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TRUTH EVERY DAY

DAILY MONITOR

UGANDA

CASES 9,864

RECOVERED 6,109

DEATHS 94

Covid-19

Uganda records eighth death in two days

Tenders

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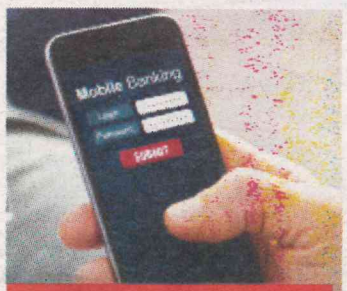

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Mobile Money scam points to inside job

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THE LIZARD

THAT NEPHEW'S TONGUE MUST BE SWEET!

Covid tests spark border cargo crisis

Crisis. The delays at the borders due to Covid-19 tests could deprive the country of raw materials for industries and other essential goods that Uganda imports for commercial and domestic use.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

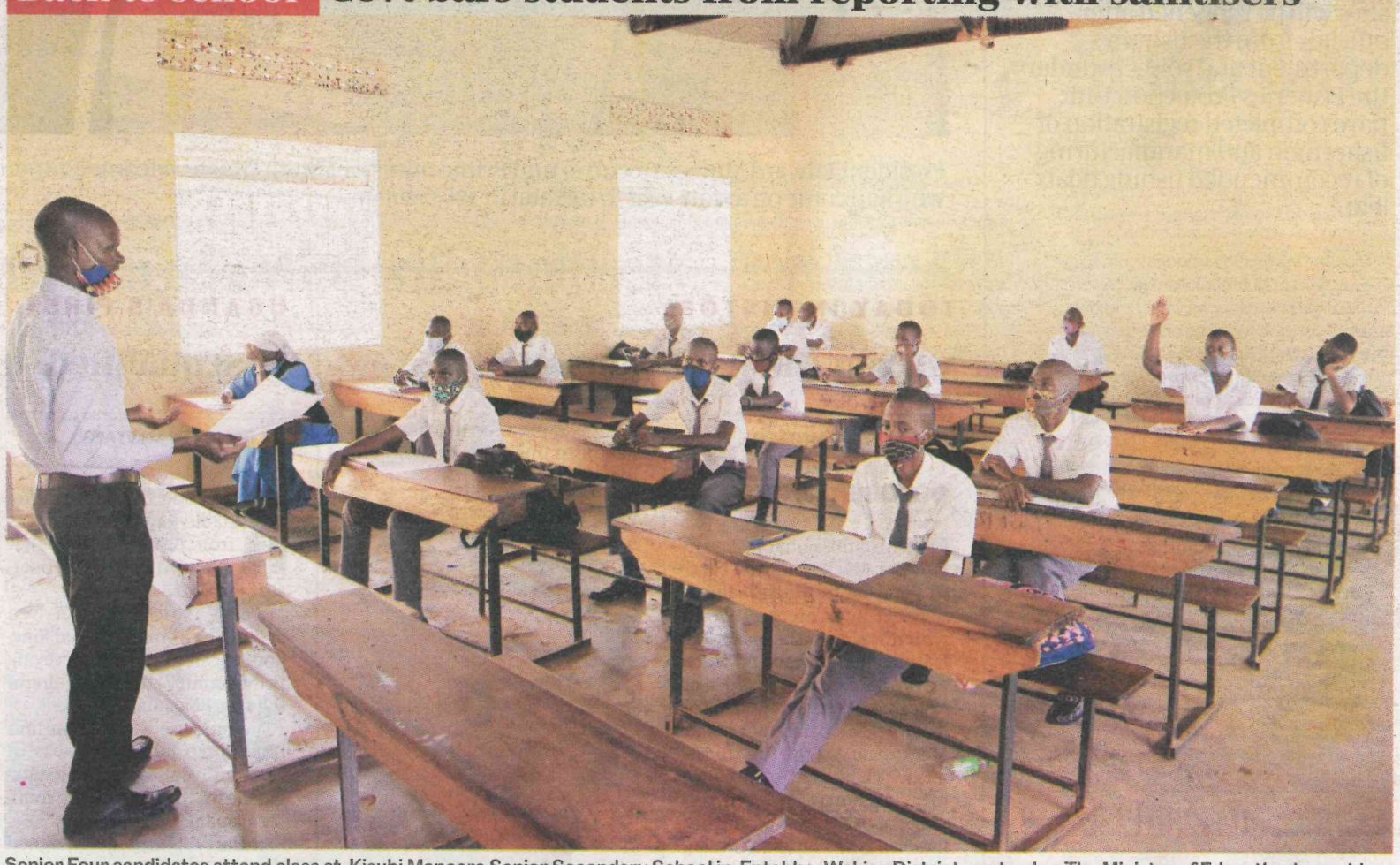
Ugandan importers and other traders are counting losses after long queues of trucks formed at the Uganda-Kenya border due to delays in customs clearance caused by slow Covid-19 testing process.

Several traders say while the decision to test truck drivers before entering the country is good, it is proving costly in maintaining the trucks and crew while waiting for the results which take several days to be released. At both Malaba and Busia borders, there are long queues of transit trucks on the Kenyan side, with one importer estimating the queue to be about "100km long".

In 2018, Uganda imported goods worth $515.8m from Kenya while exports worth $580.1m went to the opposite direction during the same period.

SEE MORE P.4

Back to school Govt bars students from reporting with sanitisers



Senior Four candidates attend class at Kisubi Mapeera Senior Secondary School in Entebbe, Wakiso District, yesterday. The Ministry of Education has said parents should not pack sanitisers for their children who are reporting back to school on Thursday. PHOTO BY DAVID LUBOWA Story on P.3

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National News

Trucks stuck at borders over Covid tests

Busia and Malaba border posts are reportedly overwhelmed because Kenya does not carry out Covid tests on truck drivers.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

Ugandan importers and other traders are counting losses due to delays in customs clearance caused by slow Covid-19 testing process.

Several traders say while the decision to test truck drivers before entering the country is good, it is costly to maintain the trucks and crew while waiting for the results.

Long queues of transit trucks form at both Malaba and Busia borders on the Kenyan side, with one importer estimating the queue to be about "100km long".

Kenya and Uganda are big trade partners in the region. In 2018, Uganda imported goods worth $515.8m (Shs1.9 trillion) from Kenya while exports worth $580.1m (Shs2.1 trillion) went to the opposite side during the same period.

Since then, the volume of trade between the two neighbours has continued to grow.

Sources say both border posts are overwhelmed because Kenya does not carry out Covid tests on truck drivers who instead flood the Ugandan side of the border for testing.

A source at the Busia border said even when the drivers are tested on the Ugandan side, they wait for the results on the Kenyan side which take days to receive them, causing delays in clearance at the immigration point.

Futile attempts

Another importer, who owns several businesses within Kampala, but preferred anonymity, said they have approached contacts in government to have their merchandise cleared, but without success.

"My goods have spent more than a week at the border. I don't know when they will be cleared. I have tried to use contacts, but how can your trucks pass when there are hundreds ahead of you? We only pray that the Ministry of Health improves the testing system so that our goods can be cleared in time," the importer said.

A fuel truck driver on 8th Street in Industrial Area, Kampala, only identified as Ahmed, said the situation has been a nightmare for them.

"If I was doing my own business, I would stop coming to Uganda at this time. I spent eight days after my samples were collected and tested before I was allowed to cross with my fuel. I am tired and I want to rest before going back," Mr Ahmed said.

He said he had been tested more than 10 times since the lockdown was announced in March because they are tested each time they enter the country.

Fuel tankers destined for Uganda queue at Matayos Town on the Kisumu-Busia highway yesterday.

PHOTOS /DAVID AWORI

"My nose and throats are paining because they remove the samples from the same places every time they test. It is painful in addition to wasting our time at the border," he added.

Mr Omar Ahmed Hussein, the proprietor of Mandela Group of Companies, said the problem keeps escalating.

"This is a crisis. In the last three weeks, we have raised the issues, we informed Amelia [Kyambadde, Trade minister], we informed the head of Unra [Uganda National Roads Authority], we informed ministry of Works, the Ministry of East African Community and that of Health, but nothing is moving. Something is really wrong. This is a very serious issue and we hope government can wake up and do something," Mr Mandela said.

He said he has more than 10,000 tonnes of goods stuck in Mombasa because even if he removes them from the port, they cannot enter Uganda with the current situation.

Mr Mandela said while Kenya is at fault for not testing their drivers, the situation is worsened by the high costs of testing on the Ugandan side.

"Vehicles are spending more than 10 days there [at the Kenyan border side]. We are waiting for the vehicles and now the people at Mombasa overcharge us. The problem is also here on our side because every Covid-19 test is $65(about Shs240,000). The impact is that we are now having shortages of wheat and shortages of many other things because nothing is coming from the border," he said.

Mr Mandela said for fuel, government uses fast forwarding, but added that it is a temporary arrangement, and that better measures should be put in place because Covid-19 will be here for a long time.

He also challenged government to pronounce itself on what they prefer most.

"Government of Uganda, what is more important? Making more money from Covid-19 or helping us in making goods move faster and then reduce on costs?," Mr Mandela wondered.

Other importers said if the border stalemate is not resolved, they are likely to lay off workers.

Kampala City Tracers Association (Kacita) described the problem as a crisis which must be addressed urgently.

Mr Everest Kayondo, the Kacita chairperson, said government must address the importers' plight urgently.

Appeal

"The ministry should ensure the problem is addressed. It impacts on the cost of doing business where you pay more money for the trucks and maintaining the crew," Mr Kayondo said.

He said they would contact the ministries of Trade and Health to ensure Covid testing time is reduced.

Mr Kayondo wondered why the test results continue to delay even when government said they had procured better equipment.

"We shall engage the ministry because they said they had put machines that give results within hours. If there are delays like this, which machines or testing kits are they using?" he asked.

Trade minister Amelia Kyambadde was not available to explain the crisis at the border or how government will rescue the traders stranded with their imports. Her known mobile number was switched off.

However, a senior source at the ministry who declined to be quoted, acknowledged the problem, but insisted the drivers have to be tested before entering the country.

"We know there is a problem and the testing delays, but there are drivers who are protesting the testing. They just want to be allowed to come in without testing, which we cannot allow," the source said.

Ministry of Health, however says the problem originates from the Kenyan side where they are not testing drivers.

Mr Emmanuel Ainebyoona, the senior Health spokesperson yesterday said the ministry has noted the problem and is working with different stakeholders to address it.

"We were there last week and the problem was that on the other side they were not testing. The drivers could not come with negative PCR certificates. However, we are working with all the stakeholders to address the problem and ensure that the congestion eases," Mr Ainebyoona said.

He said the Immigration department is working hard to ensure drivers are cleared in time once they present the required certificates so that the congestion is addressed.

This is not the first time traders are complaining of delays in clearance since the lockdown was announced in March this year.

Traders first raised alarm in April when they said their goods were stuck in Kenyan port of Mombasa and at the entry points at Malab and Busia because of delays in clearing their imports and delayed release of Covid-19 test results.

Last week, more than 3,000 trucks destined for Uganda and other countries within the Great Lakes region got stranded at the Malaba and Busia border points after Kenya ran out of test kits and regents for testing for Covid-19.

The situation has since then escalated with truck owners saying their businesses are closing.

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ALARM

Traders first raised alarm in April when they said their goods were stuck in Kenyan port of Mombasa and at the entry points at Malab and Busia because of delays in clearing their imports and release of Covid-19 test results.

REACTION

"I have more than 10,000 tonnes of wheat in Mombasa. My factories are not working here and I cannot remove wheat from Mombasa and they have been there for 15 days. Normally, when we are removing, we remove 10,000 tonnes but now we cannot even remove 1,000 tonnes," **Omar Ahmed Hussein, proprietor of Mandela Group of Companies**

"We know there is a problem and the testing delays, but there are drivers who are protesting the testing. They just want to be allowed to come in without testing, which we cannot allow," **government source**

"We were there (border) last week and the problem was that on the other side they were not testing. The drivers could not come with negative PCR certificates. However, we are working with all the stakeholders to address the problem and ensure that the congestion eases," **Emmanuel Ainebyoona, Health PRO**

240,000

Testing. Drivers are charged about Shs240,000 for every Covid-19 test on the Ugandan side of the border.

10

Days. Trucks spend more than 10 days at the Kenyan border side.

Cargo trucks bound for Kenya stuck at Busia border point last week.