



Not Seen Yaradua

Nigerian Acting President Goodluck Jonathan says he hasn't seen or spoken to ill-president Umaru Yaradua since he returned from a sick bed in Saudi Arabia. Indeed no one has seen Yaradua in public. Jonathan, who recently was in the US on President Obama's invitation to the nuclear summit, said the last time they spoke was days after his admission to hospital in Saudi Arabi, November 26.

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Gaddafi: Confused or mad?

Fallout from the Libyan leader's comment that Nigeria should split along ethnic lines



Senegal's Baaba Maal thrills Toronto audience

By Anya Wassenburg in Toronto
Special to the African World

Baaba Maal is on tour in the U.S. till June. But he was recently in Toronto to kick-off his North American tour at the Royal Conservatory in front of a huge audience.

I caught up with internationally acclaimed musician and singer after the high energy show here on April 6. Baaba Maal is a musical superstar in his native Senegal, striking international fame about twenty years ago with his fusions of West African traditions and global influences, and the soaring vocals that rise above it all.

Baaba is a Fulani and sings mainly in his native Pulaar, with the odd piece in French. Over the decades, he's been something of a stylistic chameleon, exploring various musical influences from other cultures (notably on Television, his 2009 CD collaboration with NYC based electronica group Brazilian Girls) as do so many others in adopting African rhythms and styles.

The mantle of star isn't one he wears lightly, however. Baaba is a griot, part of a West African tradition of musicians/singers/storytellers that goes back centuries to the days of the Mandé Empire. Interestingly, Baaba was not born into the griot caste, as is the tradition. He was actually born to a fisherman's family, but was educated in music from an early age by close friend Mansour Seck, a blind griot who still sings the backing vocals in his band today. To Baaba a griot is someone with a role and a responsibility, and in respect to African culture, a vital one. A socially conscious political message is part of that role.

"I think it's a subject we should (take on) as African musicians," he says. "Western music is just about business." He notes that griots were far more than entertainers. "Centuries ago, this was the role of the griots, not only to tell stories, but to advise the leaders." Leaders used their songs to mobilize



Baaba Maal: Modern-day Griot

BY PETER UDUEHI

Nigeria has recalled its ambassador to Tripoli following utterances by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi that Nigeria should be disintegrated like the former Yugoslavia along ethnic lines.

Gaddafi, self-proclaimed prince of world revolutionaries and always the quintessential protector of human rights for all people except his own, further had his government representative summoned up recently in Abuja for explanations. Nigerian leaders are peeved at the Libyan leader's comment which came on the heels of the recent murders of hundreds of people in Jos, Plateau state by Muslim terrorists who hacked their Christian victims to death in their sleep. The Muslims say they were simply retaliating for the killing of their flock by Christians months earlier in the same region.

Gaddafi first said that Nigeria should be balkanized into two along religious lines with the predominantly more Muslim north and more Christian south parting. Then he changed his suggestion that it should be along ethnic lines though he misinformed the geographical representation of the Ibos and Yorubas as coming from the west and east respectively.

His ignorance on the geography of Africa's most populous nation as well as the share gumption to make such a suggestion received aspersions from many Nigerian leaders. Senate president David Mark called him a "mad man" while

Continued On Page 2

support for projects or ideas - much the way North Americans use media, a fact that makes his role that much poignant back at home. Baaba talks about the significant factors that affect access to information in much of Africa, including the disruptions of war, language differences, and lack of education. "But they are very close to their culture," he notes - making music a natural bridge to the otherwise unreachable.

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Gaddafi

Continued From Page 1

a foreign ministry statement said "His theatrics and grandstanding at every auspicious occasion have become too numerous to recount."



Gaddafi and other African leaders in good times. African traditional rulers had at one occasion crowned him the "King of all Kings". Some believe he bribed his way into their hearts and utterances.

Many senators say it is ironic that Gaddafi, who until recently as chairman of the African Union proposed that the continent should be united into a "United States of Africa", is now calling for the disunion of one of its parts. The chairman of the House Committee on Airforce John Halims Agoda, who sponsored a motion on the Libyan issue said Ghaddafi's comments deserved to be condemned. He said that it is ironical and unfortunate that Ghaddafi has remained controversial on African and global politics and his call for the disintegration of Nigeria must not be taken lightly.

"We urge the Federal Government to liaise with the United Nations Security Council to as a matter of utmost urgency order the Libyan Leader, Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi, to stop forthwith his call for the break up of Nigeria along religious divide in order to end the recurring crisis in the country.

"We also call on the Federal Government to request the African Union (AU) to order an independent investigation into the motivation of Colonel Ghaddafi's comments on Nigeria and ascertain if there is a relationship between the comments and the primary sources of the supply of infiltrators who come to fight

Nigerians in their homeland.

"It is very inciting and dangerous to the corporate existence of Nigeria. We should condemn his (Ghaddafi) utterances and forge ahead as one indivisible nation in line with the vision of our founding fathers. We must see our differences as

something that should propel us to move ahead and continue to live in peace with our neighbours," Agoda said.

Baaba Maal

Continued From Page 1

He sprinkles his socially conscious message between the music in his concerts, about music as a way to bring people together, and about things like equality and an increased role in society for Africa's women, (this to the crowd's delight at the Toronto show.) "We need these people for the future of the African continent," he insists.

It's a role he took on in a different context in December 2009, when he attended the Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen as the climate change ambassador for the Africa Talks Climate initiative. Africa Talks is a research and communications drive that looks at the views of Africans on climate change. In Copenhagen, he introduced a global panel discussion with young people from around the world, among other things, urging climate justice for the world's poorest countries who will bear the burden of climate change they largely didn't create.

Despite his wide recognition in Senegal and an international profile, Baaba lives in a small community without the trappings of glamour or stardom. "When I'm done this tour, I go home to my small

town in Senegal." There he becomes a conduit to the larger world. "People want to know my opinion because I travel," he says, reporting a drop in atmosphere of family, friends and neighbors.

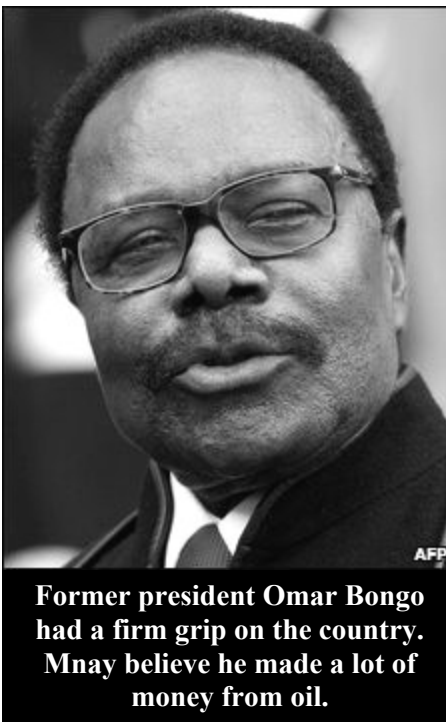
Musicians, as he points out, have a kind of authority with people long ago forfeited by the political class. "People will judge you by your words," he says. "We prefer to listen to the artists," he laughs. Shady politicians - it's an element that cuts across all the world's cultures.

He sees the commitment to a socially conscious message as lifelong. "I don't see any way to run away from that." It doesn't extend to any political aspirations beyond that, however. "I'm an artist," he says. "If something is wrong, I will make a song," he pauses, "and if it's something good, I will make a song about that too."

Shortage ensues as Gabon oil strike begins

Gabon's main oil workers' union has begun a strike which is seen as a big test for new President Ali Ben Bongo.

The strike has brought public trans-



Former president Omar Bongo had a firm grip on the country. Many believe he made a lot of money from oil.

port in the capital Libreville to a standstill and could lead to significant cuts in oil production.

The unions are unhappy at labour regulations and want restrictions on the use of foreign workers.

Gabon is one of Africa's main oil producers but is trying to diversify away from oil as revenues from it fall.

There have been reports of shortages at petrol stations and people stockpiling fuel.

"The strike will be tough and could be long," said Onep union Secretary General Guy Roger Aurat Reteno, reports the AFP news agency.

"The consequences will be hard and disagreeable, but we are pushed into situations that are deplorable for everybody."

An Onep spokesperson told AFP the strike would effect all sectors using fuel, including the national energy and water company, but not hospitals and the security services.

Onep's main grievance is that too many oil jobs are going to Africans from other countries and Westerners.

The government had offered to establish temporary restrictions on foreigners working in the oil industry if talks were resumed, but Onep rejected the offer.

Gabon's previous President Omar Bongo amassed a vast fortune during his 41 years in office and was accused of embezzling oil revenues.

His son succeeded him in September 2009 after polls which opponents say were fixed.

The election was followed by violent street protests by opposition activists.

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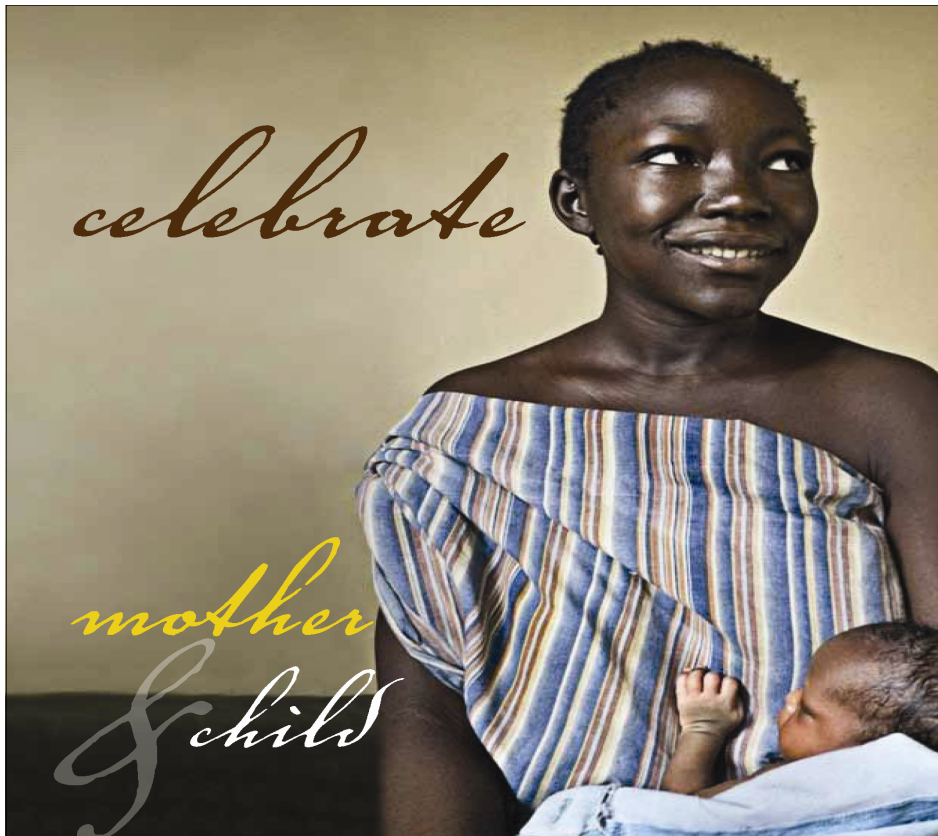
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Commentary:

By Peter Uduchi

Ibrahim Babangida, one-time Nigerian head-of-state and something of a dastardly act in the fabric of Nigerian polity because of the damage he heaped on his people for the 10 years he seized power, recently declared his intention to run for president in 2011.

It is not whether the lout announced his intent that bothers right-thinking Nigerians, it is the fact that a man of his ilk would have the temerity to raise the spectre of another open sore which gives away Nigeria as a real failed state and a nation where anything goes. It means the reputation of Nigeria as a place where anyone with money can buy power is still firmly entrenched.

Babangida knows his reputation, is keenly aware of what most Nigerians think of him, and knows that buying votes to shoot your way to power is an easy enterprise in a place like Nigeria—even though he has vowed he would not do that because according to him, he's the "most investigated Nigerian in history". For good reason, he is.

Babangida is the man responsible for the mammoth corruption currently plaguing Africa's most populous nation. Before he came to power in 1985, corruption in Nigeria did not receive the kind of ignoble distinction that it got in the last two-and-a-half decades. If politicians and leaders in government bribed and engaged in thievery the amounts looted were almost infinitesimal they made no impact on public policy; but with Babangida in office corruption reached dizzying heights as billions of dollars went missing in grand schemes. Ibrahim Abacha, who came to power after Babangida knew all too well the style of his predecessor and commandeered the economy of the country into his personal bedroom as if the nation he ruled belonged to him and his family. Abacha developed the attitude that if Babangida (a half-baked Northerner who many in the army ridiculed for his cowardice) could get away with his loot, he too could get away with murder as he sometimes amused himself when he would ask the Central Bank governor to deliver millions of dollars in armoured trucks to his villa at prompt occasions. That was the flurry of activities against the Nigerian people from its leaders because of the licentious ways Babangida foisted on his countrymen and women.

Babangida, yet to disclose how more than 40 billion dollars got missing from the Gulf War windfall in the early 1990s, has gotten it into his

Babangida and Nigerians' conundrum

head that Nigerians must overlook his misdeeds in office as he prepares his arsenal for another major effect at their coffers should he become successful in his bid. But Nigerians are no fools. Our hope is that his supports will turn spurious on him—get his loot (in fact demand it) and then thumb their ink on other candidates. That way he would have completely wasted his time and effort. And that is if Nigerians know what they are doing!

Babangida, who may well succeed as the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) during the primaries (or convention), presents Nigerians a different kind of conundrum from that which stipulates that the North of Nigeria must supply the next presidential candidate from the PDP. That means if the PDP is the almost de facto supplier of the presidency in Nigeria then Babangida stands to become the next president if he achieves his objectives at the primaries with all the cajoling, bribery and arm-twisting he will muster at such occasions.

Which is why it is difficult to grasp the reasons behind Nigerians' equanimity when it comes to how they perceive the PDP. If true analysis is worth anything, Nigerians must know that the PDP has provided them mediocrity at almost every level since the party's dominance of politics in the Third dispensation. Since 1997, the PDP has forced on us the ilk of former governor of Edo State Lucky Igbinedion, a tout fit for transport aide at New Benin Motorparks with all the concomitant of cacophony and ambivalent rudeness; a messiah of all things vain and duplicitous. Igbinedion made away with millions of dollars and turned Edo state over to thugs like himself. Then came from the ambit of PDP another former governor called James Ibori, who like Babangida, was a good-for-nothing idiot who was severely looking for a place in history

as a political armed robber only greater in descending order of agility than the famous Oyenusi by how well his pen back-pedaled to siphon off large contract percentages to his bank accounts abroad. King of bribery, Ibori even tried to cajole former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission chairman Nuhu Ribadu so he would not investigate his schemes as governor. Yet the shameless PDP continues to resurrect ugly heads past (like Babangida) and present to the political table. Nigerians must know that they don't owe the PDP anything. We don't run a prime-ministerial system of government in Nigeria, as such we should not treat the country's politics as if we have one. Because politics in Nigeria is still very colonial, our fear is that Babangida will be a product of that assumption and his wishes may come true. If that happens we will be in a big mess. That is a conundrum that will further plunge us into avoidable demise. What we are saying in effect is that other less controversial and dubious parties exist in the country and it is now time to debunk the PDP and shame all its tentacles because, for the most part, it has failed the country as a political party.

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Niger: French state-owned company "poisoning" poor

Paris — Recent research by Greenpeace suggests that French state-owned company Areva's public claims of decontamination of populated areas near uranium mines in Niger are false. High radio-activity persists in towns and rural areas near the mines, affecting some 80,000 people.

When uranium was discovered in the impoverished West African state in the 1960s, many thought that the radioactive mineral - indispensable as combustible for nuclear power plants and raw material for nuclear bombs - would be the panacea for all the social and economic afflictions haunting the former French colony.

Instead, as several recent reports by environmental organisations and independent researchers show, Niger's uranium mines constitute a deadly gift for the country, both for its public health and its politics.

Today, Niger is considered the poorest country in the world. It ranks last in the Human Development Index, and it is confronting a political crisis caused by allegations of corruption and environmental conflicts -- all linked to the uranium mines (see part two of this article).

According to a report that the global environmental organisation Greenpeace released on Mar 30, high radioactivity can still be detected on the ground near the Nigerien uranium mines, especially in the mining towns of Arlit and Akokan, some 850 km northeast of the capital Niamey.

Some 80,000 people live in these towns and in the nearby region. The mines are operated by the French state-owned company Areva, which describes itself as "rank(ing) first in the global nuclear power industry". France, which has been exploiting uranium mines in Niger for 45 years, is the main foreign investor in Niger.

In an interview with IPS, Rianne Teule, nuclear energy campaigner for Greenpeace International, explained that the group's research team visited Niger's uranium mines last November to investigate whether Areva complies with basic health and labour standards.

"We found dangerous levels of radiation in the streets of Akokan," Teule told IPS. "We also found high concentration of uranium in four of five samples of drinking water from Arlit, in doses beyond the limits established by the World Health Organisation," Teule said.

"Areva had earlier claimed that such radiation had been identified and its sources addressed," Teule said.

In some cases, the radioactivity measured by Greenpeace researchers in Akokan was 500 times higher than the normal levels.

"A person spending less than one hour per day in those places would be exposed to more than the maximum allowable annual radiation dose for the public recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection and enforced by legislation in most countries," Teule said.

Greenpeace's findings confirm earlier reports by other French environmental groups that have denounced Areva's lack of responsibility in the operation of the uranium mines in Niger.

In 2007, an inspection by the independent investigative commission on radioactivity CRIIRAD (after its French name) and the Nigerien environmental organisation Aghir In'Man discovered high levels of radiation in the streets of Akokan.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the Akokan hospital, CRIIRAD measured levels of radiation up to 100 times higher than normal background values. CRIIRAD also identified the source of the radiation as the radioactive waste rock from the mines that had been used for road construction.

"We gave our findings to the Areva board of directors and the Nigerien local authorities and called for a comprehensive radiological survey and clean-up of the village," Bruno Chareyron, an engineer in nuclear physics and director of research at CRIIRAD, told IPS.

CRIIRAD also found radioactive contamination in drinking water and radio-active scrap metal in the mining towns.

The public health consequences of the exploitation of uranium are only one of the many problems raised by the extractive industry in Niger.

Alain Joseph, a French hydro-geologist working in the West African country, told IPS that the "pasture economy is about to disappear in north-eastern Niger because of the dozens of mine projects installed there which over-exploit the scarce water resources of the area".

In 2009 alone, Niger authorised 139 uranium research projects conducted by companies from Australia, Canada and China.

Joseph said that these projects are draining water from Agadez, the region's only water source. "The uranium exploitation is not only decimating Niger's environment and public health. It is also about to destroy the economic foundations of Tuareg, Fula, Kounta and other pastoral, nomadic people in the north of the country," he said.

Nigeria: Jonathan, meets Obama on Niger Delta, and other matters

Washington DC — Acting President Goodluck Jonathan met with President Barack Obama recently ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit called by the US president to further find ways of limiting the spread of nuclear weapons worldwide.

The two leaders discussed the situation in the Niger Delta, as well as reforms Jonathan is instituting to address electoral issues and corruption in Nigeria.

Before their meeting, former Nigerian corruption Czar Nuhu Ribadu met with Jonathan to discuss the circumstances that led to his dismissal as head of the dreaded Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) which Ribadu said he was proud to spearhead because it brought to book thousands of corruptive influences in the country. Observers believe Ribadu, who lost his job when new leader Umaru Yaradua came to power, because of trumped-up charges that he had not declared his assets prior to taking office like other government department heads. But Ribadu told Obama he did declare his assets and that he was fired

because too many politicians didn't like the fact he was stepping on many influential toes and cleaning up the range of corruption in the country.

Since Jonathan came to office over the terminally ill and incapacitated Yaradua, Ribadu was exonerated by Jonathan's government, his charges withdrawn and then there is speculation he would be reinstated into government as advisor to the acting president on economic crimes matters.

It is being speculated that Jonathan will offer an advisory role to the former anti-graft Czar in an effort to boost the war against corruption in the country, but the details of yesterday's meeting were not made public.

Very rarely has an American president met with a non-substantive president of a country.

Details of the meeting were still sketchy at press time, but we have since gathered the two leaders used the opportunity to discuss outstanding issues between the two countries most of which would have been discussed all along but for the ill-health of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

The US is Nigeria's biggest customer in the international crude oil market and much of its energy security is directly affected by militant activities in the Niger Delta.

Another issue of interest to the two countries, sources told THISDAY, is Nigeria's proposed reform which seeks to radically restructure the oil industry.

Multinational oil companies have expressed worries over the revised fiscal regimes which they claim are unfavourable to their operations.

He also reiterated Federal Government's commitment to the anti-graft war and sought the co-operation and support of the American government in this regard.

The US is currently seeking UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear development programme and Jonathan's statement is understood to mean Nigeria may abstain from voting when the matter comes up.

The Acting President was accompanied on the trip by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Odein Ajumogobia, and Nigeria's former Ambassador to the US, Alhaji Hassan Adamu. The other ministers and governors who were billed to accompany him had arrived the US earlier.

Also on hand to receive the Acting President, who arrived 30 minutes later than scheduled, were the US Ambassador to Nigeria, Ms. Robin Rene Sanders, and Deputy Head of Nigerian Mission in Washington DC, Ambassador Baba Gana Wakil.

Ribadu left the country in controversial circumstances two years ago following his removal as EFCC chairman by President Yar'Adua and a chain of events which saw Ribadu demoted and dismissed from the police force.



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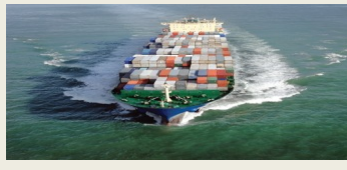
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Nigeria's Acting President Goodluck Jonathan met recently US president Barack Obama in the White House. The two discussed issues relating to their countries



Babangida intends to run for president 2011. He still calls himself an "evil genius" and says he's "the most investigated" Nigerian living or dead. For good reason, you might say!



Mr. Jonathan makes the rounds with handshakes during his recent visit to the US



Around 3,000 people commemorated Eugene Terreblanche's life. The road to Ventersdorp, home of the late Eugene Terreblanche, is fringed with fertile fields.

Terreblanche belonged to the radical right of White South Africa who wants to take the country back to the days of apartheid. He was constantly reminded that that would not happen. Many said he lived by the sword, and indeed he did as his life was marked by violence. He died recently in the hands of his two black farmers who bludgeoned him to death in his sleep.



Sudan votes in landmark elections and everyone is in the act. Many are also in frenzy as questions of rigging arise. South Sudan's fate will soon be known whether or not it will continue as part of the entire nation of Sudan. The votes will determine that.

Zambia: Health Ministry sets record straight on cholera cases

ZAMBIA has recorded 996 new cases of cholera with 87 deaths countrywide since last year when the rainy season started contrary to the report attributed to the Medecins Sans Frontieres or Doctors without Borders (MSF) which said the number of cholera cases in the country had risen to 4,000 with 120 deaths. Ministry of Health spokesperson Reuben Kamoto Mbewe said in an interview last Friday that the latest cholera cases were 996 from March month end to April 7 this year.

He said 982 cases were recorded in Lusaka province while the Copperbelt had recorded six cases.

Dr Mbewe said Southern Province had recorded two cases while Luapula had recorded three.

Central Province had also recorded three cases of Cholera.

Dr Mbewe said the number of deaths so far from the time cholera started this season was 87.

Acting Ministry of Health spokesperson Elizabeth Chizema said yesterday that this year's outbreak of cholera was not the worst and that some cases were not even confirmed but were being treated as cholera cases.

"The high numbers of cases could be that even suspected cholera cases were treated as cholera cases until they were verified as otherwise," Dr Chizema said.

Head of the MSF mission to Zambia Luke Arend was quoted on the Zambia watchdog.com site yesterday saying MSF was responding to the worst cholera outbreaks in the country for many years.

Mr Arend said cholera cases had risen to more than 4,500 while more than 120 people had lost their lives.

According to Mr Arend, MSF teams were working around the clock to treat people affected with cholera and had set up cholera treatment centres in Matero, Chawama and Kanyama.

But Dr Chizema maintained the cholera cases were not the worst as they had not been confirmed as such.

Uganda: Experts raise red flag over tuberculosis

Kampala — A strain of tuberculosis that is resistant to normal drug treatment is fast emerging in Uganda and doctors have termed it a time bomb. The new threat of the Multi-drug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) has worried medical experts because it cannot be treated with standard drug regimens.

According to Dr Grace Muzanye, a TB specialist with the Centre for Disease Control, although there are no precise figures on the numbers of drug-resistant TB, at least 10 per cent of the 40,000 new cases recorded in 2008 were found to have strains that are resistant to drugs.

"Most patients who are diagnosed with TB are given drugs and left to go and mix with the community which makes them vulnerable while those who are given drugs are not monitored and some do not continue with the dose," Dr Muzanye said, adding; "this leads to drug-resistant TB which is difficult and very expensive to manage." He was addressing journalists at Kiswa Primary School in Kampala yesterday, during a TB awareness campaign, ahead of today's World TB Day.

Uganda is number 15 among the 22 high-burden TB countries in the world, collectively account for 80 per cent of TB cases. The World Health Organisation said in its 2010 report that about 440,000 multi-drug-resistant cases were registered worldwide.

The report warns that not much is known about the drug-resistant TB. "Countries face enormous hurdles in accelerating access to diagnostic and treatment services for drug-resistant TB, and previous efforts to address this epidemic have clearly been insufficient," the report say.

According to Dr Martin Okot, a senior consultant on TB at Mulago National Referral Hospital, TB predominantly affects the lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. Dr Okot said the cost of treating drug-resistant TB is high.

It costs Shs40,000 to treat non-drug resistant TB for a period of between six and eight months while drug-resistant TB treatment can cost as much as Shs8 million per person.

Namibia: Marker achieves yet another milestone in conservation

Windhoek — The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) yet again achieved a milestone when its director, Dr Laurie Marker, was awarded the 2010 Tyler Prize Achievement for her work in wildlife conservation.

Marker will receive the award on 23 April at a private ceremony, which will be held at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills. She shares the prize, which includes US\$200 000 and gold medals, with Stuart Pimm, a Professor of Conservation Ecology at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Marker was chosen for the award in recognition of her contribution to developing an ecosystem-based approach to sustainable management which in turn also benefits the respective community economically.

She was nominated by Jeffrey Bader, former US Ambassador to Namibia for the award. He said the work of the CCF is the most successful project in its endeavour to protect the world's biodiversity.

"Laurie Marker has been involved in the study of wild cheetahs for more than 30 years and established an organisation in Namibia to study them and protect them. The organisation approaches wildlife conservation by clearly addressing the needs of human inhabitants and creating economic opportunities for them," the executive committee of the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement Award, in a statement.

Marker has been involved in the study of cheetahs since the 1970s and established the CCF in 1990. The Fund addresses problems such as cheetah predation on livestock and degradation of grazing land and wildlife habitat by an invasive plant. The award was established by John and Alice Tyler in 1973 as a means to encourage the preservation of the environment. It has been awarded annually to 61 individuals and four organisations associated with world-class environmental accomplishments.

Uganda: Multiplex linked to Bugolobi Wetland takeover

Kampala City Council yesterday linked proprietors of Multiplex Uganda Limited, a local construction Company, to a wetland under degradation in Bugolobi, a Kampala suburb.

The KCC officials while touring the site yesterday also arrested a man, Mr Edrine Wandera, who was found with the documents and a records book of the site.

The residents told the city officials that Mr Wandera had been deployed on the site to monitor activities on the wetland.

The team of KCC officials attached to Nakawa Division led by town clerk Abuna Besigye toured the site measuring about two acres.

Mr Besigye said they had received information from other people linking Multiplex proprietors to the site.

However, in a telephone interview with Daily Monitor, a Multiplex Official only identified himself as Mr Bbosa said they are on site as contractors.

"It is true that our trucks have been ferrying soil to the site but we were contracted," Mr Bbosa said. He, however, declined to discuss the matter further, saying he needs consent from his bosses.

Mr Wandera was released after the company officials came to the division offices and promised to produce clearance documents from Kampala City Council and National Environment Management Authority.

Daily Monitor reported that the unchecked destruction of green belts and wetlands in Kampala was leading to

the destruction of a wetland that filters sewage from Bugolobi flats and other neighbouring areas.

The move by the encroacher has sparked off protests from the residents who are angry that the reclamation of the wetland could lead to blockage of sewerage pipes thus exposing them to unhygienic living conditions.

Nema Deputy Executive Director Gerald Sawula Musoke said the organisation was investigating the matter with intent to arrest the culprits and cause them to remove the soil.

Namibia: Shell joins BP on the way out

THE local fuel industry has suffered its second major blow with Shell's decision to pull out of Namibia, barely a month after BP announced its withdrawal from the country.

Together, Shell and BP command 45 per cent of the local retail fuel market.

"One has to be worried that the oil companies are moving out," Mines and Energy Permanent Secretary Joseph Iita reacted yesterday.

The Ministry will meet with Shell today or tomorrow for a thorough briefing, the PS said.

Shell Oil Products Africa issued a statement saying it is "reviewing its ownership options for its downstream businesses" in 21 African countries, including Namibia.

"While a number of options are being considered, the preferred outcome is the sale of most businesses in scope as going concerns," the oil giant said.

Early last month, BP announced that it was closing shop in Namibia, following "a strategic review".

Experts in the fuel industry yesterday calmed fears that Shell's and BP's exit would cause fuel shortages in the country. Private oil companies supply 50 per cent of the fuel consumed in Namibia, while the Namibian Petroleum Corporation Group (Namcor) supplies the other half.

Harald Schmidt, Secretary of the Namibian Oil Industry Association, stressed that the pull-outs would be "planned and structured" and that the businesses would be taken over as going concerns.

"It will be business as usual," Schmidt said.

Namcor Managing Director Sam Beukes agreed, saying that fuel supplies "will be expected to be continuing as normal".

"The only change would be the ownership of the two companies in Namibia," he said.

PS Iita was equally reassuring, saying that the companies would either be bought by Government or other private investors.

"Government is seriously looking into the downstream fuel business," he said.

The chairman's report in the 2009 financial statements of Namcor clearly spells out the corporation's plans.

"Namcor has further embarked on the penetration of the downstream market to fulfil its strategic intent of becoming an integrated oil and gas company by participating in the full value chain," it stated.

In the same statements, Beukes identified Namcor's further integration into the downstream market as a way of securing "alternative sources of revenue".

Namcor suffered a loss of N\$257 million last year and was technically insolvent with liabilities outstripping assets by about N\$70 million.

Beukes yesterday said the sale of BP's and Shell's assets, including the storage tanks at Walvis Bay, will be on an open tendering basis.

"Whoever is successful will take responsibilities for the supplies [of fuel]," he said.

Beukes denied media reports that Namcor has already clinched a deal with BP to buy its assets, saying the corporation will compete with all the other bidders.

Asked whether Namcor intends taking over Shell's business, he said: "We keep our options open."

Beukes said that BP and Shell jointly enjoy 45 per cent of the downstream and supply market in Namibia.

Putting this into perspective, he explained: "Assuming that one billion litres of fuel is sold in Namibia, 450 million litres will come from Shell and BP together. Of this, they will import 225 million litres in total, while they will source 225 million litres from Namcor."

North Africa: Sahara desert solar project becoming a reality

Desertec Industrial Initiative (DII), the largest solar energy project, has recently gained the support of the US company First Solar and both the Tunisian and Algerian governments. The announcement of the Joining of First Solar on 16 March has propelled Desertec into soon becoming a reality providing solar energy, up to 15 percent of Europe's energy. If completed by the projected date in 2012, this would create a network of sustainable energy regions not only in Europe but in North Africa and the Middle East as well. Since its launch on 13 July 2009, the \$550 billion initiative has gained a great deal of momentum incorporating countries from the MENA region (Middle East North Africa) as well as the recent addition of five more companies from Morocco, Tunisia, Spain, France and Italy. Desertec Industrial Initiative was launched by 12 European companies in Munich a year after the Mediterranean Solar-Plan, which was signed on 13 July 2008 at the Union of the Mediterranean Summit. Since the DII was launched, the focus has been in creating demonstration projects in Morocco and working with governments in making sure the laws put in place allow the export of renewable energy.

Founding companies include: Munich Re, TREC, Deutsche Bank, Siemens, ABB, Abengoa Solar, E.ON, HSH Nordbank, Cevital, M&W Zander Holding, Schott Solar, and MAN Solar Millennium. Dr. Bernd Utz, chief technology officer of the Renewable Energy Division of Siemens told MediaGlobal, "The main challenge is the political framework. We need strong political support in Northern Africa, Europe and in the Middle East. In 2012 we want to present a politically approved concept of how this vision can become reality." DII uses carefully positioned mirrors in the Sahara desert to boil water and activate turbines. According to the Desertec Foundation, the technology of the solar project is based on a concentrated solar power plant (CSP). This works just like a coal steam power plant except that instead of coal, the power plant operates solely on concentrated solar power. The mirrors work to reflect and concentrate solar energy, which are transmitted to Europe and Africa by a super grid of high-voltage direct power cables. Prof. Udo Ungeheuer, Chairman of the Management Board of SCHOTT AG told MediaGlobal, "Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) technology is a crucial element of the Desertec project. SCHOTT has been involved in this type of solar technology from the very beginning. Today, our receivers form the heart of solar power plants that utilize parabolic trough technology. They can be found in the Nevada Solar One power plant located near Las Vegas as well as the Andasol power plant in Spain, the first commercial power plant of its kind in Europe. We consider ourselves to be the global leaders in terms of both technology and market share with our solar receivers." Should DII be successful, there are many advantages of the solar energy project. Besides combating climate change, power plants would create jobs and improve the economic development of the local communities. Desertec would also enhance infrastructure, thus, providing electricity to communities, which have previously not had access. Alexander Mohanty Spokesman of DII-Enabling Desertec in EUMENA told MediaGlobal, "For some countries it can lead to the reversal of capital flows in the energy sector. They will get the opportunity to sell power and to generate income rather than having the need to buy coal, oil or gas. Other countries no longer have to exploit their fossil resources and they have the option of leaving these resources to future generations without loss of income." Critics of DII have expressed concern over the view that the project may be too ambitious. How-

ever, the amount of money that has been raised is astounding. Furthermore, the recent interest in Desertec by prominent leaders and companies outside of Europe suggest that the international community is taking the solar project very seriously. Desertec Industrial Initiative is only valuable granted both the MENA region and Europe mutually benefit. If this happens, the positive contributions to the rest of the world will be significant.

Tunisia: Ministers pay inspection visit to the 'city of culture' in Tunis

Tunis — Mr. Abderraouf El Basti, Minister of Culture and Heritage Preservation and Mr. Slaheddine Malouch, Minister of Equipment, Housing and Land Planning, paid an inspection visit on Thursday to the city of culture in Tunis. During their visit they were briefed about the progress of the works and the various components of the project. The Czech contractor and all concerned parties took part in the event. The management unit of the project is also busy preparing a study on methods of management of the City of culture, the creation of the operas well as preparations relating to a Contemporary Arts museum and Cinema library in Tunis.

Tunisia: 'Golden Eye Cave' in Siliana Will Soon Compete for 'Most Beautiful Cave' Title

Tunis — One of the geological wonders in Tunisia, is undoubtedly the 3000 meter deep "Golden eye" cave located in the "Sarej" mountain, the second-highest mountain in Tunisia in the governorate of Siliana. The cave consists of nine separate rooms containing rock formations, characterized by their golden color and unique water fountains springing from the heart of the mountain. Considering the importance and sheer beauty of these caves Tunisian geologists, are preparing a file, made of videotapes, still photos and documents they will submit it to the Speleological and Caves World Federation for the nomination of the "Golden Eye cave" for the "most beautiful cave in the world" award. The cave is located on rocky terraces with crystal cataclysms formed over thousands of years each six meters high. According to speleologists, the height of the largest hall in the cave is 20 meters. In order to reach the cave's last room amateurs are required to swim, crawl, and climb. Tunisian speleologists are looking forward to explore more than 60 other caves located in the mountains of the northwest region of the country.

Zimbabwe: Campaigners lobby against building of hotel along Zambezi

CONSERVATIONISTS, villagers and tour operators in Zambia want to bar Protea Hotels Zambia's plan to build a 144-bedroomed hotel on the banks of the Zambezi River. Protea Hotels plans to construct the hotel in a wild area upstream from the world-renowned Mana Pools Na-

tional Park and World Heritage Site. The hotel will be about 12km from the Lower Zambezi National Park. Protea Hotels Zambia is 97,5% owned by Union Gold and 2,5% by Mauro Guardigli, an Italian living in Zambia.

The group operates under the Protea Inns and Hotels (Pty) Ltd franchise of South Africa. The construction of the hotel, the environmentalists argued, would have a huge impact on Zimbabwe.

According to information from various sources, the hotel will be built in an area which has already exceeded Zambia government's recommended number of hotels.

A campaign against the project was started on the social network Facebook, with 8 070 individuals in support of the campaign -- "Save Mana Pools against the building of the hotel as of yesterday". Conservationists said the proposed hotel would disturb plans to have World Heritage Status extended to the Zambian side of the Zambezi. But Protea Hotel chairman Mark O'Donnell said protests against the proposal were out of context because the environmental impact assessment (EIA) was yet to take place.

"Management wants to develop something that is appropriate and in harmony with the area," O'Donnell told businessdigest from Zambia yesterday. "I have been quoted out of context most of the time. I do not know if I should continue talking to the media. We are a responsible company that follows the law and do things properly. So much of this is taken out of context, it is so disturbing, the negative reports are coming from people who do not know what is going on down there."

Grant Cumings, vice chairman of Conservation Lower Zambezi of Zambia, was quoted in the Zambian media saying "the size and nature of the development was inappropriate for the site". "That model has proved successful for Protea Hotels in downtown Lusaka, but why put it in a wilderness? It will double overnight the number of hotel beds in the area, which are all operating at less than 50% occupancy, so it is not like there's a huge market waiting to go there. And they're not coming in at a cheap price," Cummings said.

An environmental planner, Derek Chittenden, said the hotel proposal "flies in the face of all sound planning principles".

"If this goes through, it's the beginning of the end for that area. It will have a huge impact on the Zimbabwean side, yet neither the Zimbabwean national parks or the government -- or even Unesco -- knew about the proposal," Chittenden was quoted saying.

O'Donnell however said management had approached the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) to consult them about producing an EIA study.

He said the purpose of an EIA was to ensure that what is done in the lower Zambezi area is appropriate for the area.

"People with concerns on the project are free to approach ECZ and submit their proposals. Protea will take into account what ECZ will advise," O'Donnell said.

The hotel will consist of a central lodge, conference centre and six double-storey blocks of rooms. There will be moorings on the river for boats and a parking lot to take 40 vehicles.

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Nigeria: Two die as commercial bus drivers protest in Lagos

From Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper

Lagos — NO fewer than two persons Monday lost their lives as commercial bus drivers in Lagos State stayed off the road, protesting alleged excesses of the officials of the Lagos State Transport Management Authority, LASTMA, leaving commuters stranded at bus stops across the state.

The two persons whose identities Vanguard could not ascertain at press time, were said to have died in two separate incidents at Mile 2 Oke area of Amuwo Odofin Local Government Area of the state.

One of them was said to have died when he attempted to jump on an open truck, but miscalculated and fell. He was said to have been run over by an oncoming vehicle.

The other, a bus conductor, was said to have fallen off a bus when some protesting drivers attacked his bus.

But leaders of the National Union of Road Transport Workers, NURTW, have dissociated their members from the action said to be spearheaded by unregistered Association of Danfo Drivers in Lagos State.

Stranded commuters in Lagos as commercial vehicles were off the roads to protest alleged highhandedness by LASTMA officials at the Cele bus stop, along Apapa-Oshodi Expressway, Monday.

In some areas, the protest intended to be peaceful took a violent dimension as some LASTMA officials were reportedly attacked while some commercial bus drivers, who were apparently oblivious of the planned protest, had their windscreens shattered by some aggrieved drivers.

The development caused a stampede particularly at Bariga, Oshodi, Iyana-Ipaja, Mile 12, Mile 2, Iyana-Oba and along the Oshodi-Apapa expressway, as passengers inside moving commercial buses were forced to disembark. Some of them reportedly sustained injuries as they tried to escape.

Explaining the reasons for the protest, the association said: "The intimidation and abuse of our fundamental human right by LASTMA officials can no longer be tolerated. LASTMA officials have deviated from their main job which is controlling traffic to pursuing danfo and collecting N7,000 or issue ticket of N30,000."

The association further accused the officials of using mobile policemen to harass and brutalise its members, wondering what connection the policemen have with LASTMA.

Some of the danfo drivers appealed to the Lagos State government to save them from the hands of some LASTMA officials and Mobile Policemen who usually go about in buses to arrest drivers.

The drivers who embarked on a peaceful protest to Vanguard Newspapers, in Lagos said some of the officials had left their primary assignment of controlling traffic to extortion and unjust arrest.

"There is a group of Mobile Policemen who uses bus to arrest danfo drivers making our work most uncomfortable by collecting an amount ranging from N10,000 to N15,000 from bus drivers. The intimidation and abuse of our fundamental human rights by LASTMA officials can no longer be tolerated," they said.

Meanwhile, NURTW leaders have disassociated members from the protest, describing the "act as unlawful."

The Amuwo Odofin Branch Secretary of NURTW, Alhaji Bola Hassan, who spoke to Vanguard, regretted that the commercial bus drivers, who were being represented by unknown union did not notify them before embarking on the protest, thereby taking laws into their hands.

According to him, "we, the NURTW, have condemned the wrongful act completely. If there are needs for the drivers to protest for any reason, they should have informed us because we represent them.

"There are rules guarding the union. You don't go out and take the laws into your hands. They have no right to barricade the roads and wreck havoc on those who did not participate. We enjoin the police to prosecute all those found wanting.

The Lagos State government has de-

bunked any crisis between members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers, NURTW, and members of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority, LASTMA, saying the claim was untrue.

Reacting on the issue, Special Adviser on Transportation, Mr. Kayode Opeifa, said: "Contrary to the report going on that the members of NURTW are protesting against the operations of the LASTMA, such information is not true as there is no crisis between the transport union and the traffic Agency.

Opeifa said investigation by LASTMA and the office of the Special Adviser had found out that it was a group of people of unidentified origin probably sponsored that caused the public disorder along Oworonsoki and Orile - Mile 2 axis, adding that LASTMA was at no time involved in the crisis.

Opeifa warned individuals who were out to disrupt the good works of Governor Babatunde Fashola, to desist from such act as LASTMA would not relent in performing its statutory responsibilities of monitoring, controlling and enforcing traffic rules and regulations irrespective of any sponsored campaign of calumny on the traffic Agency.

He added that motorists have the option of not paying any fine if they obey traffic rules and regulations to the letter.

He advised members of the public to go about their lawful duties as the security operatives have been directed to ensure law and order on Lagos roads.

Opeifa, therefore, enjoined those who may be aggrieved with the operations of the Agency to feel free and make their complaints known at LASTMA complaint unit, specially created by Governor Fashola, to address such issue.

Nigeria: JTF raises alarm over alleged plot to attack in Niger Delta

From This Day Newspaper

Yenagoa — The Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope, has raised alarm on plans to attack oil facilities belonging to the Anglo-Dutch oil giant, the Shell Petroleum Development Company.

The JTF in a statement by Lt Col TO Antigha, Coordinator Joint Media Campaign Centre warned those "behind the plot to abandon the idea immediately in their interest and that of the nation."

The interventionist agency made it clear that the "declaration of general amnesty and other measures taken by the Federal Government to consolidate the gains of the amnesty programme have not in any way diminished the vast capacity and capability of the JTF as a military outfit."

The JTF therefore made it clear in the four paragraphs statement that it will visit its military might on those planning the attack, anytime it happens. "Consequently, the JTF warns that it will destroy any group of ex-militants or emerging militants who attempt to sabotage oil and gas installations or dislocate the prevailing peace and tranquillity in the Niger Delta.

"The JTF enjoins all Nigerians and foreigners within and outside the Niger Delta to disregard this threat and continue with their legitimate endeavours. Parents, traditional rulers and well-meaning interest groups are advised to warn their children, subjects and adherents respectively to refrain from tampering with government installations, to enable the Federal Government concentrate on addressing the multi-faceted problems facing the region."

Ethiopia: U.S.\$1.7 billion dam may sink the hopes of 20,000

Jeff Otieno of the East African (Nairobi, Kenya)

Nairobi — Lake Turkana could be the scene of a major conflict in the near future, environmentalists are warning.

Ten years ago, then Egyptian foreign minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali said the next major wars in Africa would be over water. Now water diplomacy is starting to take centre-stage in African and global affairs.

Experts are tracing fights over water rights and shortage as the root cause of the many civil conflicts in the continent over the past three decades. As Kenya and Ethiopia enter a series of deals on electricity generation and supply, the livelihood of 200,000 people is threatened.

These people have for centuries depended on a lake that is fed by rivers currently threatened by a giant hydroelectric power project in Ethiopia. The Gilgel Gibe III hydroelectric power dam, which at a cost of \$1.7 billion will be one of the largest in Africa, is already causing concern among environmentalists and local communities.

Opponents say it will destroy the livelihood of thousands of people.

Situated on the Omo River Valley, the dam is expected to have a mammoth reservoir that will hold thousands of cubic metres of water.

Environmentalists and locals believe this will interfere with the flow of water into Lake Turkana.

Other flashpoints that Unep and UNDP have cited include the Nile, Niger, Volta and Zambezi basins.

The UNDP says population growth and economic development will lead to nearly one in two people in Africa living in countries facing water scarcity and water stress in 25 years.

Water scarcity is defined as less than 1,000 cubic metres of water available per person per year, while water stress means less than 1,500 cubic metres per year.

By 2025, according to UNDP, 12 more African countries will join the 13 that already suffer from water stress or water scarcity.

"Water disputes in Africa revolve around one or more of three issues: quantity, quality and timing. These play out differently on various scales, whether internationally, intra-nationally, regionally or indirectly," says a Unep-funded report titled: "Hydropolitical vulnerability and resilience along international waters in Africa".

The Nile Basin, which encompasses nine countries — including Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania — has been mentioned as a potential source of conflict because of the high number of people who depend on it.

For example, if the combined population of just three countries — Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan — through which the Nile runs, rises as predicted from 150 million today to 340 million in 2050, there will be intense competition for limited water resources.

This could easily spill over into war. Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea are among the Nile Basin states that are most vulnerable to climatic variations.

The amount of water left when the Nile reaches the sea has also been drastically declining, proof that the uptake along its course is rising.

In case water levels reduce drastically, Egypt, being at the lower end of the river, will be most affected.

Meanwhile, the African Resources Working Group says there are also disagreements on the use of the Okavango-Makgadikgadi Basin in Southern Africa.

Botswana's need to sustain the delta and its lucrative ecotourism is in conflict with Namibia's plans to pipe water from the Okavango river to supply its capital, Windhoek.

Also, dams and water transfers in the South African area of the Incomati River basin have reduced freshwater flows and increased salt levels in Mozambique's Incomati estuary.

This has altered the estuary's ecosystem and led to the disappearance of salt-intolerant plants and animals.

Geldof challenges BBC aid claim

Bob Geldof has challenged the BBC to substantiate its report that millions raised for famine relief in Ethiopia were diverted to pay for weapons.

The anti-poverty campaigner said there was "not a shred of evidence" Band Aid or Live Aid money was siphoned off.

The report included claims that substantial sums of aid that went into rebel-held areas of Tigray province in 1985 were used to buy arms.

The BBC World Service has said it is standing by its report.

Mr Geldof told BBC One's Andrew Marr show he would personally sue the Ethiopian government and spend the money on aid if any evidence was produced.

'Credible voices'

He said: "Produce me one shred of evidence and I promise you I will professionally investigate it, I will professionally report it, and if there is any money missing I will sue the Ethiopian government for that money back and I will spend it on aid.

"There is not a single shred of evidence that Band Aid or Live Aid money was diverted in any sense, it could not have been."

The news and current affairs editor at the World Service, Andrew Whitehead, said the BBC stood by its report.

Taking part in a discussion with Mr Geldof, Mr Whitehead said the BBC had "quite a lot of evidence" to support the report.

The World Service report featured interviews with two former members of a rebel group who made the allegations dating from the mid-80s.

They told the BBC they posed as merchants in meetings with charity workers to get aid money which they used to fund attempts to overthrow the government.

One rebel leader estimated that \$95m (£63m) from Western governments and charities, including Band Aid, was diverted.

The CIA also alleged aid money was being misused, Mr Whitehead pointed out in a radio discussion.

He accepted the 1985 report from the crime agency was written before Band Aid had gone into Ethiopia, but said it established "a pattern" that international aid was being used for military purposes. The report concluded: "Some funds that insurgent organisations are raising for relief operations, as a result of increased world publicity, are almost certainly being diverted for military purposes."

Mr Geldof, who was speaking to the BBC from Nairobi, also said one of the sources quoted in the report was a "dissident political exile" who was "not credible".

"There is a clear public interest in determining whether some money given as famine relief ended up buying guns and bullets"

Andrew Whitehead, BBC World Service Martin Plaut, the World Service's Africa editor who broke the story, said a lot of his nine-month investigation was spent trying to corroborate or dismiss events. He said: "We came across a lot of other evidence which made it clear that yes, indeed, some of the money had gone astray."

He added that the "balanced, measured" programme had gone through the entire BBC editorial process and had not simply been "thrown on air".

Mr Geldof and the Band Aid Trust are taking their complaint to the broadcasting regulator Ofcom.

They and a number of other agencies, including Oxfam, the Red Cross, Christian Aid and Save The Children, are also writing to chairman of the BBC Trust, Sir Michael Lyons.

John Kennedy, a co-founder of the Band Aid Trust, said: "The trust is writing to the BBC and Ofcom to complain about the broadcast."

A Christian Aid spokeswoman confirmed it was planning to support the complaint.

Lost Jewish tribe 'found in Zimbabwe'

The Lemba people of Zimbabwe and South Africa may look like their compatriots, but they follow a very different set of customs and traditions.

They do not eat pork, they practise male circumcision, they ritually slaughter their animals, some of their men wear skull caps and they put the Star of David on their gravestones.

Their oral traditions claim that their ancestors were Jews who fled the Holy Land about 2,500 years ago.

It may sound like another myth of a lost tribe of Israel, but British scientists have carried out DNA tests which have confirmed their Semitic origin.

These tests back up the group's belief that a group of perhaps seven men married African women and settled on the continent. The Lemba, who number perhaps 80,000, live in central Zimbabwe and the north of South Africa.

And they also have a prized religious artefact that they say connects them to their Jewish ancestry - a replica of the Biblical Ark of the Covenant known as the ngoma lungundu, meaning "the drum that thunders".

The object went on display recently at a Harare museum to much fanfare, and instilled pride in many of the Lemba.

"For me it's the starting point," says religious singer Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave.

"Very few people knew about us and this is the time to come out. I'm very proud to realise that we have a rich culture and I'm proud to be a Lemba.

"We have been a very secretive people, because we believe we are a special people."

Religion vs culture

The Lemba have many customs and regulations that tally with Jewish tradition.

They wear skull caps, practise circumcision, which is not a tradition for most Zimbabweans, avoid eating pork and food with animal blood, and have 12 tribes.

"Many people say that the story is far-fetched, but the oral traditions of the Lemba have been backed up by science"

Tudor Parfitt University of London They slaughter animals in the same way as Jewish people, and they put the Jewish Star of David on their tombstones.

Members of the priestly clan of the Lemba, known as the Buba, were even discovered to have a genetic element also found among the Jewish priestly line.

"This was amazing," said Prof Tudor Parfitt, from the University of London.

"It looks as if the Jewish priesthood continued in the West by people called

Cohen, and in same way it was continued by the priestly clan of the Lemba.

"They have a common ancestor who geneticists say lived about 3,000 years ago somewhere in north Arabia, which is the time of Moses and Aaron when the Jewish priesthood started."

Prof Parfitt is a world-renowned expert, having spent 20 years researching the Lemba, and living with them for six months.

The Lemba have a sacred prayer language which is a mixture of Hebrew and Arabic, pointing to their roots in Israel and Yemen.

Despite their ties to Judaism, many of the Lemba in Zimbabwe are Christians, while some are Muslims.

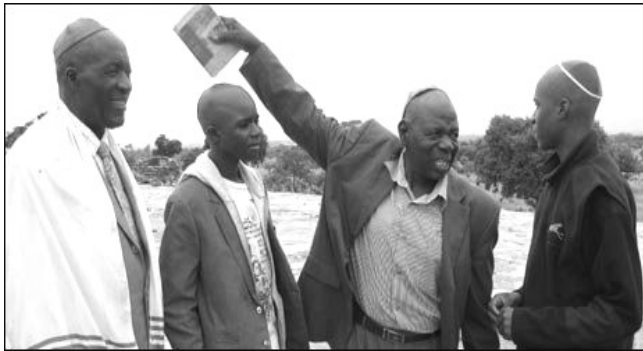
"Christianity is my religion, and Judaism is my culture," explains Perez Hamandishe, a pastor and member of parliament from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Despite their centuries-old traditions, some younger Lemba are taking a more liberal view.

"In the old days you didn't marry a non-Lemba, but these days we interact with others," says Alex Makotore, son of the late Chief Mposi from the Lemba "headquarters" in Mberengwa.

"I feel special in my heart but not in front of others such that I'm separated from them. Culture is dynamic."

The oral traditions of the Lemba say that the ngoma lungundu is the Biblical



wooden Ark made by Moses, and that centuries ago a small group of men began a long journey carrying it from Yemen to southern Africa.

"Hearing from those professors in Harare and seeing the ngoma makes it clear that we are a great people and I'm very proud"

David Maramwidze Lemba elder

The object went missing during the 1970s and was eventually rediscovered in Harare in 2007 by Prof Parfitt.

"Many people say that the story is far-fetched, but the oral traditions of the Lemba have been backed up by science," he says.

Carbon dating shows the ngoma to be nearly 700 years old - pretty ancient, if not as old as Bible stories would suggest.

But Prof Parfitt says this is because the ngoma was used in battles, and would explode and be rebuilt.

The ngoma now on display was a replica, he says, possibly built from the remains of the original.

"So it's the closest descendant of the Ark that we know of," Prof Parfitt says.

Large crowds came to see the unveiling of the ngoma and to attend lectures on the identity of the Lemba.

For David Maramwidze, an elder in his village, the discovery of the ngoma has been a defining moment.

"Hearing from those professors in Harare and seeing the ngoma makes it clear that we are a great people and I'm very proud," he says.

"I heard about it all my life and it was hard for me to believe, because I had no idea of what it really is.

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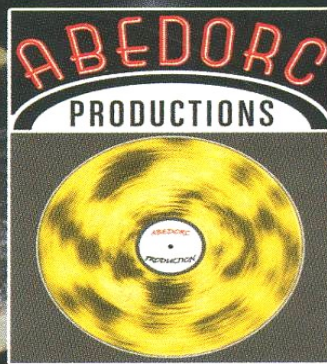
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