

## Africa Briefs

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### Wang Yi's New Year's Visit to Africa Extends the Belt and Road Initiative

The traditional Africa visit, the “first trip of the New Year” by a senior Chinese official, began Friday, January 1, when Foreign Minister Wang Yi was welcomed to embattled Nigeria. This is the 30th year that China has chosen an African country for this honor. In addition to Nigeria, Wang also visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana, Tanzania, and Seychelles on this trip. The DRC and Botswana became the 45th and 46th nations on the African continent (54 nations, total) to join China's global Belt and Road Initiative, which gives them favorable access to financing for infrastructure projects.

Wang's visit comes as many nations on the continent are struggling with the re-emerging COVID-19 virus, which has already contributed to an emergence of famine conditions in several places, and brought even the sturdier countries to the brink of collapse. In that climate, an international debt forgiveness effort has arisen, led by Nigerian Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabamila, involving seven nations.

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### African Union's CDC Director Calls Fair Vaccine Distribution a 'Moral Challenge'

As the world watched mass vaccinations beginning in Britain and other “first world” countries in early December, the Director of the African Union's Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, John Nken-

gasong, warned that some parts of Africa might not see COVID-19 vaccines until the second half of 2021.

Speaking December 12 at his now regular weekly press conference in Geneva, Nkengasong called the fair and equitable distribution of the vaccine a “moral challenge,” asserting that it would be “extremely terrible” for Africa to watch the developed world receive vaccines while African countries went without (as happened for years with antiretroviral therapy in the AIDS pandemic in the 1990s), especially as the continent is now straining under a surge of new COVID-19 cases.

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### Rosatom Announces 6th 'Atoms Empowering Africa' Youth Competition

Russian domestic nuclear power producer Rosatom has announced its 6th Annual Online Video Competition for African Youths, to encourage young scientists 18-35 to “explore nuclear technologies.” To compete, applicants must produce a video demonstrating the benefits of nuclear technology, and are further encouraged to share their pro-nuclear videos on Facebook. Three top finalists will win an all-expenses-paid trip to Russia.

In announcing the competition, Rosatom's CEO for Central and Southern Africa, Ryan Collyer, said, “Rosatom puts a great deal of resources into supporting youth to foster their talents and share their views and ideas. We are confident that nuclear can help to achieve the UN Sustainability Goals in Africa, not only through clean and affordable energy, but also through life-saving medical procedures and technologically advanced agricultural practices. Through this competition we

hope that the youth will educate themselves and their peers on the immense benefits that nuclear technology has to offer.”

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### Nigeria Calls Revived ICC Investigation 'Harassment'

In December, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced it would begin an investigation into “crimes against humanity” allegedly committed by the jihadist Boko Haram, alleging that Nigerian authorities have been lax in prosecution. In its statement, however, which refers to incidents alleged to have occurred ten years ago, the court also included the “Nigerian security forces” as among those who perpetrated crimes.

The ICC announcement comes at a moment when the conduct of Nigerian protesters against an alleged instance of police brutality is destabilizing the government—a government that is developing infrastructure and energy production as never before.

The announcement—praised by Amnesty International—was condemned by Minister of Information and Culture Lai Mohammed, saying that “the ICC and some international human rights organizations, especially Amnesty International, have constituted themselves to another ‘fighting force’ against Nigeria, constantly harassing our security forces.”

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### China Grants 3-Year Reprieve to Angola on \$20 Billion Debt

Angola, whose primary source of foreign revenue comes from oil exports, has secured a three-year reprieve from payments on \$20 billion

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debt owed to a consortium of Chinese lenders, including the China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank of China. Like many African countries, Angola's economy is now depressed due to the global pandemic and economic slowdown. It has also seen increasing civil unrest in the recent period, as COVID-19 lockdowns have added additional stress to an already weak domestic economy.

Angola is the single largest recipient of Chinese loans on the African continent, according to the *South China Morning Post*—having received \$43 billion or 29% of Chinese lending to Africa since 2000—so the decision to grant this relief speaks eloquently of China's approach to the growing global debt crisis.

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## COVID-19's Second Wave Hitting Africa Hard

Total reported cases of COVID-19 in Africa exceeded 2 million in December. While the continent as a whole appears to have suffered a smaller percentage of infections than Europe or the U.S., the pandemic strikes a continent with a poorly developed health care system, and thus potentially greater impact.

The hardest hit nation by far is South Africa, also a major victim of the first wave last year. While the country responded by building significant emergency field hospital capacity, including ICU units, it has once again reached and exceeded its limits, especially in the densely populated province of Gauteng, home to Johannesburg, Pretoria, and many townships, such as Soweto, Sebokeng, and Alexandra. There are not enough nurses and not enough oxygen for hypoxic patients. There are not enough ICU units. Hospital construction during 2020 was attacked by the opposition Democratic Alliance as a waste of money since, it claimed, the COVID-19 peak had passed. Con-

struction was suspended in Gauteng at that time, as a result.

South Africa has now closed its border with Zimbabwe, which it had not done during the first wave.

Malawi, a neighbor of Zambia, closed its borders on December 23. President Lazarus Chakwera then declared a national emergency after two of his cabinet members died on January 12.

Kenya has imposed restrictions on air travel, requiring that all incoming and outbound passengers present a "digital health pass" proving a negative virus test within 48 hours of flight time, as part of the Africa CDC's Trusted Travel Initiative, designed to both control the virus as well as increase intra-African travel during the pandemic.

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## Uganda Blocks Internet Before Election, Twitter Issues Protest

Within a week of Twitter's banning of then U.S. President Donald Trump from its platform, Twitter strongly objected when Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni took a similar measure in his own country. Within hours of Museveni's pre-election national internet shutdown, Twitter's Public Policy posted a response "strongly condemning" Museveni's actions, further calling them "hugely harmful, [a violation of] basic human rights and the principles of the #OpenInternet."

"Access to information and freedom of expression," it declared, "including the public conversation on Twitter, is never more important than during democratic processes, particularly elections."

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## Nigerian President, Cabinet to Take Covid-19 Vaccine Live on TV

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has announced that he, Vice

President Yemi Osinbajo, and other prominent Nigerians are willing to take the COVID-19 vaccine live on TV, as soon as vaccines arrive in the country. This gesture is intended to conquer fear and hesitancy—sprung from mistrust and superstition, but also from knowledge of hostile imperial intentions in the past which extended to medicine, including vaccines.

Buhari, and African leaders generally, are painfully aware of both the destructive potential of the pandemic and the damage to economic activity and development as a result of the lockdowns. Thus the importance of a high level of acceptance of the vaccine. Nigeria is expecting 100,000 doses to arrive before the end of January, through the United Nations' COVAX program.

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## Ghana Receives Sub-Saharan Africa's First LNG Regasification Unit

In a first for sub-Saharan Africa, the port of Tema, Ghana has received a liquified natural gas (LNG) "regasification" unit. For safe sea transport, LNG is cooled to a semi-frozen state (-260°F). Returning it to ambient temperature (regasification) is expensive and slow.

The floating unit was built by China State Shipbuilding Corporation.

According to project manager Edmund Agyeman-Duah, the Tema LNG terminal will "deliver roughly 1.7 million tons of LNG a year—30% of Ghana's general capacity."

Although Africa is blessed with an abundance of domestic energy resources and should ultimately be able to supply its energy needs without imports, the LNG facility will boost immediate energy supplies, with a very small investment for supporting infrastructure. The port of Tema is located just east of Accra, Ghana's largest city.