lasnier said one of Orange Business Services's strengths was that it had the ability to replicate the IT infrastructure and services across different markets.

The company employs more than 2,000 people in Africa, including 1,700 employees at its two major service centres in Egypt and Mauritius. In Johannesburg, Orange Business Services employs 60 people.

The company's focus would be in growth areas such as cloud computing services. It hopes to attract banks, oil companies and the health sector as clients.

Orange Business Services's sister company, Orange Telecom, which provides mobile network services, is pursuing a mobile virtual network operator partnership in South Africa in a bid to enter the lucrative industry. Such an operator piggybacks on an existing mobile operator's network.

AU: African Groups Call for Justice at Summit

May 17, 2013/hrw.org

Governments Should Assist Victims of Atrocities

(Johannesburg) – Civil society groups from more than 30 African countries called on African Union (AU) member countries to ensure that the AU promotes justice for grave international crimes, in a letter to the foreign ministers of African Union member states which was made public by the groups today.

The letter was sent in advance of the 21st summit meeting of the African Union, at which it will celebrate 50 years since the establishment of its predecessor, the Organization for African Unity. The summit is scheduled for May 19 to 27, 2013, at the seat of the AU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The groups noted that recent strain in the African Union's relationship with the International Criminal Court (ICC) has created significant risks to ensuring victims of the gravest crimes and their families have access to redress. As a result, they said, "[m]uch more remains to be done to advance accountability. Cooperation between international, regional, and national levels is crucial to promote justice and peace."

The letter was endorsed by 60 African civil society organizations and international organizations with a presence in Africa. The groups recognized a number of achievements by African Union members to promote justice on the continent, including supporting accountability for crimes committed in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Uganda.

The groups urged African Union members to press the AU to:

Take account of Africa's support for the ICC and its role activating ICC involvement in AU countries. Thirty-four out of 54 African countries are ICC members and African countries brought most of the situations the ICC is considering before the court.

Take steps to strengthen domestic criminal justice systems to deal with international crimes. This is the best way to ensure victims have access to redress over the long term, while addressing AU concerns about holding perpetrators to account outside the continent.

Ensure that any expansion of the jurisdiction of the African Court advances justice by carefully considering the resource implications for an expanded mandate. This would include supporting the wide range of needs associated with a criminal jurisdiction, such as witness protection and fair trials for the accused.

Improve communications between the AU and the ICC. Both institutions have nuanced mandates, and more frequent information exchange could help advance dialogue and clarify misconceptions.

In a Letter, CPJ Calls on Kerry to Speak Out For a Free Press at AU Summit

by Tadius /May 17th, 2013

CPJ

By Joel Simon, Executive Director

New York — The Committee to Protect Journalists writes to US Secretary of State John Kerry to ask him to include in his discussions at the AU Summit the issue of press freedom in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia where a systematic crackdown on independent journalists has continued unabated. With seven journalists behind bars, Ethiopia trails only Eritrea as Africa's worst jailers of the press.

Below is the letter:

May 16, 2013
Honorable John Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to bring to your attention the deteriorating state of press freedom in Ethiopia, where you will attend this year's African Union Summit. A vibrant press and civil society is fundamental to hold governments accountable and to ensure long-term development and stability. As we mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity, we ask that you include the issue of press freedom in your discussion of the challenges that Africa will face in the next half-century.

Ethiopia, in particular, has been in the spotlight for its crackdown on press freedom in recent years. Your visit to Addis Ababa comes two years after authorities launched a massive crackdown against critics and opponents as popular uprisings spread in North Africa and the Middle East. According to the 2012 U.S. State Department Human Rights Report, "the most significant human rights problems included restrictions on freedom of expression and association through politically motivated trials and convictions of opposition political figures, activists, journalists, and bloggers, as well as increased restrictions on print media."

Today, with seven journalists behind bars, Ethiopia trails only Eritrea as Africa's worst jailers of the press. Among the imprisoned journalists are award-winning columnists Eskinder Nega and Reeyot Alemu, both of whom were targeted under the country's sweeping anti-terrorism law.

Mr. Secretary, in its Africa strategy the Obama administration has noted that the interests of the United States are best served with allies and partners whose stability is based on democratic rule. Your clear voice on these issues would particularly resonate in Ethiopia, where a systematic crackdown on independent journalists, dissidents, human rights groups, and political freedoms has continued unabated.

We urge you to state unambiguously to the Ethiopian government and all other governments gathered under the AU umbrella that a vibrant independent press is a necessary pillar of healthy economies, sustainable development, and long-term stability. We ask that you ensure the issue of press freedom remains in the discussion of Africa's future so that the independent press in all AU countries are able to work freely and openly without fear of reprisal.

Yours sincerely,

Joel Simon
Executive Director

Cc List: Donald Yamamoto, Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of African Affairs, Donald Boothe,
U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia

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CPJ is an independent, nonprofit organization that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide.

UN/AFRICA :

US/AFRICA :

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

Russia 'rediscovers' Africa after a decade of neglect

by Gerrit Olivier/bdlive.co.za/mai 17 2013

THE collapse of the Soviet Union, the demise of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold War in 1991 also brought an abrupt end to Moscow's African involvement. This involvement of about 40 years left a mixed legacy. On the one hand, the Kremlin's ideological objective to promote Marxism-Leninism as an alternative to western capitalism in Africa was a notable failure. On the other hand, counteracting western strategic designs, exporting revolution and helping to liberate Africans from colonialism and racism were of historical significance.

Adopting a nonaligned posture during the Cold War years, Africa found the Soviet Union a useful collaborator, reaping significant benefits in the form of diplomatic and military support, development aid, soft loans and grants. Oddly enough, however, there is hardly any evidence of Africa showing appreciation. In spite of all its efforts, the Russian Federation (the successor state of the Soviet Union), disappeared from Africa without leaving much of a footprint.

Marxist/Leninist/socialist practices failed and were mostly dumped by the African countries that tried them. No economic and cultural legacy of any consequence was left behind. However, a caveat is that, unlike the colonial powers, Russia has no chip on its shoulder from its past African

involvement.

After almost a decade of absence and neglect, the Kremlin is "rediscovering" Africa. This time around, in contrast with the Soviet past, it is entering Africa without the driving force of an ideological obsession. Essentially, Russia wants to do business with Africa, although geopolitical/strategic considerations are no doubt also part of the game. These considerations form part of President Vladimir Putin's resolve to restore Russian "dershavnost", or "great-powerness"; to rehabilitate the Rodina (motherland) after the feeble and humiliating implosion of the Soviet Union, to catch up in the global power-political pecking order and to play a meaningful role in reshaping the global economic and political architecture.

The Kremlin realises that, as a strategic, diplomatic and business partner, Africa can help it to get closer to this vision. It knows Africa can no longer simply be dismissed as the "hopeless continent", as *The Economist* so flippantly wrote not so long ago. Various African countries have emerged as economic success stories in an otherwise depressed global economy, becoming particularly attractive for business, trade and investment by powerful international players. Russia does not want to miss the boat in this new "scramble for Africa".

So things are on the move again between Russia and Africa. A moot question is, however, whether Russia has got what it takes to become a major player again on the African scene. What counts in its favour is that it is not burdened by the colonial albatross and has a common resentment with most African states towards western assertiveness and domination. But these sentiments alone will not be enough for Russia to join the league of China, among others, and become a major player. This will take time, effort and new and lucid strategic thinking.

Even so, some promising opening moves have been made. Punctuating Africa's growing importance in the Kremlin's world vision, there were official African visits by Putin in 2006 and Dmitry Medvedev in 2008, and about 12 big Russian companies have become active in selected African states.

Formal diplomatic ties have been established with most African states and Russia is not involved in any African controversy of note. In multilateral bodies, particularly the United Nations (UN), Russo-African co-operation is generally amicable.

But while formal relations are in good shape, the Kremlin realises it has a lot of catching up to do in other areas. For example, by 2010, Africa was responsible for only 1% of Russia's total global trade. But to move forward from here, Russia should in the first place find a more dynamic and innovative way of doing business in Africa, modifying its general approach and style, which still come across as too staid and bureaucratic, if not quite "Soviet-like". It should specifically make a greater effort to become more visible as a positive, value-adding role player on the continent. In this respect, it could perhaps take note of the US's Growth and Opportunity Act, which boosted trade with Africa by about 240% between 2000 and 2006, of China's Africa reach-out, which saw bilateral trade rising from \$11bn to \$166bn in the past decade, as well as the liberal trade promotion policies of the European Union, Canada and Japan, aiming particularly to securing a niche in an African consumer market of 1-billion people (2-billion by 2050).

For the present, Russia is mainly focused on Africa's huge reservoir of largely untapped natural resources. In 2009, oil and natural gas comprised 67.4% of total Russian exports, 30% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and 40% of government revenue. About 75% of its oil and gas exports went to Western Europe, creating a situation of dependence vulnerability on the part of the latter — a situation Russia is eager to maintain and perpetuate for strategic and economic reasons.

At the same time, it also wants to remain the world's primary exporter of energy products (30% of its GDP and 64.7% of its total exports at present) for economic reasons and also in its quest towards "derzhavnost". But there are obstacles, mainly the escalating costs of accessing its domestic natural resources and fluctuating global markets.

In the Kremlin's thinking, Africa offers attractive alternative options. A handful of Russian companies, notably Norilsk, Sintez, Lukoil, Rusal, Severstal, Gazprom, Alrosa, Rosatom, Arosa and Evras, are exploiting these options and opportunities.

Basically, they are in Africa to make money, although, as is the inimitable Russian way, their business interests are closely interlinked with Russian national interests, as defined by the Kremlin.

After resources, arms sales are Russia's biggest money-spinner in Africa, worth \$14bn last year and involving 14 African states. These are government sales. Notably, Russia abstained from voting in the recently adopted UN Arms Trade Treaty (154 states approving), raising doubts about whether it will forgo this lucrative market.

But as the UN vote shows, the international mood is changing and to ignore it by continuing to sell arms to African conflict areas characterises Russia as the villain of the piece and in the role of agent provocateur, as in Cold War times.

This form of engagement might also jeopardise positive aspects of its new African engagement, for example, the significant debt reductions it made to several African countries: \$20bn last year, in addition to the \$16bn written off in 2008. Such efforts, and changing its style, reaching out to African civil society and making more use of "soft power", could help Russia overcome its present recognition deficit in Africa.

Russia's Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) membership seems to offer an interesting new opportunity, acting in conjunction with South Africa, under the Brics umbrella, to reach out to Africa.

The Declaration of Strategic Partnership signed during Putin's recent visit to South Africa could be an instrument to this effect, on condition, of course, that South Africa lives up to its posturing as a "gateway" to Africa.

- Olivier is a former South African ambassador to Russia and is an extraordinary professor in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

EN BREF, CE 17 Mai 2013 ... AGNEWS/DAM,NY, 17/05/2013