Africa Briefs

Nigeria Commits $11bn for Coastal SGR Line, Anchor for Growing National Grid

The Nigerian government of President Muhammadu Buhari has authorized construction of the important coastal segment of the nation's standard-gauge rail (SGR) grid. It will connect all six of its southern port cities from Lagos in the west, to Calabar in the east, a distance of 1200 km. The line will have 12 stops and several spurs to regional population centers. On August 5, the Federal Executive Council (cabinet) voted to allocate $11.2 billion for the project, giving it a 6-year deadline for completion, in 2027. The first segment, from Port Harcourt to Warri—it connects to the south-north line to Abuja—is expected to be complete in two years.

China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC) was awarded the contract for this line several years ago, but at the time no money was forthcoming. This financial commitment has been widely reported in Nigeria, but beyond Nigeria, it has only been reported by *Construction Review Online* and Xinhua, whose story was picked up by China's CGTN.

Nigeria's cabinet had earlier authorized the Kano-Jibia rail line and the line from Port Harcourt to Maiduguri. Other segments have already been built or are under construction. No other government in Sub-Saharan Africa is doing so much—or has as much momentum—as the Buhari government, to integrate its national territory with standard-gauge rail lines. In addition to rail, Nigerian visionaries have discussed creating entirely new port cities and enlarging and deepening existing ports.

Construction Review Online noted, "As seen in developed economies, adequate transport infrastructure is a catalyst for economic growth and development."

South Africa Ramps Up J&J Vaccine Output: J&J Sends Most of It to Europe

After about a year's delay (including the lengthy U.S. FDA restriction on Johnson & Johnson vaccine production because of the "mix-up" at a production facility in Maryland, USA), Aspen Pharmacare's South African plant in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) is finally producing J&J one-shot vaccines. The company plans to quickly ramp up production to 25 million doses per month by year's end.

J&J has committed, on paper, to an eventual 220 million doses for the African Union's African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) program. But, despite the COVID-19 third wave that hit South Africa and Africa generally this summer, J&J is shipping the bulk of doses produced at Aspen Pharmacare in South Africa to Europe.

South African Health Ministry spokesman Popo Maja blames the contract the country had to sign. The contract to bottle and finish the vaccines stipulated that South Africa could not forbid the shipment of the vaccines out of the country. He said it was "Sign contract or no vaccines."

The South African government's order for 11 million J&J doses in March, and of another 20 million in April, have been greatly delayed. The delivery of the first 1.5 million doses in June were about half of what was promised, and, in general, the EU has received delivery of 90% of the vaccines produced in South Africa.

After many needless deaths in South Africa, the EU has consented to take only 60% of the vaccines. An *EIR* analyst commented, "Then, any apparent similarity to the murderous Great Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s, when London pulled food out of a starving Ireland, is only 60% accurate."

Just days after the South African plant began producing, doses of the Chinese vaccine Sinovac began rolling off the line in Egypt, at the other end of the continent. They are being produced at the Egyptian Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (VACSERA) in Alamein. By the end of the year, the company plans to produce 40 million doses, a volume it hopes to double in 2022.

China's Poverty Alleviation in Xinjiang Highlighted by South African News Site

The South African *Independent On Line* (IOL, iol.co.za) posted an article August 3, detailing the improvements in life in a township on the outskirts of Kashgar City in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China, as part of IOL's ongoing "People's Daily Online SA" project.

In words possibly of interest to South Africa's ruling party and President Cyril Ramaphosa, author Luke Witzaney of *People's Daily Online* wrote, "China accomplished its stated goal of eliminating absolute poverty 10 years ahead of the ambitious poverty reduction target set by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, lifting over 770 million people out of extreme poverty in the astonishingly short time span of 40 years."

In sharp contrast to the never-ending stream of alleged atrocities paraded in western media, Witzaney's piece follows the plight of a single family of Uighurs, and how their lives have been transformed over the past 10 years. According to the long-time resident, simply named Memetjan, "Before we burned coal or firewood, but now our kitchen has running water and sewage as well as a gas stove, so our living conditions have gotten better." Not only does he have a better job, but his wife, Amangul, is now working, and his hopes for his children have risen even further.

"Rural revitalization and poverty alleviation is now a well-trodden path in China," Witzaney writes, a path which "has brought hope to countless families in search of a viable means to improve their lot while ensuring a better livelihood for younger and older generations alike. This road map for shaking off poverty and building common prosperity has also been widely adopted throughout the country and has encompassed all of its inhabitants, with north-western China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region no exception."

The theme of the rising, inclusive prosperity in China is found in several of the stories in the ongoing series from *People's Daily Online*. IOL is part of the large Independent Media Group (print and digital) owned by Dr. Iqbal Survé, currently chairman of the South African chapter of the BRICS Business Council.

Objections Rising to AU Commission Granting Observer Status to Israel

In what has been called a "diplomatic coup," the African Union Commission granted "observer status" to the state of Israel on July 22, allowing it a foothold on the continent, one which it had been seeking—but had been continually denied—since 2002. The decision was made solely by the office of the Chairman of the Africa Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and no action by the AU Assembly was required—or permitted. The decision will allow Israel to have a non-voting delegate present at meetings of the AU Assembly, a position which will be held by Aleli Admasu—currently Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia, Burundi and Chad—who promptly presented his credentials to Chairman Faki on July 23.

Existing AU observers include Palestine and Haiti.

In the following weeks, a growing crescendo of African voices has arisen against what they see as an arbitrary decision, one which circumvented the democratic process of the AU. On July 26, the Algerian Foreign Ministry issued a statement—which refused to even name "said new observer"—condemning the arbitrary nature of the decision. On July 28, South Africa also called the move "arbitrary," saying it was "appalled" at what it considered an "unjust and unwarranted" move. The same day, Namibia's Minister of International Relations Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah issued a statement "rejecting" Israel's presence, and Botswana's Ministry of International Affairs followed with a similar statement, reaffirming the country's support for Palestine, on Aug. 2.

As of Aug. 4, the *Agence de Presse Africaine,* based in Dakar, reported that the list of countries which "have now agreed to expel Israel" from the AU had grown to 13. With Algeria included, it is 14.

Bankrupt Zambia Elects Hakainde Hichilema, Country's Richest Man

In an upset victory, Zambians have elected billionaire Hakainde Hichilema, throwing out Edgar Lungu—who had ruled the country since 2016 and promoted nuclear power—by a three to two margin, with 71% voter participation. Buoyed into office by a reform movement of unemployed youth, this will be Hichilema's first time in elected office. He has reportedly run for the presidency six times.

Significantly—and it is a growing trend in African elections—President Lungu conceded defeat, marking Zambia's third consecutive peaceful transfer of power since independence. It was indeed peaceful, but with a violent antecedent: in 2017 President Lungu had Hichilema arrested for treason and tortured on a pretext. He emerged from that ordeal as a hero—after protest demonstrations in the UK, South Africa, and Zambia, and public statements by the U.S. State Department and the European Union—and was then invited to speak at Chatham House.

According to *Forbes* and other sources, Hichilema is worth $70 billion, making him by far the officially bankrupt country's richest man. Perhaps desperate voters think that—having watched him create jobs as a private citizen over the years—his neo-liberal economics will do the same now that he is in public office.

Zambia is the world's first "pandemic" bankruptcy, owing billions to western (not Chinese) financiers. The first major test of President Hichilema's new administration on this account will be in upcoming talks with the IMF, which are anticipated for early in 2022.