

INTERNATIONAL

Violence worries Zimbabwe farmers

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Farmers here are worried that the political violence plaguing Zimbabwe will delay Wednesday's scheduled opening of tobacco auctions and deter foreign buyers, dealing another blow to the country's suffering economy.

Zimbabwe is the world's second biggest tobacco exporter after Brazil, and the product is the nation's largest source of hard currency.

But this year, the amount of tobacco delivered to the auction floors is down sharply. Work to grade and pack tobacco has been disrupted by armed black squatters' violent

occupations of white-owned farms, said officials of the Commercial Farmers Union, which represents many white farmers here. On Monday, tobacco worth an estimated \$240,000 was destroyed when mobs torched a tobacco barn in eastern Zimbabwe, neighbors said.

Pat Devenish, growers to the floors had delivered head of the tobacco auction floors, said just 6,000 bales of tobacco. In normal years, at least 20,000 bales would have been delivered on the weekend ahead of the start of the auctions.

Though the auctions continue for several months, it is crucial that they start on

time so farmers can get money to pay off loans they took out to buy seeds and fertilizers. The country, suffering from the worst economic crisis since independence in 1980, is also in desperate need of the millions in foreign currency the auctions bring.

Elsewhere Monday, squatters illegally occupying white-owned farms assaulted and threatened black farm workers, farmers' union officials said. An unspecified number of workers were hospitalized, but the extent of their injuries was unknown. It was the latest violence in the illegal occupation of land on more

than 1,000 white-owned farms. President Robert Mugabe has insisted that the occupations, which began in February, are a justified protest by land-hungry blacks against a few thousand whites who own about a third of the nation's productive land.

Opponents of the government accuse Mugabe of allowing the violent occupations to shore up his flagging popularity ahead of nation elections expected to be called in May. Opponents also argue Mugabe wants to punish farmers for supporting the opposition.

Since April 15, squatters have killed two white farmers, both of whom had

links to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. Two other MDC members, both of them black, were killed in a firebomb attack on April 15.

But police presence in recent days has calmed the situation on the farms, said Tim Henwood, head of the Commercial Farmers Union. Police earlier had been ordered by the government not to intervene.

"They are taking an active role. There has been a definite change in the last 48 hours," Henwood said Monday.

Police on Monday morning ordered squatters camped outside a homestead near Mvurwi, 75 miles north

of Harare, to leave. The squatters left without incident, freeing farm manager Duncan Hamilton and two women who were trapped in the house overnight, Henwood said. The three were unharmed.

Also Monday, police escorted a convoy of about 45 farmers and their families back to the Macheke district. The convoy stopped at each farm to ensure it was safe for the family to stay.

The rest of the approximately 80 families who evacuated Macheke after the abduction and shooting of farmer David Stevens on April 15 were still staying away from their homes.

Nigeria urges African debt relief

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Nigeria's president said Tuesday that poorer nations could commit more resources to fighting malaria if Western nations canceled African debts.

"We have reached a stage now whereby the small amounts we could have allocated to combating malaria and improving our health care is being used to service our debt," Olusegun Obasanjo told a gathering of African leaders in the Nigerian capital.

More than 18 African presidents and prime ministers attended the one-day summit, organized in part by the World Health Organization. The conference aims to devise strategies to roll back the spread of the disease.

In a report presented at the summit, Harvard University researchers said Africa's economy might be up to \$100 billion richer today if malaria had been conquered three decades ago. The disease is one reason many African

nations remain trapped in poverty, the report said.

If their debts are not erased, African countries will find it impossible to mobilize resources against malaria, said Obasanjo, who has been at the forefront of a worldwide debt forgiveness campaign for poorer nations.

"The stranglehold of debt obligations on our developmental priorities is such that no realistic anti-malaria effort or any development strategy is conceivable or meaningful

with these debts hanging around our necks," he said.

Obasanjo also criticized Western nations for not paying enough attention to malaria since it has gone from being a worldwide problem to a mainly African one.

His remarks were echoed by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who also spoke out against Western powers investing millions of dollars in AIDS research, while neglecting malaria.

"(Malaria) gets neither equal attention for funds or research for the big pharmaceutical trusts which nevertheless derive great profits from our countries," he said in his address.

"It is our duty to remind developed countries of their obligation in terms of human solidarity and of their debts to the African people," he said.

Malaria is one of the world's worst scourges. Drugs and insecticides have made it rare in developed countries, but in tropical, developing nations, it sickens 300 million to 500 million people every year and kills at least 1 million. The WHO aims to cut malaria deaths in half by 2010.

Epidemics spread in eastern Ethiopia

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (PANA) - The Ethiopian government relief agency has dispatched medical teams and additional relief food to the

vast eastern Ogaden region, where epidemics and other health problems have surfaced among drought victims.

The Federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission said scores of people, mostly children and elderly people, have reportedly died of starvation in the Ogaden in the last two weeks.

The relief agency said nearly 43,000 tons of food grain and vitamin-enriched food are being ferried to the Ogaden and the adjoining Borena zone of south-eastern Ethiopia to feed pastoralists, whose livestock have been decimated for lack of pasture and water.

The agency also said it (See Ethiopia, Page 14)

African universities receive \$100 million

NEW YORK (AP) — Four U.S. foundations announced Monday that they are giving more than \$100 million to support higher education in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Partnership to Strengthen African Universities is a collaboration of the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller, Ford and MacArthur foundations.

The \$100 million will be given out over the next five years. The goal is to stimulate development in Africa by educating the next generation of potential leaders.

"While the challenges facing African countries are daunting, Africans determined to address them are increasingly focused on the crucial tasks of strengthening their universities," said Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation.

To be eligible for the grants, the universities must be in a country undergoing systemic public policy reform, be focused on new technologies and have creative institutional leadership.

Grants already have been made to some schools, including Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Mozambique's Eduardo Mondlane University.

ANC attacks South Africa's white press on bias issues

Cape Town, South Africa (PANA) — The African National Congress attacked South Africa's white media for portraying South Africa's black leadership as corrupt, anti-democratic, dictatorial and contemptuous of the population, with the exception of former president Nelson Mandela, in their submission to the Human Rights Commission.

The HRC, which is responsible for ensuring that the country's constitution is upheld, announced last year that it would conduct an inquiry into racism in the media, after receiving complaints from black lawyers' and accountants' associations alleging racial bias in stories published in South Africa.

The HRC was told by Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe that the country's white media measured Mandela's success by his actions that were consistent with what they considered as necessary to allay white fears.

He said white editors and journalists regarded Mandela as an exception to the country's ruling black elite. Radebe accused the white media of distorting facts to propagate their stereotype of black South Africans. "A serious effort must be made to convince everybody working in the media that they have a responsibility to contribute what they can to the achievement of the constitutional objective of the creation of a non-racial society," he said.

The South African Communist Party (SACP), in its submission, agreed that there could be no freedom of speech under the present media ownership in South Africa. (See South Africa, Page 14)

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