



New items by Prof. Wolfgang H. Thome of Kampala . Above photo by Cam McLeay

TN – News from ‘Uganda – Gifted by Nature’

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POWER CUTS REDUCE

In time for the Commonwealth Summit month of November the electricity production at the main dam in Jinja has increased by nearly 50 MW. This was possible due to the excessive rains over the past months, which have flooded part of the country but also increased lake levels by over one metre. The Entebbe Kampala corridor and much of the country will now no longer suffer of power cuts during the day and evening peak load shedding has also been reduced substantially. More thermal plants, adding a capacity of at least another 100 MW into the national grid in the near future, are also nearing installation, but at a cost to the consumers, since thermal energy is several times as expensive compared to hydro generation. However, as one hotelier put it recently: ‘it is better to have more expensive power from the grid than using generators which we had to do for a long time. That is financially a real burden and eats away our little profits. Now the generators are mostly for stand by again. But still, our electricity bills have gone up multiple compared to two years ago and if fuel prices go up more government has to step in and increase subsidies for electricity. Otherwise it becomes almost unaffordable for small hotels’.

Thermal power plants, as incidentally just advertised for tender, require nearly 95.000 tons each of either diesel or heavy fuel oil per annum to operate in continuous mode feeding electricity into the grid.

It is a common agreement amongst the captains of industry in Uganda that the commercial production from the recently discovered oil deposits cannot start soon enough and that at least by 2009 some relief is in sight, when the proposed mini refinery is expected to commence producing oil

products for domestic consumption.

In a related development, the route planning and Environmental Impact Assessment study have been completed for the proposed pipeline extension from Western Kenya into Uganda. NEMA is now due to study the document and is expected to grant permission for the project in early 2008. Work is due to commence in late 2008 and the pipeline extension is expected to be ready by 2010. This will greatly reduce the need for road transport of fuels into Uganda and also make the cost of fuel in Uganda cheaper in the long run. Hinterland countries like Rwanda, Southern Sudan and Eastern Congo are also due to benefit from this development.

SHERATON’S RHINO PUB RE-OPENS

Following extensive renovations the former Rhino Pub, one of Kampala’s favourite ‘watering holes’ has now reopened and rebranded. The area previously occupied by the Rhino Pub and the Hippo Grill has been named ‘Paradise Terrace and Restaurant’, reflecting the gorgeous garden setting on the outside. New outdoor tents with lounge sofas dot the garden terrace area and invite for casual snacks as much as for business related one on one meetings with informal luxury. The restaurant offers themed lunches and dinners across the week besides BBQ’s and meals from a newly constructed tandoori oven. During high tea time a selection of Sheraton’s acknowledged fine pastries and cakes are available from the trolley, as are of course finger sandwiches and other snacks. With this work now completed the rehabilitation and upgrading of the Sheraton Kampala Hotel is now complete and the hotel shines once again as one of Kampala’s premier hospitality choices. The hotel is the choice venue for the forthcoming Commonwealth Business Summit, which is expected to attract over 1.000 business leaders to Kampala to discuss business

opportunities and make recommendations to the Head of Government Summit. Ugandan lead coordinator for this event is the Private Sector Foundation Uganda, which has been working for over a year to make this meeting possible.

UGANDA CIVIL AVIATION ACCOUNTS FOR UPGRADE WORKS

The CAA has now given a first estimate of the cost for upgrading the international airport in Entebbe and the various elements of construction now well nearly completed ahead of the Commonwealth Summit in November this year. Presently some 87 billion Uganda Shillings have been spent in assorted road works, creating further green areas, terminal expansion and upgrading, passenger aerobridges, new radar and air traffic control equipment, the rehabilitation of the ‘old’ airport, the construction of new parking and apron areas, new electrical systems including new transformer stations and additional perimeter security measures. The work on the ‘old’ airport side is now completed and will serve as VIP arrival area during the summit, to keep the main terminal clear of the logistics train which will receive and process the heads of government from some 59 member states of the Commonwealth. After the summit the ‘old’ airport will be converted into a domestic terminal for charter and scheduled flights, leaving the main terminal exclusively for international arrival and departure activities. It will also then be the location for the Presidential and VVIP lounges, again to minimise any disruption to normal operations at the airport. To finance the works government allotted some 15 billion Uganda Shillings (one US Dollar equated presently to about 1740 US\$) while the CAA borrowed a further 40 million US Dollars. All work is part of the integrated 20 year airport development masterplan, many components of which were brought forward in order to prepare

for the summit requirements stipulated by the Commonwealth Secretariat, leaving Entebbe as the best aviation facility in the region for the time being.

CAA GETS NEW LAKE RESCUE BOATS AND EQUIPMENT

In addition to the existing fleet of rescue boats, stationed lakeside on both the Northern and Southern aircraft approaches, Civil Aviation Authority's emergency services have now received new boats, equipped with two 250 HP engines each. The boats add substantial extra capacity in case of search and rescue missions and enhance Entebbe's overall capacity to deal with emergencies.

Meanwhile, latest technology gadgets were commissioned also at Entebbe International Airport to enhance security measures at the airport and detect stolen and forged travel documents. Immigration at Entebbe was for nearly two years now in automated mode, with passport scans assisting in keeping track of the identity of visitors and if they appear on any of the global 'wanted' lists. The latest addition of new equipment will undoubtedly further enhance arrival and departure processing of visitors.

AIR UGANDA MAY MISS START UP DATE, AGAIN

The AKFED airline offspring in Uganda, formerly known as Meridiana Africa Airlines and more recently renamed into Air Uganda, may according to informed inside sources miss their anticipated start up date of 10th November. Information previously underhand released to the travel sector did point towards this date, and if it does not materialise it would be the second such miss. The airline was initially due to start up by mid year, but when they inexplicably ditched plans to operate two modern CRJ aircraft this time frame totally disintegrated. Their next plan to start with MD87 aircraft also seems to have gone out of the window with CAA sources preferring anonymity now saying they intend to start with outdated DC9 aircraft. Watch this space to see if their race to the start up line is successful or if they, as did failed Victoria International just a year ago, also need more time to get ready.

Kenya Airways in the meantime is increasingly using their wide bodied aircraft on the Nairobi Entebbe route to facilitate not only greater passenger numbers but also cater for palletized cargo shipments in and out of Uganda. A KQ source well

known to this correspondent declined to officially comment on the anticipated start up of the new Ugandan registered airline but did mention in an individual capacity: 'we are ready as ever for competition, there have been several such upstarts before and they all failed, so I am personally not worried at all. Our network is superior in Eastern Africa and across Africa, Europe and Asia and our new aircraft and service quality speak for itself. We also have an excellent frequent flier programme and a global partnership coalition led by KLM and Air France, which is unrivalled really. The market will decide on this'.

HOTEL AND TOURISM TRAINING INSTITUTE ADDS NEW HOSTEL

Uganda's national hotel school is in the final stages of opening a new dedicated hostel for the female students attending courses. This will allow the present hostel to be transformed into a facility exclusively for the male student population. The new facility has also allowed the student numbers to be increased by 50 percent for the next intake and a further student increase is set to come into effect by next year, in line with the institution's development plans. These foresee a gradual rise in students for the coming years to initially 600 on campus at any given time, compared to just 200 at present. Once finance for a new dedicated campus has been sourced, this number is set to nearly double again so that enough quality graduates can be produced for the expanding tourism and hospitality sectors. This will also allow young Ugandans to reclaim positions presently held by non Ugandan workers providing them with promising career opportunities.

The integration of HTTI into the new public 'Busitema University' has however been delayed for one year due to budgetary constraints and the new university is now commencing activities with only two constituent collages. HTTI is due to join the university during the next financial year 2008/9. While hands on vocational courses will continue even then, as will certificate and diploma courses, degree courses will then be added in tourism and hospitality management under a new tourism faculty.

ACTION AT LAST ON MONSTER TRUCK LOADS

Following Kenya's decision to ban 4 axle trailers from use by end of the year, Uganda and Rwanda have now also given similar directives to transport companies

to begin modifying their vehicles. The move is aimed to reduce overall weight carried by a single vehicle and also reduce the shearing effect the axles cause when turning or navigating narrow road corners. Many of the main roads across East Africa have been rehabilitated several times over the past decades only to see them deteriorate once more beyond recognition by excess loads carried. The latest round of road rehabilitation is now supposed to be protected by appropriate measures of enforcement, like weight bridges and load reduction.

The other side of the coin is of course that in light of record fuel prices the cost of transport for goods from the port of Mombasa to the African hinterland will become even more expensive, as trucks can from next year onwards no longer carry loads sometimes estimated to be in excess of 80 tons. At the same time the Rift Valley Railways Corporation is now also challenged to fundamentally overhaul the track network and invest in new locomotives and rolling stock to offer a credible alternative at competitive costs to both importers and exporters presently largely relying on road transport.

PARLIAMENTARIANS CRITICAL OF LAND GIVE AWAYS

As several times reported in this column, government had given land to two investors for build 5star hotels in the city, and both projects have not matured. In a recent session members of parliament took government to task over this development and situation and demanded that the land be withdrawn from the two companies and future 'investors' be subjected to stricter scrutiny, before being handed free land in return of empty promises. One of the companies is said to be Kingdom Hotels, which subsequently caused the demolition of the Shimoni Primary School and Teachers Training College to the detriment of hundreds of children and teachers, who not only lost their school but in the case of teachers also their homes. Well earned barbs for the Sheikh for taking Uganda for an expensive ride.

NATIONAL PARK LAND ALREADY LEASED OUT

Another major storm is coming across the environmental horizon, now that confirmation was obtained over a lease of 450 hectares of park land to French company Lafarge's local cement company

Hima. The company has for years been under scrutiny and faced opposition over the pollution it creates at its factory near Kasese, where dust is making the life of residents a daily misery. The French owning company is now also coming into the cross hairs of the international conservation fraternity and growing pressure is expected on them in the international arena to drop their project.

Uganda Wildlife Authority appears to be being pushed into signing a mining agreement for the land, but no environmental impact assessment has yet been carried out, making the exercise a purely political decision at this time. Wildlife experts and conservationists also pointed out, that part of the land falls under a specific Ramsar Convention protocol while other areas are key routes for animal migration in and out of the park. Government just had to concede that their ludicrous plans to give away 7.200 hectares of prime rainforest to a sugar baron had been defeated and is now set to face further opposition with this latest assault on protected areas. Said one leading conservationist to this correspondent: 'if UWA and government go ahead with this we shall take them to court. We are confident that we will win that case because right now the laws are being ignored. And we also know that the tourism sector will join hands with us because once they (Hima Cement / Lafarge) start their open surface digs for limestone in the park the area will be widely polluted with dust and tourists will shun the park'

Watch this space to follow the news and developments in coming weeks and months.

KENYA ELECTION DATE CONFIRMED FOR DECEMBER 27TH

The long awaited general election in Kenya has now been set for the 27th of December this year. Many aspirants had hoped to have the elections held before the Christmas holidays, not only to spend the time with their families instead of chasing voters, but also to avoid a very expensive campaign extending into Christmas, something which will be well understood by keen observers of the country's politics. Good luck to all. By the way, Kenya has gone out of their way to reassure potential visitors that they have nothing to worry about over the election campaign period and the Christmas holidays as their safety and security will be assured.

KENYA AIRWAYS PROFITS DROP

The six month financial results up to end September show a profit drop by about 19 percent compared to the previous year, Kenya Airways has said in a recent press release. Rocketing aviation fuel prices have eaten deeply in to the profitability, but other factors may also have come into play such as the strengthening of the Kenya Shilling against the US Dollar. Increased competition on the London route by Virgin, coupled with falling average yields, must have had an effect on the airline's performance too, especially as passenger numbers have risen to 1.4 million, up by about 100.000 passengers compared to a year ago. Cargo revenues have however declined by some 300 million Kenya Shillings and overheads have also sharply grown, impacting on the bottom line. More competition is on the way next year, when Air India, Air China and Delta Airlines will be commencing flights to Nairobi, although Delta is part of the same alliance to which KQ and KLM belong, offering Kenya Airways the option of code shares on these flights from and to the United States before commencing direct flights themselves, probably by 2009.

On the positive side, the airline will expire paper tickets by the end of this year, 5 months ahead of the expanded IATA deadline for full compliance, making KQ the leading carrier on the African continent.

MASAI MARA TO GET NEW MANAGEMENT MASTERPLAN

One of Kenya's best known game reserves, the Masai Mara, will soon be getting a new masterplan for management of not only the reserve itself but the greater catchment area. The new management plan will also include specific areas on the ecology and maintaining bio diversity, to preserve this priceless resource for the coming generations. Some time ago government tried to enforce a moratorium on new lodge and tented camp developments, but was ultimately lacking the legal foundation to keep this ban in place. The new plan however is expected to adequately address this issue, as by general consensus within the conservation fraternity the reserve is 'overpopulated' with accommodation and related facilities to the detriment of the animals.

Kenya's Tourism Trust Fund (KTTF) will be co-funding the project to the tune of 16 million Kenya Shillings and the Ministry of Tourism will cooperate with

the local councils under which jurisdiction the reserve and the adjoining areas fall, to ensure a comprehensive consultative approach and agreement, which can then be binding for all.

RWANDA'S ORTPN PLANS FOR TOURISM INSPECTORATE

The Rwanda Office for Tourism and National Parks has now invited proposals for the design and establishment of a tourism inspection department action plan, which is aimed to strengthen its capacity for monitoring, licensing and enforcement. Rwanda's tourism sector has grown in leaps and bounds over the past years due to a conducive framework put into place and strong and committed government support for wildlife conservation and tourism promotion. New investors have come on the scene of late, including the Dubai based Istithmar (a division of Dubai World) and once new projects in the lodge sector have been completed the country is expected to reap yet more from its commitment to the sector.

AIR BURUNDI TO RESUME OPERATIONS

Following a major maintenance of its single aircraft, a Beech 1900C, the airline is set to restart its scheduled operations shortly. The aircraft returned from the South African maintenance organization last week after a year long overhaul of the aircraft, its engines and avionics. The plane is the sole survivor of a fleet previously numbering 3, but two De Havilland Twin Otter aircraft were not replaced when they left the fleet. Burundi is the youngest member of the East African community and will benefit from reduced red tape in trade and services within the region once regulations have been harmonized. Rwandair and Kenya Airways flies a few times a week to Bujumbura from Kigali and Nairobi respectively, but Ethiopian Airlines is notably serving the country daily via Entebbe.

Efforts to keep operations going during the aircraft's maintenance were not successful as the airline could not find a suitable plane for lease to cover the gap and the staff were redeployed during this time to ground operations to avoid redundancies. The airline is expected to resume flights to Entebbe, Nairobi and Kigali before the end of the year. And from Livingstone / Zambia Gill Staden sends this material about tourism in her area

Chimfunshi Chimpanzee

Orphanage

Integrated Conservation Africa, which is the umbrella company for Talking Travel Africa, Bushwise Africa Safaris, Bushwise Adventures etc., have committed themselves to trying to help raise funds for the Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage and Chimpanzee Sanctuary.

I can't begin to tell you how desperately they need funds. For the last few years major donations have dried up, really due to David Siddle passing away, and Shelia just not being able to cope with the vast workload she has. Most of the food for the chimpanzees is grown by the local community, which really is their main, if not only, source of income. Other donations of food come from businesses in Chingola.

Zambia should be proud of what the Siddle family have and are doing. Their work has been recognized internationally, but there is very little support from Zambians themselves.

Please, through your newsletter could you ask if anyone is interested in helping either in the form of donations or equipment for the school and education centre, uniforms for the staff, fencing to keep the kids away from the chimps for safety reasons, cement and paint to improve the look of the Sanctuary, bedding and linen for the guests rooms - the list is endless.

We have put a page onto our website called Save - our - Chimps www.talkingtravel.co.za

Please have a look and ask your readers to look - it may encourage them to help. Donations etc., can be made to the Chimfunshi Wildlife Trust, through their accountants in Zambia or directly to Shelia Siddle at the Sanctuary

And adds Gill Staden:

Whilst every effort is being made to raise funds for the continued care of the 100 plus chimpanzees at Chimfunshi, work is also being undertaken to provide for the local community. Though the school is not yet completely finished it has been officially registered as the Twampane Community School and "classes are now going full throttle." Twampane is the Bemba word for "working together" and there has been wonderful support from the parents, and donations from nearby companies.

For more information or offers of support for the chimp sanctuary and community support programme email Gill Staden at livingstonian@samnet.zm

For previous news reports from Prof. Thomne
Please visit www.africa-ata.org/ug_hotnews.htm