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Section A

In this issue

Politics

High price 2
As more HIV-positive Africans develop resistance to classic drug regimens, they often cannot afford the more expensive newer treatments. Corinna Arndt says the pharmaceutical companies need to become more flexible.

High seas 3
Arne Perras goes to Somalia to discover what motivates modern-day pirates.

High and dry 4
Lisa Ellis examines the plight of refugees in Germany with nowhere to go and no permit to stay.

Business

Eco-energy 7
German lawmaker and Alternative Nobel Prize winner Hermann Scheer points out the economic benefits of renewable energy.

Eco-project 7
Claudia Bröll takes a look at a South African scheme to make solar energy available to low-income families.

Eco-travel 8
Global tourism has consequences for our climate. Edith Kresta says the industry needs to face up to its responsibilities and offer more sustainable travel.



Economic parenting 8
Rich countries with ageing populations are trying to encourage more people to have children. Hilja Müller takes a look at some policies promoting higher birth rates.

Life

Looking back 11
Bernhard Schulz reviews a new retrospective of the German Impressionist movement at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld.

Looking forward 13
The Ruhr valley region is a 2010 European Capital of Culture. Klaus Grimberg takes a look at what's on offer in Germany's former industrial heartland.



Looking to dreams 15
Andrea Jeska introduces a South African football project that wants to get youngsters off the streets and into the classroom.

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Vuvuzelas don't kill

A land of murderers? As the 2010 Football World Cup looms, superficial media reports are nourishing a distorted view of South Africa | By Toby Selander

The German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung called it "the most murderous country in the world." In many media reports on South Africa, the "50 murders a day" are always along with the upcoming Football World Cup. But no one has bothered to look into how many visiting foreign tourists are among the victims. The claims departments of the largest European travel insurance companies provide a clue: Not one of their policyholders has been murdered since the last Football World Cup in Germany in 2006.

There is no doubt that crime is one of the biggest problems facing the African National Congress-led administration, and the South African Police Service statistics make for a horrifying read. From April 2008 to March 2009, about 18,148 people were murdered – and that really does break down to 50 per day. Reading the stats on crimes from murder to robbery, rape to carjacking is depressing. An entire country is bending to the burden of crime and the backlash began a long time ago – people have been taking the law in their own hands.

The ruling party has slowly understood the seriousness of the situation and is now finally taking action. Political leaders have instructed the police to "shoot to kill" when necessary, and there is even talk of reinstating capital punishment.

This situation has been making headlines in the South African press for many years but now the Western media is catching up. In Germany, there have been stories that national football squad captain Michael Ballack and his teammates will have to wear bulletproof vests when they are in the country. And every murder of a foreigner is immediately linked to the upcoming World Cup.

A German woman who had been living in Cape Town for four years and was murdered by a parking lot guard is a case in point. A female teacher at the German School in Pretoria who was murdered by her boyfriend is another – the boyfriend is

German. Even during the national elections in April, the story was that the army would be called in to protect people from violence.

But on Election Day, political opponents were campaigning peacefully alongside one another in the townships and tried to win votes. And all parties fought for a harder stance against crime, without any physical fights between the party opponents. The army was not needed during the elections.

The crime statistics for the last reported year are easy to read and they contain some hidden trends that do not fit the Western media's headlines.

For example, in 65.4 percent of all murder cases, the victim knew his or her murderer, so called "social contact crime." That number was 81.5 percent just a few years ago. One reason why it is lower now is due to

last year's waves of xenophobic killings aimed at foreign workers from other African states.

When the foreign media first began reporting on the attacks on foreigners, it was with warnings to Western readers about the risk of traveling to South Africa. They omitted to mention that the victims were from Somalia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and other African countries.

Another startling statistic is that 68.4 percent of murders are committed on weekends. "We estimate that 80 percent of all murders and 50 percent of all robberies are happening in the townships, and a failed robbery can often lead to murder," said Chris de Kock, head of the police's Crime Information Analysis Centre.

Still, the official was unable to distinguish tourists from locals regarding the 18,148 victims of homicide. As a result, that lack

of detail has helped heat up the international press reporting on "the crime and rape capital of the world."

"I can only think of a couple of cases of murdered tourists since 2000; I think it is unfair to link our crime stats to the tourists arriving for the upcoming World Cup," said de Kock.

The negative press reports have created a perception that traveling to South Africa is a bad idea. This has created an enormous problem for the tourism industry.

"According to our research, we would have almost double the amount of visitors coming here without the negative perception that has been created," said Michael Tatalias, the CEO of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA). "The single biggest reason is the crime but health concerns and other reasons

policy on the issue. Today, he has 62,000 members and 1,000 "Travel Buddies," South Africans ready to help tourists who might end up in trouble as a result of crime. If the crime against tourists were a major issue, Snyman would know.

"Tourists are much safer than we South Africans are, visitors shouldn't worry too much, especially not during the World Cup," he said. "South Africans look after their animals and their tourists but maybe not so much after themselves." He said that the locals face problems with syndicates who rob houses, adding that the rewards are much greater with South African victims. Still, he noted that there have indeed been some problems with criminals following tourists from OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg and robbing them as they arrive at their hotels.

But the headlines continue to scream out the message that crime in South Africa is worse than anywhere in the world, despite police helicopters being shot down by criminals in Rio de Janeiro and many more tourists killed in Thailand by criminals or fleeing political riots.

South Africa has hosted numerous international events since democracy was installed. In March, the Indian Premier League Cricket tournament announced it was moving its tour from India to South Africa because of security reasons: India was not safe enough. They made the move four weeks before the tour kicked off and South Africa hosted it with no problems.

At the FIFA Confederations Cup this summer – considered the dress rehearsal for the World Cup – about 600,000 people attended the competition's 16 matches. Deputy Police Commissioner André Pruis said that after the cup statistics showed a decrease in serious crime such as murder, attempted murder, aggravated robbery, theft of motor vehicles and sexual assaults.

During the cup, 39 cases of criminal conduct were reported in stadiums or in their immediate vicinity; the majority of cases involved theft of cell phones but there were also five muggings, one case of reckless driving, two cases of corruption, one incident of passing counterfeit money and only one case of assault.

Even if the tourist ambassadors, the World Cup organizing committee and politicians would like to keep the numbers down, there is still the travel insurance business to examine. Euro-Center, which has been operating in Cape Town since 1995, is an emergency travel insurance office for people traveling to Africa.

Even though the company can't give an exact number as to the amount of travelers to South Africa, their statistics are illuminating.

Since 2006, they have reported five deaths: Three due to natural causes, one due to a fall from

“ Tourists are much safer than we South Africans are, visitors shouldn't worry too much, especially not during the World Cup. ”

also contribute to this negative attitude to traveling here." He also doesn't have any statistics regarding crime against tourists.

But his organization has all sorts of statistics about visitors to the country. Last year, more than nine million foreigners crossed the border into South Africa. Almost three quarters of them were Africans crossing land borders; at the same time, 1.4 million Europeans entered the country; and more than one million arrived by air from the Americas, Asia and from the rest of Africa.

And most, according to surveys, say they are extremely satisfied with the experiences in the country, even when specifically asked about safety and security.

For the past 10 years, Andre Snyman has been at the forefront of a campaign against crime, using his website eBlockwatch to harshly criticize government

Snyman recalled a British woman killed in Pilgrim's Rest in 2001 and the Austrian football delegate killed south of Durban in 2007. Retired footballer Peter Burgstaller was killed on a golf course south of Durban five hours after arriving in South Africa during a robbery. He came to the country to look for business opportunities and for the preliminary World Cup draw organized by FIFA. Looking into South African news media archives is one way to find more murdered tourists. The African Times discovered another two cases since the beginning of the decade: In September, a Welsh father of three was killed in Pretoria and a Belgian truck driver was shot by gunmen. Both victims were visiting relatives living in South Africa. Most of these cases show how crime is affecting residents of South Africa.

continued on page 2

More HIV-positive Africans have been developing resistance to classic drug regimens and are unable to afford more effective medication. But the pharmaceutical companies are refusing to give in.

Thembisa Mkhosana, 36, looks like a woman who is, to use a well-worn cliché, in the prime of life. Self-confident with laughing eyes, she has a way of walking that turns men's heads. It is impossible to see that she's HIV positive – thanks to anti-retroviral drugs.

Mkhosana is living proof that HIV does not mean that people measure their lives in weeks instead of years. She herself has passed this message on to others, in her work as an activist in the clinics in her hometown of Khayelitsha, the largest of the townships outside Cape Town. But she stopped going to work a few weeks ago. "My blood test results have worsened dramatically," she said, nervously kneading her hands. "And now I suddenly have fever and am in pain. I'm really worried."

The mother of two children has more than just fever. She has full-blown AIDS because the drugs she had been taking no longer work. Her doctors know that she will die and so does she. "They say I should just keep on taking my pills. There are no others to be had."

Since 2004, South Africa – which has the world's largest HIV-positive population – has provided its people with free AIDS drugs. If patients become resistant to the drugs, they receive a second-line treatment.

"Any further resistance means the end," Gilles van Cutsem, the program director of Doctors Without Borders (MSF), said. The humanitarian organization runs one of Africa's oldest AIDS programs in Khayelitsha. That puts it at the forefront of the battle against the disease, a battle that is far from won while funds have been running low recently.

The Global Fund, the UN-backed public-private partnership that battles AIDS, faces a more than €2-billion funding shortfall. "We're heading straight for a disaster," van Cutsem said. "And the only reason is because the rich countries are not keeping their promises – they're not paying enough money." He is referring to the internationally agreed-upon target of the UN Millennium Development Goals, which stipulates that everyone in the world with AIDS will by 2010 have access to treatment and drugs. This is a goal that G-8 nations – including Germany – had committed to.

Even though substantial sums have been paid into the fund so far, demand has been growing faster than available cash. And donor countries have been rather reluctant to respond to calls to significantly increase their contributions – in part because of the financial crisis.

Doctors Without Borders, meanwhile, has already documented the consequences of the gap in funding for six African countries. In 2009, Tanzania received 25 percent less money to combat AIDS than it did in 2008. Many clinics in Uganda are no longer accepting any patients. And in many places in Malawi, pills are running out. World-



Since stepping down as South African president, Nelson Mandela has become a committed activist in the fight against AIDS.

If you can't pay, you'll die

Expensive drugs and a lack of funds complicate the fight against AIDS

By Corinna Arndt

wide, about seven million people remain without access to AIDS drugs.

Cutting back programs at this point would be an "unprecedented" step backward, van Cutsem said. "In Europe, people may lose their jobs because of the economic crisis. In Africa, they lose their lives." From his modest office on the second floor of a building in Khayelitsha, he looks out at a small market square with flimsy shacks of wood and cardboard. Every third person there carries the HIV virus, he says.

The program in Khayelitsha serves as a model for Doctors Without Borders and offers a glimpse into Africa's potential future. The organization has just carried out a new study. Mkhosana is a part of this statistic, since 16 percent of all patients develop resistance against their first course of treatment. A quarter of these patients then

no longer react to the second regimen. While an effective third course of treatment exists, it is not part of South Africa's public health system. "The drugs aren't officially registered here and they are incredibly expensive," van Cutsem said. These drugs cost about €2,000 a year per patient compared to about €55 for the first course of treatment.

The rest of the continent now faces the same threat as what is occurring in Khayelitsha, where an increasing number of AIDS patients have developed resistance and died – a tragically ironic consequence of well-run AIDS programs. The situation mirrors that of a decade ago when the first AIDS drugs cost a small fortune, and when even experts thought it was utopian to develop a comprehensive treatment plan for Africa.

The basic issue has not changed. Drug companies have patented

new drugs and generally sell them for the highest-possible price. Africa, a poor continent, is not viewed as a good customer, said van Cutsem. So the companies are asked time and again to lower their prices and are in no hurry to push through licensing for their drugs in developing countries. This not only leads to more deaths, it also drives up the costs for AIDS programs, he added. In the end the international community ends up paying more for programs it is largely funding in the first place.

"It is high time that pharmaceutical companies possessing patents for urgently needed AIDS drugs drastically lowered their prices in Africa and allowed their drugs to be registered in countries where they have yet to be registered," van Cutsem said. According to MSF spokesman Stephan Grosserüschkamp, this applies in particular to drugs whose patents are held by companies such as Gilead (Tenofovir), Merck (Raltegravir, Efavirenz), Bristol-Myers Squibb (Atazanavir), Abbott (Lopinavir, Ritonavir), Tibotec (Darunavir) and Johnson & Johnson (Etravirine).

Taking the example of Tenofovir: The World Health Organization recommends the drug as a first-line treatment. But even in countries where a generic version of the drug is available, the tablets cost at least twice as much as an \$80 (€56) American alternative considered obsolete and with serious side effects. And yet this cheaper drug is still considered standard in many African countries. In countries where the patented original is the only drug available, the

costs rise to more than €700 per person annually.

Cheaper and better access to Tenofovir would not only sharply reduce the costs of AIDS programs – and spare poor patients the severe side effects of obsolete medications – it would also mean that fewer people would later develop drug resistance, according to van Cutsem.

The pharmaceutical firm Gilead – the patent holder for Tenofovir – points out that it has been offering discounted prices to developing countries since 2005 and that it is cooperating in some countries with the producers of generic drugs. More than 500,000 patients in poorer nations are currently being supplied with Tenofovir. "That's about 13 percent of all people who need the pills," Gilead spokeswoman Polly Ruetgers said.

Given the company's toughness, MSF was relieved when India followed in Brazil's footsteps and refused to grant a patent to Tenofovir. Patients can now hope for lower prices in these markets because generic drugs will now go into production.

Abbott (which produces Lopinavir and Ritonavir) and Merck – with its newly developed and important drug called Raltegravir – reacted in a similar fashion. They said they were willing to help the poorest AIDS patients but refused to comment on potential future price cuts for their products in Africa. And they also drew attention to existing discounts for developing nations.

Van Cutsem says he welcomes each of these steps in the right

direction but that they are far from enough. Besides, the problem is not just limited to the few companies mentioned here. MSF, for instance, has called for all AIDS drugs currently recommended by the WHO, as well as all newly developed medicines, to be collected in an international patent pool by the UN-supported organization UNITAID. This would allow companies around the world to make their own version of the drugs. Major companies would have to give up their lucrative patent rights – instead having to be content with smaller but fairer profits from licensing fees.

Gilead and Merck have expressed cautious support for the project, while Abbott said any participation would have to be voluntary. None of the three companies have been willing to make a firm commitment, however. But Van Cutsem thinks the patent pool is absolutely necessary. "If we don't succeed then I'm afraid we'll have to protest again next year to make another company take another little step. The same thing will happen in five years, and in 10 years."

But his patients cannot wait such a long time. Those like Mkhosana, lack the money to buy the pills that would help them survive. Mkhosana recently attended an international conference in Cape Town where AIDS activists accused the pharmaceutical industry of price gouging. Industry employees, whose supposed aim is to work for the benefit of all of humanity, remained silent. Some even quietly slipped behind big advertising billboards – until the protesters had left the area. ■

Easier access to AIDS medication

Starting mid-2010, a so-called "patent pool" is to help poorer countries get easier access to new and more effective AIDS medication, announced UNITAID in Geneva. The pool will make 19 patented medications from nine different pharmaceutical companies available to generic manufacturers after they pay a licensing fee. Up till now, only first generation AIDS medication cocktails are available in developing countries. Newer medicines, which have been available in developed countries for some time, are patented and therefore more expensive and not available everywhere. This becomes an issue once the virus becomes resistant to the older medications. UNITAID estimates that €700 million each year can be saved through the pool. Founded in 2006 through the initiative of France and Brazil, UNITAID focuses on making medications for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis available at lower prices. One of the ways it finances itself is through a solidarity fee put on plane tickets in eight nations, including France and South Korea.

continued from page 1

Table Mountain and one caused by a traffic accident. They also recorded 56 major medical cases, such as heart conditions and strokes; 44 injuries due to falls; 23 sport injuries; three dog bites; and two snake bites. There have been 43 cases of burglary and robbery and three cases of assault including one of policy holders assaulting each other.

In May 2004, Danny Jordaan, CEO of the Local Organizing Committee, could celebrate South Africa's winning bid to host the World Cup. Now it is less than six months to kick off.

Jordaan is busy briefing 80 Japanese journalists before the match between South Africa's Bafana Bafana and the Japanese national team. He is almost begging the journalists to go home and write about their pleasant experiences in Port Elizabeth. Jordaan hopes for 15,000 Japanese visitors during the World Cup. Overall, he estimates 450,000 football fans will come to South Africa next summer.

Johan Burger of the Institute for Security Studies estimates that about 50,000 members of the security service, excluding private

Vuvuzelas don't kill



security, will be deployed during the World Cup; 41,000 will be from the South African Police Service.

"There is little doubt that in spite of South Africa's relatively high crime levels, the state has the will and the capacity to provide high quality security for the World Cup," Burger said.

The tragic fate, lives and deaths of the people of the townships will still continue. Every night there are murders and South Africa has seven times more crime than the United States. But there are some positive signs.

The murder rate has decreased by more than 40 percent since the first free election in 1994, according to Burger.

The question is: Why has neither the South African government nor the tourism industry tried to change international perception on the nation's crime rate?

Today, readers and viewers abroad are just fed stories on how dangerous South Africa is for them, and the result is that many believe a World Cup ticket comes with a high risk of coming home in a body bag. ■