(Hundreds of workers were rescued from a fire that ignited inside a gold mine near South Africa's capital on Sunday.The fire started at 9:40 a.m. "during maintenance work on a bulk air cooler" in a mine owned by Harmony Gold Mining Co. Ltd. in Kusasalethu, near Johannesburg.)

BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

Rwanda: German Investors Eye Energy Sector
By Peterson Tumwebaze/The New Times (Kigali)/23 February 2015

German investors have affirmed their willingness to invest in the country's energy sector.

The investors were part of the German business delegation that was in the country, last week, to explore investment opportunities in mining, energy, infrastructure, construction, agro processing and ICT, among others.

The delegation was accompanied by Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German minister for foreign affairs.

Steinmeier met with President Paul Kagame and other government officials to discuss ways of strengthening both bilateral and economic partnerships between the two countries.

Dieter W. Haller, the German director-general for economic affairs and sustainable development, who headed the business delegation, said Rwanda's energy incentives are the reason most investors are interested in the country.

"So far, we have two big investors who have expressed their interest in the hydro electricity; we are confident there are still enormous opportunities in this sector that investors are looking to take advantage of," Haller said.

Other sectors we are looking at include construction and mining, Haller added during a field tour of the special economic zone.

Investing in the energy sector could help boost government's efforts to generate 563 megawatts by 2017 and help reduce on the energy import bills, Alex Ruzibukira, the director-general for investments at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, said.

"We are talking about reducing the import bill by more than $450 million, and we can only achieve this by attracting foreign investors while supporting our local industries," Ruzibukira said.

It will also help create more jobs for Rwandans along the value chain, he added.

Eckardt Dauck, group chair of Strawtec Ltd, a German company specialising in building materials in Rwanda, said the country's ease of doing business is playing a critical role in attracting foreign direct investments including those from Germany.

The latest EY's attractiveness Survey Africa report 2014, indicated that Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into Rwanda increased by 6.3 per cent in 2013, making the country one of the top 10 nations favoured by investors on the continent.

Recently, Rwanda and Germany signed a bilateral financing agreement worth Euros7 million (about Rwf5.5 billion) to support decentralisation programme and good governance.

The grant will be allocated under the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency, formerly known as Rwanda Local Development Support Fund.

The funds will also finance income generation and economic infrastructure including schools, feeder roads and markets

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RDC CONGO :

UGANDA :

Uganda: Tullow Trouble for Uganda

By Haggai Matsiko/The Independent (Kampala)/22 February 2015

Apprehensive government offers to renegotiate as once-prized wildcatter struggles to stay afloat

Since news surfaced that it was being hit hard by the downturn in the global oil markets, the mood at Tullow Oil Uganda's offices at Plot 15 Yusuf Lule Road in Kampala has been sombre apprehension. With no major works projects planned for the 2015 financial year, Tullow Uganda is effectively in hibernation.

It is a far cry from the past when blue-helmeted Tullow field staff, clad in their blue and sometimes white overalls mingled with the executives in sharp suits even as their trucks and latest model SUVs competed for space in the small parking.

Back then, Ugandans eyeing investments in the oil industry courted Tullow for any business not taken by international players like Ojec, Harliburton and Schlumberger; the dominant suppliers at Tullow's camps.

Today, tension is the new king as Tullow officials wait for a directive from London for another major staff layoff--the second in less than a year.

When asked about what shape the looming layoff might take, the Tullow Head of media, George Cazenove stuck to the official communiqué and told The Independent that there would be job cuts across Tullow and that includes Uganda.

When asked to what extent the delay by the Uganda government to award it Production Licenses had contributed to Tullow Oil's current financial situation, Cazenove said curtly that "They haven't."

Tullow's recently released financial report that showed it made a loss after tax of $1.64 billion in 2014. Accompanying notes spoke of impairment charges and a loss relating to the Uganda farm-down as the major contributory factors. Up to US$482 million loss was marked against asset disposals in Uganda.

But Tullow remains positive. When asked whether the company would participate in Uganda's new round of licensing, Cazenove again said laconically: "We don't comment on licensing rounds."

That was a slight contrast to the past when Cazenove has been quoted as having responded with a "no".

Currently as things stand, Tullow is not involved in any activity in Uganda and plans none for 2016.

Even the US$170 million it has marked for the East African operations, seem to be for mainly Kenya, where exploration and appraisal are on-going.

Tullow last lay off 41 staff in March 2014. At the time it said it had accomplished the major works in its fields and the staff had no role in the future.

The current anticipated layoffs are part of Tullow Oil's strategy to survive crumbling oil prices (at US$48 in mid-February). Tullow made a US$1.6 billion loss for the year ending December 2014 and a huge debt of US$3.1 billion is sitting on its books, according to its financial results released on Feb.11.

Weighing Tullow's options:

With Tullow's debt now over three times its earnings, observers in and out Uganda are weighing the ability of its local subsidiary-- Tullow Uganda to mobilise resources for the production phase.

Tullow Uganda owns 33.3% of Uganda's discovered oil resources and requires about US$12 billion investment to turn that into cash.

Commenting on Tullow's performance and prospects, company Chief Executive Aidan Heavey remained positive.

"2014 was a difficult year for our industry and a challenging one for Tullow," he said, "In response to this and the fall in the oil price, we have reset our business and are focusing our capital expenditure on high-quality, low-cost oil production in West Africa."

He added that Tullow had increased and diversified its sources of debt capital, reduced exploration expenditure, implemented significant cost saving initiatives, and were suspending the dividend.

According to Heavey, those measures would provide the company with substantial headroom and liquidity to deliver its strategy.

An investors' advisory by Barclays Bank agreed. It described Tullow's decisions as pragmatic given the company's current capital commitments and noted that the target of $500 million cost savings over three years is material and shows that Tullow management is focused on ensuring the company remains a low-cost oil producer and developer.

Hopefully, Tullow's optimism will reassure Uganda government officials since Tullow officials continue to pledge a commitment to the country.

It is a different tone from February 2014 when Tullow Oil's Chief Operating Officer, Paul McDade, hinted at Tullow bailing out.

At the time, McDade told the Wall Street Journal: "[Kenya]"will be easier to develop and the government is very enthusiastic for us to get underway with that development and get first oil as soon as possible. So as we look at the phasing of our investments there's a lot of priority being given to Kenya. If it continues to be very material and grow then we may look to modify our holdings in Uganda."

McDade's comment kicked up a storm in government circles in Kampala.

But when The Independent alluded to that in a recent story, aim, Tullow Uganda's Corporate Affairs Manager, Conrad Nkutu, insisted that the company was the single biggest investor in Uganda and was committed to the country.

Nkutu's reassurance is music to the over 100 Ugandans that Tullow employs throughout its operations. Tullow has also spent over US$200 million on 600 local service providers/suppliers and another US$7.5 million on training Ugandans since 2004.

Nkutu's comments fly in the face of those looking at the red all over Tullow's books currently and claiming the company may have trouble raising cash for its Ugandan obligations especially given that its focus is now on the US$4.6 billion TEN project in Ghana.

The TEN project is critical to Tullow because most of its debt matures after its first oil - in the middle of 2016. Tullow revenues are also prudently hedged at around 60% of its 2015 oil sales with an average floor price of around $86 per barrel.

But Tullow Oil is also being watched closely since its chiefs admitted on Feb.14 that they may be compelled to breach the terms of its biggest loan facility after amassing debts of US$3.1 billion. Its financial report indicated a gearing or Net Debt over Net Assets of 77%. Not good since favoured gearing in the global oil sector is between 10 and 20%.

These numbers are critical to Uganda because Tullow has the biggest number of applications for Production Licences--nine--its other partners Total E&P and CNOOC have three and one respectively.

CNOOC which is the only one to be awarded a PL has spent over $2 billion, the biggest chunk into implementing requirements for the Kingfisher production licence. It received the PL in 2013 and it is spending heavily on production infrastructure.

Tullow in its 2014 figures noted that between US$8-12 billion is required to develop Uganda's resources.

The problem is that for now Tullow seems liquidity constrained and hoping on the US$4.6 billion TEN Project in Ghana. The project is 50% complete with first oil expected in mid-2016 and 80,000 bopd gross around the end of 2016.

Some Ugandan officials say were the government to issue Tullow its 9 PLs, it would struggle to find the resources required for it to implement works around them.

Tullow, according to some officials, is partly protected by its US$2.9 farm down with CNOOC and Total which gave the three players a 33.3 percent stake in all the assets. This means that whether Tullow gets the PL or CNOOC gets it, all of them have to contribute towards financing operations.

Renegotiating contracts:

The other positive for Tullow, The Independent exclusively reveals that officials at the Ministry of Energy's Petroleum Exploration and Development Directorate (PEPD) are opening up a re-discussion of all three companies' PL applications.

The Independent has seen a letter in which, Ernest Rubondo, the Commissioner PEPD noted that with the recent oil prices falling below US$ 50 per barrel, most of the applications would not make economic sense to develop.

"This is because," Rubondo noted, "the breakeven price for the submitted development plans is mainly between US$50 and US$60 per barrel. It is important that the companies are engaged on how developments can be undertaken profitably if the oil prices did not go up quickly."

This could buy Tullow some time. In any case, Tullow Head of media, George Cazenove assured The Independent that money would be no problem.

He said: "Because Tullow will have 100,000 barrels of oil a day of low cost production at around the same time that we are aiming to get FID [Final Investment Decision] in East Africa, there will be no issue for Tullow and its financing."

As The Independent reported two weeks ago, due to delays by government to award them PLs, the oil companies were forced to push a head a key timeline--the Front End Engineering Design (FEED) --until 2016. The FEED is what determines whether the project is achievable or not. The extension of the FEED, directly means that the companies cannot reach the FID before 2017. And after the FID, the companies need 36 months before Uganda can realise first oil--the reason The Independent concluded that Uganda can only get first oil by 2020.

Tullow Uganda, as its General Manager Jimmy Mugerwa said late 2014, is wary of farther delays. Mugerwa back then also hinted on the likely impact of delays.

"Delays by Uganda could see the price dropping due to the newly discovered reserves in the USA due to this new technology (producing more resources which could rival Saudi Arabia's by 2020)," Mugerwa said, "if this makes the world oil price to collapse, investors will flee (below $60-$70 a barrel). Hence we need to capture the opportunity when it is still hot otherwise we will miss out (miss out on both revenues & jobs)." Mugerwa now has to deal with his worst case scenario. When he first spoke, he appeared to be copying from a script by Elly Karuhanga, the Chairman of the Uganda Chamber of Mines and Petroleum (UCMP).

At almost every oil function, Karuhanga would call for speed from President Yoweri Museveni. "Capital is a coward," he would say, "it only goes where it grows."

But late last year, Karuhanga told The Independent that the Ghana example had proved that Uganda was not wrong after all to take the necessary steps to avoid mistakes that the likes of Ghana who rushed have made.

At the time Ghana's Cedi was falling apart and it had borrowed heavily from the Chinese and messed up its economic fundamentals. But with the fall of oil prices, Karuhanga has found his voice again.

Recently, he told The Independent that Uganda now needs to move beyond tough negotiations over 1-5 percentage points over what is recoverable to the big picture--jobs, revenue, amongst others.

It helps that he is the Chairman of UCMP--an organ that brings together players in the mining and oil industry. Every year, UCMP brings in potential investors and experts to explore Uganda's potential--that is what the Museveni wants--and he has attended and spoken at these events.

Under this body, Karuhanga is still in position to push for Tullow and its partners' interests. All the players are hurting--Total is also shedding off some staff as The Independent reported last year. But unlike, CNOOC and Total, which are financial giants, Tullow's situation seems more pronounced.

Uganda: U.S. $900 Million Flagship Projects

By Peter Nyanzi/The Independent (Kampala)/22 February 2015

Artistic impression NSSF's Lubowa Housing EstateNSSF boss Byarugaba outlines vision for next three years

Richard Byarugaba, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) managing director, is known to be a man with a keen sense of humour. Of course he is back at the Fund following the intervention of the

President who declined to endorse his successor but instead directed that he should be re-appointed for a three-year term. So, at his first interface with business journalists, he amused everyone with the first sentence he made.

"The good news is that there has been no bad news to report in the recent past," he said with a characteristic grin. Many understood that comment to be a humorous ice breaker. But if he was serious, then he could as well be excused because he had been away from the Fund for several months.

The journalists knew better. During Byarugaba's absence, some Shs 1.5 billion had been spent on a recruitment process to find his replacement with the net being cast far and wide on five continents.

Well, as everyone now realises, that hefty sum of money went to complete waste as the replacement was rejected because those who wanted him replaced could not find a plausible reason why Byarugaba should not be re-appointed. That, definitely, is a scandal, and the loss of that money is not music to the Fund's members. Anyway, now that he is back - and thankfully so in the eyes of the Fund's members given his track record - most of the journalists' questions centred on his plans for the next three years. Of course the next three years will be tricky amid the push by legislators to have the pension sector liberalized in which case NSSF is expected to lose its long-standing monopoly, as private players take a plunge into the market.

Already, the Uganda Retirement Benefits Regulatory Authority (URBRA) has been set up to be the regulator of the industry in the run-up to full liberalisation. Having woken up from its stupor when the liberalisation bells started ringing, NSSF members are already starting to reap the benefits of a competitive market. Last month, the Fund released a mid-term report, which showed that profit before interest for the six months ending December 2014 did increase by Shs 46 billion to Shs 202 billion, up from Shs 156 billion during the same period last financial year.

Over the same period, NSSF's total assets grew from Shs 3.9 trillion to more than Shs 4.9 trillion. Collections from members increased by Shs 21 billion from Shs 300 billion over the same period during the previous year, thanks to improved efficiencies and drastic cost-cutting measures, which led to a favourable cost income ratio of 12% compared to 15% over the same period the previous year. This, in effect, means that the Fund's more than 1.45 million members will be happy come the end of the financial year as they will get a higher interest on their savings.

Last financial year, NSSF paid an interest rate of 11.5% - slightly above the average 11.2% Bank of Uganda rate for 364-Day Treasury bills, and the average 11.3% interest rate offered on fixed deposits by commercial banks. It was also several times higher than the average 3.3% interest rate offered by commercial banks on savings accounts. Byarugaba said his target is to pay an interest rate that is at least two percentage points above the 10-year rate of inflation.

Also, fixing the portfolio mix is one of his top priorities. A massive 81% of the Fund's total investments are in fixed income, while the rest is held in real estate, listed companies, and unlisted companies. In the next three years, Byarugaba said his eyes are set on accomplishing at least one of the real estate projects - Temangalo, Lubowa or the $110 m Pension Towers, which will be the tallest building in the country. The first phase of the Lubowa Estate - the most realistic target in the next three years - will cost $60m basically to set up the requisite infrastructure. On completion of the whole project, it will have cost $500 million. The Fund is sweet-talking potential big tenants such as the UN to pick interest in the project. Temangalo's unconfirmed cost is estimated at $300m and would involve high rise buildings whose technology has now been confirmed. These projects will by all standards cost a lot of money, which raised questions about how the financing will be acquired. Byarugaba suggested that the money will not be needed in one go.

This is because the investments involve numerous housing units that will be sold off so that the proceeds are re-invested in other projects. The rest of the money will come from joint-ventures with international companies that are willing to be listed on the stock market. "We need to build strategic investment companies, which will be able to raise this money on the stock market. It is part of our plan to bring to Uganda companies that are willing to be publicly-owned," he said.

Loss of monopoly:

On the ongoing liberalisation process, Byarugaba said they are not afraid of liberalisation because "NSSF was going to win and we welcome it with a passion." He dismissed claims that the Fund was at loggerheads with the regulator.

"We are a Shs 5 trillion fund and we enjoy first mover status," he said boastfully, adding that the liberalisation process is going to provide a "big opportunity" to provide new innovations. With the current law limiting NSSF to just six products, the new legal regime would enable the Fund to provide more products such as unemployment, housing, education etc as its counterparts in other countries do. They can also provide a product to informal associations such as KACITA. "NSSF has the ability to compete and to deliver those innovative products," said Byarugaba.

Describing liberalisation as "salvation," he was positive that it would remove some of the "shackles" on NSSF. For example, the Fund is fettered by a long and tedious procurement process with big decisions being made by those who have very little stakes in the Fund. He however, admitted that some stakeholders might have their views, which also need to be listened to.

The other areas NSSF is looking at, and which could potentially provide a good return to members, include infrastructure financing. Historically, the Ugandan market, unlike other regional markets, has not provided infrastructure bonds. Byarugaba said they have initiated a dialogue with the government and the Bank of Uganda in order to introduce bankable infrastructure bonds. "Uganda has failed to issue bankable infrastructure bonds and is lagging behind her regional counterparts - Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda - all of which have issued such bonds."

"We've had numerous meetings and I am preparing to have more on this matter. Why issue bonds just for monetary purposes? Why can't we issue infrastructure bonds? BoU says the decisions are made by the government not the Central Bank. So, why is the government not issuing infrastructure bonds?" He asked.

Also, NSSF wants to indentify and work with Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and Uganda Securities Exchange (USE) to enlist private local companies that are ready to list within three-five years but require either capital or debt. A fund could be initiated to make those companies get funding on the condition that they must exit through the stock exchange.

SOUTH AFRICA :

Over 400 rescued from gold mine fire in South Africa
By Fred Lambert Contact the Author/upi.com/Feb. 22, 2015

The fire is "believed to have started during maintenance work on a bulk air cooler," Harmony Gold Mining said in a statement.

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa, Feb. 22 (UPI) -- Hundreds of workers were rescued from a fire that ignited inside a gold mine near South Africa's capital on Sunday.

The fire started at 9:40 a.m. "during maintenance work on a bulk air cooler" in a mine owned by Harmony Gold Mining Co. Ltd. in Kusasalethu, near Johannesburg.

Before noon the company confirmed on Twitter that all 486 employees at the mine were pulled to safety uninjured.

"We are extremely grateful that all of our colleagues have been brought to surface, without injury," Harmony Gold CEO Graham Briggs said in a statement. "This is to the credit of our systems, employees, the unions, and mine management who have worked tirelessly over the past 12 hours. I also want to extend our thanks to mine rescue services for their efforts."

The fire began on level 75, nearly 2,300 meters underground. Investigations into the exact cause of the blaze will be held jointly between Harmony Gold's mine management and South Africa's Department of Mineral Resources, according to a company statement.

"Employees are the most valuable asset we have at Harmony – without them we would not be able to continue operating," the company said on Twitter.

Considered some of the deepest and most dangerous in the world, South Africa's mines have harbored tragedy in the past. In Feb. 2014 a fire and rock fall killed eight miners at Harmony Gold's Doornkop mine near Johannesburg, and in July 2009 a rock fall at a platinum mine in the country killed nine workers.

Hundreds of Trapped Gold Miners Rescued in South Africa
2015-02-22/Bloomberg

(Bloomberg) -- Almost 500 workers in a mine run by Harmony Gold Mining Co. Ltd., South Africa’s third-largest producer of the metal, have been rescued after being trapped by a fire.

“They’re all out,” Charmane Russell, a spokeswoman for the company, said by phone on Sunday. No injuries were reported, she said. Operations are halted at the site, which lies near Carletonville, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Johannesburg.

Harmony said 486 workers at the Kusasalethu mine, its biggest, were underground and 287 were confirmed to be safe in refuge bays after a blaze broke out. The fire started at 9:40 a.m. local time Sunday on the mine’s 75 level, about 2,300 meters (7,546 feet) below ground, the company said. The blaze may have begun during maintenance on an air cooler.

Investigations into the cause of the fire will be conducted jointly by the mine’s management and the government’s Department of Mineral Resources, Harmony said in a statement on Monday.

Harmony was forced to shut Kusasalethu for two weeks in October last year after the company arrested more than 100 illegal miners and imposed new safety measures. Chief Executive Officer Graham Briggs announced a plan to turn the operation around in December to mine higher-grade ore and return to profit by the fiscal fourth quarter.

Last February, a rockfall at Harmony’s Doornkop site started a fire underground and killed nine workers, the most deaths in a single event in the company's history.

TANZANIA :

Tanzania: 'The Hague or Geneva of Africa'
Arusha Times (Arusha)/21 February 2015

To cement the hovering concept that Arusha is now 'The Hague of Africa,' a new international institution focused on laws in relation to continental affairs has been inaugurated in the city.

Previously, in local circles, Arusha was referred to as Geneva of Africa in view of the numerous international conferences taking place in the city.

The African Institute of International Law (AIIL) is the brainchild of the African Foundation for International Law and was established in close collaboration between AFIL and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania. It was officially inaugurated in Arusha on Monday.

"Many African countries have achieved their independence about 50 years ago on average but were still far from adopting many of the international laws and legal regulations," stated Judge Abdulqawi Yusuf, the Vice President of the International Court of Justice.

According to Justice Yusuf, who is also the President of the Curatorium of the African Institute of International Law, it is now time for African states to become active participants in international law, because globalization has forced many foreign laws to encroach even the most reserved areas previously restricted for traditional, domestic or national laws.

"Arusha was chosen to host the African Institute of International Law because the city has the highest concentration of judicial system on the continent: the East African Court of Justice, the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the African Court for People and Human Rights and is soon set to host African court of justice," said Judge Yusuf.

He was on view that with all those legal chambers of international calibre based in Arusha it all left for a specialized inter-continental legal training institution to complement the city's position as 'The Hague of Africa,' thus the establishment of the AIIL, which for a while will be hosted at the Arusha International Conference Center (AICC) complex.

Inaugurating the Institute the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Dr Mahadhi Juma Maalim said Tanzania welcomes the noble initiative of the African Institute of International Law which will play a key role in the continent in creating deeper appreciation and understanding of international law.

"AIIL will enhance Africans' knowledge and expertise in international law so that we reduce our dependant on external experts in our own matters. There is no doubt that the African Institute of International Law will play a big role to provide Africa with well-trained human resources, and Tanzania shall extend all necessary support to this initiative," he said.

AIIL establishment was endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union, which underscored its strategic and unique role as a Pan African institution.

The United Nations General Assembly welcomed the creation of the Institute and encouraged the UN Secretariat to cooperate with it through the Codification Division of the Office of Legal Affairs.

Tanzania: Kenya's Ban On Shuttle Buses an Opportunity to
Arusha Times (Arusha)/21 February 2015

Kenya's ban on shuttle buses from Tanzania to access Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) may have led to a drop of airline passengers using the buses but the main concern of operators is about the future cooperation in tourism between Tanzania and Kenya.

The two are competitors in the multi-million dollar tourist industry in East Africa.

"We are pleading for our leaders to sort out this mess because increased inconveniences may in the long run lead to decline of visitors to Tanzania", complained Shabaan H. Msangi of Riverside Tours, one of the leading tour firms in Arusha.

He revealed this last week at Mezza Luna area, the main departure and arrival point for most of the shuttles plying the Arusha-Nairobi highway as some vans prepared to leave for the Kenyan capital while others were arriving from across the border.

He confirmed that since the neighbouring country restricted Tanzania-registered vehicles to its busy airport he had noticed a reduction of passengers but said the main worry of industry players was on the future relations between the two countries on tourism matters.

Riverside, Rainbow, Impala Shuttles, Horizon Travels and others have dominated the Arusha-Nairobi route for years but have lately been taking more travelers who connected international flights.

The buses which were preparing to depart for Kenya last week Tuesday afternoon were half-empty compared to those arriving. One official attributed the situation to the low tourism season which will extend up to end of May.

Ms Janeth Mtajuka, a Tanzanian living in Nairobi said at times the situation had reached a point of private vehicles with Tanzania-registration being prohibited to reach the airport on claims that was a preserve of Kenyan vehicles.

"It is a great disturbance even for private cars. I was subjected to a similar ban three weeks ago but the measure was later waived", she said inside a shuttle bus that was about to take off for Nairobi.

Ms Mtajuka said they were surprised that the ban even targeted Tanzanian-registered vehicles that belonged to Tanzanians who are resident of the Kenya capital. She appealed for restraint on the Kenyan officials.

But Amani Laizer, an operations manager with Rainbow Shuttle said the problem with the reported ban was the entry gate to JKIA and not inside the airport premises where they have been picking or dropping passengers undisturbed.

Most of the Arusha shuttles now have to drop passengers heading to the airport to catch international flights or pick others at an undesignated spot along the Mombasa road which is unsafe and prone to accidents.

The 22-seater vehicles charge Sh. 25,000 or KSh. 1,400 for a single trip and have been competing with both the tourist vans and ordinary taxis from both sides of the border which stop at Namanga.

The tour shuttles from Arusha which are now a preferred mode of transport between the two regional cities carry different people which include tourists, business travelers traders and officials working for different regional bodies.

Abraham Lazaro, a driver with Riverside bus said the reported restriction on Tanzania vehicles has been on and off and that it had not stopped them from accessing the facility.

But he was worried that their lucrative shuttle business could be hit once Kenya orders that they drop or pick up passengers at Namanga border post as per the Tourism Cooperation Agreement between the two countries signed in 1985.

An official of Impala Shuttles, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said some tourists and international air travelers preferred to use JKIA because of the high landing fees at the Kilimanjaro International Airport (Kia).

"If Tanzanians are business-minded , they should reduce the landing fees at Kia. This will bring in more tourists, fill up the hotels and lead to increased circulation of money in the economy", she said.

According to her, by landing in Nairobi an international carieer would save $ 800 from what would be spent when landing in Kia. Similarly each passenger disembarking at JKIA would save $ 200 compared to the one dropping off at Kia.

"Landing fees at the airports is a major problem for many tourists heading to Tanzania", she said, insteresting, however, the government should not bow to Kenya's pressure to re-open the Bologonja border post because the measure would 'kill' the tour business in Tanzania.

As the stand-off rages, the debate among stakeholders continues with Mr. Elishilia Kaaya of Arusha saying Kenya as a sovereign state was at liberty to flex its muscles on her internal matters as it pleases.

But many stakeholders have insisted Kenya's repeated actions on tour vehicles from Tanzania is a wake up call for the country to make its tourism sector more competitive, including having a national airline.

The measures suggested include expanding and modernizing the Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA) and other airports so that they can attract more airlines and direct flights from abroad.

"There is no need to continue fiddling with Kenya over the ban on shuttles and tour vans or whatever you call them while we have greater potential for tourism", lamented Walter Maeda, a prominent hotelier in town.

He said the problems currently facing tour operators in Arusha could end once visitors flew directly into the country from abroad and depart from the local airports instead of over dependency on the Nairobi hub.

"But the problem is that KIA does not have the capacity to handle thousands of travelers a day compared with Nairobi", he said last weekend when reached on phone.

Mr. Maeda added that failure by local airports, specifically KIA, to attract more carriers was the high landing fees and other taxes which, according to him, have failed to finance its upgrading " into a truly international airport".

The hotelier noted that instead of the government constructing airports all over the country, more resources should be directed to expand and modernize Kia and Julius Nyerere International Airport (JNIA) in Dar es Salaam.

He warned that the on-going crisis over the tour vehicles from Tanzania accessing the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) in Nairobi was enough indication that next time they would have to stop at Namanga border town.

Thomas Licati, a communication officer with the Tanzania Horticultural Association (Taha) said over dependence on an airport in another country has now started to show how risky the option is.

"We as Tanzanians should consider this as an opportunity to develop our airports like KIA and JNIA", he said. Many horticultural producers in northern Tanzania export their produce to Europe through JKIA because of low lending fees in Kenya airports.

Andrew Luzze, the executive director of the East African Business Council (EABC), an apex body of private sector associations in the region based in Arusha, faulted the Kenya government for a ban of Tanzanian shuttles from the Nairobi airport.

"The shuttles are not tourist vans but are like other vehicles used by the East Africans and international travellers", he stated, noting that the measure taken by the authorities in Nairobi were not proper.

Kenya announced earlier this month that Tanzanian-registered tour vehicles would barred from JKIA and national parks in the neighbouring country effective last Saturday after the two countries failed to reach a consensus on the travel dispute which has lingered since December 22nd last year.

In a new twist of things, the executive secretary of the Tourism Confederation of Tanzania (TCT) Richard Rugimbana exonerated Kenya for the dispute, saying the neighbouring country simply implemented the 1985 bilateral agreement with Tanzania.

He said to the best of his knowledge on the document, airports were not designated as drop off points for the tourists under the agreement, stressing; "We should got back to find out what the document says before taking any move".

He called on the two countries to meet and review the bilateral agreement so that the two countries can arrive at a point of reaching an amicable solution to the crisis.

However, he warned that the Kenyan measure can be part of the pressure being made, mainly through the EAC, to force Tanzania open up all her borders for tourists from Kenya, including the Bologonja border post on the Serengeti/Maasai Mara border. The post was closed in the late 1970s.

KENYA :

ANGOLA :

AU/AFRICA :

Cinq morts dans un attentat commis par une fillette au Nigeria
romandie.com/ 22.02.2015

Une fillette a fait exploser une bombe qu'elle portait sur elle dimanche dans un marché de la ville de Potiskum, dans le nord-est du Nigeria. Elle a tué cinq personnes, ont indiqué des témoins. L'attentat n'a pas été revendiqué mais porte la marque de la secte islamiste Boko Haram.

La jeune fille "a refusé les vérifications à l'entrée du marché et une dispute a suivi", a déclaré un témoin joint par téléphone. "Elle a fait exploser la bombe, trouvant la mort avec cinq autres personnes. Beaucoup ont été blessés." Le chef d'une milice locale d'autodéfense et une source à l'hôpital public de la ville ont confirmé ce bilan.

"Nous avons reçu six corps, dont celui de la kamikaze. Dix-neuf autres personnes ont été blessées par l'explosion, elles sont actuellement traitées" dans l'établissement, a affirmé cette source, sans donner plus de détails.

Jeunes filles kamikazes
Les témoins interrogés ont décrit la kamikaze comme une "petite fille", estimant qu'elle ne pouvait pas avoir plus de huit ans. Boko Haram a pris l'habitude depuis l'an dernier d'utiliser des kamikazes de sexe féminin, parfois de très jeunes filles.

Le 11 janvier, deux filles kamikazes s'étaient fait exploser aux abords du même marché, tuant six personnes. L'une des kamikazes avait une quinzaine d'années. La veille, un attentat similaire commis par une fillette d'une dizaine d'années avait tué 19 personnes aux abords du principal marché de Maiduguri, capitale de l'Etat Borno (nord-est), voisin de Yobe.

Ces deux attentats avaient été attribués à Boko Haram, qui contrôle plusieurs localités du nord-est du Nigeria et y multiplie les attaques meurtrières et exactions depuis six ans. Depuis 2009, l'insurrection islamiste et sa répression par les forces nigérianes ont fait plus de 13'000 morts et 1,5 million de déplacés au Nigeria.

UN/AFRICA :

France to press for UN support for Africa force to fight Boko Haram
By ABDOULAYE MASSALAKI, Reuters/February 23, 2015

NIAMEY - France will support a bid by the African Union to win the backing of the UN Security Council for its five-nation force fighting Islamist militant group Boko Haram, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said on Sunday.

Fabius spoke on a tour of Chad, Cameroon and Niger, countries that have launched operations against the militants who have killed thousands in a six-year war for an Islamic state in northern Nigeria.

"France's support for the integrated African reaction force is total. France will support a request of the African Union and other concerned countries for a resolution to be voted by the Security Council," Fabius said in the capital of Niger.

The African Union authorized the force combining Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin last month at a summit in Ethiopia. A Security Council resolution could give it a UN mandate, say senior African officials.

The force was set up in part because of a perception that Nigeria was failing to defeat the militants, who have launched a string of cross border attacks in the Lake Chad area in recent weeks, as well as killing hundreds in Nigeria.

"It is indispensable that Nigeria engages fully in the struggle against Boko Haram. Clearly, the last few actions of the Nigerian government are encouraging," Fabius told a news conference.

Nigerian forces backed by air strikes seized the northeastern border town of Baga from Boko Haram on Saturday, the military said.

Baga is at Nigeria's border with Chad, Niger and Cameroon and was the headquarters of a multinational force comprising troops from all four countries. Its recapture was an important victory, one of several in the past two weeks.

Niger will analyse parts of a missile that fell on the border town of Abadam on Tuesday killing 37 people to determine which country is responsible, said Foreign Minister Bazoum Mohamed, adding that France would help in the task. Abadam lies on the border with Nigeria. —Reuters

US/AFRICA :

Al Shabab Calls for 'Westgate'-Style Attack in U.S., Canada and U.K.
NBCNews.com/23/02/2015

LONDON — Terrorist group al Shabab released a video Saturday calling for attacks on shopping malls in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. The video, released by the Somalia-based group's official media wing, calls for attacks in the style of al Shabab's 2013 siege on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in which more than 60 people were killed.

Minnesota's Mall of America, which was referenced in the video, said it was aware of the threat. "We will continue to follow the situation, along with law enforcement, and will remain vigilant as we always do in similar situations," it said in a statement. The mall, which is America's largest, has implemented additional covert and visible security measures, the statement added.

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security said in a statement that both agencies have been working in recent months with "members of the private sector," including mall operators, to prevent and mitigate such attacks. "As a general matter, however, we are not aware of any specific, credible plot against the Mall of America or any other domestic commercial shopping center," DHS press secretary, Marsha Catron, added.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said they were aware that al Shabab threatened the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta in the video, but "there is no evidence of any specific or imminent threat to Canadians in this video." Edmonton Police Service Deputy Chief Brian Simpson said during a news conference Sunday that Canadians should go about their "normal day-to-day business" to avoid giving the terrorists "more power than they deserve." But he encouraged citizens to communicate with police if they see anything that seems "suspicious" or believe someone is showing signs of radicalization. The West Edmonton Mall said in a statement that they have also heightened security measures and "will remain vigilant."

London's Metropolitan police said they were "assessing the content" of the video.

Al Shabab was named a terrorist organization by the U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism in 2008, and the Somalia-based group pledged allegiance to al Qaeda in 2012. In September 2013, the group carried out a days-long attack on the luxury Westgate Mall, which left at least 67 people dead and about 200 injured.

Al Shabab said at the time that it sent militants with AK-47s and grenades into the Nairobi mall in "retribution" for Kenya's efforts to help the Somali government defeat the extremist group.

During a conference Thursday on countering violent extremism, President Barack Obama announced a new digital communications hub that would allow the U.S. work with the United Arab Emirates to combat "terrorist propaganda" spread by groups like ISIS, Boko Haram and al Shabab.

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

Egypt's Retrial of 2 Al-Jazeera English Journalists to Begin
Feb 23, 2015/By HAMZA HENDAWI Associated Press

CAIRO —
The retrial of two Al-Jazeera English journalists who face terror-related charges in a case widely criticized by human rights organizations and media groups is set to begin Monday in Egypt.

Both acting bureau chief Mohamed Fahmy and Egyptian producer Baher Mohammed have been free on bail since earlier this month awaiting trial, though they've had to check in with police each day.

The two, arrested in December 2013, face charges accusing them of being part of a terrorist group and airing falsified footage intended to damage Egyptian national security. Satellite news network Al-Jazeera is based in Qatar, which was the main backer of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood group, of which toppled Islamist President Mohammed Morsi belonged.

Since Morsi's ouster, Egypt has been cracking down heavily on his supporters, and the journalists were accused of being mouthpieces for the Brotherhood. Al-Jazeera and the journalists have denied the allegations, saying they were simply reporting the news.

Another colleague arrested with them, Australian Peter Greste, was deported to Australia on Feb. 1 under a new law allowing foreigners accused of crimes to be deported. Fahmy, a dual Egyptian-Canadian national, dropped his Egyptian citizenship after he said Egyptian security officials told him it was the only way he would benefit from the new law.

Egypt's Court of Cassation, the country's highest appeals court, ordered the retrial, saying the initial proceedings were marred by violations of the defendants' rights. Fahmy received a seven-year prison sentence, while Mohammed received a 10-year sentence.

Eleven other defendants in the case — mostly students accused of being Brotherhood members — previously were ordered released without bail.

Since being released on bail, Fahmy, 40, has criticized Al-Jazeera, saying its "epic negligence has made our situation harder, more difficult, and gave our captor more firepower." Mohammed, 31, previously said he was "optimistic" about his retrial, though he "decided not to any expectations."

There are at least nine other journalists in detention in Egypt. The Committee to Protect Journalists listed Egypt in 2014 as one of the 10 worst jailers of journalists around the world, along with China, Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia.

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

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